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**Working Paper**

## The development of political settlements in Uganda from independence to the present day: Background study for the CASH-IN research programme

SECO Working Paper, No. 2024:2

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

Socio-Economic Research Centre (SECO), Department of Social Sciences and Business, Roskilde University

*Suggested Citation:* Nystrand, Malin J.; Yawe, Bruno L. (2024) : The development of political settlements in Uganda from independence to the present day: Background study for the CASH-IN research programme, SECO Working Paper, No. 2024:2, ISBN 978-87-7240-001-3, Roskilde University, Department of Social Sciences and Business, Socio-Economic Research Centre (SECO), Roskilde

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/315092>

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SECO WORKING PAPER: 2024: 2

# **The development of political settlements in Uganda from independence to the present day**

## **Background study for the CASH-IN research programme**

**Malin J. Nystrand and Bruno L. Yawe**

## SECO WORKING PAPER 2024: 2

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<https://ruc.dk/en/seco-working-paper-series>

Email: [malinn@ruc.dk](mailto:malinn@ruc.dk)

CAE/SECO working papers ISSN: 2446-337X

ISBN: 978-87-7240-001-3

SECO working papers can be downloaded free of charge from

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyses political developments in Uganda from independence in 1962 until 2021. It applies a version of the political settlement approach in which power relations in society are analysed along the following five dimensions: vertical relations, horizontal relations, regime financing, ideology, and relations with external actors.

The purpose of this analysis is to provide a foundation for a subsequent analysis of the politicization of social cash-transfer programmes in Uganda. The systematic historical analysis of five aspects of the political settlement that has existed throughout Uganda's whole post-independence history also adds value to previous political settlement analyses of Uganda by providing a rich understanding of the deep roots of some aspects of its political settlements, thus illuminating both continuities and changes over time. It also illustrates how political settlements change slowly and gradually, thereby highlighting the need for deep contextual knowledge in understanding the underpinnings of political development and politicization.

The long-term continuities in Uganda's political development, which has spanned several regimes since independence, with its roots in the colonial and pre-colonial periods, include a weak democratic tradition, a strong role for the military, a lack of social cohesion perpetuated by patronage, and the strong influence of external actors. Changes that can be discerned from a long-term perspective include shifting economic policies from a state-led to a neoliberal paradigm; differences in political ideologies, where the 'broad-based government' vision of the early NRM regime was perhaps the most visionary; shifting alliances between the ruling elite and various domestic social groups; and the more recent attempts to gradually reduce dependence on Western countries and institutions.

This paper draws out the implications of this analysis for the politicization of social cash transfers. First, there is no sign that social cash transfers or social protection in general are being used as a political tool for creating strong state-society relations in Uganda, as this would not be in line with the dominant neoliberal and conservative ideologies. What is more likely, based on the strong role of patronage in securing regime support, is that certain groups might be targeted based on a perceived need to boost political support in that particular group at a particular point in time. In this regard, the strong grassroots networks that the NRM has built throughout the country, extending into rural areas, where local government institutions are used to galvanize support for the party, could be used for the politicization of cash transfers. Whether that is the case is an empirical question. Another feature worth exploring is the involvement of the military in civilian government activities, including the provision of services, and the question of how this affects state-society relations.

The Ugandan government cannot at present implement large-scale social protection programmes without international funding, primarily from Western countries and institutions. Given the increasing tensions in relations between the Ugandan government and Western donors, it is unlikely that the Ugandan regime would expand activities that exacerbate international dependence, thus further diminishing the likelihood of an extensive expansion of social cash transfers.

When analysing the politicization of social cash transfers by non-state actors, which by and large are funded by Western international donors, all the above aspects have to be considered. What relations does such provision create between providers and recipients? How are these relations affected by, and how do they affect, the role of social cash transfers and social protection in the Ugandan political settlement? If government programmes and resources are to a large extent used as patronage, i.e. to target certain groups to boost or gain support, the main question for understanding the politicization of non-state provision becomes how non-state resources complement or compete with these logics.

## AUTHORS

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank members of the CASH-IN research program, who have contributed comments on the content of this paper, and in particular Dr Fred Henry Bateganya and Dr Susan Kavuma of Makerere University, who have both contributed to earlier versions of this paper.

## FUNDING ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The research has been supported by the 'CASH-IN: privately managed cash transfers in Africa' research program located at Roskilde University in Denmark (see <https://ruc.dk/en/research-project/cashin-privately-managed-cash-transfers-africa>). The CASH-IN program has been funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Danida) through a grant (19-05- RUC) administered by the Danida Fellowship Center (DFC) in Copenhagen.

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# 1. Introduction

This paper analyses political developments in Uganda from independence in 1962 until 2021. The purpose of this analysis is to provide the foundation for a subsequent political economy analysis of social cash transfer programmes in Uganda. The paper forms part of the CASH-IN research programme, which aims to study non-state cash transfer programmes in Tanzania and Uganda.<sup>1</sup>

The paper uses the political settlement approach, proposed by Mushtaq Khan (2010) and further developed by Whitfield et al. (2015), Behuria et al. (2017) and Lavers and Hickey (2016), as the basis for its main analytical framework. While building on these contributions, it proposes and applies an adapted analytical framework, based on five dimensions of the political settlement.

Methodologically, this paper is an abductive analysis based on a literature review. From a methodological point of view, abduction can be defined as an interpretation of an individual phenomenon based on a certain analytical or conceptual framework, which leads to a reinterpretation of the empirical phenomenon in focus (Danermark et al. 2002). The analytical framework we apply here is the political settlement approach, and we use this framework in analysing previous studies of political and social development in Uganda. Hence, the analysis is based on secondary sources, but it offers a reinterpretation of these data and analyses. The analysis is also informed by the authors' deep embeddedness in and experience of Ugandan political developments during the period under review.

Political settlement analyses of Uganda have been done before, in different research programmes and for different purposes. Under the Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID) programme at Manchester University, the political settlement approach was applied to social protection policies, as well as to analysis of general economic and political development in Uganda (for example, Bukenya and Hickey 2020; Bukenya and Golooba-Mutebi 2019; Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey 2016; Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey 2013; Hickey et al. 2020; Hickey and Bukenya 2019; Hickey et al. 2021). A research group at Aarhus University, led by Prof Kjaer, has applied the political settlement approach when analysing industrial policy (Kjaer 2015; Whitfield et al. 2015) and taxation and revenue mobilization in Uganda (Kjaer and Ulriksen 2020; Kjaer and Muhumuza 2019). We include these studies in our literature review while applying our own operationalisation of the political settlement approach.

While the overarching purpose of this paper is to inform the political economy analysis of social cash transfers<sup>2</sup> in the Cash-In research programme, we also believe the analysis adds value to previous political settlement analyses of Uganda. Our specific contribution is to conduct a systematic historical analysis of five aspects of political settlements throughout Uganda's whole post-independence history. This analysis provides a rich understanding of the deep roots of some aspects of Uganda's political settlements, illuminating both continuities and changes. It also illustrates how slowly and gradually political settlements change and thereby highlights the need for deep contextual knowledge in understanding the underpinnings of political development and politicization.

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<sup>1</sup> This five-year research programme is a collaboration between Roskilde University in Denmark, Makerere University in Uganda and the University of Dodoma in Tanzania, and is funded by the Danish Foreign Ministry through the Danish Fellowship Centre. (See <https://ruc.dk/en/research-project/cashin-privately-managed-cash-transfers-africa>).

<sup>2</sup> The authors adopt Bastigliani et al.'s (2016), definition of cash transfers which are targeted at individuals or households, including, for example, unconditional and conditional cash transfers, social pensions and enterprise grants. Most cash-transfer programmes are channelled through state-based institutions or non-governmental organizations.



This introduction is followed by a presentation of the analytical framework, after which the paper delves into an analysis of Uganda's political settlements as they have developed over time. The last part summarizes the historical continuities and changes in Uganda's political settlements, as well as the main insights from the political settlement analysis of relevance to understanding the politicization of social cash transfers in Uganda.

Our analysis of Uganda's political settlement is divided into three time periods, namely:

- Period 1: independence until the start of the NRM regime - 1962-1986
- Period 2: the early NRM regime until the introduction of competitive elections – 1986-2001
- Period 3: the continued NRM regime with increasing political opposition– 2001-2021

While periodization can be done in many ways, we have kept to these three broad time periods, as they are marked by clear ruptures and changes in Uganda's political history, namely independence (1962), the start of the current National Resistance Movement (NRM) regime (1986), and the re-introduction of competitive politics and elections (2001). The analysis focuses on developments up to the 2021 election.

## **2. Analytical framework: the political settlement approach**

The political settlement approach to the analysis of political dynamics was first developed by Mushtaq Khan (2010, 2017) and further developed by two research groups, one applying it to industrial policy (Whitfield et al. 2015; Behuria et al. 2017), the other to social protection policy (Hickey et al. 2020; Lavers and Hickey. 2016).<sup>3</sup> So far, this theoretical framework has primarily been developed for and applied to politics in Africa, but in our view it has the potential for wider applications.

In our interpretation, the political settlement approach analyses how the distribution of power within a society affects political and economic outcomes. It analyses not only power relations among the elites, but also relations between elites and lower level factions or social groups. A basic assumption and starting point for political settlement analysis is that the ruling elite is interested in staying in power and that, for this to happen, they have to balance different interests within society (Whitfield et al. 2015). Broadly speaking, the ruling elite consists of those who take the decisions in a society, which could be the ruling party, the President, or a broader group, depending on where power is located in a particular society.

Following Behuria et al. (2017), the distribution of power in society is analysed along three dimensions: the vertical, the horizontal and the finance dimensions. Lavers and Hickey (2016) added two more dimensions that we find it useful to include, namely ideology, and the role of external actors.

The vertical dimension concerns the distribution of power within the ruling coalition. The ruling coalition refers to those groups in society that support the current ruling elite and that the ruling elite rely on to stay in power.

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<sup>3</sup> More recently, Lavers and Hickey (2021) as well as Kelsall (2022) have taken the political settlement approach in another direction, where they attempt to categorize political regimes and use this to make predictions for political developments. We are not convinced of the usefulness of this approach and prefer to use political settlement as an interpretative mid-range theory (or analytical framework) that helps us understand and analyse how socio-economic and political decisions are made.

The horizontal dimension concerns the relationship between the ruling elite and excluded factions, i.e. groups in society that are excluded from power either because they oppose the ruling elite or because the ruling elite ignores them. Important questions in relation to the horizontal dimension include: how strong the excluded factions are, how the exclusion is maintained, and how this affects the ruling elite's ability to take decisions.

The vertical dimension is important for understanding the internal competition and cohesion or contestation within the ruling coalition, while the horizontal dimension is important for understanding the degree of vulnerability of the constellation of power.

The finance dimension relates to how the ruling elite acquires the resources it needs to maintain its grip on power. It is important to understand where the resources come from (external sources, domestic capitalists, etc.) in order to understand who gets benefits and opportunities, and who the ruling elite are more or less dependent on.

Lavers and Hickey (2016) point out that the ruling elites are not only affected by the interests of different groups, but also by ideologies, both their own and those of others, hence this dimension needs to be included when trying to understand how decisions are made. Furthermore, even if the focus in political settlement is on domestic politics, external actors, such as international aid and financing organizations and multinational companies, can have quite a significant influence, especially in debt-ridden and/or aid-dependent countries with little power in the global political economy, as is often the case in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

In sum, a political settlement, i.e. the distribution of power in society, shapes the ruling elites' ability to change institutions and implement policy. It puts limits on what they can do, given their assumed interest in staying in power and therefore their need to balance different interests in society. Applying this framework makes it possible to understand why certain policies are adopted and others are not, and even more importantly, to what degree certain policies are actually implemented, rather than existing only on paper.

We have structured our analysis of Uganda's political settlement according to the dimensions suggested by both Behuria et al. (2017) and Lavers and Hickey (2016), thus using the following five dimensions of political settlement (explained above) as headings in our analyses of each time period.

- Vertical dimension – power relations within the ruling coalition
- Horizontal dimension – relation to excluded factions
- Financing – how the political settlement is financed
- Ideology – ideas underpinning the settlement
- External actors – their role and influence

In addition to the dimensions along which political settlements can be analysed, Khan (2010) proposed and Whitfield et al. (2015) further developed four analytical types of political settlements: competitive clientelism, vulnerable authoritarianism, weak dominant party, and potential developmental coalition/strong dominant party.

A *weak dominant party* means that the ruling elite faces few powerful excluded political factions and that the ruling coalition is composed internally of strong lower-level factions (Whitfield et al. 2015). This type of political settlement has a low degree of vulnerability in the sense that the political survival of the ruling elite is not immediately threatened. On the other hand, a lot of resources need to be channelled into the lower levels of the coalition to maintain support. This means that demands

from various factions within the ruling coalition are difficult to stem, often threatening the efficient implementation of policies.

The *competitive clientelism* type, on the other hand, is characterized by strong excluded political factions that challenge the ruling coalition, while internally the ruling coalition is characterized by fragmentation among the ruling elites. This type of political settlement is characterized by a high degree of vulnerability and contestation. Internal factionalization means that substantial resources need to be spent on distributional policies to keep the coalition together (Whitfield et al. 2015).

A political settlement defined as a *potential developmental coalition/strong dominant party* is characterized by a strong ruling elite with low degree of opposition both internally and from excluded factions. In this type of political settlement, the ruling elite has strong enforcement capabilities and the regime is relatively stable. South Korea during the 1960s has been used as an example of this type of political settlement.

*Vulnerable authoritarianism* on the other hand is characterized by strong excluded factions where the ruling elite use force or legal restrictions to retain their grip on power. Such a political settlement can have strong enforcement capacity, but it is vulnerable to violent overthrow. Several of the early regimes in Uganda, for example, both the Obote and Amin regimes, could be seen as falling into this category.

Previous political settlement analyses (Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey 2013; Bukenya and Golooba-Mutebi 2019) have characterized Uganda as having a *weak dominant party* political settlement, but with strong tendencies since the 2000s to change gradually into a political settlement more resembling *competitive clientelism*, in particular since the introduction of multiparty democracy in 2005.

As with all analytical constructs this typology is a simplification, and real-world examples often fall between categories. Furthermore, changes in political systems are always gradual, meaning that a country can have traces of more than one type of political settlement at any specific point in time. As the analysis that follows will show, Uganda's political settlement has traces of both weak dominant party and competitive clientelism, though there is indeed a strong tendency towards a higher degree of contestation in the political environment.

The categorization of regime types is primarily useful for comparison between countries and/or for comparisons over time and is not the main interest in this paper. As spelled out above, the main tools used are the five dimensions of political settlement, which we use to unpack both the contemporary and historical power dynamics in Uganda, in order to make possible an analysis of the politics of social cash transfers.

### **3. Uganda's political settlement period 1: 1962-1986**

The first part of the political settlement analysis focuses on the period from independence in 1962 to the start of the current NRM/Museveni regime in 1986. This period encompasses a period of political turbulence in Uganda's history, where changes of regime occurred several times. The analysis below is divided into four sub-periods, which analyse the five dimensions of the political settlement of each regime separately. The four time periods and regimes are:

- Mutesa / Obote I – 1962-1971
- Amin - 1971-1979
- Lule, Binaisa and Military Commission - 1979-1980
- Obote II – 1980-1985

### **3.1. Mutesa / Obote I -1962- 1971**

#### **3.1.1. Vertical dimension**

When Uganda gained independence in 1962, Mutesa, the Kabaka (king) of Buganda, became the ceremonial president and Milton Obote the first executive Prime Minister. Obote was the leader of Uganda People's Congress (UPC), whose rank and file were largely drawn from Anglicans from around the country. In a sense, Obote tried to consolidate the development trajectory started by the colonialists (Bukonya and Muhumuza 2017).

At the time, Uganda was largely running an agrarian economy with cotton and coffee as the dominant crops. To improve the management, marketing and control of these crops, statutory bodies such as the Coffee Marketing and Lint Marketing Boards were started (Brett 2006; Bigsten and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 1999). Coffee and cotton being important crops, Obote empowered farmers through the formation of cooperative societies and unions. As a result, officials in these entities became key allies in the governance of the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) and the state. In addition, labour and trade union officials in the new industries and facilities were also enlisted in the UPC and national politics.

To fend off the Democratic Party (DP), whose support base included Catholics from Buganda, Acholi, Langi (Obote's own group) and Busoga, in the 1962 elections, Obote's UPC and Kabaka Yeka (KY) formed a coalition which helped the UPC win most parliamentary seats. To consolidate power, Obote broadened his support base by i) enlisting student leaders in different institutions, including Makerere University, the only university at the time, ii) Anglican and Muslim leaders and iii) traditional leaders.

#### **3.1.2. Horizontal dimension**

The Catholic Church and DP were among the groups which Obote chose to exclude during this period. When misunderstandings arose between Mutesa and Obote, the latter responded by abolishing the kingdoms. As a result, Mutesa fled to England, where he eventually died. With the abolition of the kingdoms came tensions between Obote and the Baganda as an ethnic group. Thus, it did not come as a surprise when Obote was shot at in 1969. The attempted assassination heightened tensions between the two, something which was exploited by Idi Amin to topple Obote in 1971.

#### **3.1.3. Funding/External Relations**

To fund his government, Obote largely depended on inherited institutions such as the Lint Marketing Board (LMB) and cotton ginneries, and those established after independence, including the Coffee Marketing Board (CMB), Produce Marketing Board (PMB) and Cooperative Unions. Other funding came in form of aid from Britain, Israel and some Scandinavian countries. It must be said that tax collections were low at the time.

#### **3.1.4. Ideology**

Ideologically, Obote was a consummate socialist, as became clear to all when he introduced the Common Man's Charter. This ideological document was presented on October 8, 1969 (Tertit 1974; Ginyera 1970). The Charter decreed that Uganda was to 'move-to-the-left', another concept used to symbolize socialism. The Charter was essentially a UPC document meant to re-organize governance and public management (Tertit 1974). It emphasized state-led development and decreed that government was to take a sixty (60) percent stake in over 80 leading firms and parastatals (Ryan 1973; Bukonya and Muhumuza 2017).

In addition to the changes introduced by the Charter, there were structural changes which included (i) the formation of a unitary republican government, and (ii) the introduction of a party-state (in 1970) (Tertit 1974). The formation of the party-state meant that the UPC, the ruling party, was fused with the government.

It is not far-fetched to conclude that effects of the ‘too powerful post-colonial state’, which dished out favours and benefits to selected party loyalists and groups while marginalizing others such as the Baganda, provided fertile ground for the attempted assassination of Obote and eventual overthrow of his government in 1971 (Bukenya and Muhumuza 2017).

## **3.2. Amin- 1971-1979**

### **3.2.1. Vertical dimension**

Amin came to power through a military coup which toppled Obote in January 1971, and his regime ended in April 1979. Amin had the rank of Major-General in the Ugandan army at the time of the coup, and during his regime, the military took centre stage in the running of the country. The regime appointed governors in each of the provinces who were answerable to the Presidency. To help deal with dissent, Amin created the notorious State Research Bureau (SRB), which was blamed for many deaths and disappearances of persons during the regime. The early years of the regime were characterized by a continuation of the socio-economic policies of Obote I. As a military government, all political party activities were banned.

The political settlement in the early years of the regime focused on creating alliances and recruiting regime loyalists. To endear himself to the Baganda, Amin facilitated the return of the Kabaka’s remains for a decent burial at Kasubi Tombs, the official burial ground for royals in Kampala.

As a Muslim, Amin promoted Islam, and many were rewarded economically for converting to Islam. Nubians and Kakwa, Amin’s close kin (from the West Nile region), were critical players in the regime. In addition to joining the army in droves, they dominated business and other sectors of the economy when the Indians were expelled from Uganda (see below).

