

The Dominant Party System in Uganda
Subnational Competition and Authoritarian Survival
in the 2016 Elections



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Abstract

The Dominant Party System in Uganda: Subnational Competition and Authoritarian Survival in the 2016 Elections

This thesis studies the authoritarian dominant party system in Uganda during the 2016 general election. It focuses on how subnational competition within the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) prolongs the tenure of its leader, 30-year incumbent President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. In three districts where the NRM has been historically strong – Kyenjojo, Kayunga, and Bugiri – the thesis traces three processes to this end: the decentralisation and localisation of accountability politics away from the regime and toward expendable local politicians (H_1); the relationship between local elite rivalry and the NRM's collective mobilisation for Museveni's simultaneous re-election (H_2); and how competitive electoral pressures on NRM MPs alter the national elite bargain in the president's favour (H_3). It concludes that in strong NRM areas, the fractious divisions that characterise intra-party competition are not a by-product of its near monopolistic domination of politics, but the very basis of that dominance. This emphasis on subnational intra-party competition brings a new variable into a literature on non-democratic survival that tends to focus on more narrowly coercive and clientelist regime strategies.

The thesis presents this argument in a qualitative single case study driven by an open and inductive fieldwork component throughout the 2016 election period. Its three hypotheses are built on data from interviews (with voters and elites), ethnographic observations, official data, and secondary sources. This data is used in a process-tracing design before its conclusions are fortified by a subnational comparative analysis of the election results in the three case districts.

To my dear Amanda.

I promise this is my last thesis.

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Conducting qualitative social science fieldwork requires one to constantly depend on the kindness of strangers. Given this dependence, there may be no better place to do such research than Uganda, where strangers are abnormally kind. Of the many debts I owe for this thesis, none is greater than to those hundreds of people who were willing to volunteer their time to discuss the sensitive subject of politics with me over the course of my time in Uganda. Amid the stress and exhaustion of these ten months, the repeated experience of being welcomed into the homes of curious and enthusiastic interviewees made the whole process very rewarding. This was also due to the invaluable assistance of five research assistants and translators – who for security reasons I will not name here – who provided vital links to unfamiliar areas upon my arrival.

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Abbreviations and glossary

ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
Bisaka	See FoU
<i>Bafuruki</i>	Immigrants
<i>Bahereza</i>	See FoU
<i>Bodaboda</i>	Motorbike taxi
CA	Constituent Assembly
CEC	Central Executive Committee
CM	Council Member
CP	Conservative Party
DA	District Administrator
DISO	District Internal Security Officer
DP	Democratic Party
DPC	District Police Commander
EC	Electoral Commission
FDC	Forum for Democratic Change
FEDEMU	Federal Democratic Movement
Flagbearer	Official nominee of a political party in the general election
FoU	Faith of Unity, a.k.a. “Bisaka”, or <i>Bahereza</i>
FRONASA	Front for National Salvation
FUNA	Former Uganda National Army
GISO	<i>Gombolola</i> (Sub-county) Internal Security Officer
GSU	General Service Unit
HSM	Holy Spirit Movement
IGP	Inspector General of Police
ISO	Internal Security Organisation
JEEMA	Justice Forum
<i>Kabaka</i>	Ruler of the Buganda Kingdom
<i>Katikkiro</i>	Prime Minister of the Buganda Kingdom
<i>Kisanja</i>	Reference to the removal of presidential term limits in 2005-06
KY	<i>Kabaka Yekka</i>
LC	Local Council
LEGCO	Legislative Council of the Uganda Protectorate
LRA	Lord’s Resistance Army
<i>Lukiiko</i>	Parliament of the Buganda Kingdom
<i>Magendo</i>	Black market trading economy, 1970s-80s
MP	Member of Parliament
NASA	National Security Agency
NEC	National Executive Committee
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRC	National Resistance Council
NRM	National Resistance Movement
NRM-O	National Resistance Movement Organisation
NRM EC	NRM Electoral Commission
PAFO	Parliamentary Advocacy Forum
PISO	Parish Internal Security Officer
POMA	Public Order Management Act
RC	Resistance Council

RDC	Resident District Commissioner
SF	Special Forces
SG	Secretary General (of a political party)
UFM/A	Uganda Freedom Movement/Army
UNC	Uganda National Congress
UNLF/A	Uganda National Liberation Front/Army
UNRF	Uganda National Rescue Front
UPC	Uganda People's Congress
UPM/A	Ugandan People's Movement/Army
UPM	Uganda Patriotic Movement
UPDM	Ugandan People's Democratic Movement
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force
WMP	Woman Member of Parliament
WNBF	West Nile Bank Front
YPA	Young Parliamentarians Association

Note on Uganda-specific terminology

Most ethnic groups in southern Uganda follow a similar grammatical pattern of stems and prefixes, in which the prefix “Mu-” demotes a single person of a certain group, the prefix “Ba-” denotes plural members of the group, the prefix “Bu-” denotes the area (formally or informally) associated with the group, the prefix “Lu/Ru-” denotes the language of the group, and the stem itself (without a prefix) is an adjective relating to that group.

For example: “**Musoga**” is a person of the Soga ethnic group, as in “that man is a Musoga”. “**Basoga**” are the people of the Soga group, as in “there are many Basoga living in this area”. “**Busoga**” is the specific region home to the Basoga, as in “this district is in Busoga”. “**Lusoga**” is the language of the Soga people, as in “this woman speaks fluent Lusoga”. “**Soga**” can be used to attribute something to the Soga group more generally, as in “this dance is a Soga tradition,” or “there has historically been a lot of Soga influence on this area”.

There are numerous variations to this pattern, but this cursory understanding will greatly assist readers unfamiliar with Uganda.

Note on interview referencing system

This thesis' primary data comes from over 120 interviews conducted in Uganda around the period of the election. Sixty of these were with voters in three case districts, which I call "public interviews". The remainder were with elites and informants (politicians, campaign staff, journalists, *et cetera*), which I call "elite interviews".

For elite interviews, I have applied a blanket rule of anonymity, even in cases where interviewees did not ask for it. However in times when the interviewee is referenced in the text, and did not ask for anonymity, I have mentioned their identity in footnotes. In all other cases I reference these interviews by their randomly assigned number between one and 53. The identities of these interviewees will be provided to this thesis' examiners for scrutiny.

For public interviews, which are all anonymous, I have used a more complicated system indicating to the reader the district, MP constituency, numbered location in that constituency, number of the person being interviewed in that location, whether or not the interview was in English or translated, and whether the interview in question was the first or second of multiple meetings with that interviewee (although in almost every case there was only one interview).

For example:

KAY-NS4-2T#1

This interviewee was in Kayunga district (**KAY**), in Ntenjeru South MP constituency (**NS**), in the fourth interview location in that constituency (**4**), the second interviewee in that location (**2**), interviewed with a translator rather than in English (**T**), and the data in question was from the first interview with that interviewee (**#1**)

BUG-BN2-3E#2

This interviewee was in Bugiri district (**BUG**), in Bukooli North constituency (**BN**), in the second interview location in that constituency (**2**), the third interviewee in that location (**3**), interviewed in English (**E**) and that the data in question was from the second interview with them (**#2**)

In cases where public interviewees are quoted making particularly sensitive comments, I have withheld this code altogether so as to further minimise any risk of the discovery of their identity. As above, a full list of the locations of these interviews will be provided to this thesis' examiners.

In both elite and public interviews I have elected to insert questions as well as answers in a "Q:/A:" format wherever this was necessary for context

National and case district maps

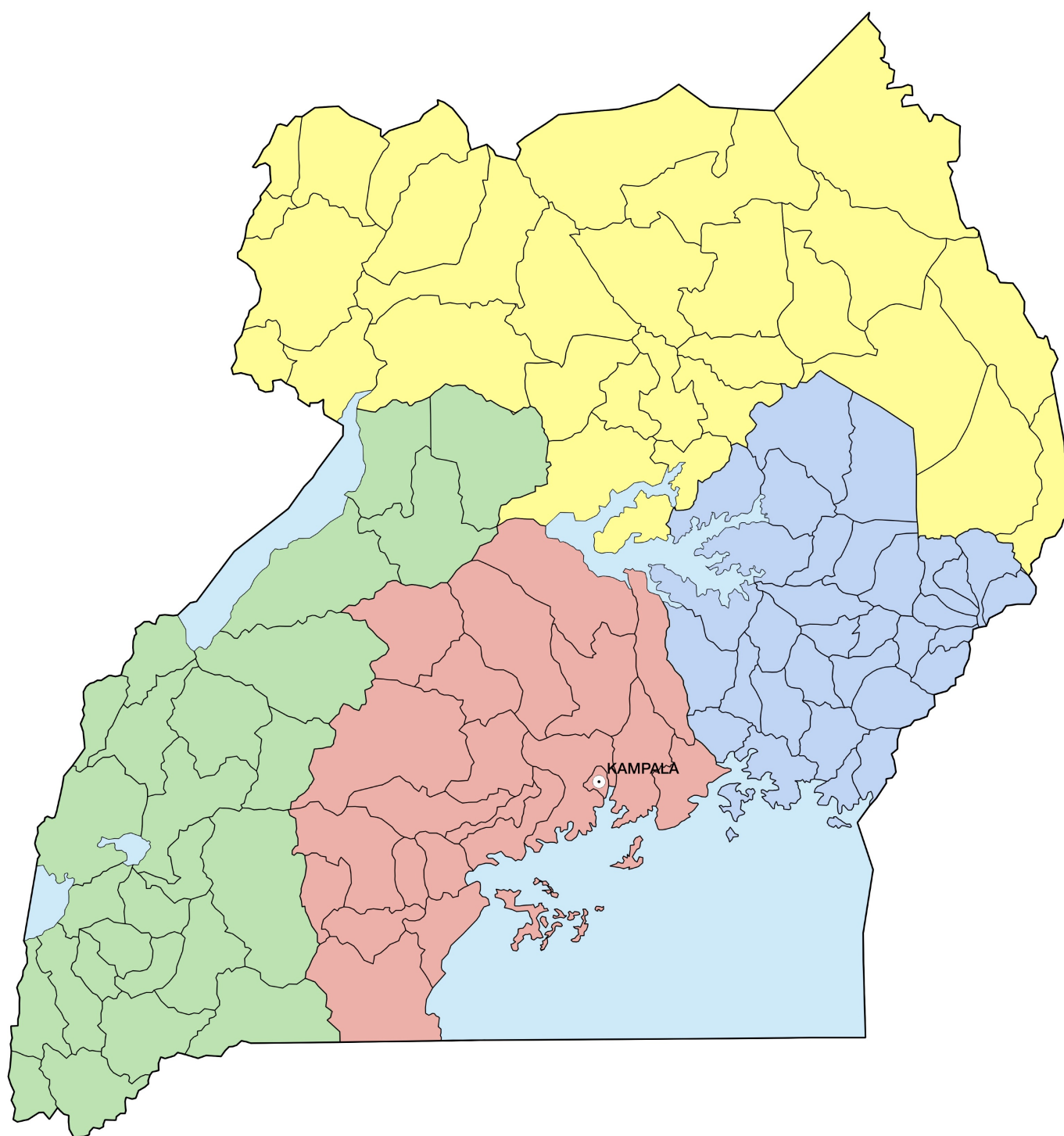
Map 0.1: Uganda country map



Map 0.2: Uganda regions and sub-regions



Map 0.3: Uganda districts

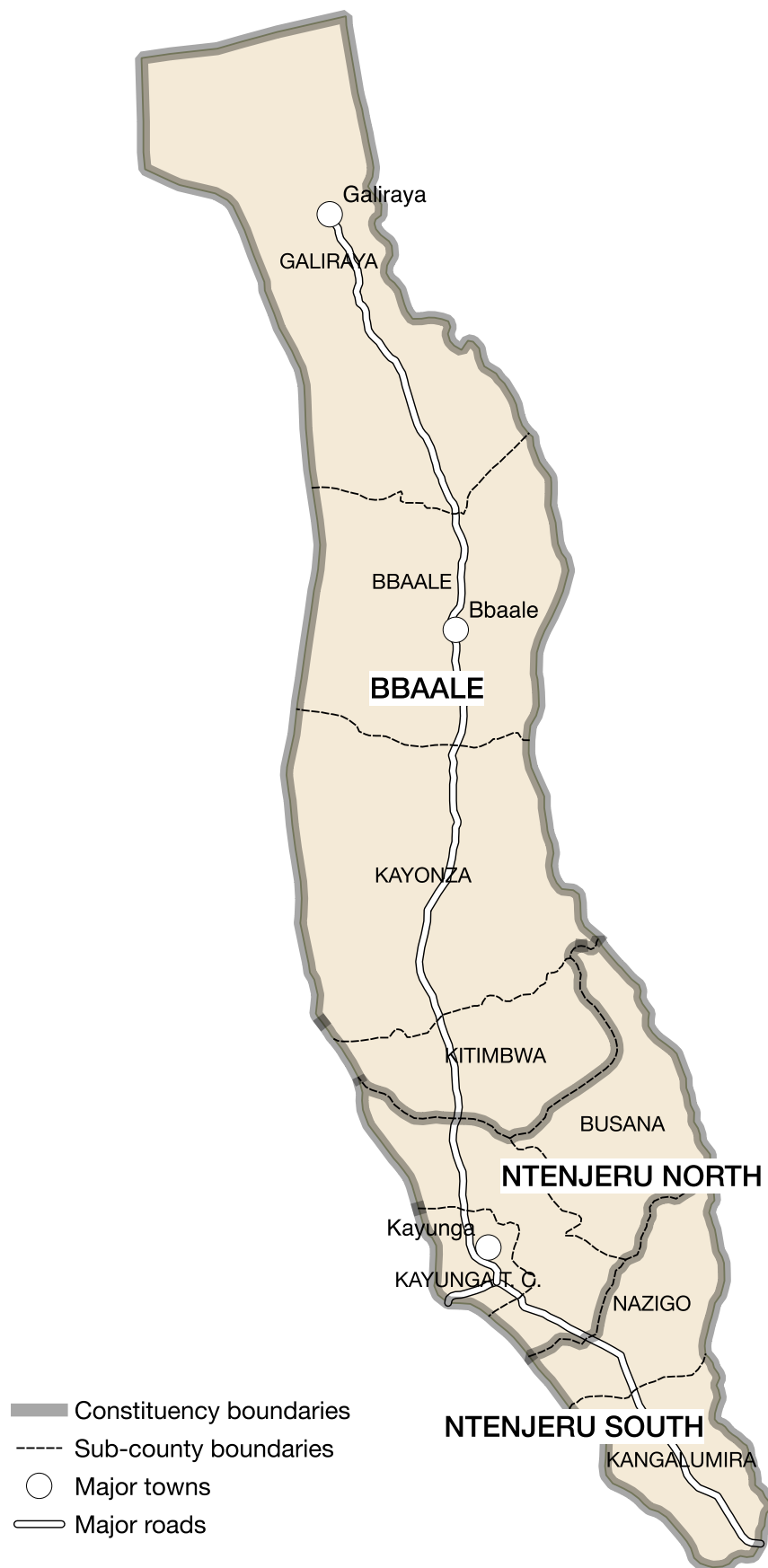


Map 0.4: Kyenjojo¹

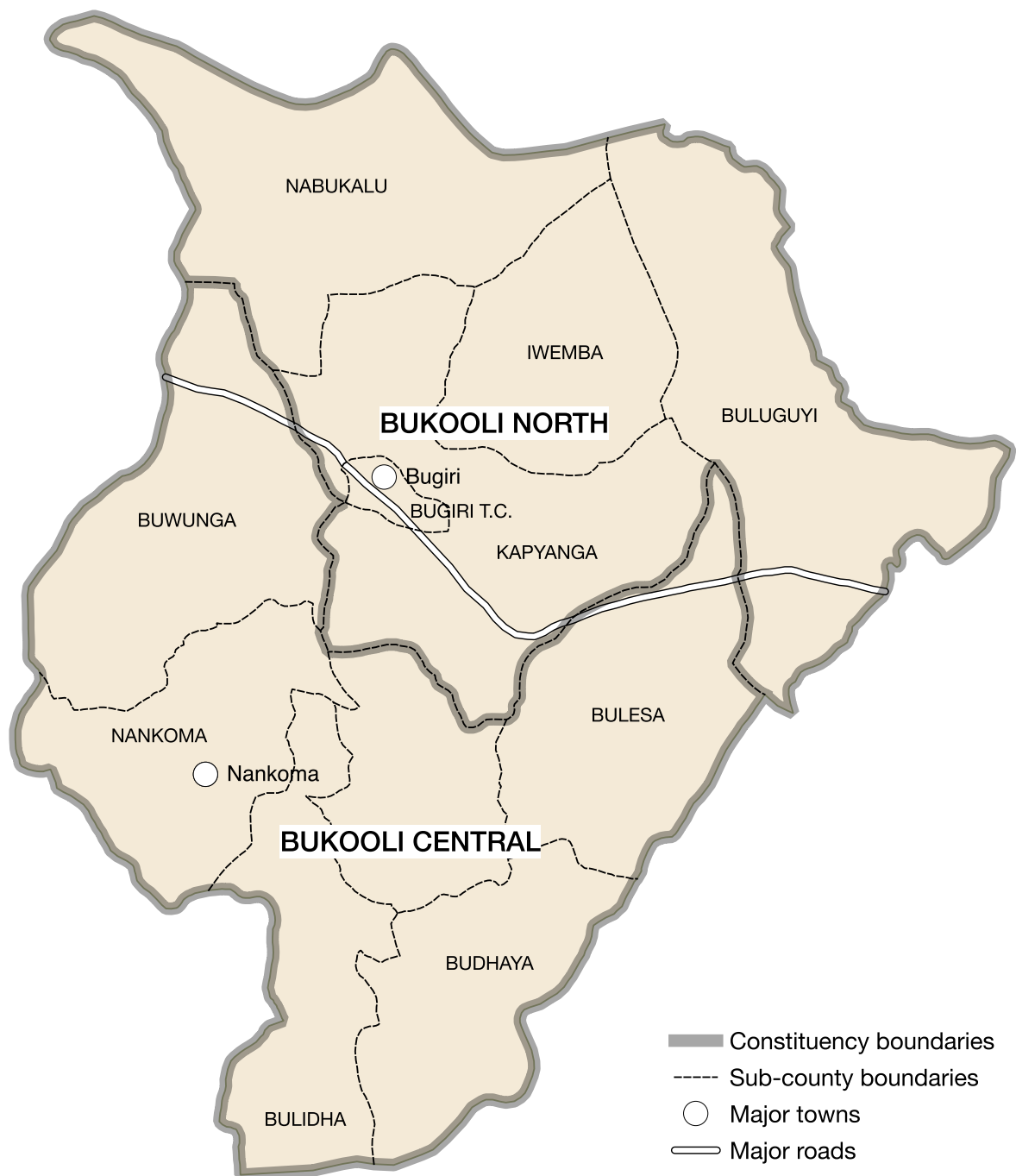


¹ Note that these sub-county boundaries were out of date by the 2016 election, as several new units were created in 2015. However maps of these units had not been released at time of writing.

Map 0.5: Kayunga



Map 0.6: Bugiri



Chapter 1

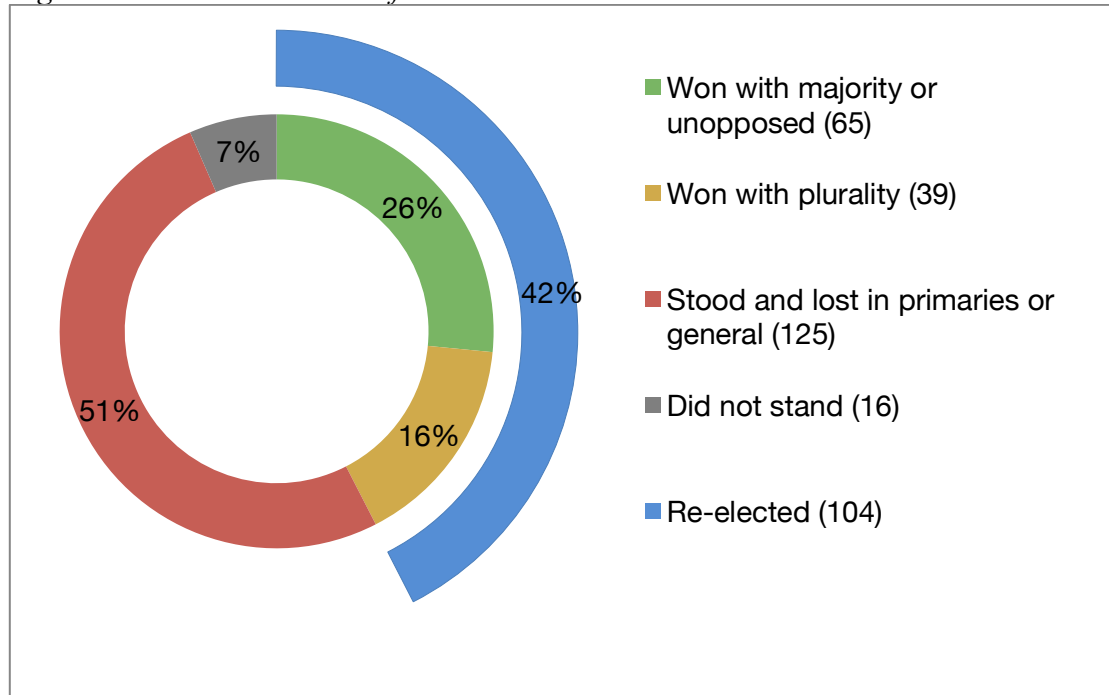
Introduction

At first glance, present-day Uganda seems a picture of authoritarian order, predictability, and control. Incumbent President Yoweri Museveni, who has led the country for over three decades, continues to tally massive re-election victories, while his National Resistance Movement (NRM) party dominates the political offices beneath him. In the 2016 election, the NRM claimed 71% of the seats in Parliament,¹ which translates to an effective 80% factoring that most of the Independents (who are 16% of Parliament) are candidates who lost their NRM party primaries but stood and won in the general election as so-called “NRM-Independents”. In large swathes of the country, the numerous elected positions in district (LC5) and sub-county (LC3) councils include no opposition representation at all. This dominance is especially evident in the area that I will define (in 1.2.2) as the “rural south” – the mainly Bantu countryside south of Lake Kyoga where the NRM has historically drawn most of its support, and where the great bulk of the Ugandan population lives. Here, the NRM is often dominant to the point of monopoly.

However, when viewed from *within* one of these strongholds, politics looks anything but ordered, controlled, or predictable. The fact that politics in the rural south is housed almost entirely inside the ruling party does not prevent it from being animated, fractious and volatile – so much so that the majority of NRM incumbent politicians lost re-election to challengers from their own party in the 2016 election. Nation-wide, only 42% of incumbent NRM MPs won re-election, only 26% did so with a majority of the vote (16% won with a plurality), and 88% of those who lost were replaced by NRM or Independent rivals (see figures 1.1 and 1.2). Moreover, in the areas where the regime does best – the rural south – each of these statistics is even more egregious: 40%, 24% and 95% respectively. Consequently, despite retaining a parliamentary majority almost identical to its previous one, a mere 32% of the new NRM caucus were members of the previous one. This type of high intra-NRM turnover has been a feature each of the five elections held under the NRM.

¹ All references to parliamentary seats exclude the small number of ex-officio, military, and special interest (youth, workers, people with disabilities) because these are not popularly elected.

Figure 1.1: Re-election rate of NRM MPs nation-wide

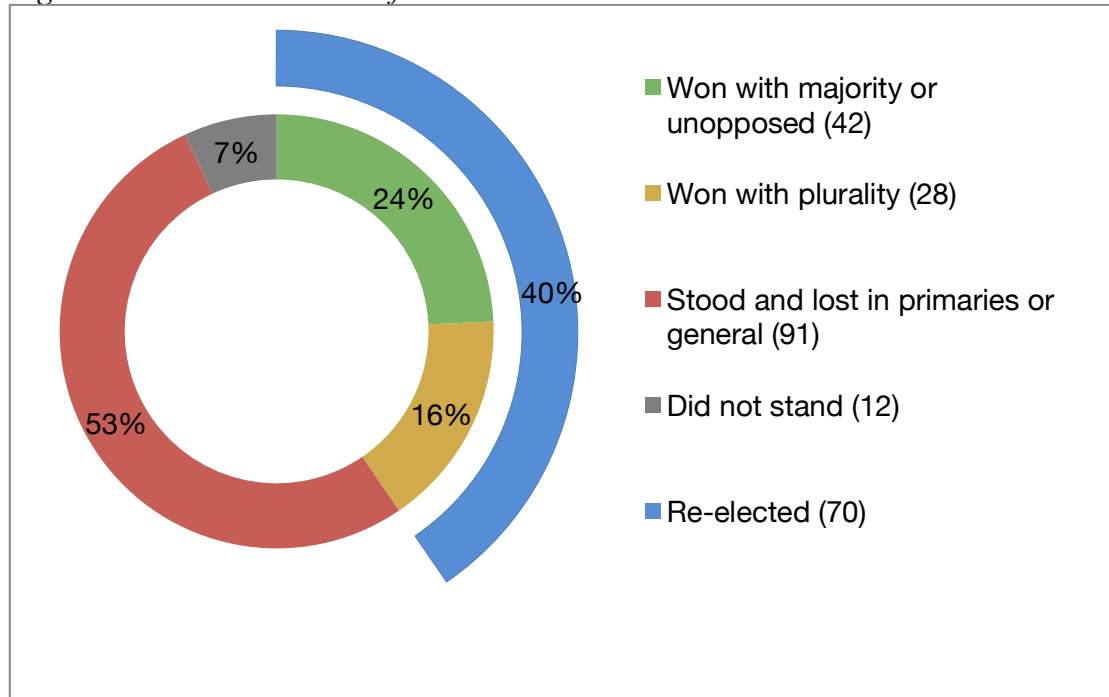


Source: Ugandan Electoral Commission.

And these intra-party local contests are not stage-managed manoeuvres orchestrated by national political factions and detached from the participation of ordinary voters. On the contrary, election season in rural Uganda is fuelled by the enthusiastic participation of citizens who see it as an opportunity to punish local politicians who have failed to deliver on the promises they made five years earlier, and invest in the hope offered by new faces. The average voter in these areas tends to be extremely frustrated with most aspects of governance – be it poor local services, corruption, ethnic or religious marginalisation – and organised behind local “change” candidates accordingly.

Local politicians compete bitterly for the loyalties of these frustrated voters, spending immense time and resources mobilising a following in their constituencies for well over a year before the election. In any remote village of the countryside, one finds dozens of campaign agents representing each of the electorate’s “camps”, shop fronts and houses covered with rival campaign posters, and the frequent and boisterous rallies of the candidates themselves. Unopposed nominations and landslide victories are rare in the rural south, where the average vote for any winning candidate was 56%. For the average NRM politician, then, the permanent condition of intense local competition is a part of political life.

Figure 1.2: Re-election rate of NRM MPs in the rural south



Source: Ugandan Electoral Commission.

Oddly, the further one gets into the rural strongholds of the ruling party, the less it looks like a party at all. Here, voting for or against “the NRM” seems an irrelevant variable: the real action is taking place *in* the NRM. Yet, these rural southern localities are also the areas that provide the consistent “vote bank” for the most important NRM incumbent of all: Museveni, who received the support of 68% of its voters in 2016. Indeed, the “first glance” of the opening paragraph above is not false – the Museveni regime’s control of the country’s collective electoral outcomes is beyond predictable. This order just sits atop a constant churn of subnational politicians attached to the regime and contains the participatory energies of voters furiously opposed to their local *status quo*. Where the party is *collectively* most secure, its local political incumbents are *individually* least secure.

1.1 Research puzzle, question and hypotheses

This portrait of intra-party local competition is the subject of this thesis, and it presents a clear set of puzzles. Why do so many people vote against their incumbent local NRM leaders but for new ones from the same party? Why do they support their incumbent NRM president in the process? How can the NRM mobilise an effectively pro-*status*

quo vote at the presidential level while housing contentious political divisions at its base? How can it contain the dynamic rivalry of local elites in the periphery, resulting in so many unsuccessful campaigns, without those losing elites taking their supporters off into opposition parties? To explore the nuances of this complicated dominant party system, this study asks a simple and broad research question: *what is the relationship between subnational intra-party competition and regime survival in NRM Uganda?*

The central argument of this thesis is that, in several ways, the NRM wins because of the kind of subnational intra-NRM competition, not in spite of it. Specifically, the party succeeds in stabilising and managing electoral politics by acting more as a forum for political action than an actor in a broader forum. In the following eight chapters, this thesis will demonstrate a causal link between two variables in this regard: the party's internally open, divided and participatory local politics in rural areas – as described above – and its collective mobilising strength in aid of the incumbent president, whose autocratic leadership constitutes the essence of the NRM regime. With qualitative fieldwork in three rural districts, secondary (historical and contemporary) observations nationwide, and comparative electoral data from each case district, it will show how the NRM's party-monopolised local competition in the rural south is open enough to capture the plural political movements of the local polity yet closed enough manage the representation of the regime itself, and therefore to insulating the president from genuine opposition mobilisation.

This argument intervenes in a literature on dominant party authoritarianism that has not taken the interplay between local and national politics seriously, even as it increases its focus on “subnational units” more generally.² Although the combination of high subnational (parliamentary and local government) turnover and stable authoritarian control is not unique to Uganda, to-date studies of non-democratic survival have only addressed their relationship in passing.³ The literature on subnational elections in authoritarian regimes has tended to focus on either high rates of inter-party local

² Eduardo Moncada and Richard Snyder, “Subnational Comparative Research on Democracy: Taking Stock and Looking Forward,” *The American Political Science Association's Comparative Democratization Newsletter* 10, no. 1 (2012): 1, 4–9.

³ This was discussed briefly in a review article on authoritarianism and elections. See: Jennifer Gandhi and Ellen Lust-Okar, “Elections Under Authoritarianism,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009): 410.

competition,⁴ or on the utility of uncompetitive local elections,⁵ rather than high rates of intra-party competition. There are exceptions to this in studies of single-party regimes in East Asia⁶ and Africa,⁷ but theories from these studies have not significantly influenced the wider literature, even with its nascent focus on authoritarian elections.

Instead, popular current approaches to authoritarian survival emphasise factors such as economic growth,⁸ global contexts and alliances,⁹ control of political finance,¹⁰ the development of institutions such as legislatures, parties and elections,¹¹ the coercive or counterrevolutionary capacity of the state,¹² co-optation of the opposition into coalitions and institutions,¹³ path-dependent solidarity of founding elites,¹⁴ among others which will be discussed in chapter 2. On the question of how non-democratic regimes manage their interface with the “masses”, most theories stress a reliance on the

⁴ Lisa Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Ellen Lust-Okar, “Elections under Authoritarianism: Preliminary Lessons from Jordan,” *Democratization* 13, no. 3 (2006): 456–71.

⁵ Ora John Reuter et al., “Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections,” *Comparative Political Studies* 49, no. 5 (2016): 662–97.

⁶ Melanie Manion, “The Electoral Connection in the Chinese Countryside,” *The American Political Science Review* 90, no. 4 (1996): 736–48; Thaveeporn Vasavakul, “Authoritarianism Reconfigured: Evolving Accountability Relations within Vietnam's One-Party Rule,” in *Politics in Contemporary Vietnam*, ed. J D London (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 42–63, <http://www.palgraveconnect.com/doifinder/10.1057/9781137347534>.

⁷ See: Henry Bienen, *Kenya: The Politics of Participation and Control* (Princeton NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1977); Cherry Gertzel and Carolyn L. Baylies, eds., *The Dynamics of the One-Party State in Zambia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

⁸ Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *The Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman, *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions* (Princeton NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁹ Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Eva Bellin, “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective,” *Comparative Politics* 36, no. 2 (2004): 139–57.

¹⁰ Leonardo R. Arriola, *Multiethnic Coalitions in Africa: Business Financing of Opposition Election Campaigns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹¹ Carles Boix and Milan W. Svoblik, “The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government: Institutions and Power-Sharing in Dictatorships,” 2008; Barbara Geddes, “Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?,” in *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association* (Washington D.C., 2006); Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski, “Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats,” *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 11 (2007): 1279–1301.

¹² Bellin, “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective.”

¹³ Ellen Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents and Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Dan Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Benjamin Smith, “Life of the Party: The Origins of Regime Breakdown and Persistence under Single-Party Rule,” *World Politics* 57, no. 3 (2005): 421–51.

instruments of vote rigging,¹⁵ clientelism,¹⁶ or coercion¹⁷ – each of which is present and important in Uganda, but do not alone account for the mass control that the Museveni regime enjoys. In an alternative approach that focuses on subnational intra-party competition, I will posit three linked hypotheses.

1.1.1 Subnational competition and accountability politics

H₁: Subnational intra-party competition provides an outlet for popular frustrations with the status quo that can be directed against local elites rather than the regime itself.

Local intra-party competition decentralises accountability politics to the regime's benefit. This point addresses the most striking puzzle discussed above: if voters are dissatisfied with the *status quo* of governance and services, why do they so often vote for their incumbent president? The kind of dominance that Museveni and the NRM have enjoyed could lead observers to one of two broad conclusions: either voters are genuinely satisfied with governance, or their dissatisfaction is suppressed through various authoritarian measures such as vote rigging, voter bribery or intimidation. While there is a significant presence of each of these measures in Uganda, none is more important than the fact that Museveni clearly still enjoys massive personal popularity in the rural south today. Instead, the NRM system relies on ingrained and embedded narratives that elevate the local polity, not the national one, as the key forum for the resolution of political grievance. This “shape” of accountability politics allows the president to play a transcendent, almost monarchical role, somewhat aloof from the substance of local grievances.

There is a deep historical context to these narratives. For the first 20 years of its life, the NRM regime managed Ugandan politics through the “Movement System” of no-party politics. In this system, political participation was pushed into newly democratised local spaces and confined to the protocols of “individual merit” rather than national partisan

¹⁵ Alberto Simpser, *Why Governments and Parties Manipulate Elections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁶ Lust-Okar, “Elections under Authoritarianism: Preliminary Lessons from Jordan.”

¹⁷ Bellin, “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective.”

alignment. Building on a longer history of vibrant local politics in pre-NRM Uganda, this system produced a culture of highly participatory and competitive local elections between NRM-aligned “individuals” campaigning mostly on parochial grievances and cleavages rather than national ones. Even after this system was abolished in 2005, its legacy lives on in the localised patterns of grievance that allow Museveni and “the Movement” (as the NRM is still often called) to act as the broad conditions of politics rather than participants in it. The unwillingness of many rural voters to deviate from these broad conditions is anchored in the traumatic memories of the conflict preceding the NRM’s capture of power in 1986 – the storied rescue from which is a critical component of Museveni’s political credibility. This history will be discussed in detail in chapter 3.

This context explains the genesis of Museveni’s present-day image in the rural south, but it does not explain the mechanisms of its perpetual maintenance. I will argue that the locally open, competitive and participatory nature of the rural NRM is the key to this maintenance. By keeping the NRM open enough to house the campaigns of rival local politicians and movements (discussed in chapter 4), elites supporting the party can champion the issues frustrating constituents and re-direct blame to their local (incumbent) rivals, rather than the president. While they represent the NRM, local candidates within the party are very critical of the corruption and incompetence of local incumbents, and the party brand is never “owned” by its local office holders to the exclusion of their rivals. The only real rule that the party enforces on its local politicians during the election is that they must not connect local grievances with Museveni’s leadership. Indeed, the president himself campaigns on the message that the NRM is full of “rats” that the people need to stop sending to Parliament.¹⁸

This is the key to the puzzle of why dissatisfied voters support their incumbent president: between them and him sits a layer of competitive politics that acts as a safety valve of their various dissatisfactions and frustrations. This system would not function as a tool of regime maintenance if the party were too rigid to incorporate anti-*status quo* local politics, or too *laissez faire* to police the representation of the president by local politicians. In such counterfactual scenarios, the NRM would likely lose its local

¹⁸ Edris Kiggundu, “Museveni: Corruption Is Killing Bunyoro,” *The Observer*, January 27, 2016.

political monopoly or fail to use it to its electoral advantage, respectively.

With such a balance of openness and control, the NRM is an organ of *re-shaping* rather than *micro-managing* accountability politics.¹⁹ Knowing that it cannot completely suppress the frustrations of the countryside through the hard and soft power at its disposal, the regime uses subnational political spaces as a buffer open enough to absorb the endogenous and plural agitations in the electorate, while disarming them of their anti-regime potential. The regime's considerable coercive power in the countryside is therefore not a blunt instrument used to suppress popular political movements, but a more surgical one used to nudge such movements into a form in which they can be managed in a more limited but sufficient way. This argument draws on an eclectic literature on localised accountability narratives and authoritarian control,²⁰ especially on an older generation of single-party African regimes.²¹

1.1.2 Subnational competition as presidential mobilisation

H₂: Subnational intra-party competition is a driving force behind the NRM's collective electoral mobilisation, including for President Museveni's re-election campaign.

A second causal link between intra-party competition and regime survival concerns electoral mobilisation. Museveni's presidential campaign, like many others in Africa, relies on the industry and capacity of local politicians mobilising supporters in the remote rural areas where most Ugandans live. For reasons closely related to the historical legacies mentioned above, local candidates in the rural south have an incentive to play-up their connections to and support of the president in the course of their own campaigns. This incentive, in concert with considerable pressure from the regime, sees local candidates undertake most of the physical mobilisation of Museveni's

¹⁹ Steve Hess, *Authoritarian Landscapes: Popular Mobilization and the Institutional Sources of Resilience in Nondemocracies* (New York: Springer, 2013).

²⁰ Seweryn Bialer, *Stalin's Successors: Leadership, Participation and Change in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Melanie Manion, "Authoritarian Parochialism: Local Congressional Representation in China," *The China Quarterly* 218 (2014): 311–38; Tianjian Shi, *Political Participation in Beijing* (Cambridge MA. and London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

²¹ Gertzel and Baylies, *Dyn. One-Party State Zambia*; Joel Barkan, "Legislators, Elections, and Political Linkage," in *Politics and Public Policy in Kenya and Tanzania*, ed. Joel Barkan (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984), 71–101; Bienen, *Kenya: The Politics of Participation and Control*.

campaign in the course of conducting their own – something I will call “co-mobilisation”.

Intense competition between these candidates makes co-mobilisation both more likely and more effective. In the first case, competition leads NRM candidates to be more sensitive to the risks of not supporting the regime. If local elites were assured of their own re-election, they may have more political independence in this regard, and undertake less of the co-mobilisation that spreads the president’s campaign. In the second case, the fact that the party is open enough to include the challenges of rival local politicians allows for a plurality of regime-friendly candidates to perform the functions of co-mobilisation and energise the NRM’s vast support base. Given most voters regard Museveni’s re-election as a *fait accompli*, close and meaningful local races solve the problem of voter apathy by giving voters a reason to participate in the electoral process and turn out on election day.

Furthermore, the specific process of intra-NRM competition produces tangible by-products that aid the party’s collective mobilisation capacity. Local NRM candidates do not simply compete with each other on election day. They are forced to compete over a complicated four-stage process that requires them to: register their supporters as party members; position their supporters within the (re-elected) party “structures”; stand in the party primaries; and stand in the general election (with primary losers running as “NRM-Independents”). Each of these stages brings dividends to the party in the form of (respectively): new members, re-built structures, exposed local candidates, and election-day mobilisation – all driven by candidates interested primarily in their own election.

Hence, it is local campaigns, particularly those for MP, that collectively constitute the engine of the party’s overall mobilisation effort, including for Museveni’s re-election. This is critical because, for all its dominance of local politics, the NRM does not have a strong institutional base in its strongholds. In fact it is often said that the party apparatus goes entirely dormant for five years and wakes up for the election.²² Intra-

²² Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, “The Cost of Politics in Uganda,” 2016, 13, <http://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Uganda-Cost-of-%0DPolitics.pdf>.

party competition is the source of this awakening. Therefore, more than simply permitting such competitive politics, in various ways (that will be explained in chapter 5) the regime seems to actively encourage it. The institutional design of the local NRM – specifically the decentralisation of its bureaucratic operations to elected district positions – systematically divides district elites into rival networks of “camps” that compete with each other for influence and district supremacy.

There is some literature connecting the design of local electoral politics with national-level mobilisation. Some of this discusses the development of local political machines and their co-optation by ruling parties,²³ especially in other African cases.²⁴ Others highlight high levels of competition that necessitate the development of these local machines,²⁵ or how electoral rules shape the calculus of political actors and potential voters.²⁶ Currently, however, most of these deal with the relationship between local and national mobilisation in strictly material terms – seeing local electoral campaigns as extensions of regime’s clientelist machines, rather than looking deeper at the substance of local political movements.

1.1.3 Subnational competition as elite management

H₃: The pressures of electoral competition on local politicians grant the executive a power imbalance over them before the election.

Finally, competitive elections put immense pressure on politicians, making it easier for Museveni to manage the national political elite. As will be discussed in chapter 6, there is significant dissent among NRM MPs, driven in part by the party’s “big tent” openness to political newcomers described above. Yet the NRM is not the kind of institutionally strong party that can discipline this elite by micromanaging candidate selection or withholding mobilisation capacity, as other dominant parties do. In fact, the party itself

²³ Reuter et al., “Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections.”

²⁴ See for example Catherine Boone, *Political Topographies of the African State: Territorial Authority and Institutional Choice* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁵ Geddes, “Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?,” 22; Lust-Okar, “Elections under Authoritarianism: Preliminary Lessons from Jordan”; Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak’s Egypt*.

²⁶ Andrew Barwig, “How Electoral Rules Matter: Voter Turnout in Morocco’s 2007 Parliamentary Elections,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 14, no. 2 (2009): 289–307.

has very little control over candidate selection, and most candidates raise their own campaign funds with very little help from the party.

In lieu of this capacity, the pressures and consequences of competitive, high-turnover subnational politics temper various threats emanating from within the elite. Where other dominant parties secure elite cooperation by *giving* something to local candidates that can be withheld for leverage, electoral competition in the NRM system *prevents* the development of independent and rural machines and the political autonomy that these would grant. That most local races are close-fought contests makes candidates more sensitive to the direct incentives and disincentives that the regime uses to effect compliance. The containment of local competition within the party is a critical component of this: with their local rivals just as loyal to Museveni as they are, incumbent MPs know precisely how replaceable they are in the eyes of the regime.

High turnover of NRM MPs also weakens the institutional capacity of the Parliament itself, which is endowed with strong oversight and appropriation powers by the 1995 constitution. MPs often skip parliamentary sessions in order to tend to their constituency, and important committees often fall short of their required quorums as a result. The astronomical personal expense of standing in the election puts most MPs in debt before and after the poll, making them more vulnerable to financial inducements from the executive. These factors undercut the capacity of the powerful NRM caucus to challenge the president on the contentious matter of his continuing tenure, or on matters of sensitive legislation or policy.

This leverage is why Museveni has on numerous occasions made highly controversial decisions in the immediate run-up to elections, such as the abolition of presidential term limits in 2005-6, and the “sole candidate” resolution in 2014. In both of these moves, the president overcame significant opposition within the party caucus in large part due to context of the looming election, wherein MPs were more focused on their own survival than on Museveni’s. Hence, Museveni has an interest in maintaining a culture of competition in order to check the independence of the rural elite on whom he relies. This is a key finding given the nature of current African studies literature, which often suggests that regimes depend on networks of rural “king makers” operating largely independent and sedimentary political bases, which through a mixture of clientelist

machine politics,²⁷ ethnic solidarity,²⁸ or land ownership,²⁹ turn out votes for national candidates.

1.1.4 Summary

Local competition situated within the NRM is therefore the basis of Museveni's electoral success. Competition localises accountability politics (H₁), forces local elites to mobilise for the president and rebuild party structures (H₂), and checks the political autonomy of the rural elites on whom the president relies (H₃). While each of these hypotheses connects competition with regime survival, the term "competition" means something slightly different in each: an idea in H₁, a process in H₂, and a structural condition in H₃. The theoretical foundations of these hypotheses will be laid out in detail in chapter 2.

Much as this theory is "case-centric" – relating to processes in some ways unique to Uganda – this study provides theoretical insights into how local competition *can* affect non-democratic regime survival elsewhere, such that the thesis is relevant to the broader literature on that subject.³⁰ It is not my contention that the precise causal mechanisms identified here are the keys to the survival of most or many other authoritarian regimes, but rather that their presence in Uganda should press scholars to look closer at the broader category of subnational politics and its relationship with regime survival, especially during elections. In this way it follows the path of numerous other single-case studies that have achieved this wider theoretical relevance.³¹ I will return to the question of broader relevance in chapter 8.

²⁷ Kate Baldwin, "Why Vote with the Chief? Political Connections and Public Goods Provision in Zambia," *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 4 (2013).

²⁸ Dominika Koter, "King Makers: Local Leaders and Ethnic Politics in Africa," *World Politics* 65, no. 2 (2013): 187–232.

²⁹ Catherine Boone, "Property and Political Order in Africa : Land Rights and State Authority," *Africa*, no. November (2010): 1–61.

³⁰ A recent review of the electoral authoritarianism literature by Morse argued for a shift back towards "case-based research": Yonatan L. Morse, "The Era of Electoral Authoritarianism," *World Politics* 64, no. 1 (2012): 161–98.

³¹ See for example: Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*; Timothy J. Colton and Michael McFaul, *Popular Choice and Managed Democracy: The Russian Elections of 1999 and 2000* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003).

1.2 Design, methods and data

To prove these hypotheses I have used a mixture of two main qualitative research designs: process tracing and small-N subnational comparison. Here, I will discuss these designs, before explaining the cases selected and the basis of their selection, and finally the sources of data gathered within them.

1.2.1 Process tracing and subnational comparison

While this study is a single case study of one country, I have used a multi-site design, using data from three of Uganda's 112 districts. Henceforth the term "case" will refer to each of these districts, not Uganda as a whole. With data from these case districts, I have used two overlapping methodological approaches to gain evidence for the above causal hypotheses.

The first is a process tracing method. Here I use data from each of the three districts in equal measure to understand the electoral processes *common* to each. These are discussed mainly in chapters 5, 6 and 7, which deal with the processes of competition, mobilisation and organisation by local candidates within the NRM. In the words of Bennett, process tracing's "central concern is with sequences and mechanisms in the unfolding of hypothesised causal processes,"³² and is therefore the best method for understanding causal processes with precision – which in this case is the causal link between intra-party local competition and regime survival. I use his method not in the deductive way that Gerring (among others) recommends, starting with a theory and verifying it with empirics,³³ but in a more inductive "case-centric" way responsive to a more open fieldwork process.

Based on Beach and Pedersen's list of three process-tracing sub-types – "theory-testing", "theory-building", and "explaining-outcome" – this study most resembles a "theory-building" process tracing design, in that it "build[s] a theory about a causal

³² Andrew Bennett, "Process Tracing and Causal Inference," in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, ed. Henry E. Brady and David Collier (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 208.

³³ John Gerring, *Case Study Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 172.

mechanism between X and Y that can be generalised to a population of a given phenomenon, starting from a situation where we are in the dark regarding the mechanism.”³⁴ For this part of the thesis’ design, spreading out over three different cases within the rural south enhanced the sample size of the empirical data used for this method. Process tracing data came mainly from elite interviews and ethnography (discussed below in 1.2.5).

The second is a small-N comparative design that links *differences* in each case’s process with differences in their electoral outcomes. Here I contrast the trajectories of my three case districts in order to substantiate the processes I have understood through process tracing. The benefit of doing this small-N comparative design in addition to a process tracing method is that I can carry complex understandings of independent variables – in this case diversions from a complex processes of intra-party competition – rather than relying on simpler variables.³⁵ These variations in process are then contrasted with a hard dependent variable – the president’s vote in each district.

There has been something of a “subnational turn” in qualitative social science in the past decade,³⁶ with scholars looking to “subnational units” within cases to avoid what Rokkan called “whole nation bias” – relying on national level data averages to infer case values.³⁷ While there are many different ways to use subnational units for within-country design, I will use what Snyder called the “subnational comparative method”,³⁸ using multiple “within-nation” units in order to better understand the single case of Uganda. In doing so, I have deliberately sought to find cases that would exemplify both the “rule” – ideal types of the process I was identifying – and “exceptions” – rarer cases where the process (independent variable) is different leading to different outcomes in

³⁴ Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines* (Ann Arbor MI.: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 11.

³⁵ The reliance of comparative research on simplistic variables has long been critiqued from the more qualitative side of the discipline. See: Edward Schatz, “Introduction,” in *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*, ed. Edward Schatz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 2; Sanford F. Schram, “Beyond Paradigm: Resisting the Assimilation of Phronetic Social Science,” *Politics and Society* 32, no. 3 (2004): 417–33.

³⁶ Moncada and Snyder, “Subnational Comparative Research on Democracy: Taking Stock and Looking Forward.”

³⁷ Stein Rokkan, *Citizens, Elections, Parties: Approaches to the Comparative Study of the Processes of Development* (New York: David McKay Company, 1970).

³⁸ Richard Snyder, “Scaling Down: The Subnational Comparative Method,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36, no. 1 (2001): 93–110.

the result (dependent variable).

These two design components – which I will refer to as the “process tracing” and “comparative” designs (respectively) – were the means by which I identified the causal mechanisms contained in H₁, H₂ and H₃. Much as these two designs compliment each other, their overlapping use must be clarified. For example, empirical chapters 4 and 5 use data from the (comparatively) “exception” case of Kayunga to make a more general argument of about the NRM “rule” process, even though parts of that process are different, leading to it being an exception. This will be explained in more detail in chapter 7, where I both summarise the full processes in question and utilise the comparative approaches by discussing the “exception”.

1.2.2 Case selection process

In crafting this study of Uganda as a subnational comparison, a preliminary question concerned the level of electoral area to use as cases – village, sub-county, MP constituency, district, sub-region, *et cetera*. I kept this question open during the first stages of my fieldwork, but soon settled on using districts for two reasons. The first is that two significant electoral offices campaigned for during the election period are LC5 (district) Chairman and district Woman MP, both of which need to be understood in their full context. The second is relevant to the findings expressed in chapter 5: that many of the security and partisan structures relevant to local politics are concentrated at the district level, making a study of these elite networks necessarily a district level question. Choosing districts as cases of my research design however has not kept me from understanding the dynamics of smaller constituencies – especially MP constituencies, which are generally the most important to politics for voters.

My criteria for case district selection related to each district’s potential in both the process tracing and comparative design components discussed above. For the first of these, I wanted at least two cases that would show the system working as in the majority of the broader population of cases, albeit with slight differences to control for

Map 1.1: The “rural south” of Uganda



differences among this population. For comparative reasons, I needed at least one rule-proving “exception” case that would contrast with the other two. Initially I hoped to include two “exception” cases: one traditionally NRM district in which the presence of opposition in local politics trended its presidential vote against Museveni, and the other a traditionally opposition district in the North where the nascent presence of local NRM politicians was having the opposite effect. However, logistical restraints made a fourth case unfeasible, and for the sake of producing better process tracing data (from both rule and exception cases), I chose to settle on three traditionally pro-NRM districts.

This decision has made this thesis a study of areas in which the NRM is historically “embedded”, rather than one that includes areas in which the party is “new.” Cases are therefore designed to represent a broader population of pro-Museveni districts, not

Ugandan districts as a whole. I describe these areas by the very broad term “rural south”, which excludes both urban areas (Kampala, Wakiso and all municipalities), and areas with a history of ongoing conflict after the NRM came to power in 1986, where consequently the opposition usually maintains a strong foothold in the local polity and support for the regime has been less forthcoming (namely Acholi, Lango, Teso, Karamoja West Nile, and Kasese). The rural south area includes ample cultural, historical and political diversity, and I am not attempting to claim otherwise. The reason for counting it as a single area is that these are the areas where the reforms of the Movement system after 1986 were most successful, and consequently where the current model of intra-party competition is most embedded. This political geography will be discussed in detail in chapter 3. While selecting pro-regime areas may strike some readers as unrepresentative of the country as a whole, it must be stressed that the majority of Uganda voters (approximately 60%) live in the rural south. Doing well here alone has the capacity to re-elect the president regardless of what happens in other areas. In 2016, 41.3% of Museveni’s 60.6% came from the rural south, and in the past this figure has been over 50%. There have been excellent studies of the NRM’s performance in other areas, which are in fact becoming increasingly important to the regime. However I contend that understanding the dynamics of the rural south is generally sufficient for understanding the operation of the NRM.

The key challenge of selecting three districts in the rural south was that in order to make observations of campaign processes as they occurred, cases had to be selected before the election, and therefore without the results that would confirm each district’s status as rule or exception in the comparative design component. I also sought subtle variations in key dimensions that could control for comparative differences. These are summarised in table 1.1.

Finally, while I wanted each district to be similar enough to represent the rural south broadly, I looked for indications that one may be trending in a different direction, and therefore capable of serving as an “exception” for the comparative design component. As my theory suggests that the NRM dominance of local politics and politicians is the basis of its success at the presidential level, I sought for this role one district with significant (and nascent) opposition presence in local politics. As the Ugandan opposition is mainly urban or northern/eastern, there were very few of these cases.

Table 1.1: Criteria for case selection

Commonalities	Variations
• In the “rural south”. • At least two hours drive from Kampala. • Historically pro-Museveni, determined by voting at least 60% in the previous two elections. • Without major city (municipality as of 2015).	• Representation of the western, central (Buganda), and eastern regions. • Some differences between the scale of Museveni’s winning vote in previous elections. • Percentage of the district who live in rural areas • Dominant local political cleavages: i.e. land, ethnicity, religion, patronage, <i>et cetera</i>. • Any presence of the opposition in local politics

Source: compiled by the author

1.2.3 Cases selected and outcomes

With these criteria, I used a collection of media reports, past voting history, and pre-election political dynamics to settle on three case districts: Kyenjojo (rule), Kayunga (rule), and Bugiri (exception). Table 1.2 summarises the characteristics of these cases as they pertain to the above list:

Table 1.2: Cases and case selection criteria

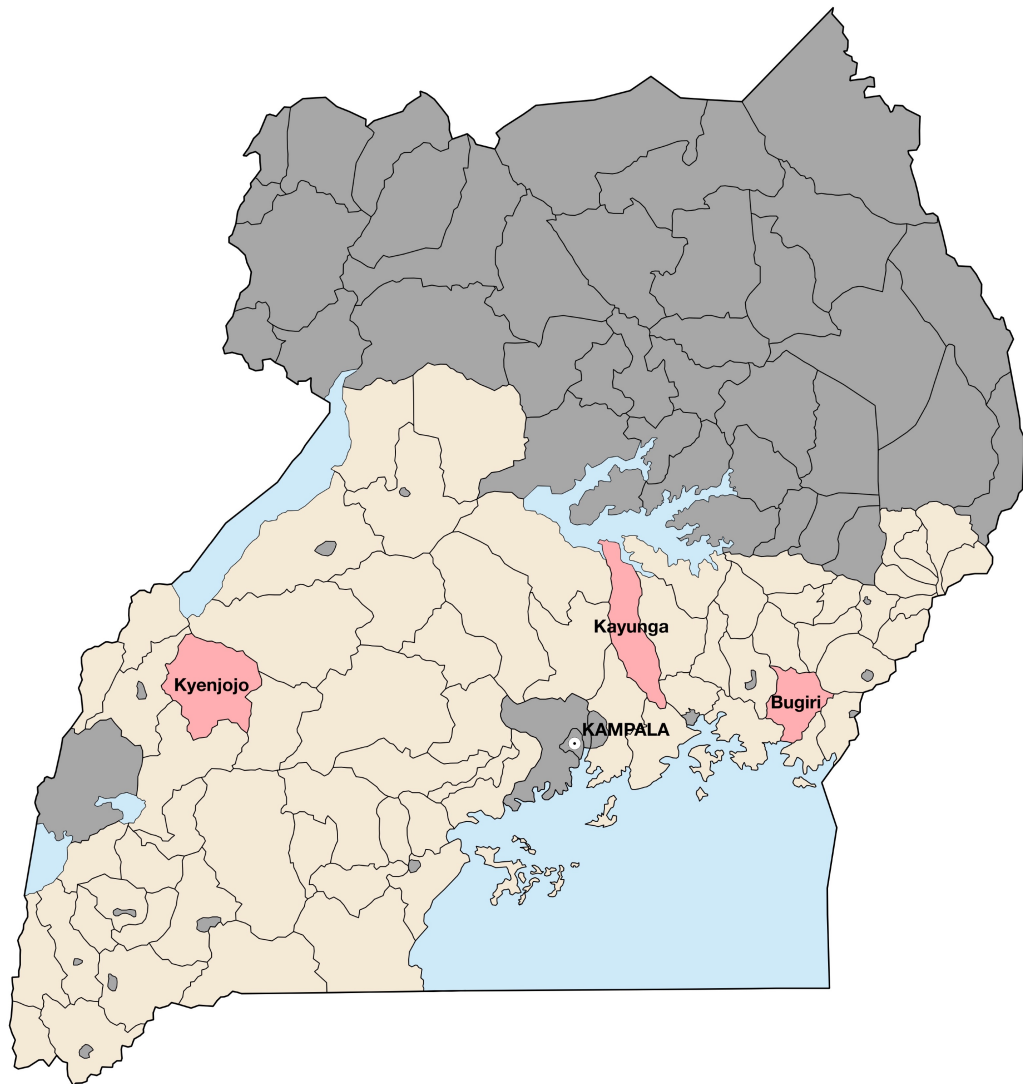
Variable	Kyenjojo	Kayunga	Bugiri
Region, Sub-region	West, Tooro	Central, Buganda	Central, Buganda
Museveni 2006 ³⁹	91.8% N +32.6 SR +3.4	68.0 N +8.8 SR +8.2	63.7 N +4.5 SR -5.3
Museveni 2011	90.7% N +22.3 SR +2.2	75.2% N +6.8 SR +12.4	70.0% N +1.6 SR -6.6
Rural % (ranking) ⁴⁰	93% (30/112)	85% (73/112)	83% (80/112)
Horizontal political cleavages	Ethnic, religious	Land	Ethnic
Local presence of opposition	None	Small	Significant

Source: Ugandan Electoral Commission.

³⁹ In this row and the next the N+/- and SR+/- refers to how this district fared compared with the national and subregional (Tooro, Buganda, Busoga) averages.

⁴⁰ These figures come from the 2014 Ugandan Census.

Map 1.2: The “rural south” with case districts



I will now give a brief background of each of these cases before summarising their eventual outcomes as “rules” or “exceptions”. Further detail of these will be introduced as they are discussed in detail in empirical chapters 4, 5 and 7.

a. Kyenjojo

Kyenjojo, four hours west of Kampala in Tooro sub-region, is an NRM stronghold of the highest order. Its most salient political cleavage relates to the ethnic demographics of Bakiga migration (from Kigezi sub-region) into the north and east of the district over the past few decades. In 2011, the race for one of its two parliamentary seats, Mwenge

North, was notably ethnic, with longtime MP Tom Butime (a Mutooro) defeated by newcomer David Muhumuza (a Mukiga) in a tense and occasionally violent campaign. Since then, Butime, who is an NRM historical and long time cabinet minister, has successfully lobbied to carve out a new constituency, Mwenge Central, on blatantly ethnic lines, leaving Mwenge North a majority Bakiga area, but still split on religious grounds in ways that were highly significant in 2016. In Mwenge South, the Bakiga are a smaller minority but still tend to vote in a bloc, as will be shown in 4.4. This constituency is represented by Aston Kajara, another longtime minister. Kajara's rivalry with Butime has for decades characterised the elite split in the district, which will be discussed in 5.1.2.

b. Kayunga

Kayunga is a large and narrow district between the Sezibwa and Nile rivers on the eastern periphery of Buganda. The district was uninhabited for much of the colonial period due to its swampy infestation of the embwa fly,⁴¹ but since this was eradicated in 1952 many people came to settle on the land from all corners of the country.⁴² Owing to this, the district has an extremely diverse ethnic makeup, leading it to be called by some the "United Nations of Uganda". I found this to be true even down to the village level, and unlike Kyenjojo, no interviewee told me that ethnicity was an important factor in the election. Instead, the hot issue in Kayunga is land grabbing. The political fight against this has been championed by Woman MP Idah Nantaba, elected in 2011, whose main rival for influence is Moses Karangwa, a businessman and landowner based in Jinja who stood for the post of NRM chairman and sponsored many other candidates. Kayunga's odd shape has led to a diversity in its politics, with its remote northern tip far stronger for the NRM than its southern areas, only an hour away from industrial city of Jinja. It has, however, been a reliable NRM stronghold, awarding 75% of its vote to Museveni in 2011 and 65% in 2006, both about 6% above the national average.

⁴¹ Also known as *simulium damnosum*.

⁴² Per Tidemand, "The Resistance Councils in Uganda A Study of Rural Politics and Popular Democracy in Africa" 1994, 94.

c. Bugiri

In looking for a suitable “exception” case with a recent opposition presence, there were only a small group of options in the rural south to choose from. I chose Bugiri, in the Busoga region, because it was a district where the opposition had emerged rapidly, and almost accidentally making it a good case to see how this emergence could disturb the normal conditions of rural south voting. In 2011, the clash between two NRM factions in Bukooli Central constituency saw the FDC’s Wafula Oguttu win with a plurality of 38%.⁴³ Since then however, the FDC has grown in the district and according to media reports Oguttu himself has become quite popular. Bugiri is split into three main ethnic groups: the dominant Basoga (a Bantu group of the sub-regional Busoga Kingdom), the Basamia (a Bantu minority related to the Luhya in Kenya), and the Japhadhola (a Luo-speaking minority group based mainly in Tororo district and Bukedi sub-region). While not as extreme as Kyenjojo, Bugiri does have a history of ethnic politics, which came out in the 2011 election. Its two main NRM camps have been based around the leadership of Woman MP and NRM national Secretary General Justine Kasule Lumumba, and a group including MPs Stephen Baka Mugabi (Bukooli North) and former Fisheries Minister Fred Mukisa (Bukooli Central).

d. Outcomes

There are intrinsic benefits to conducting observations in “real time” in this way, relating to richer data points and the possibility of ethnography – something especially important for the understanding of processes.⁴⁴ As part of the risks inherent in this strategy, however, these three cases did not turn out quite as I had expected, even though they did provide a strong comparison for my theory. While Kyenjojo went exactly as I had predicted, voting irregularities Bugiri made official results there unreliable for comparison. Fortuitously however, dynamics in Kayunga, where one of the major NRM camps strayed from the standard procedure, led to a dip in the president’s vote by a dramatic 19%, significantly higher than other districts in the rural south. With these results, the rule-rule-exception design of my small-N comparison has ended up being

⁴³ Sulaiman Kakaire, “Fights in NRM Camp Helped Oguttu Win,” *The Observer*, July 22, 2011.

⁴⁴ Edison J Trickett and Mary Ellen Oliveri, “Ethnography and Sociocultural Processes: Introductory Comments,” *Ethos* 25, no. 2 (1997): 146–51.

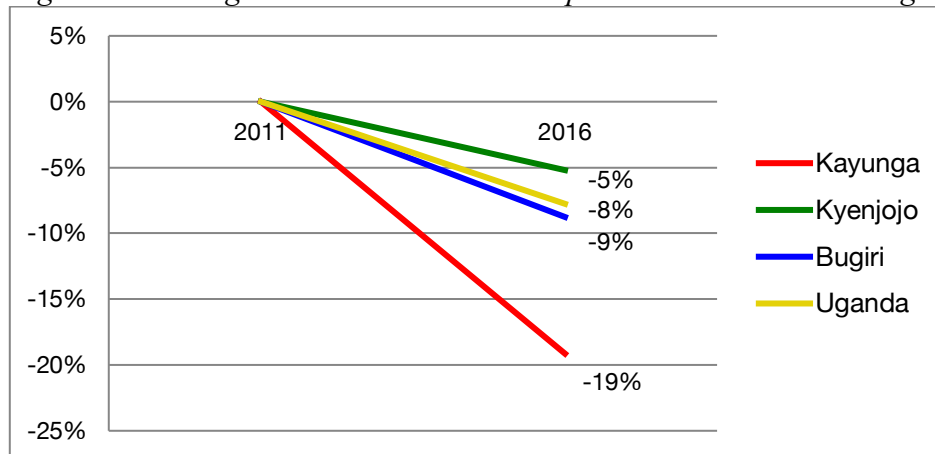
more of a rule-exception comparison between Kyenjojo and Kayunga, although rich process tracing data emerged from all three in equal measure. The exact trajectories of these districts will be elaborated in chapter 7.

Table 1.3: Outcomes in case districts

	Kyenjojo	Kayunga	Bugiri
Rule or exception	Rule	Exception	Rule
Museveni % compared with nation and sub-region	85.5% N+24.9 SR+2.7	56.1% N-4.5 SR+4	61.2% N+0.6 SR-3.7
Museveni 2011-16 swing compared with national and sub-region	-5.2 N +2.6 SR +0.6	-19.1 N -11.3 SR - 8.4	-8.8 N -1.0 SR +3.3

Source: Ugandan Electoral Commission.

Figure 1.3: Swing in each case district compared with national average



Source: Ugandan Electoral Commission.

1.2.4 Data

I collected data over two periods of fieldwork: one long trip to rural sites during the primaries and the election (August 2015 to March 2016), and one shorter follow-up trip to Kampala (March to April 2017).

a. Public interviews

My main source of data came from semi-structured interviews with ordinary voters in case districts, which I will call “public interviews”. These interviews lasted between 20

and 60 minutes, and data from them contributed mainly to chapters 4, 5 and 7. I originally planned on recruiting twelve people in each district, a number I arrived at by choosing two sites per constituency (three per constituency in Bugiri), each in different sub-counties. At each site I held a meeting with the village (LC1) chairman to introduce my project, with the aid of a research assistant (a journalist based in the district), after which I recruited from the group one man and one woman at random with whom I followed up with longer interviews in the following days or weeks. Given the curiosity in my research (especially in more remote areas) and the high participation in the election, it was not difficult to find participants.

Given that English is a *lingua franca* in Uganda, and all primary and secondary school is conducted in it, even in remote areas I found it possible to make a conversation in English in basic terms with most people. Even so, interviewing only people who could speak conversational English excluded less educated voters, who tended to be older and female voters, which was evident in the demographics of my interview group at the end of this first round of public interviews. I therefore added a second round of public interviews with a translator (who was not my research assistant), returning in most cases to the sites of my first round and balancing out the gender and age balance of the interviewee pool in each constituency. In doing so I ended up with 20 interviewees in each district making a total of 60 public interviewees, 29 women and 31 men.

Choosing the sites for these public interviews was a necessarily arbitrary and awkward process. Ideally I would have been availed of some method of randomising these sites completely. Without such a method, I instead chose sub-counties based on their geographical spread and my prior knowledge of ethnic or religious demographics where this was relevant (in order to balance these across the district pool), drove to them, and selected sites at random, with a general effort to select a balance of both small/remote and medium/accessible villages and towns. While my final total reflected a reasonable balance of demographic and geographic factors, several reasons led me to drop the fixed number of two people per research site, instead recruiting between one and six in each. The total number of sites was 24, and these are shown in the (confidential) attachment maps submitted with this thesis. All public interviews will remain anonymous for security reasons.

The majority of these interviews were one-on-one. However, in several cases people insisted on being interviewed in pairs with close friends or family, either because of increased faith in their capacity to articulate various points, or their specific knowledge (“my brother is working for *x* candidate, or witnessed *y* event”). Likewise, some interviews turned into impromptu focus groups where initial interviewees insisted on assembling groups of people to lend support to their opinions. In the two instances where this occurred I tried to follow up with as many participants individually to see if they wanted to add anything that they did not want to share with the group.

b. Ethnographic observations

Further to these semi-structured public interviews, much of my understanding of the subject matter came via more informal observations while in the field. This more ethnographic category includes direct observations of the processes of the election, especially campaign rallies, candidate posters, voting day procedures, and the vote counting. In a handful of local rallies I recorded campaign speeches that I later had translated. I also include in this category of data the hundreds of informal and unstructured conversations with taxi-drivers, security workers, rally attendees, restaurant waiters, hotel staff, and other miscellaneous encounters throughout the process.

Whether or not such material should be called “ethnography” is a matter of debate, given that I did not strictly “live” among the people I studied, nor do I speak any local languages.⁴⁵ I refer to it here as ethnography because this term’s usage in political science methodology tends to include data gathered in this way.⁴⁶ In all of these ethnographic interactions – except recorded rallies – I did not quote people I communicated with. Rather, these observations both corroborated my findings from the public interviews and provided leads for me to follow up in them.

c. Elite interviews

⁴⁵ For a good overview of these debates see: Jan Kubik, “Ethnography of Politics: Foundations, Applications, Prospects,” in *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*, ed. Edward Schatz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 25–52.

⁴⁶ Schatz, “Introduction.”

A third source of qualitative data came from 45 interviews with people chosen on the basis of their position rather than their representation of the broader population. While this included some journalists and one NGO worker, for the most part they were politicians or their assistants, ranging from local LC3 Councilor candidates to MPs. For convenience sake I have labeled all of these interview as “elite interviews”, a term common in qualitative political science, even though the adjective “elite” itself is of debatable accuracy in many instances. Most of these interviews were conducted in my first period of fieldwork in the case districts themselves, while a smaller crop was conducted on my second trip in Kampala. I have generally not mentioned these interviewees by name except for the times that this is necessary and interviewees have not asked to be anonymous. Data from these interviews is most relevant for chapters 5, 6 and 7.

d. Election results

At several points I have also used the official data on the 2016 and previous elections from the Electoral Commission website. As well as providing background understandings of my districts (mentioned in the previous section), this data is most important in the comparative approach taken in chapter 7. There are certainly some irregularities with these official results (as will be clear in the case of Bugiri in 7.4), however, they are still generally reliable enough to use in this way.

e. Secondary sources

Most secondary information useful to the project came from Ugandan journalism. In order of most common usage, the sources of these were *The Daily Monitor*, *The Observer*, (transcripts of) the *Uganda Radio Network*, *The New Vision* (state owned) and *The Independent*. I owe an enormous debt to these vibrant publications, and the journalists who work for them often at considerable personal risk and little remuneration. I also owe a large debt to many Kampala-based journalists and editors whose insights assisted my study greatly.

1.3 Organisation of thesis

In the next chapter, “Elections, Dominant Parties, Subnational Politics, and the Challenges of Non-Democratic Survival”, I review the wider literature on non-democratic regime survival in order to more precisely build a theoretical framework that applies to Uganda. The chapter consists of four sections: the first reviews the fundamental survival challenges faced by all non-democratic regimes; the second focuses on the utility of elections and dominant parties as tools to meet these challenges; the third looks at political participation in subnational spaces and how these interact with national politics; and the fourth restates my own theory applicable to Uganda, building on the findings and terminology of the prior sections.

Chapter 3, “Subnational Politics in Uganda and the Genesis of the NRM Dominant Party System”, presents a historical review of the evolution of local politics in Uganda up to the present day. After briefly reviewing local politics under the colonial government and previous regimes, the chapter continues to discuss the “no-party” Movement System of government in the first two decades of NRM rule (1986-2006), and the eventual transition toward multipartyism. Rather than just providing background, this chapter provides critical insights into unique features of the Movement System that allow the current NRM to operate the way it does.

