

# **UGANDA'S FUTURE: NAVIGATING A PRECARIOUS TRANSITION**

**THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

**OPEN SOCIETY  
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INSTITUTE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The 2021 Ugandan elections illustrated how violence has become a structural element of the Museveni regime; and the international community's inability to firmly respond. The elections also demonstrated the regime's increasing hostility towards foreign actors and Uganda's tightening political space. Given President Yoweri Museveni's age (77), a post-Museveni future is no longer a distant future, but that future is highly unpredictable given the regime's lasting effects: weakened and personalised institutions characterised by corruption and a narrow ethnic power-base. The international community needs to rethink its relationship with Uganda, as a business-as-usual strategy risks facilitating and entrenching the above dynamics. In discussing these issues, this report does three main things: it describes (i) the key characteristics of President Yoweri Museveni's military authoritarian regime in Uganda; (ii) the importance of the 'transition question' for Uganda's political future; and (iii) the regime's relationship with the international community and, in particular, the European Union (EU).

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AU	African Union
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
CRSP	Crisis Response Support Program
CSBAG	Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DGF	Democratic Governance Facility
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
GoU	Government of Uganda
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IFI	International Financial Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISCAP	Islamic State's Central Africa Province
JLOS	Justice, Law and Order Sector
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MP	Member of Parliament
NEW-U	National Election Watch Uganda
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRM	National Resistance Movement
NUP	National Unity Platform
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
SFC	Special Forces Command
UGX	Ugandan Shilling
UK	United Kingdom
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Forces
US	United States
UWONET	Uganda Women's Network

# 1. INTRODUCTION: AUTHORITARIANISM AND THE UPCOMING TRANSITION

The Museveni regime has long been considered a 'hybrid regime' at the 'crossroads between democratisation and authoritarianism' (Tripp 2010, 1; Alava & Ssentongo 2016; Bertrand 2021; Conroy-Krutz & Logan 2012; Tangri 2011).<sup>1</sup> Both in academic and policy circles, economic and political governance in Uganda are thought of as a two-level game. On the one hand, there are authoritarian tendencies, through which Museveni has remained in power. On the other, there have been efforts for political and economic liberalisation, including a free press, active civil society, and macro-economic reforms.

However, this hybrid model is no longer accurate (Abrahamsen & Bareebe 2016; 2021). **Uganda's authoritarian tendencies—the use of violence, the concentration of power, weakened institutions, and personalisation of rule—now vastly overshadow other dynamics.**

Uganda's January 2021 elections and the preceding campaign illustrate this new reality: the accompanying violence and human rights abuses were reminiscent of the darkest days of the country's history. During two days in November 2020, at least 54 people were killed during protests after the arrest of Bobi Wine—Museveni's main challenger. Many of those killed were bystanders deliberately targeted by the security forces.<sup>2</sup> Around 1000 people were kidnapped—many members of the National Unity Party (NUP), Bobi Wine's party—often suffering torture, beatings, and other abuses.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, there was a serious narrowing of the political space, with stringent measures to disrupt election monitoring as much as possible, including an internet shutdown. These abuses continue unabated: in February 2022, government-critic and novelist Kakwenza Rukirabashaija was kidnapped and tortured.<sup>4</sup> The 2021 elections and their aftermath illustrated once again that **the Museveni regime will cling to power at all cost.**

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1 Aili Mari Tripp defines hybrid regimes as embodying two divergent impulses: 'They promote civil rights and political liberties, and yet they unpredictably curtail those same rights and liberties. They limit rights and liberties often enough that they cannot be regarded as democratic—but not consistently enough to be regarded as fully authoritarian' (Tripp, 2010, p. 1).

2 Human Rights Watch (2021, November 18) 'One Year Later, No Justice for Victims of Uganda's Lethal Clampdown.' <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/18/one-year-later-no-justice-victims-ugandas-lethal-clampdown>

3 Taylor, L. & Wandera, D. (2021, May 25). *Mass abductions in Uganda: What we know and don't know*. African Arguments. <https://africanarguments.org/2021/05/mass-abductions-in-uganda-what-we-know-and-dont-know/>

4 Muyobo, K. & Wesaka, A (2022, February 7). *Kakwenza narrates torture ordeal while in detention*, Daily Monitor. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/kakwenza-narrates-torture-ordeal-while-in-detention-3707776>

As financiers of the Ugandan state and government, part of this cost is carried by international donors. How far is the donor community willing to go in paying this bill? As this report will show, there was a very limited reaction to the extra-judicial killings and large-scale abductions in Uganda, although these abuses were particularly well-documented.

There are financial costs to Museveni's actions as well. Corruption remains endemic, and continues to increase. Rather than an anomaly to the rule of the Museveni regime, it is central to it. With the failure to expand on other sources of legitimacy (such as more effective or expansive service delivery, or strong state institutions), this has become all the more important for the regime—particularly considering the fast-growing youth population.<sup>5</sup> The increased monetisation of electoral politics, with the literal handing out of cash—the 'brown envelopes' or 'sacks of cash'—to the electorate, is but one example (Titeca 2014). Corruption manifests itself on all levels of society and state, but particularly through 'grand corruption' involving high-ranking regime members, who are not held accountable (Human Rights Watch 2013).