### **3.2.2. Horizontal dimension**

As Amin built alliances and coalitions with different actors, he isolated those he deemed hostile and unfriendly to his regime. Indians, academia, the elite, former UPC leaders and members, and the church leaders were among the categories which were isolated. Those who were considered most dangerous were either murdered or forced to flee into exile.

Exiled Ugandans in various countries, such as Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, the United Kingdom and the USA, positioned themselves for a post-Amin Uganda. Several attempts to topple Amin were made, including one in 1972 mounted from Tanzania, which involved guerrilla movements led by both Obote and Museveni, who were both in exile in Tanzania (Mutibwa 1992). The then young Yoweri Museveni, who studied political science and economics at the University of Dar es Salaam, had already positioned himself as a politically active leader.

### **3.2.3. Ideology**

Amin positioned himself as an anti-imperialist and pan-Africanist and sought to empower Ugandans economically. The realization of this goal came under the 1973 Declaration whereby all Indians were given 90 days to leave the country. The businesses and enterprises left by Indians were doled out to Ugandans, many of whom were Muslims, Armymen, Nubians and Kakwa, i.e. Amin’s own groups.

Although Amin did not dismantle the state enterprises and parastatals that had been formed by Obote, he reshuffled their leadership and management. The reshuffle brought in regime loyalists regardless of their technical ability to run the enterprises.

### **3.2.4. Funding**

Amin’s dictatorship, coupled with his unprofessional management of the economy, led to a near collapse of the entire state apparatus, including the economy (Bukenya and Muhumuza 2017). The

inherited economy was run down as Britain and other key players such as the Bretton Woods institutions shunned Uganda. From around 1976, the regime lacked sustainable funding. The collapse of the East African Community (EAC) in 1977 heralded the eventual collapse of the economy. To mitigate the impact of the economic collapse, Amin turned to Libya and Saudi Arabia for support.

### **3.2.5. External Relations**

Amin's Pan-African leanings were internationally recognized when, in 1975, he was made chairman of the OAU (Organisation of African Unity), the predecessor to the African Union. He alienated Western states who used to have close relations with Uganda, but formed new alliances instead, particularly with Libya and Saudi Arabia, and with parts of the Soviet bloc (Mutibwa 1992).

Neighbouring states grew concerned about the growing instability in Uganda. Tanzania harboured the exiled Obote and was behind both the 1972 attempted invasion to topple Amin after he had threatened to take over parts of Tanzania, and the invasion of 1979, that eventually succeeded. Amin also threatened to take over parts of Kenya in 1976, but violence was avoided, and he gave up these claims (Mutibwa 1992).

By 1978 Amin had accumulated enemies both at home and abroad, and his demise was just a matter of time.

### **3.3. Lule, Binaisa and the Military Commission - 1979-1980**

The Uganda Liberation War, also called the Kagera War between the Ugandan Army (UA) and Tanzania People's Defense Forces (TPDF), to topple Amin started in October 1978 and ended in April 1979. As the war was drawing to a close following successful battles in Lukaya, the Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere started organizing Ugandans in exile and the diaspora to prepare for the formation of a new government.

Ugandan rebels and exiled politicians met at the Moshi Conference, which started on March 24, 1979, i.e. while Amin was still President. At Moshi, Obote was represented by UPC loyalists and members of the guerrilla movement Kikosi Maluum, while Museveni and his guerrilla movement the FRONASA along with prominent Baganda were headed by Yusuf Lule, a former academic and politician. At the end of the conference, the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) was born. The UNLF was to be governed by a thirty-member National Consultative Committee (NCC) and a National Executive Committee which had three special commissions: Finance and Administration, Military Affairs, and Political and Diplomatic Affairs. Chairman of the Military Commission was Paulo Muwanga, a UPC and Obote loyalist, while Yoweri Museveni became vice-chairman (Mutibwa 1992, 2008).

Given the contestations between different factions at the Moshi Conference, it was no surprise that Yusuf Lule, who became President after the fall of Idi Amin, lasted only 69 days in office. He was followed by Godfrey Binaisa, who was also toppled in May 1980. The Military Commission that took over was tasked with organizing general elections in December 1980. Obote returned to Uganda from Tanzania at the end of May 1980 as his party, the UPC, started preparing for the general elections, while Museveni started a new party called the Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM) to contest in the 1980 elections.

The period between 1979 and 1980 was very turbulent, and the military became a key player in the governance of the country. The political settlement during this period was largely defined by political parties positioning themselves for the elections. The old parties, the DP and UPC, were the main players alongside Museveni's new UPM. Since the Military Commission was dominated by Obote-

loyalists, Museveni vowed to wage a guerrilla war if the upcoming elections were rigged, a promise he came to honour.

The short-lived regimes that governed the country between 1979 and 1980 did little to prevent the downward spiral of the state's collapse (Bukonya and Muhumuza 2017). The economy was in total ruin following the destruction occasioned by Amin's mismanagement, the war and the years of sanctions and aid freezes.

### **3.4. Obote II – 1980-1985**

#### **3.4.1. Vertical dimension**

Obote's UPC won the contested general elections of December 1980. The political settlement that defined this period was characterized by coalitions with the Anglican Church, Muslims, a few learned Baganda, the Cooperative Movement and civil society, including student unions. Other means used by Obote after the elections included the 'recruitment' of opposition (DP) members of parliament (MPs), achieved through either intimidation or bribery. Obote tried to form alliances and offered appointments to most ethnic groups who served as party loyalists and former student leaders.

During this period, the military continued to play a pivotal role in the politics and governance of the country. According to Rubongoya (2007), it was under Obote II that the dual 'militarization of politics' and the 'politicization of the military' emerged, i.e. the increasing involvement of the military in political administration outside the realm of law and order, a development that has continued into the Museveni regime, as will be discussed more below.

#### **3.4.2. Horizontal dimension**

As promised during the campaigns for the general elections, Museveni made good his threat to fight the regime following the apparent rigging of the election results. In February 1981, Museveni together with 27 cadres officially launched the Bush War to topple the regime. Following the contested elections and allegations of rigging, the Catholic Church and DP were also excluded during this period. The long-seated north-south divide continued to be a political factor, expressed in particular in Obote's tensions with the Baganda and increasingly also with Banyankole, i.e. Museveni's ethnic group from the south-west.

The National Resistance Army (NRA), as Museveni's guerrilla group came to be called, was unusually well organized for an embryonic guerrilla force (Rubongoya, 2007). It was a grassroots movement, in the sense that it did not receive foreign support but recruited from peasants, and it was inclusive in that it recruited both men and women. At the same time as waging a guerrilla war, the NRA created a political organization in the form of locally elected Resistance Councils (RCs) in villages in the areas it controlled, which formed the basis of what later developed into local governance structures. The training of guerrilla recruits included both political and military training and was the start of the *mchaka mchaka* training that was continued after the war. A political programme called the Ten-Point Programme was also drawn up during this time. Hence, the NRA built alternative political structures to the existing state while fighting a guerrilla war, thus laying the groundwork for a new start when they would take over. According to Rubongoya (2007) this was unique in Africa with the exception of Mozambique's liberation struggle, which was also a source of inspiration.

#### **3.4.3. Financing and external actors**

Financing the Obote II regime meant financing a country whose public sector was completely disorganized, with the salaries of civil servants not being paid on time, a ramshackle infrastructure, an unruly national army and a scarcity of essential commodities (Bukonya and Muhumuza 2017). As a

consequence, Obote sought the assistance of international financial institutions (IFIs) (Bigsten and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 1999). The IFIs recommended a series of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), including (i) floating the exchange rate; (ii) the abolition of price controls on all commodities; and (iii) improving fiscal prudence through control of public expenditure and improving public-sector accountability (Bigsten and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 1999). The regime also started attracting aid and donations from Britain, Ireland, Scandinavian countries and Germany. However, the aid, donations and reforms yielded limited benefits, as the country started feeling the pinch of the Museveni bush war (Bukonya and Muhumuza, 2017).

#### **3.4.4. Ideology**

The whole of the Obote II regime was characterized by a violent struggle to stay in power, which left very little room for normal politics. The only new aspect of political ideology was the dual militarization of politics and the politicization of the military, as mentioned above.

#### **3.5. Summing up period 1**

The political turbulence that characterized the first decades of Uganda as an independent nation has had far-reaching consequences for its subsequent social relations and political settlements. At least three traits from this period have continued to influence subsequent regimes.

Firstly, the central role of the military in governance, first witnessed in full force during Amin's regime and further institutionalised under Obote II, has continued to define Uganda's political settlement up to the present day.

Secondly, there was the intense and often violent tensions between different groups. There are several dimensions to this inheritance, one being the damage done to social value systems and trust in society (Rubongoya 2007), and another the tendency of political cleavages to be defined by ethnicity rather than ideology or socio-economic groupings. The politicization of ethnicity was definitively inherited from the colonial regime but continued during the first decades after independence, in the north-south divide upheld by both Obote and Amin, as well as in the various ruling elites' shifting alliances with and/or alienation of the central Baganda group.

Thirdly, there was the democratic deficit. During the first 24 years covered in this section only two general elections were held, of which one was rigged, while at least five presidents were forcefully removed, including Obote, who was ousted twice. Amin banned political parties, while Obote fused the party with the state and alienated other political actors. To this day Uganda has not seen a peaceful transfer of power.

### **4. Uganda's political settlement period 2: 1986-2001**

This period starts with a clear rupture in Uganda's history when the National Resistance Army (NRA), led by Yoweri Museveni, took power in 1986 after the five-year civil war (the so-called 'Bush war'). The 1986-2001 period was characterized by 1) a no-party system with a broad-based government, and 2) the constitution-making process that eventually led to the re-introduction of multiparty politics in Uganda.

Towards the end of this period tensions built up which led to the subsequent re-introduction of elections (presidential elections in 1996 and 2001 and multi-party elections in 2006). The elections constitute the clear ruptures that motivate the periodization, but as with most political change it was in fact a gradual change, and there is some inevitable overlap between periods 2 and 3, in particular since the same regime stayed in power throughout both periods. However, the focus in this section is



on the early years of the NRM regime and the characteristics of this period that are important for understanding subsequent political developments.

#### **4.1. Vertical Dimension**

NRM took power in a Uganda that was politically, socially and economically shattered after years of violence and mismanagement, but as indicated in the previous section the NRM had developed a political ideology during the Bush War years and had an idea of how they wanted to go about managing the country. Various mechanisms were employed during the 1986-2001 period to consolidate power within the ruling coalition. These included but are not limited to (i) the broad-based government system; (ii) the adoption of decentralization to enhance service delivery (1997); (iii) inclusion of women in public affairs and office (1996); and (iv) the selective restoration of traditional and cultural institutions (starting in 1993). Furthermore, the role of the military continued to be important in Uganda's political settlement.

##### **4.1.1. The role of the military**

Upon starting the armed conflict in 1981, Museveni adopted the language of a political outsider, with verbal attacks on the political establishment. His calls for an end to bad governance and the disciplined behaviour displayed by his rebels during the conflict contrasted sharply with the corruption and unruly soldiers of both the Obote and Amin regimes. The image of the NRA as a disciplined armed force that did not mistreat the civilian population, unlike previous armies, became an important legitimizing factor for the Museveni regime. As Reuss (2020) and Reuss and Titeca (2017) have shown, the liberator narrative was and has remained a major base of legitimacy for the Museveni regime, and the centrality of the military in this narrative cannot be overstated. To fully understand the role the military plays in Museveni's regime, one ought to appreciate the role the NRA played in the formation of the NRM party, i.e. that the party emerged from the NRA, and that the NRA was the basis for what became the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF). (The continued role of and institutionalisation of the military in the political settlement is explored further in relation to the third period, i.e. 2001-present.)

##### **4.1.2. The broad-based government**

The idea of a broad-based government was central to the NRM government from the start. The broad-based government was expressed in its manifesto, captured under the Ten Point Programme, which stipulated that national unity required eliminating ethnic, regional and religious sectarianism from Ugandan politics. In order to broaden its power base, forestall potential competition and polarization, and maximize its utilization of existing human resources, the NRM welcomed leaders from other political parties and the top military brass from both vanquished and rival armies and granted them top cabinet and military positions. In the short and medium terms, this was a very imaginative policy strategy of promoting peace, retaining the best and brightest at home, encouraging the return of those in the diaspora and managing the conduct of 'potential spoilers'. Moreover, the idea of a broad-based government served as a political ploy for resolving the gap in legitimacy at the elite level (Rugumamu and Gbla 2003).

Museveni remained averse to multi-party elections, which he associated with ethnic competition and violence, and upon taking the country's leadership his strong anti-party stance immediately translated into a legal ban on the activities of the old political organizations, such as the DP and UPC.

Golooba-Mutebi (2018) has noted that for the first ten years, the broad-based government arrangements worked relatively well. There was a collective ambition to set aside the differences of yester-year in the interests of forging national cohesion and reconstructing the country after years of economic decline, occasioned by political conflict and misguided policymaking. However, it is important to note that the agreement to work together was not formalized in any legal instrument. To the extent that no agreements or memoranda of understanding were signed, individuals, and not their organizations, simply joined hands with Museveni and the NRM on the basis of their willingness to contribute to turning the country around. There was therefore a strong dose of informality in post-conflict governance right from the beginning of the Museveni era.

It is argued that the NRM government started with a *dominant party political settlement*, in Whitfield et al.'s (2015) terminology, after the suspension of political party activities and the promotion of the broad-based government formed on the basis of political party, and ethnic, regional and religion balancing (Bukenya and Muhumuza 2017). Initially, the suspension of political party activities and inclusion of opposing forces in the government was widely accepted and seen as a means of promoting national cohesion given the sharply divided society along ethnic, regional and religion sectarianism that prevailed at the time. As a result, the NRM government continued to enjoy dominance by controlling the political space, since there was no need for elections under the 'no party' regime.

Towards the end of the 1986-2000 period, the NRM government gradually came to adopt the features of a *competitive clientelism political settlement* (Whitfield et al. 2015) as a result of the increased pressure to open up a political space. This increased the pressure on the NRM government to include excluded groups in the coalition. The powers in State House progressively created channels through which the excluded could be included in government (Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey 2013). Popular among them is the decentralization governance system where the local government is bloated, thereby creating many opportunities for leadership. The devolution of power to local governments reconfigured the politics by dispersing power and responsibility from the centre to local governments. Progressively, the NRM government became expansive (inclusive) at the lower levels, while becoming narrower and more nepotistic at the top.

#### **4.1.3. Decentralization.**

The end of the civil war in 1986 opened the door to decentralization, which the new NRM government quickly adopted through a radical reform, facilitating the reconciliation of political ambitions for all previously warring factions. Decentralization became a cornerstone of a new governance model. The political infrastructure introduced already during the Bush War, in the form of democratically elected Resistance Councils (RCs) in villages controlled by the NRA, were subsequently spread throughout the country and transformed into state institutions in the form of Local Councils at all subnational government levels, with the objective of increasing local participation in the decision-making processes and strengthening democracy (Tripp 2010; Rubongoya 2007). The program was formalized in 1993 through the issuance of the Local Government Statute, enshrined in the 1995 Constitution, and later in the Local Government Act of 1997. These local-level institutions have since constituted a strong link between the upper and lower levels within the ruling coalition. The decentralization reforms were at the time hailed as good examples of the devolution of power, but as noted by Ahmad et al. (2006) they had mixed results in terms of enhancing service delivery. Paradoxically, concerns with the results of service delivery, partly driven by donors' requirements, resulted in a decentralized system relying on conditional grants and unfunded mandates.

However, this reduced the incentives, responsibility and ownership for local authorities to improve service delivery. Crucially, for functions where the local authorities had full responsibility, better service quality resulted than in those areas in which there were overlapping responsibilities between the centre and the local authorities (Mushemeza 2019).

Relations between the Local Councils (LCs) and the NRM were strong, partly because they were based on the political infrastructure introduced by the NRA during the Bush War, and partly because they were introduced during the era of broad-based government, i.e. during the one-party system, and therefore came to serve as the NRM's political organ (Tripp 2010; Rubongoya 2007).

#### **4.1.4. Inclusion of more women in public office**

The number of women in public representative offices increased dramatically in Uganda from the introduction of the NRM's 'no party' system, because affirmative action measures were taken to reserve seats for them in parliament and local government. The inclusion of women was part of the NRM's ideology that goes back to their inclusion as of both men and women as recruits in the NRA. It was also successful in the sense that it ensured the support of women, who to a large extent voted for Museveni and NRM in the 1996 election (Rubongoya 2007). However, Goetz (2002) suggests that the political value of specially created new seats was eroded by their exploitation as currency for the NRM's patronage system, thereby undermining women's effectiveness as representatives of women's interests once in office. This was because the gate-keepers of access to reserved political spaces were not the women's movement, or even women voters, but NRM elites.

#### **4.1.5. Traditional and Cultural Institutions.**

After ascending to power, on the basis of the Right to Culture contained in the Constitutional Amendment Bill that came out of the constitution-making process (Odoki 2001), the NRM government decided to restore cultural institutions. In the south this meant traditional kingdoms, but in the north traditional chiefs. The Buganda Kingdom was the first to be restored in 1993, while the kingdoms of Bunyoro, Toro and Busoga followed later. From a political point of view this was primarily about appeasing and including the Buganda community, and the pressure to restore the kingdoms came primarily from Buganda, although it was popular among some other traditional communities as well (Rubongoya 2007). The restoration of the Buganda kingdom was at least partly based on promises made during the Bush War to the Buganda communities in the Luwero triangle, which was the epicentre of the Bush War, and was where the population both suffered and supported the NRA (Reuss 2020).

### **4.2. Horizontal Dimension**

Various mechanisms were employed by the ruling coalition to relate to the excluded factions during this period. The most important excluded factions were members of political parties and supporters of multi-party democracy, including parts of civil society, the population in northern Uganda, and more generally those not belonging to favoured ethnic groups.

#### **4.2.1. Political parties and multi-party supporters**

As explained above, the intention of the broad-based government ideology was to overcome previous divisions and include various groups in society in the ruling coalition. At the same time, the Movement government imposed measures to control the activities of other political parties, thus alienating those in favour of multi-party democracy. In the beginning, a broad consensus endorsed the view that the NRM government needed breathing space to heal the wounds of civil war, restore the

rule of law, rehabilitate and reconstruct the economy and return the country to the path of constitutionalism (Omach, 2008). The advocates of the no-party democracy argued that a poor and backward country like Uganda, recovering from decades of state-sponsored violence, war, economic decay and moral degeneration, could not afford the luxury of multi-partyism. The argument was that Ugandans needed time to restore political sanity, forge national unity, reconstruct the economy, inculcate democratic values and practices, and build viable and sustainable democratic institutions. Only then, would the stage be set for a competitive multi-party political system (Odoki, 2001; Rubongoya, 2007).

During the constitution making process, in the early 1990s, there arose two factions among the elite – those in favour of a one-party regime and the other in support of multiparty politics (Odoki, 2001). This was a result of some elites suspecting that the NRM was interested in perpetuating its stay in power rather than genuinely seeking to create new forms of state-society relationships. The suspicion led many supporters of multiparty politics to return to their former parties, and Paul Ssemwogerere, the President of the Democratic Party, challenged the NRM government in the first post-war elections of 1996, though on an individual merit platform.

The 1996 election was the first step away from the movement system, where the NRM and the state were essentially the same (Rubongoya 2007). Independent candidates were allowed to compete, albeit not under party flag, and they won 25 percent of the seats in Parliament. In the presidential election Museveni won with 74.2 percent. This election was an important step towards the legitimization of the NRM's and Museveni's hold on power after the initial military takeover. However, the NRM made sure it retained control over the process by having NRM ministers appoint the Electoral Commission, which led to a boycott by some opposition groups, and to some extent tainted the process according to Rubongoya (2007).

#### **4.2.2. Civil society**

Besides demobilizing political parties, civil society organizations (CSOs) were kept in check by censoring their registration. CSOs were supposed to renew their registration annually, which gave the government an opportunity to 'weed out' troublesome CSOs at the point of renewing their registration.