Chapter 4, “Politics in a Partisan Monopoly: The Substance and Structure of Intra-NRM Local Competition”, is the first in which I draw on my primary empirical data from the 2016 election. The chapter is a thick description of two things: the breadth and nature of the NRM “monopoly” of local politics in the rural south, including its empirical, normative and coercive dimensions; and how a vibrant and participatory politics can take place within such partisan dominance. It is here that I document the local politics and candidates active in the case districts.

Chapter 5, “The NRM’s Systemic Division and Inclusion: District Elite Networks and the Terrain of Their Competition”, illuminates the processes of elite politics within the case districts throughout the course of the election period. It begins by looking at the division of NRM politicians into rival “camps” (for which I provide a typology), before describing the four-stage process of their competition over the election – the registration

of voters, participation in the NRM “structures” elections, the NRM primaries, and the general election itself.

Chapter 6, “Subnational Competition and the Challenge of Elite Cooperation”, looks at elite politics with a broader temporal and geographical lens, focusing on how Museveni’s management of the powerful NRM caucus before and after election is conditioned and altered by the election itself. It looks at what turned out to be a chance natural experiment: the defection and presidential challenge of former Prime Minister and key Museveni ally Amama Mbabazi, whose challenge was thwarted in part by the pressure the caucus faced in the election. This relates directly to H₃: the relationship between local competition and elite management.

Chapter 7, “Voting for a Monarch: Subnational Competition and Presidential Mobilisation”, explains the arguments of H₁ and H₂ in full. Building on the findings of the previous chapters, it connects the processes of subnational intra-party competition with the outcomes of decentralised accountability politics (H₁), and the mobilisation of Museveni’s vote on election day (H₂). Further to articulating these findings, the second half of the chapter embraces the comparative dimension of the thesis design by highlighting the “exceptional” characteristics of Kayunga and Bugiri districts.

The thesis concludes with chapter 8, “Reflections and Wider Impact”. This chapter is not intended to house a final summary of the main findings of the thesis (these are in chapters 6 and 7), but rather to connect these findings to the theoretical discussion in chapter 2, and to comment on the wider applicability of these findings for other cases.

Chapter 2

Elections, Dominant Parties, Subnational Politics, and the Challenges of Non-Democratic Survival

In this chapter I will elaborate the theoretical framework that guides this study, identifying key terms, puzzles, and their current responses in the literature. The chapter starts by situating my research question in the broader study of non-democratic regimes both globally and in Africa. It will then look at how elections, dominant parties, subnational competition, political participation and accountability politics can become features in non-democratic survival strategies. It concludes with a concise phrasing of the argument that will guide the subsequent five historical and empirical chapters.

2.1 The challenges of non-democratic regime survival

The study of non-democratic regimes has been a shifting field in the past two decades. During the Cold War, analysts could easily categorise such regimes into several common subtypes: communist single-party, nationalist single-party, military rule, oligarchic autocracy, or monarchies. All of these regimes legitimised their reign with some reference to the people's will, but didn't ground this claim in any form of procedural democracy. The end of Cold War bi-polarity and the resulting pressures of "Third Wave" democratisation altered the calculus of such regimes, and many could not avoid some minimally democratic reform process.¹ As a result, the study of non-democratic regimes fell into a paradigm which has since been called (somewhat derisively) "transitology", which assumed that regimes forced to slowly liberalise their politics would eventually transition to some kind of pluralist, competitive democracy.²

By the early 2000s, many non-democratic regimes had opened limited political spaces and developed some democratic institutions, yet still avoided genuine democratisation

¹ Sam Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

² Dankwart Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics* 2, no. 3 (1970): 337–63; Haggard and Kaufman, *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions*; Lisa Anderson, *Transitions to Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

and remained fundamentally uncompetitive and authoritarian.³ Scholars then broke out of the democratic-authoritarian theoretical dualism of “transitology” and developed regime categories in the “grey zone” that are stable blends of the two – so called “hybrid regimes”,⁴ “semi-authoritarianism”,⁵ “electoral authoritarianism”,⁶ “competitive authoritarianism”,⁷ among many other slightly different models and typologies. While this literature is notoriously prolific at creating new categories and labels, throughout this chapter I will refer to it as the “hybridity literature”.⁸ Where the “transitology” theorists saw non-democratic resilience as a kind of *resistance* against the powerful forces of democratisation, hybridity literature saw it as *maintenance*. The distinctive characteristics of such hybrid regimes were seen to be their very tolerance for, and use of, the various institutions of liberal democracy – elections, opposition parties, vibrant parliaments – without truly exposing themselves to the competitive forces that might actually threaten their hold on power.

Ironically, in trying to de-regidify the theoretical dualism of transitology discourse, the terminological development of the hybridity literature has filled the “grey zone” with a set of regime typologies that inhibit theory building in their own way. Specifically, it has developed a culture of taking one model and applying it to a case in a way that sticks to that previously defined category. This has been especially lamentable for Uganda, with two recent books including the term “hybrid regime” in their titles, and building theoretical framework by arguing in forms such as “as a hybrid regime, the NRM is...”⁹ This development has had the unfortunate byproduct of miring case studies in matters of theoretical classification and taxonomy at the expense of analysing the unique complexity of cases themselves.

³ Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (2002): 5–21.

⁴ Larry Jay Diamond, “Thinking About Hybrid Regimes,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 21–35.

⁵ Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged, The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003).

⁶ Andreas Schedler, “The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism,” in *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, ed. Andreas Schedler (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 2006), 1–23.

⁷ Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*.

⁸ It should be noted that many of the prior terms distinguish themselves from hybrids, notably Schedler’s “electoral authoritarianism”. See Schedler, “The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism.”

⁹ Mari Aili Tripp, *Museveni’s Uganda: Paradoxes of Power in an Hybrid Regime* (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 2010); Sandrine Perrot et al., eds., *Elections in a Hybrid Regime: Revisiting the 2011 Ugandan Polls* (Kampala: Fountain, 2014).

Furthermore, the hybridity literature has tended to theoretically ring-fence the regimes whose designation as “authoritarian” needs no qualifying adjective. Single-party regimes, monarchies, and autocratic dictatorships often include individual features common to so-called hybrids, like local elections, mass parties, foundational elite bargains, *et cetera*. It makes little sense therefore to limit the study of one or several cases to the comparative theory of only regimes in the same subtype. For example, regardless of the differences on other fronts, the elite relationships of theocratic Iran and Putin’s dominant-party Russia might have a lot in common, as could the local accountability politics of Communist China and the somewhat more democratic Tanzania, or the party functions of single-party Vietnam or Mubarak’s dominant party Egypt. Thinking in types, as the hybridity literature often does, cuts off the use of various theoretical building blocks from these alternate-type cases, and consequently places obedience to theory ahead of the interpretation of cases.

To avoid these pitfalls, this thesis draws on literature from a broader population of cases, which I group by the more abstract and minimal term “non-democracies”.¹⁰ By “non-democracies” I refer to any regime that maintains political control of a state by means other than routine free and fair elections. I do this conscious of the fact that unlike most hybrid types, “non-democracy” is not a *thing itself*: just as there are many games that are not tennis, but one cannot play a game of “non-tennis”. I use this term not in order to inscribe detailed characteristics of the functioning non-democratic state, but in order to borrow theoretical insights from regimes that may have little in common with a regime like Uganda’s. That said, while I treat this category in such a minimal way, at their core all non-democratic regimes face a common essential framework of challenges to their survival, which I will now elaborate on.

2.1.1 *The puzzles of mass and elite control*

Among all of their institutional, ideological and historical differences, all non-democracies survive or perish based on their management of two simultaneous

¹⁰ Some other scholars have also used this term, see: Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder, CO. and London: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 51; Hess, *Authoritarian Landscapes: Popular Mobilization and the Institutional Sources of Resilience in Nondemocracies*; Katsunori Seki, “Causes and Consequences of Elections in Nondemocracies” (Texas A&M University, 2015); Acemoglu and Robinson, *The Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.

challenges:¹¹

i. *The challenge of mass control.* All regimes must prevent challenges to their rule emerging from the citizenry, or the “masses.” Even regimes with sophisticated dominance of national elites and political finance can fall prey to informal crises like revolutions, mass demonstrations, economically crippling strikes, or civil wars, or (where applicable) formal crises like election/referendum defeats, or the loss of legislative majorities. Stable regimes, without exception, cannot survive in the long term without some kind of strategy to meet this challenge.

ii. *The challenge of elite cooperation.* Regimes also need cooperation from a sufficient majority of what Bueno de Mesquita (*et al*) calls the “selectorate” – politicians, financiers, bureaucrats, military figures, and others, who are collectively powerful enough to overthrow regime leaders.¹² In the absence of such accord, regimes (including those capable of meeting the challenge of mass control) can be victims of *coups*, assassinations, impeachments, legislative impasses, or institutional constraint. Regime stability therefore relies on an “elite bargain,” in which cooperation between power brokers can function.

This dual puzzle of elite and mass control will serve as the theoretical foundation of this chapter, and this thesis. It is most reminiscent of the work of Svobik, who terms these the “problem of authoritarian control” and “the problem of authoritarian power sharing”, respectively.¹³ While theoretically separate, the two challenges and their remedies are often interwoven and interdependent.¹⁴ Leaders who are known to enjoy the loyalty of the national elite are often seen as inevitable rulers by citizens who may in turn be more inclined to accept cooperation than militate for change. Likewise, leaders who are seen by elites to have the support or obedience of the masses, or the

¹¹ This framework is similar to those used in: Milan W. Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Gandhi and Przeworski, “Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats”; Hess, *Authoritarian Landscapes: Popular Mobilization and the Institutional Sources of Resilience in Nondemocracies*, 11.

¹² Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge MA. and London: MIT Press, 2003), 8.

¹³ Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, 12.

¹⁴ Beatriz Magaloni and Ruth Kricheli, “Political Order and One-Party Rule,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 13, no. 1 (2010): 128.

personal capacity to suppress and/or mobilise them, can use this as leverage to forge or maintain elite bargains with potential rivals.¹⁵

In seeking to understand the key methods of non-democratic survival, scholars have produced a range of theories emphasising different core determinants, such as: economic performance;¹⁶ global contexts and alliances;¹⁷ control of political finance;¹⁸ the development of political institutions (legislatures, parties and elections);¹⁹ the coercive and counterrevolutionary capacity of the state;²⁰ co-optation of the opposition;²¹ or the path-dependent solidarity of founding elites.²² There are many merits to these theories, and I will draw extensively on several of them as they relate to Uganda.

Before doing so however, it is necessary to stress that there are several key weaknesses of the expansive literature on non-democratic survival that make the findings of this thesis relevant. First, current trends have seen far more attention on the challenge of elite cooperation than that of mass control.²³ Some approaches even dispute the theoretical need to focus on this side of the puzzle.²⁴ Those that have looked at mass control have emphasised popular satisfaction with economic growth and conditions,²⁵ the use of state coercion to repel organised opposition,²⁶ or, most of all, the use of state

¹⁵ Martin K. Dimitrov, “Popular Autocrats,” *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 1 (2009): 78–81.

¹⁶ Haggard and Kaufman, *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions*; Acemoglu and Robinson, *The Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.

¹⁷ Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*; Bellin, “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective.”

¹⁸ Leonardo R. Arriola, “Patronage and Political Stability in Africa,” *Comparative Political Studies* 42, no. 10 (2009): 1339–62.

¹⁹ Boix and Svoboda, “The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government: Institutions and Power-Sharing in Dictatorships”; Geddes, “Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?”; Gandhi and Przeworski, “Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats”; Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival*.

²⁰ Bellin, “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective”; Stephen Hall and Thomas Ambrosio, “Authoritarian Learning: A Conceptual Overview,” *East European Politics* 33, no. 2 (2017): 143–61.

²¹ Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents and Institutions*.

²² Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*; Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia*; Smith, “Life of the Party: The Origins of Regime Breakdown and Persistence under Single-Party Rule.”

²³ Hess, *Authoritarian Landscapes: Popular Mobilization and the Institutional Sources of Resilience in Nondemocracies*, 6.

²⁴ Erica Frantz and Natasha Ezrow, *The Politics of Dictatorship: Institutions and Outcomes in Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner, 2011).

²⁵ Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*.

²⁶ Bellin, “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective.”

patronage to mobilise or appease voters.²⁷ There is very little in this mix to explain why voters would *choose* to support a regime outside the rational, material dimensions that these theories suggest. This may be in part due to a heavy reliance on large-N methods with relatively little grounded fieldwork.

Relatedly, recent studies of non-democratic regimes have not placed sufficient emphasis on the relationship between local and national politics. By this I do not mean that studies have ignored relationships between local and national elite networks, which have attracted significant interest. I am talking instead about local *politics*: the dynamics, divisions and debates within subnational units of various size, often critically vibrant in so called “weak states” whose institutional extension into rural hinterlands is not robust.²⁸ Given that most non-democratic regimes mobilise the bulk of their support in rural areas,²⁹ where the local political sphere is often more important than in urban areas, this is a significant dearth. How do these two political spheres interact and relate? This is a question I will revisit in section 2.3.

2.1.2 Political stability in Africa

For the study of Uganda, the challenges of authoritarian survival must be situated alongside the question of how political stability (authoritarian or otherwise) is maintained in the specific context of the African post-colonial state. Unlike countries whose populations mainly live in dense urban or peri-urban areas (such as Egypt or Singapore) or more expansive agrarian countries with historically strong state structures (such as China or Russia), African countries, broadly speaking, stand out for their highly rural and agrarian population balance and their historically weak state institutions.³⁰ The challenge of penetrating regime power into these peripheral hinterlands has affected statecraft from pre-colonial to post-colonial times, with regimes conventionally relying on rural elites whose power is in some ways independent from the regime to act as intermediaries. As Lonsdale said of the African colonial state’s rural periphery:

²⁷ Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak’s Egypt*; Lust-Okar, “Elections under Authoritarianism: Preliminary Lessons from Jordan.”

²⁸ For an articulation of this puzzle see: Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1989).

²⁹ Gandhi and Lust-Okar, “Elections Under Authoritarianism,” 408.

³⁰ Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

“power could not be exercised without giving some of it away.”³¹

What does this mean for the challenges of non-democratic survival identified above? For the challenge of mass control, it means that regimes must rely on alliances with actors whose power is in some way autonomous of the regime. This reliance in turn affects the challenge of elite cooperation, in that groups of these rural power brokers can use their leverage over the regime in the form of bargaining over rents and state patronage. According to Allen, it was this dynamic that led regimes to seek unified national bargains mediated by single-party monopolies after independence.³² Since the return of electoral politics in the 1990s, most of the Africanist literature has focused on the power of ethnic hierarchies,³³ land-tenure aristocracies,³⁴ or other local powerful politicians that can “deliver” the votes of their constituencies to presidential contenders during elections. Chapter 3 will show that Uganda is not exempt from this pattern historically or currently.

An assumption of much of this literature is that rural politics *itself* is controlled by these local elites with somewhat hierarchical control of their localities, owing to either their hereditary control of land or their state-enabled clientelist machines. Rural politics is therefore seen to be sedimentary, stable and dependable – and the process of assembling sufficient coalitions of rural votes is done via bargaining among the elite in the capital. Such a process may occur in many states, but I will argue that in Uganda’s case the management of the challenges of extending rural control sees much of these processes occur *within* local polities that are politically dynamic and divided, rather than stable. While rural elites with endogenous power bases and political appeal are still relied upon by the regime to mobilise its votes, the fact of intra-party competition by these local elites undercuts both the leverage that they have over the regime in the process of elite bargaining (H₃) and alters the method of their mobilisation for the regime (H₂). The NRM has this local intra-party competition in common with an earlier generation of one-party regimes that I will discuss in 2.3.2.

³¹ John Lonsdale, “The European Scramble and Conquest in African History,” in *The Cambridge History of Africa, Volume 6*, ed. J. D. Fage et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 680–766.

³² Chris Allen, “Understanding African Politics,” *Review of African Political Economy* 22, no. 65 (1995): 301–20.

³³ Koter, “King Makers: Local Leaders and Ethnic Politics in Africa.”

³⁴ Boone, “Property and Political Order in Africa : Land Rights and State Authority.”

2.2 Tools of non-democratic regime survival

2.2.1 Executive elections

Elections for regime leaders – which I will refer to as “executive elections”³⁵ – have a long history in non-democracies.³⁶ Given that non-democratic leaders (by definition) eliminate any real risk of losing power at the polls, executive elections seem intuitively like “facades” masking real power relations.³⁷ Yet for some time scholars have been interested in what these elections – even those where incumbents win 99% or 100% of the vote – reveal about the regimes that stage them.³⁸ While elections clearly open a formal risk to the maintenance of power, large-N studies show a correlation between holding elections and authoritarian regime longevity.³⁹ It is also noteworthy that authoritarian leaders who relent to foreign pressure to hold elections rarely abandon them when that pressure subsides and their ability to win consolidates.⁴⁰ For these reasons, non-competitive elections have emerged as a critical field of study in the puzzle of non-democratic survival, and have typically taken one or more of three main forms:

i. *Elections as dependent variables*: Why do non-democratic regimes hold elections? Are they forced to do so by internal or external pressures,⁴¹ or are elections opportunities grasped by leaders for various reasons?⁴²

ii. *Elections as independent variables*: What are the consequences of elections in non-

³⁵ As does Simpson, *Why Governments and Parties Manipulate Elections*, 1.

³⁶ While many studies of elections bundle executive and subnational elections into one theoretical approach, I will explain in 2.3.2 why these are fundamentally different phenomena. See Seki, “Causes and Consequences of Elections in Nondemocracies,” 11.

³⁷ Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*.

³⁸ Guy Hermet and Richard Rose, *Elections Without Choice* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Ramsa Karklins, “Soviet Elections Revisited: Voter Abstention in Noncompetitive Voting,” *The American Political Science Review* 80, no. 2 (1986): 449–70.

³⁹ Geddes, “Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?,” 6.

⁴⁰ Gandhi and Lust-Okar, “Elections Under Authoritarianism,” 407.

⁴¹ Acemoglu and Robinson, *The Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*; Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*.

⁴² Gary W Cox, “Authoritarian Elections and Leadership Succession, 1975-2000,” 2007; Valerie J Bunce and Sharon L Wolchik, “Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes,” *World Politics* 62, no. 1 (2010): 43–86; Geddes, “Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?”

democratic regimes?⁴³ Are executive elections likely to destabilise regimes and lead to democratisation,⁴⁴ or are they tools of regime stability?⁴⁵

iii. *Elections as processes*: What determines the outcomes of elections in non-democratic regimes? How do incumbents win elections?⁴⁶ How do they rig elections?⁴⁷ How do opposition candidates win against the odds?⁴⁸

This thesis is directly concerned with answering the third of these questions. However, stopping at that would not necessarily provide any evidence on the broader questions of non-democratic survival puzzle as defined in 2.1.1 above. After all, a regime could easily win an election but lose power in a revolution, internal factional struggle, impeachment, *et cetera*. Studying elections in the context of the broader puzzle of non-democratic regime survival therefore requires scholars to probe not only the causes of election outcomes themselves, but also how the medium and long-term consequences of these outcomes affect (or fail to affect) the management of non-electoral threats to regime maintenance.⁴⁹ There are four main ways in which executive elections can produce benefits to regimes' long term survival that go beyond the procedural necessity of being announced the winner: demonstration effects, legitimacy dividends, information spreading/gathering, and elite management.

⁴³ Ruchan Kaya and Michael Bernhard, "Are Elections Mechanisms of Authoritarian Stability or Democratization? Evidence from Postcommunist Eurasia," *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 3 (2013): 734–52.

⁴⁴ Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*; Staffan I. Lindberg, *Democracy and Elections in Africa* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Jan Teorell and Axel Hadenius, "Elections as Levers of Democracy: A Global Inquiry," in *Democratization by Elections: A New Mode of Transition*, ed. Staffan I. Lindberg (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 77–100.

⁴⁵ Edmund Malesky and Paul Schuler, "Why Do Single-Party Regimes Hold Elections? An Analysis of Candidate Data in Vietnam's 2007 National Assembly Contest," in *APSA Annual Meeting* (Boston, 2008); Jennifer McCoy and Jonathan Hartlyn, "The Relative Powerlessness of Elections in Latin America," in *Democratization by Elections: A New Mode of Transition*, ed. Staffan I. Lindberg (Baltimore MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 47–76.

⁴⁶ Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*.

⁴⁷ Simpson, *Why Governments and Parties Manipulate Elections*; Fabrice Lehoucq, "Electoral Fraud: Causes, Types, and Consequences," *Annual Review of Political Science* 6, no. 1 (2003): 233–56; Andreas Schedler, "The Menu of Manipulation," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 36–50.

⁴⁸ Arriola, "Patronage and Political Stability in Africa"; Nicolas van de Walle, "Tipping Games: When Do Opposition Parties Coalesce?," in *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, ed. Andreas Schedler (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 2006), 77–94.

⁴⁹ Cox, "Authoritarian Elections and Leadership Succession, 1975–2000"; Simpson, *Why Governments and Parties Manipulate Elections*.

a. Demonstration effect

The most important of these is the so-called “demonstration effect,” whereby election victories allow regimes to project an image of power and invincibility that militates against potential threats after the polls.⁵⁰ This affects both opposition sympathisers and activists who might be inclined to protest if the regime’s capacity to mobilise the masses was untested or proven to be weak,⁵¹ and rival elites within ruling parties who could be dissuaded from a formal or informal challenge on the basis of the leader’s popular support. In order to achieve a strong demonstration effect, many non-democratic leaders invest heavily in not only winning, but winning with a “supermajority” of support, with both large margins of victory and high voter turnout.⁵² Such a victory may protect a regime in lieu of state organs that would do so in a more institutionalised system. Hence, turning out votes during an election campaign is, in Ames’ terms, “both a ‘means’ and an ‘end’” of a successful election strategy.⁵³ Conversely, winning with 51%, or with a plurality, can have the opposite demonstration effect, and galvanise opposition to the vulnerability of the regime. Schedler summarises the challenge of opening up this kind of space:

To the extent that they serve to legitimate the system and demonstrate the power and popularity of the ruling party as well as the weakness of its opponents, elections tend to demoralize and demobilize opposition forces. To the extent that they allow opposition forces to get stronger and to demonstrate that the emperor is naked, that his grip on power is based on manipulation rather than popular consent, elections tend to reinvigorate opposition parties.⁵⁴

Regimes must also develop the capacity to mobilise voters in the form of election activities like rallies and the dissemination of campaign materials, as these can have a demonstration effect of their own independent of the election result.⁵⁵ Aside from warding off threats, the demonstration effect can also encourage cooperation from

⁵⁰ Geddes, “Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?”

⁵¹ Schedler, “The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism,” 13.

⁵² Magaloni and Kricheli, “Political Order and One-Party Rule”; Simpser, *Why Governments and Parties Manipulate Elections*; Geddes, “Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?”

⁵³ Barry Ames, “Bases of Support for Mexico’s Dominant Party,” *The American Political Science Review* 64, no. 1 (1970): 154.

⁵⁴ Schedler, “The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism,” 14. 2006 *Logic*: 14

⁵⁵ Cox, “Authoritarian Elections and Leadership Succession, 1975-2000,” 9.

citizens and elites who see the regime as permanent, which is especially important in clientelist systems where there is an incentive to support the eventual winner even if they are not the preferred candidate.

b. Legitimacy dividend

Similar to the demonstration effect, election victories can increase the degree to which regimes are seen as legitimate by citizens and external actors, which can prevent contentious challenges between polls.⁵⁶ Electoral legitimacy not only to appease foreign donors or internal critics, it also enhances a regime's capacity to build allies and find cooperative partners. Legitimacy narratives are a feature of even the most extreme dictatorships: those regimes that do not stage even sham elections for their executive usually propagate another form of it, such as divine right in the case of monarchs, or vanguardist paternalism in the case of communist one-party rule.⁵⁷ Schedler's model of electoral authoritarianism, which pre-supposed that election results in such regimes are often rigged, suggests that even nominally opening up power to pluralist competition fundamentally alters the basis of political authority, and "establish[es] the primacy of democratic legitimation."⁵⁸ In doing so, election victories produce a normative regime power as well as a narrowly institutional one.

Interestingly, both the demonstration effect and the legitimacy dividend suggest regimes have an interest not only in winning elections, but also in staging elections that are seen to be as credible as possible. When elections are widely seen to have been rigged, regimes cannot rely on these two by-products to bolster their rule for the remaining term. This is one of the reasons why election results which are overtly fraudulent can often cause deep contentious crises immediately afterwards⁵⁹ – as in Zimbabwe 2008, Ethiopia 2008, Serbia 2000, Ukraine 2004, Iran 2009, Kyrgyzstan

⁵⁶ Thomas Pepinsky, "Autocracy, Elections, and Fiscal Policy: Evidence from Malaysia," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 42, no. 1 (2007): 136–63.

⁵⁷ Sam Huntington and Clement Moore, *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society: The Dynamics of Established One-Party Systems* (New York and London: Basic Books, 1970), 48–72; Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 38.

⁵⁸ Schedler, "The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism," 13.

⁵⁹ Valerie Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, "Favorable Conditions and Electoral Revolutions," *Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 4 (2006): 5–18; Andrew T. Little, Joshua A. Tucker, and Tom LaGatta, "Elections, Protest, and Alternation of Power," *The Journal of Politics* 77, no. 4 (2015): 1142–56.

2005, among others. Numerous regimes that have the institutional capacity to rig elections therefore still invest heavily in mobilising constituencies during campaigns in part for this reason. Of course regimes that think they will lose – or that discover in the vote counting that they did lose – will be inclined to manipulate results outright as a second best option. However, it stands to reason that a regime that thinks that it *can* win more votes in an honest count will prefer to do this.⁶⁰ Likewise they will also build electoral institutions that are, in Cox’s words, “at least minimally credible”.⁶¹ Such a strategy does not mean that elections are likely to be “free and fair”, but rather that regimes will use longer-term strategies of unfairness and unfreedom, like embedded forms of state patronage, negotiated cooptation of opposition elites, or preventing wealth being accumulated by opposition sympathisers.

c. Information

Executive elections also provide an opportunity for regimes to gather or spread information. For reasons that transcend elections, regimes have an interest in knowing where they have the most and least support in society,⁶² and the degrees of and reasons for this unpopularity.⁶³ Due to their general aversion to contentious protest and open political dialogue, non-democratic regimes commonly face deficits of this information.⁶⁴ This affects patronage strategies, as regimes may wish to establish reward and/or punishment schemes after elections that incentivise pro-regime voting in the next poll. Conversely, they may wish to target areas where they received the least support with public spending in order to change their fortunes there (as Museveni has done in the Acholi and Teso regions of Uganda since faring poorly there in his 2001 and 2006 re-elections⁶⁵). Regimes may have means other than elections to collect this

⁶⁰ Note that Simpser disagrees with this, claiming that regimes will always pad their results with fraudulent votes if they can. See: Simpser, *Why Governments and Parties Manipulate Elections*.

⁶¹ Cox, “Authoritarian Elections and Leadership Succession, 1975-2000,” 9.

⁶² Ames, “Bases of Support for Mexico’s Dominant Party”; Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*.

⁶³ Michael K. Miller, “Elections, Information, and Policy Responsiveness in Autocratic Regimes,” *Comparative Political Studies* 48, no. 6 (2015): 691–727.

⁶⁴ Ronald Wintrobe, *The Political Economy of Dictatorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 20; Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge MA.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 136.

⁶⁵ See: Paul Omach, “Peace, Security and Elections in Northern Uganda,” in *Elections in a Hybrid Regime: Revisiting the 2011 Ugandan Polls*, ed. Sandrine Perrot et al. (Kampala: Fountain, 2014), 348–71; Sandrine Perrot, “An NRM Recapture of Teso in 2011? What Voting Means in a Hybrid Regime,”

information, but they will always be suspicious of being fed false information by their local allies. Elections through a minimally credible vote-counting institution are a more reliable means of gathering information than anything else.⁶⁶

Regimes can also use elections to gather information on voters on a smaller scale. Local leaders can track which villages, local notables or small businesses show less than enthusiastic support for the regime and punish them accordingly. Information can also take the form of discourse, in that regimes can see which arguments and critiques proffered by the opposition on the campaign trail generate the most support among citizens. In regimes with harsh controls on speech and protest, elections are ways for limited articulation of opposition grievance to be staged, as well as the organisational and financial resources of opponents to be exposed.⁶⁷

Elections can also be powerful tools of *spreading* information or propaganda about the regime or the political system to citizens.⁶⁸ This is something that has not received enough attention in studies of non-democratic elections.⁶⁹ When regime leaders are on the ballot, they have an excuse to disseminate personal narratives and messages in the form of a mass re-election campaign. Such propagandising can then form the basis of regime narratives that inform the electorate's opinion of it both during the election and long after it. In many non-democracies, elections are times of unparalleled political mobilisation, especially when executive elections are harmonised with local campaigns that reach deeper into villages and remote communities – as is the case in Uganda. Conroy-Kurtz's work on the 2011 Ugandan election found that people's exposure to such communications through canvassing and rallies significantly altered their knowledge of the political system, including both individual actors and institutional processes.⁷⁰ This tool can be used not only to put forward an official line on the regime's

in *Elections in a Hybrid Regime: Revisiting the 2011 Ugandan Polls*, ed. Sandrine Perrot et al. (Kampala: Fountain, 2014), 372–415.

⁶⁶ A. T. Little, “Are Non-Competitive Elections Good for Citizens?,” *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 29, no. 2 (2016): 1–29; Andrea Cassani, “Was It Worth the Trouble? Limited Competition and Citizen Well-Being under Authoritarian Rule,” *Italian Political Science Review* 46, no. 1 (2016): 97.

⁶⁷ Cox, “Authoritarian Elections and Leadership Succession, 1975-2000.”

⁶⁸ Demonstration effect is often considered a form of information spreading. See Seki, “Causes and Consequences of Elections in Nondemocracies.”

⁶⁹ Some exceptions here are Seki; Arturas Rozenas, “Elections, Information, and Political Survival in Autocracies” (Duke University, 2012).

⁷⁰ Jeffrey Conroy-Kurtz, “Electoral Campaigns as Learning Opportunities: Lessons From Uganda,” *African Affairs* 115, no. 460 (2016): 516–40.

legitimacy, but also to structure the norms of what goods and services people expect, and from whom they expect them.

d. Elite management

Finally, another way that executive elections can aide the survival of non-democratic regimes relates to management of key elites within the political establishment. A lot of this stems from the demonstration effect mentioned above, or has more to do with the (usually simultaneous) subnational elections discussed below (2.1.3). Aside from these, staging routine elections for the executive provides a context to gauge the loyalties of the elite by providing a context in which the explicit support for the leader is demanded. Conversely, they can act to “flush out” opponents who wish to defect, and co-opt or divide members of the opposition. Much of the work on this theory has focused on elections that see regime leaders rotate, positing that the commitment by a leader to stand for an election alleviates credible commitment problems among the inner circle and cements the elite cooperation necessary for regime maintenance.⁷¹

Allowing for elections also reduces the incentive for elites to engage in *coups*, given that there is a formal means of contestation available to them. Cox identifies an “electoral distance effect,” whereby rivals are more likely to stage *coups* the more distant the next election is given that the regime’s capacity for mass mobilisation is strongest during election campaigns.⁷² Even without such rotation, elections raise the possibility that a leader might not stand again, thus tempering the frustrations of other potential candidates. Another set of arguments in the literature suggests that executive elections can split the opposition.⁷³ Lust-Okar’s work on the Middle East shows how elections can be used to divide the broad range of regime opponents into moderate (participating) factions and radical (boycotting) ones. Ironically, elections managed in such a way can deny the opposition a tool of collective action rather than providing one.

The study of winning elections in non-democracies is therefore directly related to the

⁷¹ Beatriz Magaloni, “Credible Power-Sharing and the Longevity of Authoritarian Rule,” *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 4–5 (2008): 728.

⁷² Cox, “Authoritarian Elections and Leadership Succession, 1975-2000,” 16.

⁷³ Guy Hermet, Richard Rose, and Alain Rouquie, “Preface,” in *Elections Without Choice* (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1978), vii–xi.

study of maintaining power outside of elections. Furthermore, strategic variables in the approach to winning elections – degrees of participation, mobilisation, information coercion, patronage – all influence the ability of elections to act in the ways described above. That is, election strategies in non-democracies are never *merely* election strategies, but instances that structure and manage the broader politics of regime survival in both its mass and elite dimensions.

2.2.2 Parties

Like elections, political parties used by non-democratic regimes have for some time been the object of significant interest in the literature. This has been fuelled in part by numerous large-N studies that find regimes with parties (as with elections) survive longer than those without them.⁷⁴ In recent times much of this literature has seen parties bundled together with other political institutions like parliaments,⁷⁵ and in some cases elections.⁷⁶ In these studies, understanding non-democratic ruling parties has been treated as a dependent variable under the general “why parties?” question, which has gravitated towards a more quantitative, rationalist method.⁷⁷ Another set of current approaches looks closer at small-N or single cases with more interest in parties’ long-term function than the reasons for their creation.⁷⁸ This is in line with a much older tradition of authoritarian and single parties.⁷⁹ The causal significance of parties to regime durability splits both of these approaches, with some arguing that parties are

⁷⁴ Gandhi and Przeworski, “Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats”; Frantz and Ezrow, *The Politics of Dictatorship: Institutions and Outcomes in Authoritarian Regimes*; cf. Joseph Wright and Abel Escribà-Folch, “Authoritarian Institutions and Regime Survival: Transitions to Democracy and Subsequent Autocracy,” *British Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2 (2012): 283–309.

⁷⁵ Jennifer Gandhi, *Political Institutions under Dictatorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Gandhi and Przeworski, “Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats.”

⁷⁶ Geddes, “Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?”

⁷⁷ Geddes; Gandhi and Przeworski, “Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats”; Grigorii Golosov, “Authoritarian Party Systems: Patterns of Emergence, Sustainability, and Survival,” *Comparative Sociology* 12, no. 5 (2013): 617–44.

⁷⁸ Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*; Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*; Kenneth F. Greene, “The Political Economy of Authoritarian Single-Party Dominance,” *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no. 7 (2010): 807–34; Smith, “Life of the Party: The Origins of Regime Breakdown and Persistence under Single-Party Rule.”

⁷⁹ Ames, “Bases of Support for Mexico’s Dominant Party”; Aristide R. Zolberg, “The Structure of Political Conflict in the New States of Tropical Africa,” *The American Political Science Review* 62, no. 1 (1968): 70–87; Huntington and Moore, *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society: The Dynamics of Established One-Party Systems*.

essential institutions for regime maintenance,⁸⁰ and others seeing them as epiphenomenal to it.⁸¹ This question is inhibited by the fact that, as Magaloni and Kricheli have noted, it is not always easy to see if party arrangements are a cause or a consequence of regime longevity.⁸²

It is worth noting the variety of forms that non-democratic parties have taken historically and currently. Before the Third Wave era, non-democracies tended to either have no-party systems (usually military rule or monarchy) or single party (usually communist or nationalist) systems. Since the 1990s, there has been a sharp drop in these two forms and a proliferation of *dominant party* systems: regimes that allow a limited space for multi-party pluralism but use a ruling party structure to manage access to political positions, state patronage, and therefore politics writ large.⁸³ Not all “dominant party systems” are non-democratic (Botswana 1960-present, South Africa 1994-present, Japan 1955-93) and not all present day non-democracies govern through dominant parties (present-day Thailand, Iran), but today the vast majority of both categories overlap. Dominant party systems also differ significantly in origin, ideology, institutionalisation and breadth. Some used to be *de jure* single parties (CCM in Tanzania, FLN in Algeria) and others emerged out of multi-party democratic orders (AK in Turkey, UR in Russia). In spite of this variation, there is a heuristic value in reviewing all ruling party setups to build a theory of dominant party politics in a single case like Uganda. There is – in line with the points made at the opening of 2.1 – also a value in looking at one-party systems that can function in similar ways to those with limited plurality.⁸⁴ Viewed in this breadth, theories that build a causal connection between non-democratic resilience and the use of parties fall into two main categories, which generally correlate with the problems of elite cooperation and mass control delineated in 2.1.

⁸⁰ Gandhi, *Political Institutions under Dictatorship*; Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*.

⁸¹ Golosov, “Authoritarian Party Systems: Patterns of Emergence, Sustainability, and Survival”; Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia*.

⁸² Magaloni and Kricheli, “Political Order and One-Party Rule,” 125.

⁸³ Geddes defines dominant parties as those who have never lost control of the executive or held less than two thirds of legislative seats. See Barbara Geddes, “Authoritarian Breakdown: Empirical Test of a Game Theoretic Argument,” in *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association* (Atlanta, 1999), 28.

⁸⁴ This is the approach of Magaloni and Kricheli, “Political Order and One-Party Rule.”

a. Dominant-parties and elites

Parties can maintain stable elite cooperation in two ways.

i. *Dominant-party power sharing*. The first concerns their ability to provide an institutional structure to pacts between elites with different independent power bases. This approach stems from the premise that regime cohesion is essentially a collective action problem among these elites,⁸⁵ all of whom have a mutual interest in cooperation but a constant suspicion of each other.⁸⁶ In the absence of reliable legal institutions in most non-democracies, trust within this group inevitably suffers from a “credible commitment” problem, with members fearing being pushed out by each other. A political party can fill this void by institutionalising power sharing arrangements between elites, be they politicians,⁸⁷ or financial backers.⁸⁸ By tying their fates to a party, elites make a credible commitment to each other that they will not renege on partnerships if they lose out on various forms of bargaining. Such a commitment can only be credible if the party is equipped and willing to punish those who leave,⁸⁹ by denying them access future rents or other state favours, and punishing those who violate various agreements. In this sense, Boix and Svolik call parties “ready made collective action” solutions for elites who are betrayed by executives.⁹⁰ But these parties also accommodate those who lose out in various internal negotiations – such as who will be the party’s nominee for president – thus incentivising elites to remain inside the party.

Put simply, power sharing dominant parties make the cost of leaving an elite bargain higher than the cost of being out-bargained within it, and therefore mitigate the risks of

⁸⁵ See for example Slater, *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia*; Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*; Smith, “Life of the Party: The Origins of Regime Breakdown and Persistence under Single-Party Rule.”

⁸⁶ Barbara Geddes, “What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 122.

⁸⁷ O. J. Reuter and T. F. Remington, “Dominant Party Regimes and the Commitment Problem: The Case of United Russia,” *Comparative Political Studies* 42, no. 4 (2009): 501–26; Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*, 39.

⁸⁸ Scott Gehlbach and Philip Keefer, “Investment without Democracy: Ruling-Party Institutionalization and Credible Commitment in Autocracies,” *Journal of Comparative Economics* 39, no. 2 (2011): 123–39.

⁸⁹ Joy Langston, *Elite Ruptures: When Do Ruling Parties Split?*, ed. Andreas Schedler, *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 2006).

⁹⁰ Boix and Svolik, “The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government: Institutions and Power-Sharing in Dictatorships.”

the elite cooperation puzzle to each elite's mutual benefit. In order to function effectively in this regard, parties must be institutionalised enough to enforce rules independently from individual power brokers, including (and especially) executives. Yet this is a model of dominant party rule that is more apt in regimes where real power sharing rotations occur at the pinnacle of power, such as CCP China, PRI Mexico, or CCM Tanzania – all of which see a regular rotation of regime executives. In such regimes, the party *is* the regime, rather than a subordinate tool *of* it.

ii. *Dominant party autocracy.* An alternate model holds that parties structure elite bargains in a more asymmetric way, by equipping regime executives with a tool of managing less powerful but still important elites. This is more appropriate for non-democratic regimes whose leadership is not truly shared, but more conventionally autocratic, like in NDP Egypt, AK Turkey, or, as I will argue, NRM Uganda. These regimes may also have an interest in their parties being institutionalised to some degree, but they are different in kind given that the leader is not truly subject to the party's rules. In these cases, leaders often consolidate power through channels outside of the formal party structure, such as via the military or clientelist networks. Or, they may merge their private structures with the party, giving the appearance of a strong party even though it is actually dependent on the leader. Unlike in power sharing elite arrangements then, autocratic executives will naturally prefer *not* to have a party that is institutionally independent enough to enforce rules on them.⁹¹ Instead, parties in these regimes can be used to codify rules and norms that suit executives, but do so intending to insulate them from real power sharing within that party.

This does not mean that dominant parties in more autocratic regimes do not require the executive to make sacrifices to other elites, or that party arrangements cannot organise and formalise these. To the contrary, one reason why parties are still useful in such situations is because they structure rules and rewards for loyalty that overcome the credible commitment problem. Even the most entrenched autocrats need their cooperative elites to trust in the returns of their complicity, violations of which will always weaken the executive's ability to maintain a stable elite bargain. Nor does it

⁹¹ Henry E. Hale, *Why Not Parties in Russia?* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 207.

mean that parties have no distance from the executive. It may in fact serve leaders to put some distance between them and the bureaucratic operations of the party, even when they effectively control it, as this can be used to divert criticism. This is consistently the pattern in Uganda, where various ineptitudes and controversies of the NRM are blamed on figureheads appointed by Museveni, but not on Museveni himself. Yet these parties are categorically different from those whose function is to share power at the top, given that executives can circumvent the party itself to avoid being out-manoeuvred within it. I will show this to be true of the NRM in chapter 6.

In both of these systems, dominant parties' ability to foster stable elite bargains relies on their ability to *monopolise* access to public office. This partisan monopoly is always to a large degree self-reinforcing: elites choose to comply with the party's political rules because it is the only way to access office; and the party is the only way to access office because the vast majority of elites comply with it. Beyond this cyclical dynamic, regimes use several other mechanisms to maintain party monopoly: state security organs can be used to pressure elites against running for opposition parties or as independents; parties can function as conduits of patronage allocation and rent distribution; and parties can use their institutional power over candidate selection to force political compliance (i.e., losing candidates can be offered a place in the next election in return for supporting the party's nominee⁹²). These are the tools of dominant party maintenance that have attracted most attention in the literature.

A less discussed element of partisan monopoly is the normative dimensions of party legitimacy embedded in the way citizens think about politics, often built on path-dependent historical experiences and ingrained political narratives. This is exactly the kind of case-specific variable that large-N studies are likely to miss. In Uganda, elites running for local office have an interest in standing within the NRM because of this normative legacy among the electorate. I will discuss in chapters 4 and 7 how this affects the party's relationship with mass political dynamics, but it is worth considering here that it is a key mechanism reinforcing local elites' choice to comply with NRM partisan monopoly and all of the trade-offs that come with it. This endowment reduces

⁹² Reuter and Remington, "Dominant Party Regimes and the Commitment Problem: The Case of United Russia."

the party's reliance on other methods of maintaining its dominance, such as controlling candidate selection and granting election finance or mobilisation structures to its candidates.

b. Dominant parties and mass politics

The second set of causal theories about how dominant parties prolong non-democratic rule relates to the puzzle of mass control. Ruling parties can insulate regimes from both contentious mobilisations (revolution and insurrection) and formal political movements (electoral defeat or legislative change) that threaten their rule. In line with my criticisms of the recent literature in 2.1, many recent studies of non-democratic political parties do not focus on their connection to mass politics at all.⁹³ The assumptions of these theories form three broad categories interpreting dominant party connections to mass politics, occasionally employed in conjunction with each other.

i. *Dominant parties restrict politics.* A salient – but often implicit – assumption in the literature is that parties succeed in policing mass politics in non-democracies by restricting access to the political sphere altogether. This is apt in regimes that rely more on coercion to maintain dominant party monopoly, and hence, it is the security forces that perform the key functions of restriction more than the party itself. The purpose of the party in this arrangement is to clarify the acceptable political boundaries of the public sphere for these coercive instruments to police, especially under legal one-party restrictions. Parties can also legitimise popular political exclusion by presenting a regime as programmatic rather than oligarchic. Much as this is a theory of mass political control, it is fundamentally fragile for its reliance on mass exclusion.

ii. *Dominant Parties buy politics.* A more explicit theory relates to parties' capacity to act as channels of state patronage. These theories posit that parties can turn out big majorities during elections (and state demonstrations) because voters identify them as the exclusive conduits for state resources after the polls. Parties can facilitate and organise a punishment regime (discussed above), where resources are denied to areas

⁹³ See for example: Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*; Gandhi and Przeworski, "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats."

that vote for opposition candidates,⁹⁴ expectations of which reinforce party dominance. They also enlarge the coalition of voters who feel that they stand to lose something materially in the event that the regime is overthrown from within.⁹⁵ On a more short-term basis, patronage parties can also be useful for the practical challenges of engaging in vote buying and clientelism during election campaigns. Hence, even if people are not satisfied with the ruling party, mass patronage can lead them to vote for it anyway – a phenomenon that Diaz-Cayeros (*et al*) calls “tragic brilliance” in Mexico.⁹⁶ This imbalance is why clientelist theories are relied upon in non-democratic contexts where popular dissatisfaction is known to be high. While regimes can engage in these strategies without parties,⁹⁷ parties can provide an organisational tool that penetrates deeper into society with membership registers and official structures. The party label can also act as a useful form of information here, showing voters which candidates are officially government aligned and which are not. It is on this material basis, many argue, that ruling parties often mobilise such large majorities of votes in remote rural settings, where high poverty, low political education, and the higher capacity of state organs to reward and punish voters all strengthen the logic of voting for the sitting government.⁹⁸

iii. *Parties control politics.* An alternative view looks at how parties can actively shape the political sphere in a more proactive way than merely restricting access to it. Most theories here relate to single-party regimes that use mass-membership parties to penetrate society and keep the public in a state of permanent mobilisation. The depth of these structures can both inscribe ideological norms or values on formal political space, and monitor the loyalty of citizens on the basis of their participation. This draws on an older literature on totalitarian single parties, membership in which was often a gateway to a doctrinaire and singular formal political space.⁹⁹ These parties put a premium on connecting ideological loyalty and discipline with membership, which is leveraged in mass demonstrations and other spectacles that reify their domination of the political

⁹⁴ Gunes Murat Tezcur, “Intra-Elite Struggles in Iranian Elections,” in *Political Participation in the Middle East*, ed. Ellen Lust-Okar and Saloua Zerhouni (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 2008), 51–74.

⁹⁵ Geddes, “Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?”; Barbara. Geddes, “Challenging the Conventional Wisdom,” *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 4 (1994): 104–18.

⁹⁶ Alberto Diaz-Cayeros, Beatriz Magaloni, and Barry R. Weingast, “Tragic Brilliance: Equilibrium Hegemony And Democratization in Mexico,” n.d.

⁹⁷ The clientelist impulse was taken up by Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization*, 214.

⁹⁸ Pepinsky, “Autocracy, Elections, and Fiscal Policy: Evidence from Malaysia.”

⁹⁹ Bialer, *Stalin’s Successors: Leadership, Participation and Change in the Soviet Union*.

sphere.¹⁰⁰ Such single party regimes are confronted with the connected problems of, in Sartori's words, "self-justification and self-assertion" – where a party's presence and legitimacy are intimately linked.¹⁰¹ Hence, the "mass party" protects a regime from contentious threats not by excluding people from political participation, but by encouraging and managing it.

The theories of restricting, buying, or controlling politics provide some answers that are relevant to the partisan control of mass politics in Uganda. But in order to probe further we need to disaggregate the spaces of political participation, rather than just the broad actions of parties within them.

2.3 Local politics and non-democratic regime survival

2.3.1 Subnational and multi-level political space

One problem with most theories of non-democratic regime maintenance is that they implicitly interpret "politics" on a singular, national scale.¹⁰² In other words, theories talk about the political sphere as *one space* that can either be engaged with or not. Much as there is a lot of research on how non-executive (subnational) elections are important to regime maintenance,¹⁰³ comparatively little work has been done on what makes these politically different to executive elections,¹⁰⁴ and how the two relate to one another.¹⁰⁵ Both the elite and mass puzzles of non-democratic maintenance are affected by the fact that national and local spheres are often different. Rather than "the regime" forming one united front in all electoral or political arenas, it is usually the case that local elites face a fundamentally different electoral calculus and context than executives. Likewise, citizens can see the political system through layers of local polities, bound together with

¹⁰⁰ Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 53.

¹⁰¹ Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, 38.

¹⁰² cf Seki, "Causes and Consequences of Elections in Nondemocracies," 6; Hess, *Authoritarian Landscapes: Popular Mobilization and the Institutional Sources of Resilience in Nondemocracies*.cf.

¹⁰³ Lust-Okar, "Elections under Authoritarianism: Preliminary Lessons from Jordan"; Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*.

¹⁰⁴ See: Reuter et al., "Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections," 663.

¹⁰⁵ This challenge is articulated by Gandhi and Lust-Okar: "More attention to the differences in the level of authoritarian elections, and to how these contests are structured, may provide some leverage in disentangling claims about the role of elections." See Gandhi and Lust-Okar, "Elections Under Authoritarianism," 407.

endogenous demographic tensions and political histories. Claims that regimes repress participation, dissent, and competition are of little use if they are not disaggregated from these national abstractions: politics can be *closed* in some spaces but *open* in others.¹⁰⁶

This thesis will challenge this paradigm by positioning the local polity within a broader national system managed by the Museveni regime in Uganda. That is, it will disaggregate the different levels of politics that interact during the course of an election. To do this, it is aided by developments in the so-called “subnational turn” in comparative politics that has sought to move away from the nation as the default unit of study and/or comparison. This project has included many diverse innovations in research methods (discussed in 1.2.1), design and theory, the full array of which I will not document here. One of these is the interest in theorising the “multilevel” nature of political space, and specifically how local and national political units interact to form one system.¹⁰⁷ In looking at how multilevel systems interact, I am interested in how regimes *shape* political space between national and local units to suit their own survival, and how these multi-level shapes affect the elite and mass equations of regime survival.

As Hess states, the creation of political institutions are directly relevant to this end:

The creation of such institutions, such as hegemonic political parties, legislatures, or managed multi-party elections, is intended to enhance the durability of the regime. Such changes, however, transform the political shape of the regime, closing certain opportunities for internal or popular challengers while possibly opening others.¹⁰⁸

There are many variables that might influence this outcome: such as whether local politics is competitive or not; whether local competitive politics is intra- or inter-party; whether participation is high or low; and which issues drive it. As I have stated in chapter 1, my interest in the case of Uganda is in the balance between local intra-party

¹⁰⁶ Jacqueline Behrend and Laurence Whitehead, “The Struggle for Subnational Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 2 (2016): 3; Hess, *Authoritarian Landscapes: Popular Mobilization and the Institutional Sources of Resilience in Nondemocracies*, 11.

¹⁰⁷ See for example Enrique Ochoa-Reza, “Multiple Arenas of Struggle: Federalism and Mexico’s Transition to Democracy,” in *Federalism and Democracy in Latin America*, ed. Edward L. Gibson (Baltimore MD. and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 255–96.

¹⁰⁸ Hess, *Authoritarian Landscapes: Popular Mobilization and the Institutional Sources of Resilience in Nondemocracies*, 11.

competition and national non-democratic survival.¹⁰⁹ For the purposes of this thesis I define “local” as any polity from the MP position down through the tiers of local government. However it is worth reviewing the literature on different national-subnational arrangements so as to more effectively build a theory. Below I will review the relevant findings for the elite cooperation and mass control puzzles, respectively.

a. Elite relationships and national/subnational variations

Non-democratic regimes differ significantly in the degree of competition faced by their subnational elites, and the forms that this competition takes. Much of the subnational literature has focused on the role of subnational elections that are not competitive, questioning why such elections are held at all. Reuter *et al* suggest that in Putin’s Russia, some mayors are made to face elections as a political gift to them, given that elections enable them to maintain local political machines that grant them a degree of independence from the centre.¹¹⁰

But why would regimes allow their MPs and local leaders to be exposed to the kind of real competition that could see them lose their seats? This stands out as an important puzzle in part due to how common it is. It is frequently the case that large percentages of ruling party MPs are defeated in legislative elections in non-democratic regimes,¹¹¹ as is the case in Uganda, where only 42% of NRM MPs were returned in 2016 (see figure 1.1, chapter 1). One school of thought suggests that this arrangement fosters more stable or fair elite bargains, in that excluded elites can attribute their exclusion to their electoral performance rather than regime manoeuvring, and can realistically hope to

¹⁰⁹ Incidentally, there is much more focus within the literature on the inverse of this relationship: “brown areas” of subnational authoritarianism existing within more liberal national orders, especially in Latin America. See: Guillermo O’Donnell, “On the State, Democratization and Some Conceptual Problems: A Latin American View with Glances at Some Postcommunist Countries,” *World Development* 21, no. 8 (1993): 1355–69. Behrend and Whitehead, “The Struggle for Subnational Democracy”; Edward L. Gibson, “Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Democratic Countries,” *World Politics* 58, no. 1 (2005): 101–32; Jacqueline Behrend, *The Unevenness of Democracy at the Subnational Level: Provincial Closed Games in Argentina, Latin American Research Review*, vol. 46, n.d.; Agustina Giraudy, *Democrats and Autocrats: Pathways of Subnational Undemocratic Regime Continuity within Democratic Countries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹¹⁰ Reuter et al., “Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections.”

¹¹¹ Gandhi and Lust-Okar, “Elections Under Authoritarianism,” 410.

make a comeback in future elections. This system then sustains loyalty to the regime by disincentivising excluded elites from full “exit” from it.¹¹² Competitive subnational elections, then, are a means of keeping more elites “in” the regime than there are offices to accommodate them.¹¹³ Another set of theories relates to information. By putting their elites up for competitive elections, executives can test the popularity of these figures and therefore their value to the regime.¹¹⁴ Malesky and Schuler claim that subnational elections can be a form of “star search”, whereby regimes can promote the ascendancy of talented new political figures into their ranks.¹¹⁵

Alternatively, regimes may wish to use local competition to check the power of elites who are growing threateningly strong local political bases.¹¹⁶ When elites are under permanent threat of defeat, they may rely more on the regime (and the ruling party) for political support, especially in the form of finance and patronage. In this way, the element of local competition for subnational elites can be a game-changer in the puzzle of elite cooperation. The risk here is that regimes have their own interests in keeping certain opposition elites out of office, and opening up to too much competition can weaken their hold on formal state institutions. Hence, regimes often seek to maintain relationships with both sides of a subnational electoral contest, ideally by situating that contest within the ruling party itself. This is a common feature of dominant-party systems, which regularly house internal competition in some balance to their capacity to avoid external competition.¹¹⁷ Allowing for such internally competitive elections can also allow moderate regime opponents to seek office through the party, agreeing to support the regime in return for a seat at the policy table, thus preventing their open opposition.¹¹⁸

In such competitive arrangements, subnational spaces are likely to encourage elites to

¹¹² Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*.

¹¹³ Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*.

¹¹⁴ Victor Zaslavsky and Robert J. Brym, “The Functions of Elections in the USSR,” *Soviet Studies* 30, no. 3 (1978): 368.

¹¹⁵ Edmund Malesky and Paul Schuler, “Star Search: Do Elections Help Nondemocratic Regimes Identify New Leaders?,” *Journal of East Asian Studies* 13, no. 1 (2013): 35–68.

¹¹⁶ Ochoa-Reza, “Multiple Arenas of Struggle: Federalism and Mexico's Transition to Democracy.”

¹¹⁷ Frank P. Belloni and Dennis C. Beller, *Faction Politics: Political Parties and Factionalism in Comparative Perspective* (Santa Barbara CA.: ABC-Clio, 1978), 12.

¹¹⁸ Holger Albrecht, “How Can Opposition Support Authoritarianism? Lessons from Egypt,” *Democratization* 12, no. 3 (2005): 378–97.

form factions within ruling parties rather than form or join opposition parties. While this kind of factionalism has intuitively been seen as the antithesis of single party elite control, many dominant party systems maintain relationships with semi-formal local factions. In Taiwan, the dominant KMT regime until the 1990s relied on local factional machines in rural areas that were not a part of the party itself. The party used its control of patronage resources and candidate selection to keep these local factions in balance, ensuring that neither became too powerful. By doing this, it could outsource and decentralise its essential mobilising functions to these local actors, “absorbing” them into the party, but keeping them in check.¹¹⁹ This is reminiscent of Schedler’s claim (borrowing from Tsebelis¹²⁰) that authoritarian regimes make political competition “within” the rules rather than “about” the rules.¹²¹ While this quote refers more to the opposition, its logic can easily be extended to ruling party factions, who are given a certain space to compete in a way that does not threaten the regime itself. This solves the puzzle of why elites without a significant interest in mobilising for the regimes still do so.¹²²

b. Mass politics and national/subnational variations

The more complicated side of the question concerns how differences in subnational political designs affect the regime’s approach to the challenge of mass control. In locally uncompetitive systems, many have suggested that staging local elections acts as a tool of forming the clientelist structures that are best controlled by local elites. Elections, as Magaloni claims, “entrap” voters in clientelistic relationships with their leaders that deepen the regime’s base in society. Hence, elections foster the development of localised machine politics,¹²³ with elites lending their machines to the service or executives in the process of bargaining.¹²⁴ Others have argued that staging uncompetitive elections at the subnational level is beneficial for the same reason that it

¹¹⁹ Bruce J. Dickson, “China’s Democratization and the Taiwan Experience,” *Asian Survey* 38, no. 4 (1998): 356.

¹²⁰ George Tsebelis, *Nested Games: Rational Choice in Comparative Politics* (Berkeley CA. and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990).

¹²¹ Schedler, “The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism,” 12–13.

¹²² Magaloni and Kricheli, “Political Order and One-Party Rule,” 129.

¹²³ Reuter et al., “Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections.”

¹²⁴ Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*, 8.

is at the executive level, such as regime demonstration effects, or the legitimacy of its representative claims.¹²⁵

Several scholars have claimed that subnational competition can enhance clientelist systems by forcing elites to build better machines in their contests with one another. Lust-Okar argues that the Jordanian regime allows for intense competition in parliamentary elections, but uses various institutional strategies to make sure that these races are entirely about clientelist distribution rather than national policy. In such contexts where regimes maintain a monopoly of state resources during the democratisation process, she argues that subnational elections are “more likely to sustain the authoritarian regime than they are to promote democracy,”¹²⁶ leading to a process she calls (in previous work) “competitive clientelism”.¹²⁷

Useful as these approaches are, they often maintain the literature’s default reliance on material (clientelist) politics to understand the mass politics of non-democratic survival. How can competitive subnational politics alter the way citizens engage with the regime on a more normative, or ideational basis? A minority of the competitive-clientelist theories implicitly or explicitly suggest that competition alters the discursive substance of local politics by making them entirely about matters of patronage, rather than policy grievances that are critical of the regime.¹²⁸ In the local factionalism of Taiwan for example, Bosco adds to the clientelist thesis that local division ensured grass-roots politics remained “non-ideological”,¹²⁹ and thus unthreatening to the legitimacy of the regime. That is, intra-party competition in the local arena can alter the optics of the political sphere as well as providing a space for engagement in it. This opens up as many questions as it answers, specifically: if competitive local politics is not about the regime, what is it about? In Uganda, clientelist demands are only part of the answer.

¹²⁵ Magaloni, 9.

¹²⁶ Ellen Lust-Okar, “Reinforcing Informal Institutions through Authoritarian Elections: Insights from Jordan,” *Middle East Law and Governance* 1, no. 1 (2009): 468.

Ellen Lust, “Competitive Clientelism in the Middle East,” *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 3 (2009): 122–35.

¹²⁸ Lust-Okar, “Reinforcing Informal Institutions through Authoritarian Elections: Insights from Jordan.”

¹²⁹ Joseph Bosco, “Taiwan Factions: Guanxi, Patronage, and the State in Local Politics,” *Ethnology* 31, no. 2 (1992): 179.

2.3.2 Local participation, accountability politics and political stability

In order to understand the connection between local competition and regime stability, it is necessary to further probe further the discursive substances of the politics that flourishes in these competitive subnational polities. I will argue in this thesis that competitive subnational fora in Uganda provide, among other things, a political space in which the local frustrations of the electorate can be voiced and absorbed and re-directed away from the regime itself (H₁). Specifically, competitive local polities accommodate significant levels of *political participation* and *accountability politics* that, if not absorbed by these fora, could pose a threat to the regime. Before I get to the specifics of this theory, it is worth reviewing these two concepts and how they have been applied to non-democratic regimes in the literature.

a. Participation

I define political participation as any action by private citizens aimed at influencing the actions of any level of government.¹³⁰ There has long been an established connection between the institutional management of political participation and political stability in comparative politics. Modernisation theorists posited that the creation of newly mobilised social groups in the industrial era created participatory tensions that required formal institutions in order to be properly accommodated. Huntington made this link most explicitly: “as political participation increases, the complexity, autonomy, adaptability and coherence of the society’s political institutions must also increase if political stability is to be maintained.”¹³¹ The theoretical foundation here is that the popular will to participate in politics is an essential, fundamental element of society – a latent force that must be managed by political institutions. Many early theories in this mould claimed that the institutions of liberal democracy – specifically the universal voting franchise and a multi-party system to aggregate plural social interests – was the

¹³⁰ For debates on this definition see Myron Wiener, “Political Participation: Crisis of the Political Process,” in *Crisis and Sequences in Political Development*, ed. Leonard Binder (Princeton NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 159–204; Patrick J. Conge, “The Concept of Political Participation: Toward a Definition,” *Comparative Politics* 20, no. 2 (1988): 241–49.

¹³¹ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), 79.

natural, even inevitable form of ensuring stability in this regard.¹³²

Although both modernisation theory and the teleology of liberal democracy have expired in the literature, the link between the management of a latent mass will to participate in politics and the stability of political orders of any stripe continues to inform scholarship. In non-democratic systems, one school of thought is that regimes manage this problem by providing informal channels of participation outside of formal electoral politics.¹³³ This theory sees regimes open avenues of dissent and petition alongside autocratic control, and has been particularly popular in recent work on the Middle East and North Africa.¹³⁴ In a similar vein, others have suggested various channels of public dissent – such as criticism of policy on social media,¹³⁵ or voting “blank” in a non-competitive election¹³⁶ – act as stability-maintaining modes of participation and dissent for authoritarian regimes.

An alternate way of addressing participation in authoritarianism relates to the subnational spaces discussed above. Well before the Third Wave, scholars of authoritarianism theorised how Huntington’s puzzle of participation and stability could be addressed by institutions that localised the threat of mass participation rather than merely suppressing it. Bialer’s work on the Bezhnev-era Soviet Union is the most important to mention here.¹³⁷ Refuting the idea that participation did not feature in the Soviet dictatorship, Bialer argued that the regime had developed local political institutions which provide a “stabilising cushion, a safety valve” from the pressures mentioned by Huntington. Critically for Bialer, this hinged on a *discursive* division between “low politics” (communal matters affecting workplaces and localities) and “high politics” (matters of national ideology and policy), with participation encouraged

¹³² Norman H. Nie and Sudney Verba, “Political Participation,” in *Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby, 3rd ed. (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1975), 1–74.

¹³³ Mitchell A Seligson and John A Booth, “Political Participation in Latin America : An Agenda for Research,” *Latin American Reserach Review* 11, no. 3 (1976): 95–119.

¹³⁴ Albrecht, “How Can Opposition Support Authoritarianism? Lessons from Egypt”; Ellen Lust-Okar, “Taking Participation Seriously,” in *Political Participation in the Middle East*, ed. Ellen Lust-Okar and Saloua Zerhouni (Boulder, CO. and London: Lynne Rienner, 2008), 1–11.

¹³⁵ Jidong Chen and Yinqing Xu, “Why Do Authoritarian Regimes Allow Citizens to Voice Opinions Publicly?,” *The Journal of Politics* 79, no. 3 (2017): 792–803.

¹³⁶ Jorge I. Domínguez, Ángela Fonseca Galvais, and Chiara Superti, “Authoritarian Regimes and Their Permitted Oppositions: Election Day Outcomes in Cuba,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 59, no. 2 (2017): 27–52.

¹³⁷ Bialer, *Stalin’s Successors: Leadership, Participation and Change in the Soviet Union*.

in the former and restricted in the latter:

Contradictory as it may sound, the expanded participation [in low politics] of the Brezhnev era goes hand in hand with the retention of one of the most characteristic features of major Soviet social groups – their high level of apoliticization [in high politics].¹³⁸

Bialer therefore sees the drive for political participation as a latent force that can be “absorbed” by institutions that reshape it into appropriately “low” domains. This is a theoretical framework inherited by Shi’s study of political participation in Beijing.¹³⁹ Shi rejects the assumption that one-party rule necessitates an outright arrest of political participation, suggesting instead that citizens tailor strategies of participation to the institutional settings of Communist Party rule:

many functions performed by parties, interest groups, and elections in liberal democracies – such as interest articulation, interest aggregation, leadership recruitment, and political socialisation – are performed by different institutions in communist societies. ...interest articulation in communist societies can operate at different levels of the government and at different stages of the policy process.¹⁴⁰

Like Bialer, Shi sees a normative, discursive dimension to this system: participation kept within confined spaces both relies on and reproduces localised *ends* of participatory politics that redirect the formal and informal threats of mass politics away from the regime itself. In order to keep participation local, that is, citizens need to feel that the local forum is the most important arena in which to resolve the issues motivating them to participate.

b. Accountability

It is a short step from this thinking about demands for participation and the politics of accountability. There are of course many types of political participation that do not relate to accountability (such as citizens’ demands for material distribution or

¹³⁸ Bialer, 166.

¹³⁹ Shi, *Political Participation in Beijing*.

¹⁴⁰ Shi, 8.

ethnic/sectarian privileges) just as there are many ways that accountability mechanisms can act without political participation (such as the “horizontal” institutions of bureaucratic ombudsmen, parliamentary and judicial oversight, or critical medias). However there is a broad overlap between “vertical” forms of accountability and the participation theorised by Huntington and others to threaten the stability of non-democratic regimes. As with participation, accountability theories have traditionally been associated with liberal democratic systems,¹⁴¹ only to be more recently identified in stable non-democratic systems in a variety of forms. Two of these apply directly to subnational politics.

One relates to the “competitive clientelism” discussed above. Voters who are trapped in cultures of political clientelism can develop accountability narratives that are framed exclusively by the instrumental drive for material patronage via local political agents. Much as this can produce high levels of political participation, it does not challenge real power structures. Stokes calls this “perverse accountability”, in that it develops a kind of accountability that feeds accumulation and corruption rather than targeting it.¹⁴² Others have looked at clientelist accountability more optimistically. Lindberg’s work on Ghana suggests that materialist accountability cultures – especially that related to MPs – can produce more institutionalised state forms of distribution that undo neo-patrimonial practices in the long term.¹⁴³ Either way, the point here is that the local polity can be designed as the forum for accountability politics, and therefore a place to which demands for distribution are diverted from the executive. I have written about this in Uganda.¹⁴⁴

A second, related school of thought suggests an element of trickery in the political management of accountability: regimes can dodge accountability demands altogether by setting up local actors as the scapegoat for failings of national policy. Scholars of China have noted that local congresses are actually quite representative of people’s

¹⁴¹ Note Geddes suggestion that in authoritarian systems voters cannot “throw the bums out”. Geddes, “Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?”, 1.

¹⁴² Susan C. Stokes, “Perverse Accountability: A Formal Model of Machine Politics with Evidence from Argentina,” *American Political Science Review* 99, no. 3 (2005): 315–25.

¹⁴³ Staffan I. Lindberg, “It’s Our Time to “Chop”: Do Elections in Africa Feed Neo-Patrimonialism Rather than Counter-Act It?,” *Democratization* 10, no. 2 (2003): 121–40.

¹⁴⁴ Sam Wilkins, “Who Pays for Pakalast? The NRM’s Peripheral Patronage in Rural Uganda,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10, no. 4 (2016): 619–38.

accountability demands,¹⁴⁵ but that they do not provide representatives' with the ability to challenge national ideology or policy. Instead, the congresses are designed to focus more on the provincial concerns of local communities. This creates what Manion calls "parochial accountability."¹⁴⁶ If "real" accountability is present when "real" power is being influenced and restrained by the voices of citizens, then "parochial" issues act as a distraction that dislocates demands for accountability from forming systemic critiques of the regime – somewhat similar to the substance of Bialer's "low politics".

The underlying suggestion of both of these theories is that regimes succeed when they *re-shape* the endogenous drive to hold power to account into a localised form that does not target the true forms of power. Much as this seems to be a fraudulent form of accountability, there is something real about how the discourse and dialectics of parochial accountability alter people's interaction with the regime, and how they imagine their relationship with it. These realities, if not the true electoral restraint on a regime itself, are essential ingredients for any understanding of how a political system connects with the populace. For this reason, instead of talking about how "accountability" is configured in to a political system, I have used Fox's term "accountability politics", defined as "the arena of conflict over whether and how those in power are held publicly responsible for their decisions."¹⁴⁷ By providing a space for – and indeed encouraging the discourse of – accountability politics, regimes can proactively re-direct this latent threat into parochial, and therefore manageable, spaces.

I will argue that in Uganda, the dominant party system succeeds by opening enough space for internal competition and mass participation – both fuelled in part by this accountability politics – that redirect the latent frustrations and grievances of citizens towards expendable local actors and away from the regime itself. In this regard, the regime has many features in common with an older generation of one-party regimes in Africa that bucked the continental trend of repressing electoral participation after independence. Between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia each built systems of "participation and control" wherein routine high-

¹⁴⁵ Manion, "Authoritarian Parochialism: Local Congressional Representation in China."

¹⁴⁶ Manion.

¹⁴⁷ Jonathan Fox, *Accountability Politics: Power and Voice in Rural Mexico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1–2.

participation and high-turnover elections produced a degree of legitimacy and regime stability.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, these systems were observed to work precisely because accountability politics was driven toward more parochial local issues than national policy or leadership.¹⁴⁹ According to Baylies and Szeftel, while legislative elections in Zambia accommodated much of the participatory demand among the electorate:

participation was, however, at the local level, and the elections were to a significant extent about the state of the locality rather than the state of the nation. The outcome at the local level was the parochialisation of cleavage.¹⁵⁰

This has a sharp resonance with the arguments of H₁: subnational elections can provide an outlet for popular grievances by decentralising the norms of accountability politics. It also works within the specific challenges of African centre-periphery relations discussed in 2.1.2. While the systems of these three countries differ from Uganda's (and each other) in many ways, they have influenced the theory that will be developed in chapters 6 and 7.

2.4 Conclusion

I conclude by assembling these theoretical pillars into a concise explanation of non-democratic regime survival. I have highlighted several reasons why winning elections by big margins, and doing so with a sense of institutional credibility, benefits a regime's wider capacity to address threats to its rule. Several of these factors – demonstration effect, legitimacy dividend, disseminating pro-regime information – are directly aided by high rates of participation. In order to achieve these outcomes, regimes can activate participation-driving accountability politics that taps into local frustrations and grievances. However in order to avoid the risks of accountability politics challenging their own rule (during the election or beyond it), a regime can engage in a strategy of localising political competition to subnational domains. A dominant party can be used

¹⁴⁸ See: Bienen, *Kenya: The Politics of Participation and Control*; Carolyn Baylies and Morris Szeftel, "Elections in the One-Party State," in *The Dynamics of the One-Party State in Zambia*, ed. Cherry Gertzel (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 29–57; Barkan, "Legislators, Elections, and Political Linkage."

¹⁴⁹ Barkan, "Legislators, Elections, and Political Linkage," 90.