**Donor aid contributes to and facilitates these dynamics.** As far back as 2004, a widely publicised report (Barkan et al. 2004) commissioned by the World Bank, noted not only that the international community had failed to act against corruption but also that it was central to it.<sup>6</sup> This situation has not changed since then: every few years, a major scandal erupts involving aid money, accompanied by a pattern of avoiding accountability for the high-level perpetrators.

**There is growing consensus that the country is headed toward further crisis, particularly in the light of the upcoming transition.** With weakened and personalised institutions, there is a risk of increasing violence and conflict, including potential regional spill-overs. A term repeatedly used in interviews with journalists, civil servants, businesspeople and others is 'time bomb' to refer to Uganda's precarious political situation.<sup>7</sup> Given the narrowing regional and ethnic power-base of the Museveni regime, this situation has created underlying, but significant, ethnic tensions. Any eventual transition is undoubtedly a decision Ugandans need to make alone, but the international community directly and indirectly plays a role in this process—through its developmental and political involvement.

This background reports accompanies the June 2022 [policy brief](#), and is based on:

- (i) 72 interviews between July 2021 and March 2022 with key Ugandan sources, such as Ugandan analysts, civil society representatives, journalists, and government officials; as well as international officials (diplomatic and non-diplomatic);
- (ii) A literature review on the relevant issues (academic articles, policy reports, and press articles); and

This report lays out the key characteristics of the Museveni regime, and describes how they contribute to Uganda's authoritarian slide, paying particular attention to the 2021 electoral period. Then, it focuses on the importance of the 'transition question' for Uganda's political future. Finally, it turns to the role of the international community in reacting to, as well as contributing to and facilitating these dynamics.

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5 This population has never known war and thus attaches little value to Museveni's other claim to legitimacy (that he liberated the country and brought peace).

6 In the words of the report, 'The fact that corruption is a drag on Uganda's economy is unmistakable and probably rising. That it has not had a greater downside effect to date is no doubt a reflection of the fact that it is largely, though indirectly and unintentionally, financed by the donor community (Barkan et al., 2004, p. 66).

7 A term often used by interviewees

## 2. THE MUSEVENI REGIME: KEY CHARACTERISTICS

Aili Mari Tripp, in her book on the Museveni regime, describes the country as at a 'crossroads between democratisation and authoritarianism, rarely if ever reverting to full-blown authoritarianism of the kind we saw during Idi Amin's rule in Uganda—but rarely transitioning fully to democracy either' (Tripp 2010, 1). But a consensus is building that **Uganda is now truly authoritarian in nature** (Abrahamsen & Bareebe 2016; 2021).

This section examines three key characteristics of Uganda's military regime, and how they interrelate. It describes how patronage and corruption serve to secure political loyalty; how Museveni's increasingly militarised regime deploys coercive and repressive tactics to quash opposition; and how this situation ignites underlying, but significant, ethnic tensions.

### 2.1 PATRONAGE AND CORRUPTION

Patronage has historically been a feature of the Museveni regime (Kasfir 2004; Reno 2000). During the no-party system, in place from 1986 until 2005, the liberation argument—that Museveni and his National Resistance Movement (NRM) brought peace and stability to a divided country—imagined an inclusive and anti-sectarian approach to politics. The ruling NRM was supposed to serve as a 'big

tent'. But after the (re)introduction of the multi-party system in 2005, the big tent began to rely on patronage as a source of political legitimacy (Reno 2002; Hickey et al. 2021).

Corruption is crucial for the regime. It not only provides an economic function—self-enrichment—but also an important political one. Entrenched patronage networks are central to guaranteeing loyalty. As Barkan et al. note in 2004, corruption is a central 'mechanism for regime maintenance', which explains the 'unwillingness of the government to bring corruption under control' (Barkan et al. 2004, 4). This trend has only intensified over the years. Once an actor has been linked to corruption, it becomes very hard for them to challenge the regime for fear of blackmail or a sudden crackdown that targets them.

#### 2.1.1 Characteristics and consequences

Uganda's patronage system is transactional, pyramidal, and personalised.