In general, the Ugandan state allowed NGOs in service provision, but restricted and/or co-opted those perceived of interfering with what was seen as political, in particular advocacy activities related to human rights, democracy and governance (Tripp 2010; Wamucii 2014; Twikirize 2017). However, according to Tripp (2010) the NRM government initially allowed more freedom of association than previous governments, and the increase in NGOs in the 1990s included not only service provision, but also advocacy groups around land, debt, poverty and women's and youth rights. In particular, the women's movement was able to organize and influence policy and thus contributed to the increased representation of women in public life (Tripp 2010). However, in general, advocacy activities from NGOs were met with restrictions and suspicion, in line with the restriction of political activity in the name of national unity, which was embedded in the NRM's broad-based government model. The government also actively attempted to co-opt women and youth movements by creating state-controlled versions of such organizations and/or heavily influencing others (Tripp 2010). Furthermore, the cooperative movement that was an important part of the ruling coalition during the Obote regime was marginalized and downplayed by the NRM.

#### 4.2.3. Ethnicity and national sub-regions

Despite the inclusive ideology of the broad-based government, ethnicity continued to play a role in Ugandan politics (Lindemann, 2011). When it took power, the NRM's leadership exhibited a strong ethnic bias in favour of western and central Uganda. This was because Museveni's core group from Ankole in western Uganda had entered into a 'Bantu' alliance with the Baganda during the war (1981–1986), and the the NRM government was widely perceived as the country's first 'southern government', since both Obote and Amin were from the north. Consequently, the NRM urgently needed a formula that would convince people in all parts of Uganda that it was indeed a government for the whole country. The answer to this problem was the broad-based government system discussed above. Nonetheless, and despite the introduction of an Anti-Sectarian Law in 1988, the distribution of posts at the national level remained skewed in favour of ethnic groups from western and central Uganda (Lindemann 2011).

Another way in which ethnicity played a role was in the continued historical north-south division of the country, which Shaw and Mbabazi (2008) analyse in terms of a 'two-state nation'. Both President Amin and President Obote were from the north, and the army during both regimes was dominated by 'northerners'. In spite of the unifying ideology of the broad-based government, the NRA guerrilla campaign was therefore also characterized by a south versus north dimension. After the NRA's takeover, the army that was dominated by people from the north was progressively replaced with people from the southwest, who formed the biggest proportion of the NRA. While the NRA was pursuing soldiers loyal to the Obote regime that had fled into the northern region, they damaged the relationship between the NRA/NRM and the north. This led to insurgencies in the north that lasted another twenty years, from 1987 to 2006 (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010; Shaw and Mbabazi 2008).

During this period, the Museveni government faced no fewer than seven civil wars, most of which took place in northern Uganda (see Table 1). By the early 2000s, six out of seven insurgencies had ended (Lindemann 2011).

Table 1. Civil Wars in Museveni's Uganda

Civil War	Location	Period
Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA)	Acholiland (Northern Uganda)	1986-1988
Holy Spirit Movement (HSM)	Acholiland (Northern Uganda)	1986-1987
Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)	Acholiland (Northern Uganda)	1987-2006
Uganda People's Army (UPA)	Teso (Eastern Uganda)	1987-1992
West Nile Bank Front (WNBF)	West Nile (North-Western Uganda)	1995-1997
Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)	Rwenzori Mountains (Western Uganda)	1996-2002
Uganda National Rescue Front	West Nile (North-Western Uganda)	1998-2002

Source: Lindemann (2011).

Some of the early northern resistance to the Museveni regime thus came from previous army soldiers who had fought against the NRA in the Obote-led army. However, of the many early northern rebellions against the south-led Museveni government, that of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) under Joseph Kony became the largest and most intense. The LRA had a rather vague political agenda apart from a malicious view of the central government, and it targeted persons from northern Uganda

whom they saw as ‘unfaithful’ or as in allegiance with the government with exceptional brutality (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010). The response by the NRM government shifted between negotiations and military offensives, but towards the end of the 1990s, and after a series of unsuccessful campaigns against the LRA, it resorted to forcibly relocating much of the rural population into Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. This way of handling the tensions lay the ground for a deep distrust between the northern population and the central government that persists to this day, as will be expanded upon in the next section (Nystrand, 2014).

Another historically marginalized region was Karamoja, which borders Kenya in the east. The Karamoja region is part of a larger pastoralist region in East Africa encompassing the Turkana region in Kenya and parts of South Sudan and Ethiopia. Karamoja’s marginalization in Uganda is partly due to the general difficulties in incorporating pastoralist lifestyles in a ‘modern development’ paradigm, and partly because it has been plagued by heavily armed cattle-raiding since independence (Cately et al. 2021). During the early NRM regime this region was more or less politically neglected.

### **4.3. Ideology**

When Museveni’s NRA took power in January 1986, it promised a fundamental change. As pointed out by Mutibwa (1992), Museveni and the NRA took to the bush not just to take power, but to change the political system, which they saw as fundamentally flawed. At his swearing in ceremony in 1986, President Museveni said:

No one should think that what is happening today is a mere change of guard: it is a fundamental change in the politics of our country. In Africa, we have seen so many changes that change, as such, is nothing short of mere turmoil. We have had one group getting rid of another one, only for it to turn out to be worse than the group it displaced. Please do not count us in that group of people. (President Museveni, cited in Lindemann 2011: 387)

A key aspect of the promised fundamental change was the pledge to address Uganda’s legacy of sectarian exclusion and violence by forming a broad-based government.

The Ten-Point Program, written during the guerrilla war, reflects the principles with which the NRA created a disciplined army, organized popular support through Resistance Councils (RCs), and in particular developed a coherent political and economic explanation for why the NRA was fighting the then Ugandan government.

The Ten-Point Program argued that after independence Ugandan political rulers had greatly exacerbated the problems of economic distortion introduced by British colonial rule. The solution to these problems required a new political and economic strategy that was formulated into ten points. The first five points emphasised the importance of local democracy, the elimination of sectarianism through the removal of politics based on religious, linguistic, and ethnic factional issues, and the construction of a self-sustaining national economic policy and the reduction of foreign influence.

The five next points were practical steps for achieving these goals, including the provision of basic social services, the elimination of corruption, resolving the problems of victims of past governments, cooperation with other African countries, and the maintenance of a mixed economy.

From the onset, the NRM government promoted the ideology of broad-based, as discussed repeatedly above. Therefore, political and public service appointments were influenced by balancing political considerations with individual merit.

The NRM institutionalized its ideology of broad-based government by training leaders at various levels and civil servants in patriotism at the National Leadership Institute in Kyankwanzi. Patriotic training was a NRA policy from the Bush War period that was later extended to both soldiers and civilians. Reuss (2020) explains how the patriotic training was a way both to politicize the soldiers and to militarize society (a tendency that Rubongoya (2007) means started already during Obote, as mentioned above). The content of patriotic training was similar for soldiers and civilians and included both military and political training. The purpose was for the soldiers to be politically educated to ensure their commitment to serve the people (as opposed to previous unruly armies), and for the civilians to take part in the security of the country through local defence units, etc. Originally the idea was that a citizen militia (*mchaka mchaka*) would complement a smaller standing army, but the wars in the north led to a build-up of a larger standing army, which eventually changed the role of the *mchaka mchaka* into more of a party mobilization network. The patriotic training is one of the clear manifestations of the centrality of the military and liberation narrative that to this day is central to the NRM's ideology, as will be discussed more in relation to period three below.

#### **4.4. Financing**

When the NRM took over in 1986, the national economy was in ruins after fifteen years of violence, turbulence and mismanagement. Therefore, the 1986-2001 period was mainly one of economic reconstruction and recovery.

After some initial hesitation,<sup>4</sup> in the early 1990s the NRM government embarked on an ambitious neo-liberal economic restructuring process that aimed to reduce the role of government, while promoting the role of the private sector in the economy. These economic reforms had been initiated already under Obote II in the 1980s, in collaboration with the IMF and the World Bank, but implementation was derailed due to the war. Consequently, during the late 1980s and 1990s, the NRM government implemented structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and economic recovery programs (ERP) that stabilized the macro-economy, including exchange rate reform; removed commodity price controls (including dismantling of the Coffee Marketing Board); improved fiscal prudence by controlling public expenditure; reforming the tax regime and the Uganda Revenue Authority, privatized state-owned enterprises, liberalized trade, and overhauled the public sector to weed out corrupt officials (Whitworth and Williamson 2010; Collier and Reinikka 2001).

Macroeconomic stabilization was achieved, with inflation being contained at an average of 4.8% per annum from 1993/94 to 2003/04. The stabilization of the country and the economy meant that economic activity picked up and economic growth stayed at around 6 percent per year from 1986 to 2006. Although this was definitively an achievement, especially given the continued insecurity in the north, this growth was primarily a recovery of what had been lost during the turbulent years,

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<sup>4</sup> Whitworth and Williamson (2010: 3) claim that this was because the NRM's 'instinctive approach to economic policy was dirigiste', based on Museveni's studies at the left-leaning University of Dar es Salaam. On the other hand, the change from state-led development in the 1970s to private sector-led development in the 1980s and 1990s was a global trend, not just one forced on debt-ridden countries by IFIs as often argued, but also implemented by 'Western' governments such as the UK and the US.

illuminated by the fact that in 2003 real GDP was back at the 1973 level (Whitworth and Williamson 2010).

Following the successful implementation of the Economic Recovery Programme, focusing on stabilization, Uganda also pursued more rigorous reforms of public expenditure management.<sup>5</sup>

Efforts were made to increase tax revenues by tax reforms and by reforming the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA). In September 1991, the URA was established as a semi-autonomous revenue authority. The government hoped to achieve two main objectives when it established the URA: (i) it was hoped that, by removing tax collection from the Ministry of Finance, the newly established revenue authority would operate with limited political interference; and (ii) by being removed from the civil service, the URA would be able to offer better remuneration and thereby attract and retain competent staff. These reforms, along with the introduction of value added tax (VAT) in 1996 and the enactment of a new income tax law in 1997, registered initial success. The ratio of tax collections to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased from 7 percent in 1991 to 10 percent in 1997 (Saka et al., 2018).

However, tax revenue was still limited, and a large part of economic activity was still in the informal sector. Due to the huge needs and limited resources, the economic restructuring was to a large extent donor-funded.

Various actors took part in the country's reconstruction, but the World Bank's involvement was particularly comprehensive. In the first five years after the conflict (1987-1992), the Bank supported approximately 25 lending operations amounting to more than US\$1 billion, and it closely coordinated with other international donors. Additionally, the Bank's consistent support focused on assisting the government to achieve economic stability and promote long-term economic growth (Rugumamu and Gbla 2003).

Following a 1987 decision by President Museveni to implement structural adjustment reforms, donors (particularly the World Bank, the USA and the UK) gradually began to boost their support for his government to the extent that during the 1990s around 50 percent of the government's budget was funded by its development partners. The favour shown by donors to Uganda does not seem to have been duplicated in many other donor-recipient relationships during the same period, and by the early 2000s the country had become an established 'donor darling' (Fisher, 2012). This also meant that the NRM government came to rely upon donor funding to remain in office.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, Uganda was a prototypical donor-dependent country. During this period, the government, in partnership with its donors, focused its spending on targeted pro-poor development programmes, including primary education and basic health care. While prioritizing these social sectors has led to some improvements in social development outcomes, the quality of education and health care was still disappointing, and social protection programmes remained neglected (Ulriksen and Katusiimeh 2014).

The general improvement in the economy due to the increased stability translated into a reduction in national poverty rates from 69 percent in 1990 to 45.5 in 1996. Although this was an improvement, poverty rates were still high, and in the conflict-ridden north they remained at 65 percent in 1996

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<sup>5</sup> The public expenditure reforms that have been implemented over the years can be broadly broken down into (i) enhancing fiscal discipline; (ii) focusing public expenditure on poverty eradication; (iii) enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of public expenditure; (iv) improving financial management and accountability; and (v) improving transparency and the openness of national budget processes (Kuteesa et al. 2006).



(Rubongoya 2007). The return to elections in 1996 highlighted the need to attend to popular discontent, making poverty a concern for the political elite (Mugambe 2010). At the same time Poverty Reduction Plans became a condition for loans and debt reduction in relation to IFIs. Hence, Uganda embarked on a process of developing and implementing the 1997 Poverty Eradication Action Plan, being one of the first countries to do so (Wiegatz et al. 2018). Uganda was also the first country to benefit from the original Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative in April 1998.<sup>6</sup>

The general direction of the economic reforms were to liberalize the economy and allow the private sector space to grow, in line with neo-liberal ideology (Rubongoya 2007; Wiegatz et al. 2018). In addition to creating a ‘business-friendly’ environment through macroeconomic stability and deregulation, it involved the return of the Ugandan Asians and the privatization of publicly owned enterprises. When the Ugandan-Asian business families who were expelled by Idi Amin in 1972 were invited back, their expropriated property was returned to them. The return of the Ugandan-Asians’ property was seen as symbolically important, demonstrating the government’s commitment to private-sector development, foreign investment and a willingness to protect investors’ property rights (Nyirinkindi and Opagi 2010; Babiiha 2015; Olanya 2014). The most high-profile and wealthiest of these Ugandan-Asian families became important NRM and Museveni supporters, as they are up to this day.

A major privatization programme was initiated, which led to greater productivity in the former parastatals and increased tax payments, but the process by which the firms were sold was seen as corrupt (Collier and Reinikka 2001). According to Mwenda and Tangri (2005) many senior politicians and army officers became business owners through this process.

The privatization program, according to Rubongoya (2007), was the start of the client-based corruption which later became widespread. The military was also involved in some large-scale corruption scandals in the 1990s, most notably related to so-called ‘ghost soldiers’ as well as looting in the DRC (Rubongoya 2007; Mwenda and Tangri 2005).

Under the no-party broad-based government system that lasted until the 1996 election, the NRM and the state were the same, and there was no clear separation in financing the state and the party. As the NRM also retained control over the state after the election, it could use the state apparatus to finance campaigns and propaganda for the party, thus conflating the state with the regime (Rubongoya 2007: 163). This conflation of the party and state laid the ground for the uneven playing field for political opposition, which has continued to this day. This also means that the financing of the ruling elite, i.e. how the NRM’s hold on power is funded, is closely linked to the financing of the state, as will be discussed more in relation to period 3.

Summing up the funding aspect of the political settlement during this period, Uganda went through a tremendous economic restructuring process, creating economic stability and the conditions for economic growth. This process was to substantially donor-funded and came at the price of high aid-dependency. The merging of party and state meant that the funding of the state was the same as the funding of the regime, i.e. international donors funded the NRM regime during this period.

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<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, it was granted US\$347 million of debt relief in net present value (NPV) terms (International Monetary Fund and the International Development Association 2000). Nevertheless, as at end of 2020 the stock of foreign debt—disbursed and undisbursed—stood at US\$11.68b (UGX43.2trillion), of which US\$7.3b (UGX26.6 trillion) or 62 per cent was from multilateral creditors, US\$3.4b (UGX12.3 trillion) or 29.5 per cent from bilateral creditors, and US\$885m (UGX3.2 trillion) from commercial banks (Musisi, 2021, April 5).

#### **4.5. Relations to External Actors**

Uganda became a ‘donor darling’ during the 1990s and received a lot of support both from IFIs and European and US governments. The main reason was that the country was seen as a ‘star performer’ with regard to economic reforms, most notably the success in stabilizing the macro-economy and achieving and sustaining high economic growth, but also with regard to decentralization and other public-sector reforms. Uganda was seen as a ‘development model’ to be followed by other African countries and beyond, and it became a first mover with regard to new aid modalities, such as the poverty-reduction strategies and debt-reduction schemes (Wiegratz et al. 2018). Thus, Uganda became proof that the neo-liberal restructuring schemes worked, which was useful for the international donors and IFIs promoting such development models. The NRM and Museveni were also hailed for creating stability after the long period of turbulence in the country, a narrative often ignoring the continued conflict in the north. Furthermore, Uganda’s strong military and strategic location made it a good partner of the US with regard to the latter’s military interests in the region (Wiegratz et al. 2018).

The importance of Uganda for Western donors, for both ideological and strategic reasons, meant that it received less criticism than other donor-dependent countries. For example, as Fisher (2012) argued: “while Kampala continued to enforce a ban on political party activity, the same Western donors who supported it simultaneously suspended all non-humanitarian aid to Kenya and Malawi, insisting that these two governments immediately return to multi-party politics. Uganda, however, even at its most controversial, received little more than muted criticism and temporary part-diversion of aid, with little pressure from its donors to restore multi-partyism during the 1990s. The Museveni government faced limited public censure from major donors during its two invasions of neighbouring Congo (DRC) in 1996 and 1998 (aside from short-lived reductions in Danish aid and US military assistance).” (Fisher 2012: 407)

Uganda’s relations with its East African neighbours generally made progress, with Museveni taking an active role in attempts to strengthen the East African Community. However, Uganda’s and Rwanda’s military intervention in the 1998-2003 Congo war was controversial in many ways and resulted in rifts in relations with both the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda (Rubongoya 2007).<sup>7</sup>

However, by and large, Uganda’s external relations were good and/or improving during this period, in particular compared to previous decades, primarily due to the return to stability in the south and the impressive economic recovery.

#### **4.6. Summing up Period 2**

The main characteristics of the early NRM regime were (i) the initially strong ideology of the broad-based government that gradually met increasing political opposition, paving the way for reintroduction of elective democracy; (ii) the continued centrality of the military in the political settlement and the continuation of armed conflicts, especially in the north; and (iii) the stabilization of

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<sup>7</sup> Much more can be said about this conflict, but it constitutes a complicated analysis, which is left out here, since our focus is primarily on Uganda’s internal affairs. Among the consequences within Uganda were rises in military spending and the informal amassing of wealth by involved persons (Rubongoya 2007).

the economy in combination with a high level of aid-dependency. Excluded factions included proponents of other political parties and more generally the population in the north.

The tensions that were built up in the struggle between the broad-based government system and the reintroduction of multiparty politics can still be seen in Uganda's politics, both in tensions within the NRM and between the NRM and other political actors or groups. As will be discussed further below, the perception that the NRM is equivalent to the state is still strong both within the ruling elite and among parts of the population, and the NRM government's legitimacy still rests heavily on the liberation narrative from the guerrilla war.

The relationship between the rulers and the ruled (the social contract) in Uganda improved tremendously during this period compared to the first decades after independence. The NRM government enjoyed wide legitimacy in the south, in particular during the first ten years after its take-over, based on its ability to create alliances with core constituencies and involve them in the constitution-making process and its ability to create the conditions for economic recovery. However, the war waging on in the north meant that the relationship with the north was primarily coercive.

## **5. Uganda's political settlement period 3: 2001 – 2021**

The third period analysed is distinguished by the re-introduction of multi-party politics, and thus constitutes a departure from the broad-based government politics of the early years of the NRM regime. The changes that led up to the re-introduction of multi-party elections were initiated during the previous period; hence there is some inevitable overlap between the two periods. According to several political settlement analyses, during the third period, continuing up until the present time, Uganda's political settlement has gradually changed from a *weak dominant party* political settlement to one characterized by *competitive clientelism*, meaning an increasing degree of fragmentation and instability for the regime (Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey 2013; Bukenya and Golooba-Mutebi 2019).<sup>8</sup>

This section starts with a short summary of the transition to multi-partyism, after which the political settlement is analysed in relation to the five categories used above.

### **5.1. The road from 'no-party' system to multi-party elections**

Museveni won Uganda's first direct presidential elections, held in 1996, and was re-elected in 2001. While a poll held in 2000 had supported Museveni's 'no party' system, he subsequently declared that earlier ethnic problems with the system had been overcome, and in 2005 Ugandans, through a referendum, voted to restore multi-party politics.