¹⁵⁰ Baylies and Szeftel, "Elections in the One-Party State," 52.

as a tool to house and police this competition, due to both (a) path dependent information about elite alignment with the executive, and (b) the party's influence on the fate of local elites during and after the elections, which it can use to incentivise them to conduct their campaigns on the suitably "parochial" narratives that keep accountability politically localised and contained.

With this structure of subnational intra-party competition, three intertwined hypotheses emerge that directly address the twin challenges of non-democratic regime durability discussed in 2.1:

a. Mass control

H₁: Subnational intra-party competition provides an outlet for popular frustrations with the status quo that can be directed against local elites rather than the regime itself.

Over the course of its history, the NRM regime has developed an internally competitive local political space that has become privileged as the primary arena for the resolution of political grievances. Anger over issues like corruption, poor facilities, ethnic exclusion, and land grabbing, see voters mobilised into local campaigns against local incumbents. Candidates play a role in articulating these issues, ensuring that they remain "parochial" rather than national.

H₂: Subnational intra-party competition is a driving force behind the NRM's collective electoral mobilisation, including for President Museveni's re-election campaign.

While many approaches in the Africanist and wider literature assume that hierarchical political machines mobilise voters for ruling parties and executives, in Uganda's case the element of local competition is the key reason why Museveni mobilises so many voters during the synchronised parliamentary-presidential poll. These rival local candidates invest their own labour, resources and local knowledge into mobilising votes, and do not rely on any central party organisation. Local campaigns also tap into the participatory energies of accountability politics that turns out voters for non-material reasons.

b. Elite cooperation

H₃: The pressures of electoral competition on local politicians grant the executive a power imbalance over them before the election.

In Uganda the puzzle of elite management is qualitatively different from locally uncompetitive systems in that the executive is aided by the pressure faced by MPs during the election. Due to the competitive rather than machine mode of mobilisation (H₂), non-executive elites are not able to build secure independent power bases that could be turned against the regime. Because of this, the regime has an interest in promoting elite rivalries and entrenched factionalism in local (specifically district) NRM establishments.

These three hypotheses will guide the rest of this thesis. Of course, these distinct findings cannot be understood in isolation from one another, as they all operate as part of a broader integrated system. Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 document this system in action during the 2016 election. Before doing so, however, I will now review the historical background of subnational politics in Uganda, and the genesis of the NRM regime.

Chapter 3

Subnational Politics in Uganda and the Genesis of the Contemporary NRM

Today's NRM is built on a legacy of subnational politics in Uganda developed over the past century. While a complete chronicle of this history is beyond the scope of this thesis, this chapter reviews it in a way that grounds the subsequent discussion of internal competition in today's dominant party system. It will do so by reviewing the machinations of both the national and local political arenas, and how the two have been connected.

The chapter has two broad contentions. The first is that, for a number of historical and geographical reasons, the local polity in Uganda has been stronger than the national one in terms of the political issues and movements that mobilise mass political participation. Successful national political parties have therefore depended on their alliances with subnational actors more than on their centralised structures or ideologies. This, I will argue, was as true for the first parties that emerged in the 1950s as it is for the contemporary NRM. The second contention concerns how the entrenched two-party system that had previously captured these local political dynamics was replaced by the NRM dominant party system. I will argue that the cornerstone of this change was the NRM's introduction of so-called "individual merit" politics – which formally excluded the existing parties – during the interim period of its first decade in power (1986-96). Individual merit politics not only cut out the old parties, but produced a dominant party that was different to them in kind because of its individualised and (even more) localised political culture, a contingent element of which was the intense intra-NRM local competition that continues to this day.

The chapter begins (3.1) with an overview of national and subnational politics before the NRM came to power, looking at colonial and post-colonial regimes and the elite divisions which produced severe economic and security crises by 1986. It then (3.2) reviews the reforms of the interim period in detail, and how the no-party "Movement System" was consolidated by the time President Museveni first stood for election in 1996. Finally (3.3), it documents the gradual conversion of this *de facto* dominant party

system into a *de jure* one over the two decades before the 2016 election that this thesis studies.

3.1 Rural participation and control before the NRM era

3.1.1 Participation and governance in the Uganda Protectorate, 1894-1962

Before the colonial era, present-day Uganda was a diverse mix of interacting kingdoms and peoples with varying degrees of political centralisation. Early British (Protestant) and French (Catholic) missionaries sowed the seeds of European influence that eventuated with the Imperial British East Africa Company establishing a permanent presence in the late 19th century. The Company built an alliance with Buganda Kingdom, one of the more centralised states on the fringes of Lake Victoria at the time, in which the Kingdom would accommodate British ambitions and in return receive assistance in its war against rival kingdom Bunyoro. After a period of internal conflict and political crisis in Buganda, the dust settled on an arrangement in which a Protestant monarchy and a small British administration were mutually dependent on one another, culminating in the establishment of a British Protectorate in 1894.

Buganda and the British signed the Buganda Agreement in 1900, formalising British sovereignty over the Kingdom but allowing it to use its own political structures – the *Kabaka* (king) and the *Lukiiko* (parliament) – to govern its internal affairs. In return, the chiefs who negotiated it were given more formal land-tenure relations over the peasantry, and the Kingdom was officially privileged over other peoples in the Protectorate which soon extended to its west, north and east. The Kingdom was disarmed, and military control left with the Protectorate. Ganda generals and elites were also used as agents for extending the Protectorate's authority into its hinterlands, particularly into the less centralised areas that did not present native hierarchies for the British to co-opt.¹ As a result of this arrangement, many of the administrative customs and structures of Buganda were replicated in the periphery of the new protectorate, where 16 ethnically defined districts were administered through (in descending order of

¹ Phares Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hopes* (Kampala: Fountain, 1992), 3.

size) county (*ssaza*), sub-county (*gombolola*), parish (*muruka*) and village (*batongole*) levels. The disproportionate power given to Buganda throughout the protectorate caused revolts in some areas, and by 1930 most Ganda leaders had been replaced with indigenous authorities.² While the Baganda themselves were always a minority in the Protectorate, the Kingdom grew to be its economic base, producing most of its cash crops and attracting migrant labour from other regions and neighbouring colonies. This imbalance proved highly consequential in the politics of decolonisation and independence.

To maintain control with a tiny number of European administrators and very few settlers, the Protectorate divided the key functions of the state and decentralised its structure. Baganda filled most of the civil service, the military was recruited almost exclusively from the northern areas (particularly Acholi, Langi, West Nile, and Sudan – even though the latter was not a part of the protectorate), and Asian migrants were given a legal monopoly on the most lucrative commercial opportunities: cotton ginning, coffee curing, sugar export and the retail of imports. The Catholic and Protestant churches played an inordinate role delivering health and education services,³ and therefore grew to play a significant part in political mobilisation and identity towards independence. Administratively, the British struck deals similar to that of 1900 (although less accommodating) with the kingdoms of Ankole, Tooro, and Bunyoro, incorporating and empowering their chiefly hierarchies in line with the philosophy of “indirect rule”. Chiefs at various levels thus became the spine of the state – changing what had previously been a more reflexive and reciprocal chiefship institution into a highly authoritarian one.⁴ In Mamdani’s words, the chief “combined all forms of local authority in one: executive, legislative, judicial and administrative”.⁵

Labour strikes in 1945 and 1949, the growing acceptance of decolonisation, and a shift in colonial policy directed from London in 1947 led the Protectorate to gradually

² Samwiri Lwanga-Lunyiigo, “The Colonial Roots of Internal Conflict,” in *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, ed. Kumar Rupesinghe (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1989), 33.

³ Expediit Ddungu, “Popular Forms and the Question of Democracy, The Case of Resistance Councils in Uganda,” in *Uganda: Studies in Living Conditions, Popular Movements and Constitutionalism*, ed. Mahmood Mamdani and Joe Oloka-Onyango (Vienna: Jep Books, 1994), 375.

⁴ I base this analysis on T. V. Sathyamurthy, *The Political Development of Uganda* (Aldershot: Gower, 1986), 214–15.

⁵ Mahmood Mamdani, “The Politics of Democratic Reform in Uganda,” 1994, 8.

increase African participation in government. This new participation was to be fostered at the local level before reaching the national one, based on a system of consultative councils parallel to the chiefs that had been introduced slowly since the 1920s. Legislation in 1949 and 1955 introduced electoral politics into the management of local affairs, which were bureaucratically concentrated at the district level. Although these reforms were rolled out unevenly and in some cases met with serious resistance, on the whole they introduced a participatory vibrancy into local politics that was previously unknown. By the late 1950s, District Councils were composed mostly of elected members, and were given the power to distribute resources and allocate important positions. Enterprising politicians therefore emerged at this level to challenge the established power brokers of the indirect rule system, leading to the emergence of new political voices and reform movements.⁶ For example: in Ankole a Mwiru (lower caste member) was elected to the post of *Enganzi* (chief minister) by 1956;⁷ in Bunyoro the powers of the *Omukama* (King) were reduced by popular demand in the council;⁸ and in Buganda, Catholics organised to prevent another Protestant from being elected *Katikiro* (prime minister), as had been the convention.⁹

This rapid growth in local political participation stood in contrast to the very slow development of politics at the national (Protectorate-wide) level. The Legislative Council (or “LEGCO”), a body first set up in 1921 as an advisory board to the Governor, only added its first three African members in 1945, who were appointed rather than elected. Their number grew to 15 by 1953, now elected indirectly by district councils. While the LEGCO grew into an important forum for national elites and nationalist debates by the late 1950s, it was still occupied by part-time politicians in Kampala with little contact with the local politics of the districts they represented.¹⁰ There are several plausible reasons for why national politics developed so slowly, such as: British authorities designed it in such a way to keep different groups isolated from one another;¹¹ the lack of European settlers in significant numbers denied Ugandans a

⁶ Yoram Barongo, “Ethnic Pluralism and Political Centralization: The Basis of Political Conflict,” in *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, ed. Kumar Rupersinghe (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1989), 71.

⁷ Cherry Gertzel, *Party and Locality in Northern Uganda, 1945-1962* (London: The Athlone Press, 1974), 81.

⁸ Gertzel, 81.

⁹ Samwiri Rubaraza Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1980), 158.

¹⁰ D.A. Low, *Political Parties in Uganda, 1949-62* (London: The Athlone Press, 1962), 36.

¹¹ Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hopes*, 10.

unifying opposition as in other colonies;¹² the institutional design of the district as the hub of administration and patronage made it the natural centre of African politics;¹³ Buganda's fear of being subordinated by national political institutions saw it prevent their development;¹⁴ the ethno-linguistic diversity of the country posed too great a challenge to national-scale organisation;¹⁵ or the general sense that independence was a *fait accompli* (in contrast to many other African colonies) meant that national parties were not seen as necessary to achieve it.¹⁶ Regardless of which of these is true, evidently Uganda did not have a strong national political arena until several years before independence.

The consequence of this was that when national political parties emerged in the 1950s, they were loose networks of locally powerful politicians rather than centrally organised and programmatically unified institutions. The first of these was the Ugandan National Congress (UNC),¹⁷ founded in 1952 as a socialist-inclined nationalist party advocating "Self-Government Now". The UNC's founders, Ignatius Musazi and Abu Mayanja, built the party in concert with blossoming participation in the District Councils. Its mass following was therefore established by local elites keen to use its broad and simple nationalist framework to further their own interests, producing a party light on central ideology and heavy on parochial inconsistencies. "In a number of instances" writes Sathyamurthy, "UNC found itself supporting causes which were favoured by its followers in one part of the country but vigorously opposed by those in an adjacent part."¹⁸ A second national party, the Democratic Party (DP), emerged in 1954 out of Catholic mobilisation against the Protestant establishment in the Buganda *Lukiiko*. The DP then spread outside Buganda on the strength of Catholic communities who, although a majority, had been systematically excluded from positions of power by the

¹² Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 145–46; Low, *Political Parties in Uganda, 1949-62*, 14.

¹³ Gertzel, *Party and Locality in Northern Uganda, 1945-1962*, 22; Low, *Political Parties in Uganda, 1949-62*, 15.

¹⁴ Akiiki B. Mujaju, "The Role of the UPC as a Party of Government in Uganda," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 10, no. 3 (1976): 448; Lwanga-Lunyiigo, "The Colonial Roots of Internal Conflict," 38.

¹⁵ Uganda Protectorate, "Report of the Constitutional Committee 1959 (Wild Report)" (Entebbe, 1959), 34.

¹⁶ Low, *Political Parties in Uganda, 1949-62*, 41.

¹⁷ There had been previous political associations and networks, like the Bataka Party and the Ugandan Farmers Union, but the UNC is usually considered the first true political party.

¹⁸ Sathyamurthy, *The Political Development of Uganda*, 388.

Protectrate's *de facto* privileging of Protestants.¹⁹ It did particularly well in the areas where the Catholic Church was strong, like Kigezi, Acholi, and West Nile. Although the DP advocated a softer, slower nationalism with an anti-communist line,²⁰ it too became dependent on politicians championing local parochial issues rather than national ones, albeit somewhat more aligned by its use of the Church. In most district councils before independence, a two-party dualism emerged between the UNC and DP that varied greatly in its substance from district to district.

As the activity of the LEGCO grew in the late 1950s, national divisions emerged that shaped and split the political orientations of the major parties. The Buganda aristocracy was fearful that independence could lead to its subordination to the will of other regions, whose collective populations vastly outnumbered its own.²¹ It therefore impeded the growth of parties within the Kingdom, even though it was the seat of the capital and the home to the bulk of the bourgeois stratum most active in nationalist politics (including the founders of both the UNC and DP). Throughout the 1950s the monarchy increasingly embraced a "neo-traditional" isolationist ideology that re-asserted its solitary leadership of its Kingdom, a trend that divided the growing UNC into pro- and anti-Buganda factions. The latter faction, led by northerner Milton Obote, split from the party in 1960 and merged with the smaller Ugandan People's Union – a coalition of conservative LEGCO members who were both non-Ganda and non-UNC – to form the Ugandan People's Congress (UPC), with Obote as its leader.

When the British pushed on with national elections against Buganda's opposition in 1961, the Kingdom used its control of local chiefs to enforce a boycott of the vote, leading to a victory for the DP in Buganda (who rejected the boycott) on a very small vote, and making its leader Ben Kiwanuka Chief Minister of Uganda. Hemmed in by enemies in both parties and seeing intransigence as futile, Buganda was forced to the negotiating table in London, where Uganda's first post-colonial constitution was drafted on a semi-federalist model in 1962, granting the *Lukiiko* the right to appoint Buganda's

¹⁹ Ronald Kassimir, "The Social Power of Religious Organisation and Civil Society: The Catholic Church in Uganda," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 36, no. 2 (1998): 62.

²⁰ Justus Mugaju, "An Historical Background to Uganda's No-Party Democracy," in *No-Party Democracy in Uganda: Myths and Realities*, ed. Justus Mugaju and Joe Oloka-Onyango (Kampala: Fountain, 2000), 16.

²¹ Buganda was also scared of a possible East African Federation with other British colonies, an arrangement that was floated by Governor Andrew Cohen in 1953.

members of the National Assembly indirectly. In elections soon afterward, the Kingdom established its own party, *Kabaka Yekka* (KY, “The King Alone”), built on the power of its chiefly hierarchy. KY then won a landslide victory in the *Lukiiko* elections which prevented the DP from retaining power nationally. With none of the three major parties (UPC, DP and KY) wielding a legislative majority, KY formed an alliance with the UPC in which Obote would become prime minister and the *Kabaka* a largely ceremonial president of Uganda – a partnership of ideological opposites made possible by Obote’s tact and the antipathy between Kiwanuka and the *Kabaka*.

Much as it is important to understand the history of these machinations at the national level, the bigger concern for this inquiry relates to the *shape* of centre-periphery politics developed in the late colonial era, and the party templates that were capable of national mobilisation therein. Participatory politics was (and is) an extremely local affair in Uganda, and the parties that managed to mobilise on a national scale before independence did so more by allying with factions of the local polity than by building machines or ideologies capable of transcending them. The closest approximation to such transcendent features was the sectarian and ethnic divisions that had come to the fore in the previous decade. Thus, to the degree that parties were in fact representative of national political cleavages, this was almost exclusively ethnic or sectarian: the DP was seen as Catholic and somewhat grounded in Buganda; the UPC Protestant and anti-Buganda;²² and KY a vestige of the Protestant monarchy within Buganda (it did not contest elsewhere).²³

These overarching identities provided the preliminary basis in most districts for the two-party duopoly to absorb subnational political divisions that were always more complicated than the identities themselves. In West Nile district, the Catholic and Protestant churches became the bases of partisan duopoly even where such religious rivalry was not strong beforehand.²⁴ In Acholi the DP made use of the district’s strong Catholic presence to establish its political base, but its local rivalry with the UPC was a

²² The UPC, like the UNC, was not founded as a Protestant organisation, but became one by default given that it mobilised among well-educated strata that, due to Protectorate policy, were disproportionately Anglican.

²³ T. V. Sathyamurthy, “The Social Base of the Uganda Peoples’ Congress, 1958-70,” *African Affairs* 74, no. 297 (1975): 450.

²⁴ Gertzel, *Party and Locality in Northern Uganda, 1945-1962*, 79.

complicated balance of clan and elite rivalry based on the setup of indirect rule.²⁵ In Ankole, the DP consisted of an alliance between the Catholic Bairu and the Protestant Bahima elite, with most Protestant Bairu joining the UPC – a division that related more to land tenure and caste politics than simple religious animosity.²⁶ Occasionally religion and ethnicity had no impact at all on the UPC-DP district duopoly. In Busoga for example, a claimant to the post of *Kyabazinga* (paramount chief), William Nadiope, used the UPC to champion his cause, to which the incumbent Henry Mukula and his supporters reacted by affiliating with the DP – even though they, like Nadiope, were mostly Protestant.²⁷ In Teso, the DP-UPC split related more to the historical disparities between the southern and northern counties developed under indirect rule than religious rivalry *per se*.²⁸

Hence, the true political power in the system lay with these subnational elites, not the parties themselves. Mujaju's summary of the UPC at independence captures this well:

in those areas where the UPC did not have independent political base, it was frequently dictated to by bosses who legitimized the party in their own areas. It had to travel a delicate path. The Party President [Obote] did not acquire an independent political base all over Uganda since in many areas, his popularity derived from the fact that his associates were men of power in their home districts.²⁹

3.1.2 Centralisation and de-participation in independent Uganda, 1962-79

From this decentralised foundation, the independent Ugandan state would rapidly centralise both administrative and political control over the next decade. This centralisation was triggered by crises in its precarious national political order. The UPC-KY arrangement showed immediate strains. Obote used his power of cabinet

²⁵ Gertzel, *Party and Locality in Northern Uganda, 1945-1962*.

²⁶ Martin Doornbos, "Land Tenure and Political Conflict in Ankole, Uganda," *The Journal of Development Studies* 12, no. 2 (1975): 58.

²⁷ Dan Mudoola, "Religion and Politics in Uganda: The Case of Busoga, 1900-1962," *African Affairs* 77, no. 306 (1978): 34.

²⁸ Joan Vincent, "Teso in Transformation: Colonial Penetration in Teso District, Eastern Uganda, and Its Contemporary Significance," in *Government and Rural Development in East Africa: Essays on Political Penetration*, ed. Lionel Cliffe, James Coleman, and Martin Doornbos (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 25.

²⁹ Mujaju, "The Role of the UPC as a Party of Government in Uganda," 449.

appointments to lure DP and KY members of the National Assembly to cross the floor and join the UPC, such that by October 1964 the alliance was defunct and the UPC could govern outright. This enabled him to enact his “Fight Against Feudalism” reforms that took power away from Kingdom authorities and granted it to the state.³⁰

The party’s inclusion of opposition members in the National Assembly further reduced any policy cohesion and drove fierce factionalism between its disparate ideological wings. At the fractious delegates’ conference in Gulu in 1964, a left-leaning faction leader John Kakonge was ousted as Secretary General and replaced by the more conservative Grace Ibingira.³¹ Then, when Obote was out of Kampala, Ibingira’s faction joined with remaining KY and DP members in the Assembly (KY had since collapsed as a party and instructed its members to join Ibingira’s faction of the UPC) to pass a motion condemning Obote and key members of the military for corruption. Obote then returned to Kampala to stage a *coup*, granting himself extra-constitutional powers which he used to sack high-ranking rivals. With the 1962 constitution in tatters, the *Kabaka* declared Buganda’s secession and demanded that the Obote-led government remove itself from Buganda soil. Under the pretext that the Kingdom was stock-piling arms for a future rebellion,³² Obote then sent troops to occupy the royal palace in Mengo, Kampala, killing thousands and forcing the *Kabaka* into exile in London. A hastily organised session of the National Assembly soon after, accompanied by strong military presence, adopted a new constitution that members were not even allowed to read until after the vote. Elections scheduled for 1967 were postponed, and a more deliberative constitution was passed the following year that abolished the kingdoms and created a stronger executive presidency. This series of events has since been termed the “1966 crisis”.

In rural areas, the crisis ushered in a radical reduction of political participation and a centralisation of state control.³³ The government already had a dysfunctional

³⁰ Holger Bernt Hansen, “Uganda in the 1970s: A Decade of Paradoxes and Ambiguities,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 1 (2013): 84.

³¹ Dan Mudoola, “Communal Conflict in the Military and Its Political Consequences,” in *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, ed. Kumar Rupersinghe (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1989), 125.

³² Barongo, “Ethnic Pluralism and Political Centralization: The Basis of Political Conflict,” 80.

³³ Nelson Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena: Participation and Ethnicity in African Politics, with a Case Study of Uganda* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), xii.

relationship with the numerous local councils that had DP majorities,³⁴ which were generally feared by Obote as breeding grounds for potential opposition. The new constitution and the Local Administration Act of 1967 greatly reduced the statutory power of the district and lower councils, making them mostly appointed bodies and terminating the highly participatory politics that they continued to house since independence.³⁵ Politicians thereafter looked to the central government, not the districts, for influence and patronage.³⁶ Buganda was split into four districts, while the *Lukiiko* was abolished and its building handed to the Ministry of Defence.³⁷ The government also centralised control of the chief system, screening incumbents for political disloyalty and proposing their rotation around the country as party-loyal civil servants rather than embedded members of the local community.³⁸ The net effect of this was to use the two most important arms of the local state – district councils and chiefs – as partisan organs answerable only to Kampala.

Much as the UPC grew to dominate the state, after independence it remained the weak organisation it had been beforehand.³⁹ For example, when a party member from Acholi, Otema Alinadi, was officially removed from the party in 1962 for running against its official candidate, he and his followers simply ignored the verdict and little else could be done. Obote was forced to solve the problem by appointing him a deputy permanent representative to the United Nations.⁴⁰ The leaders of UPC structures throughout the country were even disinclined to expand its membership, given that this was seen as a lucrative means of accessing state favour.⁴¹ Even the opposition members of the National Assembly who crossed the floor before 1964 were not embraced by UPC

³⁴ Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hopes*, 31.

³⁵ Anthony Regan, "Decentralisation Policy: Reshaping State and Society," in *Developing Uganda*, ed. Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), 162; Francis X. K. Lubanga, "The Process of Decentralisation," in *Democratic Decentralisation in Uganda: A New Approach to Local Governance*, ed. Soren Villadsen and Francis Lubanga (Kampala: Fountain, 1996), 49.

³⁶ Barongo, "Ethnic Pluralism and Political Centralization: The Basis of Political Conflict," 81.

³⁷ Peter Willetts, "The Politics of Uganda as a One-Party State, 1969-70," *African Affairs* 74, no. 296 (1975): 279; Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hopes*, 60.

³⁸ Tidemand, "The Resistance Councils in Uganda A Study of Rural Politics and Popular Democracy in Africa," 50.

³⁹ Sathyamurthy, "The Social Base of the Uganda Peoples' Congress, 1958-70," 453.

⁴⁰ Mujaju, "The Role of the UPC as a Party of Government in Uganda," 454.

⁴¹ Dan Mudoola, "Political Transitions since Idi Amin: A Study in Political Pathology," in *Uganda Now: Between Development and Decay*, ed. Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (London: James Currey, 1988), 290.

functionaries in their constituencies.⁴² After the 1966 crisis, whatever autonomy the party had left completely disappeared. As it had not been politically relevant to the crisis, it ceased to regularly hold meetings at any level, or act as an important forum for political positioning that it had been in years prior.⁴³ When it re-emerged in a delegates' conference in 1968 (its first in four years) it had been transformed into a passive state-party, with Obote in total control. He was elected party president for a seven-year term, and given the power to appoint its key office holders.⁴⁴ The following year, after an assassination attempt on Obote, all other parties were banned, making Uganda a *de facto* one-party state.⁴⁵

While the party's influence declined, that of the military gradually increased. High ranking officers were courted by the factional players in Kampala, as "politicians had to reckon with the military as part of their political calculations for survival".⁴⁶ The developments of 1966 showed this to be true, as Obote sacked senior officer Shaban Opolot (a westerner thought to be aligned with the *Kabaka*), and relied on Commander Idi Amin (a northerner from West Nile) to storm the Mengo palace.⁴⁷ Not long after this, however, the army split again on ethnic lines, with the Acholi and Langi faithful to Obote and those from West Nile to Amin. The president then sought to marginalise Amin by expanding the use of paramilitary forces answerable only to himself – primarily the General Service Unit (GSU), led by his cousin Akena Adoko, and the Special Forces (SF).⁴⁸ Thus, as the military was politicised, so too was it de-institutionalised.⁴⁹

Seeing his own ouster coming, Amin overthrew Obote while the latter was out of the country in January 1971. He then went even further than his predecessor in centralising power: banning all parties and eliminating local government altogether. Elections

⁴² Mudoola, 290.

⁴³ Mudoola, "Communal Conflict in the Military and Its Political Consequences," 127–28.

⁴⁴ Mujaju, "The Role of the UPC as a Party of Government in Uganda," 461.

⁴⁵ It should be noted that in the last few years of Obote's rule several steps were taken to make the UPC a more internally competitive single party, like TANU in Tanzania or KANU in Kenya. See Sathyamurthy, "The Social Base of the Uganda Peoples' Congress, 1958-70," 455; Willetts, "The Politics of Uganda as a One-Party State, 1969-70."

⁴⁶ Mudoola, "Communal Conflict in the Military and Its Political Consequences," 121.

⁴⁷ Mudoola, 126.

⁴⁸ Edward Khiddu-Makubuya, "Paramilitarism and Human Rights," in *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, ed. Kumar Rupesinghe (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1989), 141–57.

⁴⁹ Hansen, "Uganda in the 1970s: A Decade of Paradoxes and Ambiguities," 85.

scheduled weeks after the *coup* were cancelled, and new district and provincial boundaries were drawn up with local government units led mainly by members of the military. Amin also sought to *coup*-proof his armed forces by eliminating officers that aroused his suspicions and packing the rank and file with soldiers from Southern Sudan and his native West Nile district.⁵⁰

The new regime was initially popular in much of the country that had come to despise Obote, especially Buganda. This was enhanced by its confiscation of the property of the 50,000 strong Asian community in 1972, and British-owned businesses soon after. This honeymoon soon ended as a severe economic and security crisis emerged. The racial expulsions led to massive decline in productivity, and as the regime handed lucrative and powerful cooperative marketing boards to cronies without the skills to manage them the formal economy started to collapse outright.⁵¹ This may have occurred earlier had the regime not been the beneficiary of a boom in prices for coffee and cotton in the mid-1970s.⁵² As formal marketing channels disappeared, a black market “*magendo*” economy developed in its place, with growers selling their crops through underground networks of border-crossing agents. Others simply returned to subsistence agriculture. The crisis worsened significantly in the regime’s final two years, by which time per-capita income was well below independence levels.⁵³

As political discontent rose, the Amin regime relied totally on the military to maintain control throughout the countryside. Stories abound of roving bands of uniformed soldiers rapaciously suppressing any form of opposition and alienating civilians in the process. Like Obote, Amin purged the chiefs throughout the country and replaced them with political allies.⁵⁴ Many of these were young soldiers with no connection to their

⁵⁰ A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-85* (Kampala: Fountain, 1994), 112.

⁵¹ Godfrey Asiimwe, “From Monopoly Marketing to Coffee Magendo: Responses to Policy Recklessness and Extraction in Uganda, 1971–79,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 1 (2013): 104–24; Susan Dicklitch, “Uganda: A Microcosm of Crisis and Hope in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *International Journal* 51 (1995): 118.

⁵² Vali Jamal, “The Agrarian Context of the Ugandan Crisis,” in *Changing Uganda: The Dilemmas of Structural Adjustment*, ed. Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (London: James Currey, 1991), 79.

⁵³ Keith Edmonds, “Crisis Management: The Lessons for Africa from Obote’s Second Term,” in *Uganda Now: Between Development and Decay* (London: James Currey, 1988), 99.

⁵⁴ Aiden Southall, “Social Disorganisation in Uganda: Before, During and After Amin,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 18, no. 4 (1980): 629.

areas, who governed as arbitrarily and erratically as one might expect.⁵⁵ Tidemand found that in Kangalumira (in present-day Kayunga district), one chief appointed by the regime in 1975 was so unpopular that he was lynched by a village mob as soon as Amin was overthrown.⁵⁶ In other areas the regime simply held local landlords and local notables responsible for the security of their area.⁵⁷ Worse than the chiefs and their arbitrary rule, however, was the state of general lawlessness and “decentralised brutality” that developed in the countryside, particularly after 1977.⁵⁸

The Amin era should therefore be seen as an absolute suspension of any kind of participatory politics and the total militarisation of the state.⁵⁹ At the national level, political or civic figures even mildly threatening to the president – including the Chief Justice, the Vice-Chancellor of Makerere University, and the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda – were systematically murdered. Political parties went into hibernation, and their leaders fled the country. It would be a mistake however to see the 1971 *coup* as a sudden change toward this mode of political survival. As we have seen, between independence in 1962 and 1971 real power had been consolidated in ever-smaller and more informal foundations: from the National Assembly (1962-64), to the UPC caucus (1964-66), to the military (1966-) and gradually to the presidency itself. By the end of all this centralisation, each institution was hollowed-out and subordinated to Obote’s control. As Mudoola pointed out, the very fact that Amin was able to brush the UPC aside with a simple decree shows just how shallow its roots were.⁶⁰ In this context, the autocratic tyranny of Amin’s regime appears to be more of a continuation than a shift.⁶¹

3.1.3 *The UNLF, Obote II, and the Bush War, 1979-86*

Amin’s downfall came when he invaded and annexed the Kagera salient, a small disputed territory in Tanzania. Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere swiftly mobilised his

⁵⁵ Cherry Gertzel, “Uganda after Amin: The Continuing Search for Leadership and Control,” *African Affairs* 79, no. 317 (1980): 470.

⁵⁶ Tidemand, “The Resistance Councils in Uganda A Study of Rural Politics and Popular Democracy in Africa,” 54.

⁵⁷ Southall, “Social Disorganisation in Uganda: Before, During and After Amin,” 647.

⁵⁸ Ali A. Mazrui, “Between Development and Decay: Anarchy, Tyranny and Progress Under Idi Amin,” *Third World Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1980): 45.

⁵⁹ Hansen, “Uganda in the 1970s: A Decade of Paradoxes and Ambiguities,” 95.

⁶⁰ Mudoola, “Communal Conflict in the Military and Its Political Consequences,” 131.

⁶¹ This point has been made well by Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-85*, 105.

military to advance all the way to Kampala and overthrow the regime. Far from a knee-jerk reaction to the Kagera incursion, Nyerere had been involved in organising Ugandan exiles since the 1971 *coup*, and had allowed Tanzania to act as the staging ground for several exile-led invasions. Obote led one of these in 1972, alongside a number of other dissidents including a young Yoweri Museveni. Museveni, a former UPC youth winger in Ankole, studied at Dar es Salaam until 1970, when he returned to Uganda to become a Secretary of Research in Obote's government. Their 1972 effort was a failure, in part because the political shine had yet to come off Amin's new regime, nor the morale bled from his troops.⁶² The guerrillas were defeated in Mbarara and forced to return to Tanzania. Disagreement over strategy at this point led to a falling out between the former president and Museveni, who formed his own group, the Front for National Salvation (FRONASA), with a distinctly leftist intellectual flavour inspired by Museveni's trips to the FRELIMO battlefields in Mozambique while a student.

It was clear by the late 1970s that political divisions within the exile community were hampering any attempt to unify an opposition to Amin. As the situation in Uganda deteriorated further, Nyerere organised a conference of 28 exiled groups at Moshi in March 1979 to act as an official government and military in exile, the main forces in which were the pro-Obote/UPC bloc including the *Kikosi Maluum* forces of northern military veterans, Buganda politicians allied with the DP, and the more radical leftists including Museveni and Edward Rugumayo. Only Tanzania's intervention forged any sense of unity between these disparate groups, who carried on their pre-1971 political debates as if Amin's rule was merely an interlude.⁶³ Out of its various militias the conference founded a political coalition and an army, the Uganda National Liberation Front/Army (UNLF/A), and it was this force that accompanied the Tanzanians across the border in 1979.

After taking Kampala, a two-year power struggle ensued between the main factions of the UNLF. For fear of being accused of meddling, Nyerere deliberately avoided bringing Obote, his close friend, back into the presidency directly. However subsequent machinations of the interim government showed that UPC agents were in control of the

⁶² Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hopes*, 98.

⁶³ Gertzel, "Uganda after Amin: The Continuing Search for Leadership and Control," 464.

process and could rely on Tanzanian military influence to avoid losing it. Interim presidents Yusufu Lule and Godfrey Binaisa were both forced out when they threatened the interests trying to bring Obote back,⁶⁴ and in the UNLA, Acholi generals David Oyite Ojok and Tito Okello – both Obote allies – showed themselves to be the strongest forces. Museveni, who was originally appointed Minister of Defence, used the early Tanzanian/UNLF occupation of the west to recruit fellow westerners into a smaller faction aligned to him.⁶⁵ Like in previous years, these military factional allegiances proved to be the true basis of political power.⁶⁶ When Binaisa tried to dismiss Ojok in May 1980, a six-person Military Commission (including Museveni) dismissed him and the cabinet,⁶⁷ announcing on Radio Uganda that it would hold power jointly until elections in December.

These 1980 elections, Uganda's first since 1962, were manipulated by the interim regime intent on installing Obote at any cost. The four parties in contention were the UPC, the DP, a Buganda royalist Conservative Party (CP), and Museveni's new Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM). Despite enthusiasm for the UPM among urban progressives, the election turned out once again to be a two-horse race between the UPC and DP. The UPC was effectively the incumbent government at this point, as the Military Commission was led by Obote loyalist Paulo Muwanga, who could rely on support from Ojok and Okello to pressure DP candidates and members during the campaign.⁶⁸ Yet the DP defied the odds and rode a wave of anti-Obote (and by now generally anti-Northern) sentiment to pick up a large number of seats in the new Parliament. As it became apparent in the vote counting the DP would form a majority, Muwanga took control of the process and declared the UPC the winner of the remaining constituencies.⁶⁹ Obote then resumed the presidency nine years after it was taken from him.

It is worth emphasising here the remarkable return of the UPC-DP partisan duopoly

⁶⁴ Oliver Furley, "Uganda's Retreat from Turmoil?," 1987, 7–8.

⁶⁵ Southall, "Social Disorganisation in Uganda: Before, During and After Amin," 650.

⁶⁶ Mudoola, "Political Transitions since Idi Amin: A Study in Political Pathology," 291.

⁶⁷ Jimmy K. Tindigarukayo, "Uganda, 1979-85: Leadership in Transition," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 26, no. 4 (1988): 613.

⁶⁸ Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-85*, 137–38; Justin Willis, Gabrielle Lynch, and Nic Cheeseman, "'A Valid Electoral Exercise'? Uganda's 1980 Elections and the Observers' Dilemma," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59, no. 1 (2017): 222.

⁶⁹ Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hopes*, 143.

after it had been in hibernation for so long. In rural constituencies across the country, the same candidates, often mobilising the same networks and on the same local issues, divided districts just as they did in the years before and after independence. In the words of Willis (*et al*):

Across the country, the locally influential men, and a few women, who had been the backbone of political activism in the 1960s threw themselves into the election... With the end of Amin's rule, these local elites – the big men of small towns across the country – leaped at the chance to reassert their status, and renew their rivalries.⁷⁰

This renaissance is especially notable for the DP, which unlike the UPC had been in total hiatus for fifteen years. Even without significant funds, national leaders found old local networks emerge to organise rallies and provide vehicles for campaigns.⁷¹ Despite all their structural weaknesses and (for the DP) state suppression, the parties' *modus operandi* was still capable of mass mobilisation. The UPM won only one seat. Despite being the only party (ever) to be led by a westerner, it couldn't even break into the UPC-DP duopoly in that region. Museveni himself lost to his future brother-in-law Sam Kutesa of the DP.

In protest of the conduct of the election, numerous armed groups took to the countryside in early 1981 to oppose the "Obote II" regime, so beginning the "Bush War". Among half a dozen other groups,⁷² Museveni took 27 followers he had accrued in FRONASA and the UNLA and founded the Uganda People's Resistance Army, which soon merged with Yusufu Lule's (mainly Ganda) Uganda Freedom Fighters to form the National Resistance Movement (NRM). Lule was the Movement's chairman, operating from London, and Museveni its deputy chairman and head of the High Command of the group's military, the National Resistance Army (NRA).⁷³ Museveni became chairman when Lule died in 1985.

The NRM/A's plan was to conduct a highly political guerrilla campaign in the "Luwero

⁷⁰ Willis, Lynch, and Cheeseman, "'A Valid Electoral Exercise'? Uganda's 1980 Elections and the Observers' Dilemma," 223.

⁷¹ Willis, Lynch, and Cheeseman, 223.

⁷² For a summary of these see: Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-85*, 164–71.

⁷³ Furley, "Uganda's Retreat from Turmoil?," 15.

Triangle” – the rural area of Buganda to the north west of Kampala – from which its fighters would draw on popular support to attack government barracks and installations. It carried a concise “Ten Point Plan” proposing political, economic and social reforms for the country. The backbone of its strategy and basis of its eventual success was the relationship it developed with civilians through its Resistance Council (RC) system. RCs were village level authorities of around 40 houses set up to provide food for the guerrillas, screen its new recruits, and act as an intelligence network on UNLA activities.⁷⁴ Initially these councils were based around local notables approached by the guerrillas on an *ad hoc* basis. They soon became elective councils with significant powers to manage village affairs and even police the behaviour of the guerrillas themselves.⁷⁵ This led to a reasonably high rate of participation by ordinary villagers, who could vote to recall their leaders if and when they wanted. As the NRA’s area of occupation grew, village RCs (RC1s) indirectly elected equivalents at the parish (RC2) and sub-county (RC3) levels in the areas that now constitute Kiboga, Kyankwanzi and Nakaseke districts.⁷⁶

Further to the popularity of the RC system, the NRA skillfully propagated a populist narrative with its operations. After robbing a bank in Kabale, for example, guerrillas provided meals and new shoes for the townspeople.⁷⁷ The decision to stage the war on Buganda soil also enabled the NRA to mobilise the significant hatred of Obote by the Baganda, and it was the landowning Ganda village establishments throughout the Luwero Triangle that formed the bedrock of the RC system in its infancy.⁷⁸ This populist strategy stood in stark contrast to the UNLA’s, which conducted the war against the rebels with extraordinary brutality. It relied on its own networks of UPC Youth Wingers to inform on the rebels’ activities and the identities of their sympathisers, after which it would emerge from its base in Bombo and conduct reprisals.⁷⁹ For this reason, the war was fought on extremely granular, local terrains, with old personal rivalries and ethno-class village divisions taking advantage of the war

⁷⁴ Ddungu, “Popular Forms and the Question of Democracy, The Case of Resistance Councils in Uganda,” 377.

⁷⁵ Nelson Kasfir, “No-Party Democracy in Uganda,” *Journal of Democracy* 9, no. 2 (1998): 62.

⁷⁶ Ddungu, “Popular Forms and the Question of Democracy, The Case of Resistance Councils in Uganda,” 376–77.

⁷⁷ Furley, “Uganda’s Retreat from Turmoil?,” 18.

⁷⁸ Tidemand, “The Resistance Councils in Uganda A Study of Rural Politics and Popular Democracy in Africa,” 70, 77.

⁷⁹ Tidemand, 74.

to settle old scores. Both the UNLA and its twin paramilitary organisation the National Security Agency (NASA) were poorly trained and equipped, and recruited in haste on political grounds.⁸⁰ By all accounts the indiscriminate violence of these soldiers led many previously neutral civilians into the NRA's arms.⁸¹

With the strengthening of the NRA in its first two years, the government launched "Operation Bonanza" in January 1983, using three quarters of the troops at its disposal.⁸² The operation herded civilians into concentration camps, officially for their own protection, with the aim of cutting the rebels off from their support networks. The UNLA was permitted to kill anyone found outside these camps, resulting in a death toll in the hundreds of thousands.⁸³ French political scientist Jean-Francois Medard toured the region immediately after the war and provided this account of the damage:

The UNLA...left behind it an area in ruins. Not a house intact: they were literally [sic] torn apart, the soldiers went as far as pulling out the doors, the windows and corrugated iron roofs and in order to sell them in their own area of origin. Only the walls remained covered with political and obscene graffiti: "A good Baganda is a dead one". Around the houses, one occasionally walks on Human bones. Wherever detachments of the army were stationed, bones of torture victims who had not been buried in communal graves were collected. In one village I was able to count 200 skulls of which some had been smashed; the bones were sometimes bound together.⁸⁴

By 1984 the operation achieved its main objective, forcing the NRA out of the Luwero Triangle and towards a new front in the Rwenzori hills on the western border with Zaire.⁸⁵ But this was a Pyrrhic victory for two reasons. First, the massive civilian death toll, combined with other massacres against protesters⁸⁶ further alienated the Obote II

⁸⁰ Tindigarukayo, "Uganda, 1979-85: Leadership in Transition," 617; Mahmood Mamdani, "Uganda of in Transition: Two Years of the NRA/NRM," *Third World Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1988): 1158.

⁸¹ Tidemand, "The Resistance Councils in Uganda A Study of Rural Politics and Popular Democracy in Africa," 71.

⁸² Furley, "Uganda's Retreat from Turmoil?," 19.

⁸³ Kasfir, "No-Party Democracy in Uganda," 53.

⁸⁴ Jean-Francois Medard, "The Creation of a Political Order in Uganda" (Nairobi, 1986), 4.

⁸⁵ John Kiyaga-Nsubuga, "Political Instability and the Struggle for Control in Uganda, 1970-1990" (University of Toronto, 1995), 223.

⁸⁶ Among many of these, the massacre at the Namugongo Church north of Kampala caused a significant diplomatic reaction. See: Furley, "Uganda's Retreat from Turmoil?," 21.

regime from any international support (notably the US, UK and Tanzania), which it desperately needed.⁸⁷ Second, and of more immediate consequence, the massive casualties in the UNLA's own ranks, coupled with the fact that these were borne disproportionately by Acholi rather than Langi soldiers, exacerbated an ongoing rupture within the heart of the regime.⁸⁸ This culminated in a *coup* in July 1985 by its two most senior Acholi generals, Tito Okello and Bazillio Okello (no relation),⁸⁹ whose troops defeated those loyal to Obote at Karuma falls and marched on Kampala with the NRA's acquiescence. Obote fled once again, this time to Zambia.

For several months, the new Okello regime tried to negotiate a peace settlement in Nairobi with the numerous rebel groups active throughout the country. The NRA were hesitant to embrace these talks and instead used the cessation in hostilities to spread out across the west, where it set up its RC system in the second half of 1985. Museveni refused to accept parity in a peace deal with other rebel groups, especially the Former Uganda National Army (FUNA) forces of the old Amin regime, who had been fighting the UNLA in West Nile. He also wielded the most powerful and well-organised army of them all,⁹⁰ a fact which was probably not appreciated by the Okellos. On January 26 1986, the NRA marched into Kampala, sending the remnants of the UNLA scattered to the north. Despite the high number of armed groups operating in the country, the NRA secured national control surprisingly quickly, reaching the Kenyan border in a few weeks and taking Gulu (the Acholi capital) on March 8.⁹¹

For the sake of understanding the political success that the new NRM government would achieve in its first decade and thereafter, the sheer depths of the security, economic and social crisis wrought on the Ugandan populace in the decade before 1986 cannot be overemphasised. During the Amin, UNLF (interim) and Obote II regimes, the trends of decentralised violence and social rupture that began in the late 1960s deepened. This was not merely a matter of the abuse of government by its incumbents, but one of the outright collapse of social order. When I asked people about this period

⁸⁷ Furley, 21.

⁸⁸ The NRA numbered roughly 15,000 troops according to Kiyaga-Nsubuga, "Political Instability and the Struggle for Control in Uganda, 1970-1990," 221.

⁸⁹ Oyite Ojok died in a helicopter crash in December 1983.

⁹⁰ Kiyaga-Nsubuga, "Political Instability and the Struggle for Control in Uganda, 1970-1990," 223.

⁹¹ Furley, "Uganda's Retreat from Turmoil?," 27.

during my fieldwork (none of which was in the Luwero Triangle), respondents talked about the experience of social disorder on very local terms: the constant theft of agricultural produce; the inability to move from town to town because gangs controlled the roads; or the high rate of sexual violence against women (see 7.2.1.a). As discussed, the war itself was one between villagers as much as between armies. One of Tidemand's interviewees in 1994 made this telling comment about the intimacy of the conflict: "The 'youth' [who helped the UNLA] were a very bad lot moreover they were our own children, our very own stock."⁹² That the NRM was able to stabilise this situation in government – which will be explained in the next section – was to be the foundation of its political success in the following decade.

3.2 Re-shaping the polity

The first decade of NRM rule (1986-96) was a critical juncture in Ugandan history. Between seizing power in January 1986 and being elected in earnest for the first time in 1996, Museveni achieved two outcomes that continue to affect the resilience of his presidency today. First (3.2.1), under a system called "no-party democracy", competitive politics was pushed further out of a national sphere and into the local one, where it was conducted under the auspices of "individual merit" rather than party affiliation. Second (3.2.2), the NRM's control of the space of local politics was gradually converted into a *de facto* political party when direct participation in the national arena was finally re-opened in 1994 and 1996. These two events constituted a re-shaping of the Ugandan polity, dislodging the DP and UPC from their duopolous footholds in the local arena.

3.2.1 Resistance Councils and 'broad based' government, 1986-89

Although its strong military kept the young NRM regime safely in power, its grip on the country's peace-time politics was tenuous and untested in its early years.⁹³ On taking power, Museveni was Uganda's sixth president in eight years, and despite his personal popularity in most of the south, little was known about him throughout the

⁹² Tidemand, "The Resistance Councils in Uganda A Study of Rural Politics and Popular Democracy in Africa," 74.

⁹³ Mamdani, "Uganda of in Transition: Two Years of the NRA/NRM," 1168.

country.⁹⁴ The 1980 election proved that the major parties were capable of springing back into operation against all odds, and unlike then, in 1986 both had been in operation for the previous five years (the DP served as the opposition in Parliament, and participated in the Okello regime). Both therefore maintained a large network of followers across the countryside, and were reasonably well resourced.⁹⁵ Had an election been called straight away in 1986 (as some NRM sympathisers assumed would be the case) there was little doubt that the result would look similar to that of 1980, leaving the NRM to the same fate as its predecessor, the UPM.⁹⁶

The NRM's approach to this problem was to declare an "interim period", during which it broadened political participation in the local and national political arenas while rigidly segregating them from each other. At the national level, Legal Notice No.1 of 1986 suspended several chapters of the 1967 constitution and mandated the NRM – now often referred to as simply "the Movement" – to govern the country for four years before holding elections. It also gave the Movement's highest political organ, the National Resistance Council (NRC), the authority to act as the national Parliament. While the NRC initially included only NRM political cadres and soldiers (so-called "historical" members of the Movement), a new cabinet drew from a wide spectrum of national elites under the theme of "broad-based government." This cabinet included figures from all political parties, most notably the leader of the DP Paul Ssemogerere, whose participation was essential for the regime's claims to inclusion. At the same time, militias that had been fighting the UNLA and the NRM were steadily absorbed into the NRA and their leaders given roles in government.

Embracing the participation of such figures granted the young regime a significant degree of early legitimacy at home and abroad, giving it more leeway to act as an interim regime. For all its approval and goodwill, broad-based national government was hardly

⁹⁴ Giovanni M. Carbone, *No-Party Democracy? Ugandan Politics in Comparative Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2008), 79.

⁹⁵ Justin McKenzie Smith, "'Breaking with the Past?' A Consideration of Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement, and of Social and Political Action in Uganda during Its Government," Occasional Papers (Edinburgh, 1993), 41.

⁹⁶ Nelson Kasfir, "The Ugandan Elections of 1989: Power, Populism and Democratisation," in *Changing Uganda: The Dilemmas of Structural Adjustment*, ed. Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (London: James Currey, 1991), 252; Oliver Furley, "Democratisation in Uganda," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 38, no. 3 (2000): 81.

an act of real power sharing.⁹⁷ While the cabinet included ministers from several parties, it was Museveni who selected them, not the parties themselves. It was also clear in this period that it was the NRA that provided the regime with its hold on power, if not its legitimacy. Throughout its first years, the regime appeased a suspicious national elite with the promise of elections and lengthy commissions of inquiry into local government, historical human rights violations and constitution-making.

While this was going on in Kampala, the new regime vastly expanded participatory political space at the base of the state. It dispatched a group of District Administrators (DAs) to set up the RC system throughout the rest of the country and convert it into a tool of local administration. This rollout was highly uneven, and it was some years before the system operated with any degree of uniformity across the country.⁹⁸ In most areas the setup of councils depended on the fact that they acted as conduits for dispensing sparse commodities like sugar, paraffin and soap – something that gave DAs significant leverage to compel participation.⁹⁹ At the village (RC1) level, councils included every adult citizen of the village, who then elected a village committee of nine people. As these took root, indirect elections took place for higher councils. All village committee members in a parish formed the parish (RC2) council, which then elected the nine-person parish committee. This process repeated itself at the sub-county (RC3), and district (RC5). A county level RC4 was only used later for indirect elections to the NRC.

The nine-person committees at each level included a chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, secretaries for finance (treasury) defence/security, youth, women, publicity and information, rehabilitation, and mass mobilisation.¹⁰⁰ These committees were granted significant powers, which for most matters required a quorum of five members. Aside from dispensing commodities (which ceased by 1988), they were mandated to: maintain the services and common resources of the village; consent to the arrest of any

⁹⁷ For a critical take on the NRM's treatment of its early collaborators see Amii Omara-Otunnu, "The Struggle for Democracy in Uganda," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30, no. 3 (1992): 443–63.

⁹⁸ Expedit Ddungu and Ernest A. Wabwire, "Electoral Mechanisms and the Democratic Process: The 1989 RC-NRC Elections" (Kampala, 1991), 9.

⁹⁹ Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, "Reassessing Popular Participation in Uganda," *Public Administration and Development* 24 (2004): 292.

¹⁰⁰ NRM Secretariat, "Structure of Resistance Councils and Committees" (Kampala, 1986), 1–2.

village resident by the police;¹⁰¹ sit as courts of law on non-criminal matters (only RC1-3); and appoint Tax Assessment Committees (RC3) to regulate the collection of revenue. Aside from these more formal functions, the committees and their chairmen were given the more informal power to manage, in the NRM secretariat's words, "the day to day running of the affairs of the community."¹⁰² These powers were given to a body which was not only elected, but subject to a standing right of recall by the village residents, which by all accounts was exercised frequently.¹⁰³ In other words, the RCs assumed the functions that the chiefs and village headmen used to perform since the inception of colonial rule: the embodiment of the local state, and the maintenance of social order within the community.

For citizens who had known nothing but centrally (and politically) appointed chiefs since the colonial era, the RCs provided a revolutionary change to village life. In the very broad spectrum of analyses on the system in its early years, there is near consensus that they were met with widespread enthusiasm and participation by residents, and had a transformative affect on village politics as a result.¹⁰⁴ In Ahikire's words, they "brought about new energies unheard of in the history of Uganda."¹⁰⁵ This vibrancy constituted a new politics of localised popular accountability. On community matters ranging from the sale of village land to curbing youth drunkenness, ordinary villagers could now effect change through local organisation.¹⁰⁶ Because elections at each RC were initially carried out with a simple queuing system – each voter standing behind the candidate of their choice – there was no need to wait for scheduled elections or petition higher authorities to intervene. Much as the more formal functions of the RCs like conducting regular meetings and planning village projects withered away after a few

¹⁰¹ Ddungu, "Popular Forms and the Question of Democracy, The Case of Resistance Councils in Uganda," 374.

¹⁰² NRM Secretariat, "Structure of Resistance Councils and Committees."

¹⁰³ Ingvid Burkey, "People's Power in Theory and Practice: The Resistance Council System in Uganda," 1991, 33.

¹⁰⁴ Ddungu and Wabwire, "Electoral Mechanisms and the Democratic Process: The 1989 RC-NRC Elections," 22; Burkey, "People's Power in Theory and Practice: The Resistance Council System in Uganda," 10; Kiyaga-Nsubuga, "Political Instability and the Struggle for Control in Uganda, 1970-1990," 241; Golooba-Mutebi, "Reassessing Popular Participation in Uganda," 291; Joe Oloka-Onyango, "The Labours of Drawing Up a Human Rights Balance Sheet" (Kampala, 1996), 4–5; Tidemand, "The Resistance Councils in Uganda A Study of Rural Politics and Popular Democracy in Africa," 104.

¹⁰⁵ Josephine Ahikire, *Localised or Localising Democracy: Gender and the Politics of Decentralisation in Contemporary Uganda* (Kampala: Fountain, 2007), 6.

¹⁰⁶ Tidemand, "The Resistance Councils in Uganda A Study of Rural Politics and Popular Democracy in Africa," 98–99.

years,¹⁰⁷ the sense of local ownership and empowerment inculcated by the RC system continues to characterise village life today.

Two critical aspects of the RC system prevented this local participation from affecting higher political orders. First, the indirect electoral college system meant that while electoral participation was generally high, the only place that it could be exercised by most citizens was the village. As a consequence, ordinary citizens had little capacity to alter the policies of higher RCs, whose leaders were not well known to them.¹⁰⁸ These higher levels therefore tended to be dominated by the “old guard” of district politicians who could count on their residual followings at those levels.¹⁰⁹ For this reason, holistic references to the actions of “the RCs” in this period which do not take this variance into account can be misleading.

Second, the NRM locked the parties out of the RC system altogether. While they were allowed to keep their offices and publish communications, parties were legally barred from staging rallies, enlisting new members, or officially promoting candidates during the interim period. In their place, RC participation was governed by the protocol of “individual merit”; a political code of conduct that required political candidates be judged on their personal aptitude for office and their record of achievement rather than on the grounds of ethnicity, clan, or religion. This was the product of the NRM’s well-developed philosophy that parties were poorly suited to agrarian African societies where – unlike in the class-based politics of Europe – they inevitably become vehicles for horizontal, sectional divisions that inhibit progress.¹¹⁰ Popular participation should therefore be individualised and confined to the local polity, as this is the most important arena for the management of peasant life.¹¹¹ Initially this view was only explicitly espoused by the NRM’s political commissars, and although there was much consternation about it, there existed a general sentiment in the broad-based cabinet that

¹⁰⁷ Burkey, “People’s Power in Theory and Practice: The Resistance Council System in Uganda,” 11; Golooba-Mutebi, “Reassessing Popular Participation in Uganda,” 289.

¹⁰⁸ Tidemand, “The Resistance Councils in Uganda A Study of Rural Politics and Popular Democracy in Africa,” 169.

¹⁰⁹ Tidemand, 168; Mamdani, “The Politics of Democratic Reform in Uganda,” 10.

¹¹⁰ Yoweri Museveni, *Selected Articles on the Uganda Resistance War* (Kampala: NRM Publications, 1985), 48–50.

¹¹¹ For a good overview of this see: Kasfir, “No-Party Democracy in Uganda,” 60.

no-party politics was only an interim arrangement before parties would return in a general election.

The DAs superintending the RC elections enforced a strict set of rules on their conduct ensure compliance with individual merit rules. Campaigns of any kind were banned, and instead candidates standing for RCs were allowed to address voters in the presence of the DA for five minutes, during which they could not mention either their party affiliation (if they had one) or any of their sectional alignments.¹¹² The effect of these rules was that national policy of any kind was removed entirely from the local forum.¹¹³ Aside from its illegality, it made little sense for any candidate looking for votes in his or her village to take positions on the remote developments of the national political arena, and hence, as Kasfir puts it, Museveni's theory that peasants had no political attachments beyond their locale became "true by fiat".¹¹⁴

These two strictures led to criticism that the NRM was simply using RCs as a means of building a political base to undercut the other parties.¹¹⁵ By their very name – "Resistance" – the committees were linked with the new regime, and for all their participatory credentials, they were still subject to the oversight of the powerful DAs. The NRM government also set the general framework for developmental policy that the committees were supposed to enact.¹¹⁶ Further to shutting parties out, in its early years the NRM's DAs, cadres and mobilisers also organised political education campaigns which blurred the boundary between encouraging non-party politics and spreading anti-party propaganda. The most contentious of these was *Mchaka mchaka*, a military boot camp cum civic education course mandatory for rural civil servants and RC members. Ostensibly aimed at "demystifying the gun" via self-defence training, its instructors

¹¹² Ddungu and Wabwire, "Electoral Mechanisms and the Democratic Process: The 1989 RC-NRC Elections," 13.

¹¹³ John Ssenkumba, "The Dilemmas of Directed Democracy: Neutralising Ugandan Opposition Politics under the NRM," in *The Politics of Opposition in Contemporary Africa*, ed. Adebayo O. Olukoshi (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1998), 186; Joe Oloka-Onyango, "Uganda's 'Benevolent' Dictatorship," *Current History* 9, no. 5 (1997): 213.

¹¹⁴ Kasfir, "No-Party Democracy in Uganda," 62.

¹¹⁵ See for example: Joe Oloka-Onyango, "The National Resistance Movement, 'Grassroots Democracy' and Dictatorship in Uganda," in *Democracy and Socialism in Uganda*, ed. Robin Cohen and Harry Goulbourne (Boulder, CO. and Oxford: Westview, 1991), 136.

¹¹⁶ Jessica R. Kisakye, "Political Background to Decentralisation," in *Democratic Decentralisation in Uganda: A New Approach to Local Governance*, ed. Soren Villadsen and Francis Lubanga (Kampala: Fountain, 1996), 44.

were prone to give anti-party lectures which glorified the transformative merit of the Movement.¹¹⁷

Political parties and their sympathisers therefore grew increasingly nervous that the NRM was in fact turning into a political party in its own right. For the duration of the interim period, the question of participating in the RCs (and the broad-based cabinet) split both the major parties.¹¹⁸ The UPC was in total disarray after the 1985 *coup*. Obote remained president of the party in exile, and was staunchly against legitimising the NRM regime by participating in it in any way. The UPC members who participated in the cabinet therefore did so against his will. The DP's position was more complicated. Even though Museveni was a Protestant and former UPC member, his opposition to the UPC since 1979 had built a special relationship between himself and the DP. The DP and UPM had even flirted with the idea of forming an alliance in the 1980 election,¹¹⁹ and some DP leaders had maintained communications with the NRA during the Bush War.¹²⁰ Its leadership therefore chose to cooperate with the interim arrangement in order to wield influence from within it. As mentioned, Ssemogerere accepted Museveni's offer to join cabinet, and while the party could not formally participate in the RC elections, it attempted to infiltrate them from within by encouraging its members to stand for councils and committees.¹²¹ As the likely winners of the 1980 vote, the DP probably also felt that when the interim period expired it would again prove to be a stronger party than any other, and at any rate its main threat at that point would once again be the UPC – not Museveni. Ssemogerere would find growing opposition to this stance in the more skeptical and radical DP Mobilisers group, who disagreed with his cooperation.¹²²

In 1989, the regime relented to pressure to hold its first national elections. However it

¹¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Hostile to Democracy: The Movement System and Political Repression in Uganda," 1998.

¹¹⁸ Dicklitch, "Uganda: A Microcosm of Crisis and Hope in Sub-Saharan Africa," 108.

¹¹⁹ Willis, Lynch, and Cheeseman, "'A Valid Electoral Exercise'? Uganda's 1980 Elections and the Observers' Dilemma," 222.

¹²⁰ Akiiki B. Mujaju, "The Status of the Democratic Party in the NRM Politics," in *Combining Civic Peace with Civic Freedom: Constitutional Options for a New Uganda, 1st-3rd February* (Kampala, 1994), 4. Note also that Yusufu Lule, original Chairman of the NRM, was a DP member who was almost its presidential candidate in 1980.

¹²¹ According to Kasfir, the DP "dominated many of the higher RCs" in their early years: Kasfir, "The Ugandan Elections of 1989: Power, Populism and Democratisation," 266.

¹²² The African American Institute, "Uganda: Pre-Election Assessment" (Washington, DC., 1993).

designed these elections in such a way as to ensure that the outcome would not threaten its hold on power. The presidency itself was not up for election, 40% of the expanded NRC (still acting as a parliament) would be appointed rather than elected, and the 38 “historical” members of the original NRC would not have to stand for election at all. Furthermore, the “snap” timing of the poll – held just weeks after they were announced – left the parties little time to organise themselves. Most importantly, the elections were conducted on the indirect, individual merit formula used in the RC system. RC4 councils were established at the county level to select an NRC member, and RC5 councils allocated NRC seats reserved for women (one per district). Fresh RC1-5 elections took place prior to these.

Constituting a parliamentary election of a kind, the 1989 vote was seen as a test of whether the no-party indirect formula could successfully keep the old parties at bay. On this point there were mixed results. Fourteen ministers and deputy ministers lost their seats,¹²³ and despite the constraints on their activity, the parties had some success in intervening in the indirect process. Despite its official stance boycotting the elections, four high ranking UPC members from the Obote II regime won their seats back in the south west by managing the electoral college process from the village level up.¹²⁴ The DP also won several seats in the new NRC.

Given the indirect formula, however, it remained unclear at this point whether the parties could win the straight fight with the NRM that they were asking for. Despite their success in several of their old strongholds, many party heavyweights in the NRC remained cut off from voters, relying instead on the smaller groups of notables at the county and district levels. NRC candidates were also the only ones in the indirect system excused of the obligation to stand and win in lower RC races in order to contest – seemingly a gift, but one that kept them segregated from the nascent participation at the village and parish levels. Hence, even though many party members won NRC seats, this separation from the masses coupled with the hollowness of the new NRC (many NRC powers were moved to a newly created National Executive Committee (NEC) controlled by the president) meant that the NRM still had total control of the system.

¹²³ All ministers were made members of the NRC in 1987. Kasfir, “The Ugandan Elections of 1989: Power, Populism and Democratisation,” 261.

¹²⁴ Kasfir, 261.

Moreover, by participating in the system, the parties lent legitimacy to the growing idea that the no-party model could act as more than a temporary arrangement – a debate that would define the second half of the interim period.

Before moving on that period, it is necessary to comment on the geographic disparities that were emerging at this point. From its outset, the NRM/A faced significant opposition in areas of the north and east where the UPC had been popular. The Langi, Acholi and Iteso peoples had not been as devastated by the wars of the Obote II era as had the peoples of the south, and when the NRA rapidly took control of these regions in 1986 many people saw it as an occupying force. Furthermore, the NRA units sent to occupy major northern cities included the less disciplined troops absorbed from rival Bush War militias (the “35th battalion”), who responded to potential threats with the same brutality that their own soldiers had seen from the UNLA in Buganda.¹²⁵ Consequently, a number of armed groups emerged to fight the NRA. The Ugandan People’s Democratic Army Movement (UPDA/M), led by former UNLA Acholi officers and backed by Sudan, formed in August 1986 and fought the NRA until signing an amnesty in 1988.¹²⁶ In Teso, Obote II minister Peter Otai founded the Ugandan People’s Army/Movement (UPA/M), whose numbers swelled with civilians who lost cattle to rustlers in the wake of the NRA’s victory (the NRM dismantled the local militias that had previously prevented this).¹²⁷ The most serious threat came from the unlikely Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), led by Acholi spirit medium Alice Auma (a.k.a. “Lakwena”, the name of the spirit she channeled). The HSM’s peasant army had remarkable success against the NRA, marching as far south as the outskirts of Jinja, where they were defeated in a bloody battle in October 1987.¹²⁸ A similar spiritualist movement led by Joseph Kony, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), built on the HSM example and held territory in the north for almost two decades.¹²⁹ Rebel groups in other

¹²⁵ Kiyaga-Nsubuga, “Political Instability and the Struggle for Control in Uganda, 1970-1990,” 234.

¹²⁶ Sallie Simba Kayunga, “The Impact of Armed Opposition on the Movement System in Uganda,” in *No-Party Democracy in Uganda: Myths and Realities*, ed. Justus Mugaju and Joe Oloka-Onyango (Kampala: Fountain, 2000), 112–13.

¹²⁷ See: Justin Epelu-Opio, *Teso War 1986-1992: Causes and Consequences* (Kampala: Fountain, 2009).

¹²⁸ Heike Behrend, “Is Alice Lakwena a Witch? The Holy Spirit Movement and Its Fight against Evil in the North,” in *Changing Uganda: The Dilemmas of Structural Adjustment*, ed. Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (London: James Currey, 1991), 162–77.

¹²⁹ For a good overview of the LRA see: Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot, eds., *The Lord’s Resistance Army: Myth and Reality* (New York: Zed Books, 2010).

parts of the country included the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF), and the politically heterogeneous Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in Kasese, both of which commenced operations in the early 1990s.

That these areas of the country experienced significant conflict after 1986 is politically relevant for two reasons. First, the NRA, responded with heavy-handed tactics against rebels – using concentration camps and locally trained militias – that had a devastating effect on civilian populations.¹³⁰ This caused lasting damage to the Museveni/NRM political brand in these areas, just as this brand was being built in the south. Second, the ongoing conflict inhibited the growth of the RC politics that was developing in other areas.¹³¹ When RCs were set up in these areas they often became icons of NRM collaboration, and therefore targets of rebel reprisals.¹³² Without strong RCs, the government came to rely more on the military, which contributed to the original problem. As the first predominantly southern government in charge of independent Uganda, the NRM was always likely to find opposition from non-Bantu areas that had been somewhat favourable to the UPC. But the clumsy and often brutal way that it responded to these early conflicts made the traditional north-south political divide stronger than ever.

3.2.2 Individual merit goes national, 1989-96

In the years following the 1989 elections, the modicum of elite goodwill present in the “broad based” era of cooperation declined.¹³³ Although parties had a presence in the NRC after the elections, key decision making was concentrated in the hands of the president,¹³⁴ something which was particularly evident when the interim period was extended in late 1989 without consulting the parties.¹³⁵ The NRC had lost much of its authority to the unelected NEC,¹³⁶ which was itself superseded by a Presidential

¹³⁰ Omara-Otunnu, “The Struggle for Democracy in Uganda,” 454.

¹³¹ Ddungu and Wabwire, “Electoral Mechanisms and the Democratic Process: The 1989 RC-NRC Elections,” 20–21.

¹³² Smith, ““Breaking with the Past?” A Consideration of Yoweri Museveni’s National Resistance Movement, and of Social and Political Action in Uganda during Its Government,” 29.

¹³³ Mugaju, “An Historical Background to Uganda’s No-Party Democracy,” 1.

¹³⁴ John Ssenkumba, “NRM Politics, Political Parties and the Demobilisation of Organised Political Forces” (Kampala, 2000), 3.

¹³⁵ Kasfir, “The Ugandan Elections of 1989: Power, Populism and Democratisation,” 274.

¹³⁶ Burkey, “People’s Power in Theory and Practice: The Resistance Council System in Uganda,” 25.

Economic Committee that called most of the shots on policy.¹³⁷ Most of the key non-NRM figures of the first cabinet were gradually replaced, and Museveni started making fiery speeches against the parties – something that he had previously left to his cadres and commissars.¹³⁸ This was all evidence that the NRM had consolidated itself in the first years of the interim period, and was less reliant on the cooperation from others. Beneath this tension was the growing realisation that Museveni saw the no-party arrangement – now called the “Movement System” – as a permanent rather than temporary framework for Ugandan politics. This idea split the political sphere into “movementists” and “multipartyists”, and focused attention on how the matter would be resolved in the new constitution, the drafting of which consumed national politics for several years.¹³⁹

The constitution-making process had much in common with the 1989 election. On the one hand, it was a highly participatory process that included many non-NRM figures, for which it drew high praise internationally.¹⁴⁰ On the other, it was carefully engineered to produce the outcome that Museveni and the NRM needed. The process was led by a Constitutional Commission mandated to conduct mass consultations and produce a draft constitution to be voted on by a Constituent Assembly (CA). Named after its Chairman, Chief Justice Benjamin Odoki, the “Odoki Commission” became a key player in the consolidation of NRM rule by acting as a stalking horse for entrenching the Movement System in the constitution. It was on the advice of the Commission that the interim period was again extended in 1991, and when it produced a draft constitution the following year that recommended codifying the Movement System (albeit with a referendum on its continuation after five years) few were surprised. It was a foregone conclusion that had the incumbent NRC sat as a CA (the NRM’s original plan¹⁴¹), this draft constitution would be promulgated with few amendments. Despite its hold on power, however, the government faced significant

¹³⁷ E. A. Brett, *Providing for the Rural Poor: Institutional Decay and Transformation in Uganda* (Kampala: Fountain, 1993), 37.

¹³⁸ Mujaju, “The Status of the Democratic Party in the NRM Politics,” 8.

¹³⁹ Joe Oloka-Onyango, “New Wine or New Bottles? Movement Politics and One-Partyism in Uganda,” in *No-Party Democracy in Uganda: Myths and Realities*, ed. Justus Mugaju and Joe Oloka-Onyango (Kampala: Fountain, 2000), 49.

¹⁴⁰ Devra C. Moehler, “Participation and Support for the Constitution in Uganda,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 44, no. 2 (2006): 281.

¹⁴¹ Oliver Furley and James Katalikawe, “No-Party Democracy: Uganda’s Election to the Constituent Assembly, 1994” (Kampala, 1999), 3.

domestic and international pressure not to do this.¹⁴² It compromised by agreeing to a new, directly elected CA, albeit under the individual merit conditions.

The CA elections were held in 1994. Even though the CA's sole purpose was the drafting of the constitution, the fact that its constituencies roughly corresponded with those of the NRC led to the widespread belief by incumbent NRC members that becoming a CA delegate was a prerequisite for eventually being elected to the post-interim Parliament.¹⁴³ Two thirds of the incumbent NRC members and four fifths of the cabinet chose to stand, largely for this reason.¹⁴⁴ This meant that the polls took on the character of legislative elections, and were seen to be so by most voters.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, even with the no-party format, it was clear that with direct elections the old party notables in rural areas would for the first time test their electoral strength against movementist candidates. As we have seen, the indirect nature of the 1989 votes had enabled many incumbent party members to win by mobilising smaller numbers of supporters at the district and county level, leaving the comparative strength of each side undetermined. The CA elections were therefore seen as the first test of whether the NRM had succeeded in building a political base that could compete with the parties directly.