By 2001, some members of the core team of the NRM had defected to join old parties or form new ones. Two key personalities were Winnie Byanyima and Kizza Besigye, both NRM veterans (and a couple) who went public with their criticism of the NRM and eventually left the party. Byanyima openly criticized the increasing corruption in the party, while Besigye attacked Museveni and became the key opposition candidate for the presidency. Besigye offered stiff competition to Museveni in the 2001 presidential election, where he got 28% of the vote, and subsequently formed and became the party leader of the new opposition party, the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC). The referendum in 2005 on whether to retain a single-party system or transition to multi-party politics was won by

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<sup>8</sup> Although we don't use these categories actively in this analysis, as discussed in Sections 2 and 6.1.3, we agree that the gradual change to Uganda's political settlement can be characterized as a combination of these two regime types.

those in favour of the latter. Eventually, the ‘no-party’ NRM was reconfigured into the current NRM-O political party.

Makara et al. (2009) address the process behind the decision of the NRM to reintroduce multiparty politics in Uganda. In March 2003, the NRM made a U-turn on the restrictions on party activity, which had been introduced when the NRM assumed power in 1986, as well as upheld in the 2000 referendum, and it agreed to a return to multiparty politics in Uganda. Makara et al. (2009) explain why the NRM leadership sanctioned a transition to multiparty politics and how it sought to remain in control of the transition process. They argue that the reintroduction of a multiparty system in Uganda was stimulated primarily by internal conflicts between factions within the NRM and much less by international (donor) pressure (as is often assumed). They show that the decision to move to multiparty politics was made contingent upon other constitutional changes, which enabled the executive and the central political leadership to remain in power. Helle and Rakner (2017) make the same argument, i.e. that introduction of multiparty democracy was seen by the NRM as a solution to the increasing conflicts within the party. They cite Museveni saying that it was a housecleaning exercise that would ‘rid the movement of saboteurs’ (Helle and Rakner 2017: 8). They also argue that this was on condition that the NRM would control the institutions and mould them in their favour. This was done, for example, by ensuring that the incumbent could stay on as President, by the removal of term limits on the Presidency in 2005, and the removal of age limits in 2017. Additionally, the introduction of a number of institutional reforms in local governance structures strengthened NRM control of the lower levels (as discussed more below). The effect of these compromises can be seen in tensions remaining to this day (to be discussed further below).

## **5.2. Vertical dimension**

In contemporary Uganda, the most important parts of the ruling elite are the military and the President and his family. In order to stay legitimate, their influence is nevertheless balanced by the strong relations between lower and higher levels in the government and the NRM party and the need to retain the support of the Parliament, large domestic businesses, traditional leaders and religious communities, and by maintaining the idea of an inclusive broad-based government.

### **5.2.1. The military**

The military has remained central to the retention of power in Uganda, both formally and informally. The military’s power is also institutionalized, in that it has reserved seats in the Parliament, which is unique among African nations (Kagoro 2020, November 19).

The central role of the military constitutes a continuity with the Ugandan history of violent conflicts and the fact that NRM started as a guerrilla movement that took power by military take-over and then transformed itself into a civilian political movement, as explained in previous sections. But how and why has the military retained its importance at the centre of power in Uganda, 35 years after the Bush War? There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the Museveni regime has continued to face military threats domestically, most significantly the LRA guerrillas in the north that were first defeated in 2006, and later the ADF guerrilla in the West, as well as attacks and threats by Muslim extremists connected to Al-Shabab. Neighbouring countries have also been unstable, and Uganda has been active militarily in several of these conflicts, such as the war in the DRC in 1998-2003, in which Uganda was a main actor, and South Sudan, where Uganda supported Salva Kiir and SPLM. Secondly, the legacy of the Bush War has remained central to the legitimacy of the Museveni regime (Reuss and Titeca 2017), as will be discussed in more detail below. Reuss (2020) argues that the military is in fact central to the NRM’s vision of society and is seen by the party and the President as ‘the morally superior and most capable institution of the state’ (Reuss 2020: 261).

The military and security forces play a role in relation to excluded factions, since violence has been used as a response to various protests and opposition groups (Human Rights Watch 2022), but they are also used for popular mobilization and productive activities. In 2014 the implementation of an agricultural support programme was removed from the semi-autonomous National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) under the Ministry of Agriculture, relaunched as Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), and taken over by the UPDF (Uganda People's Defence Forces). Since then, military officers have distributed agricultural inputs to rural communities in Uganda.<sup>9</sup> According to Reuss (2020), this productive role of the military is part of the idea of the army as the superior public-service providers and the normalization of blurred lines between civilian and military spheres in society. The military has also been involved in distributing cash and party paraphernalia to rural areas during election campaigns (Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey 2016), as well as food during the first COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (second quarter of 2020). Furthermore, with effect from the fiscal year 2021/2022, President Museveni directed that the construction of schools and hospitals be undertaken by the Army Construction Brigade.

The military in many ways functions as an extension of the NRM party (Reuss 2020), rather than as a non-partisan force protecting the nation (or rather, the NRM is seen as the state and the army as protecting the national good by protecting the NRM). The army's MPs sit on the ruling party's side in Parliament and normally vote in line with the NRM. Moreover, the political education of soldiers focuses more on the ideology of the NRM than on democratic institutions and the constitution, and threats of military intervention have been voiced in response to heated debates in Parliament (Reuss 2020). This centrality of the military in current Ugandan politics should be seen in light of the origin of the NRM as a 'liberation movement' that took power through a military takeover and the continued centrality of this 'liberation legacy' to NRM ideology.<sup>10</sup>

### **5.2.2. Personalization and centralization of power**

Since the early 2000s, power has increasingly been centralized and personalized around President Museveni (Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey 2013; Tripp 2010). Changes to the constitution to enable Museveni's re-election are the most visible watersheds in this development. In 2005 the president and his allies undertook a successful political campaign of removing presidential term limits. This was followed in 2017 by the amendment of the constitution to allow persons older than 75 to vie for the presidency (Makara 2020). These two amendments to the Constitution gave rise to intense friction both within and outside the ruling coalition, as will be discussed in more detail below.

The centralization of power around the President can be traced in the making of many concrete decisions. One is related to cash transfer, as when in 2013 the President suddenly took an interest in and committed to the Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) programme, i.e. cash transfers to the elderly, and ordered a scaling up of the programme to the national level, apparently following a direct visit to him by dignitaries from Yumbe district in the north, asking for their district to be included in the pilot version of the programme (Hickey and Bukenya 2016). In addition to the President's direct involvement in detailed decision-making, the centralization of power is also manifested in the institutionalization of the relationship between the President and the broader state. Each district has a Resident District Commissioner (RDC) who is directly appointed by the President (as discussed more below). Furthermore, the President appoints the Electoral Commission, which is

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<sup>9</sup> Agricultural officers and extension workers interviewed are not particularly satisfied with this program and complain that the distribution of inputs does not follow agricultural practices and seasons (Author's interviews with agricultural officers and extension workers in Gulu and Amuru district, August 2019).

<sup>10</sup> The blurring of lines between army and party is also seen in other regimes that came to power through a military takeover, such as Egypt and Zimbabwe.

subsequently approved by Parliament (Article 60, Constitution of Uganda). The Personalization of power is also expressed in personalized patronage, i.e. the President giving out resources directly from himself or State House to create or maintain his support base (Muwanga et al. 2020). Furthermore, pledges to set up schools, health centres and other public services are often made when the President visits a community (Titeca 2018), thus connecting the public services to him personally rather than to the government in general. This is part of a more general tendency of personalization and patronage-based politics, where MPs and other politicians are also doing the same, i.e. connecting public services to themselves as the guarantors and initiators of such services, rather than as representatives of a state-citizen relationships.

Another aspect of the personalization of power is the increasing involvement of the President's family in politics and the military. The First Lady, Janet Museveni, ran for a political office for the first time in 2005 and was elected a Member of Parliament in the 2006 election. She was later appointed Minister for Karamoja Affairs in 2009 and Minister of Education from 2016. The President's oldest son, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, has made a career in the military, being commander of several strategically important security units and operations, including the Special Forces Command (SPC).<sup>11</sup> In June 2021, Muhoozi was appointed the commander of land forces of the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF). The President's brother Salim Saleh was for many years a general in the army and headed the strategically important military operations in the DRC in the early 2000s. Although formally retired, he remains a presidential advisor on military matters. It should be noted that the involvement of political leaders' families in politics is not against the rules in Uganda and is not unique to the Museveni family and the NRM. For example, Milton Obote's wife Miria Obote inherited the Presidency of the UPC when he died and later handed it over to their son Jimmy Akena. Furthermore, in the current main opposition party, the NUP, the brother and wife of the flagbearer Robert Kyagulanyi hold powerful positions.

However, due to Museveni's long time in power, the increasing formalization of powerful roles for the First Lady and the oldest son have given rise to speculation and fears of hidden plans to keep power within the first family once Museveni retires or passes on, but these fears have consistently been rebuked by both the President, family members and NRM representatives (Musinguzi 2021, May 13). These rumours and speculations will most likely not disappear until the issue of the succession is dealt with decisively. So far, Museveni as well as the NRM party have dismissed the need to discuss the succession (Uganda NTV 2017, March 22; Musinguzi 2021, May 13). Given the concentration of power around Museveni and his unavoidable ageing (he was born in 1944), the lack of an explicit succession plan creates a fertile ground for positioning and power struggles within the NRM.

### **5.2.3. The Parliament**

However, it should be noted that, even though there is no doubt that President Museveni has a lot of power in Uganda, his power is not absolute. There is a certain division of power within the political system, where Parliament is sometimes able to get its way and overrule the President. One such example is the regulation of the sugar industry, where in 2020 the President had to give in after many years of a power struggle between himself and Parliament with regard to certain details in the so-called 'Sugar Bill' (see Nystrand et al. 2023). The reason for this is found in Uganda's electoral system, where most Members of Parliament (MPs) are elected based on their constituency, not on party nominations; meaning that the elections of MPs are both personalized and often highly

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<sup>11</sup> The role of the SPC, according to its spokesperson, is VIP protection duties, counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism (Magezi n.a.), but it has also been accused of extrajudicial abductions, tortures, disappearances and killings of the political opposition and has been cautioned by the ICC in this regard (Burke 2021, May 3).

competitive (Kjaer and Katusiimeh 2021). This means that MPs need to be responsive to their constituencies if they want to be re-elected, and this constitutes opportunities for direct democracy. Not only does this constitute a possible power platform for opposition politicians, but it also means that NRM MPs sometimes take positions contrary to the party and the President on issues of importance to their constituency, as in the case of the promulgation of the Sugar Bill into law in 2020.

#### **5.2.4. Relations between lower and higher levels of the NRM**

A strength of the NRM party is that it is well organized all over the country, with NRM chairpersons at district level as well as at lower levels of governance. In addition to the party organization, the NRM also leverages the fact that its candidates dominate state structures, i.e. Local Councils (LCs), in mobilizing support for the party. The relationship between the LCs and the NRM is historically strong, as these institutions were initially formed as Resistance Councils by the NRA during the Bush War and thereafter transformed into state structures, as mentioned above (Tripp 2010; Rubongoya 2007). The NRM is therefore an efficient mobilization organization with strong relations between the higher and lower levels of the party. No opposition party is as well organized as the NRM, and other parties cannot use the state structures for mobilization in the same way, apart from Kampala, where the opposition reigns. The former FDC President Muntu had the ambition to decentralize the party's organization, but never managed to win enough support within the party to put energy into this endeavour (*The Daily Monitor* 2018, September 25). The older parties the DP and UPC are too small to have a national presence, while the NUP, the largest opposition party in the 2021 election, is too new to have developed grassroots structures.

According to Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey (2013) direct support to the grassroots, in the form of cash or promises of targeted programmes, is one of Museveni's main strategies for keeping the ruling coalition together. To keep these grassroots relationships tied to himself as a person is also a way to prevent other strong persons from developing independent constituencies outside his influence.

Grassroots support is a crucial component of the NRM's power base and ruling coalition. As formulated by Tripp (2010: 111) the NRM has built its power base through vertical relations between the centre and regions, while horizontal relations have been suppressed or constrained, i.e. with other political parties, civil society and the media. Tripp also argues that the relationship between the NRM, the government and the grassroots is non-coercive and based on patronage. Several authors, for example, Titeca (2018), Helle and Rakner (2017) and Tripp (2010), have analysed how the NRM has shaped local governance structures and institutions to work as patronage vehicles for the party. Helle and Rakner (2017) argue that understanding this control of the local level forms part of the larger picture of why and how the NRM agreed to introduce multiparty democracy.

The decentralization initiatives introduced during the era of broad-based government, i.e. during the one-party system, came to serve as the NRM's political organ. When the multiparty system was formed, these institutions were not changed to fit the new system. On the contrary, a number of changes were introduced that together contributed to increasing the NRM's control at the local level. Titeca (2018), Helle and Rakner (2017) and Tripp (2010) all agree that the lack of elections at the LC1 level,<sup>12</sup> the expansion of districts and the way local governments are funded and governed play a role in centralizing control over the local level.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Ugandan local governance system consists of four levels: village (LC1), parish (LC2), sub-county (LC3), district and city level (LC5).

<sup>13</sup> They all present other factors that contributed to the same development, but these are the most important ones on which they agree.

There were no elections at the LC1 level between 2003 and 2018. Since the elections in 2003 were made during the movement system, it meant that all LC1 chairmen sat as NRM representatives for fifteen years (Titeca 2018). Elections at the LC1 level were held in 2018, but they were conducted by physical line up, not by ballot, hence voting was not anonymous. In addition, the NRM has won most of the LC3 and LC5 elections,<sup>14</sup> which Helle and Rakner (2017) attribute to opposition parties' lack of resources and organization at the local level. Helle and Rakner (2017) also add that both the President and other NRM representatives often warn citizens of the negative consequences of not voting for NRM.

The funding of local government was initially meant to be based on a graduated personal tax, market dues, a property tax, parking fees and permits (Tripp 2010). To begin with, and as Tripp points out, all these taxes were unpopular and difficult to collect. Furthermore, and more importantly, the graduated personal tax was first cut in 2001 and then scrapped in 2006, as was the tax on boda-boda drivers (Tripp 2010), essentially undermining local funding at the local government level. These decisions were made during election campaigns and at the central level without consultations with the local level. The effect was (and is) that local government became dependent on funding from central government. Titeca (2018) claims that 95 percent of local government funding comes from the central level, of which 95 percent consists of conditional grants, i.e. funding earmarked for spending priorities decided nationally. It is also common for President Museveni to make pledges to various public provisions at the local level (such as hospitals, schools, etc.) when he travels, and then he takes the credit for services delivered locally (Titeca 2018), further strengthening the impression that it is the central level that controls local-level funding.

In addition to the financial dependence, the central level has also taken control of decision-makers at local level. Firstly, elected leaders at the local level are paid by the national government, meaning that their accountability is upwards more than to the voters (Titeca 2018). Secondly, since 2005 the recruitment (hiring and firing) of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) at the district level, which used to be controlled locally, has been controlled from the central level, according to both Tripp (2010) and Titeca (2018). CAOs were also given patriotic training or *mchaka mchaka*. The same goes for the district tender boards, which in 2005 were replaced by a contract committee chaired by the CAO. Titeca (2018) also mentions that before 2005 CAOs were often accused of being opposition collaborators. Thirdly, the role of the Resident District Commissioner (RDC), who is appointed by the President, and according to the 1995 Constitution was to be politically neutral, has increasingly come to play a political role, according to Titeca (2018). The RDC has the role of monitoring, inspecting and supervising central government programmes (which as mentioned above constitutes the absolute majority of local government budgets), and has therefore become a powerful figure who tends to overshadow other local functionaries.

Lastly, for many years Uganda has increased the number of districts by dividing them, from 33 districts when NRM took over in 1986 to 146 districts in 2021. This trend is particularly clear from 2005 onward, especially during election campaigns, and is therefore clearly linked to the introduction of multiparty system. Firstly, it increases the number of positions that can be used for patronage (Helle and Rakner 2017). Secondly, it is explicitly used to gain votes and as patronage gifts, i.e. new districts are expected to vote for the incumbent. Titeca (2018: 120) cites Museveni saying that he 'has regretted granting Bukomansimbi a district status because its residents voted for Opposition leaders in

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<sup>14</sup> However, the NRM's support at the local level has decreased. In the 2016 election the NRM won 76 percent of LC5 (district/city level) chairman elections, while in the 2021 election it was reduced to 64 percent (according data from the Ugandan Electoral Commission website).



the 2011 general elections'. Furthermore, Titeca argues that it is a way to reduce the power of strong local leaders, giving the example of dividing Gulu district and creating Amuru district, which reduced the power base for the popular opposition leader from the Democratic Party, Norbert Mao. Helle and Rakner (2017) adds that the increasing number of districts also makes it difficult for the opposition to fund candidates, as nomination fees are expensive.

All in all, the scholars cited here argue that the NRM has used its incumbent power to shape the institutions at the local level to favour them and thereby secure the vertical link between the party and the local levels throughout the country, which is a central part of their ruling coalition.

#### **5.2.5. The broader powerbase: ethnicity, religion, women and business**

Even though the core of the ruling coalition is made up of the NRM party, the President's family and the military, this is not enough to stay in power. Museveni would not have stayed in power for 35 years if he had not understood that he needs to broaden the power base beyond his own immediate interest. As Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey (2016) have argued, this regime uses both soft and hard power for regime survival. It has combined violent clampdowns and repression of the opposition with responsiveness to popular demands from different groups in society. Attempts have been made to make coalitions with various groups in society. Therefore, many groups in society can be seen as part of the ruling coalition, although the relationships with some of them have shifted over time.

Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey (2013) identify, in addition to the main groups in the ruling elite discussed above, what they term an 'outer circle' of 'window-dressing elites', carefully selected to represent certain regions, ethnicities and religious groups. They attribute Uganda's very large cabinet to this need to ensure that all groups in society are represented. This is a remaining legacy and expression of the ideology of the broad-based government that characterized the first period of the NRM regime.

It is often claimed that NRM is ethnically biased in favour of the Banyankole, the ethnic group of Museveni's home area in the Western part of the country. Given the practice of appointing people from all groups in society to formal positions, it is easy to dismiss this, at least on the face of it. Furthermore, the many divisions among people from western Uganda make it hard to view them as a coherent political group (Tripp 2010). For example, Kizza Besigye, the main opposition leader for many years, is from the same ethnic group. However, many would still argue that people from western Uganda are holding key positions within the ruling elite.

The relationship between the state and cultural institutions (kings in the south and chiefs in the north), has also shifted over time. Re-establishing cultural institutions at the beginning of the NRM regime was certainly an attempt to acknowledge and incorporate various ethnic groups into the movement. However, the cultural institutions have not always had the intended unifying effect, but sometimes become platforms instead for all sorts of political tensions, at times with violent outcomes as in Rwenzori in 2014 (Reuss and Titeca 2016). Furthermore, the Ankole kingdom was never restored due to various internal conflicts. The NRM's relationship with the largest, most institutionalized and most powerful Buganda kingdom is complex. The NRM was initially supported by the Baganda elite, but there are also clear lines of conflict which have intensified over time, in particular around land,<sup>15</sup> and the NRM can no longer count on the Buganda kingdom for political support.

In 2010, the Government decided to enact a law to regulate the operation of the cultural leaders, commonly known as the 'The Traditional or Cultural Leader's Act'. The objective of this Act was to

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<sup>15</sup> Some of these issues resulted in violent conflicts such as the September 2009 riots, which claimed lives and caused the loss of properties (John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre, 2013).

operationalize Article 246 of the Constitution on the institution of Traditional or Cultural Leaders. The Act seeks to provide for the existence of Traditional and Cultural Leaders in any area of Uganda in accordance with the Constitution, for their recognition by the Government, and their privileges, benefits and roles (primarily relating to conflict resolution). However, some clauses in the Act have proved controversial, such as the government's power to withdraw recognition from a traditional leader who engages in politics, penalties when someone compels another to pay allegiance to a traditional leader, punishment of a traditional leader who provides a platform for a member of a political party to discuss politics, and the rotational power-sharing in a regional government, among other things (John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre, 2013).

Religion is not a major dividing line in contemporary Ugandan politics, although it remains a major social force in Uganda. Unlike the old Ugandan parties the DP and UPC, which were clearly aligned with the Catholic and Anglican Churches, respectively, Museveni has explicitly tried to be inclusive of all religions in Uganda. Overcoming ethnic and religious divisions was after all a central aspect of the NRM's 'broad-based government' ideology. Hence, religious affiliation does not translate directly into certain party preferences in contemporary Uganda. However, individual religious leaders sometimes take a stand on political issues, and some larger religious organizations have intentionally created a space for political debates at election time (Alava and Ssentongo 2016; Gibb 2016). Alava and Ssentongo (2016) also point to the position of religious leaders in networks of patronage and their vulnerability to state intimidation as factors restricting their willingness to engage in political debate. Although President Museveni engages with all religious communities, it is well-known that the First Lady and other members of the Presidential family are active in the so-called 'born-again' churches.

Women have played an important role in the NRA/NRM since the Bush War, and they were also included in public office in the broad-based government system, as mentioned above. Women have also supported the NRM and Museveni in elections to a greater degree than men, and the women's movement has been a beneficiary of the NRM's patronage (Goetz, 2002).

Large domestic businesses, in particular Ugandan-Indian business owners, have remained close to the Museveni regime. As explained above, re-inviting the expelled Ugandan-Indians to Uganda in the 1980s was important for revamping the economy, and they have remained important for Museveni's ambition to industrialize the economy and structurally transform it (Olanya 2014). Given the precarious history of the Uganda-Indians as ethnic outsiders in the country, they need political protection (Hundle 2018), hence it is also in their interest to stay close to the power that protects them. Business actors close to the ruling elite also include those who became businesspersons because they were already part of the ruling elite, for example, senior politicians and army officers who benefited from the privatization of state-owned businesses in the 1990s (Mwenda and Tangri 2005).

### **5.3. Horizontal dimension**

The excluded factions in the Ugandan political settlement in recent decades includes the political opposition, a decreasing space for civil-society organizations, an initially marginal role for the north in a broad sense, which started to change during the period, and a continued marginal role for the Karamoja region.

#### **5.3.1. Political opposition**

A main characteristic of political developments in Uganda over the last twenty years is that of increasing political opposition. This constitutes a clear break with the relative cohesion under the broad-based government during the first decade of the NRM regime, but also a continuation of the tensions that started to develop during this time. The institutions have continued to favour the incumbent, as described above, but in spite of this, several high-profile opposition leaders have

challenged Museveni in all elections since 2001, thereby contributing to more open contestation in the political environment.

The election in 2001 opened politics up for contenders in the Presidential election, while in 2006 the first multi-party election took place. Kizza Besigye, a Bush War veteran, former minister and a retired colonel in the Ugandan army, was one of the first to openly criticize the NRM and leave it as a reaction to what he saw as increasing sectarianism and non-democratic practices (Besigye 1999, November 7). In the 2001 election he became the main presidential contender under the Reform Agenda banner, and thereafter his party, the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), became the main opposition party in all elections from 2006 to 2016. Its support base was mainly in urban areas and among young people, as well as in the north of the country to some extent. As mentioned above, the opposition has not been able to mobilize grassroots support in the same way as the NRM. Besigye received between 27 and 37 percent of the votes in the Presidential elections from 2006 to 2016 (according to Uganda's Electoral Commission), but the FDC and the other opposition parties have never managed to secure a significant portion of Parliamentary seats. For example, in the 2016 election the NRM gained 293, the FDC 36 and other opposition candidates and independents 87 of the 426<sup>16</sup> Parliamentary seats (Gibb, 2016). Nevertheless, the FDC MPs have often been active in the media and in their opposition role in Parliament, but since NRM MPs are the majority in Parliament the opposition cannot really influence decisions at the national level.

In the run-up to the 2021 election, musician turned politician Robert Kyagulanyi (more known under his artist name Bobi Wine) took over as the main opposition presidential contender, and his 'People Power' movement, which was eventually transformed into the National Unity Platform (NUP), became the main opposition party. He started his political career in 2017 when he won a seat as Member of Parliament in the by-election for the Kyandondo County East constituency in Wakiso district just outside Kampala. His background as a musician and his upbringing in a poor neighbourhood of Kampala, gave him a strong support base among poor urban youth (he has been nicknamed 'the ghetto president'). This support eventually spread to young people all over the country through his nation-wide 'People Power' tours. He has positioned himself as a representative of the young majority of Ugandans who have never seen another president than Museveni and who want change.

The results of the 2021 election showed that Museveni won the Presidential vote with 58.38% while Kyagulanyi garnered 35.08%. Although the NRM retained the majority in the Parliament, several high-profile NRM candidates lost their seats in Buganda. The result was contested by the opposition on grounds of election fraud and questioned by international observers, in particular on grounds of the lack of a level playing field (Abrahamsen and Bareebe 2021).

Bobi Wine's political movement has repeatedly been met with violence and arrests from the security forces. Additionally, his campaigns and his music concerts were increasingly stopped by security forces in the lead up to the 2021 elections, as well as beyond the elections. Besigye, the previous main presidential contender, was also arrested many times during his years as the main opposition candidate and his 'Walk to Work' campaigns stopped, so the use of the legal system and security violence against political opponents is not new. However, the level of violence has increased considerably in recent years, especially in the run up to the 2021 election (Human Rights Watch 2022).

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<sup>16</sup> The total number of Parliamentary seats include ten reserved for the military.

The President and NRM officials have accused Bobi Wine and his 'People Power' movement of being supported by foreign elements. This has also affected the relationship between the state and international donors, where donor support to democracy-related programmes has been stopped or paused, as will be discussed in more detail below (Abrahamsen and Bareebe 2021; Titeca and Reuss 2021).

The main interpretation of the increased repression of the political opposition is that dissent constitutes a real threat to the NRM regime. Uganda's demographic trends are one main cause of this tension. The country has one of the youngest populations in the world, with 75% of its population below thirty years of age (UBOS 2020), while politics is dominated by elderly men and women who gained their legitimacy mainly from stabilizing the country 35 years ago (Reuss and Titeca 2017). This stabilization story line is less relevant to young people, who struggle to find jobs and an income in an economy that has failed to provide them with opportunities. It should be noted that Bobi Wine is very good at connecting with these young voters and passionately talks about issues that concern them. His potential support base therefore constitutes the majority of the voters.

In addition to citing the increasing strength of the political opposition, most political analyses of Uganda point out that the last twenty years have seen increasing factionalism within the NRM itself (Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey 2013; Kjaer and Katusiimeh 2012). Several high-profile leaders have followed Besigye and left, openly criticizing the NRM party and Museveni. There are many examples, but among high-profile persons who have shunned the NRM are the former Commander of the Army, Mugisha Muntu, who left the NRM in the early 2000s to join the opposition party the FDC (he currently leads the Alliance for National Transformation (ANT) party); former Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi, who left the NRM and ran as a contending presidential candidate in 2016 (only later to return to the NRM); Augustine Ruzindana, who served as Uganda's first Inspector of Government from 1986 to 1996 and later as Member of Parliament, who fell out with the NRM in 2005 and joined the FDC; and Amanywa Mushega, who was Chief National Political Commissar during the Bush War and served in various ministerial roles during the 1990s and as Secretary General of the East African Community up to 2005, when he left the NRM over the term limits issue and joined the FDC. In each case there might be a multitude of reasons for leaving the NRM, such as their own ambitions clashing with Museveni's or the party's or diverging ideas on the direction of the content of the politics. But some of the critique was also explicitly directed against the personalization and centralization of power around Museveni, and the two amendments to the constitution, i.e. the removal of term-limits in 2005 and the removal of age-limits in 2017 which allowed Museveni to keep standing for presidential elections, are crucial points of factionalism. In particular, the period leading up to the removal of presidential term-limits in 2005 provoked the exodus of a number of senior government and NRM personalities (Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey, 2013). This means that there is a rather large group of former NRM members who for various reasons have been sidelined and excluded from their hitherto powerful positions.

But there are also signs of factionalism and power struggles among those who have stayed with the NRM (Kjaer and Katusiimeh 2021). This increasing factionalism means that it requires more effort to keep the ruling elite together, i.e. to handle power struggles within it. This has consequences for the ruling elite's ability to take decisions and on the whole, it makes the regime more vulnerable. One way this has been handled is through increasing the number of districts, to allow more people room for creating a power base (Awortwi and Helmsing, 2014), as discussed above.

### 5.3.2. Civil society

The increased political tension that accompanied the gradual shift to multiparty democracy also affected the relationship between the Ugandan state and civil society. In 2013, NGOs were warned by the Minister of Internal Affairs to ‘back off politics’ and keep to their registered activities (*New Vision*, 2012, June 1). During the last fifteen years, the regulation of NGOs has been amended and expanded several times, each time gradually increasing state control over the sector. The Ugandan NGO Act from 2006 was criticized for limiting the focus to service-delivery organizations and for introducing a tedious and bureaucratic registration process. The new NGO Act, introduced in 2016, further increased the government’s monitoring and supervision of NGOs and was widely criticized for giving the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National NGO Bureau and the NGO Board extensive and discretionary power to close or deregister NGOs on unclear grounds and for introducing extensive monitoring of NGO activities. The NGO Bureau has used this power to suspend a large number of NGOs, first in a major review in 2019, but also continuously (for example, 54 NGOs were suspended in August 2021) (*The Guardian* 2019, November 21; McCarthy n.a.; Article-19, 2021, August 26). The increasing number of NGO closures, suspensions, searches and seizures by state security organs since 2011 have often coincided with the country’s electoral cycles. These actions have also in many instances been at odds with the government agencies that work closely with the affected NGOs.

In spite of this, the NGO sector has continued to organize, including in advocacy, for example, around environmental issues, land issues, human rights, etc, but there is an increasing wariness and awareness of a limited space in which to operate (*The Guardian*, 2019, November 21). NGOs in service provision have generally not been seen as a threat to the Ugandan state, as long as they do not clash with other political interests, but there are examples of cash transfers being politicized at election time (Nystrand et al. 2024). According to Wamucii (2014) it is a continuous pattern of colonial as well as independent governments, in Uganda as well as in other parts of East Africa, that member organizations and mass movements, such as trade unions and cooperative movements, have been seen as a threat and suppressed and/or co-opted, while NGOs in service provision have been allowed room to operate, as long as they do not interfere with what is seen as political.

The suppression of non-state mass movements and the focus on NGOs as service deliverers have meant that the NGO sector tends to be seen as urban-based and elitist (Wamucci 2014). The fact that the NGO sector is an important employer of the educated urban middle class strengthens this view. According to Twikirize (2017), the sector employs about 70 percent of qualified social workers.

An important aspect of the NGO sector in Uganda, which is not analysed by the authors cited above, is its extensive involvement in relief work in relation to conflicts and refugee situations, in collaboration with UN organizations and the Ugandan government. Uganda has a long history of receiving refugees from neighbouring countries, in addition to its own internal conflicts having resulted in large groups being internally displaced, in particular in the north.

### 5.3.3. Marginalized regions

The regions in Uganda that have been marginalized during the last decades are the north in a broad sense and Karamoja in the east.

Northern Uganda was excluded from the ruling coalition for much of the NRM regime, but it started to change after the 2006 ceasefire. Its marginalization was a consequence of the historical north-south divide in Uganda that Shaw and Mbabazi (2008) analyse in terms of a 'two-state nation' with an impoverished north and a 'developing and democratic south' since the 1980s, a division that was augmented by the way in which the LRA war was handled and played out, including the forceful relocation of much of the rural population into Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. In 2005 it

was estimated that more than 1.5 million persons (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010), corresponding to between 25 and 90 percent of the population in the northern districts, had been 'imprisoned' in IDP camps (*International Alert* 2008; Shaw and Mbabazi 2008). Finally, in 2006, after a number of attempts to reach a ceasefire or peace agreement, the LRA relocated its area of operation towards southwest Sudan, the northern DRC and the eastern CAR (where it is still active).

The relocation of the population into IDP camps was motivated by government's security concerns over protection of the population from the LRA's attacks, facilitation of the army's fight against the LRA in the rural areas and the hindering of further recruitment. However, from the perspective of the majority within the northern population it was perceived as an attempt to grab their land and as a way to keep them poor and impoverished, in particular since the years went by while the large and resource-rich Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), funded by the US military, failed to defeat the roughly 100-400 person-strong LRA. The situation was interpreted through the narrative of the old north-south divide, where the power and prosperity of one region was seen to be at the expense of the other region (Apuuli 2008; Shaw and Mbabazi 2008). Life in the camps was characterized by fear and dependence on food aid; domestic violence and alcoholism flourished, and traditional social relations were deeply challenged.<sup>17</sup>

By the end of the war, poverty in the north was more than double that of other parts of Uganda (UBOS, 2012), and starting up economic activity again was challenging due to a loss of assets and the many social challenges of the war and displacement. Politically, there was widespread mutual mistrust between the northern population and the national government. This was expressed, for example, in the common sentiments that 'the government/Museveni does not want us to develop, they want us to remain poor' and that 'the government wants to grab our land' (Babiiha 2015; Serwajja 2014), and it was not helped by public officials and other national elite representatives often characterizing the former IDP population as lazy because of its dependence on handouts. The government and donors, both multi- and bilateral, and NGOs developed several reconstruction plans. Furthermore, humanitarian donor involvement was heavy in the north during the war and contributed strongly to the type of donor-dependent war economy that emerged. After the cessation of hostilities the humanitarian actors started to focus on more development-oriented programmes, and many of them moved to other parts of Uganda, such as Karamoja.

In more recent years, the situation in the north has stabilized, and the economy has grown. Since the ceasefire in 2006 the north has received many targeted government-supported grants and interventions. In line with the legacy of the broad-based government, people from the north have been appointed to important positions in government, for example, Chief of Justice Owiny Dollo and the late Speaker of the Parliament Jacob Oulanyah. Remaining challenges that are specific to the north pertain to the influx of refugees from South Sudan and land conflicts after the return of the displaced population. In the 2006 election the north was an opposition stronghold, but in subsequent elections the picture has been more mixed, with some districts supporting the NRM and others the opposition (according to data from Uganda's Electoral Commission). Hence, the resistance seems to have abated somewhat, although many observers attribute it more to a lack of alternatives than to genuine enthusiasm for the NRM regime.

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<sup>17</sup> Dolan (2009) use the term 'social torture' to describe their existence (supporting the notion that this was inflicted on the northern population by the government, with the international community as a complicit bystander), while Bøås and Bjørkhaug (2014) use Agamben's term 'bare life' to characterize life in the camps and describe this extreme case of a displacement economy as a prison-like economy.

Another marginalized region is the pastoralist Karamoja. High levels of gun ownership in the community and violent cattle-raiding both within Karamoja and in surrounding communities has created insecurity in the region for many decades. After being neglected during the first decade of the NRM regime, this region started to draw attention in the 2000s. The Ugandan state intervened with disarmament programmes, between 2006 and 2010 being led by the Ugandan army and involving forced settlement of the population in 'protected kraals' controlled by the army (Catley et al. 2021). The disarmament campaign improved security, but also led to increases in poverty and inequality due to the loss of livestock and the concentration of cattle in the hands of wealthier community members. The post-disarmament period saw an influx of international aid organizations to meet these humanitarian needs. The appointment in 2009 of the First Lady Janet Museveni as Minister for Karamoja indicated a renewed attempt by the government to integrate the region into the nation state. Mineral extraction opportunities in the region is an underlying issue, and large tracts of land have been set aside for government-issued licensees for extraction, which naturally conflicts with access to pastureland (Catley et al. 2021).

Yet another marginalized part of the country is the Rwenzori mountains, where a guerrilla resistance movement called the ADF operates on both sides of the border with the DRC and where the traditional kingdom was heavily oppressed in 2014 after failing to galvanize support for the NRM (Reuss and Titeca 2016). The ADF guerrilla movement is often mentioned by the ruling elite as a threat to stability, and opposition politicians, such as Besigye, have several times been accused of supporting them. The ADF has its roots in Ugandan Islamist networks and has received support from international Islamist networks at different points in time, but it has developed into a local and regional actor in the Uganda-DRC borderland (Titeca and Vlassenroot 2012) and the extent to which it poses an actual threat to Ugandan security is rather unclear. The ADF may or may not be connected to the unresolved killings of some twelve imams in 2014-2015, which gave rise to a lot of speculation as to who was behind these killings (Athumani 2015, 1 July). The Rwenzori area in the Uganda-DRC borderland has also seen local tensions that led to a heavy army crackdown in 2014. This has been presented as an ethnic conflict, but according to Reuss and Titeca (2016), the tensions are more complex and relate to several of the general political issues in Uganda, such as district divisions, patronage and electoral politics.

Northern Uganda and the Rwenzori area also host large refugee populations from neighbouring countries. Uganda is well known for its refugee policy, which requires any support for refugees to devote resources also to the local community by way of a 70/30 formula, i.e., a minimum of 30 percent of the funds must be channelled to the local population. The refugee policy is also particular in that refugees are allowed to settle anywhere in the country. Even in the designated refugee settlements, where UNHCR and the Ugandan government provide protection and support, refugees live side by side with the national host population. Refugee populations are sometimes perceived to access more or other resources than Ugandan citizens (Kagan, forthcoming), which can cause tensions and affect state-citizen relations. The 70/30 principle is clearly aimed at easing this type of tension.

Lie (2017) describes and helpfully analyses the political aspects of the role of humanitarian NGOs in northern Uganda. During the protracted conflict in northern Uganda from 1986 to 2006, when most of the population lived in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), humanitarian NGOs together with UNHCR were the main providers of food and social services, thus coming to replace the state in the camps. Furthermore, the regional main town of Gulu came to suffer from 'NGO obesity' (Lie 2017: 200) since international NGOs employed thousands and created an aid-dependent civil society and economy. When the LRA guerrillas were finally forced out of Uganda in 2006 the security situation improved, and the IDPs were forced to return to their villages, though humanitarian actors

continued to provide support to meet their needs in the post-conflict phase. In 2007 the government started up its own recovery plan for northern Uganda (PRDP), and in order to fund it urged international donors to reorient their support from humanitarian actors to the government's reconstruction programme, which they did to a large extent.

Lie (2017) analyses how the government actively recast the discourse on the Acholi region in the north from a humanitarian narrative into one of development and recovery, while the humanitarian actors and donors saw huge humanitarian needs in the post-conflict situation as well. According to Lie, the dominant perception among his Gulu-based informants was that the government actively reclaimed political control over the north from the externally funded actors in order to embark on a state-formation process in the hitherto marginalized north, even though little change had actually taken place on the ground. By 2013/2014 most of the humanitarian actors had left the north, and Gulu no longer suffered from NGO obesity, but from the reverse situation, as government services did not fill the void left behind by the humanitarian actors.

In the wake of this reduction of humanitarian actors in the Acholi part of the north, several humanitarian NGOs moved their operations to the Karamoja region in the east. The timing was just after the disarmament intervention in Karamoja, which had resulted in improved security but also in increasing poverty and inequality. Although Karamoja had always been marginalized, the situation in Karamoja was now recast discursively as a humanitarian situation. Lie (2017) cites a Gulu-based informant stating: 'There's little new to the situation, but now the government and donors suddenly see this as a new humanitarian crisis' (2017: 202).

Lie's (2017) analysis illustrates the link between humanitarian NGOs, the relationship between ruling elites and their subjects (i.e. social contract), and the government's recasting and construction of which population groups are important from a political perspective. Whereas the north had been neglected (some would say actively pushed down; Dolan 2008; Nystrand 2014) for decades, and where humanitarian NGOs and UN actors had been allowed to become the most important providers and thereby take on the role of the state, from around 2006 the government actively took back control and re-established themselves as the providers of social service. Most likely this came about as a response to the low support for the NRM in the Acholi region in the first multiparty elections. Lie's analysis also contributes to the understanding of the strong presence of humanitarian actors in Karamoja, i.e. it is at least partly a consequence of the exodus of humanitarian actors in the Acholi region.