With this much at stake, it was highly significant that the movementist candidates vastly outperformed their multipartyist opponents. As both sides were organised unofficially, it is difficult to produce a precise balance of this victory, but most analysts suggest that around two-thirds of the elected delegates were movementists,¹⁴⁶ with most multipartyists coming from the north or the east. Indeed, the result was sufficiently promising for Museveni to exclaim that "we won" after the results were announced. Before turning to the consequences of this result, it is critical to understand how and why movementist candidates won and multipartyists lost, as these races revealed the changes that had occurred in local politics under the NRM since 1986.

¹⁴² Oloka-Onyango, "New Wine or New Bottles? Movement Politics and One-Partyism in Uganda," 48.

¹⁴³ Judith Geist, "Political Significance of the Constituent Assembly Elections," in *From Chaos to Order: The Politics of Constitution Making in Uganda*, ed. Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (Kampala: Kampala, 1995), 103-04.

¹⁴⁴ Nelson Kasfir, "Uganda Politics and the Constituent Assembly Elections of March 1994," in *From Chaos to Order: The Politics of Constitution Making in Uganda*, ed. Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (Kampala: Fountain, 1995), 168.

¹⁴⁵ The African American Institute, "Uganda: Pre-Election Assessment," 21.

¹⁴⁶ Carbone, *No-Party Democracy? Ugandan Politics in Comparative Perspective*, 37.

There are three broad reasons why movementists performed so well in the south. First, after eight years in power, Museveni and the NRM had become widely popular in the rural south. There were many causes of this popularity, but the most important was the dramatic improvement in the security situation inherited by the NRM,¹⁴⁷ something conceded even by the government's early critics.¹⁴⁸ This development was in part due to the effective relationship between the security officials in the lower RCs and the state security forces.¹⁴⁹ These connections resulted in a decrease in petty and violent crime, and gave villagers a degree of ownership in this outcome. It has been suggested that the RCs even played an important role in defeating the HSM armies in Busoga in 1987.¹⁵⁰ People were also generally impressed by the NRA's discipline as a national army. The new government made a statement by publishing the army's code of conduct in 1986, and demonstrated that was serious about enforcing it.¹⁵¹ Hence, many people who had benefited from this broad security improvement considered a vote for movementist candidates as a way to maintain it.¹⁵²

The president's popularity was also driven by a steady recovery of the Ugandan economy. The government's early fiscal and monetary reforms reduced rampant inflation and allowed for increased agricultural exports and several years of high economic growth.¹⁵³ This was helped further by a global boom in coffee prices between 1994-95.¹⁵⁴ By 1994, Uganda was the third fastest growing economy in Africa,¹⁵⁵ and while it is debatable how much of this growth was seen by the average rural voter, the

¹⁴⁷ Mamdani, "Uganda of in Transition: Two Years of the NRA/NRM," 1157.

¹⁴⁸ Oloka-Onyango, "The National Resistance Movement, 'Grassroots Democracy' and Dictatorship in Uganda," 128; Ssenkumba, "The Dilemmas of Directed Democracy: Neutralising Ugandan Opposition Politics under the NRM," 184.

¹⁴⁹ Ddungu, "Popular Forms and the Question of Democracy, The Case of Resistance Councils in Uganda," 374.

¹⁵⁰ Tarsis Kabwegyere, "Birth Pangs of Democracy, Foundations for Development," in *Uganda Economics Association Public Lecture Series* (Kampala, 1993), 7; Dan Mudoola, "Institution-Building: The Case of the NRM and the Military in Uganda, 1986-9," in *Changing Uganda: The Dilemmas of Structural Adjustment*, ed. Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (London: James Currey, 1991), 235.

¹⁵¹ Mudoola, "Institution-Building: The Case of the NRM and the Military in Uganda, 1986-9," 238.

¹⁵² Geist, "Political Significance of the Constituent Assembly Elections," 112.

¹⁵³ Paul Collier and Ritva Reinikka, "Introduction," in *Uganda's Recovery: The Role of Farms, Firms and Government*, ed. Paul Collier and Ritva Reinikka (Washington, DC.: World Bank, 2001), 2.

¹⁵⁴ Collier and Reinikka, 2.

¹⁵⁵ Dicklitch, "Uganda: A Microcosm of Crisis and Hope in Sub-Saharan Africa," 118.

improvement on the *magendo* economy of the 1980s was substantial.¹⁵⁶ The government sought to appease traditionalists in the south by bringing back the kingdoms in Buganda, Bunyoro, Tooro and Busoga – albeit in a largely ceremonial role. It also further devolved state power in the 1993 Local Government (Resistance Councils) Statute, which shifted power from the appointed DA (now called the Central Government Representative) to the elected LC5 Chairman.¹⁵⁷

All of these improved living conditions and popular reforms, in combination with Museveni's considerable charisma as a politician, gave the idea of supporting the NRM genuine appeal in rural areas of the south, and this was a significant factor in the election result.¹⁵⁸ It should be noted that despite the no-party formula which restricted campaigning to short joint sessions and barred mention of party affiliation, it was clear to all voters which side of the movementist-multipartyist divide a candidate was on. Many candidates were keen to play up their connections to the NRM by emphasising their personal ties with Museveni,¹⁵⁹ or for NRA veterans, campaigning in uniform.¹⁶⁰ The parties appeal had also declined. Tidemand's survey before the CA vote found a dramatic drop in party support,¹⁶¹ and even in areas of traditional party strength there was discontent with the decisions of party leadership during the interim period.¹⁶²

Unsurprisingly, therefore, there were numerous occasions of candidates moving from the multipartyist camp to the movementist one throughout the campaign.¹⁶³ Many old party figures had already switched sides before the election started, and re-entered local politics as zealous movementists.¹⁶⁴ Others attempted to reconcile their partisan

¹⁵⁶ William Muhumuza, *Credit and Reduction of Poverty in Uganda: Structural Adjustment Reforms in Context* (Kampala: Fountain, 2007), 5; Oloka-Onyango, "The Labours of Drawing Up a Human Rights Balance Sheet."

¹⁵⁷ Brett, *Providing for the Rural Poor: Institutional Decay and Transformation in Uganda*, 48; Regan, "Decentralisation Policy: Reshaping State and Society," 166.

¹⁵⁸ Geoffrey B. Tukahebwa, "A Study of the 1994 Constituent Assembly Elections in Bushenyi District" (Kampala, 1994), 21.

¹⁵⁹ Oloka-Onyango, "New Wine or New Bottles? Movement Politics and One-Partyism in Uganda," 50.

¹⁶⁰ Tukahebwa, "A Study of the 1994 Constituent Assembly Elections in Bushenyi District," 17.

¹⁶¹ Tidemand, "The Resistance Councils in Uganda A Study of Rural Politics and Popular Democracy in Africa," 120.

¹⁶² The African American Institute, "Uganda: Pre-Election Assessment," 28.

¹⁶³ Sallie Simba Kayunga, "The No-Party System of Democracy and the Management of Ethnic Conflicts in Uganda" (Makerere, 2001), 140; Tukahebwa, "A Study of the 1994 Constituent Assembly Elections in Bushenyi District," 17.

¹⁶⁴ Tukahebwa, "A Study of the 1994 Constituent Assembly Elections in Bushenyi District," 17.

membership with their inclusion in the movement system.¹⁶⁵ It was on the basis of these developments that many observers site the CA elections as the birth of the NRM as a political party in the popular imaginary.¹⁶⁶ There were of course many areas – mainly in the north and east – where this fact was a liability to movementist candidates,¹⁶⁷ but not enough to tilt the balance towards multypartyists nationally.

A second reason for the movementist victories was the regime's abuse of incumbency during the campaign. The Odoki Commission's much lauded consultations with thousands of RCs did as much lecturing as listening,¹⁶⁸ and the Commission was often accused of abusing these interactions to propagate the evils of parties and the merits of the no-party system. This influenced not only the draft constitution, but also the subsequent elections. The *Mchaka mchaka* courses since 1986 had the same effect.¹⁶⁹ Although these were reduced in number during the CA campaigns, those that did take place invited only movementist candidates to speak to participants.¹⁷⁰

The NRC incumbency of individual candidates – most of whom were movementists – also had a great effect on the results. While not always an advantage, Council Members (CMs), and ministers in particular, had access to resources that their opponents did not. For example, the minister for education Amanywa Mushega, who was standing in Igara East, unveiled a large spending package from his ministry to local schools in such a way that made it appear to be the fruit of his own generosity.¹⁷¹ Ministers also used their portfolios as an excuse for holding public rallies outside the joint campaign protocol, and took every opportunity to display the “paraphernalia of state power” in the course of their campaigns.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁵ James Katorobo, “Electoral Choices in the Constituent Assembly Elections of March 1994,” in *From Chaos to Order: The Politics of Constitution Making in Uganda*, ed. Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (Kampala: Fountain, 1995), 124.

¹⁶⁶ Mamdani, “The Politics of Democratic Reform in Uganda,” 14; Oloka-Onyango, “New Wine or New Bottles? Movement Politics and One-Partyism in Uganda,” 52.

¹⁶⁷ The African American Institute, “Uganda: Pre-Election Assessment,” 41; Katorobo, “Electoral Choices in the Constituent Assembly Elections of March 1994,” 121.

¹⁶⁸ John M. Waliggo, “Constitution-Making and the Politics of Democratisation in Uganda,” in *From Chaos to Order: The Politics of Constitution Making in Uganda*, ed. Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael Twaddle (Kampala: Fountain, 1995), 27.

¹⁶⁹ The African American Institute, “Uganda: Pre-Election Assessment,” 45.

¹⁷⁰ Tukahebwa, “A Study of the 1994 Constituent Assembly Elections in Bushenyi District,” 19.

¹⁷¹ Tukahebwa, 13.

¹⁷² Furley and Katalikawe, “No-Party Democracy: Uganda's Election to the Constituent Assembly, 1994,” 12–14.

Third, and most importantly for the purposes of this study, the individual merit politics developed in the RC system robbed the parties of their ownership of the local factional politics which they had previously depended on. Even with the previously mentioned popularity of the Movement brand, the CA elections were – just as previous elections – based more on local issues than national ones. In particular, the horizontal divisions common in the past were still very present on both sides of CA races.¹⁷³ For example, Furley and Katalikawe report that Minister Henry Kyemba (a Musoga) criticised his rival Tony Otoa (a Langi) by saying that "Busoga is a place for Basoga and we should be allowed to choose our own destiny".¹⁷⁴ In Sheema North constituency, the local Catholic-Protestant rivalry of previous elections was reborn in a duel between two movementists candidates, both of whom were party converts.¹⁷⁵ The above-mentioned Igara East, a constituency with a history of strong Protestant-Catholic rivalry between UPC and DP members, was in the CA elections contested by two Protestants: Mushega and UPC strongman Adonia Tiberondwa. Rather than eliminating the importance of religion, Mushega used the Catholic Church as a campaign base, building on the historical antipathy that this local faction had for the UPC.¹⁷⁶ The movementists' success was therefore not merely that they managed to build a better national brand than the multipartyists (although they did), but that they managed to absorb the factional politics endogenous to rural constituencies in their own campaigns.

The election format also brought new candidacies into the local polity that would likely not have been there without it.¹⁷⁷ The relatively low restrictions of entry (12 signatures and USh100,000) saw numerous candidates stand,¹⁷⁸ and the joint candidate meetings somewhat leveled the playing field with more established ones.¹⁷⁹ This boosted the necessity of retail politics,¹⁸⁰ and put the heat on incumbent CMs accused of underperforming. In many parts of the country incumbency was often as much a

¹⁷³ Kayunga, "The No-Party System of Democracy and the Management of Ethnic Conflicts in Uganda," 141.

¹⁷⁴ Furley and Katalikawe, "No-Party Democracy: Uganda's Election to the Constituent Assembly, 1994," 20.

¹⁷⁵ Tukahebwa, "A Study of the 1994 Constituent Assembly Elections in Bushenyi District," 17.

¹⁷⁶ Tukahebwa, 14.

¹⁷⁷ Oliver Furley and James Katalikawe, "Constitutional Reform in Uganda: The New Approach," *African Affairs* 96, no. 383 (1997): 260.

¹⁷⁸ Kasfir, "Uganda Politics and the Constituent Assembly Elections of March 1994," 158.

¹⁷⁹ Geist, "Political Significance of the Constituent Assembly Elections," 96.

¹⁸⁰ Katorobo, "Electoral Choices in the Constituent Assembly Elections of March 1994," 140.

hindrance as an advantage.¹⁸¹ In some cases, these conditions allowed for underdog victories against established politicians in both the movementist and multipartyist camps. In Sheema South, for example, movementist candidate Elijah Mushemeza conducted a low-key campaign on a bicycle (in stark contrast to the lavish convoys of most candidates) with such success that more senior movementist candidates were pressured to step down in his favour. He went on to defeat UPC veteran Edward Rurangaranga handily.¹⁸² Charles Rwomushana achieved a similar feat in Rujumbura, campaigning on cycle and foot while tending voters' gardens between campaign stops.¹⁸³

However, for every newcomer that won an underdog victory like this there were many more that spent enormous amounts of money to give them the edge. According to Katorobo, there was a general perception among candidates that these were the most expensive elections in the nation's history.¹⁸⁴ While there was a high degree of satisfaction with the general conditions of the country, candidates routinely faced voters who felt that their own area had been under-served, which they compensated for by spending heavily on the campaign trail in the form of salt, sugar and soap, among other gifts.¹⁸⁵ There were also cases of candidates allying with local businessmen to fund ostentatiously grand campaigns to display their wealth and connections.¹⁸⁶ Again, this was a consequence of the elections being fought on highly local rather than national issues. Ironically, this "monetisation" of politics¹⁸⁷ must be seen as connected to individual merit: the shrinking importance of party labels or national issues made one's own ability to "deliver" patronage the most important criterion of "merit" for many voters.¹⁸⁸ It also gave candidates another incentive to play up their movementist connections, as this was seen as an indication of one's ability to deliver in the future.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸¹ Geist, "Political Significance of the Constituent Assembly Elections," 106.

¹⁸² Tukahebwa, "A Study of the 1994 Constituent Assembly Elections in Bushenyi District," 18–19.

¹⁸³ Katorobo, "Electoral Choices in the Constituent Assembly Elections of March 1994," 122.

¹⁸⁴ Katorobo, 141.

¹⁸⁵ Geist, "Political Significance of the Constituent Assembly Elections," 96; Furley and Katalikawe, "No-Party Democracy: Uganda's Election to the Constituent Assembly, 1994," 21.

¹⁸⁶ Tukahebwa, "A Study of the 1994 Constituent Assembly Elections in Bushenyi District," 18.

¹⁸⁷ William Muhumuza, "Money and Power in Uganda's 1996 Elections," *African Journal of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (1997): 169.

¹⁸⁸ Oloka-Onyango, "New Wine or New Bottles? Movement Politics and One-Partyism in Uganda," 51; Sallie Simba Kayunga, "Electoral Processes in Uganda: From Individual Merit to Multi-Party Democracy," in *Africa's New Governance Models: Debating Form and Substance*, ed. Joe Oloka-Onyango and Nansozi K. Muwanga (Kampala: Kampala, 2007), 134.

¹⁸⁹ Oloka-Onyango, "New Wine or New Bottles? Movement Politics and One-Partyism in Uganda," 50.

With such a grand movementist victory, Museveni was assured of a generally favourable constitution to emerge out of the CA, which sat between May 1994 and October 1995. The Movement System of no party politics was codified in the constitution, albeit with the draft's five-year referendum condition. The new constitution also formalised affirmative action seats for women;¹⁹⁰ required that a comprehensive land bill be passed within two years; defined an apolitical role of Kingdoms; renamed the RCs Local Councils (LCs); and, against Museveni's strong opposition,¹⁹¹ renamed the NRA the Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF).

Even while being so outnumbered, the multipartyists made the deliberations a lively affair. Tensions between the two sides peaked in June 1995 when he and the UPC's Cecilia Ogwal (who had become a *de facto* leader of her party in the CA) proposed deleting all references to "the Movement" in the constitution. When this was voted down all of the multipartyist delegates (except members of the CP) left the Assembly for good, and Ssemogerere quit the NRM cabinet two days later.¹⁹² Museveni also received surprisingly strong resistance from moderates within his own ranks. Two NRA delegates, Col. Serwanga Lwanga and Gen. David Tinyefuza, proposed returning to multipartyism immediately,¹⁹³ and there was generally more hesitance to lock in the Movement system among pro-NRM delegates than many people expected.¹⁹⁴

With the constitution drafted in his favour, Museveni entered the 1996 elections hoping to finalise his consolidation of power, which he did convincingly. His success in the presidential race was for the same general reasons that the movementists had done well in 1994. He remained very popular among the rural peasantry in the south, and could boast of significant security and economic achievements, as a result of which the slogan "no change" became the mood-reflecting catchcry of his campaign. He was also the beneficiary of a particularly poor campaign by his main opponent, Ssemogerere, who fronted a coalition with Ogwal's UPC faction. As in 1994, the government widely

¹⁹⁰ Oloka-Onyango, "Uganda's 'Benevolent' Dictatorship," 213.

¹⁹¹ Sauda Nabukenya, "The Power Dynamics of Constitutional Making Process in Uganda, 1959-1995" (Makerere University, 2008), 70.

¹⁹² Justus Mugaju, ed., *Uganda's Age of Reforms: A Critical Overview* (Kampala: Fountain, 1996), 8.

¹⁹³ Nabukenya, "The Power Dynamics of Constitutional Making Process in Uganda, 1959-1995," 68.

¹⁹⁴ Sabiti Makara, "Voting for Democracy in Uganda: Issues in Recent Elections, 1996-2001," in *Voting For Democracy in Uganda: Issues in Recent Elections*, ed. Sabiti Makara, Geoffrey B. Tukahebwa, and Foster E. Byarugaba (Kampala: LDC, 2003), 10.

abused its grip on the state to its advantage. In the most egregious case, the president sent a signed letter to the chairmen of every village LC in the country, designating them mobilisers for his campaign and asking them to form village “task forces” for his election.¹⁹⁵ Given that LCs were a paramount source of authority and information for many remote areas,¹⁹⁶ this had an enormous affect on mobilisation.¹⁹⁷ It also validated many of the suspicions of the RC/LC system’s early critics that they would eventually become tools of party-like mobilisation.¹⁹⁸

Museveni also used his incumbency to his advantage on the campaign trail. His decade in power meant that – even without ever being elected – he was Uganda’s longest ever continuous leader, something which enabled him to play the role of patron with extreme ease.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, while Museveni toured the country months before the elections rolling out his *Entandikwa* and *Kulumbeka* anti-poverty schemes,²⁰⁰ Ssemogerere was limited to the official campaign period of only 39 days. With these unfair advantages, combined with his far superior campaign, it was no surprise that he won in a landslide of 75.5%.

The 1996 parliamentary election continued and consolidated the trends of the 1994 CA elections, with local politics increasingly captured by movementist candidates.²⁰¹ Two factors aided this: Museveni’s election had come seven weeks earlier, making the races even more devoid of national content; and in protest to his election many multipartyist candidates boycotted their parliamentary races. The timing of Museveni’s election was

¹⁹⁵ Foster E. Byarugaba, “Bunyoro Voters Wary of ‘Unholy’ Alliances in the 1996 Elections,” in *Voting For Democracy in Uganda: Issues in Recent Elections*, ed. Sabiti Makara, Geoffrey B. Tukahebwa, and Foster E. Byarugaba (Kampala: LDC, 2003), 94; Geoffrey B. Tukahebwa, ““Block Voting” in South Western Uganda: The Case of 1996 Elections in Rukungiri District,” in *Voting For Democracy in Uganda: Issues in Recent Elections*, ed. Sabiti Makara, Geoffrey B. Tukahebwa, and Foster E. Byarugaba (Kampala: LDC, 2003), 188.

¹⁹⁶ Akiiki B. Mujaju, “Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Mbale District: A Case Study of Bungokho,” in *Voting For Democracy in Uganda: Issues in Recent Elections*, ed. Sabiti Makara, Geoffrey B. Tukahebwa, and Foster E. Byarugaba (Kampala: LDC, 2003), 150.

¹⁹⁷ Makara, “Voting for Democracy in Uganda: Issues in Recent Elections, 1996-2001,” 21.

¹⁹⁸ Oloka-Onyango, “The Labours of Drawing Up a Human Rights Balance Sheet,” 6.

¹⁹⁹ Ssenkumba, “The Dilemmas of Directed Democracy: Neutralising Ugandan Opposition Politics under the NRM,” 191.

²⁰⁰ Muhumuza, “Money and Power in Uganda’s 1996 Elections,” 173; Makara, “Voting for Democracy in Uganda: Issues in Recent Elections, 1996-2001,” 17; Aaron Kudaga Kabweru Mukwaya, ““Movementisation’ of Politics in Busoga: A Study of Bukooli North Constituency,” in *Voting For Democracy in Uganda: Issues in Recent Elections*, ed. Sabiti Makara, Geoffrey B. Tukahebwa, and Foster E. Byarugaba (Kampala: LDC, 2003), 167.

²⁰¹ It should be noted that there are not many sources on these races.

something that the government had fought very hard for in the CA. Although it seemed puzzlingly parochial at the time, its benefit to the regime was evident when parliamentary candidates had an extra reason to play up their connection to a presidential regime that had already been installed.²⁰² Understandably, voters thought that movementist candidates would be better positioned to bring home resources and be appointed ministers.²⁰³

However, as pro-Movement allegiance became more ubiquitous in rural parliamentary races, it became less determinant of their outcome. Instead, elections became even more localised contests, usually (in the south) between several movementist candidates.²⁰⁴ These races saw extremely high competition for seats. Of the 214 directly elected members, only 16 went through unopposed and 85 won with less than 50%.²⁰⁵ Many movementist candidates who had defeated multi-partyists in 1994 found themselves challenged by fellow movementists running better local campaigns. In Bugangaizi County, incumbent CA delegate Sebastian Sekitoleko, a former DP man who had switched to the Movement, lost to newcomer Baltazar Kasirivu-Atwooki in a campaign based on matters such as the former's underperforming bus company and the influx of Bakiga migrants who had recently settled on local land.²⁰⁶ The above-mentioned Charles Rwomushana was unable to repeat his CA election, losing to NRA veteran Jim Muhwezi, who constructed a health centre and a road in the areas where Rwomushana did well in 1994.²⁰⁷ In Buyanja County, a former NRM minister Kasaija Matia was bedeviled by a narrative that he had not returned to the community after his initial election, and that he was disloyal to the Bunyoro. His victorious opponent, also a movementist, was a "son of the soil" credited with repairing local roads.²⁰⁸

At both the presidential and parliamentary level, the 1996 election punctuated the

²⁰² Oloka-Onyango, "New Wine or New Bottles? Movement Politics and One-Partyism in Uganda," 50.

²⁰³ Kayunga, "The No-Party System of Democracy and the Management of Ethnic Conflicts in Uganda," 141; Mujaju, "Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Mbale District: A Case Study of Bungokho," 159; Byarugaba, "Bunyoro Voters Wary of 'Unholy' Alliances in the 1996 Elections," 106; Furley, "Democratisation in Uganda," 87.

²⁰⁴ Muhumuza, "Money and Power in Uganda's 1996 Elections," 175.

²⁰⁵ James Katorobo, "The Uganda Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 1996," *Les Cahiers d'Afrique de l'Est* 17 (1999): 25.

²⁰⁶ Byarugaba, "Bunyoro Voters Wary of 'Unholy' Alliances in the 1996 Elections," 107.

²⁰⁷ Tukahebwa, "'Block Voting' in South Western Uganda: The Case of 1996 Elections in Rukungiri District," 197.

²⁰⁸ Byarugaba, "Bunyoro Voters Wary of 'Unholy' Alliances in the 1996 Elections," 109–10.

NRM's decade-long consolidation in power. According to Furley's estimation three quarters of the 275 MPs were bona fide "movement men".²⁰⁹ But while it is important to understand this success as that of a political party, we must note here the important differences that distinguished the Movement's individual merit politics from the previous political parties. Where the older parties had generally maintained their footholds in the local political arena by allying with *single* local political factions, the NRM created a space open enough to *include them all* – provided that they supported Museveni. It is this difference that accounts for the high rates of competition within the ranks of movementists in parliamentary elections.

The case of Kabale Municipality constituency is illustrative of this. With a history of entrenched DP-UPC rivalry on religious grounds, movementist and Minister Ruhakana Rugunda's solid victory against DP Secretary-General Robert Katariko in the 1994 CA elections was considered a "transformation of a constituency deeply divided on religion and parties into a *landslide* for movement politics."²¹⁰ Rugunda was a Protestant, and he faced the stiff competition of Catholic power brokers in the constituency who pushed hard for the election of Katariko. He also received strong support from heavily Protestant areas of the constituency. However, two years later Rugunda returned to face an "upstart" movementist candidate Serapio Rukundo, who was backed by the district Catholic establishment and groups of younger voters who alleged that Rugunda had neglected the constituency while serving in Kampala.²¹¹ While Rugunda still won, his vote in 1996 fell to 55% from the 77% he received in 1994.²¹² Catholic and Protestant blocs have polarised intra-Movement politics in Kabale ever since.²¹³

This was something of a pattern in the late interim period: a strong movementist candidate defeats a multipartyist in 1994, only to find the local network of his/her former rival challenging them on a movementist platform in 1996. Local factionalism – in content and veracity – in most cases remained the same as before the NRM era.²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ Furley, "Democratisation in Uganda," 87; This is about the same as Katorobo's estimate of 70-80%: Katorobo, "The Uganda Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 1996," 22.

²¹⁰ Katorobo, "Electoral Choices in the Constituent Assembly Elections of March 1994," 121 emphasis original.

²¹¹ Katorobo, "The Uganda Presidential and Parliamentary Elections 1996," 30–31.

²¹² Katorobo, 28.

²¹³ See for example Joseph Mazige, "Religion Divides Politicians in Ankole, Kigezi Regions," *The Daily Monitor*, August 9, 2010.

²¹⁴ Furley, "Democratisation in Uganda," 95.

It was now simply housed *within* the Movement rather than being split by competing national parties. The demise of local inter-party rivalry had the consequence of removing the one tenuous connection that the local polity did have with the national one, making politics under a rural Movement monopoly even more localised and parochial than had already been the case. The anti-party politics of individual merit therein reshaped the relationship between the national and subnational polities, and in so doing forged for Museveni precisely the mass base that he lacked only ten years earlier. I will reflect on this achievement in the conclusion to this chapter.

3.3 From Movement System to NRM dominant party

3.3.1 Growth of a central NRM bureaucracy 1996-2006

While the Movement was politically ascendant after the 1996 election, there was still considerable ambiguity about what exactly it – if not a party – actually was. Its identity had been somewhat easier to figure in the interim period, when Legal Notice No.1 1986 made the Movement's NRC, Secretariat and Chairman the temporary custodians of the state itself. But with the election of a non-interim parliament and president that version of the Movement technically ceased to exist.²¹⁵ Its ambiguity was all the more problematic given that the 1995 constitution granted the Movement certain rights within the state, even though it too failed to define who or what it was actually granting power to. Indeed, had Ssemogerere won in 1996 it is not entirely clear how he could have governed, given that the constitution granted political supremacy to a "Movement" which he did not lead.²¹⁶ The CA deferred the resolution of this matter to the new Parliament, which had the obligation to define a Movement independent of the regime.

In doing so, the Parliament created a Movement organisational framework that would go on to form the basis of the formal political party that the NRM became in 2005. In 1997, the highly contentious Movement Act was passed, which created a set of Movement Committees parallel to the LCs throughout the country. Set up from 1998, these were theoretically separate from the state, and formally mandated with the vague

²¹⁵ Furley, 95.

²¹⁶ Ssenkumba, "NRM Politics, Political Parties and the Demobilisation of Organised Political Forces," 15.

quasi-political tasks previously assigned to the DAs.²¹⁷ They were however funded by the state budget, and the committees were composed almost entirely of members of their parallel LCs along with some state appointed officials, most of whom were movementists. While the committees were theoretically apolitical organs, it was of course impossible for them to be politically neutral given the association of the term “Movement” with the Museveni regime – unless supposing that support for that regime was itself apolitical. The Act also made every Ugandan a “member” of the Movement: a similarly ambiguous action given that the Movement was already supposed to be composed of all citizens by default. Hence, the Act tasked with defining the Movement instead redoubled all of its party/state ambiguities, while increasing its presence.²¹⁸

This was also the case for the Movement’s national structures. The peak of the organisation was its National Conference, consisting of the Chairperson, all MPs, RDCs, and a delegate selected by electoral colleges at the sub-county.²¹⁹ At the first National Conference in 1998, 1,300 delegates re-elected Museveni and Moses Kigongo as Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Movement.²²⁰ Indeed, the only unambiguous aspect of the Movement – in its image and its structure – was Museveni’s leadership of it. The other high posts were also similar to the organs of the interim period, with a Chief Political Commissar leading a rejuvenated Secretariat, answerable to a new NEC. These were all highly sought-after positions because they demonstrated political clout within the regime, and because they had the power to appoint hundreds of mobilisers and officials throughout the county.

However, despite this internal activity, the post-1996 Movement remained institutionally weak and highly dependent on its attachment to the Museveni presidency.²²¹ It is not clear that many of the Movement Committees were highly functional,²²² and their ambiguous “mobilizing” functions usually amounted to nothing.²²³ The secretariat did not for the most part intervene in local races between

²¹⁷ Carbone, *No-Party Democracy? Ugandan Politics in Comparative Perspective*, 98.

²¹⁸ For a discussion of this see: Joshua Rubongoya, *Regime Hegemony in Museveni’s Uganda* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 138–41.

²¹⁹ Rubongoya, 139.

²²⁰ Carbone, *No-Party Democracy? Ugandan Politics in Comparative Perspective*, 96.

²²¹ Rubongoya, *Regime Hegemony in Museveni’s Uganda*, 99.

²²² Elliot D. Green, “Decentralisation and Conflict in Uganda,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 8, no. 4 (2008): 436.

²²³ Carbone, *No-Party Democracy? Ugandan Politics in Comparative Perspective*, 98.

movementist candidates in the 2001 elections (to ensure the most loyal candidate won) but instead saved its resources for races where multi-partyists stood a chance of winning.²²⁴ In other words, politicians only felt the organisational might of the Movement if they confronted it from the outside, not the inside. As a result, high rates of intra-Movement competition produced MPs and officials whose dedication to the regime was actually quite thin. Internally, it was still a poorly disciplined group of individual politicians. Some have suggested that this was a deliberate setup to avoid an independent Movement organisation from becoming powerful enough to challenge Museveni's control.²²⁵

At this point, the DP and UPC were in an abyss from which they have never emerged. Both maintained strained relationships between their autocratic leaders (neither of whom had been elected since before the NRM era) and dwindling activist bases.²²⁶ The 1996 election seemed to prove that neither could triumph nationally against the Movement, and many old party members (mainly in the south) gave up their opposition and declared allegiance to Museveni in order to keep their careers alive. Their presence throughout the sixth (1996-2001) and seventh (2001-2006) Parliaments depended more on the individual strategies of their parliamentarians than any formal organisational strength.²²⁷

However, it was the movementists themselves in Parliament that would become the bigger thorn in the regime's side in these years.²²⁸ As discussed, the individual merit system of recruitment meant that even those MPs who campaigned and won on the movementist ticket were not highly dependable allies for the government's legislative agenda. The government's attempt to organise a "Movement Caucus" had only a mild organisational impact, and instead moderate movementists and the remaining multipartyists utilised Parliament's committees (which had been given significant power by the constitution), and formed a number of caucuses that resisted the

²²⁴ Carbone, 147.

²²⁵ Giovanni M. Carbone, "Disguising Partisanship and Hegemony: A New Type of Democracy in Uganda?," *Il Politico* 65, no. 4 (2000): 521.

²²⁶ Ssenkumba, "NRM Politics, Political Parties and the Demobilisation of Organised Political Forces," 17–19.

²²⁷ Carbone, *No-Party Democracy? Ugandan Politics in Comparative Perspective*, 172.

²²⁸ For a discussion of this, see: Michaela Collord, "From the Electoral Battleground to the Parliamentary Arena: Understanding Intra-Elite Bargaining in Uganda's National Resistance Movement," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10, no. 4 (2016): 648.

government's legislative agenda and pursued corruption cases against high profile ministers.²²⁹ Notable among these caucuses were the Young Parliamentarians Association (YPA) and its successor, the Parliamentary Advocacy Forum (PAFO), both of which were coalitions of multipartyists and independent-minded movementists.²³⁰ Significant pieces of legislation, such as the contentious Political Organizations Bill, were rejected by Parliament because of their power, and the regime instead relied on bypassing due process by bribing individual MPs or pushing bills (such as the Movement Act and the Referendum Act of 2000) through without quorum.

It was out of this internal opposition that Museveni's great nemesis, Col. Kizza Besigye, would emerge. Besigye served as Museveni's doctor during the Bush War before becoming a minister and senior political figure in the NRA/UPDF. In 1999, while still in uniform, Besigye wrote his famous "Insider's View of How the NRM Lost the Broad Base", an open letter detailing corruption allegations and the abandonment of democratic ideals. After narrowly avoiding a court martial over this, Besigye was allowed to leave the UPDF in late 2000, after which he immediately declared his intention to challenge Museveni for the presidency in the 2001 elections. While not the most senior Museveni critic in the NRM or the UPDF, it is likely that Besigye was encouraged by some silent partners above him to take this stand, including many in the caucuses that had developed in Parliament.²³¹

The Besigye candidacy rattled the cage of the regime, and marked the end of the movementist-multipartyist division which had defined national politics in the 1990s. Fearful that Besigye (who was also from the south west) could eat into its own political base, the regime responded with more violence and intimidation than in any previous or subsequent episode of its tenure. As the constitutionally mandated referendum on keeping the Movement System had been won by the government a year earlier the presidential and parliamentary races would be conducted under individual merit rules. Making a further mockery of the idea that the Movement was a non-partisan body, both

²²⁹ Rubongoya, *Regime Hegemony in Museveni's Uganda*, 135.

²³⁰ Nelson Kasfir and Steven Hippo Twebaze, "The Limits of Institutionalization of a Legislature without Parties: The Ugandan Parliament," in *Paper Prepared for the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association* (Washington, DC., 2005), 12.

²³¹ Moses Khisa, "Managing Elite Defection in Museveni's Uganda: The 2016 Elections in Perspective," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10, no. 4 (2016): 738.

the NEC and the Movement's National Conference declared in November 2000 that that Museveni was its "sole candidate" for the elections.²³² During the campaign at least 17 people were killed in election-related violence, and hundreds more offences were recorded.²³³ A Parliamentary Select Committee later concluded that presidential advisor Maj. Kakooza Mutale led a plain clothed paramilitary group, the Kalangala Action Plan, beating and harassing Besigye supporters.²³⁴ Museveni won the vote with 69.3% to Besigye's 27.8%. The latter got the majority of his vote from the North and the East, as had Ssemogerere in 1996.

3.3.2 NRM as a party, 2006-present

Soon after winning its first re-election, the regime signaled that it might finally drop the Movement System and return to multipartyism for the 2006 election. In 2002 the NEC submitted a report exploring the issue which argued that a return to pluralism would enable the party to rid itself of the corrupt and disloyal influences which had risen within it.²³⁵ The following year the national conference agreed in principle to the change, and after a failed attempt to push it through Parliament the matter went to a referendum in 2005 which it comfortably won. Under the new system, the Movement converted into a political party under the name NRM-Organisation (NRM-O) – although few people used this technical name the party was widely known as just the "NRM", as it has been since.²³⁶ In making this transition, the new NRM party inherited the Movement organs that had developed in the previous decade, including those created by the Movement Act of 1997. Its national delegates conferences were much the same as those conducted since 1996, and while the secretariats of the old and new structures were technically different, in practice most of the personnel simply transferred from one to the other

²³² Sabiti Makara and Geoffrey B. Tukahebwa, "An Overview of the 2001 Presidential Elections," in *Voting For Democracy in Uganda: Issues in Recent Elections*, ed. Sabiti Makara, Geoffrey B. Tukahebwa, and Foster E. Byarugaba (Kampala: LDC, 2003), 272; Sabiti Makara, Lise Rakner, and Lars Svåsand, "Turnaround: The National Resistance Movement and the Reintroduction of a Multiparty System in Uganda," in *Electoral Democracy in Uganda: Understanding the Institutional Processes and Outcomes of the 2006 Multiparty Elections*, ed. Julius Kiiza, Sabiti Makara, and Lise Rakner (Kampala: Fountain, 2008), 273.

²³³ Makara and Tukahebwa, "An Overview of the 2001 Presidential Elections," 284.

²³⁴ Makara, Rakner, and Svåsand, "Turnaround: The National Resistance Movement and the Reintroduction of a Multiparty System in Uganda," 272.

²³⁵ Makara, Rakner, and Svåsand, 264.

²³⁶ Julius Kiiza, Sabiti Makara, and Lise Rakner, "Introduction," in *Electoral Democracy in Uganda: Understanding the Institutional Processes and Outcomes of the 2006 Multiparty Elections*, ed. Julius Kiiza, Sabiti Makara, and Lise Rakner (Kampala: Fountain, 2008), 13.

between 2003 and 2006.²³⁷

Simultaneous to this transition, the regime attempted an even more contentious change: the abolition of presidential term limits in the constitution. Article 105(2) of the constitution limited a presidency to two five years terms, meaning that Museveni would have to retire in 2006. The preparations for this change also started very soon after the 2001 vote, and the issue became a matter of national debate under the name “*kisanja*” (a luganda term meaning “terms” and also “dry banana leaves” – the latter became a symbol of Museveni’s 2006 campaign). It was not until a heated meeting of the NEC in June 2005, mere months before the election, that the position of the NRM was settled in favour of amending the constitution. A handful of ministers who spoke up against the move in this meeting were sacked soon after. The government also had the difficult task of pushing the vote through the Parliament, which required it to openly bribe legislators and eliminate anonymous voting in order to enforce compliance.²³⁸ The vote was carried, but no incident before or since has brought the regime closer to collapse. High-ranking members of the UPDF were court martialled or detained for speaking out against *kisanja*, and historical members who had been at the forefront of establishing the Movement throughout the 1980s and 1990 permanently fell out with the president.²³⁹ In their wake, a more loyal crop of insiders rose to further prominence within the consolidated regime.²⁴⁰

Together, these two changes marked the transition into the dominant party system that we see today in Uganda. They also set up an acrimonious contest in the 2006 election. From exile in South Africa, Besigye merged his Reform Agenda pressure group – a network of people who had worked with him in 2001 – with the PAFO caucus to form the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) party. This time, many of the formerly silent partners within the military and government openly declared their support for his

²³⁷ Carbone, *No-Party Democracy? Ugandan Politics in Comparative Perspective*, 102.

²³⁸ Claire Pamela Atoo, George Okiror, and Arne Tostensen, “Changing the Rules of the Political Game,” in *Electoral Democracy in Uganda: Understanding the Institutional Processes and Outcomes of the 2006 Multiparty Elections*, ed. Julius Kiiza, Sabiti Makara, and Lise Rakner (Kampala: Fountain, 2008), 29.

²³⁹ See: Khisa, “Managing Elite Defection in Museveni’s Uganda: The 2016 Elections in Perspective,” 736–37.

²⁴⁰ This group included Amama Mbabazi, Gilbert Bukenya and Hope Mwesigye.

election. Former UPDF head Mugisha Muntu, long time “historical”²⁴¹ and minister Amana Mushega, even (for a brief time) deputy Prime Minister and Museveni’s childhood friend Eriya Kategaya, among many others, crossed to the FDC. This gave Besigye’s candidacy heightened momentum and allowed him to improve on his 2001 performance to take 37% of the vote. Again, most of this support came from the north and east, and again, the regime used violent tactics to protect its vote and pressure the courts against penalising irregularities.²⁴² The new FDC won 37 seats in the eighth Parliament to become the largest opposition party.

In 2011, a third race between Museveni and Besigye saw a stronger performance for the president, who received 68.4% to Besigye’s 26%. The regime benefited this time from a stronger performance in the north – particularly Teso²⁴³ and Acholi²⁴⁴ – where the long running conflict with the LRA rebels had finally wound down allowing for a measure of social and economic recovery. The president invested heavily in making inroads into these regions, which had given Besigye and Ssemogerere the majority of their totals in 1996, 2001 and 2006. Contrary to the NRM defections before the previous two elections, 2011 saw a number of non-NRM figures join or re-join the party.²⁴⁵ These elections were also conducted with less overt violence than the previous two.²⁴⁶

Given that the NRM was in many respects already a political party throughout the 1990s, it is important to examine what did and did not change after its formal transition in 2005-06. The ambiguity of whether “the Movement” was an official state organ or a political party only marginally decreased. We could summarise that it went from being a state organ that denied it was a party to a party that denied it was a state organ. In the popular imagination it remained both of these, and the blurred boundaries between its political and apolitical attributes remain critical to its success to this day (see chapter

²⁴¹ As mentioned in 3.2.1, the term “historical” refers the original 38 members of the NRC who did not have to face election in 1989 on account of their participation in the Bush War. The term is often used in a more general way to describe anyone with a connection to the NRM of the Bush War era.

²⁴² Human Rights Watch, “In Hope and Fear: Uganda’s Presidential and Parliamentary Polls,” 2006.

²⁴³ Perrot, “An NRM Recapture of Teso in 2011? What Voting Means in a Hybrid Regime.”

²⁴⁴ Omach, “Peace, Security and Elections in Northern Uganda.”

²⁴⁵ Khisa, “Managing Elite Defection in Museveni’s Uganda: The 2016 Elections in Perspective,” 735–36.

²⁴⁶ Sandrine Perrot, Jerome Lafargue, and Sabiti Makara, “Introduction: Looking Back at the 2011 Multiparty Elections in Uganda,” in *Elections in a Hybrid Regime: Revisiting the 2011 Ugandan Polls*, ed. Sandrine Perrot et al. (Kampala: Fountain, 2014), 30.

4). The local agents of the state – particularly the powerful Resident District Commissioners (RDCs) and Internal Security operatives – remained fused with and overtly loyal to the regime, and many voters assumed that only through the party could the resources of the state be accessed.²⁴⁷ One study before the 2011 election found voters in Buliisa who believed that it was illegal to vote for another party.²⁴⁸

The transition to a formal party did give the president some more control over subnational elites, and by extension, the legislature. The NRM caucus' meetings (inparticular its regular "retreats" at Kyankwanzi) gradually developed into the site where the most important policy decisions were made in the absence of opposition and independent MPs (see 6.1.1). This not only granted a small measure of control over the policy making process, but also heightened the incentives for MPs to be official NRM MPs and therefore play by its rules in the election. However this conclusion must be qualified. The creation of an NRM political party did not develop an institutional structure that could truly control the actions of its members as in more robust single or dominant party regimes. From its beginnings, the NRM-O was disorganised, divided and structurally weak, with power disproportionately wielded by the direct and informal interventions of the president via his control of patronage and state appointments – just as it had been in the Movement System. The limited bureaucratic power of the party was centralised in the hands of Secretary-General Amama Mbabazi, who became personally powerful in part by doing Museveni's bidding against historical rivals. But this power only extended so far. For example when candidates lost party primaries in 2006 and 2011 they usually stood as so-called "NRM-Independents" in the general election anyway.²⁴⁹ I will discuss this in detail in chapter 5 (5.2.4).

While internal competition remained high (see 3.3.3) the most important difference for these races in the multiparty era was that an extra layer of intra-party electioneering was added to the pressures of political survival. The obligation to stand in party primaries added a costly and time-consuming burden entirely separate from the general election itself. In the party's strongholds in the rural south, where linkages with Museveni and

²⁴⁷ Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, "The State of Political Pluralism and Democracy at Local Government Level in Uganda: A Report from an Assessment of Seven Districts" (Kampala, 2010), 15.

²⁴⁸ Akijul, "Towards the Uganda 2011 Elections: An Assessment of Conflict Risks and Mitigating Mechanisms" (Kampala, 2010), 41.

²⁴⁹ Kayunga, "Electoral Processes in Uganda: From Individual Merit to Multi-Party Democracy," 138.

the government had long been a critical source of political capital, the idea of being the NRM's official nominee (or "flagbearer") instantly became a highly coveted title. That the attainment of this title brought candidates through primaries organised by the NRM secretariat gave the secretariat somewhat more leverage over them than it had before.

As I will show in chapters 5 and 7, the spectacle of primaries well before the actual election also provided a layer of pro-NRM campaigning that promoted the regime generally. In most areas it was already the case before 2006 that individual merit rules against partisan campaigning were ignored by candidates who promoted the movement as if it were a party already. But with the 2006 shift this pro-Museveni campaigning could take place in more brazen and explicit forms. Local campaigns were now adorned with official partisan paraphernalia and imagery that promoted the NRM and Museveni over the months that primary campaigns were the exclusive political event in the countryside. In fact, it is often suggested that the primaries are a bigger affair than the general election itself.²⁵⁰ This was especially the case in 2011 when primary voting was opened up to all adults regardless of official party membership.

3.3.3 Trends in local competition, political space and elections

Several other trends bear mentioning of the post 1996 NRM. First and foremost, rates of intra-NRM competition at the subnational level have remained extremely high. It is difficult to track this with precision in 1996 and 2001, both because the Movement System made party allegiance informal and because the parliamentary statistics are not readily available. Carbone shows that candidates faced a higher number of opponents in 2001 than 1996, at just over four per constituency,²⁵¹ and according to Rubongoya 10 ministers and 50 other movementist MPs lost re-election in 2001.²⁵²

Since the shift to multipartyism this trend is easier to track. Generally, the individual merit culture within the subnational base of the Movement was carried over through

²⁵⁰ Angelo Izama and Michael Wilkerson, "Uganda: Museveni's Triumph and Weakness," *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 3 (2011): 74.

²⁵¹ Carbone, *No-Party Democracy? Ugandan Politics in Comparative Perspective*, 138.

²⁵² Rubongoya, *Regime Hegemony in Museveni's Uganda*, 145.

this transition.²⁵³ While the total percentage of the NRM bloc in Parliament has remained stable at around 70%, table 3.1 shows that NRM MPs have been increasingly likely to face their main threat from an Independent candidate rather than a member of the opposition. Though some Independents are opposed to the government, the vast majority are “NRM-leaning”,²⁵⁴ especially common in the rural south, where the most common election contest today is between an NRM flagbearer and an NRM-Independent. As a consequence of this, the number of Independents in Parliament compared with opposition party members has been slowly rising. Each election in the multiparty era has seen a large number of incumbents – including powerful NRM “historicals” and ministers – lose to their local rivals in parliamentary races. As table 3.1 shows, only a tiny percentage of NRM MPs were elected unopposed, and the average vote share of successful NRM candidates has been falling since 2006. As will be clear to the reader already, this reality of high intra-party competition informs the argument of this thesis.

Table 3.1: Competition faced by NRM MPs, 2006-16

	2006	2011	2016
Total Direct/ Woman MP constituencies	284	350	402
MPs elected			
NRM	192 (67.6%)	251 (71.7%) ²⁵⁵	284 (70.6%)
Opp. Party	56 (19.7%)	58 (16.6%)	57 (14.2%)
Independent	36 (12.7%)	41 (11.7%)	61 (15.2%)
Winning (opposed) NRM candidates' average vote share	61.2%	56.4%	55.9%
Winning NRM candidates' closest opponent:			
Unopposed	16 (8.3%)	4 (1.6%)	11 (3.9%)
Opp. Party	86 (44.8%)	98 (40.2%)	83 (29.2%)
Independent	90 (46.9%)	142 (58.2%)	190 (66.9%)

Source: Ugandan Electoral Commission.

While this internal competition has been increasing, the political space available to local elites has been growing since 1996. Among the most important examples: districts have

²⁵³ Kayunga, “Electoral Processes in Uganda: From Individual Merit to Multi-Party Democracy,” 146; William Muhumuza, ““Fading Support”? Explaining NRM’s Victory in Uganda’s 2011 Local Elections,” in *Elections in a Hybrid Regime: Revisiting the 2011 Ugandan Polls*, ed. Sandrine Perrot et al. (Kampala: Fountain, 2014), 175; Collord, “From the Electoral Battleground to the Parliamentary Arena: Understanding Intra-Elite Bargaining in Uganda’s National Resistance Movement,” 642.

²⁵⁴ Valérie Golaz and Claire Médard, “Election Results and Public Contestation of the Vote: An Overview of the Uganda 2011 General Elections,” in *Elections in a Hybrid Regime: Revisiting the 2011 Ugandan Polls*, ed. Sandrine Perrot et al. (Kampala: Fountain, 2014), 60.

²⁵⁵ Data for 2011 is missing for 7 races with NRM winners but no information on opponents or results. “MPs elected” figures are therefore percentages of 244, not 251.

increased in number from 33 in 1986, to 56 in 2000, to 112²⁵⁶ in 2010;²⁵⁷ directly elected and women MP constituencies²⁵⁸ have increased by 118 between 2006 and 2016; the cabinet has expanded to over 70 positions (making it one of the largest in the world²⁵⁹); and the number of well-financed presidential advisers, mobilisers, and “special assistants” has increased at a similar rate.²⁶⁰ It is the first of these – so called “districtisation” – that has raised the most concern of observers and critics. Given the crippling costs of creating them,²⁶¹ and the ease with which the constitution allows it to be done, the cabinet had to impose a moratorium on their expansion in 2012.²⁶² The government justifies their proliferation on the basis of improving service delivery and preventing ethnic conflict.

There is ample reason to doubt that service delivery has improved from the rapid creation of districts,²⁶³ and skeptics of this line have offered a number of more political motivations. These include: that new political space provides avenues of patronage to fund the NRM’s electoral machine;²⁶⁴ that it accommodates factions left out of existing district positions in order to prevent elites from deserting the NRM;²⁶⁵ that (along with the expansion of MPs) it puts a strain on the electoral resources of the opposition and therefore increases the electoral areas where the NRM is effectively unchallenged;²⁶⁶

²⁵⁶ The figure of 112 includes Kampala, which is technically a “city” not a district.

²⁵⁷ Government of Uganda, “Decentralization and Local Development in Uganda” (Kampala, 2014), 21.

²⁵⁸ Woman MP seats were allocated one per district, as they still are.

²⁵⁹ Andrew Mwenda, “Uganda Has 3rd Largest Cabinet in the World,” *The Independent* (Kampala, January 2011).

²⁶⁰ Andrew Mwenda and Roger Tangri, “Patronage Politics, Donor Reforms, and Regime Consolidation in Uganda,” *African Affairs* 104, no. 416 (2005): 459.

²⁶¹ See: Umar Kakumba, “Local Government Citizen Participation and Rural Development: Reflections on Uganda’s Decentralisation System,” *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 76, no. 1 (2010): 183–84.

²⁶² Yasiin Mugerwa and Nelson Wesonga, “Cabinet Approves 42 New Constituencies,” *The Daily Monitor*, July 9, 2015.

²⁶³ For a good summary of these see: REEV Consult International, “Review of Local Government Set-Up in Uganda” (Kampala, 2012), 16–17.

²⁶⁴ Kakumba, “Local Government Citizen Participation and Rural Development: Reflections on Uganda’s Decentralisation System,” 183; Elliott D. Green, “Patronage, District Creation, and Reform in Uganda,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 45 (2010): 83–103.

²⁶⁵ ARD, “Democracy and Governance Assessment: Republic of Uganda, 2005” (Burlington, VT, 2005), 41; Joe Oloka-Onyango, “Decentralization Without Human Rights? Local Governance and Access to Justice in Post-Movement Uganda” (Kampala, 2007), 6; Gina Lambright, “The Dilemma of Decentralization: A Study of Local Politics in Uganda” (Michigan State University, 2003), 92.

²⁶⁶ Golaz and Médard, “Election Results and Public Contestation of the Vote: An Overview of the Uganda 2011 General Elections,” 68; Joe Oloka-Onyango and Josephine Ahikire, “How Do You Control Consent?,” in *Controlling Consent: Uganda’s 2016 Elections*, ed. Joe Oloka-Onyango and Josephine Ahikire (Trenton, NJ.: Africa World Press, 2017), 4.

and that it directly increases Museveni's popularity because citizens widely support it.²⁶⁷ One argument that is not as often proffered is that the increase in districts and constituencies further shrinks the power bases of subnational elites of whom the regime is wary.²⁶⁸ Even the strongest MP or district power broker now controls a political base and local machine that extends to only a minute fraction of the country's total population, in stark contrast to the elected districts of the 1950s-60s, which, as mentioned above, were powerful players in centre-periphery relations before being abolished in 1967. Chapter 5 will give further evidence of this argument by revealing how political networks (or "camps") were still centralised at the district level in 2016.

The politics of the local state have undergone several other key reforms. By the mid 1990s the LCs had lost their participatory energy, with council meetings rarely being called by chairmen, and a general bitterness that much of the state's administrative responsibilities were borne by them without compensation.²⁶⁹ The 1997 Local Government Act made the positions at LC3 and LC5 salaried, and for the first time, directly elected (as opposed to the use of electoral colleges). It also made it very difficult to remove elected LC leaders outside of an election – in contrast to the standing right of recall in the original RC system.²⁷⁰ Elections to these posts – the first since 1992 – took place the following year, and unlike the quick and simple process of the early polls, took a full five months to conduct. These races saw fierce competition for the salaried posts on offer, with highly sectarian and monetised campaigns in which most incumbents lost.²⁷¹ The post of LC5 chairman grew to be especially powerful, and for a time in the early 2000s, was arguably more coveted than the position of MP.²⁷² In the past decade however a general re-centralisation of district council functions, along with their geographical shrinkage, has seen a revision of this ordering.

²⁶⁷ Muhumuza, "'Fading Support'? Explaining NRM's Victory in Uganda's 2011 Local Elections," 167; Green, "Decentralisation and Conflict in Uganda," 439.

²⁶⁸ Douglas Karekoma Singiza and Jaap de Visser, "The Unresolved Ethnic Question in Uganda's District Councils," *Law, Democracy and Development* 19 (2015): 123.

²⁶⁹ Ddungu, "Popular Forms and the Question of Democracy, The Case of Resistance Councils in Uganda," 385; Oloka-Onyango, "The Labours of Drawing Up a Human Rights Balance Sheet," 5; Golooba-Mutebi, "Reassessing Popular Participation in Uganda."

²⁷⁰ William Muhumuza, "The 1998 Local Government Elections and Democratization in Uganda," in *Voting For Democracy in Uganda: Issues in Recent Elections*, ed. Sabiti Makara, Geoffrey B. Tukahebwa, and Foster E. Byarugaba (Kampala: LDC, 2003), 230.

²⁷¹ Muhumuza, 243; Kayunga, "The No-Party System of Democracy and the Management of Ethnic Conflicts in Uganda," 141–42.

²⁷² Green, "Decentralisation and Conflict in Uganda," 434.

While district and sub-county politics flourished after 1996, the opposite trend has occurred at the lower levels of the LC system. The 1997 Act formalised an existing trend which designated LC1s and LC2s as “administrative units” rather than units of “local government”,²⁷³ meaning that their council members were not sufficiently salaried, facilitated with resident civil servants, or given control of any significant standing budget. While the chairs of the LC3 and LC5 committees were elected by secret ballot, until 2001 LC1 and LC2 leaders were still elected by the same queueing system of the original system.²⁷⁴ For all of these reasons they were not subject to the same highly competitive politics as higher posts in the local government elections. Since 2001, however, they have not been elected at all. In 2006 the government attempted to hold elections on a no-party basis (despite the fact that parties had been legalised for other posts), but this was successfully challenged by the FDC in court. The government then dragged its feet on making the necessary legal changes,²⁷⁵ and has since argued that holding any election at all is too expensive.²⁷⁶

That the LC1 and LC2 chairmen are immovable objects in villages and parishes, and that they remain tied to the idea of the Movement, has given them a critical importance in the overall NRM system.²⁷⁷ In spite of their lapsed electoral mandate, they remain extremely important to the everyday life of rural citizens. Even though the formal procedures of their councils and committees have atrophied, chairmen are still called upon to adjudicate social matters in the community, and liaise with the security and developmental arms of the state.²⁷⁸ The fact that they remain *de facto* NRM members who cannot be replaced has given the regime a permanent foothold in rural politics that it continues to use to its advantage. One could argue that they have gradually come to replace the partisan chiefs in the old system, albeit with a significantly higher degree of community consensus and consent. The nature and significance of their role will be

²⁷³ Ahikire, *Localised or Localising Democracy: Gender and the Politics of Decentralisation in Contemporary Uganda*, 52.

²⁷⁴ Ahikire, 89.

²⁷⁵ Muhumuza, ““Fading Support”? Explaining NRM’s Victory in Uganda’s 2011 Local Elections,” 141.

²⁷⁶ Yasiin Mugerwa, “Government Suspends LC Elections Again,” *The Daily Monitor*, March 23, 2017.

²⁷⁷ Muhumuza, ““Fading Support”? Explaining NRM’s Victory in Uganda’s 2011 Local Elections,” 140.

²⁷⁸ Ahikire, *Localised or Localising Democracy: Gender and the Politics of Decentralisation in Contemporary Uganda*, 139; Paul Francis and Robert James, “Balancing Rural Poverty Reduction and Citizen Participation: The Contradictions of Uganda’s Decentralization Program,” *World Development* 31, no. 2 (2003): 329.

addressed in chapters 4 and 5.

Finally, one point that may seem minor bears significantly on the later findings of this thesis: the dates of elections across the spectrum of political offices have slowly become aligned. After fighting hard in the CA to hold the presidential election weeks before the parliamentary ones, from 2006 onwards the regime agreed to hold both on the same day. The LC elections, held independently in 1998 and 2002, were conducted three months after the 2006 presidential and parliamentary votes, and only weeks later in both 2011 and 2016. The consequence of this is that an “election season” now consolidates the campaigning of all actors in the local polity, forming a greater necessity for local networking and cooperation, which I will discuss in chapter 5. Nationally, it also means that the presidential campaigns run in parallel to all of these local campaigns. I will argue in chapter 7 why this is important for the regime’s electoral mobilisation effort.

3.4 Conclusion

It stands as a remarkable political achievement that the NRM inherited a state which had hitherto produced unstable, low-participatory regimes, and consolidated a system of dominant party control which, although fundamentally authoritarian, includes the regular elections and relatively high levels of political participation that previous regimes avoided. In doing so it uprooted an entrenched a two-party political culture which had previously showed itself to be highly resilient after periods of repression. This chapter has argued that the interim period of 1986-96 was skillfully used by the regime to consolidate its power. Specifically, the regime used the non-party Resistance Councils as a space to develop an “individual merit” politics that could break free of the previous UPC-DP duopoly on formal political participation, which affected higher subnational politics by the time that direct parliamentary elections were finally allowed in 1994 and 1996.

Reflecting on the NRM’s consolidation, it is important to note the things that it *did not* change about the modes of Ugandan politics it inherited in 1986. This chapter has shown that, for reasons both historical-institutional (colonial district design) and geographical (rural immobility), Ugandan politics has generally tended to be a local affair. Subnational elites with intimate connections to the parochial politics of these

rural arenas – especially MPs and district politicians – have formed the backbone of successful national parties with otherwise weak institutional and ideological bases. This is something that the NRM has in common with the parties that preceded it. For all its leftist origins and “movement” branding, the NRM did not undertake a wholesale reform of Ugandan society in any way that would create a binding ideology or policy platform. Other than the freelancing of some ambitious DAs and cadres in its first few years, it did not seek to intervene in the substance of local politics in any way that would upset the divisions and factions that had animated the local polity in previous generations.

What the NRM *did* change was the partisan framework in which that these local divisions articulate themselves. Where UPC-DP duopoly previously meant that powerful local politicians had little choice but to ally their industry and identity with either party, the NRM created a political brand capable of incorporating and transcending multiple local factions. Understanding this change leads us back to the critically important concept of individual merit. While this mantra acted as a convenient tool for the NRM to demonise and constrict the old parties, it would be a mistake to dismiss its lasting salience in rural politics. This salience lies entirely in the first of its two words. Of course there was no more *merit* to local politics than before – on the contrary, the local polity remains riven by sectarian, ethnic, material and personal politics prevalent before. The true change was the further *individualisation* of political mobilisation, towards more atomised, personal modes of political entrepreneurship and networking within the local polity. Where the DP and UPC brands were inseparable from the minutia of local politics, over its first decades in power the NRM brand came to transcend them, acting as more of a minimal condition for local candidates than a defining one. The one significant reform that the regime did enact – the expansion of local political space through the RCs/LC system and districtisation – further localised rural political movements into ever-smaller polities. In doing so Museveni developed a dominant party system better tailored to Uganda’s decentralised political geography than any previous regime.

This narration gives a cursory understanding of the NRM’s success, but also raises questions. How precisely do local candidates navigate the NRM local monopoly? How does internal competition affect the calculus of regime survival, rather than merely

blocking opposition mobilisation? These are the questions that the next chapters address.

Chapter 4

Politics in a Partisan Monopoly: The Substance and Structure of Intra-NRM Local Competition

A contention of this thesis is that the NRM regimes' electoral survival relies on it being, in some aspects, *open* enough to include the endogenous tensions and divisions of the local rural polity. The previous chapter showed how the individual merit protocols of the interim and Movement System era periods (1986-2006) allowed the subsequent dominant party system to incorporate and monopolise these divisions. The aim of this chapter is to provide an ethnographic account of the nature of intra-party politics during the 2016 election. It will show how, and where, the party is open and internally competitive, and what forms of politics it houses. To do this, it will draw on primary interview and ethnographic data for the first time.

In investigating the substance and structure of intra-NRM politics, the chapter reveals two categories of findings. The first of these (4.1, 4.2) looks at the *structure of the party* as viewed from the village perspective. Here I review the breadth of the party's effective "monopoly" on rural political terrains – a term which I will define in the several dimensions in which it applies. I then locate the internal space for competitive local politics by figuring the precise balance between party's apolitical components and its more competitive, open ones. The purpose of this is to use contemporary empirical data to show how the decentralised, participatory local polity discussed in chapter 3 exists today in the three case districts. Put another way, the aim here is to simply understand what the NRM *is* from a village perspective.

A second category (4.3, 4.4) documents the *forms that local political movements take* within these competitive spaces. Specifically, it reveals how the endogenous grievances and frustrations of the local polity fill the spaces for competitive politics within the party in the form of the campaigns of local politicians. To do this, it covers two broad forms of local grievance: "horizontal," meaning ethnic, religious, or regional; and "vertical," meaning frustrations with the quality of governance in an anti-*status quo* or anti-incumbent narrative. The intention of this is to understand the strong bond between grievance-driven voters and the local politicians who champion their causes. Later in the thesis (7.1) I will argue that this bond enables local actors to act as intermediaries

of the president's successful mobilisation of the local polity during his re-election campaign.

Further to simply documenting the bases of these subnational political bonds, I will carry an important argument throughout the chapter. In the process of translating these social divisions into political campaigns, both the standing power of endogenous grievances *and* the opportunistic agency of elite candidates are at work in the precise form of their political articulation. I found no case where elites had conjured divisive campaign issues and movements independent of any social reality on the ground, nor any cases where endogenous divisions manifest themselves in political campaigns without being shaped in some way by the elites who champion them. This distinct structure/agency balance is crucial as it relates to the general argument of the thesis.

4.1 The breadth of NRM “monopoly”

In the 2016 election, ten years after the transition to multipartyism, the local politics of the rural south looked similar to what it did during the Movement System of 1996-2006. The most divisive politics was local rather than national, and it was housed within the NRM rather than between it and opposition parties. While the opposition was active to varying degrees in the eight MP constituencies that I studied, in each of these the NRM was the default space of political operation in lower levels of politics, especially those politics in which mass participation was essentially an NRM invention – the village, parish and sub-county (see 3.2.1).¹

It is important to define what I mean by “monopoly”. In using this term, I do not mean that opposition activity does not exist *at all* in the rural south, but rather that for the vast majority of the population the forum culture of politics pioneered in the Movement System remains in place today. The term, however, needs to be understood in the multiple dimensions in which it applies. Here, I look at three of these forms of monopoly: “empirical” (4.1.1), being the simple numerical breadth of the party's domination of most local offices; “normative” (4.1.2), being the common idea that politics *should* be kept within the party; and “coercive” (4.1.3), being the degree to

¹ Parts of southern Bugiri were a slight exception to this, which I will explain in 7.4.

which coercion and intimidation buttress the prior two forms and prevents local movements from spilling over into the opposition.

4.1.1 Empirical monopoly

The most straightforward form of the NRM's monopoly is its simple numerical superiority in the existing political order. Table 4.1 shows the extent of this in the three case districts:

Table 4.1 NRM dominance in case districts (2011-16 incumbents)

	Kyenjojo			Kayunga			Bugiri		
	NRM	IND	OPP	NRM	IND	OPP	NRM	IND	OPP
Direct MPs	2	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	1
Woman MPs	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
LC5 Chairs	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
LC5 Councillors	23	1	0	15	1	0	16	3	0
LC3 Chairs	10	4	0	7	2	0	9	1	0
LC3 Councillors	171	12	1	94	15	3	95	13	12
Total offices	208	17	1	120	19	3	123	17	13

Source: Ugandan Electoral Commission.

While each of my three case districts are in the rural south, they display different degrees of NRM dominance. Kyenjojo, in the typically pro-Museveni western region, was the most consolidated monopoly. In each of the three constituencies there, interviewees reported almost no organised opposition presence during the elections, and every public interviewee personally identified with the Movement.² Kayunga and Bugiri, which both had more opposition sympathy in some areas, were still dominated by NRM office holders.

One factor common to all three districts was that the NRM's dominance was stronger in more remote rural areas than in the higher populated towns. Citizens in bigger towns tend to be more educated and mobile than rural dwellers, which correlates with greater opposition sentiment. They also tend to have large concentrations of young men organised in the transport industry and other forms of migrant labour that are often pillars of opposition mobilisation. Conversely, in the more remote and "deep" villages

² Public interview KYE-MN2-5T#1; public interview KYE-MN2-6T#1; public interview KYE-MN2-1E#1.

in the countryside the NRM maintains a complete stranglehold on political participation. Here, elite and public interviewees spoke about “contesting” or “standing” assuming I knew this meant contesting within the NRM – just as they often discuss the political battles between Local Councillors and Chairmen (LC3 & LC5) without needing to remind me that challengers to NRM incumbents came from within the party. Correspondingly, it is in the more local polities – the village (LC1), parish (LC2) and to a slightly lesser extent the sub-county (LC3) – that the party is almost guaranteed of success.³ Even opposition sympathisers and supporters are likely to support NRM candidates at this level.⁴

In Bugiri, the only case district with a significant opposition presence at the MP and LC5 level, the NRM was still generally seen to have a monopoly on these local (LC1-3) domains of participation.⁵ One quite well educated villager said that although the FDC Woman MP candidate Namatende Eunice was receiving a lot of support, “when it comes to local level, people from the village will again just go back to their party, NRM.” In spite of the FDC’s growing clout in the broader eastern region, he continued, “when it comes to rural areas, something just sticks in their minds to stick with the NRM party.”⁶ I will discuss the complicated presence of the opposition in Bugiri more in 7.4.

The local and rural dominance of the NRM is also evident in the form of the party’s organisation. Many people described the NRM/opposition imbalance with reference to both the party structures and membership cards that parties were expected to have.⁷ While the NRM maintains thirty-person committees at the village, parish, sub-county and district level during the election (see 5.2.2), the FDC (which was the strongest opposition party in all three case districts) had almost no structures to speak of, and certainly nothing at the village or parish level (with the possible exception of Bukooli Central⁸). In the words of one interviewee in Kyenjojo, the presence of some individual opposition sympathisers without these structures meant that opposition parties “are here but they are not visible.”⁹ In Kayunga too, the lack of structures with an NRM-style

³ Public interview BUG-BC3-1E#1.

⁴ Public interview KAY-NS1-1E#1; public interview BUG-BC1-1E#1.

⁵ Public interview BUG-BN2-1E#1.

⁶ Public interview BUG-BN1-1E#1.

⁷ Public interview KAY-NS1-1E#1; public interview KYE-MN1-2E#1.

⁸ Some elite interviewees spoke of these structures but I cannot verify that they exist. Interview 52.

⁹ Public interview KYE-MC1-1E#1.

procedure for the election of office holders and hierarchies was seen by some to invalidate the claim of some to be opposition supporters at all:

There are other parties, but they do not have support on the ground... because you cannot find the structure of the other party, or a leader of those parties. There are some who claim to be members, but they are not being elected. Democratically we know that people should go through elections.¹⁰

This speaks as much to the empirical presence of the NRM as to the absence of the opposition. The fact that the NRM maintains its structures and membership (a process that I will describe in 5.2.1-2) is seen by many to signify its empirical strength from the ground up. In fact, the NRM structures' mere presence in the village is more important than their actual function, which is actually extremely limited. This unrivalled presence gives the NRM an advantage in recruiting candidates, who often chose to stand within the party despite being highly critical of it and the regime. Empirical monopoly is therefore cyclical and self-reinforcing. In the words of one political aspirant with opposition sympathies, "I go for NRM, because you first look at what the majority of people want."¹¹ Put another, somewhat tautological way, the NRM remains a monopoly in part because it already is a monopoly.

4.1.2 Normative monopoly

Further to its empirical dominance, the vast majority of interviewees who identified strongly with the NRM repeated the Movement System ideal that politics *ought* to be contained within the party, not just that it already *is*. This more normative dimension of monopoly is interdependent with the empirical one. In this narrative the party is seen to have enough space for internal competition (see 4.2.2) to make opposition membership a redundant, even radical step. This is conditioned by the perception that the local party is still extremely open and participatory. All of those who endorsed the idea of the party monopoly spoke of the NRM with a sense of collective ownership, speaking of it as more of a concept than an organisation – albeit one tied to Museveni. In this sense, the

¹⁰ Public interview KAY-BC1-1E#1.

¹¹ Public interview BUG-BN1-1E#1.

NRM remains more of an open idea than a closed entity:¹² people speak of “the NRM” as the general system of politics introduced and favoured by Museveni, not as a certain group of local actors or a narrow selection of policies. Indeed, one of the most important normative dimensions of the NRM dominant party system is the idea that the party brand cannot be truly owned by any local group or individual – aside from Museveni.

A significant pillar of this normative monopoly is the Movement’s ambiguous position as both a political party and an arm of the state (see 3.2.2). Aside from the fact that so many people in NRM strongholds continue to revere Museveni personally, this implied state attachment also leads the NRM politicians to be seen as the only candidates capable of bringing state resources to the community, which is the most important criterion of their success (see 4.4.1). For example, one interviewee in Kyenjojo said simply that “the NRM is the only party [in this village] because they support Museveni.”¹³ When asked about the FDC or other opposition parties, people often claimed that it had done nothing to provide the resources of governance – associating these with Museveni and the NRM rather than the state.¹⁴ “I haven’t seen what they have done,” said one woman of the FDC in Bugiri, as if its political merit required an entirely alternate state apparatus.¹⁵

Relatedly, the NRM’s dominance of local political spaces is buttressed by the historical interpretation that local participation in general – and the LC system specifically – was created by the Movement after 1986. This is the official narrative of the party, and is accepted many by older residents, especially older women, who tend to be the bedrock of NRM support in villages.¹⁶ These voters often say out of hand that bringing the opposition “back” in any form would mean return to the pre-1986 situation.¹⁷ Conversely, it tends to be the small but growing demographic of educated youth –

¹² Richard Vokes and Sam Wilkins, “Party, Patronage and Coercion in the NRM’s 2016 Re-Election: Imposed or Embedded?,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10, no. 4 (2016): 581–600.