To sum up, the excluded groups in Uganda's political settlement include the political opposition, civil-society actors engaging in what are seen as politically sensitive issues, and certain regions in the country that remain on the fringes of the nation state. The inclusion and exclusion of regions has shifted somewhat over time, the broader north now being more integrated than before, while Karamoja also receives more attention, but primarily as a security and humanitarian problem (like the north before). Uganda's large refugee population from neighbouring countries in combination with its generous refugee policy is a source of international good will and attracts a lot of donor aid, but it also causes friction over resources locally.

#### **5.4. Ideology**

It is often argued that Uganda's political parties are not differentiated on the basis of political ideology, and that opposition parties have been formed primarily by those who have been excluded from the regime based on religion, ethnicity and region. Although this might be true to some extent, the NRM regime is characterized by certain ideological beliefs and discourses that are more or less explicit.



The broad-based government was a clear political vision at the beginning of the NRM regime, but with the change to multi-party democracy this idea waned as a major NRM ideology. The main new message was instead that the NRM, and President Museveni personally, was the only guarantor of peace and stability in the country. This message has been legitimized by the ‘Bush War legacy’ story, i.e. that through the bush war of the 1980s the NRM liberated the country from the chaos of the Obote and Amin regimes, and restored stability and prosperity to Uganda (Reuss and Titeca 2017). Based on this liberation discourse, the NRM is seen as the natural state-bearing party, which in principle cannot be questioned and which leaves the opposition as more or less illegitimate in the eyes of NRM. The entrenchment of this ideology is confirmed in studies showing that ‘many Ugandans are unable to decouple the NRM from government, believing that the government of Uganda is the NRM and the NRM is the government of Uganda’ (Gibb 2016: 98). From an ideological point of view, Reuss (2020) formulates this as a ‘liberator’s birthright’ principle, i.e. the idea that those who fought for liberation can claim certain rights because of their sacrifices, as well as a certain moral superiority. She also situates this as part of a broader pattern that is common to post-liberation parties that came to power through force. This ideology is manifested, for example, in the reverence for ‘Bush War veterans’ and their continued powerful influence in the party. Beyond this liberation narrative, the NRM lacks an explicit ideology, which is why it has been prompted to use patronage and coercion to retain power, according to Reuss and Titeca (2017). Furthermore, this narrative has become increasingly ineffective, since the young generation that constitute the majority of voters were born after the Bush War and have no personal experience of previous regimes discredited by the NRM.

The Ugandan President has been personally involved in advocating patriotism in the country and has argued that Uganda needs ‘rekindling the spirit of patriotism’ (Kanakulya 2013). In a 2009 speech during a patriotism workshop in Masaka district, he argued that: ‘Patriotism meant loving your country and being prepared to sacrifice for it... The liberation of Uganda was done by patriots... and Uganda would now be a failed state if patriotic people had not fought for redemption...’ (cited in Kanakulya 2013: 36).

The patriotism training for civilians discussed in relation to period 2 above, which was initially intended as a complement to the army, has been scaled down and is currently mainly invoked in connection with elections, and targets primarily civil servants and students. Currently, the Patriotism Program is being implemented by the National Secretariat for Patriotism Clubs (NSPC), which was established in 2010 under the Office of the President. It is mandated with developing and coordinating patriotism clubs in post-primary schools and colleges across the country with a view to grooming and mentoring young learners into patriotic citizens (*The Independent*, 2019, July 30). Reuss (2020) interprets patriotism training as involving the simultaneous politicization of the military and the militarization of society, as well as being a continuation of the Bush War legacy. The content of the patriotism training is more or less the same for both civilians and soldiers, and it contains both military and political training, with the political content implying ‘non-sectarianism, Pan-Africanism, socio-economic transformation and education’ (Reuss 2020).

When it comes to economic policy, since the 1990s, Uganda has gone in a clear neoliberal market direction (Wiegratz et al. 2018; Kutesa et al. 2010), especially when compared to countries such as Tanzania and Mozambique with a stronger socialist heritage, where the role of the state in the economy is more pronounced. In Uganda there is a strong emphasis on the private sector as the engine of growth and on the state being non-intrusive in relation to the private sector. There is also a recurring narrative about entrepreneurship, namely that people should be job-creators, not job-seekers. This outlook is widely shared within the Ugandan elite, and not just within the NRM, which means that it is rarely presented as a particular ideology. In the early years of the NRM regime Museveni

talked about socialism, but this was forgotten in the 1990s when Uganda became a star performer of neoliberal economic reforms promoted by international finance institutions (IFIs). Around 2010 economic policy was moved away from primarily relying on the market to a focus on the structural transformation of the economy, with state-led initiatives to make investments in infrastructure and strategic industries, in particular the oil industry. As pointed out by Hickey (2013) it is not clear whether this constituted a change away from the IMF/WB policy direction, as the IFIs changed their policy direction in the same way at around the same time.

Traces of this neo-liberal ideology can also be seen in the government's approach to cash transfers, which is clearly dominated by the idea that cash transfers are 'hand-outs' that create a dependency mentality and decrease the incentive to be productive (Hickey et al. 2020). It might not come as a surprise that this view is particularly strong within the Ministry of Finance (Hickey and Bukenya 2016).

The latest NRM Manifesto for the years 2021-2026 (NRM, n.a.) contains formulations that confirm the ideological components discussed here. It states that the policy direction is informed by Uganda's history and the NRM's role in stabilizing the country. Following its success in toppling 'bad regimes', NRM policy has been to consolidate 'the people's victory and use it to embark on massive recovery and transformation of Uganda's socio-economic landscape'. It also states that the NRM's policy direction has been to ensure (i) a correct line in politics (Democracy and good governance, Nationalism, Patriotism and Pan Africanism); (ii) a correct military line (Pro people's army; protecting the people and their properties); and (iii) a correct organizational line, (a clear program of action in politics and the social sector, and a mixed private sector-led self-sustaining, independent, integrated national economy) (NRM Manifesto 2021-2026). Furthermore, the centrality of Museveni as a leader is highlighted by having the Manifesto start with a presentation of his person.

## **5.5. Financing**

The legitimacy of the NRM during its first fifteen years, both internationally and nationally, depended to a large extent on its ability to create the conditions for economic recovery. The record in this regard during the last two decades is more mixed, and at the same time it has become increasingly expensive for the NRM to stay in power, due to its increasing dependence on patronage to galvanize support.

In order to stay in power, the NRM has to keep providing general economic progress, and in particular create jobs for the large young population, use state funds to support important constituencies, both formally and informally, and fund the increasingly expensive elections. This is gradually becoming more challenging.

### **5.5.1. Economic progress**

Uganda managed to maintain high economic growth from 2001 to 2011 (7.5% on average), while it has declined the last decade, averaging 4.5% in 2012-2021.<sup>18</sup> Since population growth is high, averaging around 3% per year, GDP growth per capita has stagnated to around 1% per year, meaning that in effect the overall economy has hardly increased during the last decade. A report by the Ugandan National Planning Authority published in April 2022 pointed out that the working-age population is growing faster than the economy, and that only 34% of new entrants to the job market each year are absorbed by the labour market (Angurini and Naturinda 2022, May 4). This is not

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<sup>18</sup> Sources of national economic data are the World Bank's official data, available at <https://data.worldbank.org/country/uganda>. Accessed 6 January 2023.

enough to address the developmental expectations of the population. In particular, the lack of jobs for the large young population constitutes a major political problem.

Around 2010, there was a shift from the emphasis on poverty reduction to longer-term development planning leading to the formulation of Vision 2040, which was meant to be operationalised in the five-year national development plans that started in 2010 (Hickey 2013). The vision spelled out was that Uganda was to achieve middle-income status by 2040 (African Development Bank 2022). The shift from poverty reduction to structural transformation was motivated by the frustration that prior economic reforms had not transformed the economy, as the majority of the labour force (about two-thirds) was still in the agriculture sector. The change meant a larger focus on investments in infrastructure, primarily energy and road networks, as well as in the upcoming and at the time promising oil sector. Infrastructure investments have to a large extent been funded by loans from China and/or the World Bank.

The confirmation in 2006 of ‘commercially recoverable’ quantities of oil in Uganda gave rise to increasing hopes of substantial income generation, which has not yet materialized. The Government of Uganda has been applauded for negotiating good deals with international oil companies to establish an oil refinery. However, most of the agreements have remained secretive from oversight bodies such as the Parliament, the media and civil-society organizations (CSOs) (Bukonya and Nakaiza 2018). Due to capacity constraints, Uganda’s oil industry has attracted the participation of foreign oil companies that have been changing over time (Bukonya and Nakaiza 2018).<sup>19</sup> Uganda’s oil reserves are estimated at 6.5 billion barrels of oil, projecting Uganda as one of the oil giants of Sub-Saharan Africa. If properly harnessed, it was hoped that Uganda’s oil revenue would provide an alternative source of resources to finance Uganda’s development, as well as serve political interests, which explains the President’s heightened interest in the sector (Wass and Musiime 2013). However, the accelerating pace of the global green transition, with projected changes in the global oil industry, means that these prospects have deteriorated. Huxham et al. (2020) estimated that the value of Uganda’s oil reserves fell by 70% in five years, suggesting that international oil companies will want to renegotiate contracts and that oil now seems a less viable driver of Uganda’s economic development than it did just a few years ago.

Museveni often emphasizes the industrialization and structural transformation of the economy as the way forward for Uganda. The implementation of industrial policy has, however, become engrained in patronage logics, which has made it less effective. Kjaer (2015) show how the implementation of industrial policy in the dairy sector, agricultural sector and fishing industry respectively were influenced by political logics in various ways,<sup>20</sup> where the outcome was that only the intervention in

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<sup>19</sup> For instance, in 1991 the Government of Uganda signed a Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) with the Belgian Company Petrofina, which eventually pulled out in 1993. The subsequent PSA was signed with a USA company known as the Uganda Works and General Engineering Company, whose operations were suspended in 1996 due to unsatisfactory progress. In 1997, the GoU signed another PSA with Heritage Oil and Gas for rights in the Semiliki basin and a sector in the southern part of Lake Albert. Other PSA agreements were signed with Hardman in 2001, Neptune Petroleum-Uganda in 2005 and Dominium Petroleum in 2007 (Bukonya and Nakaiza 2018). Commercially viable oil deposits were licensed to Heritage Oil and Tullow Oil plc in 2006. However, Heritage Oil sold its shares to Tullow Oil plc, and Tullow expanded further by buying shares from Total E&P and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC).

<sup>20</sup> Essentially support to the fishing industry faded away because the regulation of the industry threatened the livelihood of small-scale fishermen, who were backed by army officers and who in turn were important members of the ruling coalition. In the case of the agricultural service reform, the content of the program gradually changed to include more tangible benefits to farmers, which could be used to win support in elections. The dairy sector was concentrated primarily to the southwestern part of Uganda, where the President and many other members of the ruling elite originate. The dairy farmers and traders were important support groups to

the dairy sector proved efficient, due to a willingness to compromise with dairy owners in western Uganda, which is a major Museveni support area.

The outcome so far in terms of the structural transformation of the economy is that the share of agriculture in GDP has fallen and the industrial sector has grown only modestly, while the service sector has grown (Pozhidaev 2020; African Development Bank 2022). Agriculture is still the most important sector in the sense that it employs about 70% of the population, while only contributing about 25% to GDP (World Bank, 2018). The vast majority of Ugandans still live in rural areas, but urbanization is increasing rapidly, from 14.8% in 2000 to 25% in 2020. In plain terms this means a growing trend of people moving from agricultural activities in the rural areas to (often informal) service sectors in the urban areas. This is a structural transformation, but not of the type that increases productivity on a large scale and creates economic growth. The goal of achieving upper middle-income status by 2040 still seems far away and would, according to the African Development Bank (2022: viii): ‘require structural shifts for the economy to grow by more than 12 percent a year over the next 20 years’.

### **5.5.2. Social investments and social protection**

The Ugandan government has implemented ambitious programmes for both the health and educational sectors in the form of the Universal Primary Health Care (UPHC) in 2002, Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1996 and Universal Secondary Education (USE) in 2006. However, as shown by Nystrand and Tamm (2018), since these reforms were combined with the downsizing of the public sector and decentralization, responsibility for their implementation came to rest on local governments, which lacked the resources to provide the services, and on user fees, which meant that funding came to rest on informal personal networks. Some funding came from the central government, but not enough to uphold the quality and accessibility of public provision. The result is that the quality and accessibility of public social services is limited, and that private-sector providers dominate social provision, with associated inequalities in access to quality health-care and education.

Social protection has not been a major tool for the Ugandan regime. Existing schemes such as the Pensions Scheme and the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) target only the small percentage of the population that works in the public and private formal sectors (less than 10 percent of the workforce). This means that the majority of people, especially those who work in the agricultural and informal sectors, are excluded from large-scale social protection (Byaruhanga and Debesay 2021).

In 2010 the Ugandan government established a national social-protection system called the Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE), which includes cash transfers as one of its main pillars. Two design options, the Senior Citizen’s Grant (SCG) and the Vulnerable Family Grant (VFSG), were piloted between 2011 and 2015 to test their impacts (Dietrich et al., 2020). The VFSG was phased out after the pilot phase because ‘its administration was problematic and not well appreciated by the communities’ (Mukoki and Geraldine 2019: 3-4). Tran and Ghadially (2021) suggest that the reason was that its design, which was based on community-based targeting, made it vulnerable to ‘elite capture and exclusion errors’, i.e. it became enmeshed in patronage relations at the local level. The SCG programme, on the other hand, was expanded nationally, after the President realized that it was effective in election campaigning. However, in the national roll-out it only covered persons above 80 years of age (Expanding Social Protection, 2021), which in the Ugandan context means that it includes very few people.

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NRM, which explained why negotiations and compromises were possible, in spite of diverging interests between the ruling elite and the dairy actors (Kjaer, 2015).

The Ugandan government has also used cash transfers as a way of cushioning the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. In 2021 a small one-off payment was distributed to 500,000 households in urban areas (ISER 2021; Mukhaye 2021, February 23), and in early 2022 a similar package was issued for privately employed teachers whose jobs and incomes disappeared due to the lockdown (*The Independent*, 2022, January 25). Both programmes have been criticized for being both insufficient and for unclear inclusion criteria.

Hence, state-based cash transfers and social protection in Uganda are neither as large nor as institutionalized as in Tanzania (Lavers and Hickey 2021),<sup>21</sup> but seem to be used as part of existing patronage relations. Bukenya and Hickey (2020) have shown how social protection programmes were also subject to intense negotiations between various parts of the government, most notably the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED), and the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD). The latter worked closely with donors promoting social protection, while the former was concerned with financial sustainability and was ideologically biased against what it saw as ‘hand-outs’.

The slow introduction of the SAGE programme has to be seen in light of the tendency within the Ugandan elite to see cash transfers as ‘handouts’ rather than as a tool to create economic development and social cohesion. Besides this being in line with conservative ideologies around cash transfers, also common in other African countries (Hickey et al. 2020), it might also be linked to the history of cash and food transfers in northern Uganda during the war, where aid to internally displaced persons was seen as having corrupted their working morale and destroyed the social and moral fabric.

### **5.5.3. Funding the state**

The Ugandan state is funded through a combination of taxes, debt and international donors.

#### ***Tax revenues***

The improvements in tax revenues in the first two decades of the NRM regime has continued, albeit at a slower pace. The tax-to-GDP ratio in Uganda increased by 1.0 percentage points from 11.1% in 2020 to 12.2% in 2021. Since 2010, the average for the 33 African countries has increased by 1.5 percentage points, from 14.1% in 2010 to 15.6% in 2021. Over the same period, the tax-to-GDP ratio in Uganda has increased by 3.9 percentage points, from 8.3% to 12.2%. The highest tax-to-GDP ratio reported for Uganda since 2000 was 12.2% in 2021, with the lowest being 8.2% in 2001 (OECD 2024).

Uganda’s domestic revenue collection has grown from UGX 11,231 billion in FY2015/16 to UGX 16,752 billion in FY2019/20. However, the year-on-year growth in net revenue, which is UGX 134 billion, from FY2018/19 to FY2019/20, was the lowest at 0.18% compared to the five-year average of 11.65%. The period during COVID-19 saw a significant shortfall in tax revenues for FY2019/20, UGX 3,592 billion (18%) less than the government’s target for the same year. This was not the case before COVID-19; in fact, a surplus revenue was collected in FY2018/19, before the pandemic struck (Development Initiatives 2021).

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<sup>21</sup> Lavers and Hickey (2021) analyse the institutionalization of state-based social protection in eight African countries, concluding that Uganda has the lowest institutionalization of the countries compared. They defined institutionalization as ‘the process by which national governments progressively take responsibility for the delivery of social transfer programmes’ and assess it by five criteria, namely 1. Statutory (legislation/strategies), 2. Finance (domestically financed), 3. Implementation (implemented through state structures), 4. Scope (national in scope), and 5. Coverage (at least 10% of the population).

The stagnation in tax-revenue collection is attributed to a large proportion of the population remaining untaxed, especially in the informal and commercial agriculture sectors. The narrow tax base is compounded by high levels of tax-evasion, tax-avoidance, low tax compliance and corruption. It is reported that the largest compliance gap is recorded in the VAT take, the URA realizing only 60% of the potential VAT revenue. Yet, tax revenues play a significant role in the economy, contributing the largest proportion of domestic revenue, estimated at 72.4% in FY 2020/21 (Kakumba and Krönke 2023).

### ***Public debt***

The low tax revenues have led the country to experience serious financing gaps, demonstrated by the wide fiscal deficits that peaked at 13.6 % of GDP in 2001/02, before falling to 7.5 percent in 2007/08 and eventually to 7% in 2019/20, due to various debt-forgiveness initiatives and the government's commitment to finance most of the budget from domestic revenues. The stock of total public debt increased by 21.7 percent from US\$ 15.34 billion (UGX 57,215 billion) at the end of June 2020 to US\$ 19.54 billion (UGX 69,512 billion) by the end of June 2021. Of this, external debt amounted to US\$ 12.39 billion (UGX 44,061 billion), while domestic debt was US\$ 7.2 billion (UGX 25451 billion) (Republic of Uganda, 2021).

Public debt has been increasing, reaching 49.1 percent of GDP in nominal terms at the end of FY2020/21, below the expectation under the previous debt-sustainability analysis. The positive surprise in the lower level of debt was due to a combination of a lower than expected fiscal deficit and the appreciation of the exchange rate. The increase of almost fourteen percentage points in debt stock over the past two fiscal years was primarily driven by external borrowing, with two-thirds of outstanding public debt owed to external creditors (US\$13.2 billion or 31.7 percent of GDP) on a residency basis. Domestic debt amounts to about US\$7.2 billion (17.4 percent of GDP). In present value terms, total public-sector debt amounted to 41.1 percent of GDP at the end of FY2020/21 (World Bank, 2022).

### ***Donor funding***

International donor funding has been and is important both for funding government activities and for the economy in general. In the first millennial decade (1999-2009), Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) hovered between 10-15 percent of GNI, while since 2009 it has been between 5 and 10 percent of GNI (World Bank data), reflecting a higher GNI. In actual terms, aid has increased during the last decade (for instance, aid per person was US\$183 in 2009, which has since risen to US\$ 583 in 2019). Uganda benefits more from bilateral than multilateral aid and IFI-lending. Its major bilateral donors are the United States (providing almost half the bilateral aid), the United Kingdom and Scandinavian countries, while the World Bank, the Global Fund and the European Union are the major multilateral donors (Development Initiatives 2021; Lee 2022; Ulrich et al. 2024). A large part of aid goes to the health sector, in particular to HIV/AIDS interventions, partly because the US allocates a major part of its funds to this sector, and partly because the Global Fund is a large donor. However, the Global Fund indicates that funding for the HIV/AIDS sector will be reduced in the near future (Ulrich et al. 2024). The humanitarian sector is the second largest sector (Development Initiative, 2021), due to Uganda's role as a major refugee recipient in the region.