¹³ Public interview KYE-MN1-1E#1.

¹⁴ Public interview BUG-BN1-2E#1; public interview BUG-BN2-1E#1.

¹⁵ Public interview BUG-BC1-2E#1.

¹⁶ Public interview KYE-MC2-1E#1; public interview KAY-BC2-1E#1; public interview BUG-BC3-1E#1. Several women told me that the NRM’s affirmative action for women leaders (in the form of women councilors and MPs) and avenues for participation (the women’s wing of the party structures) meant that they continued to rely on the party for their right to participate at all: Public interview BUG-BC2-3T#1.

¹⁷ Public interview KYE-MS1-1E#1.

especially young men – who are slowly moving to the FDC in rural areas.¹⁸ A boom in private secondary education in rural areas has precipitated this, as graduates usually aspire to an ideal of formal-sector employment that the NRM’s generally pro-peasantry model of development is not seen to provide. While these groups are still very much a minority, owing to Uganda’s extremely young demographics they are seen by voters in all of my districts to be a growing force behind the opposition. One middle-aged woman in Bugiri dismissed their “rebellious” critique of the NRM and Museveni in a way that encapsulates the predominant attitudes in support of the NRM’s normative monopoly:

A: ... I think that the youth are wrong to [cast a “protest vote”] – they are just lazy. They don’t want to dig [farm] so they just hang out in towns. But the protests focus generally on the president.

Q: If the youth focus on problems like unemployment, do you think that there are any problems like this yourself? And if so who is responsible for those?

A: I think that they have a point, but the way that they explain the message is wrong. In a family, if the children are not happy with the way the home is run, it is not good to go out and shout about it. They should use the right channels. If they think things are bad they should take things through the youth councils, rather than casting a protest vote. I recognise that there are inadequacies and things that need improvement, but there are better ways it could be handled. The youth are just impatient.¹⁹

Aside from the important references to the president’s patriarchal position in the NRM as the head of a family (see 7.2), note here the fact that she grants the “point” that there are problems that need addressing, but maintains that the NRM’s “right channels” provide a valid forum for their resolution. From this perspective, voting for the opposition is a radical, even revolutionary act. Hence, the normative footing of the NRM’s empirical monopoly is dependent on its perceived openness as a forum for resolving disputes.

¹⁸ Public interview BUG-BN2-1E#1; public interview KYE-MN2-3T#1.

¹⁹ Public interview BUG-BC2-3T#1 (emphasis added).

4.1.3 Coercive monopoly

A third dimension of the NRM's local monopoly on participation in the rural south relates to its subtle but powerful use of coercion and intimidation to prevent opposition mobilisation. This involves the abuse of its incumbency in several ways. One common tool is the withholding of state resources to opposition members – whether this is real or assumed. Just as people chose to support the NRM because of its perceived hold on resources, many fear that voting for someone else will impede their access to these.²⁰ Museveni openly tells citizens that voting for opposition members of parliament will mean that he “sends” them nothing.²¹ On a more local basis, many fear that voting or mobilising for an opposition party will inhibit their access to various forms of distribution that flow through the official NRM structures and the LC1 chairmen.

Further to this, the NRM uses the considerable security apparatuses of the state to monitor opposition activity and threaten opposition mobilisation. As well as the LC1 and LC2 chairmen (discussed below), this structure also includes the network or Gombolola (sub-county) Internal Security Officers (GISOs), answerable to the District Internal Security Officer (DISO), who in turn reports to the RDC. The police, who have outposts in many larger trading centers, also act as a network of political surveillance. Voters and elites alike spoke of “the security” – a reference to these networks – as a by-word for the president's political intelligence, implying that he personally knows who and where the opposition is. Take this exchange with the political assistant to an MP in Kyenjojo for example:

A: But when a person wants to tarnish your name, especially in the security, he sees where he can link you, wherever he can create a ridge between you and state house.

Q: What do you mean in the security?

A: The whole security here, it has thinking of the party, the NRM party. So if you are against the NRM you are against the state.

²⁰ Public interview KAY-NN1-1E#1.

²¹ Abubakar Kirunda, “Don't Re-Elect Katuntu - Museveni,” *The Daily Monitor*, March 9, 2015, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Dont-re-elect--Katuntu--Museveni/-/688334/2646396/-/y9vxolz/-/index.html>; Perez Rumanzi and Colleb Mugume, “Blame Your MP, Museveni Tells Rukungiri,” *The Daily Monitor*, January 8, 2016, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/SpecialReports/Elections/Blame-your-MP--Museveni-tells-Rukungiri/-/859108/3025092/-/q0nhw5/-/index.html>.

Q: So by that do you mean the RDC?

A: I cannot specify, but you understand that everything begins from the head.²²

Many figures in the “security” openly campaign for the NRM, in spite of their state positions. Some voters also voiced fears that the “Crime Preventers”, volunteer village security groups trained by the police, would intimidate people on election day – although for the most part this did not occur.²³

Contrary to the assumption that political repression is most common in opposition areas, I found that it was in the stronger NRM areas of Kyenjojo, northern Kayunga and northern Bugiri that people spoke of the potential backlash of the security organs for political transgressions. In one remote village in Kyenjojo, an interviewee supposed that if a resident like him was to appear one day with an FDC membership card, “there and then they take the information to the chairman LC1, that this man is like this... so when they see you with a card of FDC or any other party, they take you as if you are carrying a gun.”²⁴ Clearly, in spite of the normative monopoly opinions profiled above, most people in the village are well aware of the potential of meeting this coercive edge.

Aside from retaliatory coercion (and somewhat linked to it), NRM empirical monopoly is also maintained by a general sense that voting for a different party would bring insecurity to the both the whole country and the community. One young person in Bugiri framed the NRM’s dominance in reference to this: “The most popular party is NRM, and people in these rural areas they fear to change. They think that if they change they may get some problems. They only fix on that which they know most.”²⁵ In Kayunga, a frustrated opposition voter said attempts to build the FDC brand in his village were hampered by the widespread apprehension that this could ruffle too many feathers:

²² Interview 6.

²³ Public interview BUG-BC2-1E#1; on the complicated functions of the Crime Preventers, see: Rebecca Tapscott, “Where the Wild Things Are Not: Crime Preventers and the 2016 Ugandan Elections,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10, no. 4 (2016): 693–712; James Nkuubi, “Of ‘Yellow’ Police, A Cadre Army and the Liberation War Psychosis: The Question of Electoral Security,” in *Controlling Consent: Uganda’s 2016 Elections*, ed. Joe Oloka-Onyango and Josephine Ahikire (Kampala: Africa World Press, 2016), 401–30.

²⁴ Public interview, reference withheld.

²⁵ Public interview BUG-BN2-2E#1.

Q: So if you wanted to be an LC1 chair, would you have to be a member of the NRM?

A: If you come as FDC, you are likely to find it hard to go through. That's why in most cases people decide to come as independent, because when you are associated with FDC, or Go Forward, or what, they see you as a problem and they won't support you.²⁶

Again, it is the elders in village society that promote this idea most. In the words of an older man in Kyenjojo, "We old men suffered in the past. We were beaten, we used to line up for sugar and salt. These youth have not seen such, that's why they are supporting FDC."²⁷

There is a fine line between whether the fear of throwing out the NRM is a fear of the opposition's actions in government or a fear of retaliatory actions by the NRM and Museveni himself. I heard strains of both of these opinions in various interviews, often in combination with one another.²⁸ It is important to mention, however, that many of those who were keenly aware of the NRM's retaliatory coercion (the man who used the gun metaphor above, for example) were still enthusiastic supporters of the party in the more normative sense.²⁹ This reflects an interpretation that the NRM's capacity to maintain peace and order necessitates a degree of compliance by the citizenry that opposition membership contradicts. While many observers may find such a coercive backbone fundamentally at odds with the presence of the internally democratic narratives of normative monopoly mentioned above, understanding the NRM's dominance from the ground requires one to see these two dimensions of monopoly working in tandem to reproduce the empirical one.³⁰ I will discuss the precise place of coercion within the NRM in 8.2.

4.2 The space for internal competition

From the village perspective, there are three general components to the NRM's

²⁶ Public interview KAY-NS1-1E#1.

²⁷ Public interview KYE-MN2-2T#1.

²⁸ Public interview KAY-BC1-3E#1.

²⁹ Public interview KAY-BC1-3E#1.

³⁰ See: Jude Kagoro, "The Military Ethos in the Politics of Post-1986 Uganda," *Social Sciences Directory* 2, no. 2 (2013): 31–46.

ontology. Two are fixed and immovable features of the party-state: President Museveni at the top, and the LC1/LC2 (village and parish) chairmen at the bottom. These two components are unique in the system because they are the only points at which the formal NRM political party, the administrative state and the coercive/security state are intertwined and personified in a single office holder. While these figures are expected to maintain the electoral consent of their subjects, they are in some ways apolitical, and not deemed to be open to competitive forces by those who subscribe to the NRM's normative monopoly. I will elaborate on exactly why Museveni himself is seen as apolitical in 7.2.1. Here, I will discuss the fixed and competitive dimensions of the NRM at the local level.

Table 4.2: The NRM's fixed and competitive spaces

Polity	Competitive	Fixed
National		President
District	Woman MP LC5 Chairman	
Constituency ³¹	MP	
Sub-county	LC3 Chairman LC5 Councillor	
Parish	LC3 Councillor	LC2 Chairman
Village		LC1 Chairman

Source: compiled by the author.

LC1/LC2 chairman, while critically important to the lives of Ugandans in the rural south, are both more the *conditions* for delivering the fruits of the state than they are the *agents* of it. Such agency is reserved for the third component that sits between LC1/LC2 chairman and the president composed of the broad field of rival politicians clustered at the sub-county (LC3), district (LC5), and MP constituency levels. These figures compete against each other in a space reserved for competitive politics within the NRM, mounting campaigns that embody divisions and grievances of their respective polities – divisions which the “fixed” components of the system seem to transcend. The obligations of delivering from office in the patrimonial sense, and for setting right various ingrained grievances in the broader community, sit with the players in this more competitive layer of politics, the apex of which is usually the MP.

³¹ Note that in 15% of districts there is only one directly elected MP, meaning that the district and constituency polities are the same.

In the following sections I show how these fixed and competitive political spaces fit within the NRM's political narrative.

4.2.1 Fixed: village and parish

LC1 and LC2 chairmen are critically important in the lives of most Ugandans in rural areas. In a sense, they personify the local state, and according to several people I spoke to they are the second most important office in the country after the president.³² While in theory they govern as the head of a nine-person committee, in reality most tasks are informal and are adjudicated by the chairman alone, with the most important of these relating to the general maintenance of order and comity in the village (3.2.1) They also link with the security organs to achieve this: "if they [LC1] say that 'no, this man is not guilty', no one is going to arrest you."³³ The LC1 is also the first port of call for anyone new to the village, and they regularly note IDs and official documentation of visitors (as they did for me) and relay information to the police to monitor people's movement. I found that they were more meticulous in these tasks in more remote areas, and that in bigger towns meeting with them was not as important. LC2 chairmen have the same function at the parish level, although many interviewees reported having minimal contact with them, unless in the event that something cannot be handled by the LC1 chairman.³⁴

As an extension of this security mandate, the LC1 chairman performs the task of adjudicating various civil disputes within the community.³⁵ In the words of one interviewee in Bugiri, his purpose is "just to keep law and order in the village. When there are disputes in the community, people go to the LC1 chairman."³⁶ This is particularly important for land disputes, which are quite frequent given the poor registration of land titles in rural areas,³⁷ but can involve tasks as diverse as disciplining truant children or enforcing the standards of village latrines.³⁸ LC1 chairmen are also called on to verify the character of village residents when they apply for jobs, loans, or

³² Public interview KYE-MS1-1E#1.

³³ Public interview BUG-BN1-1E#1.

³⁴ Public interview KAY-BC1-1E#1; public interview KAY-NS2-1T#1.

³⁵ Public interview BUG-BN2-2E#1.

³⁶ Public interview BUG-BN2-1E#1.

³⁷ Public interview KAY-NN1-1E#1; public interview KYE-MN1-2E#1.

³⁸ Public interview BUG-BC2-1E#1.

various state funds at higher levels.³⁹ They also have a role in the administration of government programmes more broadly, which involves both relaying information to higher levels about the needs of the community⁴⁰ and assisting with the rollout of various programmes that affect the village, like the construction of infrastructure or the delivery of state services.⁴¹

As mentioned in 3.3.3, LC1 and LC2 chairmen were last elected in 2001, before the multi-party transition, making them the last structural vestiges of the Movement System. For this reason, they perform a critical but ambiguous function at the boundary between the NRM and the state. While they all identify as NRM owing to their history, their local realm of operation, mixed with the broad discretion they are afforded, often lead them to be seen as non-political figures. It is common to hear opposition supporters in rural areas speak highly of their chairmen, seeing no reason why they should not continue serving.⁴² This reflects a certain distance from contentious governmental decisions that higher levels of local government are mired in (see 4.2.2). One recent survey found that many village residents were not even aware that their last election was so long ago.⁴³ LC1s and LC2s are officially “administrative units” not “local governments” like LC3 or LC5,⁴⁴ and they do not control a significant statutory budget or any revenue regime. Although no elections were held in 2016, for the first time the NRM held primaries for LC1 and LC2 chairman, which afforded an opportunity to test the support of incumbents electorally. While the results of these have not been published, in my research sites most incumbents appear to have won their primaries, in stark contrast with anti-incumbency rates for other levels of local government.

In spite of the relatively non-political status of these chairmen, they are clearly seen by residents to be members of the Movement and open supporters of Museveni, and they play an important political role in the party’s re-election efforts.⁴⁵ According to one opposition activist in Bugiri, if the LC1s were ever replaced by the opposition, “then Museveni would have no stand. He would just be in the air hanging, but down here, no

³⁹ Public interview KYE-MC1-1E#1; public interview KYE-MS2-1E#1.

⁴⁰ Public interview KYE-MN1-2E#1; public interview KAY-BC1-2E#1.

⁴¹ Public interview KYE-MN1-1E#1; public interview KAY-NN1-2E#1.

⁴² Public interview BUG-BC1-1E#1.

⁴³ Christine van Hooft, *pers. comm.*

⁴⁴ International, “Review of Local Government Set-Up in Uganda,” 15.

⁴⁵ Public interview KYE-MC1-1E#1; public interview KYE-MN1-2E#1.

roots. That's why he has remained with those ones."⁴⁶ Further to their linkages to the security organs, the chairmen are also linked with the NRM party organs, and frequently appear at the visiting rallies of higher politicians praising the president. One resident in Kayunga said of their role that "in this period of elections, the government gives a lot of proposals, so they say 'you Movement people you come and get this' and the LCs are the ones who come and get his small sum of money."⁴⁷ In some cases, LC1 chairmen were members of the thirty-person NRM structural committees,⁴⁸ although they were technically not supposed to be (see 5.2.2).

It is unclear to what degree LC1 chairmen get involved in the campaigns of the competitive races for offices above them. In my first period of fieldwork I got the impression that most refrain from picking sides in these. One chairman in Bugiri for example declined to answer my questions about who he was supporting in the LC5 and MP races because "I have to take a neutral stance as an LC1 chairman," (although he did declare his support for Museveni without such restraint, adding that he will "encourage others to do as well").⁴⁹ However when I discussed this impression with several MP candidates themselves after the elections some told me that LC1 chairmen usually campaign for candidates in higher races.⁵⁰ Regardless of which of these is true, it is certainly clear that LC1 and LC2 office holders themselves are seen in a different light than those in higher offices.

4.2.2 Competitive: sub-county, district, and MP/Woman MP

Above this fixed local space, rural voters participate in a fiercely competitive political space for the various posts which are contested in the general election. This space encompasses four different polities: the parish, the sub-county, the MP constituency, and the district (ascending in size, see table 4.3). Generally, most people see the directly elected MP as top of the hierarchy,⁵¹ followed by LC5 Chair, LC3 Chair, LC5

⁴⁶ Interview 51.

⁴⁷ Public interview KAY-NN1-1E#1.

⁴⁸ Public interview BUG-BC5-1T#1; interview 18.

⁴⁹ Public interview BUG-BC2-2T#1.

⁵⁰ Interview 7, interview 23.

⁵¹ Note that the term "directly elected", although commonly used for constituency MPs, is confusing because the Woman MP, although reserved for woman candidates, is also directly elected.

Councillor, and LC3 Councillor.⁵² To clarify, these are all state positions in local and national government that members of any party can stand for. I refer to them as spaces for “internal” competition because the narrative of normative monopoly pre-supposes competition against NRM incumbents from NRM challengers. Therefore the vast majority of rivals to incumbents during the election are NRM members who challenge through the party primaries, and if they lose these, as “NRM independents” in the general election – a process I will explain in detail in section 5.2.

Table 4.3 The NRM’s competitive space

		Level of government		
		LC3	LC5	Parliament
Polity of election	District (LC5)		LC5 Chair	Woman MP
	Constituency			Directly Elected MP
	Sub County (LC3)	LC3 Chair	LC5 Councillor	
	Parish (LC2)	LC3 Councillor		

Source: compiled by the author

The voters who embrace normative dimensions of the NRM monopoly do so because this competitive space forms an outlet for the grievances and frustrations of the community and acts as a forum of their resolution. As discussed in 4.1.2, the NRM as a concept is fluid enough that no incumbent can claim to “own” it to the exclusion of rivals, and hence, challenges to NRM incumbent politicians at every level are common. While incumbents frequently claim their connection with the president as political capital in local arenas, (7.2) it is inconceivable that they or their supporters would claim that to challenge them was akin to challenging the party itself (although this is said of NRM-Independents in the general election, see 5.2.4). That these spaces are open to competitive local political forces is a direct legacy of the individual merit forum-politics of the Movement System (3.2). Despite the authoritarian character of the NRM regime nationally, state security agents are more measured in intervening races between NRM candidates in this local sphere.⁵³ While the police and district security are often accused of being partial to one candidate,⁵⁴ for the most part the competition between NRM candidates in the primaries and the general election seems to be unhindered by the state in the way that opposition mobilisation is.

⁵² This position is often referred to as “Parish Councillor” in reference to the polity of its election.

⁵³ One such disturbance did occur in Kayunga, see 5.2.2.

⁵⁴ Public interview KAY-NS1-1#1.

Given the breadth and openness of this field, entering it is often seen as an avenue of socio-political mobility in lieu of those in the formal economy. This is enhanced by the fact that the units of local government which house these offices have proliferated so rapidly over the past two decades (3.3.3). Naturally this mobility is realised most in the event of electoral victory, but for many local elites, even contesting without a chance of winning offers significant opportunities. Many invest heavily in a campaign for one of these positions in the hope that they will then find themselves on the radar of the president and/or the district elite looking to accommodate potential rivals. Hence, one of the reasons why even strong incumbents face numerous rivals during the elections is unrelated to the realistic prospect of their defeat:

...you find someone who is a performer, politically, he has a political position like an MP, he has performed, he is famous, and definitely popular, so that the electorate likes him and admires his work, everybody, there shouldn't be anybody to challenge him or her, but people come up to contest against him. They come up not because they want to unseat that person, they already know that they cannot unseat that person, but to make themselves a name. When they contest against him they make themselves a name. And in future when the president is to appoint RDCs, and their deputies, the president appoints them first.⁵⁵

That is, having demonstrated a mobilising strength that could act as a liability if not accommodated, elites use this as leverage to find positions in government. An incumbent LC3 speaker was more direct in saying how these figures can cause a problem for office holders:

A: ...they think that they can be given something in order to keep quiet.

Q: Keep quiet in what way?

A: Ok for example, I can be talking some bad words [about] you – telling other people that “that Sam is bad, he’s doing this and that”. When you hear that [I am] talking bad things, you would think, “what do you want, there is this provision, there is a job”. You know someone who is idle, who has nothing to do, can keep loitering around and talking a hail of words. But if someone is very busy with his programmes, sometimes they don’t talk.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Interview 15.

⁵⁶ Interview 6.

While the material dimensions of getting a job after the election are big reasons for running, the more immaterial social esteem of establishing oneself as a leader in the community is an equally important factor. Even the above-quoted speaker prefaced his comments about job-seeking opportunists by reminding me that “it’s not the wage, they want that prestige of being known.”⁵⁷ This is particularly significant at the lower levels, where the number of positions allows the competitive space of the party to graft onto micro-political terrains within villages and parishes. In these contests, the competitive political sphere is less about the functions of government or party than the general social stature of being recognised by one’s community.⁵⁸

With all of these inputs, it is difficult to overstate the vibrancy and sheer size of this field of intra-NRM competitive politics during election season, or the degree of participatory engagement with it by voters. Towns and villages deep in NRM strongholds are plastered with yellow posters of various candidates. Shop stoops, village corners and *bodaboda* stages are frequently the sites of active debates about the relative merit of candidates – as well as campaigning by the candidates themselves. All of my interviewees, without exception, knew the names of the leading two or three candidates for the competitive positions in their area, and most had made contact with them at rallies or other events. Most even knew the candidates of previous elections, and could recount the standard narratives of why they won or lost. Rudimentary as this point may seem, I emphasise it to dismiss the idea that this realm, while competitive, might be seen as a socially irrelevant elite management system and/or a side-show to the bigger presidential campaign. Put simply, local politics matters immensely to rural voters.

The basis of this level of engagement is the degree of political accountability that separates this competitive space from the more fixed components of the NRM party-state. Unlike LC1 or LC2 chairman, politicians who hold these more competitive offices are subject to extraordinary pressure from the electorate to account for the quality of local services (4.4). Moreover, the majority of voters in NRM strongholds see the local competitive arena as the key forum for the resolution of structural and historical

⁵⁷ Interview 6.

⁵⁸ Interview 50.

disputes across social cleavages in the community (4.3). On both of these fronts, the openness of this competitive space affords elites the ability to articulate and champion the grievances of the electorate, and voters the ability to cast their votes *against* the *status quo* in various contexts – something which is the basis of H₁. Moreover, there is a widespread belief that only candidates who stand and win through the NRM – whether as flagbearers or NRM independents – are capable of achieving redress on both of these fronts (more on this in 5.2).⁵⁹ A more rigidly closed system, in which local NRM elites were empowered to avoid challenges to their tenure, would not offer this flexibility. Instead, in the NRM system even well-established elites are forced to be responsive to the popular agitations of their electorate, something that leads to the downfall of most of them each election. In the next two sections of this chapter I profile the substances of these local grievances and the forms they take in local campaigns.

4.3 Horizontal forms of internal politics

Museveni and the NRM frequently claim that they have moved Uganda past the sectarian tensions which formerly characterised its politics: ethnicity, clan, religion and region.⁶⁰ While this may be true to some degree at the national level, at the local level such horizontal divisions frequently characterise the competitive spaces of the polity identified in 4.2.2. While there is widespread agreement that campaigning on ethnic grounds is morally wrong, and against the NRM's nominally post-ethnic character, in practice such alignments are common within the party in many districts. One elder in Kyenjojo with political memories stretching back to the late 1950s told me that the Movement system tried to make non-sectarian reforms, but inevitably caved into the independence era politics that had characterised previous regimes' politics: "when you build a house on a bad foundation, it doesn't matter how you paint it."⁶¹ In this section I draw on primary and secondary data to profile several key examples where these tensions – which I refer to as "horizontal" grievances – found their political voice in the form of local campaigns within the competitive spaces of the local NRM.

Of my three cases, Kyenjojo and Bugiri are relevant here. Both of these are in traditional

⁵⁹ Public interview KAY-NN1-2E#1; public interview KAY-NN2-1E#1.

⁶⁰ Rubongoya, *Regime Hegemony in Museveni's Uganda*, 167.

⁶¹ Public interview KYE-MN2-5T#1.

kingdoms (Tooro and Busoga respectively) but have significant numbers of “migrants” from other areas. As mentioned in 1.2.3.b, Kayunga’s population is so ethnically diverse that sectarian issues in the community are non-factors in the district’s politics. This is also due to the fact that the district was settled relatively recently, as it was uninhabitable due to an insect infestation up until the 1950s. Since then, people from all corners of the country have settled in the district, and it is not uncommon to find a single small village with elders from all four regions of Uganda, as well as South Sudan, Kenya and Rwanda. Hence, while it is nominally part of the Buganda Kingdom, it is very much the periphery of it, and only a small minority of the population are ethnic Baganda.

a. Kyenjojo

The ethnic division between the Batooro (often referred to as “founders”, “originals” or “indigenous”) and non-Batooro migrants (called *Bafuruki* – a somewhat derogatory term for “immigrants”) has been a factor in local politics in Kyenjojo for decades. The latter migrated from the more densely populated south west of Uganda in the past three decades owing to both land pressures and the conflict in nearby Rwanda. They are mainly Bakiga, but the term also includes Banyarwanda and Bakonzo (who are from Rwenzori boundary with Tooro, not the south west). This migration pattern and its resulting authochtone-allochtone political narrative has also affected the demographics of other districts in Tooro as well as in neighbouring Bunyoro (Kibaale district in particular) and western Buganda.

In Kyenjojo ethnic tensions have been strongest in the north and south east of the district, where Bakiga numbers are highest. In 1996 and 2001, NRM “historical” MP Tom Butime, a Mutooro, and his Bakiga rival Gaston Mulira, led violently sectarian campaigns against one another in the constituency.⁶² In the last election Butime was narrowly defeated by David Muhumuza, a young Mukiga; a race which included a declaration from the Tooro Elders Forum that Bakiga should not hold leadership positions in the Kingdom, among other acts of sectarianism.⁶³ Since then, the majority

⁶² Joseph Mugisa, “NRM Mwenge Seat Left to Tom Butime,” *Uganda Radio Network*, December 6, 2005, <http://ugandaradionetwork.com/story/nrm-mwenge-seat-left-to-tom-butime>.

⁶³ Joseph Mugisa and Felix Basiime, “Batooro Want Ring-Fencing of Top Posts,” *The Daily Monitor*, December 8, 2010, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/688334-1068270-b6mcqpz/index.html>.

Batooro sub-counties in Mwenge North have split off to form Mwenge Central (more on the reason for this in 5.1.2).

While the current Mwenge North is therefore mainly Bakiga, a dividing factor within the Bakiga majority is religion. A slight majority of residents are Catholic, but a significant number, including incumbent MP Muhumuza, are followers of a small micro-religion called Faith of Unity (FoU), who follow the teachings of Owobusobozi Bisaka, a prophet based in Kapyemi, Kibaale district, across the northern border of Kyenjojo. Bisaka left the Catholic Church in 1980, when he claimed that God gave him special healing powers, leading him to author *The Book of the Faith of Unity*, which sets out a path followers should take to achieve eternal life. The faith considers the Bible to be a “source of disunity”, and disputes the existence of Jesus.⁶⁴ The followers of this religion – referred to as “believers of Bisaka”, “believers”, or more disparagingly *Bahereza* – occasionally wear distinctive white tunics. While some areas have a larger FoU presence than others, for the most part followers live side by side with Christians and a few Muslims throughout the constituency.

In 2016, there was a complicated relationship between religion and ethnicity in the politics of Mwenge North. In 2011 Muhumuza presented himself as a champion of the long-suffering Kiga minority, and intended to solidify this position. In 2016, his challenger, Lawrence Akugizibwe, was a Mutooro with a Mukiga mother.⁶⁵ Further to being Catholic, he is also the younger brother of Father Bernard Bitekerezo, one of the wealthiest and most powerful Catholic priests in the region. Therefore, Muhumuza and Lawrence attempted to make their campaigns about ethnicity and religion, respectively, as these placed them in majority demographics.⁶⁶

It is difficult to pin down whether tribal and religious tensions are present in society outside of elections. It is fair to say that the Bakiga and the FoU believers – the demographics with the longest memories of ethnic and religious marginalisation respectively – were more likely to ground their support for one side in deeper fears

⁶⁴ Francis Mugerwa, “Owobusobozi Bisaka: The Self-Styled God in Bunyoro Region,” *The Daily Monitor*, May 12, 2015, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/SpecialReports/Owobusobozi-Bisaka--The-self-styled-god-in-Bunyoro-region/-/688342/1403840/-/mkrvynz/-/index.html>.

⁶⁵ Ethnic identity is patrilineal in most of Uganda.

⁶⁶ Interview 15.

about their place in the community. Take this exchange with a Mukiga regarding why he supported Muhumuza in 2011.

A: If you decide to elect a Mutooro as your leader you will face some problems, like being chased from your own land...

Q: You had a Mutooro MP previously, were there problems then?

A: Yes.

Q: What happened?

A: During that time our people were dying, Bakiga, Bakonjo but not Batooro... Since we have our people in government they are saying this will not happen again.⁶⁷

In the words of another, referring to Muhumuza's supporters in the 2016 primaries:

people supported [Muhumuza] because they feared that if a Mutooro like Lawrence went through, perhaps they would chase the Bakiga back to Kabale.⁶⁸

Other Bakiga claimed that Col. Butime excluded them from services when he was their MP.⁶⁹ Likewise, consider this woman's description of life as an FoU Believer:

Q: Outside of elections is there ever any tension between the religions?

A: The differences are there. If you are of another faith that people don't believe in people don't see sense in you, they don't consider you as someone with knowledge, or with intelligence.⁷⁰

Much as these tensions are present in some degree, most interviewees told me simply that it is "during the campaign, that's when we start religions and tribalism".⁷¹ Regardless of the precise origin of sectarian politics, in all my formal interviews as well as in various informal interactions with voters, it was essentially a given that FoU believers supported Muhumuza and Catholics/Batooro supported Lawrence. Many

⁶⁷ Public interview KYE-MN2-1E#1.

⁶⁸ Public interview KYE-MN2-3T#1. These statements refer to the districts of the far south west (in Kigezi), from which the Bakiga migrated in the 1980s and 1990s.

⁶⁹ Public interview KYE-MN1-1E#1.

⁷⁰ Public interview KYE-MN2-4T#1.

⁷¹ Public interview KYE-MN1-2E#1; also public interview KYE-MN2-6T#1; public interview KYE-MN2-5T#1. There is a wealth of literature on how elections can harden ethnic cleavages in Africa. For an overview see: Idean Salehyan and Christopher Linebarger, "Elections and Social Conflict in Africa, 1990-2009," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 50 (2015): 23-49.

Lawrence supporters tied Muhumuza's religion with their dissatisfaction with his performance as an MP, claiming that he delivered for Bisaka rather than his constituents:

When Muhumuza comes, he only visits the place of Bisakas, not those of other religions. And we think that's why we think people will reject him.⁷²

Or, that he was politically loyal to Bisaka rather than the community, tapping in to the slur that the *Bahereza* are an inward-looking group who only help each other:

When his God, for example, his Bisaka says 'you go and vote' or 'you go and do this' they follow him, they have to follow his order.⁷³

At its most extreme, anti-FoU discourse labelled the *Bahereza* as members of a Satanic "cult" – a word used by Lawrence himself in my interview with him.⁷⁴ One elite in Nyankwanzi, who was a Lawrence supporter and later his campaign agent, explained how other Lawrence agents planted anti-Christian slogans to mobilise Catholic opposition among the Bakiga:

A: ...in order for the Bakiga to support a Mutooro, what they did, because there is the other minor group of the Bahereza to divide the Bakiga, was to put in this religious slogan: "Bisaka beats Jesus". It is what they would write on some buildings.

Q: As in: "Bisaka is better than Jesus"?

A: Yes. So others would write: "Satan wins Jesus". They would write it on some buildings, so that the Bakiga, who are so tribalistic, but are not Bahereza, they can now vote for the Christian.

Q: So they made religion a bigger factor than tribe?

A: Yes, yes, yes. To make religion a big factor.⁷⁵

Voters I spoke with almost always discussed sectarian or ethnic politics as something that the "other side" practices.⁷⁶ It was always expressed as something forced upon the

⁷² Public interview KYE-MN2-1E#1.

⁷³ Public interview KYE-MN1-2E#1.

⁷⁴ Interview, Lawrence Akugizibwe, 16/02/2016.

⁷⁵ Interview 15.

⁷⁶ Public interview KYE-MN2-4T#1.

interviewee as if in self-defense, and never a pro-active ideology of supremacy. My own position as an outsider is likely to have suppressed any such expression of ideology. Even if so, this shows how voters know that such politics is officially frowned upon, and not how their democracy should work. I found this to be the case in Bugiri as well (see 4.3.b).

Likewise, all interviewees (public and elite) told me that candidates themselves usually do not engage in sectarian language, but rather send their agents to do so.⁷⁷ In Lawrence's case, several interviewees told me that his Priest brother had delivered sharply anti-*Bahereza* sermons linked to Lawrence's campaign.⁷⁸ Moreover, voters told me that the candidates subtly signaled their religious loyalties by attending only their own faith's fundraisers (a key electioneering terrain).⁷⁹ Both Lawrence himself and Muhumuza's campaign coordinator laid the blame for sectarian and ethnic campaigning at each other's feet,⁸⁰ although the latter may have let the cat out of the bag by saying that "he's [Lawrence] the one who's been campaigning on religion – typical Catholic".⁸¹

Yet, as much as sectarian politics was regarded as beneath the NRM's collective standards, voters and candidates alike saw the party's internal competitive spaces as a forum to resolve these tensions, and nobody thought that the party brand *itself* was a token of sectarian competition, as if it "belonged" to one side and not the other.

In Mwenge South, where the Bakiga are a smaller minority (around 40% by some estimates⁸²), FoU has not penetrated, and the narratives regarding the "Bafuruki" are the main grounds for horizontal politics. Most Bakiga in the constituency live in the far east, and have supported Mukiga lawyer and landowner Vincent Mugisha over the course of several elections in his challenges against incumbent MP and Minister Aston Kajara. According to residents in the one mainly Kiga village in Mwenge South I visited, Mugisa built his following among the Bakiga by buying land and allowing them

⁷⁷ Public interview KYE-MN2-2T#1.

⁷⁸ Public interview KYE-MN2-5T#1.

⁷⁹ Public interview KYE-MN2-3T#1.

⁸⁰ Interview, Lawrence Akugizibwe, 16/02/2016.

⁸¹ Interview 4.

⁸² Felix Basiime and Edison Amanyire, "Two NRM Big Shots to Face off in Mwenge South," *The Daily Monitor*, April 12, 2015.

to settle on it when Tooro landowners would not:

Q: Is it a problem that people around here don't have enough land, or don't own their land?

A: Other people have land but they don't give it to people. Land is very sparse, some migrated from Kabale, they came without land, others came as workers, eventually they got the chance of getting this land. Because this Mugisha has 960 hectares.⁸³

As voters here railed against Kajara's failings as an MP, they also mentioned their frustration at being ostracised from the district's elite, and that the Kajara faction of the NRM had tried to prevent them from registering to vote in the primaries because they were Bakiga: "When they know that you're Bakiga, they could stop registering or ask for money, but when they are Batooro, they could watch you register."⁸⁴ In other areas of the constituency, Tooro voters dismissed the Bakiga as a minority who only support their own candidates.⁸⁵

b. Bugiri

A similar pattern of ethnic grievance and voting occurs in Bugiri, albeit on a somewhat smaller scale. Bugiri is part of the Busoga Kingdom, and it is half of the Bukooli county (the southern half is in Namayingo District) whose traditional leaders are the Wakooli clan of the Basoga. The largest ethnic minority in the district is the Basamia, a Bantu group closely related to the Luhyas of Kenya, most of whom live in and around Tororo and Namayingo District. There are also other minorities such as the Banyole, another Bantu group mainly from Bukedi sub-region, and the Japhadola, a Luo-speaking group related to the Acholi in northern region. To the frustration of some, in spite of its place in Busoga, Bugiri's top political positions have been dominated by non-Basoga in recent elections: Woman MP Kasule Lumumba, Bukooli North MP Stephen Baka Mugabi, and Bukooli Central MP Wafula Oguttu are all Samias, and LC5 chairman Siraje Lyavala is a Munyole.

The narrative of ethnic divisions across Bugiri takes an autochthone-allochtone form as

⁸³ Public interview KYE-MS2-1E#1. Note that I cannot verify that this is the correct size of Mugisha's land.

⁸⁴ Public interview KYE-MS2-1E#1.

⁸⁵ Public interview KYE-MS1-1E#1.

in Kyenjojo, asserting that the Basoga, and specifically the Bakooli, are the rightful leaders of the area, and that Samias, Japadholas and Banyole are all migrants whose homeland is further east.⁸⁶ It is common to hear allegations that non-Soga candidates won in past elections because people come in from across the border to vote. On the other hand, some Samias fear that entrenched Basoga rule could activate dormant ethnic landowning hierarchies and push them off their land. Much as this discourse is present in some form everywhere, it manifests unevenly across different areas and constituencies, and nowhere did it dominate the polity to the same degree as in Mwenge North. In fact several interviewees said simply that ethnicity was not a factor at all in the election.

The degree to which this was the case changed in different constituencies. One voter I spoke with mentioned his village's frustration with outgoing Woman MP Lumumba (who was forced to vacate her seat due to being appointed national NRM Secretary General) for steering her seat toward a fellow non-Musoga in the primaries – a vacancy many Basoga saw as an opportunity to alleviate their exclusion from top political posts:

A: ...she brought in a tribe-mate called Taaka. So when she did that people said “ah no”.

Q: What tribe is that?

A: They are from that side of Tororo, but they grew up from here... So now people said “uh-uh, that cannot happen. She's your tribe mate, and you want to take that post back to your area? No.”⁸⁷

The suggestion that being led by a Samia (Taaka) would constitute taking the post “back to her area” is itself a revealing take on the spatial dimensions of autochthony politics. The woman MP race also had a religious dimension, as Taaka's opponent was a Muslim, and was seen to have the support of the Muslim minority.⁸⁸ In fact, several elites also told me that religious divisions between Muslims and Christians are critical political demographics in the district.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Public interview BUG-BC1-1E#1.

⁸⁷ Public interview BUG-BN1-1E#1.

⁸⁸ Public interview BUG-BC3-1E#1.

⁸⁹ Interview 47, interview 46.

As in Kyenjojo, politicians played a key role in exacerbating these fears during election time. Most people said that in spite of the postures people take during elections the communities lived peacefully during the term time. Take this discussion in Bukooli Central:

Q: Going back to the general issues of politics around here, is there ever any issue around things like religion or ethnic group.

A: That one is there, and it is not good. For example, in the case of the area MP [flagbearer], he's a Tororo, he's a Japadhola, and Wafula is a Musamia. And this one Mulengani Bernard is a Musoga. And you know this is the land of the Basoga. So Mulengani is saying "don't vote for this one because he's a Jap[adhola]", that element is there.

[...]

Q: In these sub counties is there every any trouble between the Basoga and Basamia or Japadhola?

A: Ah no, it is not the case.

Q: So it is only in politics?

A: It is only in politics! [laughing]⁹⁰

In Bukooli North where the MP contest was between a Samia incumbent Baka and a Mukooli Musoga challenger Gaster Kyawa Mugoya, the ethnic dimensions of the polity were probably strongest. Given my interest in the FDC presence in Central, I did not do as many public interviews in North, but several elites I spoke with painted a clear picture of how this took form:

A ... the matter of tribalism also came in.

Q: How did it come in? What did people say and where was it used?

A: When we look at tribalism, yeah, the indigenous of this place, who they call the "landlords", they are the Basoga, but from that small clan of Bakooli. We say the Balangira – they are the owners of the land. So when somebody comes and says, "the owners of the land are being thrown away, so I've come to resurrect our dignity", I think people respond. And they say "this one just migrated from somewhere else and entered here". Those are the words they were using during the campaigns. And I think it is not a good type of campaign.

⁹⁰ Public interview BUG-BC3-1E#1.

Q: And were both sides doing this or just one?

A: As you know, if some one brings this issue, the other one has to bring another in defence! So I shall not put it on one side. I think both of them misbehaved. We should change the mode of campaigning.

Q: And when they do that, do the candidates say it themselves, in rallies, or do they have their agents say it?

A: These candidates themselves are not bad. But the supporters, they are good at creating stories, and it disseminates. This one because he loves the other candidate more than this one, he creates a story, and that story covers the area.⁹¹

While this accusation is aimed at the agents of Kyawa (as a Mukooli), Kyawa's campaign manager asserted the opposite to me: that Baka's campaign had fired the first shot here by telling local Samias that if Kyawa won he would use his royal heritage to evict them from the land.⁹²

Ethnic insecurity was one of many factors that drove political participation in Bugiri. Even though it was not as prominent as in parts of Kyenjojo, it was clearly present in the dominant narratives of the polity, and both voters and politicians engaged with it.

Leaving aside the fact that the opposition was strong in Bukooli Central, the rural areas of NRM-dominated Bukooli North paint a portrait of how the competitive space of the NRM is seen as a fitting place for ethnic tensions of the community – whatever their significance – to be addressed and resolved during the campaign season. I did not hear any interviewee mention their concerns about the ethnicity of the LC1 or LC2 chair in the same way (including in many mixed-ethnicity villages), nor did any interviewee suggest that the NRM *itself* should be the property of any one ethnic group. As discussed in 4.1, the strength of NRM normative monopoly is its ability to transcend these divisions.

4.4 Vertical forms of internal politics

4.4.1 Anti-status quo

⁹¹ Interview 53.

⁹² Interview 40.

Across each of my three case districts, the strongest political narrative within the NRM's competitive space was widespread dissatisfaction with government services and material distribution from the centre. I asked all of my public interviewees whether they and the rest of their community were satisfied with government services in their area. The overwhelming majority said an emphatic "no", and went on to elaborate a litany of complaints about services: schools in disrepair, too few functioning boreholes, hospitals without medicine, pot-holed roads, and state development programmes not reaching citizens.

Any incumbent politician can be the target of these complaints, but typically the brunt of the blame goes towards incumbent MPs, who, as the top of the local political hierarchy, are deemed to be most capable of delivering the state's resources from Parliament.⁹³ A combination of the exceedingly high expectations of the electorate, the pressure from well resourced rivals, and most of all, the promises of past campaigns by candidates themselves, are the basis of this. Several voters declared "empty promises" (or a variant) to be the key issue motivating their community to vote at all,⁹⁴ and the majority of those voting against their incumbent included poor service delivery as among the main reasons – even where the sectarian factors discussed above were also at play.⁹⁵ The following comment by a voter in Bukooli North, Bugiri, is typical of these sentiments:

People want politicians to deliver what they promised. If they put you into power and you don't deliver what you promised, you will be in trouble. Now there's an MP, Baka, this guy used to tell them that "I'm going to work upon that road, then I'm going to build boreholes" and so on, but he hasn't delivered anything. So when we went for NRM primaries, there was a certain guy called Kyawa came in, and people said that this time they re not giving him [Baka] the vote. He even promised security lights, but there are none. So people turned around and chose another person.⁹⁶

Similar narratives of politicians refusing to tend to their constituents were common throughout all three districts. The woman MP for Kyenjojo, Lyndah Timbigamba, was

⁹³ See Wilkins, "Who Pays for Pakalast? The NRM's Peripheral Patronage in Rural Uganda."

⁹⁴ Public interview KAY-BC2-1E#1.

⁹⁵ Public interview BUG-BC1-1E#1; public interview KYE-MN2-2T#1.

⁹⁶ Public interview BUG-BN1-1E#1.

universally panned for not having returned enough to her district while in office.⁹⁷ Bbaale County incumbent and Minister for the Elderly Suleiman Madada was also heavily criticised for not having sealed the road between Galiraya and Kayunga as he promised to do in previous campaigns.⁹⁸ Voters also hold local politicians accountable for corruption in government. One interviewee in Kayunga vented his fury that the “people are being cheated” by “all” politicians and technocrats in his area.⁹⁹ Another in Kyenjojo claimed that he was not given a pension he was owed because the LC5 and his administrators refused to do their job.¹⁰⁰

A metaphorical lexicon frames this frustration. Most common is the claim that the MP does not “come back” to the “ground” after they are elected.¹⁰¹ This refers to the expectation that MPs should spend only some of their time in Parliament, and the rest tending to the needs of the constituents who sent them there. The concept of the “ground” however is as symbolic as it is physical: note this discussion with a frustrated Mwenge North voter who had supported incumbent David Muhumuza in 2011:

A: Since we voted Muhumuza, he usually asked us to vote him because he’s going to do this and this and this, for example he promised us very many things... [but] since he went in to Parliament, has never stepped here, in these LCs. He has never stepped in Kyenjojo.

Q: In the whole district?

A: I’m telling you, in the whole district! The whole term he has never stepped in Kyenjojo. When he wants to come in Kyenjojo, he just comes, and he just appears in his home, he has a home there in [nearby town]. He just closes the windows of his vehicle, so that people do not see him, just to pass through and he sleeps in his house, then in the morning he goes back in Kampala. When you want to call him to give him information, he says “I’m in Kenya”, “I’m in Tanzania” yet he’s in Uganda... So Muhumuza, the whole term, has done nothing.¹⁰²

That is, he has (literally) “stepped” in the constituency, but done so in a way that did

⁹⁷ Public interview KYE-MC1-1E#1; public interview KYE-MN1-2E#1.

⁹⁸ Public interview KAY-BC1-2E#1.

⁹⁹ Public interview KAY-BC1-1E#2.

¹⁰⁰ Public interview KYE-MN2-5T#1.

¹⁰¹ Public interview KAY-NS1-1E#1.

¹⁰² Public interview KYE-MN1-2E#1.

not attend to the needs of the people who needed him. This style of critique represents a frustration with abandonment by elites – this being the subjectivity of the ordinary people on the “ground”. Another of Muhumuza’s constituents declared the previous five years to be “dead years”, because he and Timbigamba have done “totally nothing”.¹⁰³

These sentiments reflect the extraordinary pressure voters place on elites to effect noticeable developmental change in their short terms in office. This pressure is evident in the frustrations of MPs themselves, many of whom “fear to return to the people” because of the demands for financial support they may receive from the village.¹⁰⁴ Aside from the expectations gap in development and services, assumptions of how much time an MP can spend in the village also frustrate MPs. Timbigamba, who lamented the logistical impossibility of reaching over 700 villages in her electorate, still conceded the reality that over the five years, “people expect you to step in all those villages.”¹⁰⁵ She continued to say that in spite a small degree of civic education, “you find that a community is asking for a government service from an MP. But of course an MP is not government.” I found this to be true in all my public interviews. Most citizens tend to view parliamentarians as branches of executive rather than legislative government, hence making them an appropriate scapegoat for the general failures of the state.¹⁰⁶

On top of the distribution of various central government resources, there are immaterial dimensions to this wish for MPs to be more “grounded”. One woman in Bbaale County, Kayunga, explained why she was supporting a challenger to her incumbent MP:

Because he promised so many governmental plans for this place, and unlike previous MPs it is going to be different, and he will be spending more time in the constituency rather than in Kampala, especially on weekends, he’ll come here and get the ideas of the people.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Public interview KYE-MC1-1E#1.

¹⁰⁴ Interview 34.

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Lyndah Timbigamba, 22/02/2016.

¹⁰⁶ This has also been raised by Kayunga, “Electoral Processes in Uganda: From Individual Merit to Multi-Party Democracy.”

¹⁰⁷ Public interview KAY-BC3-1T#1.

This wish to share “ideas” with elites is common,¹⁰⁸ and reflects an ideal of two-way participation and inclusion as much as the simple receipt of services. Without it, voters feel left out of the political system, and forgotten by its power brokers. This ideal of exchange – as with the metaphor of the “ground” – subtly taps into the reservoir of frustration that fuels participation in the NRM competitive space.

These anti-*status quo* political dynamics show the NRM’s internal competitive space at its most versatile. Only in very few cases did people blame the problems addressed here on the NRM in general, the central government, or President Museveni himself. I will talk more about this distinction in chapter 7, but it is worth noting here that voters’ willingness to blame local leaders for the lack of government services is not a reflection of a devolved governance structure in which local government itself is seen as an autonomous institution of service delivery. Instead, voters imagine the flow of resources and services as emanating directly from Museveni’s (fixed) personal generosity, to be delivered to the people through (competitive) local intermediaries, lest their incompetence, corruption, or sectarian favouritism prevent this. Put another way, people do not blame local actors for poor services due to a devolved state structure, but because of a devolved narrative of patrimonial agency. This is why it is MPs, who are tasked with “lobbying” the President in Kampala, on whom the highest expectations of patrimonial largess are placed more than LC5 or LC3 leaders who actually sit on the ground.

Instead, the openness of the NRM local competitive space sees this widespread dissatisfaction channeled into the candidacies of challengers within the NRM, who draw from it to craft anti-*status quo* campaign narratives. Kyawa Mugoya in Bukoli North, Bugiri, for example said this at one of his rallies immediately before election day:

Kyawa: ...when I started walking making campaigns, someone said that this area is very okay, that because every where you are to reach has got water, has electricity, has good schools, but do you have all of them?

Audience: no.

Kyawa: but have you been voting?

¹⁰⁸ Public interview BUG-BC1-1E#1.

Audience: yes.¹⁰⁹

He proceeded to tout the churches and mosques he helped build in the constituency, as well as the ambulance he donated which was next to him as he spoke. Predictably, lofty and vague promises to fix all services like this (unlikely ever to be fulfilled) are the basis of the cycle of popular frustration that unseats most MPs. Kyawa's rivals were certainly confident of defeating him in five years on this basis.¹¹⁰ In other areas I found MP candidates promising to provide motor bikes for *bodaboda* (motorbike taxi) drivers and bring job-providing factories to their rural constituencies, knowing that If they did not make such pledges their opponents would.

4.4.2 *Pro-status quo*

While the vast majority of interviewees were dissatisfied with government services, I did find some who credited their MPs and other leaders with various successes enough to send them back. A notable example of this was Ntenjeru South MP Amos Lugoloobi, a former bureaucrat in the Uganda Revenue Authority, whose concluding first term was seen by many to have produced significant benefits to the constituency. These included the delivery of power to various trading centres under the Rural Electrification Programme. I attended one rally where a power interchange was being opened by Lugoloobi and the district RDC, where the MP said that the programme had not occurred until his tenure because “previously you had been voting for blocked straws” – that is, incompetent or corrupt MPs.¹¹¹

It was however rare to see MPs with widespread popularity due to service delivery. In other cases, generally unpopular MPs held pockets of support in parts of their constituencies where residents felt a degree of connectedness. Often, such as in my interviews in Nazigo sub-county, Ntenjeru South, this was due to the fact that the MP was from that area, and therefore perceived to be more likely to deliver from office.¹¹² Interviews around the home areas of incumbents in Mwenge South¹¹³ and Bukooli

¹⁰⁹ Campaign rally of Gaster Kyawa Mugoya, Buluguyi, Bugiri, 12/03/2016.

¹¹⁰ Interview 45.

¹¹¹ Campaign rally of Amos Lugoloobi, Kyania, Kayunga, 03/02/2016.

¹¹² Public interview KAY-NS2-1E#1.

¹¹³ Public interview BUG-BN3-1E#1.

North¹¹⁴ bear further examples of this. Of course, in many ways realities like this make it difficult to separate vertical pro/anti-*status quo* politics from the horizontal divisions profiled above. In many cases, people's frustration with a politician's performance on service delivery correlated exactly with their alignment with them on sectarian grounds. In Mwenge North for example, FoU voters were less likely to blame Muhumuza for poor services, although they did sometimes acknowledge these. The reverse was also true: often it is the dissatisfaction with elite performances which make fertile ground for claims of sectarian favouritism among voters not otherwise inclined to assume this about their leaders.

4.4.3 Land

As population density grows throughout the countryside, and commercial farming investment increases, land tensions are a factor in the politics of many districts across Uganda. This was the case to a small degree in Kyenjojo¹¹⁵ and Bugiri,¹¹⁶ but it was in Kayunga where the politics of "land grabbing" totally defined local politics throughout the district during the election period. Kayunga has a long history with contentious evictions – colloquially called land "wrangles." These have occurred mainly in the lightly-populated northern sub-counties of Bbaale and Galiraya, which are part of the Bbaale County MP constituency. A combination of the fertile soils (the district is located between the rivers Nile and Sezibwa), the mainly pastoralist land usage of the area, and its comparatively recent settlement (leading to messy land registration) all make it an area fraught for commercially-driven land grabbing. Residents rarely have formal titles for their land, and state institutions like courts and police are often accused of corruptly siding with the landlords. Over the past two decades, conflicts between evicted *bibanja* (untitled tenants or "squatters") and landlords have been numerous and occasionally violent. In 2009 a landlord was burnt to death by tenants who accused him of plotting their eviction,¹¹⁷ and several activist tenants are alleged to have gone missing

¹¹⁴ Public interview KYE-MS3-1E#1.

¹¹⁵ Public interview KYE-MN1-2E#1.

¹¹⁶ Public interview BUG-BC2-3T#1.

¹¹⁷ Eriasa Mukiibi Sserunjogi, "Kayunga: A Hotbed of Land Wrangles," *The Daily Monitor*, July 5, 2013, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Kayunga--A-hotbed-of-land-wrangles/688334-1905230-iylni3/index.html>.

in 2013 after confronting landlords.¹¹⁸

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a full background of land issues in Kayunga, but suffice to say that many of the current issues date back to mass evictions of tenants in the 2003-05 period, including several cases involving land owned and sold by high ranking regime and military figures. Two cases stand out here. One is a sale in 2003 by then head of the Internal Security Organisation (ISO) Brig. Henry Tumukunde to a Danish commercial farm, Danuga Farm Uganda, via a local businessman Eriya Paul Kiwanuka. The other involved a plot bought by a landlord and Jinja NRM chairman Moses Karangwa, some of which he still owns. Both plots are around 400 acres, and have seen tenants evicted periodically over the past decade but mostly in the 2003-05 period, who now claim to have been insufficiently compensated. In other cases, land previously used for cattle grazing was sold to commercial sugar farms by various landlords in contentious circumstances.

While the land question had been significant in northern Kayunga for some time, throughout the 2011-16 parliamentary term it reached new proportions due to the activism of Woman MP and State Minister for Lands Idah Nantaba. Soon after her first election in 2011 and her appointment to cabinet in 2012, Nantaba controversially led a group of evictees back onto the Kiwanuka/Danuga plot, destroying commercial crops and farming equipment in the process.¹¹⁹ In doing so, she started a political feud with not only the district leadership, but the various “generals” whom she accused of being behind or allied to land grabbing in the district, most notably Tumukunde and Inspector General of Police (IGP) Gen. Kale Kayihura. The following year, she did the same thing with Karangwa’s plot, leading to a local political rivalry that has characterised the district elite split ever since (see 5.1.3).

Many of the residents I interviewed in Kayunga, almost all of whom were subsistence farmers, showed a visceral fear of land grabbing. “Those ones just come and buy the

¹¹⁸ Fred Muzaale, “Nantaba Suspends Land Committee,” *The Daily Monitor*, May 31, 2013, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Nantaba-suspends-land-committee/688334-1867826-bxi51qz/index.html>.

¹¹⁹ Dicta Asiimwe, “Uganda Taxpayers to Pay for Nantaba’s Costly Land Move,” *The East African*, December 22, 2012, <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Uganda-taxpayers-to-pay-for-Nantaba-costly-land-move/2558-1649982-vlsvr6z/index.html>.

land” said one resident of Bbaale sub-county, “they chase people, they bribe, they do what[ever], without compensation. So that’s why we have been fearing about the land.”¹²⁰ Almost all interviewees declared the “wrangles” to be among the main issues motivating them to vote in the elections.¹²¹ For example, the following conversation was typical:

A: During this political season, the aspiring politicians, they mention about the issue of land so much, because they know it is an issue toughing the community. So if you leave it out, the community feels as though you are not concerned about them.

Q: How does the land issue affect the people around here? Are people owning their own land? What’s the land system here?

A: The system here is individual ownership of land, but sometimes, the problem is that someone has stayed on a piece of land for fifty years, and then someone comes after fifty years claiming that he’s the rightful owner of that particular piece of land, moreover with documents, land titles, that is the biggest challenge. These people have stayed on that piece of land for so many years, but they don’t have documents. When they go to courts of law they [lose], and they are rendered landless. So that is a very big problem in Kayunga.¹²²

Nantaba’s intervention in 2012-14 as an NRM MP and cabinet member kept the land issue within the NRM competitive space, rather than spilling out into opposition mobilisation (see 7.3). Although Bbaale county is a strong NRM area (80.7% voted for Museveni in 2011), and most of my interviewees identified with the party, many people narrated the land issue as one caused by their local officials (all of whom were NRM or NRM-Independent), who merely “end up telling us that if there’s such a problem we must go to court, but that is not easy.”¹²³ Nantaba herself accused the district police command and the LC5 council of being involved in the problem, something which many interviewees agreed with. As with the frustration over poor government services mentioned above, the land issue is often narrated in a class dimension:

¹²⁰ Public interview KAY-BC3-3T#1.

¹²¹ Public interview KAY-BC1-1E#1; public interview KAY-BC3-3T#1; public interview KAY-BC3-1T#1; public interview KAY-NS1-2T#1.

¹²² Public interview KAY-NS1-1E#1

¹²³ Public interview KAY-BC1-1E#1.

A: Because we are of two categories, there are those without land titles, but they are bonifide occupants, and then there are those with land titles. So the land act mostly looks at that one, with land title, as the owner of the land. So those without that land title, they are seen as squatter on the land. Whereby, the one with land title has much authority.

Q: Who is actually grabbing the land?

A: Rich people, because if someone has money, he can get that land title.¹²⁴

In taking such a form, during the election the land issue transcended its material rationality throughout the district by becoming an icon of the general frustration of the local state's unfairness, corruption and incompetence. To those who stated this frustration without mentioning land, Nantaba was still seen as a champion not only of the landless and evicted, but of the poor – fighting for those left out of the system in various ways.

As much as the popular outrage over the land issue has fuelled its entrance into the political arena, the scope of its politicisation is also due in significant part to Nantaba's actions. Although most of the evictions in question took place over a decade ago, subsequent elections in 2006 and 2011 were not fought so exclusively on the land question.¹²⁵ Nantaba's opponents therefore accuse her of exploiting and exaggerating the problem to favour her own political rise, which has been extraordinarily acute.¹²⁶ A group of journalists based in Kayunga agreed that there had been big problems with evictions, but suggested that many of the people resettled by Nantaba in 2012-13 were fraudulently claiming not to have been compensated, and that the essence of the issue was more about former tenants negotiating for more compensation than fighting to be resettled on it.¹²⁷

The spectacle of the “wrangles” made land a defining political issue even for those nowhere near its epicentre. As far south as Kangulamire, almost two hours drive from

¹²⁴ Public interview KAY-BC1-1E#1.

¹²⁵ Interview 27.

¹²⁶ Several district officials sued Nantaba in July 2015 for her accusation that they had sold 10 villages in Kitimbwa Sub-County (which is well south of previous wrangles) to Indian sugar investors, although she denied this. See: Fred Muzaale, “Kayunga Leaders Sue Nantaba,” *The Daily Monitor*, July 14, 2015, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Kayunga-leaders-sue-Nantaba/-/688334/2787586/-/h6k5b2/-/index.html>.

¹²⁷ Interview, group of five Kayunga-based journalists, 02/03/2016.

Bbaale sub-county, when I asked one Nantaba voter to explain why she supported she laughed and said “Isn’t it obvious? Land!”¹²⁸ In fact most interviewees who nominated land as the driving force of their political participation were not directly or indirectly affected by land grabbing in the past, but rather had heard about the “wrangles”. Nantaba’s considerable mobilisation skills, and the widespread attention of the President’s multiple visits to resolve the issue, are the reason for this.

As with the ethnic politics of Kyenjojo and Bugiri, we find here a fine balance in the form of political mobilisation in the NRM competitive space. Both the endogenous pressures and fears land grabbing among the community *and* the political opportunism of the issue’s elite champion were both at work in the precise form of its political articulation. Hence, land in Kayunga is a classic case of an anti-*status quo* issue finding its articulation within competitive spaces of the NRM. While towards the end of the election process this case went from the rule to the exception category (see 7.3), we can still see aspects of the ideal-type here.

4.5 Conclusion

The point of this chapter has been to understand the local politics of the NRM “stronghold” from below. In doing so it has revealed a different conception of the NRM from the remote authoritarian hegemon commonly described in much of the literature. Much as there are coercive edges to the party’s grip on local politics (4.1.3) it is fundamentally *open* in many ways. Nobody in the local polity “owns” the party brand to the exclusion of others. Instead, the competitive spaces within the party constitute a more dynamic field for political action, not a political actor in a broader forum. This is a space where citizens truly value their vote as a means of changing their personal circumstances, despite the regime’s authoritarian behaviour in other contexts.¹²⁹

For this reason, when people are frustrated with either local incumbents or the party’s internal machinations – frustrations so common that they are systemic – the default

¹²⁸ Public interview KAY-NS1-3T#1.

¹²⁹ Conroy-Krutz and Logan reach the same conclusion with survey data, see: Jeffrey Conroy-Krutz and Carolyn Logan, “Museveni and the 2011 Ugandan Election: Did the Money Matter?,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 50, no. 4 (2012): 649.

recourse is to support another candidate within the NRM's competitive space, not an outsider from the opposition. While this is changing among many younger voters in the rural south, for the majority the legacies of the Movement System – and in a broader sense the cultures of local politics before 1986 – live on in this regard. In sections 4.3 and 4.4 I have divided “vertical” and “horizontal” forms of politics not as a way of typologising the party's local politics (as vertical *or* horizontal) but to reveal a sense of variation and versatility within its local competitive space. Every local polity produces subtly unique combinations of various political grievance and dissatisfaction. This is the basis of my H₁ argument, showing the NRM's ability to monopolise the agitations and frustration of the electorate in ways that localise accountability and shield the presidency – a process I will conclude in chapter 7.

But there are also important findings here for H₂ that bear directly on the following chapter. The glue that binds the voter to their local champion is a critical component of the entire mobilising system of the NRM's collective electoral machine. As will be shown, local politicians and their followings are the base units of the NRM's decentralised political anatomy (much like the older parties discussed in chapter 3), and the engine of its collective electoral mobilisation effort. The culture of partisan monopoly allows these units to be combined under the NRM in sum; but equally important is the net increase in participation that their very *competition* produces. The party relies on these strongholds to be animated by their internal divisions in order to drive turnout and participation on election day. For example, the high participation that is driven by the anti-FoU sentiments of voters in Mwenge North is a primary force that brings people to vote for Museveni, as it is for Lawrence Akugizibwe. This is not a dominant party system that merely includes competition; it relies on it. In the following three empirical chapters (5, 6, and 7) I will reveal the more elite contexts that allow the party to redirect these participatory energies so efficiently.

Chapter 5

The NRM's Systemic Division and Inclusion: District Elite Networks and the Terrain of Their Competition

This chapter looks at the processes of intra-NRM competition from the perspective of rural politicians. In doing so, it will add two new findings to those made earlier. The first (5.1) is that campaigns for all offices within the NRM competitive space are networked in intricate ways to constitute factional “camps” at the district level. Led by established political power brokers (often MPs), these camps usually number two or three, and to varying degrees absorb candidates for lower races into their tussle for influence and supremacy.

The second finding (5.2) is that the rivalry of these camps expands and maintains the NRM's rural monopoly discussed in 4.1. Throughout the long and arduous processes of winning elections in the rural south, camps compete in a four-stage political process where winners of each stage are advantaged, yet losers are not excluded. These stages are: the registration of NRM members (who in 2016 were the only people capable of voting in NRM internal elections and candidate primaries), NRM internal elections (for the party “structures”), NRM primaries, and the general election. While each of these processes is driven by district camps, they each produce a by-product of party-building and collective mobilisation that benefits the party as a whole.

In detailing the nature of elite competition throughout this process, I will therefore characterise the NRM's rural elite culture as one of *systemic division and inclusion*. In every district, there are elites and camps who lose to their rivals at each of these stages, yet remain entrenched enough to contest the next one, or the next election in five years. With this fine balance, the party rewards victors, but includes the vanquished within its ranks. These findings will develop the chapter's contention that the strength and breadth of the NRM in these districts lies in this practice of division and inclusion. This picks up on the points made in 3.2.2 about the NRM's inclusion of plural district-level factions.

5.1 Division of NRM elite “camps” at district level

The structure of intra-NRM competition cannot be understood only within the individual units and races in which candidates compete, (as I have done in chapter 4). Instead, competition needs to be placed in the context of broader networks at the district level in which MP races and others are situated, the common term for which is “camps”.¹ These camps are decentralised nodes of political organisation and (occasionally) finance that compete with each other on numerous fronts over the course of the election.

As mentioned earlier (1.2.2), there is a good reason to focus on the district level as the most important one for understanding rural elite networks. Although individual rivalries exist at higher and lower levels, the most powerful offices of NRM’s electoral operations are concentrated at the district. As this bureaucracy affects the primaries in the entire district, and its key offices are open to the participation of local stakeholders, candidates are forced to negotiate settlements with other actors at this level. The state security and administrative organs (the Police, the Internal Security Organisation and the Resident District Commissioner), which have a hand in the internal functions of the party, are also concentrated at this level. Hence, camps spanning multiple constituencies with mutual district-level agendas are a fixture in every district in the rural south, even where there is a significant opposition presence (see 5.1.3 on Bugiri below). The basis of their division often has little to do with the endogenous divisions profiled in chapter 4, but on the simple struggle for supremacy and influence in the district.

However, much as they are common to all districts, these camps include subtle variations. To tease these out in my three case districts, I use a typology of camp rivalry based on the two most important of these variables:

- i. *Concentration*: whether rivalry at the district level is either *polarised* or *diffuse*. In polarised rivalries, lower level elites are forced to pick sides in the camp divisions, whereas in more diffuse rivalries these candidates can run campaigns more

¹ Some analyses that have looked at NRM camps include Kayunga, “The No-Party System of Democracy and the Management of Ethnic Conflicts in Uganda,” 145.

independently of camp divisions.

ii. *Optics*: whether camp rivalries are incorporated into the *visible* popular interpretation of politics by voters or more *subterranean* to that popular discourse.

Table 5.1: Typology of district NRM camps

		Optics	
		Visible	Subterranean
Concentration	Polarised	Visible and polarised (Kayunga)	Polarised and subterranean (Bugiri)
	Diffuse		Diffuse and subterranean (Kyenjojo)

Although elite division is a structural component of the NRM in each district, these two variables qualitatively alter the nature of this competition. I will now display these differences by profiling each of my three cases as they fit into this typology. I will reflect on camp dynamics in the conclusion to this chapter.

5.1.1 Kayunga: polarised and visible

In 2016, the key figures in Kayunga's camp rivalry were Lands Minister and Woman MP Idah Nantaba and businessman and landlord Moses Karangwa. Theirs is a more recent rivalry than equivalents in Kyenjojo or Bugiri, in that their particular camps are a formation of the last parliamentary term (2011-16) only. Previously, the key elite rivalry was between (NRM) LC5 chairman candidates Thomas Mulondo and Stephen Dagada. At this point, seeking her first election, Nantaba was aligned with Dagada, who won on a popular anti-corruption platform.² The current camp alignment is a product of Museveni's direct intervention elevating Nantaba to the Lands ministry, which antagonised many in the district (and the Parliament) who felt this was beyond her station.³ Museveni continued to offer support to Nantaba throughout the 2012-13 land wrangles as her political profile rose rapidly. By the time of the 2016 election, she had become extraordinarily popular in the district.

² Interview 27.

³ Anon., "Fiery Nantaba Can't Stand Slow People," *The Observer*, September 16, 2012, <http://observer.ug/features-sp-2084439083/profile/20993-fiery-nantaba-cant-stand-slow-people->.

The precise reasons for Museveni's interest in Nantaba and Kayunga are unclear. As well as Tumukunde's past involvement (he and Museveni fell out dramatically between 2006 and 2014) there are numerous rumours of various national elites having a financial stake in Kayunga, including many UPDF generals with political influence. However, no elite interviewee considered any such national rivalry a significant factor in Museveni's elevation of Nantaba. The Karangwa camp itself was a conglomerate of strange bedfellows united by their opposition of Nantaba, many of whom felt threatened by her aggressive political tactics. Although Karangwa himself had not been involved in Kayunga politics at this level before, he assumed a leadership posts in part because of his deep connections to the national NRM, and his significant personal wealth. However perhaps more important than that, in the words of one of his eventual allies:

he had some characteristics of Nantaba. Violent politics. And he also brought in violent politics. So those people who were not supporting Nantaba thought that the only ally who can help us fight Nantaba is Karangwa with that violent approach to politics.⁴

Going into 2016, both Nantaba and Karangwa plotted to uproot each other from electoral positions in the district, and built vast networks to do this. Nantaba, who had long accused various local officials of being involved in land grabbing, endorsed MP candidates Fred Baseke in Ntenjeru South and Kumama Nsamba in Bbaale against incumbents Patrick Nsanja and Suleiman Madada, respectively. The third incumbent, her brother Amos Lugolobi, was (and is) the other key figure in her camp. On the other side, it seems that the political and financial threat posed by Nantaba forced an unlikely conglomerate of politicians and landlords into an alliance, which became the Karangwa faction, including Nsanja and Madada. Karangwa recruited Juliet Nalunga, one of Nantaba's sparing partners on the district council, to face her for the position woman MP.

⁴ Interview 31.

Table 5.2: *Kayunga camps*⁵

	Nantaba camp	Karangwa camp
Bbaale MP	Kumama Nsamba (P) Ronald Kyagaba (G)	Sulaiman Madada (inc.) (P) Kumama Nsamba (G)
Ntenjeru North MP	Amos Lugoloobi (inc.)	Immaculate Namata
Ntenjeru South MP	Fred Beseke	Patrick Nsanja (inc.)
Woman MP	Idah Nantaba (inc.)	Juliet Nalunga
LC5 Chairman	William Tom Sserwanga	Sazir Mayanja
NRM District Chairman	Idah Nantaba	Moses Karangwa

Source: compiled by the author.

The titanic tussle between the two camps – which essentially pitted Nantaba’s popularity against Karangwa’s wealth and organisation – forced lower candidates to take sides against their wishes.⁶ According to one journalist in the district, the main reason people aligned with Karangwa was the fear that he would fund their opponent if they did not.⁷ Likewise, Nantaba used her political popularity to pressure people into aligning with her. Bbaale candidate Kumama Nsamba is a good case of this. As a candidate in the previous three elections, Kumama was known to the constituency well before Nantaba’s emergence. He was initially supported by her against incumbent Madada, but became uncomfortable with her divisive rhetoric after winning his primary, and attempted to toe a middle line between the two camps – including, notably, appearing at several functions with Nalunga and Karangwa after the latter became district NRM chairman.⁸ According to Kumama, this was his impartial responsibility as a flagbearer, but an infuriated Nantaba saw it as a betrayal and threw her support behind independent candidate Ronald Kyagaba late in the campaign.⁹

Kayunga is an example of a *polarised* district elite rivalry because the Nantaba and Karangwa camp networks extended all the way down to the LC3 and even the parish level during the election.¹⁰ At an NRM flagbearer rally in Bbaale town, one LC3 chairman candidate caused a stir when he gave a fiery pro-Nantaba speech in front of Karangwa, enlivening the half of the audience who had previously booed through

⁵ Names in bold represent the leaders of each camp, (inc.) candidates who were incumbents, and (P) and (G) candidate alignment in the primaries and general election (respectively) where these changed.