Although actual aid flows have increased, its character has changed (Lee, 2022). In the early 2000s, Uganda was a pioneer as a recipient of aid in the form of government budget support, as well as in coordinating bilateral aid under national development planning, first under PEAP, and from 2010

under the National Development Plan. However, the share of bilateral aid channelled through public institutions has decreased, from around half of bilateral aid in 2010 to 24% in 2019 (Lee 2022). Furthermore, budget support has to a large extent been replaced with project-based aid and to some extent sectoral support, with a higher degree of donor influence, and less fungibility of funds. This reflects donors' decreasing trust in government institutions due to major corruption scandals, as well as decreasing support from several main donors to the direction political developments in Uganda have taken, in particular after the 2006 changes to the constitution. Bilateral donors have therefore increasingly reallocated their funds to non-state actors, while maintaining the aid flow. There are, however, large differences between donor countries, with the UK continuing with budget support, although at a lower level than before, and Japan, Germany and Denmark still channelling a major part of their funds through public institutions, while Sweden, for example, only channels 15 percent of its funds through the government (Lee 2022).

Although bilateral aid still dominates aid flows to Uganda, IFI loans to the governance and security sectors have increased in recent years, thus increasing the loan proportion relative to grants (Development Initiative 2021; Ulrich et al. 2024).

China has also increased its investments in Uganda during the last decade, in particular in large infrastructure projects such as roads and hydropower (Swedlund 2017). The size of Chinese aid and investments is difficult to estimate since it takes many different forms (aid, concessional loans and non-concessional loans) and since China refuses to share data on its official finances, though available estimates suggest that it is still significantly lower than ODA financing (Swedlund 2017; Muchapondwa et al. 2016). China's financing is primarily channelled through state-owned Chinese companies and is primarily directed towards the productive sectors; it therefore constitutes a different type of funding than ODA.

In sum, during the early 2000s, the link between donor assistance and regime survival was strong. Since then, donor dependency has decreased, but it still constitutes a significant contribution to both the national economy and the state budget and is therefore still important for regime survival. The decrease in aid through public institutions contributes to the increasing difficulties in funding the regime, as will be discussed more below.

### ***Election funding***

Several studies indicate that election campaigns in Uganda have become increasingly expensive since the 2000s due to increasing competition both within and between parties (Bukenya and Muhumuza 2017; Khisa et al. 2022). Khisa et al. show that presidential elections are much more expensive in Uganda than in Tanzania, which they attribute to the waning legitimacy of the long-staying Museveni. They show that elections are funded by a combination of official state funding of parties, unofficial use of state resources, and private contributions from both businesses and individuals. The unofficial use of state resources, as well as contributions from larger domestic businesses, mainly benefit the incumbent party and its candidates. The main donors to the NRM are large Ugandan-Asian businessowners, who are mainly rewarded by being granted access to land and more recently with tax breaks and import privileges (Khisa et al. 2022; Tangri and Mwenda 2013). With regard to the use of state resources, Bukenya and Muhumuza (2017) show how budgetary rules and laws have been amended to allow supplementary budgets, which are often allocated to 'classified expenditures' in connection with election campaigns.

### ***Governance reforms***

From around 2000, Uganda implemented a series of economic and political reforms that led to major changes in the country's governance. Some of the major economic reforms included the

establishment of the National Planning Authority (NPA) with a mandate to plan for the development of the country, a function formerly a preserve of the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED). Another reform was the enactment of the Budget Act of 2001 which clearly spelt out the responsibilities of the relevant stakeholders, such as parliament, the executive and other actors. The Budget Act put in place measures to promote budgetary discipline such as the provision that all supplementary expenditures above 3 percent had to be approved by Parliament. A Public Finance and Accountability Act of 2003 was passed to provide for the fiscal policy framework, promoting good public financial management, public borrowing and the auditing of government accounts.

Economic governance (and the military) are what Hickey et al. (2021) call ‘pockets of effectiveness’ within Ugandan public governance, with the Bank of Uganda, the Ministry of Finance (MFPED) and the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) as the top performing institutions. The competence of and high regard for these institutions is both a cause and effect of Uganda’s success in economic reforms and economic performance since the 1990s. However, their effectiveness has varied over time, in particular their ability to control the budget process.

Bukenya and Hickey (2019) note that, from early 2000, there was a laxity in the budget discipline and aggregate fiscal discipline characterized by disparities between resources allocated to sectors and what was actually spent, as well as increased demands for supplementary budgets. Bukenya and Muhumuza (2017) report that, according to the Auditor General’s report for 2014, the supplementary funding increased the original budget by 221 percent from UGX 63.2 billion to UGX 203.5 billion. In 2011, ahead of the general elections, parliament approved a supplementary budget of UGX 980 billion. Bukenya and Muhumuza (2017) note that supplementary funds are always allocated to classified expenditure where government is not obliged to reveal how the funds are spent. Bukenya and Hickey (2019) further note that the MFPED was always under pressure to allocate resources in the budget and a supplementary budget to the Office of the President to enable the President to honour his pledges (sometimes the above resources are allocated in the budget) and other institutions where the President has strong control, such as State House and the Ministry of Defence, which have classified expenditures. Over time, the government gained more flexibility over the budgeting process, especially the supplementary budget when the Public Finance Management Act (2015) was amended to allow the government to reallocate 3 percent of the national budget without parliamentary approval, as mentioned above. In addition, the government was able to include a clause in the Act that allows the MFPED to receive advances from the Bank of Uganda without prior approval from Parliament. Bukenya and Muhumuza (2017) note that amendments in the laws are normally passed during the electioneering period, raising the suspicion that the funding involved could be diverted to finance party activities.

In 2001 two competent and well-respected top management officials, the Minister of MFPED Gerald Ssendaula and the permanent secretary Emmanuel Mutebile, were removed from the Ministry and appointed as the Executive Director of the NPA and Governor of the Bank of Uganda respectively. Bukenya and Hickey (2019) note that the two managers could challenge the President’s position and stood in the President’s way in implementing new strategies. The transfer of these two officials sent a signal to the new and retained staff not to object strongly to the President’s position and eventually compromised the technical input. It is therefore viewed that the subsequent leaders played more of a political than a technical role, particularly the new minister, who had authored the NRM’s first party political manifesto at the 2006 elections.



### ***Corruption***

Since 2000, Uganda's public resource management has been characterized by corruption scandals. A case in point is the sector budgets presented prior to hosting the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in Uganda in 2007, where several of the budget lines were not justified such as planting flowers along Entebbe Road at a cost of UGX 4 billion. Besides the CHOGM corruption scandal, there were other corruption scandals such as the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) scandal in 2006, a Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria scandal in 2005 and the Peace Recovery and Development Programme (PDRP) scandal in the office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in 2012 (Bukonya and Muhumuza 2017; Bukonya and Hickey 2019).

Formally, Uganda has good legal and policy frameworks and several institutions for fighting corruption, but implementation is weak. Bukonya and Muhumuza (2017) attribute this weak implementation partly to a lack of funding and the inadequate staffing of anti-corruption agencies, as well as poor coordination between institutions, but also to what they call an 'anti-reform coalition' in government, which is not interested in changing corrupt practices, since they are instrumental in upholding the patronage networks needed for regime survival.

The NRM and the President acknowledge that corruption is a problem in Uganda. It is often mentioned as a vice that the NRM is fighting, for example, in the President's end of year speech (*The Observer*, 2020, Jan 1). Furthermore, the President has been leading anti-corruption walks (Bigirimana 2020, Jan 2), and in 2020 the First Lady launched an Anti-Corruption Campaign (Inspectorate of Government, 2020, 12 Nov).

The corruption scandals have not only contributed to reducing the channelling of donor funding through public institutions, as discussed above, but also negatively affected citizen's perceptions of the government and public provision (Nystrand 2014; Findley et al. 2017). Findley et al. (2017) show that Ugandan citizens prefer donor-funded programmes to government-funded ones, which is linked to perceptions of corruption and inefficiency in the public sector. Uganda ranks as one of the most corrupt countries in the world in Transparency International's corruption perception index (number 142 out of 180 countries in 2022), and worse than the African average according to the Mo Ibrahim foundation (Kakumba 2021). According to the Afrobarometer (Kakumba 2021), 73 percent of Ugandans think the government is 'doing badly' in fighting corruption.

### ***Summing up financing***

The financing part of Uganda's political settlement can be summed up under five main headings: 1) economic progress and economic governance is an important aspect of the NRM's legitimacy, but it has become increasingly difficult to sustain; 2) elections in Uganda are expensive, which puts pressure on both formal and informal funding structures; 3) corruption is a major problem that is engrained in the patronage mode of staying in power; 4) tax reforms have made progress, but tax revenues are still too low; and 5) donor funding is still important, but increasingly channelled through non-state actors, due to tensions between major donors and the ruling elite, thus limiting the funds available for regime survival. The overall picture is thus that funding the regime has become increasingly difficult.

## **5.6. Relation to external actors**

International bilateral and multilateral donors and development banks have been and continue to be important funders of investments and development projects in Uganda, thus also influencing the political settlement.

As explained above, the US and UK, other European countries, the European Union and the World Bank are the main bilateral and multilateral donors. Large parts of the funds consist of ‘general’ development aid, i.e. support to various sectors in society, government institutions and civil society, and like all development aid they are affected by trends in development thinking, as well as donor countries’ own political interests and agendas. However, a significant part of aid, in particular from the US, goes into the military and security sector, being motivated by security interests in the region. This matters for understanding the complexities of the relations between Uganda and its main donors (Abrahamsen and Bareebe 2021).

The relationships between Uganda and its main Western donors have deteriorated during the last twenty years, from the 1990s’ view of Uganda as a ‘donor darling’ and a ‘star performer’ with regard to development reforms, to increasing concern and criticism from donors, primarily with regard to democratic development and corruption. In several instances, donors have frozen funds in response to various corruption scandals, and criticism has often been issued against democratic deficiencies and human rights concerns, especially in connection with elections and LGBTQ rights. However, funds have continued to come in. There might be many reasons for this, including internal institutional logics in development organizations and various political considerations within donor countries, but as Abrahamsen and Bareebe (2021) point out, the securitization of the development discourse, in combination with Uganda’s strategic position in the region, certainly plays a role. This includes Uganda’s contribution of troops to regional peacekeeping operations, but also its willingness to take in refugees from neighbouring countries.

In the aftermath of the 2021 elections, relations between Uganda and its main donors reached a new low (Titeca and Reuss 2021; Abrahamsen and Bareebe 2021). Museveni accused donors of supporting the opposition, and a large European fund for support to civil-society organisations working on democracy was frozen for a couple of weeks in January-February 2021 (Muhumuza 2021, February 3; Mukhaye 2021, February 23). Abrahamsen and Bareebe (2021) argues that there are signs that several Western donors are losing patience and considering drastic changes. The future will tell if there will in fact be any major changes or not.

The power of Western donors has also diminished, for various reasons. It is often argued that the increasing role of Chinese financing is a contributing factor, but Swedlund (2017) argues that China’s increasing role is more a symptom than a major cause of the declining bargaining power of Western donors. Since Chinese aid is so different from ODA, not the least in that it focuses on the productive sector rather than the social sector, she argues that it often fulfils more of a complementary role. Having said that, Swedlund (2017) argues that when China and ODA funders compete directly, Chinese aid is often preferred since it is faster and comes with fewer non-economic ‘conditionalities’. The main reason for the diminishing power of Western donors is instead the general decrease in aid dependency. In the case of Uganda, Swedlund (2017) claims that the discovery of oil, in combination with large-scale aid suspensions in 2012, which annoyed the Ugandan government, shifted the dynamics of donor-government relations, and made the Ugandan government more determined to decrease the country’s dependence on aid further.

Uganda has made itself known as a generous host country for refugees, primarily from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), but also from Burundi, Somalia, Rwanda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Eritrea, as well as for its efforts to integrate refugees with host populations (Ahimbisibwe 2019). In 2016 there was a huge influx of South Sudanese refugees due to a deterioration in the security situation in their country, which meant that refugee settlements mushroomed, in particular in the West Nile region in the north-western corner of Uganda. Many of

these refugees are still in Uganda in various settlements around the country, as well as in urban areas. Uganda is well known for its generous refugee policy, which allows refugees to settle in local communities and provide for themselves, and which also includes the 70/30 policy, which stipulates that the host community should receive 30 percent of any resources allocated to refugees to ease tensions and improve relationships between Ugandan citizens and refugees. This policy has led to Uganda becoming one of the largest refugee-hosting countries in the world. This has given it a lot of goodwill internationally, and it also means that the country receives a lot of humanitarian aid. In the refugee settlements, humanitarian NGOs normally work under the management and coordination of UNCHR in cooperation with the Ugandan state, with the Office of the Prime Minister as the responsible government entity (interview with Karen Lind, Danish Church Aid, June 2022). There are instances where NGOs have been required to close down certain types of operations, and there is continuous monitoring and oversight of their activities, but in general the NGOs' contributions to the humanitarian needs of both refugee and host communities is appreciated by the government, and the cooperation is constructive. It has been argued that Uganda's role as a refugee host is one of the reasons the country remains important to international donors (Abrahamsen and Bareebe 2021).

Hence, although the relationship between Western donors and the Ugandan government is rocky, and the Ugandan elite often talks about decreasing aid dependency, their interdependence means that aid funds continue to flow.

When it comes to the funding of the social sector, the Ugandan government does not at present have any good alternatives to ODA funding. Tax funding is the only long-term alternative, but is likely to be far from sufficient within the foreseeable future. This also means that foreign donors still have an influence in relation to the social sector, in particular when it comes to agenda-setting, although this power is also limited (Hickey et al. 2020). Social protection and social assistance policies have been promoted by international donors for about twenty years, but the Ugandan government, like most African aid-dependent governments, have resisted and do not spend as much on the social sector as recommended by the World Bank and other international donors.<sup>22</sup> Lavers and Hickey (2021) contend that a policy alliance between donors and state representatives is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the institutionalization of social transfers in Africa. The determining factor is domestic political factors, such as political competition and/or some type of 'distributional crisis' that threatens regime survival in some way. According to Lavers and Hickey (2021), Uganda has a low degree of the institutionalization of social transfers exactly because of an absence of sufficient political competition and/or distributional crises, in spite of the promotion of social assistance policies by donors.

In sum, while Uganda's relations with external actors are greatly characterized by aid dependency, this dependency has decreased financially during the last decades, but perhaps even more significantly also mentally, that is, in the attitude towards donors from the Ugandan government.

### **5.7. Summary of period 3**

Uganda's political settlement during the last two decades has been characterized by an increasing level of fragmentation, not the least in strengthening the political opposition, along with increasing repression of that opposition. The personalization and centralization of power has become entrenched,

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<sup>22</sup> The International Labour Organisation and the World Bank have suggested social assistance programmes at a cost of 1.3-1.5% of GDP, but hardly any African governments have approved expenditures of more than 0.5 percent of GDP (Seekings 2017).

and several constitutional changes, which increased the political division both within the NRM and outside it, have made it possible for Museveni to become one of Africa's longest serving leaders.

The initial legitimacy of the NRM regime based on the liberator narrative from the Bush War has lost much of its appeal, not least among Uganda's large young population. No strong unifying ideology has replaced it, and the regime now retains its power based on a combination of patronage, responsiveness to popular demands, and the repression of political opponents. The military continues to play a crucial role in upholding the regime.

The relationship with international donors has deteriorated, for two main reasons: 1) a decrease in aid dependency caused by economic growth, the discovery of oil and the availability of other financing, for example, from China; and 2) the increasing distrust between Western donors and the Ugandan government over democratic principles and corruption. The mutual dependence, based on the security concerns of Western partners and the financial needs of the Ugandan government, prevents the relationship from breaking down completely.

State-society relations have increasingly moved in a more coercive direction compared to the first decade of NRM rule, although coercion is still combined with patronage and responsiveness to popular demands. The next, concluding section will summarize the historical development of political settlements in Uganda, in particular identifying continuities and changes over time, as well as drawing out dimensions of the political settlement that are of relevance to understanding the politicization of social cash transfers.

## **6. Concluding discussion**

The concluding discussion has two parts: a summary of the historical continuities and changes in Uganda's political development since independence and an analysis that draws out the main lessons learned for a subsequent analysis of the politicization of social cash transfers in Uganda.

### **6.1. History: continuities and changes**

Our historical analysis of political developments in Uganda highlights both continuities and changes over the years. The clear change from the political instability of the early independence period to the relative stability of NRM rule hides deeper continuities in the country's politics. Similarly, the political settlement has continued to change under the NRM regime. Hence, the nature of a political settlement is not only connected to who rules, but also to deeper political developments in a society. Here we will draw out some of these long-term trends, divided into continuities and changes.

#### **6.1.1. Continuities**

Long-term continuities in Uganda's political development, which span the various regimes since independence (with roots in the colonial and pre-colonial periods) include a weak democratic tradition, a strong role for the military, a lack of social cohesion perpetuated by patronage, and the strong influence of external actors. Although Uganda has these features in common with many post-colonial countries, they have to be spelled out and taken into account, as they affect the way politics are played out.

##### ***Weak democratic tradition***

To date, post-independence Uganda has never had a peaceful transition of power. For long periods of time political parties were not allowed, not during the Amin regime nor during the first fifteen years of the NRM regime. Furthermore, the political leadership has had difficulties in accepting opposition parties and allowing them a level playing field even during periods of multi-party democracy (the

Obote I and II regimes, and the later part of the NRM regime). Political opponents have either been co-opted or repressed under both Obote and the NRM.

Weak democratic traditions in a formal democracy are certainly not unique to Uganda, but it is a central characteristic of its political settlement that has several consequences. Firstly, the conflation of the state and the ruling party is both a consequence of this political pattern and a cause of the pattern's continuation. Secondly, like other East African countries, civil-society groups have been allowed in service provision while being restricted with regard to advocacy, except for a period in the 1990s. Thirdly, weak institutionalization means that politics is highly personalized, and a few persons, in particular Milton Obote and Yoweri Museveni, have had immense influence on the country's politics over the years. Museveni has had a key role in Uganda's politics from the early 1970s until today, while Obote had a key role from independence until 1986. Naturally, they both had to form alliances with other persons and groups in the country to stay in power.

### ***Social division and patronage***

Uganda is characterized by social division rather than cohesion. This can certainly be traced back to the arbitrarily drawn borders and politics of divide and rule during colonialism, but the division has also been perpetuated by post-independence politics. The main divisions are between north and south, and between ruling elites and political opposition, while other divisions also play a role, such as ethnic, age-based and rural/urban. Patronage, i.e. the giving and removing of resources, benefits and protection, is central to the ruling elite's attempts to gain support and contributes to the country's exclusion/inclusion mechanisms. This has characterized all regimes in post-independence Uganda.

### ***A strong role for the military***

The military is the most powerful institution in Uganda and has been so throughout its post-independence history. Since independence Uganda has had five military take overs, the last one in January 1986. While the Amin regime was a military dictatorship, the military has been central to all Uganda regimes, with violence being used to gain as well as keep power.

To fully understand the role the military plays in Uganda, especially during Museveni's regime, one must appreciate the role the NRA played in the formation of the NRM party and how it was reshaped into the national army, called the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF). The central role of the military in upholding the regime has also been acknowledged by President Museveni himself, as he has is reported to have said explicitly that he came to power by the gun and will stay in power by the gun (Nordic Africa Institute 2021).

For the NRM, the centrality of the liberation or Bush War narrative to its political legitimacy puts the military at the centre of its ideology, while the belief in the military as the most competent institution extends its role into civilian spheres of society. Notably, the politicization of the military and the militarization of politics through patriotism training has been a feature of both the Obote and Museveni regimes.

The important role of the military in upholding the Ugandan regime signifies elements of what Nugent (2010) calls a coercive social contract, i.e. a situation where the relationship between the rulers and the ruled is based on force or fear. However, since the Ugandan ruling elite is also responsive to popular demands and uses patronage to garner support, the relationship between the ruler and the ruled comes closer to Nugent's definition of a permissive social contract, i.e. one where force is combined with engagement between rulers and ruled. In practical terms, the importance of the military means that any political leader who aspires to take over power in Uganda has to secure the support of the military. Given Museveni's strong hold over the military and the important role of both

his brother and son in the armed forces, this seems like an almost impossible endeavour at present. Therefore, the importance of the military in upholding the regime can hardly be overestimated.

### ***Influence of external actors***

While emerging from colonialism in the 1960s, Uganda remained structurally dependent on the UK and received a lot of aid and loans from other Western countries and institutions as well, with the aim of building a national economy and polity. Amin's attempt at self-reliance failed, due to inherent weaknesses in the economy and the mismanagement of both economic and political relations. The poor state of the economy in the 1980s put Uganda under both the Obote and Museveni regimes in a dependent position in relation to international donors and institutions, which has decreased somewhat, but still continues today. Alliances are starting to shift away from Western-dominated institutions and allies towards China, Russia and other actors, but the Ugandan economy is still quite dependent on external actors, which means that its politics are as well. In spite of Museveni's hardened rhetoric against Western donors, they are still supporting Uganda due to mutual interdependencies with regard to security and refugee issues, but only the future will tell how long this will last.

### **6.1.2. Changes**

Changes in the Ugandan political settlement that can be discerned in a long-term perspective include shifting economic policies, differences in political ideologies, and shifting alliances between the ruling elite and various social groups both within and outside the country. The 1990s stand out as a period with more freedom for civil-society groups than either before or since, being a time when relations with external actors, in particular international donors, were less strained than before or since.

### ***Economic policies***

Ugandan economic policy has shifted from being state-led in the 1960s and 1970s to a more mixed economy approach from the 1980s, followed by a shift to neoliberalism from the 1990s, with a slight tweak towards a larger degree of state intervention in the productive sector from around 2010. From a Ugandan perspective, this might be seen as being driven by domestic ideas and actors, but it fits exactly with the general trends in economic development policies in Africa, as promoted by international development actors. For example, the Amin regime's investments in state-driven activities and Obote's promotion of cooperatives were fully in line with the dominant development narratives at the time, which subsequently changed during the 1980s. Museveni initially proposed a more mixed economy approach, but in the 1990s the NRM adopted neoliberal policies then promoted by IFIs. What is perhaps characteristic to Uganda is the degree to which neoliberalism has been accepted and normalized within the elite, with very little fundamental critique of the direction of economic policies. Uganda was also highly successful in implementing neoliberal policies in the 1990s, to the extent that the country became a model for other countries implementing IMF- and World Bank-directed policies. The success has been harder to sustain in recent years, which poses challenges in sustaining both the economic base of the regime and its political legitimacy, of which NRM's ability to deliver on economic development is an important component.

### ***Political ideology***

Political ideologies, as presented by each regime, have shifted over time, from Obote's state-led development to Amin's self-reliance and the NRA/NRM's ten-point programme. The most visionary and unique ideology was perhaps 'the broad-based government'. This was an explicit attempt to break with the inclusion/exclusion legacy and create institutions that could foster social cohesion. Although it was not sustained as a political system, and did not succeed in creating social cohesion, it reduced the importance of certain lines of conflict. In particular, it decreased the importance of religion as a

political dividing line, increased the formal inclusion of different ethnic groups in the ruling elite, and increased female political representation. The NRM regime currently lacks a powerful visionary ideology, since the legitimacy of the Bush War narrative is waning among the younger population, and the economic development narrative is also weakening. The political opposition does not present a clear alternative vision either, as it is primarily campaigning for a change of guard.

### ***Shifting alliances within the country***

All rulers and ruling elites need to create coalitions domestically, i.e. ensure the support of important groups in society, in order to stay in power. These coalitions have shifted over time.

In broad terms, Obote and Amin had support in the north, while Museveni has had support in the south, each drawing on their own groups. Museveni has also made serious attempts to form alliances with other ethnic groups, for example, through the reintroduction of traditional institutions and through the broad-based government. Furthermore, the NRM regime could not have stayed in power for so long without forming alliances with the Buganda elite, although this relationship has always included tensions as well.

While the Catholic Church was an important ally of Obote and the DP, and while Amin favoured Islam and Muslims, Museveni has, rather successfully, positioned himself as a president for all religions.

The cooperative movement was an important coalition partner under Obote, and the vehicle to include the farming population in the ruling coalition, but it was marginalized under the NRM. On the other hand, the NRM has created strong links between the ruling elite and the rural population through local government structures, which had already been introduced during the Bush War.

The women's movement grew strong under the NRM, and women have been strong supporters of both it and Museveni, being a population group that was largely marginalized under previous regimes. In general, there was more freedom for NGOs and advocacy groups in the 1990s than before and since.

Last but not least, the Ugandan-Indian businessowners and capitalists, who were important domestic economic actors at independence, were expelled by Amin, with disastrous consequences for the economy, and brought back by Museveni in the 1980s. It has been argued that bringing them back and returning their property had importance beyond the impact of the businesses they restarted and expanded, since it revived confidence in Uganda as an investment destination for foreign investors.

### ***Shifting international alliances***

As noted above, international actors have had a large influence on Ugandan politics, as is often the case in post-colonial nations.

Since independence, European nations, the USA and Western-dominated IFIs and NGOs have had a great influence on Ugandan politics based on historical ties, them providing Uganda with extensive funding, and having been its most important trading partners. Basically, Ugandan regimes have had to maintain these relationships for reasons of economic dependence, as was clearly illustrated when Amin strained these relations, with disastrous consequences for the economy. The NRM and Museveni built up relations with the West again, and Western support has been the main source of funding for the NRM regime, consisting of both aid and soft loans. During the 1990s Uganda was the 'donor's darling', being seen as an example of both democratic and political development.

Nevertheless, such relations of international dependency are bound to include tensions, which have become more strained during the last decade, in particular with regard to diverging views on

democratic development and LGBTQ rights, as well as persistent corruption. These increasing tensions come at a time when both Europe and the US are preoccupied with internal problems, both politically and economically, as well as with the war in Ukraine, which means that aid to Uganda and other African countries is and will continue to be reduced. Uganda is still relevant to the West for security and refugee reasons, and Uganda still needs the aid, in particular for the social sector, but only the future will tell how the relationship develops.

China's role as a trading partner and investor has increased tremendously in recent decades and has given Uganda an alternative ally to the West, increasing the country's room for manoeuvre somewhat. However, Chinese funding is primarily directed towards the productive sector and infrastructure, and therefore is more a complement than a substitute for Western funding, in particular for the social sector.

Nevertheless, although Uganda is still in a position of dependence on the West, there is a trend towards shifting international alliances, which reflects both changes in the Ugandan elite's attitudes to this dependence and global geopolitical shifts towards a more multipolar world.

### **6.1.3. Uganda's political settlements over time**

Based on the analytical types of political settlement proposed by Khan (2010) and Whitfield et al. (2015), the Ugandan political settlement can be seen as having moved from competitive clientelism under Obote I, through vulnerable authoritarianism under Amin and Obote II, to a weak dominant party during the first decades of the NRM regime, to gradually moving towards competitive clientelism again since the introduction of multiparty democracy in the mid-2000s (see section 2 for descriptions of these categories). In some cases these shifts have been abrupt, as in Amin's, Obote's and Museveni's military take-overs, while the last change towards more competition during the NRM regime has been gradual over many years.

Although these categories might be useful for comparison between countries and over time, they are not particularly useful as a basis for the political analysis of a particular policy area within a country. For that purpose, the five dimensions of political settlement (horizontal, vertical, funding, ideology, and external relations) constitute a much more useful tool for unpacking how power is exercised and as a basis for understanding how certain phenomenon are politicized. The following section will draw out the implications of this analysis for the politicization of social cash transfers in Uganda.

## **6.2. Politicization of social cash transfers in Uganda**

The aspects of our political settlement analysis that are relevant for analysing the politicization of cash transfers and social protection include: the relationship between patronage and institutions; included and excluded factions in society; the NRM's grassroots organization; the role of the military; ideology; and the relationship with international donors. This analysis not only summarizes where we are now, it is also forward-looking; i.e., based on our analysis, we are hypothesising what role social cash transfers might play in Ugandan politics and how it might affect the social contract, i.e. the relationship between rulers and ruled.

### **6.2.1. The relationship between patronage and institutions**

One striking feature of Uganda's political settlement is the high degree of personalization of power and the related extensive use of direct patronage to gather support. This type of personalized patronage is generally seen to undermine formal institutions and stands in contrast to the ideal of strong institutions that apply the law to all citizens alike. However, as has been pointed out in several political settlement analyses, it is quite common for widespread patronage to be combined with strong



institutions in certain sectors, so-called pockets of effectiveness (see, for example, Whitfield et al. 2015).

The personalization of power relates in part to the centralization of power in the office of the President, but it also includes the personalization of power at other levels, for example, with regard to Members of Parliament (MPs).

With regard to the President, there are many examples of his intervention in detailed decision-making, sometimes based on direct requests from particular groups of citizens. One example that was mentioned above is the inclusion of Yumbe district in the senior citizen grant (SCG) programme (Hickey and Bukenya 2016). In the Yumbe case, however, the President, having included Yumbe in the pilot phase of the programme, also directed MGLSD to extend the programme to the whole country. Hence, in this case the request was made based on expectations of the President's personal power, but the President himself decided to make the 'patronage' nation-wide, hence institutionalizing it and making it part of wider state-society relations, since he saw it as a means to gain voter support more generally. Hence, the relationship between patronage, institutions and personalized power is rather complex and must be analysed from case to case.

Personalization and patronage not only apply to the President, but also to other political leaders, such as MPs (Collord 2020; Kjaer and Katusiimeh 2021). In Uganda, MPs are personally elected by their constituencies,<sup>23</sup> and the relationship between them and their constituencies is highly personalized, in the sense that they need to use their power to bring political benefits to their own constituency to maintain support. This means that MPs might push for social services and, for example, cash-transfer programmes in their own districts if they perceive them as a way to gain voter support, i.e. if they can find a way to take the credit for bringing these programmes to the constituency.

Given the strong practice of political personalization and patronage, it is likely that different forms of social provision, including cash transfers, are or could be used as a way to give certain groups a priority, based on concrete requests or a perceived need to gain political support for a particular social group. However, at least in theory, this could also mean such social provision being extended to the entire population as well, if the President views it as an important way to gain voter support at the national level by strengthening his and the NRM's relationship with the population more generally. It could be argued that this is what happened with the SCG. However, since the coverage was limited to persons above 80 years of age, the effect on state-society relations has been very limited.

### **6.2.2. Included and excluded factions in the population**

There are many groups in Ugandan society that are or view themselves as being excluded from representation and from benefitting from the achievements in society.

Young people are a majority population in Uganda, but many of them see themselves as lacking representation and prospects in the current development of the country. They are key voters due to their large numbers, and many of them support the opposition, in particular Bobi Wine/Kyagulayi, and in particular in urban areas. The Youth Livelihood Fund is a government support programme intended to win political support from this group. It is based on extending credit, hence it is in line with the dominant ideology that cash transfers are primarily for vulnerable groups and not for able-bodied young people. It is not unlikely that more programmes could be used to attempt to strengthen

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<sup>23</sup> This is in contrast to countries in which the party decides which candidates go on the party list, and the voters vote for the party, not the individual candidates.

the relationship between the young and the rulers, but using cash transfers in this context would require a reconsideration of the ideology around them.

There is also a perception of power and privilege being ethnicized in Uganda. For instance, there is a perception that Museveni's own ethnic group, the Banyankole from the west of the country, have more access to economic opportunities. Hence, any preference given to persons or groups from this part of the country would fuel already existing tensions. Given the tradition of broad-based government, implying that all groups in society should be at least formally represented, and Museveni's awareness of this perception, it is unlikely that such privileges would be given explicitly.

What is more likely from a political settlement perspective is that certain groups might be targeted based on a perceived need to boost political support in that particular group at a particular time. Kjaer's (2015) analysis of how industrial policy was used to strengthen the political settlement includes the example of support to the dairy sector that benefited primarily the west of Uganda due to the large dairy sector in that part of the country. However, her political settlement analysis does not frame this in terms of ethnicity, but as a need to secure support from that particular elite group at that point in time.

Targeting a certain group to gain support has also been seen many times in relation to northern Uganda. The north as a whole has been excluded and marginalized throughout a large part of the NRM regime, as explained above. However, after the end of the violent conflict in 2006, the NRM regime has made many attempts to gain support in this region, often through targeted government programmes e.g., the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF).

The Ugandan state has previously shown that paying attention to particular population groups can change. As Lie (2017) showed, this is what happened with regard to the Acholi region in the north, where the state consciously phased out humanitarian NGOs in order to place itself as a main provider and thus integrate this population group in state-building and as voters, while Karamoja was recast as a humanitarian and security situation and thus integrated as a marginalized region.

Hence, state resources and external aid would most likely be geared towards constituencies in which voter support needs to be boosted for one reason or another, either because support for the NRM is low, or because it is an NRM stronghold whose support needs to be secured or rewarded.

### **6.2.3. NRM's grassroots organization**

One clear way in which relations are formed between citizens and the ruling elite in Uganda is through the strong grassroots organization of the ruling NRM. As mentioned above, grassroots organizations had already been formed during the Bush War in some parts of the country, and throughout the years the NRM has built a strong network at all levels of governance throughout the country, extending them into rural areas. These networks and institutions have been instrumental in mobilizing voters and support for party activities. It should be noted that other political parties do not have corresponding grassroots organizations, except for organizations for students and other elite groups.

These networks can be used, for example, to identify beneficiaries, and for consultation and mobilization meetings. If these networks are used for party supporters and other groups that are excluded from access to services or social cash transfers, it can create tensions.

This has happened before with government programmes, for example, with the agricultural support programme NAADS (Kjaer 2015). Beneficiaries of this programme were originally identified by programme coordinators, but eventually this was changed so that local politicians were in charge of

identifying beneficiaries, in the form of the local district chairperson and, if he/she was not a member of the NRM, then also the local NRM chairperson. This change undermined the effectiveness of the programme in terms of agricultural extension services, while it succeeded in securing support from lower-level factions of the NRM (Kjaer 2015).

#### **6.2.4. The Role of the Military**

The military is central to the political settlement in Uganda, as discussed above. According to Reuss (2020), it is seen by the party and the President as the most capable institution of the state.

The involvement of the military in the mobilization of voters and in dispatching agricultural inputs, none of which would normally be included in the military's responsibilities, has to be seen in this light. It signifies the perceived need for the ruling elite to secure control over these activities, since the military tends to be loyal to the regime. It is also in line with the liberation and patriotism ideology discussed above (Reuss 2020), which entails a lack of differentiation between the political and military spheres. The question is how this is perceived by voters and recipients of funds or inputs. How does the implicit threat of force that the military symbolizes affect the recipients' or voters' views of what the state offers through the military and how does it form their perception of their relationship with the state, i.e. their expectations of their rulers? Does it instil fear on the part of citizens, and if so, what effect does that have? It might be important to take this dimension further in the analysis of social provision in Uganda, in particular in the light of what many see as an increasing level of violence.

#### **6.2.5. Ideology**

The broad-based government ideology of the early years of the NRM regime was intended to be inclusive and aimed at overcoming divisions in society. However, this did not succeed, and with multi-party democracy taking over no new overarching ideology has taken the place of the broad-based government, since the 'Bush War legacy' discourse has become less effective in relation to the increasingly youthful electorate. Therefore, patronage and coercion have taken over as the main means of keeping the regime in power (Reuss and Titeca 2017). Hence, no overarching ideology exists to create social cohesion for the whole of Uganda.

At present there is no sign that cash transfers or social protection in general are seen as a means to create a stronger relationship between state and society in Uganda, i.e. beyond being used as patronage. Quite the opposite, since cash transfers are continually seen as 'handouts' by the elite rather than as a tool to create both economic development and a social contract. In addition to this being in line with conservative ideologies around cash transfers that are common among African elites (Hickey et al. 2020), as well as with the neoliberal economic ideology that predominates in Uganda, it might also be linked to the history of cash transfers in northern Uganda during the war, when aid to internally displaced persons in camps was seen as something that corrupted their working morale and destroyed the social and moral fabric.

#### **6.2.6. The role of international donors**

The role of international donors in Uganda's political settlement is multifaceted. As important funders of all sorts of activity, not the least in the social sector, both through the government and through non-state organisations, they have an influence on what type of services are delivered to the population. The effects on state-society relations most likely depend on the modalities of delivering programmes. If delivered through the state, this can contribute to strengthening the relationship between the government and the population, provided the programmes are well received and can be continued over time. Programmes delivered through non-state actors can, however, create other types of relationship, including the population's expectations of external actors, which might resemble social

contract-type relations. Whether and how such programmes affect relations between the population and the government is an open question, one that will be explored empirically in the research programme of which this study forms a part. It is clear from the Ugandan government's increasing aversion to donor-funded programmes outside direct government control, that there is a fear of the possibility of such interference in the state-citizen relationship (see Nystrand et al. 2024).

Another aspect of the role of international donors is that the Ugandan government currently cannot implement large-scale social-protection programmes without financial support from international donors. Tax income is not large enough, and alternative financiers, such as China, are not interested in funding the social sector. Hence, the ability of the Ugandan government to use social protection and similar social investments to improve its relations with its population depend to a large extent on its relations with international donors. An improvement in the current and increasing mutual distrust in these relationships therefore seems to be a precondition for any further development of the social sector. (See also Ulrich 2025 forthcoming for an analysis of the political feasibility of scaling of cash transfers in Uganda.)

#### **6.2.7. Summing up the implications for the politicization of social cash transfers**

There is no sign that social cash transfers or social protection in general are used as political tools for creating stronger state-society relations in Uganda, as they are not in line with the dominant neoliberal and conservative ideologies. What is more likely from a political settlement perspective is that certain groups might be targeted based on a perceived need to boost political support in that particular group at a particular time. The decreasing relevance of the Bush War legacy as a legitimizing ideology has made patronage the main tool for retaining political support for the Ugandan regime, leading Nystrand et al. (2024) to describe the distributive logic in Uganda's social contract as 'patronage-based'. The selective inclusion of groups makes this rather unstable, as there will always be excluded groups where discontent can grow.

One particular feature of Ugandan politics of relevance to how patronage might be manifested is the strong grassroots networks that NRM has built throughout the country, extending into rural areas, where local government institutions are used to galvanize support for the party. Whether these are or could be used for the politicization of cash transfers is an empirical question to be explored. Another feature worth exploring is the involvement of the military in civilian government activities, including the provision of services, and the question of how this affects state-society relations.

The Ugandan government cannot at present implement large social protection programmes without international funding, primarily from Western countries and institutions. Given the current tensions in these relationships, it is unlikely that the Ugandan regime would expand activities that would exacerbate these dependencies, thus further diminishing the likelihood of an extensive expansion of social cash transfers.

When analysing the politicization of the provision of social cash transfers by non-state actors, which by and large are funded by Western international donors, all the above aspects have to be considered. What relations do such provisions create between providers and recipients? How are these relations affected by, and how do they affect, the role of social cash transfers and social protection in the Ugandan political settlement? If government programmes and resources are to a large extent used as patronage, i.e. to target certain groups to boost support, the main question for understanding the politicization of non-state provision becomes how non-state resources complement or compete with these logics.

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