⁶ Interview 23.

⁷ Interview 24.

⁸ Interview, Kumama Nsamba, 11/03/2016.

⁹ Interview 34.

¹⁰ Interview 33.

Nalunga's speech. In fact, all of the LC3 Chairman candidates were known by local elites to be either in one of the two camps.¹¹

Relatedly, Kayunga's was a *visible* camp division because the optics of this rivalry framed political narratives of participation throughout the district. Many voters I interviewed revealed that the camp divisions played an important role in the narratives of the local polity, and camp alignment informed voter decisions.¹² The journalists I interviewed all agreed that the camps go "to the ground,"¹³ which was validated by many public interviewees who agreed that camp politics descended down to local terrains. I asked one man in Bbaale whether people in his village discuss the Nantaba-Karangwa dispute often and he replied "*nnyo, nnyo, nnyo, nnyo, nnyo, nnyo nnyo*" [very, very...].¹⁴ In the words of another voter:

The camp issue reached the village level, because we had the camp of Idah Nantaba, the honorable minister for lands, we also had a camp of Mr. Karangwa, chairperson NRM Kayunga, so we had two camps. However, during the primaries, whoever was identified belonging to the camp of Mr. Karangwa, automatically lost. Because it is even said – I'm not sure, but it is said – that [he] grabbed land from that side of Bbaale, Galiraya. Even on this side people here were afraid that if he's disturbing people the other side, then he's likely to come here.¹⁵

Given this superstructure, local politics often included unfounded accusations of being on the Karangwa side by Nantaba populists, as happened on the Kayunga Town Council elections. In one elite's words, "if you are branded Karangwa, then you are in trouble. People will not vote for you."¹⁶

There are many other examples of districts whose elite structures are visible and polarised in this way. The contests between Theodore Ssekikubo and Sam Kutesa in Ssembabule, Muyanja Mbabaali and Mulindwa Birimumaaso in Lwengo, Harriet Nankabirwa and Onyango Kakoba in Buikwe, Alex Ruhunda and Stephen Kaliba in

¹¹ Interview 27.

¹² Public interview KAY-NS1-1E#1.

¹³ Interview, group of five Kayunga-based journalists, 02/03/2016.

¹⁴ Public interview KAY-BC3-1T#1.

¹⁵ Public interview KAY-NS1-1E#1.

¹⁶ Interview 26.

Kabarole, among many others. Kayunga however is slightly abnormal in that one of the two sides had overwhelmingly more public support – the causal consequences of which will be considered in 7.3.

5.1.2 Kyenjojo: diffuse and subterranean

The elite split in Kyenjojo is more established than in Kayunga. Since the NRM came to power the biggest political figure in the district has been Col. Tom Butime, who was a Bush War cadre in the NRA and one of the “historical” members of the NRC from 1986. Butime has had a complicated relationship with Museveni over the years, with many assuming him to harbour presidential aspirations.¹⁷ Tension between them peaked in 2006 when Butime openly criticised the abolition of term limits, after which Museveni moved him from the Ministry of Lands and Urban Development to the Ministry of Karamoja – widely perceived to be a demotion. This tension has over the years played into the hands of the district’s second biggest political figure, Aston Kajara, whom Museveni offered the Karamoja ministry to when Butime turned it down – an act of “divide and conquer”¹⁸ that was highly controversial among the Kyenjojo elite.¹⁹

Matters intensified in 2011 when Butime faced a challenger in his Mwenge North seat, David Muhumuza, who was organised and funded through NRM Secretary General Amama Mbabazi at a time when the latter was known to be Museveni’s primary political “fixer”. When Muhumuza defeated Butime, many therefore saw this as an instance of Museveni eliminating an opponent to his continued rule, which has resulted in the entrenchment of Kajara, (who supported Muhumuza in 2011) as the district’s most powerful politician. Butime retained formal influence through longtime ally James Byamukama’s retention of the LC5 Chair from 2007-16.

Butime and Kajara remain, in one MP’s words, the two political “godfathers” of the district.²⁰ Going into 2016, several key developments altered the terrain of the Kyenjojo

¹⁷ Tripp, *Museveni’s Uganda: Paradoxes of Power in an Hybrid Regime*, 69.

¹⁸ Interview 2.

¹⁹ Interview 18; Anon., “Butime Fans Threaten to Undress over Ministry,” *New Vision*, June 13, 2006.

²⁰ Interview 19.

camp rivalry. First, after a *detente* with Museveni, Butime (with the help of Byamukama and Tooro elders) successfully lobbied for the creation of a new constituency, Mwenge Central, which he was to contest.²¹ Knowing that he lost in 2011 on mainly ethnic grounds, Mwenge Central was created as a Tooro enclave, slicing off the parts of the constituency where the Bakiga were a majority – in the north and east – in ways that made little practical sense.²² This development opened up a new front between the camps, as Butime stood against Methusela Kasukaali, who was allied with and partially funded by Kajara. Second, after almost a decade as LC5 Chairman, Byamukama decided to challenge Kajara for MP in Mwenge South, after his attempt to have a Kyenjojo Municipality seat created fell flat (something which Kajara supported too, in order to avoid a direct contest). This left the LC5 Chair race open to the return of William Kaija, who had held it from 2001-2007, and was recently the RDC of Kumi district in eastern Uganda. Kaija had a long history of bouncing between the Butime and Kajara camps, first losing controversially to Byamukama in a 2007 LC5 runoff²³ and then unsuccessfully challenging Kajara in Mwenge South in 2011.

Table 5.3: Kyenjojo Camps

	Butime camp	Kajara camp	Mugisha camp
Mwenge North MP	Lawrence Akugizibwe	David Muhumuza (inc.) (P)	David Muhumuza (inc.) (G)
Mwenge Central MP	Tom Butime	Methusela Kasukaali	
Mwenge South MP	James Byamukama	Aston Kajara (inc.)	Vincent Mugisha
Woman MP	Grace Kemugisha (P) Faith Philo (G)	Lyndah Timbigamba (inc.) (P) Spellanza Baguma (G)	Miriam Kesiime
LC5	Christopher Mwesigye (P)	William Kaija	

Source: compiled by the author.

The Butime-Kajara rivalry influences much of the district's elite arrangements. In the words of one MP:

you find that they have made cocoons, or groups. Like if you're contesting you have a

²¹ Interview 7, interview 9.

²² To get from one side of the new Mwenge North to the other, for example, one has to connect through the middle of Mwenge Central.

²³ Jonathan Akweteirecho, "Jubilations in Kynjojo as Byamukama Wins Electinos," *Uganda Radio Network*, June 1, 2007.

group of people that you want in your line. If you can go with A B C you can get service delivery. But you cannot work with D E F, so you fight them, and support A B C.²⁴

That is, these two camps have monopolised the capacity to deliver services in the district such that politicians must align with one but not the other. This MP continued to the reason for these “cocoons”: “the reasons why these ones are fighting, Kajara is a minister, Butime is scared that if he goes through he [Butime] will be a backbencher”.²⁵ Another MP candidate told me that she had shown up to a well-attended gathering of supporters to find out later that it had been sponsored by a fellow politician interested in her victory without her prior knowledge.²⁶

However, Kyenjojo differs from Kayunga in both the concentration and optics of district rivalry. First, its camp structure is more *diffuse* than the polarised cases of Kayunga or Bugiri. This does not mean that the main camps do not recruit elites into their ranks at all, but that it is somewhat easier to exist as a candidate outside of them, or to “divert” from supporting fellow camp-members in various contests. The case of Vincent Mugisha, who has been a consistent player in the district without ever truly allying himself with either camp, illustrates this. In 2016, he stood against both Byamukama and Kajara in Mwenge South, and his wife Miriam Kesime stood for Woman MP against the candidates of both camps.

The Mwenge North race is another example. Butime took a strong interest in defeating the man who ousted him in 2011, Muhumuza, and therefore aided the recruitment of Lawrence Akugizibwe.²⁷ In a more polarised rivalry, one would expect Kajara to take an interest in maintaining links with Muhumuza and defeating Lawrence, however I found no evidence that this was the case, in spite of their connection in 2011.²⁸ This was likely due to the expense of doing so given Kajara’s own threat from Byamukama and Mugisa in Mwenge South. Nonetheless, the widespread assumption that, as in 2006, the district had only one ministerial appointment that *either* Kajara or Butime would receive, keeps the rivalry going between Mwenge Central and South, where each

²⁴ Interview 14.

²⁵ Interview 14. This was supported by interview 19 and interview 7.

²⁶ Interview 19.

²⁷ Interview 18.

²⁸ Interview 19, interview 7.

sponsored each other's challenger (Byamukama and Kasukaali respectively).

Unlike Kayunga but similar to Bugiri, the optics of the camp rivalry are more *subterranean* than visible. While many voters are aware that Butime and Kajara have not cooperated with each other, most of the more local electoral battles of the two camps are not widely interpreted to be connected to their rivalry. Instead, most voters see elite rivalries existing at the MP constituency level and below. District networks also relate to religious affiliations behind the scenes more so than in my other case districts. The link between Butime, who is a former seminarian and staunch Catholic, and Lawrence, is the latter's brother Father Bernard Bitezereko, who bankrolled Lawrence's expensive candidacy, and most of the latter's campaign agents were members of the Catholic parish church network.²⁹ Another Catholic Father, Parish Priest of Katoosa, Moses Mutangirizi is also very close to Butime, although he has also supported Kajara allies in the past. In Mwenge Central, Kasukaali was strongly supported by the local (Anglican) Church of Uganda.³⁰ Finally, the Bisaka may have supported Muhumuza in Mwenge North and Nguhirwa in the LC5 Chairmans race, and possibly other candidates as well.³¹ These religious backers utilise their church networks in both mobilising and fundraising. Museveni himself has given donations to several of these figures, including a US\$300m donation to Father Mutangirizi in July 2015.³² Apart from in Mwenge North, where the religious affiliation of Lawrence and Muhumuza was the key political issue, no voter mentioned these religious players to me while discussing the district's political divisions.

Fitting of a more diffuse camp culture, elites gave me a mixed impression of whether MP campaigns recruited networks of agents and lower candidates to conduct their campaigns, as in Kayunga. One MP called this "personal, not automatic", but went on to note the advantages:

You find that sometimes you have friends running for offices, so you facilitate him. And you find that when you facilitate him he also does your work, he also looks for your vote... At a certain point, the LC3, the councillor, is a little nearer to the people

²⁹ Interview 15.

³⁰ Interview 7.

³¹ Interview 18.

³² Anon., "Museveni Pledges Shs300m to Catholic Church in Kyenjojo," Eagle Online, 2015.

than you.³³

In Mwenge Central, Erisa Mutabazi, the LC3 Deputy Chairman for Katooke Sub County, mentioned that both Butime and Kasukaali tried to recruit him to campaign with him, and that many people in Mwenge Central dropped out of races because they had been influenced by Butime.

It is very important because these [local] officers who are running their offices they normally meet the community... You get this MP who doesn't know the community. But if he convinces an officer to support him, then this officer will go to the community and try to mobilise for him. So that is why it is important for MPs to go to these officers.³⁴

However, he also mentioned that camps are not straightforward in their district connections: "you get me supporting an MP, and this MP being supported by Chairman LC5, but you can find me not supporting this LC5 candidate, so some they are connected and others are not".

In Mwenge North, one District Councillor candidate, who had previously stated that some local candidates pick sides and some do not, explained his own choices:

Q: So what about your own candidacy then. Did you get swept up in these MP races? Did you have to declare which side you were on? Did you get support from either candidate?

A: I didn't. I didn't get any support. Had I wanted their support, I would have gotten it. Especially by showing the side. But I did not. Because, the candidate I wanted, who is Lawrence, was not liked by the society in which I live, on tribal grounds. The majority of the people here are Bakiga. So being Mukiga, they expect me to support a fellow Mukiga. ... I could not let Lawrence know that I was supporting him because beside him were some people from this side, that he would let them know, and I could not let this one know because there are those on Lawrence's side, so I was in a fix.³⁵

³³ Interview 14.

³⁴ Interview, Erisa Mutabazi, 22/02/2016.

³⁵ Interview 15.

For this perspective, declaring connections with higher candidates was an option for these local candidates (one of the above candidates' rivals declared his support for Lawrence and received money for it) but not a necessity as in the more polarised Kayunga or Bugiri. Likewise, many voters described how local candidates picking MP sides in such a divided context was an inherently risky endeavour, and therefore relatively uncommon.³⁶

5.1.3 Bugiri: polarised and subterranean

The Bugiri NRM is *polarised* much like Kayunga is, although these divisions are more optically *subterranean*, as in Kyenjojo. Over the past ten years there have been two distinct camps in the district. One has been led by Fred Mukisa, the former Minister of Fisheries and MP of Bukooli Central between 1996 and 2011. His primary allies include Bukooli North MP Stephen Baka Mugabi, and former LC5 Chairman Azalwa Marijan. The other camp is led by Kasule Lumumba, the longtime NRM parliamentary whip who was chosen by Museveni to replace Amama Mbabazi as the NRM Secretary General in late 2014. She was the district Woman MP between 2001 and 2016, when she had to step down as part of the new conditions for members of the NRM secretariat. Her principal camp ally has been incumbent LC5 Chairman Siraje Lyavala. Today, people in the district generally refer to these camps as Lumumba-Lyavala and Mukisa-Baka-Marijan.

Mukisa and Lumumba are one-time friends who fell out around the time when the latter stood successfully against Mukisa's wife for the Woman MP seat in 2001. Their two camps have fought on various fronts ever since. In 2011, the main fora of their conflict were the Bukooli Central and the LC5 Chair races. In Bukooli Central, Mukisa lost his primary to Lyavala, who was then the incumbent LC5 chairman, in controversial circumstances. When Mukisa stood as an independent in the general election the bitterness between him and Lyavala was so extreme that both candidates told supporters at rallies to vote for the FDC's Wafula Oguttu, rather than each other.³⁷ Whether or not this affected the race is unclear, but Mukisa and Lyavala split the NRM vote with

³⁶ Public interview KYE-MN2-3T#1; public interview KYE-MN2-4T#1; public interview KYE-MS3-1E#1.

³⁷ Sulaiman Kakaire, "Fights in NRM Camp Helped Oguttu Win," *The Observer*, February 27, 2011.

roughly 10,000 votes each, allowing Oguttu to win with only 16,226. Mukisa then turned more heads by showing up to Oguttu's victory celebrations, telling him "We are disorganised. We deserved the loss."³⁸

In the contemporaneous 2011 LC5 race to replace Lyavala, Mukisa ally Marijan defeated Daudi Mulengani (at the time allied with Lumumba), in the primary and both went on to contest in the general. After a tense race, a fist fight broke out between the two candidates and their assistants as results were being announced at the district headquarters in Bugiri town after Marijan was declared the winner. Years later in 2014, Marijan was found guilty of assault for this incident and was sent to Luzira prison for an eight-month sentence, which his supporters insisted was driven by a nationally ascendant Lumumba and aimed only at hurting him politically. As a result, a by-election was held for the vacant LC5 position in March 2015, less than a year before the general elections of 2016. Given this timing, a lengthy primary was deemed unnecessary by the party, and a district delegates meeting attended by the president was arranged to appoint a flagbearer. In typical Museveni style, he threw a bone to each camp, anointing Lyavala as the NRM flagbearer for the race in question, but declaring Mukisa as the best candidate to defeat Oguttu in Bukooli Central in the upcoming general election, knowing that such an out-of-hand endorsement would enrage the Lumumba camp.

In spite of this grace from Museveni, Mukisa and his allies were unwilling to accept Lyavala as chairman and, according to several NRM and FDC elites I spoke with, tacitly supported the FDC candidate Luba Bumaali,³⁹ an allegation which Mukisa allies acknowledge but deny.⁴⁰ Lyavala went on to defeat Bumaali in extremely close (157 votes) and controversial circumstances, where the ballot box that tipped the scales toward the former mysteriously went missing for several hours, and 23 FDC agents were arrested by police on polling day.⁴¹ It is possible that the opposition to Lyavala was driven more by popular sympathy for Marijan – something very evident in my 2016 interviews – more than the open campaigning of his faction. Nonetheless, according to some elites in the party, Museveni was furious with the Mukisa camp after this.

³⁸ Walter Wafula, "Defeated Minister Congratulates Oguttu," *The Daily Monitor*, February 20, 2011.

³⁹ Interview 41, interview 51, interview 37.

⁴⁰ Interview 45.

⁴¹ Trevor S. Baleke, "How the NRM Beat the Opposition in Bugiri," *The Observer*, March 23, 2015.

Table 5.4: Bugiri Camps

	Lumumba (+Kyawa) camp	Baka-Mukisa camp
Bukooli North	Gastar Kyawa Mugoya	Stephen Baka Mugabi (inc.)
Bukooli Central	Solomon Silwani	Fred Mukisa
Woman MP	Agnes Taaka	Hadija Babi
LC5	Siraje Lyavala (inc.)	Azalwa Marijan
NRM Dist. Chairman	Musa Mutumba	Sunday Mukoova (inc.)

Source: compiled by the author.

Going into 2016, an emancipated Marijan faced Lyavala for the LC5 chair, and Mukisa stood against youthful new Lumumba-backed candidate Solomon Silwani, who came third in the 2011 primaries. The tighter races this time were for Woman MP and Bukooli North MP. After vacating the seat as per new NRM secretariat rules, Lumumba attempted to steer her candidate Agnes Taaka into the position against Hadija Babi, who was supported by Baka, Marijan and Mukisa. A new development occurred with the entry of the well-financed Gastar Kyawa Mugoya (known by Kyawa, pronounced “cha-wa”), a former Kampala magistrate and NRM lawyer who stood against Baka in Bukooli North and was unaligned with either existing camp. According to most of the elites I spoke with, Kyawa’s extraordinary wealth and the political operation he built in Bukooli North made him almost a third faction in the district throughout the 2016 cycle,⁴² albeit one that cooperated with Lumumba in the key points of the cycle in order to defeat their common enemies in the Baka-Mukisa camp. Such an alliance of convenience testifies to the bifurcating tendency of the polarised camp culture: in the words of Kyawa’s campaign manager, “she [Lumumba] pulled him into the camp”, because she could help him defeat Baka.⁴³ As I will reveal below, the Mukisa faction was almost entirely wiped out in 2016, with the sole exception of Marijan, leaving Kyawa the likely occupant of an anti-Lumumba power vacuum in the district.

As a more subterranean camp division, these rivalries did not feature in the interpretations of most voters I interviewed, who were more focused on the rivalries at constituency level. For minor elites caught up in the camp rivalry itself however, its polarised nature made picking sides unavoidable. In the words of one NRM incumbent LC3 chairman in Bukooli North:

⁴² Interview 45.

⁴³ Interview, Godfrey Watega, 27/03/2016.

A: They want to force most of us to join certain political camps. And you see that this MP falls into this camp, this one falls into this camp – though they are of the same party! So when this one forces you to join the other camp, and you pretend to be neutral, that one is a tug of war. Here people want you to help them to fight their wars. ... Everyone needs you, so if you remain in the middle they suspect you may be on the other side, so they instead fight you.

Q: How do they fight you?

A: They give the opponents money. For them they have money. For us we have nothing. You hear of somebody being given 10 million, and for you, you don't have even a million. So in fact it has affected us a lot. We've been so much affected, that much I can tell you.

Q: Are the camps led by Baka and Kyawa, or are they district wide camps that they are included in?

A: These camps are bigger than those two people! [Laughing]

Q: Tell me more about them

A: We've got some very big officials, even bigger than these ones, here, who are commanding these camps. It is a long history.⁴⁴

He continued on how the expectations of the electorate make refusing camp rivalries extremely difficult:

the electorate has their expectations in the leaders that they are going to choose. But they are influenced with these monies. And I think they are forced to elect leaders who are not of their choice. Here, you know, people are poor. He wants to choose this one because he's expecting a road, he's expecting a health service, he's expecting A B C D, but instead somebody comes with 10,000 shillings! "Can you accept to offer your vote and I give you this?" He or she will just accept, because of the poverty situation. So in fact it is affecting the whole system. People are electing leader who are not of their own choice, but are just being influenced and bribed here with those monies from those bigger bigger camps.⁴⁵

Yet, as in Kyenjojo, the fact that smaller constituencies usually have pockets of both candidates' supporters, local politicians often prefer to remain unaligned if they can

⁴⁴ Interview 53.

⁴⁵ Interview 53.

avoid it. One NRM district councillor incumbent, who lost the primary and general election to opponents who were sponsored by Baka and Kyawa, claimed:

when you move with some MPs, people have different attitudes. If you move with [JEEMA candidate] Basilirwa, they think you're supporting Basilirwa. If you move with Baka they say you're supporting Baka. When you move with Kyawa, they say you're with Kyawa. Now you have so many enemies. Supporters of Baka, they will not like you. Supporters of Kyawa, they will not like you.⁴⁶

For many however, the financial demands on local candidates overcome these issues and lead them into the patronage and endorsement of one of the camps, as the above-quoted candidate's rival did.

5.2 Processes of competition and inclusion

By now the reader may well be wondering how it could be the case that local politics could possibly remain divided and competitive for so long before a single election. Specifically, how is it the case that there are multiple "NRM candidates" at election day yet official primaries before them? Why are primary-losing candidates not spent forces by election day? Why do candidates capable of winning in the general election not just skip the expensive primaries altogether? How can such competition exist before, and even after the election? In this critically important section, I will answer these questions by detailing the *institutional terrain* of elite camps' competition in the processes of the election, from the registration of party members up to the general election itself.

This terrain is characterised by a fine balance of systemic competition and inclusion. It is competitive in that it forces camps and candidates to fight each other at each stage, yet it is inclusive because although it rewards victors of these contests, it maintains space for losers to continue their campaigns. Such a fine balance enables the party to both promote rivalry and to prolong it.

It is over the outputs of this terrain that we can begin to see the collective utility of intra-

⁴⁶ Interview 50.

party competition to the regime. As mentioned in 1.1.2, it is often said that the NRM party organisation and structures go completely dormant after each election and wake up five years later for the next one.⁴⁷ Remarkably, given this period of hibernation, by election day the party has millions of card-carrying members, deep official structures penetrating the most remote villages in the countryside, and a raft of its own (official and affiliated) candidates that are better known to the electorate than any opposition contenders. The process of internal competition that I will now profile is the force that “wakes” the party up in this regard. The purpose of this section is to explain how the specific terrain of intra-NRM elite competition is engineered to a) maximise and prolong that competition, and b) have it produce this structural byproduct beneficial to the party as a whole, and therefore the regime. Exactly how this byproduct is redirected towards the president’s electoral advantage will be made clear in chapter 7.

Such a culture of constant division and inclusion is maintained by the internal processes of the party, which spread rivalries out over four stages. While the victors of each stage are rewarded in the next, the vanquished are not excluded from the terrain of internal competition, but provided space to maintain their competition. Put differently, the internal culture of the party tells rival camps that success in each of the four stages of competition is aided by, but not reliant on, success in the prior one, therefore provoking and prolonging camp competition. These four stages are:

- i. Mass *registration* of new party members early in 2015. Only registered members can vote in the structures elections and primaries.
- ii. *Internal structures elections* in the party between June and July, leading to the electoral college appointment of the district NRM committee, which manages the party primaries
- iii. The *party primaries* in September-October that select its official flagbearer nominees for the general election.
- iv. The *general election* itself, which in most cases sees the flagbearers face their

⁴⁷ Golooba-Mutebi, “The Cost of Politics in Uganda.”

primary rivals for a second popular election.

I will now profile each of these stages and the links between them both nationally and in my three case districts.

5.2.1 Registration of NRM members

The first step in rebuilding the party before 2016 was the renewal of the party membership list and the (re)registration of members. In 2011, the NRM opened primary voting to all Ugandan adults, regardless of whether they were formally members of the party or not. In 2016, primary voting was open only to registered party members, leading it to undertake a mass registration exercise a month beforehand. This was also deemed necessary due to the alleged mismanagement of the previous list by outgoing Secretary General Amama Mbabazi. President Museveni and the secretariat launched the registration drive in Gulu in April, where the president filled out a large prop yellow membership card to become the first official new member.

The national secretariat worked with the outgoing district party leadership (appointed before the 2011 election and soon to be replaced) to appoint registrars to manage this process. Unlike the following two stages of party building, the secretariat and the state took more control over this process in order to ensure it was not entirely co-opted by local actors with an interest in registering only their own supporters. While the district committees nominated a selection of candidates for the powerful district registrar position, it was the secretariat that made the final selection. These district registrars then appointed registrars for the sub-county, parish and village level, who would manage the registration of voters. In theory this was supposed to involve handing out voter cards, but for the most part ended up signing NRM voters up into a “yellow book”. Security officials – especially the parish and sub-county ISO agents (PISOs and GISOs) – were used to vet village and parish registrars to ensure that suitable candidates were chosen.

Local elites realised early on how important it was to register their supporters for participation in the later structures elections and party primaries, and therefore

constituted the driving force in the registration process throughout the country.⁴⁸ In the words of Kasukaali, candidate in Mwenge Central Kyenjojo,

by the time of registration, we would go to radios and encourage our voters: “please if you want me to be your member of parliament, it doesn’t matter how much you talk, you have to be registered.” So the mobilisation for registration was done more by candidates than government.⁴⁹

The party provided little if any resources to the local registrars to do this, instead relying on the local candidates’ participation and resources.⁵⁰ Many were angry with the party secretariat for allowing their opponents significant leeway in the registration rather than leaving this in the hand of the outgoing district committee.⁵¹ Many also accused these opponents of registering opposition members to bulk up their numbers,⁵² or of hoarding registration materials in order to privilege their own supporters.⁵³ In **Kyenjojo**, the registration phase was so sensitive that when the secretariat’s appointee Winnie Ngobi was seen by the Byamukama/Butime faction as a Kajara/Muhumuza agent, Byamukama (who was outgoing NRM District Chairman) stormed out of the room and factional underlings engaged in a fist fight.⁵⁴

From the outset, the national NRM secretariat resisted heavy pressure from incumbent party and parliamentary office holders (representing their camp interests) to leave the registration effort in their hands, infuriating the majority of the parliamentary caucus.⁵⁵ Naturally, as Registrars tended to be from the districts, they universally fell under suspicion of being either sympathetic to or corrupted by one of the camps. While this may have been true, it was more consequential for the structures and primaries elections than the voter registration, which seems to have been open enough for all camps to push

⁴⁸ Interview 5, interview 33. These incentives for candidates to drive membership registration were also noted in Zambia’s one-party state, see: Baylies and Szeftel, “Elections in the One-Party State,” 33.

⁴⁹ Interview, Methusela Kasukaali, 19/03/2017.

⁵⁰ Interview 9.

⁵¹ Sadab Kitatta Kaaya, “MPs Raise Alarm on New Register,” *The Observer*, May 11, 2015.

⁵² Martins E. Ssekweyama and Dan Wandera, “Confusion as NRM Registers Members,” *The Daily Monitor*, May 22, 2015.

⁵³ Andrew Mulinda, “Tanga Causes Arrest of Buikwe NRM Boss,” *The Observer*, May 20, 2015, <http://www.observer.ug/news-headlines/37944-tanga-causes-arrest-of-buikwe-nrm-boss>.

⁵⁴ Edison Amanyire, “NRM Leaders Exchange Blows over Registrar,” *The Daily Monitor*, June 6, 2015.

⁵⁵ Stephen Kafeero, “2010 Ghosts Haunt NRM Registration,” *The Daily Monitor*, July 7, 2015; Kaaya, “MPs Raise Alarm on New Register.”

for their supporters to be registered as party members.⁵⁶ Few elites whom I spoke with found the process to be problematic in its later stages, although there were many accusations to the contrary as it got underway (as in Kyenjojo above).

Although my fieldwork commenced well after the registration period, several elites in my case districts mentioned that MP campaigns took strong interest in driving the registration process.⁵⁷ In **Bugiri**, one informant told me that MP candidates played a big role in registration, going as far as saying that “every candidate mobilises in every village, telling supporters to register.”⁵⁸ In **Kayunga**, Minister Nantaba used her presence on the radio to encourage her supporters to sign up, although she did not use her agents. According to one elite who was affiliated with her camp: “during the time of registration, so many people registered because of Nantaba [...] she was encouraging people to register, so that they can vote for her.”⁵⁹

The net result everywhere was a frenzied effort by district elites to sign up as many members as possible, which they did. According to the NRM Secretariat, the exercise signed up 10.2 million members.⁶⁰ This is likely an exaggeration, but given that many public interviewees claimed to have signed up during the process, the true figure is probably well into the millions. The registration exercise also consolidated the branding of the party at village level. This was especially the case regarding areas with opposition supporters, who had to recite a loyalty oath to the party in order to be registered, overseen by the existing village party leadership.⁶¹ This would have been a much more significant a development in competitive areas like the north and north east, more than in the rural south where NRM self-identification is stronger. These effects were more important to the party than the institutional utility of organising the structures and primaries elections. In fact, in Bugiri the primaries abandoned use of the voters register

⁵⁶ The supporters of Vincent Mugisha may be an exception to this. Mugisha told me that there was significant resistance to registering Bakiga voters in his strongholds.

⁵⁷ Interview 41.

⁵⁸ Interview 45.

⁵⁹ Interview 26.

⁶⁰ Deo Walusimbi, “Opposition Rejects NRM’s 10.2 Million Registered to Vote,” *The Observer*, July 22, 2015, <http://www.observer.ug/news-headlines/38886-opposition-rejects-nrm-s-10-2-million-registered-voters#comment-123094>.

⁶¹ Sadab Kitatta Kaaya, “Uproar as Opposition People Sneak into NRM Yellow Book,” *The Observer*, May 25, 2015.

for and allowed for the village NRM Chairmen to simply supervise the vote instead.⁶² I cannot say whether this was common in other districts.

As briefly mentioned in 4.1.1, official party membership in both the NRM and the opposition affects political behaviour in rural areas, with voters placing a premium on both the relative structural presence of each party, and the breadth of “card holding” membership in their community. Often when asked about voting patterns generally, or of the voting preferences of others, people answer in reference to which card they have. It is hard to say whether membership is a cause or a consequence of voting choice, but there is good reason to say that it is at least complimentary. The mass registration of members therefore reified the “mass-party” credentials of the NRM, and played to the voters will to be “in” the party.

5.2.2 NRM internal “structures” elections

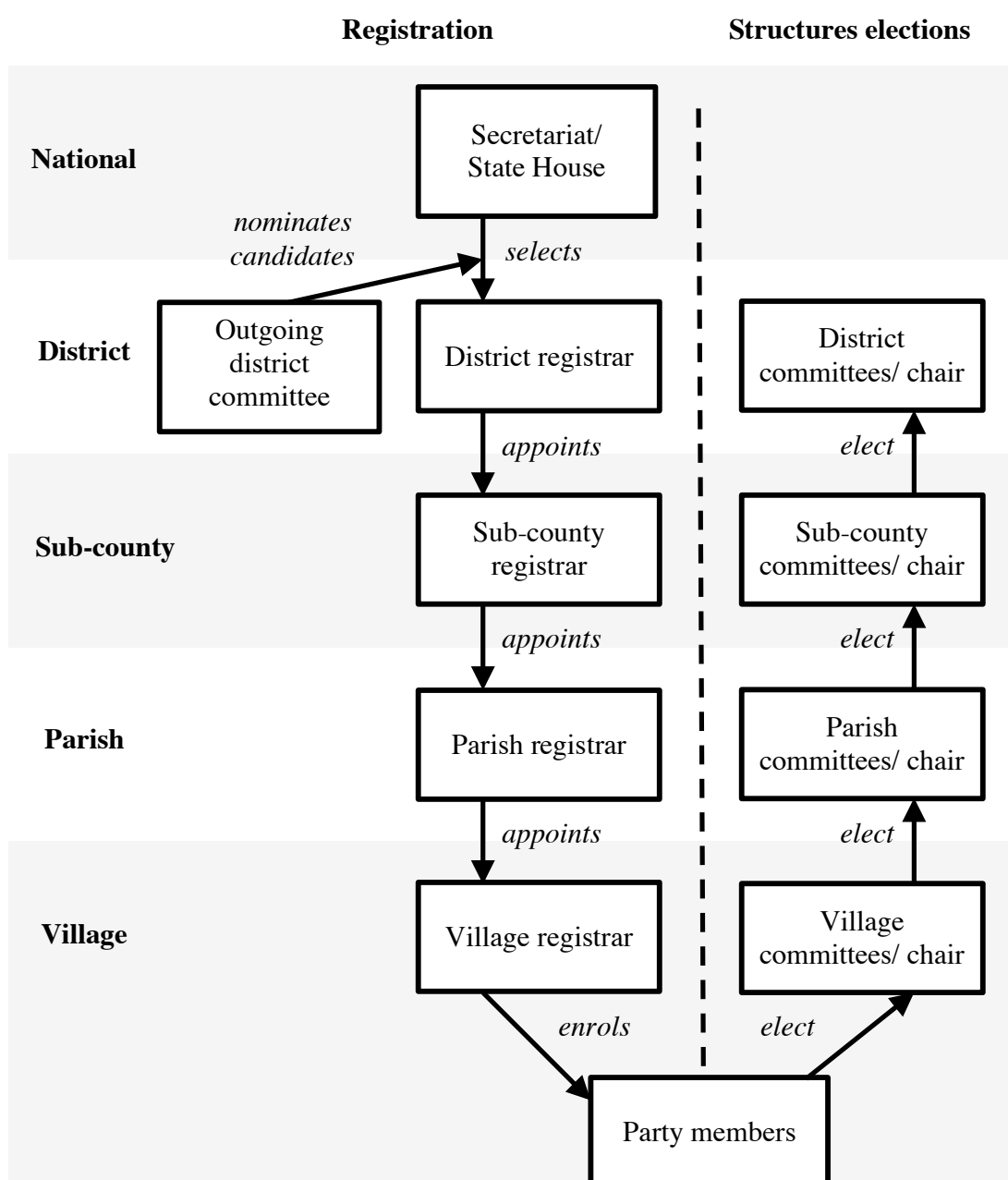
Following the registration exercise, the NRM held elections for its internal membership structures (henceforth “the structures”) throughout September, in which only the registered members could stand or vote. This consisted of an electoral college process similar to the early RC system in the 1980s (see 3.2.1), starting at the branch (village) level, where thirty-person NRM committees were elected by members, who then conferenced at the parish level and elected a thirty-person parish committee, and so on up through the sub-county and district level. Unlike the appointment of registrars during the registration process, which had been managed mainly by the secretariat, the structures elections offered the prize of the local NRM leadership to whichever camp out-maneuvered its rivals.

The advantages of this were most fruitful in the appointment of the influential NRM District Chairman by the district party committee, a post which “determines so many things”.⁶³ Along with the prestige of party officialdom, the holder of this office and his/her appointees have a hand in managing the party primaries the following month, and can do so to their own camp’s advantage. The chairman also had some control over

⁶² Interview 42.

⁶³ Interview 26, interview 7.

Table 5.5: Procedure for registration of NRM members and structures elections



Source: compiled by the author.

the finances allocated to the party's official mobilisation efforts⁶⁴ – although these paled in comparison with the sums raised by camps and their candidates themselves. Put simply, the District Chairman is “the head of the party.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Interview 7.

⁶⁵ Interview 7.

These potential advantages gave district camps enormous interest in participating in the electoral college process, which was marred by misconduct allegations and/or violence in most districts.⁶⁶ The fact that the NRM primary process is controlled in part by the District NRM executive is the key reason why camps exist at the district level rather than any other, and is the cause of many strange bedfellows joining forces – Kyawa and Lumumba in Bugiri, and Kaija and Kajara in Kyenjojo being good examples. While there were incumbent party chairmen in each district, incumbency afforded no significant advantages over one's rivals.

With the electoral college system in place, district elites interested in shaping the district level structure were forced to start in the village level, requiring the mobilisation of vast networks of agents and considerable finance.⁶⁷ In **Bugiri**, the incumbent chairman Sunday Mukova was an ally of the Mukisa/Baka camp, and was therefore seen as objectionable to the other players in the district. After initially floating separate candidates, Lumumba and Kyawa agreed to support Musa Mutumba (Lumumba's political assistant). The pair then embarked on a campaign to defeat Mukova in the structures elections, which in the telling words of Kyawa's campaign manager, meant that "we had to uproot him."⁶⁸ This manager then took me through the stages of this fight and the resistance they encountered from the other camp, which involved activating a vast network of agents throughout the constituency's hundreds of villages to enlist and sponsor factional candidates at each level from the village, and ensuring these were paid highly enough to resist being bought off by Baka's camp who were attempting the same thing. In the process of explaining this, the manager drew maps of the NRM structures in which each person was represented by an arrow: facing one way or the other.

Aside from defeating the incumbent district party chairman, camp participation in the Bugiri structures elections also solidified their own networks. A District Councillor

⁶⁶ Denis Olaka, "Bukedea District NRM Polls Called Off," *Uganda Radio Network*, September 17, 2015, <http://ugandaradionetwork.com/a/story.php?s=77919&licensed=1>; Olive Eyotaru, "Sembabule NRM Members Want Structures Election Cancelled," *Uganda Radio Network*, September 17, 2015; Anon., "Smiles, Chaos as NRM Elects New Leaders," *The Daily Monitor*, September 19, 2015; Mudangha Kolyangha, "Minister Loses NRM Election, Stoned by Mob," *The Daily Monitor*, September 20, 2015.

⁶⁷ Peterson Amanyisa, "Bushenyi NRM Leaders Boycott Party Polls," *Uganda Radio Network*, September 17, 2015.

⁶⁸ Interview, Godfrey Watega, 27/03/2016.

candidate I interviewed, who was Publicity Secretary in the village level NRM structures and General Secretary at the parish level, gave me a view of this rationale from the ground:

Q: Why do you think the MPs are interested in supporting their own ones through [structures elections]?

A: To add to their strength, for someone who can stand on their behalf.

Q: Why would they need that though?

A: You see now, when you want to mingle food, like for us the three stones, you have to lay down your support. So that nobody can shake you. If you put this one here, this one here, and this one here, you'd be strong.

[...]

Q: In the thirty people in the district [NRM structures], the main factions are around the MP candidates, Kyawa, Baka, and Basilirwa. Which is the biggest do you think?

A: Now it is Kyawa.

Q: And do you think that helped him win?

A: Yes, it helped him a lot.

Q: And you think that's because what you said about the stones?

A: Yeah, you need a strong foundation and also Kyawa got people earlier enough than Baka, that's why he was able to go through.

Q: What do you mean by that? He got people earlier?

A: This man came earlier enough.

Q: When did he come?

A: Now Baka came late, when this man had already captured people at the grassroots.

Q: When did Kyawa start coming?

A: Before we went for primaries, he had started 4 months in advance.⁶⁹

Aside from the utility of controlling the district NRM branch during the election, making one's own local network of agents official NRM office holders also adds a certain prestige to a campaign. The incumbent LC3 chairman quoted in 5.1.3 said much the same thing of the camps' involvement in the structures elections:

Q: In [your sub-county] are there strong village NRM structures with the thirty-person NRM committees? Are they there?

⁶⁹ Interview 50.

A: They have been there, but they are influencing them, making them affiliated with different camps. As I've said. Because you may find a sub-county NRM chairperson doing the right thing, but they call him threatening him, that "if you don't follow our instructions, you will not lead successfully". He also changes! And it is the current situation in [my sub-county] now. Because a party chairperson, he is supposed to move with a flagbearer at the sub-county level, but he's intimidated, threatened, eventually he's forced to support an independent candidate.⁷⁰

In the end, the Kyawa-Lumumba alliance was successful in 'uprooting' Mukova from the position of NRM chairman, replacing him with Mutumba.

In **Kyenjojo**, the camps also coalesced around two candidates. Butime, Byamukama and Lawrence supported Sam Magezi, a former LC3 chairman of Bugaaki (Mwenge Central), and Kajara, Kaija and Spellanza all supported George William Musabe, Kajara's political assistant. Mugisha also contested for the post personally. One source whom I spoke with was an NRM chairperson at LC3 level, and also a minor power broker in the district elite. After supporting Muhumuza against Butime in 2011, he had now rejoined the Butime-Byamukama faction, even though Kajara lobbied for his support. During the structures elections, he explained the interest his candidacy garnered from Kajara, who started opposing his candidacy "from the grass roots":

[Kajara] was a very wise man. If I failed to come as [sub-county] chairperson NRM, this Magezi Sam was going to lose. Because I was the one mobilising for him. So people at the very village, the LC, Kajara was injecting the money. At the village and the parish, injecting injecting, so that people would come, and be ready to vote for his political assistant. Even in the whole district, he was trying to build up so that at all of the sub-counties, they would be his supporters.⁷¹

Much as Butime supported him for his own factional benefit, this party chairman likely mobilised NRM members within the structures elections from the village level. As with the registration of voters, it was the local candidates who drove participation in this entire exercise, transporting voters to the polling stations and providing them with

⁷⁰ Interview 53.

⁷¹ Interview 18.

compensation.⁷² As well as the use in determining the district NRM office holders, bringing one's network of agents into the NRM structures at the village, parish and sub-county levels also adds to their cachet as MP entourages.⁷³ As one candidate put it: "when you want to contest on a party ticket, you want to show that you are established in the party systems." On polling day, Magezi narrowly defeated Musabe to become party chairman.

In **Kayunga** the structures elections took on meteoric importance in the battle between the camps of Karangwa and Nantaba, who both contested for the position of NRM chairperson personally. Karangwa likely thought that gaining control of the official NRM and its primary influence was his only possible leverage against Nantaba's extraordinary popularity. Nantaba in turn understood that in preventing this she could finish off Karangwa's faction during the election, and solidify her political hold on the district. Unlike other cases however, camps were not involved in actively fostering representatives at the earliest stages (village) of the process, and instead got involved at either the parish or sub-county level, according to conflicting sources.⁷⁴ This was most likely due to Nantaba's grassroots popularity, which by all accounts led to her domination of the lower structures.

Instead, competition at this stage heated up at the higher stages of the electoral college, when the numbers of voters became fewer – particularly the point where the sub-county committees (in their collective capacity as the district council) elected the district executive. This was a naturally difficult terrain for Nantaba, given that incumbent NRM district councilors and LC3 Chairs were entitled to vote, and these had been her political enemies over the previous four years. Several sources told me that Karangwa injected significant money into the district election⁷⁵, better understood the procedures of the electoral college system, and arranged for the electors to take an "outing" to nearby Jinja immediately prior to the vote.⁷⁶ The election occurred on Sunday 20th September, and extended into the dark hours, angering the Nantaba camp who thought it should be postponed. According to local journalists, Karangwa assigned each elector a

⁷² Interview 9.

⁷³ Interview 4, interview 7.

⁷⁴ Interview 33, interview 27.

⁷⁵ Interview 28, interview 31.

⁷⁶ Interview 27.

personalised number for them to write on their ballot, so that he could confirm who had voted which way. When the NRM registrar announced Karangwa the winner, Nantaba and her supporters rioted, and were tear-gassed heavily by the police.⁷⁷

It is worth noting two things before moving on. The first is that these NRM party structures, while having some connection to official party mobilisation efforts at the district level, are subordinate to the camps that compete for them in terms of finance, networks, and, (therefore) political power. Camps and candidates do not fight to populate the structures in order to harness a latent party mobilising machine – instead the structures are tokens of competition that bring rewards in their ability to shape future party outcomes bureaucratically, and to adopt the official branding of the party. While the presence of the structures in villages were important, I never heard of the village committees actually meeting or doing anything, other than simply existing.⁷⁸ Second, the process of the structures’ revival every five years is entirely reliant on the competition of the camps, not the centralised organisation power of the party itself. Without this ingredient, they probably would not exist at all. I will speak more about the structures relevance in chapter 7.

5.2.3 NRM primaries

Since the transition to multipartyism in 2005-06, the NRM has held primaries for its nominees in general elections. While data from 2006 is not strong, in both 2011 and 2016, these primaries were a bigger spectacle than the general election in the rural south, so much that one could be forgiven for thinking that the primaries *are* the elections.⁷⁹ “It’s like running twice”, said one MP from Kyenjojo.⁸⁰ The reason for their significance is that those who win the primary are licensed to carry the party’s symbol – the bus – on the ballot as its official candidate, making them party “flagbearers”. As a practical matter, this is important for illiterate voters who look for only this symbol to vote NRM. But its major impact is to provide candidates with a prestigious link to party

⁷⁷ Interview 27.

⁷⁸ They have this in common with the Movement Committees of the late 1990s, see: Carbone, *No-Party Democracy? Ugandan Politics in Comparative Perspective*, 96.

⁷⁹ David Mugambe Mpiima, “Political Party Primaries: Was There Method to the Madness?,” in *Controlling Consent: Uganda’s 2016 Elections*, ed. Joe Oloka-Onyango and Josephine Ahikire (Trenton, NJ.: Africa World Press, 2016), 17.

⁸⁰ Interview 19.

officialdom. The formal NRM line is that party members should only vote for these flagbearers. Chants of “bus, bus, bus”, reflecting party-line voting, are common at official NRM rallies attended by flagbearers, and robocalls by Museveni also campaign for NRM flagbearers as an extension of his own candidacy, although as will be shown in 5.2.4 this support is somewhat half-hearted.

Despite the widespread perception that flagbearers are financially aided by the party,⁸¹ all of those I spoke with said the amount they received from the party was negligible, and a tiny fraction of the resources they raised personally to mount competitive campaigns. Moreover, the use of any institutional structures of the party – its personnel, vehicles, mobilisation strategies – is not a factor in seeking the flag, as all of these institutional properties of the party are weak. The real benefit of being the flagbearer is that carrying the label carries a strong appeal among many voters, and this alone moderately enhances the prospect of winning in the general election. Much as there are many in the village who are open to NRM-Independent candidates, there are some who will only vote for the party flagbearer.⁸²

For many of these voters, there is a general sense that as NRM members this is their responsibility, something that flagbearers play on in their campaigns. During one rally I visited in Bbaale, Kayunga by the Karangwa camp (which at this point had co-opted the district NRM structures completely) a speaker gave a 40-minute lecture imploring voters to only vote for flagbearers. One voter told me directly that when choosing whom to vote for in February, there is a “general consensus of the NRM that we should vote for only NRM candidates from the lower levels all the way to the top.”⁸³ For others, the impression that flagbearers are likely to win *because* they’re flagbearers, gives those campaigns momentum, as it theoretically proves that one has more support than his/her rivals. Upon being asked which candidate is likely to win, several voters referred simply to the flagbearers:⁸⁴ “NRM is a mass party” reasoned one of these, an undecided voter at the time, “so the NRM candidates are likely to win”.⁸⁵ In several other interviews

⁸¹ Rita Abrahamson and Gerald Bareebe, “Uganda’s 2016 Elections: Not Even Faking It Anymore,” *African Affairs* 115, no. 461 (2016): 755.

⁸² Public interview KAY-BC3-1T#1.

⁸³ Public interview BUG-BC5-2T#1.

⁸⁴ Public interview KAY-BC1-1E#1.

⁸⁵ Public interview BUG-BC3-1E#1.

between the primaries and the general people referred to flagbearers as incumbent MPs already.

MP candidates – and all other candidates – are keenly aware of this.⁸⁶ I asked Amos Lugoloobi, MP for Ntenjeru North, Kayunga, why he decided to contest in the primaries:

this area had been predominantly NRM, and the tendency has always been that you will stand better chances if you are NRM, and since I was already an NRM member, I don't want to throw that opportunity to someone else, because that would offer a huge challenge against me... people previously have been voting symbols, the symbol of bus has been very popular. And a lot people who are generally illiterate, who could not know how to read and write, the campaign message normally says that "vote bus, vote bus". Because so many other parties that exist do not have the mantle of going through all the villages to sell their identity... So many of these people who are illiterate, only go there to tick what they have been told to do. So the people marketing the bus, have been able to position that bus into their minds.⁸⁷

Aside from its advantages in winning the election, only flagbearers are considered NRM MPs for the duration of their term in parliament, something that carries significant perks (see 6.1.1). This is also something that many voters are keenly aware of, and given the narrative of distribution that values a local MP's relationship with Museveni above all else (see 7.2.1.b), this feeds back into the electoral advantages of being a flagbearer.

Further to reaping these benefits of competing in the primaries, in many areas candidates have no real choice but to do so. A significant factor here is exposure. The period lasting from registration to structures elections to primaries constitute such a spectacle in the rural south that staying beneath the radar is not an option for most candidates. As one opposition candidate in Bukooli North put it:

it gave them [NRM contenders] an advantage. Because you see people were even asking me, "where have you been? These ones moved a long time ago." ...So when we

⁸⁶ Interview 29, interview 9, interview 7.

⁸⁷ Interview Amos Lugoloobi, 03/03/2016.

went in [the general election] they were saying “but we already have candidates, who have been moving around. I wish you had also come at that time.”⁸⁸

An NRM candidate in Kyenjojo agreed:

these people have moved in the primaries, all over the district, they have made themselves known, they have moved and people have seen them physically on the ground. So when you come up as an Independent, and you are not well known before, you find these ones already established.⁸⁹

Part of this is due to the coercive monopoly discussed in chapter 4. In Kayunga for example, police were dispatched to pull down the campaign posters of non-NRM general election candidates who had erected them before the EC’s official campaign period, but left those of candidates competing in party primaries – effectively meaning only NRM posters could stand for months before the general election.⁹⁰

The prospects of success in the primaries is closely linked to the previous stage of competition in the party structures elections. Some elites who failed to install their preferred NRM District Chairman took the consequences seriously enough to sit out the primaries altogether on fears that they would be rigged of victory. In **Kyenjojo**, all the major candidates competed in the NRM primaries with the exception of Byamukama, for whom the election of Sam Magezi was not a sufficient counterweight to the threat that the Kajara-approved registrar Winnie Ngobi would rig him of victory. However, this could also be due to the fact that Byamukama was under-resourced throughout the elections and may have used this as a face-saving reason to quit the primaries,⁹¹ or thought that if incumbent Kajara lost in the primaries the new flagbearer would be easier to defeat.⁹² Kajara then contested against Vincent Mugisha and won. Elsewhere, the primaries tested the mobilising strength of the MP candidates. Butime defeated Kasukaali in Mwenge Central, and Lawrence beat Muhumuza in Mwenge North.

⁸⁸ Interview 37.

⁸⁹ Interview 15.

⁹⁰ Fred Muzaale, “Police Warn Contestants in Kayunga on Early Campaigns,” *The Daily Monitor*, August 4, 2015, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Police-warn-contestants-in-Kayunga-on-early-campaigns/-/688334/2819380/-/kh0yak/-/index.html>.

⁹¹ Interview 19.

⁹² Interview 7.

Allegations of rigging were widespread in all three.

In **Kayunga**, the fallout from the NRM structures elections constituted a turning point in the race (the full ramifications of which will be discussed in 7.3). Furious with the process, Nantaba chose to boycott the party primaries. She claims to have inhaled so much tear gas in the confrontation that she had to spend a month with a specialist in Nairobi, and after nominating as an independent she largely left the campaign trail until the weeks before the general election.⁹³ As a result of her decision, her opponent Juliet Nalunga sailed through with little opposition to become the NRM flagbearer.

Across the district, other primary contests between the camps did take place, with varying results. Amos Lugoloobi, due to a combination of his relatively workable relationship with the Karanga camp, his popularity as an MP, and his importance in Parliament as Budget Committee Chairman, did not face a well-organised opponent like Nantaba did. His only opponent, Immaculate Namata, did not campaign for very long, although it is not clear whether Karangwa planned this non-confrontation or not. In Ntenjeru South, a key contest between the camps, incumbent Patrick Nsanja won in highly controversial circumstances against Nantaba's candidate Fred Baseke. Owing to Kumama's ambiguous position in the camp structure, he defeated Minister Madada in the primaries, who according to public interviews had declined in popularity among the voters for various unfulfilled pledges over the years, including the tarmacking of the Kayunga-Galiraya road.⁹⁴ Throughout the district however, it was generally understood (or alleged) by voters and elites that NRM flagbearers were in the Karangwa camp, and Nantaba's allies were independent – which, with the exception of Lugoloobi, was basically true.

In **Bugiri**, it is unclear whether the election of Musa Mutumba as NRM District Chairman directly affected the primaries (or whether Lumumba's appointment as NRM Secretary General did for that matter), but the top Lumumba-Kyawa candidates certainly fared better in the primaries than those of the Mukisa-Baka faction. Kyawa defeated Baka in Bukooli North, Taaka defeated Hadija in Woman MP, and Silwani

⁹³ Interview, Idah Nantaba, 03/03/2016.

⁹⁴ Public interview KAY-BC1-2E#1.

defeated Mukisa himself in Bukooli Central. This last race was the most surprising, given that Mukisa came a distant third behind Silwani and Daudi Mulengani. This may be the result of malpractice in the district NRM, but it is more likely a reflection of Mukisa's widespread unpopularity in the constituency – something which came through in many of my public interviews there. The only exception to this factional balance sheet was in the LC5 Chairman race, where incumbent Lyavala lost to an emancipated Marijan, who had developed widespread sympathy through his prison stay.

Reflecting across all three case districts, it is hard to say with certainty what the relationship is between the NRM structural elections – specifically the position of district NRM chairman – and the party-bureaucratic advantages employed during the primaries. While there were several cases where persistent rumours from elite interviews suggested such a connection (Kajara in Mwenge South, Nsanja in Ntenjeru South, Sazir in Kayunga LC5, Taaka in Bugiri Woman MP) this was not always the case. The fact that several candidates whose camp won the former but who personally lost the latter (Madada in Bbaale, Lyavala in Bugiri LC5) and vice versa (Lugoloobi in Ntenjeru North, Spellanza in Kyenjojo Woman MP) make it difficult to claim such a connection in black and white terms. Furthermore, the opacity of the NRM internal bureaucracy make this connection difficult to prove empirically in any case.

However, in connecting the two phases of intra-party electoral competition, two points are germane. First, even if there is not necessarily a direct connection between holding the office of NRM District Chairman and rigging primaries in one's favour, there is evidently the *perception* among elites that this is possible. Therefore, camps may be competing for structural dominance either hoping that this may make a difference, or acting to prevent their opponents from doing so. The majority of camp power brokers operate under this perception, and it is clear that it drove camp participation in the structures elections and NRM registration processes.

Second, camp dominance in the structures elections brings advantages for primary campaigns in other forms than simple rigging. Evidence from Bugiri especially shows that camps have an incentive to merge their personal networks into the party structures for the sake of enhancing their mobilising potential in both the primaries and the general election. This is especially so given that, as evidence from the LC3 Chairman in Bugiri

quoted above suggests, party office holders do not always campaign for flagbearers like they are supposed to. Hence the true mobilising advantage that comes with being a flagbearer in the general election – the prestige and officialdom of formal NRM candidacy – can be offset slightly by rivals claiming to be supported by the NRM officeholders at village, parish, sub-county and district levels.

5.2.4. General election

The final stage of local competition is theoretically the only one that actually matters: the general election itself. As discussed above, in most NRM strongholds this is seen as a less significant event than the primaries, so much so that it is very often called simply “Kiggundu’s elections”, in reference to Baddru Kiggundu, the Electoral Commission Chairman. This ordering reveals a perspective that multi-party change in 2005-06 has not really changed the process of electing MPs – where the true continuity is between the old Movement System elections and the current NRM party primaries – but instead added an extra hurdle where opposition and independent candidates can challenge Movement candidates, in “Kiggundu’s elections”. However, this should not be taken to mean that these elections are a mere formality. Candidates still need to clear this hurdle regardless of their success in the primaries. The culture of division and inclusion of the NRM’s local politics carries on, as most primary losers stand as Independent candidates, referred to as “NRM-Independents”. In the vast majority of districts and constituencies throughout the rural south, the general elections were a rematch of the top two or three candidates in the primaries, or a contest between flagbearers and NRM identifying candidates who chose not to contest in primaries for various reasons, (such as Byamukama in Kyenjojo) whom I will also call “NRM-Independents”.

That so many NRM-Independents can run in the general election is a phenomenon that needs to be understood from both the elite and voter perspectives. Each election, incumbent MPs (and later flagbearers) put pressure on Museveni and the party secretariat to take a hard line on people running as NRM-Independents after losing primaries. The main reason for this is financial, in that MPs know that they will have to spend far more on their general election campaigns if their main primary opponent stands against them, not to mention the fact that they are less likely to retain their seat with a strong opponent. In 2016, as in prior elections, these MPs were told that this time

would be different, and that NRM-Independents would meet the full force of party discipline.⁹⁵

However, when the time came the party secretariat and the president didn't lift a finger to actually prevent this from occurring. Candidates who lost primaries claimed to have been rigged out of victory by their opponents: a repertoire that is so consistent it is almost boilerplate, but one that allows for a nominal exception to the "rules" of the NRM against independent candidacies. The president then played the role of saviour, personally granting audiences with groups of primary losers and allowing them the right to stand as independents, unless there was a chance that opposition candidates could sneak through as a result (as happened in Bukooli Central in 2011).⁹⁶ In my elite interviews I found little evidence from NRM-Independent candidates that the national party discouraged them to stand again,⁹⁷ with the exception of one councillor candidate in Bugiri.⁹⁸ One NRM-Independent, Vincent Mugisha in Mwenge South, even claims to have been "advised" by a representative of State House to stand again.

The space for NRM-Independents is also created by perceptions from voters about the openness of NRM normative monopoly discussed in 4.1.2. As stated above, being a flagbearer carries its most important advantages in the brand legacy of NRM officialdom, as many rural voters want to support the party's nominee. The same ambiguity that exists within the national party about whether candidates are "allowed" to run independently is mirrored on the ground, fuelled by the widespread belief that primaries were rigged by winners.⁹⁹ One voter in Bugiri called campaigning as an NRM-Independent the "behind door" route to being an MP.¹⁰⁰ While there are many "staunch" NRM members who will always support the flagbearer, many (probably most) people maintain their allegiance for whomever they voted for in the primaries,

⁹⁵ Sadab Kitatta Kaaya, "NRM's Plot to Eradicate Independents Revealed," *The Observer*, May 18, 2015.

⁹⁶ Sadab Kitatta Kaaya, "Museveni Defied by NRM Losers," *The Observer*, December 4, 2015, <http://www.observer.ug/news-headlines/41447-museveni-defied-by-nrm-losers>.

⁹⁷ Note that these candidates often did receive pressure from the district NRM, although as discussed these branches were by this point tokens of local camp conflict.

⁹⁸ Interview 50. It should be noted however that this pressure came from Kasule Lumumba in her capacity as party Secretary General, who as we have seen, was invested in such an outcome more for local than national reasons.

⁹⁹ Public interview KYE-MN2-4T#1; public interview KAY-NS2-1E#1.

¹⁰⁰ Public interview BUG-BN1-1E#1.

even if they do use this “behind door”.¹⁰¹ One voter described this split in his community explicitly:

There are two kinds of people, there are those who stick with the flagbearer, whoever has been fronted by the party, and there are those who go with personalities and promises of the candidates.¹⁰²

There was also a sense that NRM-Independent candidates were acceptable to the electorate to stand because they had already shown that they were NRM supporters at heart in the primaries, or previously, and thus were not strictly “Independent” candidates whose success would violate NRM empirical or normative monopoly. “You have to show that you’re NRM, first of all” said one NRM-Independent candidate.¹⁰³ NRM-Independents catered to this by actively campaigning for the president and embracing the NRM’s yellow theme colour in their clothing and campaign posters. This conversation in Mwenge North captured the partisan ambiguities of the NRM-Independent well:

Q: Are people more likely to support the NRM flagbearer?

A: Yes.

[...]

Q: What about people like Muhumuza, who is an NRM MP but not the flagbearer? Are people still less likely to support him based on the flag?

A: As long as you were once in the NRM, and you campaign for the NRM, much as you failed in the primaries they can still support you and you [will] go through. Even when Muhumuza lost in the primary, some people were inspired by his religion and ethnic group, because he is a Mukiga.¹⁰⁴

While this pattern of exceptionality seems so predictable as to not make it an exception at all, I did find that most of the people I interviewed in Kyenjojo before the primaries¹⁰⁵ genuinely thought that NRM losers would be too “ashamed” to stand as NRM-

¹⁰¹ Public interview BUG-BC2-3T#1.

¹⁰² Public interview KAY-BC3-1T#1.

¹⁰³ Interview 7.

¹⁰⁴ Public interview KYE-MN2-3T#1.

¹⁰⁵ Kyenjojo was the only district I visited before the primaries for logistical reasons.

Independents,¹⁰⁶ or were unlikely to run because of the NRM's rules against it. In one case I returned to re-interview someone of this opinion who was now actively supporting his NRM-Independent candidate, having previously told me that such a scenario was unlikely.¹⁰⁷ As will be discussed in 7.1.4, the president aids this reality by avoiding "decampaigning" NRM-Independents at his rallies (to which they are usually invited).¹⁰⁸

To clarify: that candidates can stand as NRM-Independents does not negate the advantages of official nomination discussed above. Rather, the evident advantages of being a flagbearer are tempered by a certain flexibility on the ground about the NRM-Independent "behind door". This is similar to the link between registration and structure elections, and that between structure elections and primaries: winning gives advantages to the victor, but does not eliminate the loser.

From both the elite and local perspectives then, we can conclude that a major factor in creating the space for NRM-Independents is the popular perception that the party's bureaucracy on the ground has been decentralised and captured by local competitive forces, illustrated in 5.2.2. This allows candidates and voters alike to claim that although they were unhappy with the NRM's official candidates, this was a result of these candidate's own capture of the party, not the party or the president forcing bad candidates on them. I heard from several candidates who were furious with "the NRM" regarding the processes of the primaries, but used this term in reference to the locally captured branch, not the party as a whole, or the president.¹⁰⁹

The results of the general election in my three districts varied greatly. In the strongest NRM case district, **Kyenjojo**, flagbearers won all five major races, each facing their main primary opponent. Notably, Byamukama's gamble not to stand in the primaries did not pay off, as he finished third behind Kajara and Mugisha. It is difficult to tell whether the flag made the difference here, or whether the primaries were in fact fair and

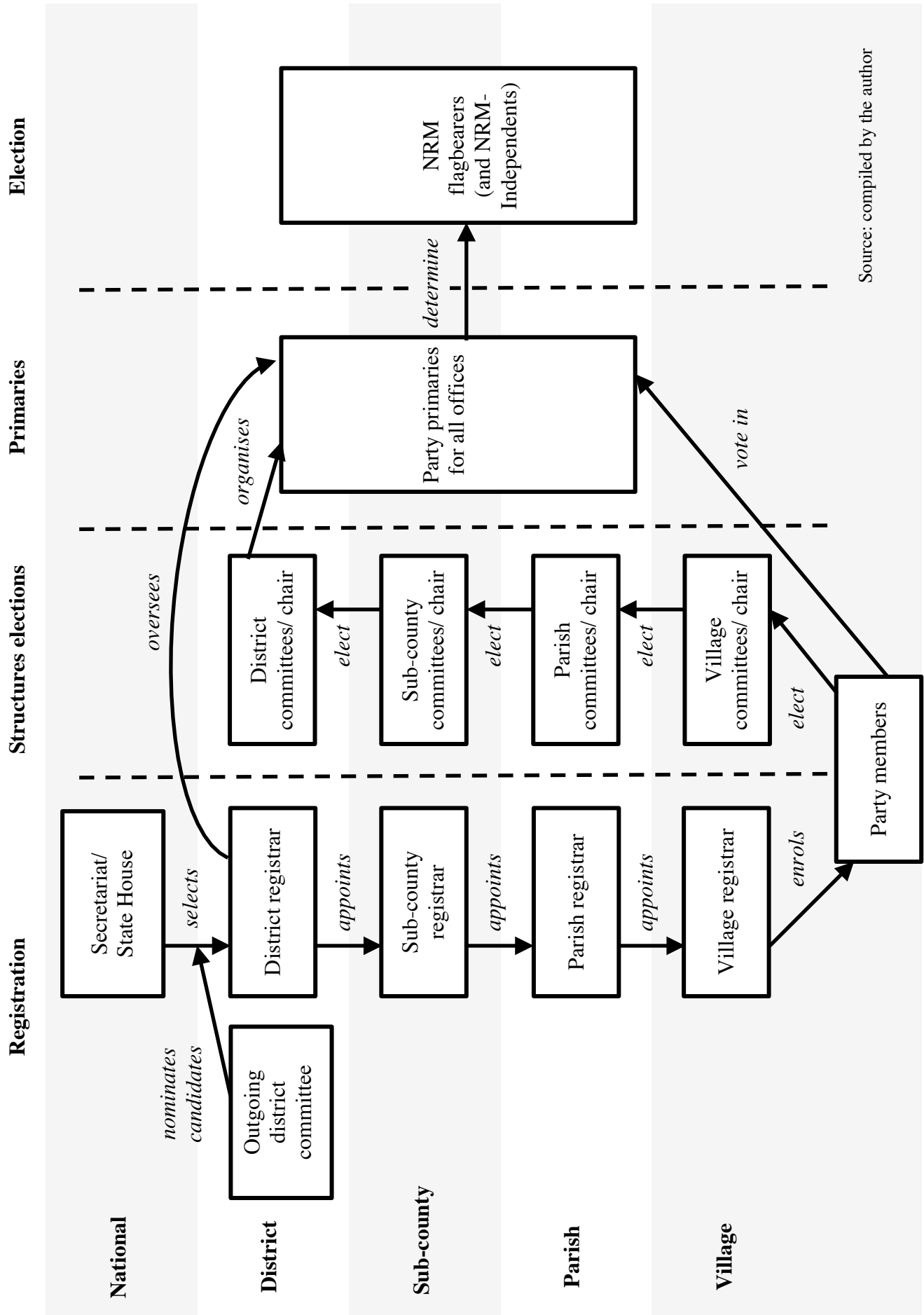
¹⁰⁶ Public interview KYE-MN1-2E#1.

¹⁰⁷ Public interview KYE-MC2-1E#1.

¹⁰⁸ The president's strategic embrace of NRM-Independents has also been suggested by Muhumuza, "Fading Support? Explaining NRM's Victory in Uganda's 2011 Local Elections," 170.

¹⁰⁹ Interview 35, interview 45.

Table 5.6: Processes of intra-NRM local competition



therefore repeated in the general, although it is probably a combination of these two factors. **Bugiri** produced more mixed results, in part a reflection of the strong opposition presence in the Woman MP and Bukooli Central races. In both of these races the two main primary challengers, Takka and Hadija in the former and Silwani and Mulengani in the latter contested in the general, where the flagbearers (Takka and Silwani) both won – although in both of these there is reason to be suspicious of the accuracy of the final results (see 7.4). Furthermore, Lyavala decided not to contest as an Independent after losing his primary.¹¹⁰ In Bukooli North however, Baka and Kyawa took their primary battle into the general, which Kyawa won. Given the fact that the Mukisa-Baka faction was largely wiped out, there is a good chance the camp structure in Bugiri will change significantly leading into the next election.

The situation in **Kayunga** was slightly different. In a rare move, Minister Madada in Bbaale county opted to accept defeat and not stand against the victor Kumama, and as mentioned Lugoloogi's primary challenger was not organised enough to threaten him. However, in Ntenjeru South the Baseke-Nsanja race carried on into the general, and while she did not stand in the primary, Nantaba's own race against Nalunga was effectively a flagbearer/NRM-Independent race. Across the board, Nantaba and her faction wiped out their opponents, revealing the asymmetry of the factional contest with Karangwa. The minister herself won with 86% – the fourth highest percentage of any re-elected MP in the country¹¹¹ – along with Lugoloobi, Baseke and Sserwanga. Kumama won his race in Bbaale county, but had Nantaba's last minute promotion of Kyagaba had more time to sink in the result would probably differ. That Nantaba (and her camp) could achieve this landslide without participating to the same degree in the prior stages of competition discussed above, revealed her to be an exceptionally powerful local politician – an exception I will discuss in detail in 7.3.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has portrayed the NRM's anatomy as one in which power is devolved and decentralised to district level camps in the countryside in a way that inverts the

¹¹⁰ Several sources I spoke with suggested this was the case because he thought Marijian would not serve a full term because of his legal troubles.

¹¹¹ This excludes incumbent MPs who were unopposed.

relationship between candidates and party structures that would feature in a more institutionalised dominant party system. Instead of seeing the “strength” of the party in the latent organisational capacity of its structures and their ability to control the selection and promotion of candidates, “the NRM” actually draws its power from the camps themselves, for whom official structures and party nominations are merely the advantageous tokens of campaigning. The reason the president manages to keep a degree of control (the methods and ends of which I will reveal in chapters 6 and 7) in such a decentralised power structure is that these units are kept in a state of permanent and largely balanced competition with each other (H₃). The primary intervention of the president therefore does not take the form of the direct management or suppression of local candidates, but in acts of *division and inclusion* aimed at provoking and prolonging this inter-camp competition.

Of course, it is difficult to know the president’s intentions with certainty, but a brief review of his actions in the cases above is instructive. In Kyenjojo, the camp arrangement is a direct product of Museveni’s promotion of Kajara into the cabinet position turned down by Butime. It is maintained by the idea that only one cabinet position is up for grabs between them, which was re-affirmed after the election, when Museveni dropped Kajara and appointed Butime. In Kayunga, Nantaba’s remarkable popularity throughout the 2011-16 term was initially a product of Museveni’s intervention, first promoting her to cabinet against very strong local and national opposition, and then lending his support in her early clashes with the powerful district elite. And in Bugiri, the promotion of Lumumba to the post of secretary general elevated her power in the district, something Museveni tried to offset by endorsing Mukisa for the Bukooli Central election. We can also see acts of inclusion alongside these acts of division. The most obvious is the systematic allowance of NRM primary losers to run as NRM-Independents, which occurred in all three districts. More specifically Museveni agreed to create Mwenge Central out of Mwenge North on clearly ethnic lines to bring Butime back into Parliament and invited both NRM and NRM-Independent candidates to his rallies.

This practice of division and inclusion is not only useful for controlling politicians. The particular institutional terrain on which camp competition is staged is configured such

Table 5.7: Collective benefit of internal competition to the NRM

Stage	Candidate incentives	Candidate actions	Collective outcomes
Registration	Allow supporters to participate in structures elections and primaries	Registration of own supporters	Members signed up
Structures elections	Control of NRM district chair, inclusion of supporters in local structures	Mobilisation of supporters from village level to participate in the party structures	Party structures rebuilt down to the village level
Primaries	Becoming the NRM “flagbearer”	Mobilisation of supporters, agents and networks for primaries	Exclusive exposure of NRM candidates to electorate
General election	Winning office	Mobilisation of supporters for election day	High turnout on election day

that various collective party strengths are reproduced as a by-product. I have revealed many of these in the sections above: the mass registration of members, the rebirth of party structures down to the village level, and pro-NRM primary campaigns which mobilise more voters than general election campaigns. Others, like the more normative representation of the president (H₁) and the physical mobilisation of his campaign (H₂), both of which are also outsourced to local actors, will be discussed in chapter 7. At every point, it is the dynamic energy of division and rivalry, not the static strength of either camps or the party institutions, that makes the collective NRM juggernaut so strong during election season. In the years required to prepare for races, candidates effectively rehabilitate and regenerate the party networks that have been in hibernation since the last election.

It is worth stressing at this point how much fine-tuning there is in this process aimed at producing and prolonging local competition within the party. This is especially necessary given how much scholarly and media commentary on this process – especially the primaries – implicitly characterises it as a shambles born out of poor planning and an inability to enforce party rules. If Museveni wanted to enforce the candidate selection process and stop NRM independent candidates from standing in the general election he could easily do this – in the same way he pressures candidates to compete within the NRM in the first place. Instead, it is reasonable to infer that there is

a design to the fact that local competition is promoted and prolonged by the specificities of the NRM process. This may not be reflected in the formal rules of the party, which seem to promote unity and party-line discipline, but in the consistent state of exception that occurs when candidates allege rigging. This supposed state of exception is in fact the rule.

Yet it also necessary to mention that alongside these complicated institutional and organisational arrangements are the embedded norms and behaviours in the voting public that have been a product of three decades of NRM rule. The themes explored in the previous chapter – the openness of the NRM as a forum for competition, and willingness to blame local elites rather than the central government for poor governance – are essential to foster the degree of competition between flagbearers and NRM-Independents without it bringing the party brand or the president into disrepute.

Chapter 6

Subnational Competition and the Challenge of Elite Cooperation

Previous chapters have looked at Uganda's dominant party system in local and rural domains only. This chapter pans out to look at the national level NRM by connecting the local competition explained earlier to the "challenge of elite cooperation" defined in 2.1.1. In brief, this challenge concerns how regime leaders protect their hold on power from threats originating from within the national elite: *coups d'état*, factional manoeuvres, corruption probes, legislative constraint, *et cetera*.

As a "big tent" party that houses the great bulk of the Ugandan political elite, the NRM is rife with dissent and ambition, including the matter of Museveni's continuing tenure. As will be shown in the next section, many of the subnational elites in the party – particularly MPs and MP candidates – are highly critical of his leadership. Yet, since the interim period ended in 1996, Museveni has never even been formally challenged within the party.¹ While many NRM figures have left the party to challenge the regime from the outside, this has never reached the "tipping point" at which the regime's control of the party is seriously threatened. In 2014, the NRM made Museveni its "sole candidate" for the 2016 election, meaning that once again the party's procedure for electing its presidential "flagbearer" went unused.

In this chapter I will make the case of H₃: that subnational electoral competition assists Museveni's ability to manage the challenge of elite cooperation and mitigate threats of overthrow emanating from within the NRM. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first (6.1) explains this theory, with reference to the findings of previous chapters and interviews with NRM politicians. The second (6.2) looks at a key episode that illustrates the workings of this theory – the unsuccessful presidential challenge of erstwhile regime insider, Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi.

¹ NRM figures have attempted to bring challenges in both 2006 and 2011, see: Mpiima, "Political Party Primaries: Was There Method to the Madness?," 24.

6.1 Subnational competition and the challenge of elite cooperation (H₃)

In order to explain H₃, it is useful to apply some of the terminology of “selectorate theory” developed by Bueno de Mesquita (*et al*) to the challenge of elite cooperation.² Although there are several aspects of this complicated theory that do not apply well to Uganda,³ three of its basic components are apt: a) all regime leaders require a majority of support among the “selectorate” – the group of elites collectively empowered to choose the regime leader; b) the selectorate’s power and composition varies depending on the “selection institutions” through which they “determine how leaders are chosen or deposed”;⁴ and c) that the regime leader utilises various “countermeasures” (e.g. oppression) to offset the power of the selectorate.⁵ In this section, I will define NRM MPs as the “selectorate”, Parliament and the party caucus as the key “selection institutions”, and the pressures of electoral competition as one of the “countermeasures” tempering the selectorate’s power.

6.1.1 NRM MPs as a “selectorate”

While the term “selectorate” in NRM Uganda could mean different things at different times, the most fitting application is the NRM parliamentary caucus. Chapters 3 and 7 show the major reason for this: that subnational elites have, in the past and present, wielded significant power in electoral systems in Uganda’s rural and largely immobile population. In chapter 4 (4.2.2) I explained the local, social dimension of holding high office and how this encourages many candidates to enter politics for, in the words of one candidate, “the prestige of being known.”⁶ It is likely that the historical legacies of the office of MP would attract the bulk of the political class regardless of the design of the NRM system. Nonetheless, several aspects of the regime’s institutional design seem to actively maintain this overlap.

Specifically, the regime has invested a lot of power in the office of NRM MP in order

² Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival*.

³ Specifically, the term “winning coalition” is not directly applicable to the nature of intra-elite politics within the NRM regime.

⁴ Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival*, 26.

⁵ Bueno de Mesquita et al., 329.

⁶ Interview 6.

to make it coveted by the political class. First, the Ugandan Parliament is not a “rubber stamp” of regime interests.⁷ MPs are called to vote on measures that are of genuine importance to the regime and national governance. Some examples in recent years have been the abolition of term limits in 2005, sensitive oil legislation since the late-2000s, and post-2016 votes on the removal of presidential age limits in the constitution. As put by one NRM official in Bugiri, “it is the Parliament which moves money and makes laws and so on, and it has the powers to even impeach the president, so if you don’t have a majority in Parliament, that means that you are in trouble.” As discussed in 3.3.1, Parliament is also well equipped with strong oversight capacities that can cause significant problems for the government when they are used properly. MPs therefore have a seat at the table of consequential decisions which, alongside the fact that they are well paid,⁸ enhances the incentives for rural power brokers to enter Parliament.

Second, in their capacity as NRM caucus members, NRM MPs are voters in important resolutions related to the direction of the regime, notably those held at the caucus’ periodical retreats at Kyankwanzi. The caucus is occasionally deferred decision on contentious policy by the cabinet,⁹ and has weekly meetings with the president or his representative. As will be discussed below, in 2016 its role included the controversial “sole candidate” resolution that nominated Museveni as NRM presidential flagbearer without challenge. These powers are among the reasons why candidates stand in the NRM primaries in order to be official NRM MPs throughout the term. NRM-Independent MPs are involved in the decisions of the party (some are cabinet members) but do not sit in the caucus meetings or with the government in the chamber. As one NRM-Independent said a year after his first election:

As a member of Parliament they call me an “NRM-leaning Independent”. I participate in the caucus of the party. But I don’t have any voting rights. And you know it affects, because you know sometimes you want to deliberate on issues, but given you are not a

⁷ Collord, “From the Electoral Battleground to the Parliamentary Arena: Understanding Intra-Elite Bargaining in Uganda’s National Resistance Movement”; Kasfir and Twebaze, “The Limits of Institutionalization of a Legislature without Parties: The Ugandan Parliament.”

⁸ Lawrence Misege, “MPs to Raise Allowances,” *The Observer*, March 30, 2016, <http://www.observer.ug/news-headlines/43364-mps-to-raise-allowances>.

⁹ Mercy Nalugo, “Cabinet Pushes Anti-Gays Law Back to NRM Caucus,” *The Daily Monitor*, January 9, 2014, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Cabinet-pushes-Anti-Gays-law-back-to-NRM-Caucus/688334-2139330-gxkfc9/index.html>.

member of the caucus, so sometimes it affects.¹⁰

According to multiple MPs, the president regularly attends meetings of the caucus and pays close attention to vocal dissent from the floor.¹¹ “Our caucus meetings are not always a bed of roses by the way,” said one MP, “we quarrel, we raise voices.”¹²

In combination with the “prestige” factor endogenous to the constituency, this explains why prominent NRM politicians who lose their seats dedicate years of planning and a small fortune trying to regain them. Examples of this from case districts include former ministers Tom Butime in Kyenjojo and Fred Mukisa in Bugiri. Notable examples from elsewhere include Jim Muhwezi in Rukungiri and Kirunda Kivejinja in Iganga. All of these show the same thing: being personally connected to the president is of little political value if you cannot also call yourself an MP. This stands in contrast to previous Ugandan regimes that have reduced the selectorate capacity of Parliament and the ruling party caucus (Obote I after 1966, see 3.1.2), or eliminated them altogether and exercised power through a small group of military figures (Amin, see 3.1.3). Ever since the lively Constituent Assembly that drafted the 1995 constitution, this has not been the case under Museveni.

6.1.2 Competition as a counterbalance to the selectorate

If the above is intended to shepherd and coalesce the selectorate into “selection institutions” – Parliament, the party caucus room – in which they can be better managed, the next question concerns how these institutions (or other factors) act as “countermeasures” to their collective power. In many dominant party regimes, the party itself performs this function.¹³ However, this is not the case in Uganda, where the NRM’s institutional power over its members is weak. Instead, the intention of H₃ is to configure the high-turnover electoral competition discussed in previous chapters within an approach to the challenge of elite cooperation. Specifically, it suggests that the

¹⁰ Interview 23.

¹¹ Interview 14, interview 19, interview 44.

¹² Interview 19.

¹³ This is often argued to occur through parties’ control of political finance, see for example: Reuter and Remington, “Dominant Party Regimes and the Commitment Problem: The Case of United Russia”; Greene, “The Political Economy of Authoritarian Single-Party Dominance.”

electoral pressure faced by NRM MPs grants the president leverage in his dealings with them on matters related to his grip on power:

H.: The pressures of electoral competition on local politicians grant the executive a power imbalance over them before the election.

While other countermeasures such as coercion and the control of state patronage are important as well, I will argue below that these must be situated within the context of competition that makes them more effective. There are two ways that competition acts as a counterbalance in this way.

a. High turnover weakens Parliament

First, high turnover of MPs weakens their collective capacity to challenge the regime institutionally. The fact that each new Parliament is full of new MPs unfamiliar with its technical procedures severely hampers its ability to exercise the formal capacity discussed above. This makes Parliament strong on institutional powers, but weak on institutional memory. One MP put this succinctly:

legislation needs continuity sometimes. You need to maintain a certain percentage of MPs from one session to another. So if you lose 85%, you've lost a lot. Because all the incoming ones need time to learn the system, and by the time they learn, the session is ending.¹⁴

The word “legislation” could easily be substituted for “oversight” in this statement. As well as preventing institutional capacity in this way, the all-consuming nature of electoral competition forces MPs to dedicate much of the time, energy and resources to returning to the electorate rather than staying in Kampala. It is a common criticism from MPs that so much is expected of them by their constituents (see 7.2.1.b) that they have little time left to do their work in Parliament.¹⁵ This is a factor for the entire term, but increasingly so as the election draws nearer.¹⁶ As one former minister put it:

¹⁴ Interview 34.

¹⁵ Interview 14. Some scholars have claimed that this constituency service to public policy ratio is a hallmark of African parliaments in general: Barkan, “Legislators, Elections, and Political Linkage,” 71.

¹⁶ Nelson Wesonga and Yasiin Mugerwa, “Election Fever: MPs Skipping Parliament to Campaign for

the five year term, in itself, has its own challenges. In the first two years, people are trying to learn. In the third year campaigns are again on the ground. So people have not done a lot. So that causes a bit of a problem in our political arrangement.¹⁷

One MP, interviewed a year into his first term, went further:

I am telling you people have already started campaigning! ...They think “when I lose this seat where will I go?” So you will see, it actually affects business here in Parliament. I sit on the [policy] committee of Parliament, but it’s difficult to have a quorum!¹⁸

A related issue is the crippling debt that the majority of MPs carry before and after elections.¹⁹ Running a successful MP campaign costs around USh560m (\$162,000),²⁰ which candidates raise through a mixture of personal savings, mortgaging/selling property, or loans. Even with the generous wages paid to MPs, it can often take them years after elections to get back on their feet financially. MPs told me stories of their colleagues sleeping in the legal sanctuary of the parliamentary chamber in order to avoid debt collectors, or being arrested for missing repayments.²¹ This has direct implications for the ability of the president to pass his agenda, particularly towards the end of the term when debts accumulate before the election and Parliament becomes, in Collord’s words, “more docile”.²² Consider the following story from an MP:

I can give an example of an MP who took out USh1.5b from an Indian, but failed to repay. He was arrested, and he was supposed to be declared bankrupt, but then when the President was reached out, he had to help him. Although he’s still paying the debt to State House.²³

2016 Elections,” *The Daily Monitor*, July 3, 2015, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/MPs-skipping-parliament-to-campaign-for-2016-elections/-/688334/2773342/-/1ig879/-/index.html>.

¹⁷ Interview 31

¹⁸ Interview 23.

¹⁹ Alliance for Campaign Finance Monitoring (ACFIM), “ACFIM Survey of Members of the 10th Parliament on Campaign Finance Reform” (Kampala, 2016); Wilkins, “Who Pays for Pakalast? The NRM’s Peripheral Patronage in Rural Uganda.”

²⁰ This figure is the average of seven estimates from knowledgeable sources: three candidates (one of whom was an incumbent) one political assistant to a candidate, one former NRM District Chairman, and two journalists.

²¹ Interview 14.

²² Collord, “From the Electoral Battleground to the Parliamentary Arena: Understanding Intra-Elite Bargaining in Uganda’s National Resistance Movement,” 652.

²³ Interview 14.

While it is also the case that MPs drive up their debt with lavish lifestyles and legal bills, the vast majority comes from either repaying the previous election bill or saving for the next one.²⁴

b. Competitive pressures threaten individual MPs' survival and weaken their leverage over the regime

Second, and more importantly, the electoral pressures faced by each MP force them to focus more on their own political survival than Museveni's. The constant and real threat of electoral demise at the expense of one's ever-present "camp" opponent weakens the leverage MPs wield over the regime on matters of elite cooperation, and provides a ready-made alternative for potential regime intervention. In the blunt words of one NRM MP, while talking about legislation pushed by State House:

Very few MPs are pro-people, they are for their survival. The pro-people MPs are not very many. So the person will be interested in "how do I survive?" "So how do I get another term to continue earning for another five years?" That's it! That is the priority.²⁵

The direct threat to "survival" in this usage is not simply the wrath of the president, but a rival in one's constituency. This is something that Museveni alludes to in his disputes with MPs. In the words of one incumbent:

[Museveni] has always said: "you are trying to raise a lot of issues here with me, but you also have a lot of issues in your constituency, why don't you first handle those?"²⁶

This is often understood to mean (including by this MP) that the regime is directly backing their local rival. Whether or not this is true, and how frequently it occurs, is difficult to know empirically. My interviews with district politicians did not lead me to think that the regime habitually picks winners in this way, and it is more likely to be a relatively rare occurrence, although one that is often used as a threat. However, the structures of local competition described in the previous chapter would be necessary for

²⁴ Wilkins, "Who Pays for Pakalast? The NRM's Peripheral Patronage in Rural Uganda."

²⁵ Interview 23.

²⁶ Interview 19.

its effectiveness regardless of how frequently it occurs. On the one hand, if it is true that the president frequently sponsors the local rivals of troublesome MPs, the prior conditions of divided district political enables even small interventions to have dramatic effects. As we have seen, the political norm in rural areas is that local power brokers are divided into “camps” in a state of constant competition and near equilibrium. This situation provides a ready-made alternative to bring into Parliament that does not disrupt the NRM’s local monopoly. Presidential sponsorship – if it is widespread – should therefore not be taken as evidence that Museveni’s leverage over MPs is essentially financial. On the contrary, the presence of the fine-balanced camp competition described in chapter 5 would still be a critical condition of its effectiveness.

On the other hand, if direct regime intervention in local races is either uncommon or non-existent, statements like these are still effective reminders that MPs face greater concerns than the “issues” they may have with the president. Although evidence is scarce, I suspect that this is more likely the case, and that the *threat* of intervention is more common than intervention itself. As discussed in chapter 5, the regime benefits from keeping local political factions balanced so as to exert as much energy from them in the pursuit of their own survival, something that would be jeopardised if local factions believed that the outcome was simply decided by the regime in advance. Moreover, as will be discussed in 7.1.4, the regime has an interest in treading lightly even against those local factions destined to lose.

Either way, the important point to clarify for H₃ is that it is not merely the presence of electoral competition and turnover that alter these relationships, but the *absence* of dominant local machines that could be used to threaten the regime. In a party system in which subnational politicians were the undisputed “kingmakers” of their local territory, the election itself would not pose a strong enough reason to cooperate with the regime. Instead, the key factors conditioning cooperation would likely be inclusion in post-election clientelist arrangements, or more coercive strategies. The make-up of the UPC in the Obote I regime is an illustrative comparison. As discussed in 3.1.2, the UPC at this time was locally owned by, and totally dependent on, the political machines of single rural factions. As long as elections remained a part of the political order, these subnational actors had real leverage over the regime, which had no alternative to their structures for its own mobilisation. When this leverage was utilised in the 1966 crisis

(see 3.1.2), the regime's only option was to postpone the election and revoke the "selection institution" powers of UPC caucus altogether, moving instead to a total dependence on military figures and patronage to maintain elite cooperation. This is precisely the leverage that *does not* exist for MPs in Museveni's NRM, where the selectorate members do not "own" the party branches in their area. This does not mean that the NRM has an institutional core that the 1960s UPC lacked – on the contrary, like the UPC it relies entirely on subnational actors for its mobilisation (see 7.1). Rather, the difference is that with the NRM's monopoly of local politics and its "individual merit" culture of intra-party factionalism, the local rivals of these subnational selectorate members are just as welcome to the regime as incumbents.

Subnational electoral competition is therefore critically important to structure the regime's management of elite cooperation because it acts as a "countermeasure" to the powers of the selection institutions empowered to overthrow the president. A corroboration of this can be observed in what Cox calls the "electoral distance effect", where a regime's power over its elites grows as the election approaches.²⁷ Museveni has tended to leave the resolution of sensitive matters of elite cooperation until the period immediately before the election. The best example of this is the *kisanja* issue of abandoning constitutional term limits for the presidency in 2005 (see 3.3.2), which drew serious opposition in the party and was held mere months before the 2006 elections. The downfall of Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi (discussed in the following section) is another case of the regime relying on the context of the election to make a sensitive decision within the selectorate.

The recent election of the speaker of Parliament after the 2016 election demonstrates the other side of the "electoral distance effect" – the regime's relative weakness *after* elections. Despite Museveni's push for the election of current Deputy Speaker Jacob Oulanyah, incumbent Speaker Rebecca Kadaga – who had been a thorn in the president's side on a number of matters – defeated him handily. This was not as significant an event for regime maintenance as the Kisanja or Mbabazi episodes, but nonetheless serves as an example of the weaker leverage that the president wields after

²⁷ Cox, "Authoritarian Elections and Leadership Succession, 1975-2000," 16.

the election.²⁸

Another illustrative case is the so-called “rebel MPs”, a group of four NRM backbenchers – Theodore Ssekikubo, Barnabus Tinkasiimire, Wilfred Niwagaba, and Muhammad Nsereko – who broke with convention to sharply criticise Museveni’s leadership soon after the 2011 election. The group crystalised out of a broader faction of dissenters to form a “backbench cabinet”, claiming that they were “tired of the old guards,” and that “we are giving the president up to 2016 and if he says he is coming back we shall defeat him through the power of the vote.”²⁹ They then opposed the government’s agenda in Parliament, particularly on the sensitive matter of oil management.

For these actions and a string of other criticisms,³⁰ the NRM’s Central Executive Committee (CEC) decided to make an example by ousting them from the party in April 2013 and attempting to have them ejected from Parliament so that by-elections could replace them with more loyal members.³¹ However a legal saga ensued for over a year determining whether the four were entitled to sit in Parliament if they had been forced out of the party on whose flag they were elected. The matter bounced between the Constitutional and Supreme courts, before it was finally decided that the party had no such power.³² Aside from opposition in the courts, Speaker Kadaga strongly resisted the regime’s action against the rebels.³³ The impression this left in the middle of the parliamentary term was that the government was losing control of its backbenchers, and did not have the coercive, judicial, or parliamentary leverage to tame them.

²⁸ This is somewhat offset by the president’s appointment of cabinet members after the election.

²⁹ Mercy Nalugo, “NRM Alternative Back-Bench Cabinet: Is the Party Falling Apart?,” *The Daily Monitor*, July 8, 2012, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/Magazines/PeoplePower/NRM-alternative-back-bench-cabinet--Is-the-party-falling-apart-/689844-1447466-9n38v2z/index.html>.

³⁰ Especially Ssekikubo’s claim on Capital FM that the president was a “lawyer for the corrupt”.

³¹ Yasiin Mugerwa, “Repeat of History as NRM Expels ‘Rebel’ MPs,” *The Daily Monitor*, April 16, 2013, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Repeat-of-history-as-NRM-expels--rebel--MPs/688334-1749452-ucgm8z/index.html>.

³² The government tried to amend the Ugandan constitution to grant the party the power to expel MPs from Parliament, but this did not receive enough support. See: Solomon Arinaitwe, “Legislators Reject Government 2016 Electoral Reforms,” *The Daily Monitor*, May 13, 2015, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Legislators-reject-government-2016-electoral-reforms-/688334/2714462/-/1t4xooz/-/index.html>.

³³ Yasiin Mugerwa, “Expelled NRM MPs Cannot Lose Their Seats - Kadaga,” *The Daily Monitor*, May 2, 2013, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Expelled-NRM-MPs-retain-their-seats/688334-1799668-sn3yn/index.html>.

Circumstances changed as the election approached. Ideally for the regime, the candidates would have been shut out from the primary process and met their fate on election day. Each rebel MP knew exactly who their “camp” rival was, and reports in the press signaled that Museveni had begun making direct links with these rivals in order to boost their chances of defeating the rebels.³⁴ However, to complicate matters, the rebel MPs affair was now intertwined with the Mbabazi defection (discussed below), which posed a far greater threat to the regime. After the group praised Mbabazi’s decision to run for president and Mbabazi made a highly political speech at Tinkasiimire’s wedding, the president engaged in a dialogue with the group in order to bring them back into the party in July 2015, which two of the four agreed to do.³⁵ The general consensus of my elite interviewees was that the extraordinary conditions of the Mbabazi affair rescued the rebels from certain defeat.

While the Mbabazi defection may have confounded the rebels’ situation, it is interesting to note how little they were willing to accept in order to return to the party – particularly as the defection itself gave them additional leverage. According to the *Observer*, the group entered negotiations with a number of demands including the restoration of previous NRM internal laws and a public discussion of post-Museveni succession – neither of which were granted.³⁶ Other demands, such as the relief of their legal bills, also went unmet. In the end all they received from the president was an invitation to return to the party, and presumably an agreement that he would not decampaign them when he visited their constituency. While the exact relationship between each candidate and the Museveni campaign differs, perhaps the most emblematic is Ssekikubo’s, who was generally considered to be the group’s leader. He won his primary and attended Museveni’s campaign rally in February 2016, leading the crowds in chants that

³⁴ Chris Obore, “NRM Takes Fight against Expelled Rebel Legislators to Constituency,” *The Daily Monitor*, April 21, 2013, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/NRM-takes-fight-against-expelled-rebel-legislators/688334-1753708-n0f0mc/index.html>; Edward Ssekika, “Museveni Plots MP Tinkasiimire Defeat,” *The Observer*, April 21, 2014, <http://www.observer.ug/component/content/article?id=31354:-museveni-plots-mp-tinkasiimire-defeat>; Robert Muhereza, “Museveni Tells Voters to Punish MP Niwagaba,” *The Daily Monitor*, January 16, 2015, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Museveni-tells-voters-to-punish-MP-Niwagaba/688334-2590702-kge0tn/index.html>.

³⁵ Sadab Kitatta Kaaya, “Inside Museveni, Rebel MPs Meet,” *The Observer*, July 3, 2015, <http://www.observer.ug/news-headlines/38577-inside-museveni-rebel-mps-meet>.

³⁶ Sadab Kitatta Kaaya, “How Museveni, Rebel MPs Meet Was Hatched,” *The Observer*, July 1, 2015, <http://www.observer.ug/news-headlines/38537-how-museveni-rebel-mps-meet-was-hatched>.

“Museveni should stay”³⁷ – a far cry from the Museveni critic he was a few years earlier. In the words of one interviewee who was in Parliament throughout the saga, “President Museveni has learnt how to manage them, to keep close to them, those who are fighting – the Ssekikubos the Barnabuses – they are now tamed”.³⁸ On election day Ssekikubo narrowly defeated his perennial rival Patrick Nkalubo, and returned to the 10th Parliament.

6.2 The Mbabazi defection

In 2016, Museveni’s management of the challenge of elite cooperation was tested more rigorously than in any time since the abolition of term limits in 2005-06. As of the beginning of 2014, John Patrick Amama Mbabazi (a.k.a. “JPAM”) was more integral to the regime than any elite had ever been, bar Museveni.³⁹ Dubbed the “superminister” in the media for his experience in many senior cabinet portfolios over the years – Defence, Security, Attorney General – after the 2011 election he was made Prime Minister. These positions brought him close to the key security and administrative arms of the regime, where he allegedly built factions dedicated to his eventual move for the presidency,⁴⁰ and an immense personal wealth to facilitate it.

However, Mbabazi’s most important post was not any position in government, but that of the Secretary General (SG) of the NRM. As the political “fixer” operating on behalf of the president for so long, it has been said that he constituted the “operating system” of the NRM.⁴¹ Most notably, the SG role enabled him to grow a faction of MPs within the NRM caucus loyal to his potential challenge for the presidency. Prominent in this

³⁷ The full context of this chant was that Ssekikubo was petitioning Museveni to act against his Ssembabule District rival Sam Kutesa. The full chant was “*Kutesa agende, Museveni abeewo*” (Kutesa should go, Museveni should stay). See Edris Kiggundu, “Drama as Ssekikubo Dares Museveni on Kutesa,” *The Observer*, February 3, 2016, <http://www.observer.ug/news-headlines/42400-drama-as-ssekikubo-dares-museveni-on-minister-kutesa>.

³⁸ Interview 9.

³⁹ Joe Oloka-Onyango, “Enter the Dragon, Exit the Myths: The Contested Candidacy of John Patrick Amama Mbabazi,” in *Controlling Consent: Uganda’s 2016 Elections*, ed. Joe Oloka-Onyango and Josephine Ahikire (Trenton, NJ.: Africa World Press, 2017), 99.

⁴⁰ “Museveni, Mbabazi and the Power Struggle within NRM,” *The Daily Monitor*, February 16, 2014, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/Magazines/PeoplePower/Museveni--Mbabazi-and-the-power-struggle-within-NRM/689844-2207906-xaen6yz/index.html>.

⁴¹ Timothy Kalyegira, “Inside the Museveni, Amama Battle for NRM,” *The Daily Monitor*, June 21, 2015, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/Magazines/PeoplePower/Inside-Museveni-Amama-battle-NRM-/689844/2759028/-/cm3yjp/-/index.html>.

group were MPs from the northern region where the NRM grew support in the 2011 election, and younger members in the south who, with his help, defeated “historical” rivals to his ambition (David Muhumuza’s defeat of Tom Butime in Kyenjojo for example). According to multiple press reports around 2014, a sizeable bloc of the caucus was loyal to Mbabazi for this reason. Hence, if there was ever a rival that could threaten Museveni’s hold on the NRM from within, it was Mbabazi.

As it happened however, Mbabazi failed to bring on a formal challenge to Museveni in the NRM, and received a paltry 1.4% of the vote as a candidate in the general election. This section will address the role of the NRM selectorate members on Mbabazi’s failed candidacy, and the effect the electoral “countermeasures”, described above, had on influencing their decision.

6.2.1 A contest in four rounds

The contest between Museveni and Mbabazi took place in four stages, each of which were won handily by the president. First, seemingly at the height of Mbabazi’s power in February 2014, the NRM caucus met at its retreat in Kyankwanzi. While speculation of Mbabazi’s candidacy was rife within the caucus, the retreat organisers had suggested that the matter of succession would not be discussed, and instead the controversial “Homosexuality Bill” was expected to dominate discussion.⁴² Out of nowhere, a young and relatively unknown MP Evelyn Anite approached the podium while Museveni was talking and presented a resolution that he “offer himself” as the party’s candidate in 2016, as well as demanding that other “senior leaders” with presidential ambitions desist campaigning against him.⁴³ Known thereafter as the “sole candidate resolution”, this was then passed around the caucus, eventually reaching a stunned Mbabazi who, as a self-declared Museveni man, had little choice but to sign it. Avoiding doing so would have equated to a declaration to challenge Museveni, which Mbabazi was not prepared to do. However in signing the resolution, Mbabazi effectively stunted the momentum

⁴² Yasiin Mugerwa, “Succession Not Part of Agenda at Retreat - NRM,” *The Daily Monitor*, February 6, 2014, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Succession-not-part-of-agenda-at-retreat---NRM/688334-2194444-807nmlz/index.html>.

⁴³ NRM Caucus, “Resolution on Party Cohesion and Governance [Sole Candidacy Resolution]” (Kyankwanzi, 2014), <http://www.monitor.co.ug/blob/view/-/2202362/data/684438/-/bbx6a7/-/nrm-resolution.pdf>.

behind his candidacy by accepting that the bulk of the caucus – the “selectorate” – was more loyal to the president than himself when it counted.

A period of ambiguity followed the retreat. Despite the symbolic power of the resolution, there was uncertainty around whether it was legally binding to the party’s presidential nomination. Mbabazi was still the NRM SG and enjoyed the loyalty and sympathy of numerous power brokers and an enormous personal wealth. According to some commentators, the NRM at this moment could still be split into the “NRM-Museveni” and the “NRM-Mbabazi” factions.⁴⁴ Had he reconciled with the president and abandoned his leadership aspirations this might have been the end of it. When he refused to do so, the Museveni’s next move was to strip him of his formal offices in the government and the party. He was sacked as prime minister on September 18, placed on “leave” from the SG position a month later,⁴⁵ and dismissed from that position altogether at an NRM delegates conference in December. The conference also amended the party constitution to make the secretariat appointed by the party Chairman (Museveni) rather than elected by delegates. Mbabazi’s allies were prevented from attending the conference by local security officials who managed the invitations,⁴⁶ and the former Prime Minister refused to accept the outcome.

After all this, Mbabazi still refused to give up on his plan of mobilising his network within the NRM, and began to plan a challenge to Museveni for the position of NRM presidential flagbearer in the pre-election National Delegates Conference in August 2015. On June 15 2015, he released a video officially announcing his candidacy for the presidency, and soon afterward began calling *himself* the “unopposed” NRM candidate, adding that he would not contest against the party’s choice.⁴⁷ With an open contest too threatening to the regime, security forces were mobilised to prevent Mbabazi’s “consultations” with NRM branches throughout the country, even though the EC had

⁴⁴ “Museveni, Mbabazi and the Power Struggle within NRM.”

⁴⁵ Ivan Okuda, “How NRM Top Organ Boxed Mbabazi into Leave,” *The Daily Monitor*, October 21, 2014, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/How-NRM-top-organ-boxed-Mbabazi-into-leave/688334-2493562-onuf0n/index.html>.

⁴⁶ Interview 9.

⁴⁷ Ivan Okuda and Frederic Musisi, “I Will Not Stand against NRM Choice,” *The Daily Monitor*, July 5, 2015, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/-I-will-not-stand-against-NRM-choice-/688334-2775298-55r0piz/index.html>.

cleared them.⁴⁸ He was arrested *en route* to one such “consultation” in Mbale in early July. In cruel twist, the police cited the controversial Public Order Management Act (POMA) that Mbabazi had personally pushed through Parliament as its legal authority. Moreover, the party imposed a raft of restrictive by-laws on the process of challenging for the leadership, which further convinced the Mbabazi team of the futility of the NRM route.⁴⁹

Forced out of his party’s nominating process, Mbabazi’s last option was to take his chances against Museveni in the general election without the NRM flag. On July 31, he announced his independent candidacy. After an unsuccessful flirtation with an opposition grand coalition, he emerged on the campaign trail with a small team of allies mostly from his own family and minor opposition parties⁵⁰ – a shadow of the vast network he initially threatened to mobilise. The regime maintained security pressure on his campaign for a time but relaxed this as the threat he posed looked increasingly weak. Other than a few scuffles between his supporters and the security forces,⁵¹ he was largely left to hold his rallies in peace. After untold media attention and years of high expectations, polls showed that the FDC’s Kizza Besigye (who refused to be led by Mbabazi in a coalition) was once again the leading opposition candidate. Mbabazi’s campaign seemed to run out of steam well before the finish line,⁵² such that few were surprised by his abysmal final tally.

6.2.2 Theoretical implications

There are numerous reasons why Mbabazi failed to meet the high expectations set for

⁴⁸ Sadab Kitatta Kaaya, “Kayihura Moves to Stop Mbabazi,” *The Observer*, June 23, 2015, <http://www.observer.ug/news-headlines/38424-kayihura-moves-to-stop-mbabazi>.

⁴⁹ Oloka-Onyango, “Enter the Dragon, Exit the Myths: The Contested Candidacy of John Patrick Amama Mbabazi,” 105.

⁵⁰ These included his sister-in-law Hope Mwesigye, the leader of the DP Norbert Mao, the former leader of the UPC Olara Otunnu, and the leader of JEEMA Asuman Basalirwa

⁵¹ Uganda Radio Network, “Anger in Soroti as Police Disperse Mbabazi Supporters,” *The Observer*, September 9, 2015, <http://www.observer.ug/news-headlines/39788-anger-in-soroti-as-police-disperses-mbabazi-supporters>; Sadab Kitatta Kaaya, “Mbabazi, Museveni Supporters Clash in Ntungamo,” *The Observer*, December 13, 2015, <http://www.observer.ug/news-headlines/41600-mbabazi-museveni-supporters-clash-in-ntungamo>.

⁵² Nicole Beardsworth, “Challenging Dominance: The Opposition, the Coalition and the 2016 Election in Uganda,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10, no. 4 (2016): 760.

his candidacy.⁵³ First, as the above summary makes clear, the regime utilised its coercive capacity against Mbabazi to dismantle his potential local mobilising structures and reduce the “visibility” of his campaign.⁵⁴ Second, during his ascendancy Mbabazi had made as many enemies as allies within the NRM.⁵⁵ These enemies formed a powerful faction within the party ready to mobilise against him when the opportunity arose.⁵⁶ Third, and perhaps most importantly, Mbabazi was simply outfoxed strategically by the regime – especially regarding the surprise Kyankwanzi resolution that caught him and his network off guard.

However, the key *terrain* of the Museveni-Mbabazi contest was their tug-of-war throughout 2015 over the loyalties of the NRM’s “selectorate” elite who would ultimately decide their fate – initially through their power in the regime’s formal processes, and later for their ability to influence the presidential choices of rural voters during the election (see chapter 7). Despite the three factors listed above, the main reason for Mbabazi’s failure at every stage was the fact that so few of his numerous allies in the NRM were willing to openly join him. This is puzzling given the sheer size of the NRM’s selectorate, and Mbabazi’s deep roots within it. For all the regime’s intimidation and tact, these tools alone are insufficient to explain the lack of loyalty to Mbabazi. Indeed, the evident panic of the regime after Mbabazi announced his entry into the race in June 2015 is likely a sign of this.⁵⁷ The *Daily Monitor* made this point in reference to the “rebel MPs” discussed above:

If four young NRM “rebel” MPs could withstand the pressure and intimidation of

⁵³ For a good summary, see: Oloka-Onyango, “Enter the Dragon, Exit the Myths: The Contested Candidacy of John Patrick Amama Mbabazi”; Beardsworth, “Challenging Dominance: The Opposition, the Coalition and the 2016 Election in Uganda.”

⁵⁴ Isaac Imaka and Alfred Tumushabe, “When NRM Took Anti-Visibility War to Amama Camp,” *The Daily Monitor*, November 23, 2015, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/SpecialReports/Elections/When-NRM-took-anti-visibility-war-to-Amama-camp/-/859108/2968336/-/13dajml/-/index.html>; See also: Khisa, “Managing Elite Defection in Museveni’s Uganda: The 2016 Elections in Perspective.”

⁵⁵ This was particularly the case with the “historical” members he attempted to undercut after 2005, who remained wealthy and well-connected. Interview 31.

⁵⁶ Oloka-Onyango, “Enter the Dragon, Exit the Myths: The Contested Candidacy of John Patrick Amama Mbabazi,” 114.

⁵⁷ Oloka-Onyango, “Enter the Dragon, Exit the Myths: The Contested Candidacy of John Patrick Amama Mbabazi”; Edgar Tushabe Muhairwe, “Mababzi Announcement Shakes NRM, Museveni,” *The Independent*, June 21, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.ug/cover-story/10351-mbabazi-announcement-shakes-nrm-museveni#sthash.XNaJ1cPK.dpuf>; Sadab Kitatta Kaaya, “Museveni Offers Mbabazi VP Deal,” *The Observer*, May 4, 2015, <http://www.observer.ug/news-headlines/37663-museveni-offer-amama-mbabazi-vp-deal>.

Museveni and the party machinery in 2013, just imagine how many more MPs, RDCs, civil servants, ambassadors, intelligence officers, Anglican Church dignitaries, civil society activists, journalists and other Mbabazi loyalists would rebel and openly call for the creation of a Kenya-type Orange coalition to challenge Museveni if he ever touched Mbabazi.⁵⁸

The short answer as to why this did not occur is that politicians feared that joining Mbabazi would jeopardise their own political survival. The regime made it clear that it was capable of targeting Mbabazi supporters coercively. For example, one of the very few NRM MPs who did campaign for Mbabazi from beginning to end, Nulu Byamukama of Kamwenge, had his radio station shut down by the police when it hosted the former Prime Minister.⁵⁹ Similar consequences befell Mbabazi supporters in his native Kanungu district who were accused of violating the NRM rules and therefore prevented from standing in the primaries.⁶⁰ There were many carrots as well as sticks in this strategy. According to one MP Museveni's outreach to a group of primary losers included promises of jobs and compensation.⁶¹ Generally speaking Mbabazi sympathisers in positions of power were not sacked from those positions if they agreed not to explicitly oppose the president.⁶²

Furthermore, as it became increasingly clear that Museveni was going to win the election the risks-to-rewards ratio for Mbabazi allies was further imbalanced. This momentum is likely the reason why many of Mbabazi's scant team – such as former NRM MPs Steven Kaliba of Kabarole and Ronald Ssekitooleko of Wakiso – defected back to Museveni as the election drew nearer. This is what made the Kyankwanzi resolution so important; not as a binding document but as a shift of momentum from which Mbabazi never fully recovered.

However, consideration of these two factors alone would ignore the fact that their

⁵⁸ "Museveni, Mbabazi and the Power Struggle within NRM." The "Orange coalition" refers to the powerful opposition movement led by Raila Odinga against Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki in 2005 after the two fell out.

⁵⁹ Sadab Kitatta Kaaya, "Mbabazi Faces Hurdles in Museveni's Kiruhura," *The Observer*, January 27, 2013.

⁶⁰ Mark Baguma, "Mbabazi Supporters Ejected from NRM Poll," *The Observer*, September 28, 2015, <http://www.observer.ug/news-headlines/40131-mbabazi-supporters-ejected-from-nrm-poll>.

⁶¹ Interview 14.

⁶² Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, *pers. comm.*

effectiveness relied on the NRM's culture of subnational division and competition discussed in chapter 5. If Mbabazi failed because each of his allies in the selectorate saw the consequences of joining him as too risky for their political survival, this must partly be due to the fact that the survival prospects of these elites were precarious *to begin with*. As discussed above, it is in the context of fragile survival odds that small interventions by the regime can have a decisive impact in rural races. Each of the potential Mbabazi allies knew precisely how easy it would have been for the regime to eject them from the NRM primaries, for the president to decampaign them at one of his rallies, or for some State House money to boost the campaign of their opponents.

The nature of subnational competition in the NRM puts every member of the selectorate in this position. In order to defeat troublemakers, the regime does not have to go to war uprooting the monolithic local machine of a “kingmaker” – it merely needs to support an existing and well-established NRM alternative. Again, whether such intervention is common or not is irrelevant – the nature of divided NRM district elites makes *the threat* of it potent, and therefore the leverage of the selectorate weaker. Hence, what the earlier-quoted *Monitor* quote misses about the 2013 rebel MP situation and the decisions of MPs in 2015, is that the context of the election makes this group more survival focused, risk-averse, and therefore easier for the regime to threaten with the coercion and inducements meted out to Mbabazi allies.

6.3 Conclusion

Both the “rebel MPs” and Mbabazi episodes show how the NRM party is institutionally weak: in the first case when the party's expulsion of the rebels had no impact on their ability to pressure the government from Parliament; and in the second case when Mbabazi's total control over the secretariat provided him no real advantage in his quest for the party leadership. The Mbabazi saga also shows why the government has an interest in keeping it this way – had the SG controlled a disciplined bureaucracy, this could easily be used by him against the president.

Yet these episodes also clarify the seemingly paradoxical reality that this weak party exists in a very stable dominant party system. In lieu of strong party institutions, the challenge of controlling subnational elites depends on the fact that they are divided

amongst themselves and under constant threat of electoral demise. Put another way, the most important check on the power of subnational selectorate members is the culture of intra-party competition that prevents them from accumulating too much power and independence in the first place, before any reactionary intervention from the regime is required.⁶³ Hence, the constant turnover of NRM politicians directly aids Museveni's management of the challenge of elite cooperation. As journalist Daniel Kalinaki put it after the raucous 2010 party primaries: "Chaos is the way NRM works, not how it fails".⁶⁴

⁶³ The role of subnational competitive elections in lieu of a strong party has also been suggested by Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*, 3.

⁶⁴ Daniel Kalinaki, "Chaos Is the Way NRM Works, Not How It Fails," *The Daily Monitor*, September 9, 2010.

Chapter 7

Voting for a Monarch: Subnational Competition and Presidential Mobilisation

Previous chapters have explained how the NRM dominant party system is *open* in certain aspects: open enough to incorporate the multiple tensions and grievances of the local polity (chapter 4), and open enough to include and prolong competition between rival politicians and their “camps” within these polities (chapter 5). As should be clear by now, I contend that this openness is the key to the party’s expansive, monopolistic breadth during election season. In this chapter I will explain how the party is *closed* in certain ways that allow it to reap the benefit of this breadth. This closure relates to the relationship between President Museveni’s re-election campaign and the campaigns of subnational candidates. Museveni is intimately tied to campaigning at every level of NRM strongholds. NRM candidates for all offices, whether in the primaries or the general election, evangelise his transcendent persona and mobilise his voters as a matter of course alongside their own campaigns. This chapter will explain how and why this closed relationship between the presidential campaign and subnational politics exists within the NRM, and how the processes of intra-party subnational competition multiply its benefits.

The chapter’s first two sections explain H₂ and H₁, in that order. The first (7.1) looks at the presidential campaign’s reliance on the physical mobilisation carried out by local candidates and their agents in various forms – which I refer to as “co-mobilisation”. I analyse the various methods of and incentives for this co-mobilisation based on interviews and campaign observations. The section then discusses how high rates of competition among these subnational campaigns make co-mobilisation more likely and more fruitful. This finding builds on the findings of chapter 5, which revealed the ways that district rivalry builds the party apparatus during the election season. The second section (7.2) analyses the decentralised accountability politics prevalent in the divided NRM stronghold. It shows that most voters blame local politicians rather than the president for shortcomings in the political *status quo* – frustration with which is extremely high. Like the prior section, it then addresses the causal links between this outcome and high intra-party subnational competition. Together, I will argue that these

advantages are the key to the president's electoral supremacy.

Having explained the causal mechanisms of H_1 and H_2 , the chapter's remaining two sections address the "exceptions" to the "rules" found in two of my case districts. Section 7.3 looks at how the particular dynamics of local competition in Kayunga led to a dramatic decline in the president's vote there. Section 7.4 looks at the opposition presence in Bugiri, where competition outside the NRM led to heavier state intervention than in either of the other two cases. Kayunga and Bugiri, I will argue, were exceptions to the rule of districts in the broader population of the rural south.

7.1 Competition as mobilisation (H_2)

In chapter 3, we saw that national parties in Uganda have generally been decentralised networks of locally powerful individuals rather than centrally organised machines. As that chapter concluded, for all its other changes the NRM is the same as previous parties in this regard. In the 2016 election, local politicians within the NRM were the engine of President Museveni's re-election campaign – far more so than the campaign managed by State House itself. While that central campaign had significant organisational power in its own right (in the form of financial resources and control of local security structures) the vast bulk of the burden of mobilising voters fell on the local politicians profiled in earlier chapters. Further to documenting the forms that this takes, this section will show the incentives faced by subnational candidates that produce this outcome, and how high levels of competition between such candidates increased its output.

7.1.1 Forms of co-mobilisation

Museveni's dependence on local NRM candidates during the election takes three forms. The first can be considered campaign *labour*. In any given location in the rural south during election season, the physical paraphernalia of the president's re-election campaign was distributed by a local politician's efforts. The yellow posters bearing Museveni's image, ubiquitous throughout so much of the countryside for the months leading up to February 2016, were installed on shop fronts and houses by the agents of local candidates, not, for the most part, agents appointed by the president's campaign itself. When local candidates held rallies of various size in their constituencies,

loudspeakers played Museveni's campaign theme song *tubonga nawe* while crowds sang along. When starting the rally, the candidates and their agents almost always took to the microphone and chant "*NRM Oyee, Kaguta Oyee*" ("up with the NRM, up with Museveni" would be a rough translation) to start the meeting, which would be matched with "*oyee*" from the crowd. This is among a host of other chants and slogans attached to the Museveni presidency: "no change", "*NRM pakalast*" ("NRM forever"), "NRM means Never Remove Museveni", among others. Other than the president's own rallies (of which he usually held one per constituency) there were very few "NRM rallies" organised by the party itself that citizens might attend.¹ Local campaign rallies fill this void. If one stood in the NRM heartland during the peak of electioneering and saw, heard, or experienced the thick of what appeared to be "the Museveni campaign", in the vast majority of cases this campaign would in fact be an inbuilt component of local campaigns rather than a centrally organised one.

The second dimension of co-mobilisation concerns the material *resources* of electoral mobilisation. Local candidates, both NRM flagbearers and NRM-Independents, finance their campaigns from their own savings and debt – not the party's coffers. While flagbearers do receive a small sum of money from the party secretariat, this was a fraction of the overall cost of their campaigns. MP flagbearers, for example, received around US\$20m (\$5,600) from the party, but (as mentioned in chapter 6) spent around US\$560m (\$162,000) on their campaigns. The US\$20m figure was also designated for mobilising for the president's rally, and is not significantly higher than the amount that candidates had to pay to the party in order to stand in the primaries. Candidates across the spectrum of large and small offices often sell their houses and cars and take on crippling debts to fund this shortfall.² Given the shared campaigning labor mentioned above, this means that the presidential campaign relies as well on the resources of the local candidates. That is, the hands that plaster Museveni's poster across the countryside are not only organised by local candidates, but are paid by them as well. This is not to say that most local candidates voluntarily spend extra-money on the president's campaign, but rather that as Museveni's campaign mobilisation relies on the labour of

¹ The only one of these that I attended was in Kayunga, where it was held by the members of the Karangwa camp who had won most of the primaries (see 5.2.3).

² Interview 29, interview 6.

local campaigns, the fact that these campaigns are self-funded means that he is also relying on their resources.

The third way to understand the president's reliance on local campaigns relates to their unique *capacity* to reach certain voters and spaces. Local campaigns can extend into pockets of rural society to a depth that no centrally organised campaign ever could. To list a few examples, while on the trail with local candidates I witnessed rallies and hustings in isolated and remote villages of several houses, to small groups of migrant workers on commercial farms, and to youths playing football on the side of the road. Even where candidates themselves don't go, their networks of agents – many of whom are organised in the official NRM structures (5.2.2) – reach even further than their rallies can take them. Local campaigns also have the knowledge of community interests and tensions discussed in chapter 4. One MP rally I attended in Kayunga took place in a tiny community of the Kuku ethnic group originally from the border of West Nile and South Sudan. The candidate made it very clear that she was aware of the needs of this community, and had arranged translators to convert her Luganda speech into the Kuku language, which included a reminder that the president had not forgotten them. In a broader sense, many of the bigger campaigns that represent sectarian loyalties described in 4.3 can be seen as an extension of this capacity: a Museveni messenger tailor-made for every demographic of the constituency. None of this is done as a matter of charity from local candidates to the president. Rather, they penetrate these crevices of rural society in search of their own votes. Nonetheless, given the linked nature of co-mobilisation, where their campaigns went, so went Museveni's.

7.1.2 Incentives for co-mobilisation

There are a number of reasons why local candidates co-mobilise for the president. The simplest of these is that many genuinely like the president and support the continuation of his tenure in office. That the president commands the genuine loyalty of many in the NRM's ranks in this way should not be dismissed as a factor in the system. However, my interviews indicate that the higher up the chain of office holders and office seekers one looks, the less likely this is to be true. Some higher candidates (for MP, Woman MP, LC5 Chair) I interviewed did seem to genuinely support the president, but most fell into two other broad categories: those that are frustrated with him but resigned to

accept the continuation of his rule as a *fait accompli*, and those that are firmly opposed to his continued leadership. The first of these groups talked about Museveni's presidency as if it was a fact of Ugandan political life that cannot be changed. They expressed their disdain for the president's "overstay" in power, or the authoritarian impulses of his regime, but often laughed off the futility of opposition figures like Kizza Besigye or Amama Mbabazi, or the quixotic missions of local opposition candidates. Those in the second group, on the contrary, spoke of the president in private as if they were members of the opposition. Some stated their support for the presidential candidacies of Besigye or Mbabazi, and stressed their opposition to the current reform of age limits in the constitution. I met one passionate Besigye-voting NRM candidate in the VIP tent awaiting a Museveni rally. Several others were from heartland NRM areas where Museveni receives enormous majorities. I cannot put any numerical estimate on what percentage of NRM politicians fall into these loose categories, but for the sake of this thesis' contentions it is sufficient to note that my interviews show that a sizable bloc of NRM candidates are far more skeptical of the president's political merit than their statements at campaign rallies would suggest.

Given that this is the case, why do so many carry out the routines of co-mobilisation? Coercion in various forms is a part of the reason. Candidates who decline to associate themselves with the president risk facing the security forces, or being in State House's bad books when state appointments are decided. This is due to the expansive reach that the security services – particularly the Internal Security Organisation and the Police – have in the countryside. In the words of one elite interviewee, "Of course the president knows what they are doing, security is everywhere".³ The following conversation with an opposition-supporting NRM candidate reveals an awareness of this:

Q: What about if you were FDC? If you were actually campaigning for Besigye?

A: You risk. If you are campaigning for Besigye, you are only secure if you don't gather momentum. With the momentum I gathered, if I was opposition I would have been arrested. They leave you to do all you want to do. But they watch that you don't gain momentum. If you gain momentum. It will be an issue.⁴

³ Interview 41.

⁴ Interview 7.

Image 7.1: Banner of President Museveni and Solomon Silwani, Bulidha, Bugiri



Image 7.2: Campaign bus of Jinja mayoral candidate Majid Batambuze



Image 7.3: Campaign posters of Fort Portal MP candidate Setven Kaliba



Image 7.4: Campaign vehicle of LC5 Chairman candidate Azalwa Marijjan, Bugiri



There are two points to note here. The first is that while physical threats by the security forces are real, they are only likely to be a problem if a candidate is popular, or gains “momentum”. In fact there are opposition candidates in most of the constituencies of the rural south who are not bothered by security services only because they do not achieve such momentum. Second, candidates talk about the pro-Museveni litmus test in terms of action, not thought. That is, there is space in the NRM for people who are hostile to the president, and known to be so. Only when one declares this in the course of campaigning is this likely to cause problems.

Coercion of this kind is a crucial force that I do not wish to downplay. However the bigger reasons for co-mobilisation by Museveni-skeptics in the NRM are carrots, not sticks. Specifically, the ingrained personality cult surrounding the president – which I will discuss in detail in 7.2 – has produced a situation where local candidates gain an advantage by playing up their support for him, and are disinclined to campaign against him. The candidate quoted above added that to campaign in an NRM stronghold:

A: ...you must show that you are NRM. When you say that you are not NRM it's very difficult.

Q: Why is it difficult?

A: Our people, if you are not NRM they think you are a rebel. Actually you are not opposition but a rebel. Actually they don't know the difference between opposition and a rebel. So you have to say that you have links to NRM even if you are not officially.⁵

This has been evident in the rural south since the early Movement System era when the president was first on the ballot (see 3.2.2). Indeed, as discussed earlier (5.2.3), this is the principle reason why candidates stand in the costly primaries in the first place. When candidates place the posters of Museveni next to their own, they are less seeking to mobilise voters for him than to build an association between him and their candidacy. Images 7.1-7.4 show that candidates often put their images and the presidents side by side, as if to play up the idea that the two are part of the same campaign. The idea of possessing some kind of connection with the president that could be used to lobby for

⁵ Interview 7.

his support is in fact a key source of political legitimacy in higher races, especially for MP. For example, the president's rally in Mwenge North constituency, Kyenjojo, was held in Bufunjo sub-county, home of flagbearer Lawrence Akugizibwe. A speaker at the rally noted that before Lawrence's ascendancy the president had never set foot in the sub-county, to which the crowd cheered loudly.⁶ The appeal of this fact is the same reason why Akugizibwe had plastered his own posters and Museveni's side-by-side throughout the constituency. Relatedly, candidates accuse their rivals of not-supporting Museveni in order to delegitimise them. In Kayunga, MP Amos Lugoloobi was accused by a rival of having too few Museveni posters on his car, after which he promptly added more to refute the charge.⁷

This is evidence of a culture in the NRM where the *idea* of mobilising for the president possesses its own political capital in the eyes of voters. Many of the organs and offices ostensibly devoted to presidential mobilisation actually have more to do with this local political capital than with any institutional mobilisation role. A good example of this is the "task forces" common throughout the rural south, appointed the "task" of mobilising votes for the president. There is a long history of this term dating back to the 1996 election, when LC1 chairmen were asked to assemble task forces to campaign for Museveni (see 3.2.2). From what I could gather, none of these groups actually do any mobilising in the procedural sense, such as phoning potential voters, moving door-to-door, organising rallies independent of local candidates, or erecting Museveni's posters.

All of these functions are actually performed by local candidates in the form of co-mobilisation described above. Yet, in spite of their frivolity, elites and voters alike see the idea of being appointed to mobilise for the president a sign of power – of being connected to, and relied upon by him. Hence, people often mention at rallies that they are a member of some kind of "task force", or that they are a designated "NRM mobiliser". At several places in my fieldwork I noticed big signs on the road bearing the pictures of a local "task force", and at one rally a group of local candidates and notables stood up and were introduced as a "task force" by the event master of ceremonies (MC).

⁶ Campaign rally of President Museveni, Bufunjo, Kyenjojo, 21/01/2016.

⁷ Interview 25.

7.1.3 Competition and co-mobilisation

None of the above findings have presented anything particularly theoretically innovative. There is lots of scholarship showing that these kinds of national-subnational mobilisation strategies occur in other cases, especially in other African elections.⁸ The key theoretical intervention of H₂ is that in Uganda, the practice and benefit of co-mobilisation are increased by the existence of competition between the subnational politicians performing it:

H₂: Subnational intra-party competition is a driving force behind the NRM's collective electoral mobilisation, including for President Museveni's re-election campaign.

We can set the explanation of this theory around two points:

a. Competition makes subnational candidates more likely to co-mobilise

Competition between subnational NRM elites makes presidential co-mobilisation more likely because candidates in a competitive local race are more likely to be sensitive to the incentives and disincentives listed above. In this sense, the word “competition” can be substituted for the phrase “likelihood of losing”. If a candidate fears that his or her election will come “down to the wire”, the small benefits attached to being linked to the president, or the costs of falling afoul of local security forces, may be determining factors among the electorate. As we have seen in the opening pages of this thesis, high turnover of MPs is wide spread in Uganda, especially the rural south, where the majority of NRM MPs lose every five years in either the primaries or the general election. The vast majority of subnational elites therefore face elections with a very real chance of defeat. In such a position, even those who may be personally hostile to Museveni will not forgo the carrots or risk the sticks discussed above for the futile endeavour of challenging him.

Alternatively, if a politician could be assured of their re-election, the benefits of

⁸ For a recent theory of national elites relying on local intermediaries during elections see: Koter, “King Makers: Local Leaders and Ethnic Politics in Africa.”

performing the tasks of co-mobilisation, or the risks of not doing so, would be less consequential for political survival. In such a scenario the candidate's own opinions or interests in the matter might determine whether or not he or she co-mobilises for Museveni. This returns us to the principle identified in chapter 3: that the power of mobilisation has always lain more with subnational elites than centralised national parties. Even with Museveni's embedded personal popularity and the power of his centrally controlled security forces, a strong local campaign driven by local grievances and led by a local champion still poses a serious risk to his re-election. In cases where the condition of competition does not exist, then such politicians may avoid co-mobilisation at the president's expense. Moreover, such a candidate may even wish to withhold support for the president in order to show their power and use this to bargain for a better position within the government. In 7.3, I will argue that this is precisely what occurred in the case of Kayunga's Idah Nantaba, whose runaway popularity excused her the obligation to co-mobilise for Museveni.

b. Competition makes co-mobilisation more effective

High rates of subnational competition make presidential co-mobilisation more effective for reasons that we could term "addition" and "multiplication". In the first sense, the fact that the NRM incorporates the campaigns of numerous pro-Museveni candidates rather than just one, *adds* plural local movements and factions to his local electoral coalition. The openness of the local NRM to new and old local political factions means that there will be more local campaigns co-mobilising on the ground. An alternative situation, where strong NRM candidates could avoid competition altogether, would suppress the mobilisation of local opponents and/or drive them into the opposition. Even if such a candidate won election decisively, his/her opponents would not be mobilised at the presidential level, or may not vote at all. This is most important when thinking about co-mobilisation as "capacity" – explained above as the unique ability of subnational actors to penetrate remote and sectional voter demographics in the local polity. As we have seen in chapters 4 and 5, the NRM's openness allows candidates to emerge as champions of minority interests and groups that would likely never find a voice in a dominant party that was closed to local challengers. In many cases they represent minority sectional interests that have little hope of winning. Yet these potentially excluded interests are just as valuable for the president's search for votes.

For example, the pro-Bakiga campaign of Vincent Mugisha in Mwenge South is, for demographic reasons, unlikely to ever win so long as ethnicity is a major factor in the race. Yet, due to the openness of the local party and the practice of co-mobilisation, the president benefits from the fact that this sizeable minority is mobilised on election day alongside the much bigger Batooro campaign/s. The same could be said for other minority campaigns discussed in chapter 4.

Second, the competitive processes of the NRM stronghold *multiply* the base mobilised for the president on election day. The elongated processes of inter-camp electoral competition described in detail in chapter 5 add a degree of synergy to co-mobilisation, making it greater than the sum of its individual campaigns. That even the strongest local candidates cannot be assured of their re-election forces them to dedicate more labour and resources to their campaigns, which, as discussed above, helps the president's as well. The average winning NRM candidate in the rural south won 56% of the vote in 2016, a statistic which has been similar in previous elections. Hence, all candidates expect tough, competitive races, and spare no effort in their campaigns. Competition is therefore the force which mobilises the NRM stronghold so effectively in lieu of an institutionally strong national party. This is self-evident in the findings of chapter 5, which showed that the process of subnational competition necessarily enrolls party members *en masse* (5.2.1), rebuilds the party's 30-person "structures" from the village to the district (5.2.2), produces the spectacle of the NRM primaries months prior to the general elections (5.2.3), and mobilises turnout on election day (5.2.4).

From the point of view of voters, locally competitive races give purpose and meaning to the act of showing up to vote. Voters are heavily invested in the local outcomes of the election, and take their vote very seriously. An election without the kind of vibrant, meaningful competition discussed in chapters 4 and 5, where office holders were practically assured of re-election, would provide no such incentive for participation. This is especially important given that so many see the president's victory as a foregone conclusion.

7.1.4 Mobilisation as capital

Subnational elites are well aware that the president relies on their mobilisation efforts in this way. Consequently, proving their capacity to mobilise the local electorate acts as a kind of political capital that they use to become relevant and visible to the president. In the words of one Kayunga power broker: “first he looks at your mobilisation strategies – that’s how you become a darling.”⁹ Displaying mobilisation capacity also acts as a source of leverage throughout the campaign. This is why the president is sure to employ a very soft touch against even small and unsuccessful candidates in local races – provided that they are willing to co-mobilise. While I was discussing with one former MP about Museveni’s outreach to potential Mbabazi sympathisers who lost NRM primaries, she made their leverage clear: “MPs who lose have people – they have followers. An MP can lose with 7,000, 10,000...that’s quite a number of votes.”¹⁰

Nowhere is the desire to display mobilising potential on show more than at the president’s rallies. During the election these rallies were important events in the campaigns of local candidates, and revealed the inter-camp struggles that animated the districts during election season. In almost all cases, the president held one rally per constituency, and usually covered all the constituencies of one district on the same day. Part of the advantage of being an MP flagbearer was the right to choose the location of these rallies and act as their MCs. Naturally, flagbearers tended to dominate the proceedings themselves, and pack the stage with junior members of their own camps who would address the audience in the long hours spent waiting for the president’s helicopter to arrive. As MCs, however, they are not allowed to exclude their rivals altogether, and if those rivals were flagbearers for junior offices in the constituency they had a right to speak. Given the presence of both camps, the rallies then became sites of contest over who could show the president more mobilizing power than the other. In Mwenge North, Kyenjojo, even though flagbearer Lawrence Akugizibwe made the event his own, his rival, incumbent David Muhumuza sat in the VIP tent as the incumbent MP. Muhumuza’s campaign also organised truckloads of visitors from his strongholds to attend the rally, with his and Museveni’s posters prominent on the side

⁹ Interview 28.

¹⁰ Interview 14.

of vehicles that brought them. Of this competition, Lawrence said simply “everyone wants to show the president that he can mobilise supporters.”¹¹ With this much to be “shown”, thousands of attendees are brought to these rallies by local candidates. Although flagbearers are given money for this exercise (technically this is the purpose of the US\$20m they are given by the party) I heard of at least one MP candidate in Bugiri adding his own money to the effort.¹²

Accordingly, the president only ever makes generic statements in favour of the local flagbearer, without truly campaigning *against* his/her NRM-Independent rival. I asked one NRM-Independent who attended the presidential rally in his constituency about Museveni’s treatment of independents:

he dared not criticise us, because he was fearing it. He knew what we were doing, the moment you talk bad about us yet we are also campaigning for you, then we can also turn around and cause trouble.¹³

This is symbolic of Museveni’s attitude to NRM-Independents. At no point in the campaign – even when flagbearers were demanding that stronger action be taken – did Museveni do anything to prevent NRM-Independents from contesting in the general election. Much as flagbearers complain about this, my impression is that most understand and expect this treatment.¹⁴ As one NRM-Independent candidate put it: “Museveni will be interested in you, if he knows that he has something to lose if he’s not with you.”

7.2 Decentralisation of accountability politics (H₁)

Having explained *how* the president’s campaign message is spread through co-mobilisation, I will now discuss exactly *what* this message is, and how it is conditioned by competition in the local polity. In doing so I return to the puzzle described at the opening pages of the thesis: how can there be so much dissatisfaction with local NRM

¹¹ Interview, Lawrence Akugizibwe, 16/02/2016.

¹² Interview 40.

¹³ Interview 8.

¹⁴ Interview 12.

politicians, yet so much support for the incumbent NRM president? How can the broad frustrations with distribution, exclusion and corruption displayed in chapter 4 sit within districts in the rural south that produce enormous support for Museveni? Following the theoretical framework developed in chapter 2, to ask this question is to look at a particular *shape of accountability politics*.¹⁵

This section has two goals. The first (7.2.1) is to describe this “shape” in detail. How do voters perceive the roles, responsibilities, and credentials of the president compared with subnational politicians? Where are the boundaries between what Bialer called “high” and “low” politics?¹⁶ What narratives and discourses allow these to exist in harmony? The second goal (7.2.2) is to explain how competitive local politics produces and maintains this particular shape of accountability politics (H₁).

7.2.1 Museveni’s transcendent persona

In its “high” political dimensions, the NRM is little more than a personality cult. As mentioned in previous chapters, the party is entirely devoid of any central policy, ideology, or political meaning of any kind other than its attachment to Museveni. This charismatic bedrock is not in any way shared by other senior national NRM elites with similar historical credentials in the NRM/NRA story. Voters who discuss the critical role that the president has played in the country’s history rarely ever talk about other NRM or UPDF figures in a comparable way, and when senior figures have withdrawn their support in the past it has not fundamentally altered Museveni’s image. The dominance of Museveni’s personality is well known by subnational politicians:

In Uganda today, people vote President Museveni, they don’t vote NRM. No. People want Museveni as a person, period. These other NRM issues come because President Museveni has said it: “Vote NRM, the NRM person is so and so, don’t leave him.” So Museveni says “let’s vote that person”. But they are not voting a party. The party *per se* is useless. What is useful is the man who leads.¹⁷

¹⁵ Hess, *Authoritarian Landscapes: Popular Mobilization and the Institutional Sources of Resilience in Nondemocracies*.

¹⁶ Bialer, *Stalin’s Successors: Leadership, Participation and Change in the Soviet Union*.

¹⁷ Interview 8.

I found an abundance of evidence of this in my public interviews. The following quotes were typical:

Museveni is a person of all persons; he is even our saviour, he saved this country from bad leaders.¹⁸

For president, the people here know only one person.¹⁹

Our man the president, is ok. We are waiting for those independent people to come, and we see how we fight them. That Amama Mbabazi and Kizza Besigye, they cannot challenge Museveni! [Laughing]. How could they come and throw him away? ... How can you challenge our Mzee?²⁰

There are other parties but people are not interested in those parties, because that party of our president, people are interested in that one because it is helping people. The president is helping people very well.²¹

Yet, despite its centrality to the meaning of the NRM, the president's personality is in many ways distant from the local politics that constitutes the bulk of the NRM's activity. Paramount to the Museveni personality complex is its ability to transcend the grounded "parochial" conflicts of the local polity:²² to remain somewhat aloof and abstracted from them, while still seeming symbolically important to their resolution. This does not mean that he is considered irrelevant to people's local struggles, but that his imagined role is more that of a condition than an agent (see table 4.3, chapter 4). In this regard, the popular representation of the president among most of his supporters more closely resembles a monarch than a politician: his place in the nation's politics is fixed, yet it can only be so because his role is that of an *overseer* of politics than a figure *mired in* politics. Towns and villages thick with the rambunctious and divisive politics described in chapters 4 and 5 seem to rarely even engage with the question of whom they will support in the presidential race, or what Museveni has actually done in the

¹⁸ Public interview KYE-MS1-1E#1.

¹⁹ Public interview BUG-BN3-1E#1.

²⁰ Public interview KYE-MN2-1E#1.

²¹ Public interview KAY-NS2-1E#1.

²² Manion, "Authoritarian Parochialism: Local Congressional Representation in China."

previous term. People still regard voting for him as important, but consider the matter settled in a way that makes it an almost apolitical consensus.²³

There are many ways to delve into the popular understanding of Museveni's political merit – especially given that he has been known to take on numerous personas and identities over the years.²⁴ Here, I will discuss two broad roles: his role as a guarantor of security and national unity, and his patrimonial role as the distributor of the state's material resources to citizens. These match the broad descriptions of “horizontal” and “vertical” political grievances documented in chapter 4. In explaining both of these roles, the key point to note is the discursive contrast and connection between the president and local politicians, and the narratives of accountability that shift the blame for various problems onto the latter.

a. Security and ethnic/religious unity

The first and most important dimension of Museveni's political persona relates to his image as the sole author and protector of the peace currently enjoyed in Uganda – a concept Rubongoya calls “*Pax Musevenica*”.²⁵ In chapter 3 I discussed the security crisis that existed in Uganda in the decade before the NRM took power. During that period, the country experienced an outright collapse of state control and social order – a situation that was finally brought under control in the rural south by the NRM government and its security apparatuses in the first years of its tenure.²⁶ The fact that this turmoil ended three decades ago does not prevent a visceral fear among Ugandans young and old that any other president would not be able to hold the country together as well as Museveni can. Consider the following public interview excerpts:

Q: Why do you think [Museveni has support here]?

A: You have so many things. One is about the leadership background in Uganda.

²³ I use this term in the same way that Bialer did in writing of the “high politics” of the Soviet Union. See: Bialer, *Stalin's Successors: Leadership, Participation and Change in the Soviet Union*, 166.

²⁴ He has often called himself a “chameleon”. See: Frederick Golooba-Mutebi and Sam Hickey, “‘I Am a Chameleon’: Why and How Museveni and the NRM Dominate Uganda's Political Landscape,” in *Paper Presented at Workshop Titled “The NRM Regime in the 2016 Ugandan Elections,”* (All Souls College, Oxford, 2016).

²⁵ Rubongoya, *Regime Hegemony in Museveni's Uganda*.

²⁶ Again, this is true for the south but not the north.

Those old men can tell you about what happened earlier before. Secondly, we see how security is being maintained in the country. So people can go walk so freely.²⁷

During those former regimes, we are told that political instability was the order of the day. People in the villages were always on the run, they could not even cultivate, and if you had money it would be at risk. It was that kind of life. So when this president came in, at least the situation changed, there is political order, political stability in the villages.... When you try to tell the community “Let us change the government, we give it to people like Besigye” they say “ah, don't cause us problems, we are sleeping. You want to take us to the old days of Obote and Amin.”²⁸

Mzee is the one! We are having his peace.²⁹

One point which is often misunderstood about Museveni's historical narrative is the very local and granular dimensions of security and insecurity that frame it. It is true that people remember previous regimes as directly politically repressive in their own right, particularly regarding the abuses of former soldiers and chiefs. However, the default image of insecurity in rural Uganda that contrasts to “*Pax Musevenica*” relates more to states of local disorder and anarchy than to tyrannical regime power (see 3.1.3). The following interview excerpts make this clear:

Museveni brought peace. By the time of Amin and other members, Obote and whatever, we had no peace. That is the information I got from my parents. There has been no peace. For example people used to sleep in the bush. If you wanted to buy a bicycle first they ask you so many questions – “why have you got money?” Now a man buys his vehicle and drives and nobody can ask him like that. So we have peace in Uganda. That's the main issue. People are voting Museveni for that.³⁰

The most important issue in my experience is on the security and the peace. That's what I base my support on. And that goes specifically for the higher position, the presidency. Before I moved to this place for marriage, I heard so many stories that this place is rife with murder, robbery, things like that. But since the president came, things have

²⁷ Public interview KAY-BC1-1E#1.

²⁸ Public interview KAY-NS1-1E#1.

²⁹ Public interview KYE-MN2-1E#1.

³⁰ Public interview KYE-MN1-2E#1.

changed. It's peaceful now, I can have harmony as a woman and my husband won't grab it away from me. Because of women's emancipation I can now attend meetings and give my opinions and be listened to.³¹

Q: What do you think is different now compared to when the government came to power? What were the main problems during that time?

A: In my personal experience, my father was a coffee farmer, and whenever he would sell his coffee armed robbers would come and steal it. And they made two attempts on my father's life. My father would send us to buy sugar and we would get ambushed along the way and have our money taken.³²

I more frequently heard about these states of local disorder in discussions about Museveni than the excesses of the soldiers of the Amin or Obote regimes, although the weakness and recklessness of the latter was implicitly blamed for the former.³³

That insecurity is framed more as local disorder than the abuse of state violence may explain another counter-intuitive aspect of the Museveni persona: that people often recognize and even fear the authoritarian impulses of his leadership while simultaneously approving of him personally. In some cases, people discussed these impulses in a way that complimented, rather than contradicted, the virtues of *Pax Musevenica*. Consider the following excerpts:

A: People are afraid of violence after the election - they say that Museveni will cause violence if he doesn't get the vote. People cite a time on the radio that he said "no one can take my paraffin".

Q: Do you like him?

A: Yes I like him, he's done a good job.³⁴

Q: I know you didn't vote this time, but do you support the president?

A: I would have supported him

³¹ Public interview BUG-BC2-3T#1.

³² Public interview BUG-BC2-2T#1.

³³ Note this this may be different if in the "Luwero Triangle" area where state violence against citizens was more frequent during the Bush War (see 3.1.3).

³⁴ Public interview KAY-BC1-1E#1.

Q: Why?

A: According to what I hear from the parents, for them, the situation before was not good. I fear wars and violence to come. I also heard Museveni say that if we don't vote [for] him, wars will come back.³⁵

I love Museveni for bringing peace. And if we vote him out he may bring war.³⁶

This was not always the case: many opponents of the regime in the rural south and elsewhere are driven to their opposition by outrage at such actions, just as many Museveni supporters don't recognise accept that he abuses his power at all. Nonetheless the seemingly contradictory image of Museveni as both a guarantor of security and – in the same capacity – evidently appeals to many voters in the rural south. The oft-posed question of whether Ugandans vote for Museveni out of fear or love presents a false dichotomy, reliant on a misunderstanding of the deep fear of political change and turmoil among most voters.³⁷

In the general sense of personal and social security, most people in the rural south are satisfied with the *status quo*, in that local insecurity usually does not manifest as a political issue in either local or national politics.³⁸ As a political issue, it is also not considered to be something for which local politicians are accountable. To the extent that local actors are criticised for matters of security, these tend to be district-based civil servants – RDCs, DPCs and DISOs.

However, there is a thin line between the issue of security and that of ethnic or religious disunity. When people recall the chaos of the pre-1986 past, they usually associate this with the time of the “old parties”, when politics was entirely about tribe and religion. On this subject, the image of the president and the widespread interpretation of the *status quo* is more complicated.

³⁵ Public interview KYE-MN2-3T#1.

³⁶ Public interview KAY-BC1-3E#1.

³⁷ For further discussion of this see Vokes and Wilkins, “Party, Patronage and Coercion in the NRM’s 2016 Re-Election: Imposed or Embedded?”

³⁸ An exception to this rule is the Rwenzori area after the election.

A key component of the Museveni personality is the narrative that he has “de-tribalised” politics compared with previous leaders. It is widely known that Museveni’s inner circle (and his family) is from the south west, as are the preponderance of the military hierarchy. Yet, in my interviews, (which were not in the south west) people rarely talked about the president in an ethnic capacity, where his being a south westerner or a Munyankole was relevant to any form of political favouritism in office. The fact that Museveni’s main political challenger since 2001 has been Kizza Besigye, another south westerner, both reflects and reinforces this claim. Museveni’s supporters can therefore talk about the president as if he is an icon *against* the tribal politics of his predecessors and contemporary rivals (especially those in the Buganda Kingdom).

As we have seen in 4.3, however, ethnic and religious politics is rife within local polities. The fear of being left out or marginalised on the basis of ethnicity or religion continues to play a big role in the subnational politics of the rural south. However, far from invalidating Museveni’s claim to be a bulwark against these vices, voters tend to place the blame for them on local politicians, not him. In fact it is quite common for both sides of a local ethnic dispute to look to Museveni as their protector, and cite their local opponents as the source of “tribalism”. The ethnic politics of Kyenjojo show this clearly. In the words of Vincent Mugisha, “[Kiga] People fear that if Museveni goes the Batooro will chase them from town.”³⁹ This was echoed by many Kiga voters I interviewed: “Even the president came back to Kyenjojo, saying ‘I don’t want conflicts of Bakiga and Batooro in Mwenge, Kyenjojo’. So eventually the people followed what the President said. We have been in peace.”⁴⁰ In the interviews when Batooro expressed their frustration about the Bakiga moving to Kyenjojo, this frustration was never linked to the policy of the president.

If Museveni was mired in local ethnic politics as a “protector” of the Bakiga, then we could assume that those on the other side of this dispute might be critical of his role in doing so. Instead, the president seems to act as a general icon of non-tribal politics whose vision for ethnic harmony is simply not adhered to by local politicians. The same is true for the Basoga-Basamia tensions in Bugiri.

³⁹ Interview, Vincent Mugisha, 24/03/2017

⁴⁰ Public interview KYE-MN1-2E#1.

b. Patronage

The second dimension of the president's image relates to the distribution of state resources. Like many other cases of "state capture", Museveni has cultivated a persona in which all of the state's resources are a personal gift from him to citizens. He has claimed to audiences in the past that he personally controls all of the resources of the government,⁴¹ and repeatedly suggests that he "sends" sufficient money to local politicians and bureaucrats in order for them to fulfill his lofty developmental designs, only to be frustrated by their incompetence. This image is reinforced and reified by the grandiose donations that Museveni makes at most of his campaign stops, and the impossibly large sums that he pledges to various funds in the name of youth, women, farmers, *et cetera*. This was well reflected in public interviews, as voters often referenced the state spending in this personalised manner, coming "from" the president himself.

It is in this area that the contradiction between Museveni's image and people's experience with governance is most dramatic. Voters in the rural south are consistently disappointed with the state of government services and material distribution to their local areas. It is routine, not just common, to hear Museveni supporters bemoan the poor conditions of local roads, the lack of medicine in hospitals, the shortage of teachers in schools, the absence of state agricultural programmes, and other shortfalls. However, just like the issue of ethnic and religious disunity discussed above, these frustrations are reconciled with Museveni's persona by habitually laying the blame at the feet of local politicians, whose corruption, incompetence, or lack of influence account for the under-serviced local state. Interviewees often mentioned that he was "concerned" with a local issue,⁴² or that his efforts to fix something are "frustrated" by politicians on the ground.⁴³ The following discussions with Museveni supporters were typical in this regard:

Q: Are you generally satisfied with the government services in this village?

⁴¹ David Osobo Awori and David Musengeri, "I Own the Money in Uganda - Museveni," *The Daily Monitor*, January 21, 2015, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/I-own-the-money-in-Uganda---Museveni/688334-2596184-c87iqa/index.html>.

⁴² Public interview KAY-BC1-1E#1.

⁴³ Public interview BUG-BC3-2T#1.

A: I'm not satisfied. For example the school; there is only one building that is acceptable, the rest are in a bad state. Some of them are semi-permanent and some of them are almost falling.

Q: And who do you blame for that?

A: MPs. From the MPs to the local leaders.⁴⁴

Q: Are you satisfied with services generally?

A: Not adequate, especially hospitals.

Q: Who is responsible for that? Will it change your vote?

A: It is not the fault of the president, his programmes are frustrated by people on the ground.⁴⁵

Q: What do you want your MP to do for you?

A: Construct schools, build health centres, he hasn't done either of these. Mainly people are very poor. In Christmas doctors go to their homes and leave our hospitals without any care. Even drugs, they are not there.... Our area, in terms of development, is really bad.⁴⁶

A: There were also school problems, because we only have one government school. And we don't have a health centre...

Q: So people want that to change?

A: They want that to change. Because they need those health facilities, the education, and even the boreholes. There are not enough of them.... So those are the main issues. We were telling [the MP candidate], "when we vote [for] you, you go there, you talk to our president, so that he can send us, that help. We need that help. We are not having enough boreholes, we are not having enough schools, we are not having enough hospitals in our village." So those are the issues they are discussing. And he told us he is going to fight, so that they can provide us with those facilities.⁴⁷

Each of these voters was an enthusiastic supporter of the Museveni. The recurring pattern in their comments is that: a) local government services are woefully inadequate; and b) it is local politicians, not the president, who are accountable for this. It should be

⁴⁴ Public interview KYE-MN2-3T#1.

⁴⁵ Public interview BUG-BC3-2T#1.

⁴⁶ Public interview KYE-MN2-1E#1.

⁴⁷ Public interview KAY-NS2-1E#1.

noted here that this is not a reflection of a devolved governance structure wherein local politicians are in fact more powerful than the president. While a lot has been made of fiscal devolution in Uganda under the NRM, the bulk of the state budget is still controlled centrally. More importantly for the present argument is the widespread *perception* of a centralised budget. As shown in the above quotes, voters evidently imagine state resource flows in highly centralised terms. The fact that people demand most from their MPs, (who, unlike LC5 Chairs, have no formal role in local government) is further evidence of this. As MPs sit in Kampala and meet with the president, the widespread perception of their role is to “lobby” Museveni for his resources.⁴⁸ The following passage is illustrative of the common view:

[The MP] is the one who goes and talks about our problems as a district in the Parliament. All our problems, we give him, so that he can send those problems to the president. In case we have problems as Kayunga District, we need to give those problems to him, to that MP, then the MP faces the president, and he gives our problems to him. That’s the reason why MPs are important. He is the one who takes our problems to the President, so that he can help us. ⁴⁹

Hence, Museveni’s role in the process of distribution is somewhat like a busy benefactor who relies on the effective petitioning of his “lobbyist” MPs in order to fulfill his grand developmental ambitions. With this narrative, the failure to receive such benefits sees voters blame their incumbent MP rather than the president. As chapter 4 showed, this decentralised accountability narrative is picked up by local candidates who use it to fuel their campaigns. For example, at an election rally celebrating the launch of electricity to Kyania village, Kayunga, Ntenjeru North MP Amos Lugolobi derided his predecessor’s incapacity to deliver Museveni’s power programme:

[village] chairman said that he wrote a letter in 2001, by then I was not an MP. After 10 years, nothing happened until I came because I know where president Museveni stays. You have been voting for the blocked straws, for me I am not a blocked straw [audience claps]. I can get things from where they are and bring to Kyanya... President is only one person, he can’t reach all the villages so he needs someone whom he can

⁴⁸ Wilkins, “Who Pays for Pakalast? The NRM’s Peripheral Patronage in Rural Uganda.”

⁴⁹ Public interview KAY-NS2-1E#1.

work with to deliver services

On the subjects of ethnic and religious unity and material distribution, a lot more could be written of the president's political persona than the above.⁵⁰ There are also many more dimensions to this public persona than these. For the purpose of this thesis however, it is sufficient to note simply that accountability politics on these matters takes a very decentralised shape. Voters' demand for change in NRM areas is almost always directed at lower level politicians, not the president. It is this realisation that necessitated the theoretical framework of multi-level accountability politics developed in 2.3. As the above shows, it is useless to talk about a single voter as "satisfied" or "dissatisfied" in Uganda without considering the different standards applied to the national and subnational political arenas, or the ideational relationship between the two.

7.2.2 Local competition and accountability politics

Similar to our position in 7.1.4, the mere existence of the above narrative of Museveni's transcendent image does not reveal any causal mechanism of its origin or maintenance. After all, in the recurring scenario of incumbent politicians being accused by voters of not bringing enough state projects back to their community, it is puzzling that the most obvious excuse for this shortcoming – that the president did not "send" enough in the first place – is so seldom used. Likewise, even with the transcendent narratives described above, it is puzzling that more voters do not come to this conclusion themselves.

There are many reasons why Museveni's transcendent image is so durable. As with H₂, state coercion in the form of media control and pressure on regime-critical local politicians (see 7.1.2) is an important factor, which I will return to in chapter 8. However the theoretical contention of H₁ is that the maintenance of decentralised accountability politics relies mainly on high rates of local competition within the rural strongholds of the NRM:

⁵⁰ Ronald Kassimir, "Reading Museveni: Structure, Agency and Pedagogy in Ugandan Politics," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 33, no. 2/3 (1999): 649–73; Giovanni M. Carbone, "'Populism' Visits Africa: The Case of Yoweri Museveni and No-Party Democracy in Uganda," 2005.

H₁: Subnational intra-party competition provides an outlet for popular frustrations with the status quo that can be directed against local elites rather than the regime itself.

This causal connection can be seen in two ways: through the decisions of politicians and the eyes of the voters.

a: Competitive pressures on local politicians decrease the likelihood that they will risk the consequences of “decampaigning” the president.

This point is essentially the same as 7.1.4.a, relating to the relationship between competition and co-mobilisation. Competition makes candidates more conscious of their political mortality and therefore more sensitive to the political risks associated with appearing to oppose the president. Yet the puzzle is more dramatic for H₁. While the practices of co-mobilisation are not particularly difficult for local candidates, the choice not to blame the central government for local shortcomings could theoretically be the difference between winning and losing in a competitive race – especially for incumbents. I witnessed several rallies where incumbent politicians were grilled by their audience for not fulfilling the promises of their previous election campaigns, yet none blamed the central government or the president.

There is a causal feedback loop to the transcendent narrative described above, wherein the Museveni personality cult has become so embedded in the rural south that local candidates simply do not have the power to shift opinion on it. Consider the words of one candidate from a strong NRM area of Bugiri:

People in our villages, when you talk ill about president Museveni, they will hate you...because they look at him as their messiah. Because this was an area when Obote II was there that people were being slaughtered like chickens.⁵¹

Likewise, given that Museveni is projected as the source of all state resources, a candidate campaigning against him is all but admitting that he/she has no connection to

⁵¹ Interview 44.

this source, and cannot “lobby” for any projects for constituents. There is certainly a high degree of path-dependence for this motivation that makes a single election-cycle incapable of revealing it in full. However it can still be said that local competition, by weakening the political hold that subnational elites have over their constituencies, reduces the power they have to shift any opinion, and makes the maintenance of decentralised accountability politics more likely. As will be shown in 7.3, in the rare cases where the competitive balance between NRM subnational politicians disappears, the narratives of decentralised accountability politics can easily be threatened.

b: The existence of a locally competitive polity maintains the popular narrative the change is driven by local actors rather than national ones.

More importantly, the existence of local competition provides an outlet for voters to “throw the bums out” without changing the government. The above narratives of decentralised accountability would not make any sense if the NRM fronted election campaigns as a united team of candidates from village to president. Instead, the continuing existence of a dynamic, competitive local polity provides a way for voters to vote for change without supporting the national opposition. In this way, local competition is something of a “safety valve” for dissatisfied voters to release their frustration on a plausible embodiment of the *status quo*. Far from elevating local elites to a position of worrying prominence, the inflated importance of the local MP to most voters is actually useful to the president, who can invest in these local power brokers all of the hopes and expectations of his lofty agenda.

Hence, the openness of the party to new campaign narratives and grievances (chapter 4), and to new political entrants (chapter 5) is critically important to Museveni’s transcendent accountability story. Thinking back to the woman quoted in section 4.1.2 about the irresponsibility of youth voting for the opposition, it is clear that the popular image of the NRM has an inbuilt capacity for change within its own space. It is this very flexibility that makes it so difficult to remove. Alternatively, a more closed dominant party, which restricted anti-*status quo* discourse in local campaigns and insulated local elites from competition, would not be able to provide such a safety valve to popular discontent. Political frustrations would instead be forced to take the form of *de jure* opposition candidates, however suppressed they may be. In Uganda, the

opposition parties face numerous state-imposed hurdles when mobilising in rural areas – but none of these is more important than the *lack of demand* for their candidacies by citizens voting for change. The NRM’s internal space for self-styled change agents (see 4.4.1) cuts off the oxygen for such opposition candidates and in doing so re-generates the narratives of decentralised accountability and presidential transcendence. Consider this response from a voter to the question of how most NRM candidates campaign for votes:

They come and highlight the weaknesses of the incumbent. For example they tell us that government sends money for the youth livelihood programme and for the elderly, but have you ever seen that? And of course we haven’t, and they say that we shall monitor to make sure that those funds get to you, the way they are intended.⁵²

The theatrics and discourse of Museveni’s rallies show this theory in action. Every one of these rallies that I attended or heard about followed a similar pattern: the president read the achievements of the NRM in terms of bringing services to the area, and when people in the crowd complained that no such development occurred in their area, he proceeded to dress down any civil servant or junior politician he could afford to alienate while the crowd cheered.⁵³ At most of his rallies he used the same metaphor to explain the situation: “I have been told that there are many embeba [rats] that are stealing millet here. But I am going to use my cats to catch them.”⁵⁴

In other occasions, the president would simply tell the audience to send him better MPs.⁵⁵ No matter what language he was using, the underlying dynamic here is that the president was relying on the outlet of local competition to sidestep widespread general dissatisfaction with local governance. According to several interviewees that attended these rallies, this strategy worked:

Q: Do you blame the central government in Kampala at all?

⁵² Public interview KAY-NS1-2T#1.

⁵³ See for example: “Hold Your Leaders Accountable - Museveni,” Uganda Election 2016 (Vision Group), 2016, <http://www.elections.co.ug/new-vision/election/1415410/museveni-campaigns-kibaale>.

⁵⁴ Kiggundu, “Museveni: Corruption Is Killing Bunyoro.”

⁵⁵ For example, at a rally in Ntungamo, Museveni said that the only reason there is no development in some areas is because he has to “threaten” and “beg” reluctant MPs to do their job. See Perez Rumanzi, “Constitution Failing Me - President,” *The Daily Monitor*, January 6, 2016.

A: According to me, the central government does its work. It is the district which does not extend practice to the people.

Q: Are you satisfied with the president's performance?

A: When the president came here, he told us that for him, he does what he is supposed to do. He sends what we are supposed to get. But the rats in the millet there divert what we are supposed to get.

Q: And you think that's true, that it's not his fault?

A: Yes, because he was telling us exactly what we have seen.⁵⁶

A: He used a parable that he grew millet, and he put it somewhere for storage, and then the rats came and stole it. So he told these voters to set traps for those rats; to drop them.

Q: Was [incumbent MP] Hon. Nsanja there?

A: He was there!

Q: And how did he react?

A: In fact he was about to cry! Even at that very moment people started singing that Mzee told us to chase the rats!⁵⁷

Clearly, there is a vibrant culture of accountability politics is alive and well in the NRM strongholds of the rural south which depends on the capacity to vote against local incumbents. In the conclusion of this chapter I will return to the significance of this accountability politics for the overall challenges of regime survival that this thesis set out to address. Before then however, I will show how the comparison between the three case districts gives more evidence to the theories of H₁ and H₂.

7.3 Nantaba and Kayunga

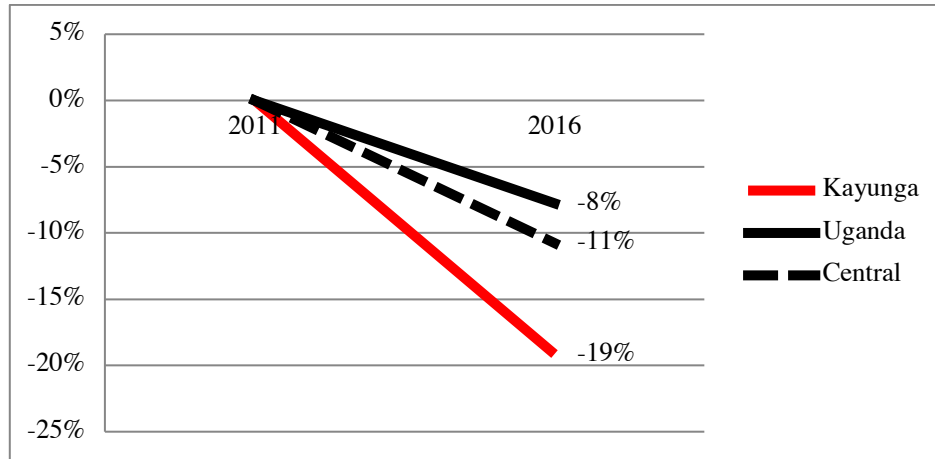
As mentioned in 1.2.2, my original case selection strategy included two districts (Kyenjojo and Kayunga) where I predicted high intra-NRM competition would lead to a large victory for the president, and one (Bugiri) where I predicted that opposition subnational presence would show the opposite. As I will discuss below (7.4), Bugiri did not go to plan in this regard. However, the more fortuitous surprise was the process and outcome in Kayunga. There, Museveni's vote dropped more from 2011 levels than any

⁵⁶ Public interview KYE-MN2-5T#1.

⁵⁷ Public interview KAY-NS1-2T#1.

other district in the country bar one: 19% (75%-56%), compared with the national average of 8%, and the sub-regional (Buganda) average of 11%.

Figure 7.5: Swing in Kayunga compared with national and sub-regional average



Source: Ugandan Electoral Commission.

I have already explained the background of Nantaba's emergence as a political figure in chapter 4, and the process of her camp's feud with Moses Karangwa in chapter 5. In this section I will speak only about how she positioned herself regarding the president, and the consequences of these choices.

7.3.1 Initial dynamics as a "rule"

Kayunga has in the past been very faithful to President Museveni. In the 2006 and 2011 elections it voted for him at a rate 8.8% and 6.9% higher than the national average, respectively. It has also been an NRM monopoly at the subnational level (with the exception of some of the southern areas), closely resembling the norms of H₁ and H₂ described above. In previous elections, competing local factions have fought close and bitter races within the NRM while still supporting the president. This is the context in which the career of Idah Nantaba grew. As described in 5.1.1, Nantaba's rise was initially the result of her direct elevation by the president to the Ministry of Lands, and the subsequent attention of several visits he made at her request in the following years.

During the first years of her foray into the district's land politics, she was careful to keep to the script of decentralised accountability outlined above. At a victory party in Kayunga after being appointed Minister in 2012, she told the crowd that although land

grabbers were targeting her, Museveni's intentions on the matter were good.⁵⁸ In July the following year, in an attempt to resettle evicted tenants back onto commercial farm land, she placed a phone call to the president's private line and (in front of television cameras) asked him to help resolve the matter. She then held the microphone to the phone as he answered in the affirmative, after which she and the crowd celebrated.⁵⁹ This linkage with the president was a key source of her legitimacy as a champion of the land matter. One district councillor said of her in late 2011 "We used to see Museveni in Kayunga District only during campaigns but she has managed to bring him regularly and out of his visit, many people and the district have benefited."⁶⁰

As the conflict continued, Nantaba made it clear to her followers that her enemies were high ranking generals – widely perceived as Inspector General of Police Gen. Kale Kayihura and Gen. Henry Tumukunde – but not the president. According to her, during this time Museveni directly encouraged her to continue the fight:

at one point they have been warning me, "we will kill you, you must stop the fight. You must go slow, you must come on the table and talk." But I refused... And I reported to the president, that so and so has called me, and has threatened me, like this, he's telling me to give up the fight. But the president kept encouraging me to go on in the fight.⁶¹

Publicly, Museveni attempted to appear interested in resolving the matter, but was unwilling to take sides in the political factionalism that immediately developed around it. In 2012 he promised to provide mechanisms for tenants to pay rent through a government channel to deny landlords an excuse to evict them.⁶² After a failed meeting to try and resolve the Dagada-Nantaba dispute in July 2012, Museveni addressed a public rally where he warned landlords not to evict tenants who refuse to pay

⁵⁸ Fred Muzaale, "Land Grabbers Targeting Me, Nantaba Says at Victory Party," *The Daily Monitor*, November 1, 2016, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Land-grabbers-targeting-me--Nantaba-says-at-victory-party/-/688334/1608744/-/107lfplz/-/index.html>.

⁵⁹ Sserunjogi, "Kayunga: A Hotbed of Land Wrangles."

⁶⁰ Fred Muzaale, "Who Is Idah Nantaba?," *The Daily Monitor*, October 22, 2011, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/artsculture/Reviews/Who-is-idah-Nantaba/-/691232/1538642/-/item/1/-/oyhtpr/-/index.html>.

⁶¹ Interview, Idah Nantaba, 03/03/2016.

⁶² Fred Muzaale, "Tempers Flare as Museveni's Visit to Kayunga Flops," *The Daily Monitor*, July 9, 2012, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Tempers-flare-as-Museveni-s-visit-to-Kayunga-flops/-/688334/1448798/-/14rhsy/-/index.html>.

“exorbitant” fees.⁶³ At a later meeting in his rural ranch in Kiruhura, Museveni again pledged to fight land grabbing, and that he would launch a national anti-grabbing campaign from Kayunga just as he launched his struggle against dictatorship (the Bush War) from Luweero, and in his classic transcendent style, cited the corruption of state organs as one of the reasons for grabbing in the district.⁶⁴ After another meeting in July 2013 Museveni said that:

If the land owners made mistakes we shall ask them to correct them and if squatters stayed on the land illegally we shall see how to help you because we are all Ugandans...I have come here as the judge and to find the truth.⁶⁵

All of this is typical of the aloof but concerned persona described above. Both sides claimed that they were acting with the support of the president, and given the ambiguities of his statements, this may well have been true.

7.3.2 Change to an “exception”

However, while things appeared to follow the typical script for a time, local political dynamics in Kayunga ended up directly challenging the narratives of decentralised accountability politics discussed above. In the lead up to the election, the Nantaba-Museveni relationship deteriorated. By now it was clear that the minister had established a political brand in Kayunga with runaway success, and as the primaries approached, she started using her local power to publicly pressure the president not to appear at rallies which included Moses Karangwa. In late August 2015, weeks before the NRM structures elections in which she was participating, Nantaba shunned a presidential visit commissioning a new radio station owned by Karangwa, telling the media that “we are surprised that our dear president is going to preside over the commissioning of investments owned by a person who has led to the suffering of many

⁶³ Muzaale.

⁶⁴ “Reconcile, Museveni Tells Kayunga Leaders,” *The New Vision*, July 28, 2012, <http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/633509-reconcile-museveni-tells-kayunga-leaders.html>.

⁶⁵ Ivan Okuda and Fred Muzaale, “Museveni Wants Two Weeks to Fix Kayunga Land Wrangles,” *The Daily Monitor*, July 5, 2013, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Museveni-wants-two-weeks-to-fix-Kayunga-land-wrangles/688334-1905212-item-01-wyo4itz/index.html>.

people.”⁶⁶ According to one experienced journalist in the area, these statements caused a serious stir throughout the district, and were akin to an accusation of collusion between Museveni and a land grabber.⁶⁷

The relationship deteriorated further after the fractious and violent NRM District Chairman elections in which Nantaba was defeated by Karangwa and teargassed heavily in the aftermath. Not only did Nantaba refuse to stand in the primaries, but when she nominated as an independent candidate for Woman MP (an important event in the campaign of rural candidates) she made a statement criticising Museveni’s inaction against Karangwa, suggesting that her supporters should vote for whichever presidential candidate they please.⁶⁸

Aside from these statements, the question of whether Nantaba actively “decampaigned” Museveni is complicated. Just like the above nomination statement, her actions fell significantly short of a wholesale opposition to his re-election, and she never affiliated with any opposition candidate. At the only rally of hers that I attended, she carried a financial gift from the president and offered it to the local community in a way perfectly in consistent with the co-mobilisation practices listed above. Indeed, several of her supporters whom I interviewed were still clearly supporters of the president, and assumed that she was too.

However, several of her actions during the election showed a clear refusal to co-mobilise, and were taken as signs by many in the constituency that she was opposed to the president. In the words of one informed observer: “during her campaign she did not campaign for President Museveni, and she did not decampaign him.” At the rally of hers that I attended in Wampologoma, I noticed that her vehicles had no posters of Museveni on it. When a young Museveni supporter attempted to put one on the car, Nantaba’s campaign manager told him that they had chosen not to do so. More significantly than any of that, however, was the fact that Nantaba refused to attend

⁶⁶ Fred Muzaale, “Nantaba to Shun President’s Visit,” *The Daily Monitor*, August 19, 2015, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Nantaba-to-shun-President-s-visit/-/688334/2838200/-/4t5gcb/-/index.html>.

⁶⁷ Interview 33.

⁶⁸ It should be noted that there is no exact transcription of this statement, and that I have summarised its content based on numerous mentions of it in elite and public interviews.

Museveni's three rallies in Kayunga. According to her:

A: I am very, very angry with what happened to me. I'm still carrying the anger.

Q: Angry at the President?

A: I have told him when he came here for his rallies, because I didn't attend his rallies, so he rang me the next morning, 'why didn't you attend?' So I told him, I'm not happy with the way your people are treating me. I have told him all the battles I have had, I have shared everything with you, I was like 'you have left me to be devoured by these angry people'. So I told him I was very angry. I could not... I have been fighting for these people, they know very well. Now eventually the guns have turned against their person who stands for them, so they are angry themselves. So coming to them, and telling them, 'you know what, ok vote for the President, vote for the NRM', to many of them it didn't make sense.⁶⁹

Nantaba's absence altered the nature of these rallies significantly. The first of the three, in Bbaale town – closest to the epicentre of land grabbing – was very poorly attended with only a fraction of the field used for the rally filled. At both of the two that I attended (Bbaale and Kangalumira), Nantaba's opponent Juliet Nalunga was loudly booed when she spoke to the audience, and the largest cheer of the event came when the president mentioned the Nantaba's name (both times he said he would try to reconcile her and Karangwa).

Several public interviews in Kayunga after the election give me the clear impression that many voters interpreted Nantaba's actions and statements – cryptic as they were – as a message that they should not vote for Museveni. The following examples are illustrative:

Q: You mentioned land as the main [political issue], which candidates were best at leading that fight?

A: Nantaba mostly, who has been campaigning on the land issue.

Q: So she's very popular around here?

A: It's very evident, for example she got more votes than the president, by a staggering margin.

⁶⁹ Interview, Idah Nantaba, 03/03/2016.

Q: Did she support the president in this campaign?

A: No she didn't at all.

Q: What did she say to give you that impression?

A: I think from what she says, that she was given the mandate from the President to take care of the land issues, but then the president got other people to fight her while she was doing her job.⁷⁰

Q: Did Hon. Nantaba support the president in her campaign?

A: She did not.

Q: How did she not? Did she say to support somebody else or did she just not campaign for him?

A: She didn't bother on that front, she only looked for her own vote. She didn't campaign for or against the president.⁷¹

Q: Did Nantaba support Museveni?

A: No, only herself and Baseke.⁷²

Q: Nantaba is an Independent, but to your knowledge is she still in the NRM and does she support President Museveni?

A: I think so, probably.

Q: You didn't hear her decampaign Museveni any way?

A: She didn't actively campaign for the president or against. She told us it was our choice. But then I heard that she supports the NRM, but the NRM five years ago, not in the current form. That's what attributes to the raising in profile of the FDC.⁷³

... at some point she mentioned that we shouldn't vote for him.⁷⁴

Other politicians in the area, including those allied with Nantaba, believe that her refusal to support the president fully was a message received by the voters:

I think she was now expressing her anger. She had wanted Museveni to act to Karangwa and the other the way she thought. And somehow she thought now Museveni had

⁷⁰ Public interview KAY-BC3-2T#1.

⁷¹ Public interview KAY-BC3-3T#1.

⁷² Public interview KAY-NS1-3T#1.

⁷³ Public interview KAY-BC3-1T#1.

⁷⁴ Public interview KAY-NS1-2T#1.

picked some sense in the matter and said ‘let the law follow’. So she expressed her anger by not supporting the president straightforward. In fact in her voting station, they voted Besigye overwhelmingly, where she voted in her village.⁷⁵

She did not tell people not to vote for the president, but people see that if the person fighting for them have gone through all of these problems, and the head of state does not come out openly to condemn such acts. So people thought now maybe the president is also behind this, and they are just hoodwinking us. So lets vote our own, and make sure he’s down. So basically that was it.⁷⁶

7.3.3 Comparative implications

From this interview evidence, we can infer that Nantaba’s lack of support for the president was the dominant factor in why the president’s vote dropped so dramatically in Kayunga. It is possible that there were other factors, or that the nature of the land tussle meant that it was inevitable that Museveni would take some of the blame no matter what Nantaba said during the campaign. Against these counter hypotheses, it should be remembered that, (as discussed in 4.4.2) intense land politics have always been a factor in intra-NRM politics in Kayunga, and during those tussles Museveni performed better than in 2016. Indeed, the controversial acts land grabs in question occurred years before the 2016 election (before the 2011 election for that matter). Given this, Nantaba’s quasi-decampaigning is the key. In her own words:

It [Museveni’s vote] came down because of those wrangles between me and Karangwa, first of all tear gassing me, attempting to kill me, all those things angered the electorate. And people were like “if he [Museveni] does not remove this man from the district, we are not voting for him”. I also stood my ground, said I’ll only bow again to NRM if this man is out of the district.⁷⁷

My theoretical contention here is not simply that Museveni’s vote declined in Kayunga because a local candidate did not support him, but that this lack of local candidate support was only so because *the condition of high subnational competition was absent*.

⁷⁵ Interview 31.

⁷⁶ Interview 23.

⁷⁷ Interview, Idah Nantaba, 03/03/2016.

By the election season, Nantaba had become an abnormally popular local figure. Because of her considerable skill in attracting media attention, her charisma behind the microphone, and because land insecurity was an issue that touched just about everyone in the district, it was clear that no matter how well-resourced and well-connected Juliet Nalunga's campaign was, it did not have a chance against Nantaba. In the event, Nantaba won 86% to 13% – the fourth highest total of any re-elected incumbent MP in the country (one of the other three was her brother and fellow camp-member Amos Lugoloobi, who won with 89%), and the highest vote for any independent.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the threat of defeat is a critical element of the system of using local agents to mobilise for the regime. If Nantaba faced a real threat of losing her seat, as almost every other incumbent MP in the rural south does, it is unlikely that she would have taken the risks that she did regarding the president. What makes Kayunga exceptional, then, is not Nantaba's *choice* to "stand her ground" against the pressures to co-mobilise, but the absence of local competition that would otherwise have constrained this choice. In the words of one journalist based in the district:

[most independent candidates] are not sure of their support, so they have to cling onto Museveni's. But for someone like Nantaba, who had support, there's no reason as to why she would even be bothered.⁷⁸

Hence, the case of Nantaba and Kayunga presents a rule-proving exception to both H₁ and H₂. For the former, the accountability politics that was boiling away in the district was not shielded from the president by the subnational politician championing it. Nantaba had become the undisputed spokesperson on the issue and refused to exonerate the president for his inaction. Regarding H₂, the evidence is somewhat more mixed. While the Nantaba camp as a whole certainly competed in the processes of intra-party competition documented in chapter 5 (to the benefit of the local party registration and structures), towards the end of the campaign her refusal to co-mobilise undoubtedly harmed the president's campaign.

The events documented here are also relevant for H₃. In chapter 6 I argued that the

⁷⁸ Interview, group of five Kayunga-based journalists, 02/03/2016.

presence of local electoral competition allows Museveni a measure of control over peripheral agents in the processes of setting elite bargains. Because Nantaba's popularity saw her escape this pressure, she has since been too powerful for Museveni to discipline as he may have wanted to given her actions in the election. To the surprise of many, she was reappointed to the cabinet immediately after the election (although as the Minister of Communication and Information Technology, not Lands). Moreover, in the politics of presidential age limits in the constitution, she has continued to be something of a thorn in his side.⁷⁹

There is only so much change that can be driven in a single electoral cycle like 2016. A strong NRM area like Kayunga was never going to be turned around completely. Indeed, many of the ideal type NRM monopoly conventions are visible there, as is the deep reverence of Museveni by many citizens – he did comfortably win the district, after all. However, there is enough evidence in the Nantaba story to show that the absence of balanced competition between subnational actors indirectly affects the president's re-election campaign.

7.4 The FDC and Bugiri

Bugiri was an exception for a different reason. Much of the district is strong NRM territory – particularly Bukooli North (half of the district), where NRM candidates have dominated local contests. This was the case again in 2016, as the race between Stephen Baka Mugabi and Gastar Kyawa Mugoya was a typical intra-NRM battle. Bukooli Central is a different story. As discussed in 1.2.3.c, perennial FDC candidate Wafula Oguttu won an upset race in 2011 with 38% of the vote after two NRM candidates (Fred Mukisa and Siraje Lyavala) split the vote.⁸⁰ In the years since, media reports suggested that Oguttu had built a strong political brand in the constituency by regularly returning and assisting in the maintenance of local services,⁸¹ even though NRM camp rivalry has

⁷⁹ Fred Muzaale, "Chaos in Kayunga as pro and Anti-Age Limit Supporters Fight," *The Daily Monitor*, October 21, 2017, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Age-limit-Minister-NRM-MP-forced-wear-red-ribbons/688334-4149712-e8uc1b/index.html>.

⁸⁰ Kakaire, "Fights in NRM Camp Helped Oguttu Win," July 22, 2011.

⁸¹ Sulaiman Kakaire, "NRM Vs Opposition: Key Contests in Busoga," *The Observer*, September 7, 2015, <http://www.observer.ug/news-headlines/39735-nrm-vs-opposition-key-contests-in-busoga>; Asuman Musobya, "FDC Launches Road Works Drive in Bugiri," *The Daily Monitor*, June 15, 2015, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/FDC-launches-road-works-drive-Bugiri/-/688334/2751762/-/h7tqal/-/index.html>.

carried on as if the district was still an NRM monopoly (see 5.2).

The reason for picking Bugiri as a case was that these conditions seemed to be ripe to prove or falsify the theories of H₁ and H₂. Most opposition MPs in Uganda are from either urban areas or regions long hostile to the NRM, not the rural south. The case for H₁ and H₂ would be evident if a strong local campaign by Oguttu led to a dip in Museveni's vote with interview evidence connecting the two – i.e., precisely what happened in Kayunga. Alternatively, the hypotheses would be weakened by a finding that Oguttu mobilised as much as he could against Museveni but did not change the vote at the presidential level. That finding would suggest that figures of the subnational realm are not as important to Museveni's presidential re-election as theorised, especially if Oguttu won, proving his independent strength in the local polity.

7.4.1 Evidence of an "exception"

Public interviews in Bukooli Central (14 in total) gave me the impression that Bugiri could indeed work as an exception as predicted. First, Oguttu appeared to be very popular in the constituency, and this was mainly the case for local issues and services – fixing roads, attaining supplies for schools – rather than his national attachment to the FDC brand.⁸² Many interviewees spoke particularly highly of Oguttu's programme of fixing boreholes across the constituency,⁸³ a project that he made his own and funded in part through his personal savings.⁸⁴ In the words of two Bukooli Central voters:

Mainly it's the issue of water. Before he came into the position, we had just over 100 boreholes. Now we have close to 300. So women don't have to go long distances looking for water. That's a big one.⁸⁵

A: His middle name is now "water"... If that borehole next door fails, we just give him a call and the next day a van arrives and it is fixed. For five years he's done that.

Q: Was water a particularly big problem before he came in?

⁸² Public interview BUG-BC2-4T#1.

⁸³ Public interview BUG-BC3-1E#1.

⁸⁴ Interview 52.

⁸⁵ Public interview BUG-BC3-4T#1.

A: Very, very big. We had to travel close to six miles, and to swamps.⁸⁶

This popularity was not universal,⁸⁷ but it seemed to me that enough people were impressed by the Oguttu's performance to give him significant leverage as a local force. One interviewee who was not generally supportive of Oguttu admitted that "he did fix the boreholes, and I credit him for that... Even those who don't support his party can support him."⁸⁸ Even a high-ranking figure in the district NRM said "I have to commend what he has done. He has built boreholes, made papers for schools, maintained roads."⁸⁹

It also seemed that after Oguttu's victory the FDC had grown substantially in the area. This was the impression of multiple public interviewees,⁹⁰ one of whom claimed: "In 2011 elections, even some posts people could not stand for FDC. But now at each level you see a contestant".⁹¹ This was also the opinion of the staff of the district FDC branch,⁹² and Oguttu's political aides,⁹³ both of whom attributed the party's growth to Oguttu's establishment and popularity. The FDC's newfound strength was visible in the growth of another high-profile party figure in the district, Woman MP candidate Eunice Namatende. Namatende was a politician with a similar history to Oguttu, in that she had stood in numerous previous elections but consistently fell significantly short of beating her NRM opponent Kasule Lumumba. In 2016, however, she was a far stronger candidate with – according to every political figure and observer I spoke with – a very good chance of winning. While her rise in this regard was probably aided by the fact that Lumumba did not run, it was likely also helped by the general improvement in the FDC's brand following Oguttu's ascendancy.

The popularity of Oguttu and the concurrent rise of the FDC in Bugiri does not necessarily indicate a threat to Museveni. There were in fact several interviewees who made it clear that the presidential vote was still an entirely separate matter from the

⁸⁶ Public interview BUG-BC5-2T#1.

⁸⁷ Public interview BUG-BC3-3T#1.

⁸⁸ Public interview BUG-BC5-1T#1.

⁸⁹ Interview 45.

⁹⁰ Public interview BUG-BC1-1E#1; public interview UG-BC3-4T#1; public interview BUG-BC5-1T#1.

⁹¹ Public interview BUG-BC2-1E#1.

⁹² Interview 38.

⁹³ Interview 52.

performance of the local FDC.⁹⁴ Yet there were many interviewees that suggested that Oguttu's performance in office and his mobilisation for Besigye did cause them to think differently about re-electing Museveni. Consider this particularly clear example:

Q: Do you think that the FDC party has strengthened since he was elected in 2011?

A: I think the support may have gone up slightly, because he's [Oguttu] delivered, and the NRM MPs have promised things before and can't deliver on them. So I have a feeling that maybe the FDC ones are able to fulfill certain promises across the different levels.

Q: Personally, does your approval of Wafula at the MP level make you more likely to vote for FDC candidates at any other office?

A: Given my state as a parent, even if I'm an NRM supporter, I'm inclined to think that maybe the FDC candidates can be better, because I've tried the NRM people but they only enrich themselves. Maybe the FDC are promising, so I might be inclined to vote for them as well.

Q: Is that specifically district levels or the presidential level as well?

A: The same. I think it may influence my vote from the district all the way to the presidential level.⁹⁵

As in this example, it was common in Bukooli Central to hear people attribute their dissatisfaction with the *status quo* to "the NRM" or "NRM MPs" rather than individual politicians, as is more common in other areas. In other words, I found the decentralised shape of accountability politics (H₁, 7.2) less evident in Bukooli Central than most other places. There is a chance that this reflects a general tide of FDC support in the area independent of subnational actors like Oguttu, but it is more likely that the two are linked.

Unfortunately, I was not able to witness any of Oguttu's campaigns in the rural areas of the constituency that might have given an indication of whether this occurred. My interview with Oguttu made it clear that he was aware of the challenges of setting up a party platform in a culture of individual merit politics:

This thing of Individual merit is strong... There are people who vote for me who do not

⁹⁴ Public interview BUG-BC3-4T#1; public interview BUG-BC2-3T#1.

⁹⁵ Public interview BUG-BC5-2T#1.

vote for Besigye. There are people who voted for Besigye who did not vote for me! Very interesting, and they have their reasons. They might just not like Wafula, and not like Besigye. Or they like Museveni.⁹⁶

However, he also claimed that he did his best to campaign for Besigye's vote:

Q: Did you make any conscious decisions about that when you were campaigning? Did you say for example, "people will make up their own mind on the president so I'm going to run my own campaign?" Or did you say "I'm here to be an FDC brand"?

A: I was FDC brand, I was a Besigye agent, that is it. And I didn't care whether I pleased you or not. A lot of people who would want those votes of Museveni people, those who fear Museveni, they would not even mention Besigye... I was saying "vote for me and if you vote for me alone, I will not be useful to you, also vote for Besigye."⁹⁷

In other words, although the option of running as an "individual merit" candidate divorced from the national polity was an option to opposition members like Oguttu just as it was to NRM candidates, Oguttu chose not to take this option, and campaigned vociferously for Besigye. This was the interpretation of numerous NRM and opposition elites in the area as well.⁹⁸ With this in mind, my expectation was that the results in Bukhooli Central would look similar to what ended up occurring in Kayunga: Oguttu would win a strong victory, and in his constituency, Museveni's vote would come down by more than the national and regional average.

7.4.2 Questionable official results

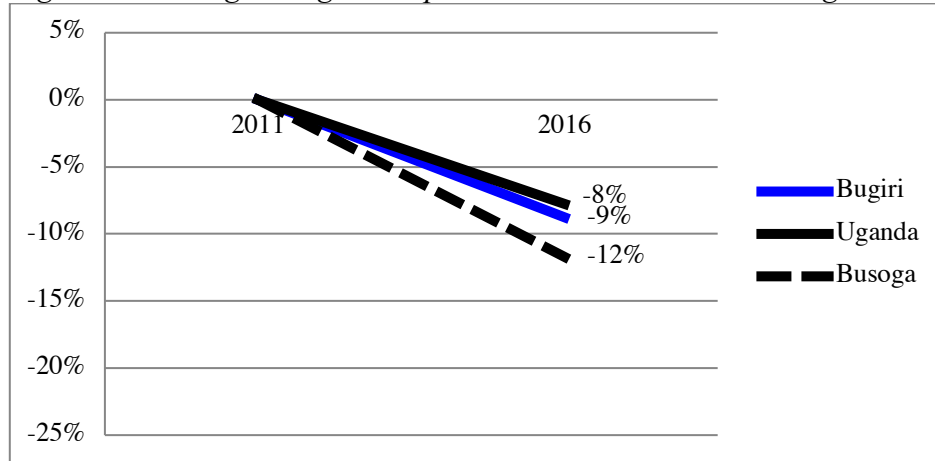
The results did not show this outcome. Not only did Museveni's vote *not* drop substantially in Bukooli Central, Oguttu and Namatende both lost their races, and every NRM flagbearer won in the MP, WMP, and LC5 races.

⁹⁶ Interview, Wafula Oguttu, 14/04/2017.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Interview 42; interview 37.

Figure 7.6: Swing in Bugiri compared with national and sub-regional average



Source: Ugandan Electoral Commission.

The possibility must be entertained that this finding does indeed falsify H_1 and H_2 in Bugiri – although not as much as if Ogutto won and the presidential results remained stable. However on my trip to the district after the election, and in discussions with several district elites in my second period of fieldwork, several factors emerged that call the validity of these official results, and the applicability of Bugiri as a case of comparison, into question.

First, it became evident that Oguttu's activities as the leader of the opposition in parliament made Museveni abnormally interested in defeating him. Many opposition members in Parliament form relationships with the president that mitigates any threat of them becoming a target during the election.⁹⁹ Oguttu, conversely, was a strong thorn in the executive's side on parliamentary matters.¹⁰⁰

Several prominent NRM elites in Bugiri were surprisingly blunt about how this lead to Oguttu's demise. In the words of one:

Wafula created a problem for himself, because he opposed him [Museveni] so much in the Parliament. He saw him as a thorn. So he had to put there force to ensure that he comes out of Parliament.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Interview 19.

¹⁰⁰ Deo Walusimbi, "One Year Later, How Has Oguttu Led the Opposition?," *The Observer*, April 5, 2015, <http://www.observer.ug/news-headlines/37177-one-year-later-how-has-oguttu-led-the-opposition>.

¹⁰¹ Interview 42.

Second, the fact that Bugiri's Kasule Lumumba was now the Secretary General of the NRM increased the target on Oguttu's back.¹⁰² Lumumba was not a particularly powerful national politician in her own right when she was picked by the president to lead the NRM Secretariat. Her appointment was likely advanced in order to both curb the influence of Speaker Rebecca Kadaga (who is also from Busoga, and has also been an occasional thorn in the regime's side), and to show Museveni's commitment to the who Busoga sub-region, given it is a heavily populated area where the FDC has made some rural inroads. Hence, many people told me that Kasule would not have kept her job if she was shown to be incapable of preventing the opposition from winning in her own district. As the above-quoted NRM official continued:

Kasule could not allow Wafula to go through from the place where she comes from, as the Secretary General. That meant her job was at stake. So she had to fight very hard. That is why she put in a lot of money in Silwani [Oguttu's opponent]. That was her area of concentration.¹⁰³

He went on to say that Oguttu would have easily gone through without such pressure from above. Interviews with him and one other well-positioned district elite indicated that money, state interference with Oguttu's campaign, and outright rigging on election day all played a role in the outcome. The second informant suggested that the NRM spent 1 billion shillings to get Silwani elected.¹⁰⁴ The first informant told me that only two weeks before the vote, a large number of Oguttu's campaign agents were taken to Kampala and put up in a hotel, where they were lobbied to switch sides and assist Silwani on election day.¹⁰⁵ Campaign agents like these are crucial to protect and mobilise candidates' votes.¹⁰⁶ In Oguttu's words:

they took people from a number of our strong campaigners, from every sub-county. I don't know the exact number, but I know for sure about 17 of them who have told me, who were taken and given money and told "don't fight Wafula, don't show him you've

¹⁰² Asuman Musoby and Abubakar Kirunda, "Bukooli Central: A Proxy War between Kasule Lumumba and Wafula Oguttu," *The Daily Monitor*, February 2, 2016, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/SpecialReports/Elections/ukooli-Central-proxy-war-Kasule-Lumumba-Wafula-oguttu/-/859108/3059766/-/dm6rspz/-/index.html>.

¹⁰³ Interview 42.

¹⁰⁴ Interview 45.

¹⁰⁵ Interview 41.

¹⁰⁶ Interview 52.

switched, just work for us”...and then they became agents of the NRM.¹⁰⁷

According to Oguttu’s senior staff, the agents that did not turn on them recorded different results from the formal ones announced at the district tallying centre.¹⁰⁸

However it was in the woman MP results that suspicions of malpractice were highest. Several elite interviewees have suggested that Namatende was leading the tallying before soldiers dispersed observers at the tally centre with tear gas and announced Taaka the winner 42,231 to 40,817.¹⁰⁹ I cannot confirm this incident (although there are media reports of violence clashes between police and FDC protesters afterwards),¹¹⁰ but both of the NRM informants mentioned spoke as a matter of fact that Namatende won. When I asked the election winner in Bukooli North, Gaster Kyawa Mugoya, about rigging against Namatende, he gave a suspiciously weak denial: “it’s possible, but there’s no excuse for not safeguarding your own vote, you need to be prepared.”¹¹¹

7.4.3 Comparative implications

In summary, Bugiri turned out to be a much murkier example than I expected. It is possible that no rigging took place against opposition candidates, and that voters rejected the FDC both nationally and locally. On the balance of evidence however there is good reason to think that the regime dedicated exceptional energies to intervening in the politics of Bukooli Central due to the factors listed above. Had this not been the case, Bugiri might have looked more like Kayunga, with powerful subnational politicians dragging Museveni’s vote down. Interview evidence discussed above, which seems to be at odds with the final results, points to this.

All of this has made me question whether rural southern opposition strongholds are in fact good cases for comparison with NRM monopolies. There are so few cases where opposition candidates mobilise well within NRM strongholds, that it is unlikely that all

¹⁰⁷ Interview, Wafula Oguttu, 14/04/2017.

¹⁰⁸ Interview 52.

¹⁰⁹ Interview 43; interview 37.

¹¹⁰ Asuman Musobyia, “Bugiri Woman MP-Elect Guarded by 10 Soldiers,” *The Daily Monitor*, February 24, 2016, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Bugiri-Woman-MP-elect-guarded-by-10-soldiers/688334-3089784-12w1maw/index.html>.

¹¹¹ Interview, Gaster Kyawa Mugoya, 21/04/2017.

the other conditions for comparison (especially regarding the actions of the regime) will remain unchanged. In fact, the bigger lesson for Bugiri is more about the opposition than the NRM. The individual merit culture of politics makes the relationship between subnational and presidential mobilisation quite dependent on the choices of individual candidates. Conversations with Oguttu and Asuman Basalirwa (candidate for Bukooli North and leader of JEEMA opposition party) both indicated that opposition membership was a poor indicator of the likelihood that one would co-mobilise for an opposition presidential candidate.

7.5 Conclusion

The first pages of this thesis described the puzzle on which it is based: how can a stable system of authoritarian rule contain a culture of tumultuous and unpredictable electoral politics within its subnational strongholds? This chapter, building on the previous chapters that described this subnational politics, has attempted to answer this question. Local instability is a *cause* of regime stability in Museveni's Uganda, not a byproduct of it or a threat to it. As long as this competition is housed *within* the NRM, and compliant with its mandated practices and processes, the competitive local polity serves as the engine of the president's electoral success, mobilising the masses (H₂), and re-establishing the regime-friendly accountability politics that protect his monarchical image (H₁).

Politics is a very local affair in Uganda. Although the regal longevity and charisma of the Museveni presidency tempt observers to see the regime as a centrifugal system with power exercised from the centre, closer analysis shows that Museveni is dependent on the subnational politicians who mobilise the remote corners of Uganda's rural populace. Collectively, these actors are – as in previous regimes – the true source of power in the political system. As the story of Idah Nantaba in Kayunga shows, when they escape the conditions of competition keeping their power in check, they pose a serious threat to the dominant political narratives that sustain the Museveni presidency, no matter how embedded they are. However the Nantabas of the NRM are very much the exception, not the rule, in the rural south. Most incumbents lost re-election, or snuck through with a slim majority, and therefore enjoyed no such freedom in their political choices regarding co-mobilisation and decentralised accountability politics. As long as this

remains the case for the bulk of the rural south, the region will continue to look more like Kyenjojo than, Kayunga, and the president will be safe from the collective power of local politicians.

Much as the patterns of behavior described here are consistent to the point of being “systemic”, it is important to address the question of how centrally designed and intentional this system is. As discussed in chapter 3, there are *longue duree* historical legacies and geographical conditions that add a degree of inertia to the local political cultures described above. It is also the case that the openness of the local NRM serves the interests of the local political notables who aspire to enter it. These factors should militate against any assumption that every aspect of the NRM dominant party system is the invention of one man alone. Rather than simply conjuring up this system on a drawing board, Museveni’s locally competitive NRM should be seen as a response to inherited political conditions in a more sustainable and robust way than any of his predecessors.

Chapter 8

Reflections and Wider Impact

This thesis has shown how subnational intra-party competition is foundational to the survival of the dominant party NRM regime in Uganda. This competition provides a “safety valve” for anti-status quo voting (H_1), forces subnational elites to mobilise votes for the president in the course of their own drawn-out campaigns (H_2), and undercuts the independent leverage that subnational elites have over the president on matters of elite bargaining (H_3). Beyond this brief synopsis, this concluding chapter will not summarise key arguments of this thesis, which have been made in full in the previous two chapters. Rather, its intention is to reflect on these findings and to comment on their relevance to cases of non-democratic survival beyond Uganda.

The mechanisms discussed above have not featured prominently in the existing literature on authoritarianism. This thesis therefore validates the use of inductive, single case study research for the sake of probing deeper into complex political processes.¹ An approach to Ugandan authoritarianism that was blinkered by the dominant variables of the present literature – or devoid of the historical and ethnographic depth that a single case study allows – may not have appreciated the subtler dimensions of the mechanisms discussed here.

However, the fact that the precise combination of H_1 , H_2 and H_3 presents a somewhat case-centric explanation of non-democratic survival does not mean that these findings are relevant only to Uganda. As discussed in chapter 2, the basic challenge that the NRM faces is common to all non-democratic regimes: maintaining control of mass political dynamics and maintaining sufficient cooperation among the political elite. That its response to these challenges is rooted in Uganda’s path dependent historical context, or that it takes a somewhat atypical and idiosyncratic form, does not alter the this underlying universality, especially since the tools used to effect this response – elections, a dominant party, subnational politics – are common in other regimes. Hence, there is heuristic, theory-building merit to conducting single case studies like this one

¹ Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge MA.: MIT Press, 2005), 25.

without constricting them to the generalised theoretical variables prominent in existing theory.²

Moreover, the wider applicability of the above explanation should not be treated in a holistic all-or-nothing sense. There may well be individual aspects of the explanation presented here that are relevant to multifaceted strategies of regime survival in different cases. As discussed in chapter 2, there is a problematic trend in comparative politics of abiding by rigid regime typologies rather than looking for theoretical parallels across seemingly disparate cases. Just as this thesis has found merit in studies of regimes that have very little in common with Uganda's, components of its findings may well be relevant to regimes whose character differs greatly from the NRM's.

With this potential in mind, this conclusion offers three points of reflection specific to the case of Uganda yet highly relevant to studies of all non-democratic regimes. The first section (8.1) reflects on the general importance of the election for regime survival in Uganda. The second section (8.2) then tackles the complicated question of how the coercive elements of the Museveni regime should be figured in its overall survival strategy. The final section (8.3) comments on the "shape" of national-local politics in Uganda. In all three sections, I will discuss how these individual reflections might impact the current literature on non-democratic survival outside Uganda.

8.1 Elections matter

Regarding the twin challenges of mass control and elite cooperation, elections are central to the survival strategy of the Museveni regime. As discussed in 2.2.1, there is a difference between understanding how elections are won by non-democratic regimes, and how the manner of election victories affects regime survival beyond elections themselves. It is possible that a strategy that deals with the former may be insufficient to address the latter – as numerous post-election political crises around the world show. Many studies of elections under authoritarianism have not been theoretically precise on this point. In this regard, each of the three hypotheses in this thesis, while *directly* addressing the narrow question of how the regime performs in the election, are also

² Schram, "Beyond Paradigm: Resisting the Assimilation of Phronetic Social Science."

relevant for the maintenance of regime power after the vote. H₁ and H₂, while dealing specifically with accountability politics and mobilisation (respectively) during the election campaign, can be seen as methods of propagating pro-regime narratives that aide the challenge of mass control independent of the context of the election. Likewise, H₃ shows how challenges of elite cooperation can be staged near the vote when the regime is at its most powerful. All three hypotheses then, provide not only a means for the election to be won, but a means for that election themselves to serve as the basis of power in a broader sense. This is so precisely because the election is such a seismic event in the lives of most citizens and all politicians.

Put simply then, in the maintenance of non-democratic regime power in Uganda, *elections matter*. They are not inconvenient hurdles that the regime is forced to clear, distant from the “real” means of maintaining power. On the contrary, in Uganda the election is the event on which all components of the political system turn. This is a rudimentary point, but one that bears mentioning if only because it is often unappreciated in the literature. As discussed in chapter 2, there are a number of studies that highlight the centrality of elections to regime survival,³ including some that look directly at subnational elections.⁴ However there are still many approaches that assume, in the words of one recent piece, that elections under authoritarianism are “secondary phenomena”.⁵ While this may well be true for many cases, its more universal application likely endures because of its intuitive resonance: by definition, it may seem, non-democratic regimes should find the process of soliciting votes contemptible and burdensome.⁶ But even if this is true, it does not necessarily follow that such regimes should develop strategies of maintaining power in which these elections are “secondary”. Museveni’s Uganda is not a democracy, and various episodes past and present (see 3.3.2) suggest that that the regime does not accept the voters’ right to eject it from power. Nonetheless, the regime still dedicates immense energy, resources, and tact not only to the way these elections are run and won, but to the end that their staging aids its political survival for the following years.

³ Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*.

⁴ Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak’s Egypt*; Lust-Okar, “Elections under Authoritarianism: Preliminary Lessons from Jordan.”

⁵ Grigori Golosov, “Voter Volatility in Electoral Authoritarian Regimes: Testing the ‘Tragic Brilliance’ Thesis,” *Comparative Sociology* 15 (2016): 536.

⁶ See for example: Fredrik Sjöberg, “Competitive Elections in Authoritarian States: Weak States, Strong Elites, and Fractional Societies in Central Asia and Beyond” (Uppsala University, 2011), 13.

Election victories can perform this function is because they mean so much to citizens as well as politicians. Given that the regime puts a premium on turning out as many voters as possible, and (as chapter 4 showed) participation is driven mainly by grievances that lead people to support local candidates (who in turn co-mobilise for the president – 7.1), a critical condition of this sequence is that voters should see their votes as being important instruments of change in the local forum. Put another way, elections are useful to the regime’s mass control strategy because they matter to citizens. This system would look very different in Uganda if the average citizen saw the election as a “sham” in which the outcome was pre-determined. Countless fieldwork experiences with frustrated voters enthusiastically expressing their plans (and rights) to vote for challengers or incumbents have convinced me that Ugandans, for the most part, do not have this attitude, and instead place enormous value on their vote. This too is a counterintuitive point in the context of non-democratic politics, and one that opens an interesting discussion about the place of democratic norms in authoritarian or “hybrid” regimes. It would seem to be a validation of Schedler’s argument that even token reforms towards political liberalisation “establish the primacy of democratic legitimisation” in a way that fundamentally alters the popular perspectives on political power.⁷ This point is especially relevant when thinking about possible democratisation in regimes like Uganda’s.

This leads back to the suggestion in 2.2.1.b that non-democratic regimes actually have incentives to equip electoral institutions with some degree of credibility, for reasons other than making them a plausible facade for rigging. There were certainly irregularities in the 2016 vote.⁸ There were also incidents where local opposition members were victims of significant malpractice, as in the case of Bugiri in the previous chapter. These incidents probably padded Museveni’s total somewhat, but they are not evidence that the election was simply “rigged” by the vote counters. While the Electoral Commission is clearly led by people sympathetic to the NRM and dependent on Museveni for their jobs, most of the criticism of its performance in recent elections

⁷ Schedler, “The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism,” 14.

⁸ See: European Union Electoral Observation Mission, “Uganda Presential, Parliamentary and Local Council Elections, 18 February 2016: Final Report” (https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/uganda-fr-forprint-14-04-2016_en_0.pdf, 2016).

points to its general incompetence and lack of rigour, not to any sophisticated rigging operation in favour of the regime.⁹

Other than the occasional interaction with and observation of electoral officials during fieldwork, this thesis has certainly not tackled this question directly. However, certain aspects of its hypotheses show why the regime has an interest in maintaining some degree of regularity to the voting process. This is most obvious for H₂ and H₃, in that subnational elites would be far less inclined to participate in the more costly and exhausting processes of the election if they thought that the results were pre-arranged for or against them. For H₁ as well, the kind of accountability politics in which elections are meaningful events for citizens would also crumble if voters saw the vote as a “sham” in which their votes were simply not counted. To be clear, this does not mean that the 2016 election was – to use a worn out phrase – “free and fair”; but rather that its unfreedom and unfairness should be understood on a far broader scale than what happens on election day, or even during the election campaign. While non-democratic regimes like Uganda’s will always prefer electoral institutions to be weak enough to be unthreatening in the event of crisis, this does not mean they will want them to be as weak as possible.

8.2 Figuring coercion

One of the trickier points of this thesis concerns the precise place of coercion within the regime’s overall survival strategy. Although most voters in the rural south genuinely support Museveni, coercion is clearly a constituent element of NRM rule in Uganda, and I have not avoided discussing this where relevant in the previous chapters (3.3, 4.1.3, 5.2.3, 6.2.2, 7.1.2, 7.2.2, 7.4). An equally detailed research project as this one could be undertaken on exactly how Museveni controls and employs the security services, and how this control is an important element of regime survival. (Incidentally, a cursory understanding of this matter gathered during this project suggests that internal competition between these organs – as with NRM subnational politicians – is a critical

⁹ Sabiti Makara, “Managing Elections in a Multiparty Political Dispensation: The Role of the Electoral Commission in Uganda’s 2011 Election,” in *Elections in a Hybrid Regime: Revisiting the 2011 Ugandan Polls* (Kampala: Fountain, 2014), 110–37; Oloka-Onyango and Ahikire, “How Do You Control Consent?” 11.

component of this control)

Readers may therefore be wondering: isn't this the whole story? Isn't Uganda simply an oppressive dictatorship that just happens to include vibrant electoral politics? The simplest answer to this question is that coercion, though widely present and structurally important, is more of a *surgical* instrument, used to nudge political dynamics into preferred patterns, than a *blunt* one aimed at directly controlling them. Although in many cases the threat of state violence influences the behaviour of voters and elites, the burden of controlling political dynamics still rests more with the process of systemic local division and competition described above. Electoral competition's importance therefore makes it imperative to understand along with the coercion that it works alongside.

This is important because it is not clear that the regime has enough power to provide such a blunt force control of the system in lieu of political support. A recurring point of this thesis (especially in chapter 3) is that political power in Uganda has always emerged from the ground up, in the form of local champions of the rural polity. Coercion is an effective tool against these elites breaking their local followings away from the NRM, but it is only useful when these followings are not powerful enough to withstand the coercion that may threaten them. The example of Idah Nantaba in Kayunga, who veered well off script in a way that caused significant harm to Museveni's performance in the district, is a strong counterpoint to the suggestion that coercion is the only factor forcing elites like her to co-mobilise for the regime. As discussed in chapter 7, the reason why coercion (or any other direct opposition) to Nantaba would not have worked was that her local following was simply too strong.

Subnational intra-party competition also averts the need for coercion by providing a safety valve space for a limited form of political dissent,¹⁰ where criticism of every aspect of governance – bar Museveni's leadership – is permitted and encouraged. On this point, the following interaction with a candidate in Kyenjojo was one of the most illustrative of my fieldwork:

¹⁰ On the place of dissent within stable authoritarianism, see: Albrecht, "How Can Opposition Support Authoritarianism? Lessons from Egypt."

Q: It sounds like the NRM is the only option as a party around here. Could you go through as FDC, or Go Forward, or DP, or anything?

A: ...There are many bottlenecks [opposition candidates] face. It is intentional, that the government does it. When you come up and you are famous and popular, and people may like your ideas, very quickly, what government does is to come up and intimidate you. They begin by intimidating you. When you stick to the point. What the government does is to bribe you, to give you something for you to denounce the other party. When you insist, the repercussions are worse. In most cases the repercussions are worse. You find people missing, nobody knows where somebody is. It is not so common, but it does happen. Why is it not so common? Because the door is open for you to join the NRM.¹¹

The last two sentences here are perhaps the most cogent description of the broad contention of this thesis. The survival of the dominant party system depends on a degree of *openness* without which its *closedness* would not work. More specifically, it speaks to the relationship between surgical coercion and limited political dissent: violence is present, and critical, but the party's openness to voices of protest prevents the necessity of its constant deployment.

Moreover, behind this "open door", politicians find just as many incentives to play by the rules as disincentives against violating them. The candidate quoted above was both a harsh critic of the president and a candidate in the NRM primaries, through which he planned on building a political career within the party. As discussed in chapters 4 and 6, there seems to be a deliberate attempt to invest significant capital in the figure of the NRM MP, such that candidates are willing to put up with numerous challenges and insecurities in order to attain and retain it.

Surgical as coercion may be, it is nonetheless an essential component of the survival of the NRM, and the Museveni regime does not deserve to be called anything but "authoritarian" because of this. Hence, the above conclusion should not dissuade scholars (of Uganda or elsewhere) from focusing on coercion, but, on the contrary, should encourage them to look more closely at how coercion works within and

¹¹ Interview 15.

alongside broader systems of political management and control. As discussed in 2.1.1, there is a problematic tendency in the literature that take the presence of (any) coercion as evidence that it alone is the central pillar of a regime's approach to the challenges of mass control. Much like the discussion of elections in the previous section, it may well be the case that many authoritarian regimes do use coercion in such a way; but the intuitive resonance of this connection can easily spill over into the generalised interpretations of cases where coercion is used with more nuance. Indeed, several analyses of the 2016 election in Uganda have overstated the nature of coercion because of this.¹²

8.3 The political “shapes” of authoritarian control

Finally, the most significant theoretical output of this thesis relates to the potential utility of local politics in the systems of non-democratic regime survival. An underlying aim of this project has been to take seriously the latent participatory and accountability pressures among citizens of non-democratic regimes. These regimes, like all others, have to contend with the fundamental challenge articulated by Huntington: that inevitable increases in political participation must be balanced by institutions capable of accommodating them (see 2.3.2.a).¹³ As discussed in chapter 2, any effective approach to the challenge of mass control must include a response to this. Naturally, this is difficult for non-democracies, given that, in Geddes terms, their “citizens cannot ‘throw the bums out’.”¹⁴ Instead of resting heavily on the assumption that coercion, clientelism and vote-rigging simply *bypass* the need for such a strategy, this thesis – specifically H₁ – showed how vibrant subnational politics can act as a tool of *managing* the latent accountability politics that fuels the mass will for formal participation.

Chapter 4 showed just how important the local polity is to most citizens' perception of political accountability. As mentioned many times in this thesis (4.4, 7.2), the average Museveni voter in the regime's rural heartland tends to be immensely dissatisfied with the state of governance in their area. Because of the regime's ingrained “individual merit” culture (3.2.1), and its normative monopoly of local anti-status quo movements

¹² Abrahamson and Bareebe, “Uganda's 2016 Elections: Not Even Faking It Anymore.”

¹³ Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 79.

¹⁴ Geddes, “Why Parties and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes?,” 1.

(4.1.2), the local polity provides a space where Ugandan voters can indeed “throw the bums out”, without swaying from their steadfast support for the president himself. This finding is a confirmation of Hess’s arguments about the “shape” of authoritarian politics,¹⁵ and of the continuing relevance of older one-party systems in Africa that used subnational elections to “parochialis[e] cleavage” (see 2.3.2).¹⁶

As discussed in 2.3.1, there is a nascent interest in looking at subnational units and “multilevel” systems in the field of comparative politics. However much of the subnational literature dedicated to the challenges of authoritarian survival tends to focus on the elite structure of regimes and the material dimensions of their electoral strategies.¹⁷ While H₂ and H₃ have shown the relevance of subnational politics to elite-bargains in Uganda, H₁ suggests a need for a closer look at more discursive and normative dimensions to the national-subnational relationship. In Uganda, while the local polity is in many ways *separate* from the national one, its ability to function so effectively as a tool of presidential mobilisation requires it to also be *intertwined* with it in the narratives of entitlement and achievement summarised in 7.2. Put differently, the local polity, while a political universe unto itself, is also the lens through which the national polity is viewed, and very often, depoliticised to the regime’s advantage. This more discursive approach to local-national authoritarian relations was clearer in an older generation of works on authoritarianism.¹⁸

This does not mean that under every stable authoritarian system we should expect to find the exact system that exists in Uganda. As discussed in chapter 3 the NRM’s development of internally competitive local politics was in some way inherited by the endogenous cultures of district politics that had developed since the 1950s, and kept in place by the immobility of Uganda’s agrarian population. The message for cases that do not share this condition is not *what to look for*, but *where to look*. In particular, scholars should look more at non-democratic regimes with high rates of local or legislative turnover at elections, which has been flagged by Gandhi and Lust-Okar as a

¹⁵ Hess, *Authoritarian Landscapes: Popular Mobilization and the Institutional Sources of Resilience in Nondemocracies*, 11.

¹⁶ Baylies and Szeftel, “Elections in the One-Party State,” 52.

¹⁷ Reuter et al., “Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-Based Theory With Evidence From Russian Mayoral Elections.”

¹⁸ Bialer, *Stalin’s Successors: Leadership, Participation and Change in the Soviet Union*; Manion, “The Electoral Connection in the Chinese Countryside.”

common phenomenon.¹⁹ Just as voting against an NRM MP has almost nothing to do with the idea of voting *against the NRM* in Uganda, local elites of ruling parties elsewhere should not simply be understood to represent “the regime” or “the ruling party”, but perhaps be of relevance to local political terrains in which support or opposition to that regime is not the most salient political question. As the first two paragraphs of this thesis suggested, authoritarianism can look very different when viewed from below.

¹⁹ Gandhi and Lust-Okar, “Elections Under Authoritarianism,” 410.

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