At its core are **transactional relationships** that create both wealth and political legitimacy. Opportunities for wealth creation come from associating with the president and regime insiders:<sup>8</sup>

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8 The chief of staff of the land forces, Major General Leo Kyanda, was associated with a wide range of criminal activities, including an attempt to scam a group of Polish investors. He was sent off to India for a year of training and, upon return, was promoted to major general (Rolls, 2021:75).



as long as this wealth creation or corruption directly or indirectly benefits the Museveni regime, it is tolerated (Titeca 2019a).<sup>9</sup>

**At the top of the patronage pyramid is the first family**, creating the image of a ‘monarchy, with a strong military influence’ to describe the ‘near absolute control over the state and vital sectors of the economy held by Museveni and his extended family’ (Rolls 2021, 70).<sup>10</sup> Then there are a range of mid-level level figures: powerful district politicians, businessmen, religious and cultural leaders, ruling party officials, businessmen, and so on. They link the core of the Museveni regime to the broader population through clientelist networks, and identify political opportunities and threats. These relationships are largely transactional, allowing various political or economic actors to develop political, social, or economic authority in return for political—and often, financial support—to the President and the regime. In Uganda, the majority of economic power brokers—those near the top of the pyramid—hail from southwestern Uganda, President Museveni’s home region (Rolls 2021, 71-85).

These transactional relations are **highly personalised**, and **government is micromanaged** by the President. In one example, legislation to regulate Kampala’s informal economy was reversed after informal taxi drivers and market vendors—an important political constituency—reached out to the President (Goodfellow & Titeca 2012). In another example, interviewees described the President personally blocking the appointments of District Polie Commanders. These cases share a pattern in which various interest groups seek ‘favours’ from the President to solve problems or conflicts, where Museveni is the final authority, directly intervening in public administration or particular policies. Rather

than systematic investment in public services, a public administration has been created that hinges on personal links with the President.

As a result, **national-level political figures with major influence are limited**, and declining. The large majority of NRM ministers are politically weak. Their main source of power is their link to the President, and their appointments part of Museveni’s strategy to gain or maintain power at the sub-regional level. Actual power resides elsewhere, with Permanent Secretaries or others within State House—Museveni’s residence and institutional extension of his personal rule—who receive direct orders from the President. For instance, instead of relying on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to manage relationships with other countries, State House mainly depends on the External Security Organisation as a ‘shadow foreign apparatus,’ and a handful of trusted diplomats (Rolls 2021, 86). As one analyst put it, ‘by keeping the structure, and now the cabinet, as weak as possible, the president is able to exercise better control.’

## 2.1.2 Patronage through public funding

### Patronage traditionally relies on public funding.

It is commonly accepted<sup>11</sup> that classified and supplementary budgets have been used for these purposes—the latter particularly around the time of elections, as will be further explored in Section 2.2.2 in this report (Hickey et al. 2021, 8). Association with state agencies has allowed individuals to enrich themselves, particularly members of the military (Reno 2002) and those closest to the president (Thomas & Barkan 1998). But there is also an overall consensus that access to major budgets not only offers opportunities for rent-seeking, but

9 In this pyramidal relationship, clients are ‘obliged to raise campaign funds, rally political support through patronage or leverage traditional charismatic or bureaucratic authority and participate in meting out punishment on critics’ (Rolls, 2021: 70).

10 This ‘virtual royal family’ is described in detail by Rolls (2021).

11 See e.g., Mufumba, I. (2010, September 18). ‘Who funds NRM?’ *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.ug/who-funds-nrm/>

also includes an obligation to contribute funds to the regime (Rolls 2021, 81): funds from different ministries and government agencies are used for political and electoral purposes (Barkan et al. 2004, 57). Through this system, officials in Permanent Secretaries of Ministries, heads of revenue collecting agencies, parastatals, etc.—all of whom are political appointees—are able to acquire enormous personal wealth, in turn deepening their dependence on the regime. Key in this process of ‘raiding the public budget’ is the participation of officials within the public administration, ‘bureaucrats who can manipulate procedures and use public resources for partisan political mobilisation’ (Rolls 2021, 80).

A striking example of patronage through public funding happened at the 2011 elections, **when state funds were used on a large scale to finance the NRM campaign**. The Bank of Uganda governor Emmanuel Tumusiime-Mutebile claimed ‘he was misled by the government into indirectly financing electioneering activities in 2011, an action which plunged the country’s economy into chaos’.<sup>12</sup> The Ministry of Finance was ‘forced to approve massive allocations to State House, the Office of the President, and the Ministry of Defence, all channels through which the NRM’s militarised and monetised strategies of regime survival are funded’ (Hickey et al. 2021, 13). This political pressure was further institutionalised through the Ministry of Finance’s agreement to significantly increase the annual budgetary allocation for State House (Hickey et al. 2021, 13).

In this system, **economic and political power are connected**. The regime exerts a degree of control over the private sector, which is expected to contribute financially to avoid problems (Tangri &

Mwenda, 2019). A form of crony capitalism emerged in which well-connected businesses benefit from state assistance, tax breaks, or access to land. This is facilitated by Museveni’s hand-picking of leading officials for key finance institutions, who owe their loyalty to him. In general, there is a disregard for formal rules, procedures, and institutional hierarchies (Tangri & Mwenda 2019; Cheeseman 2021), creating dependency on the regime and key figures within it (such as Salim Saleh, and others identified by Rolls [2021]). As one analyst described it: ‘The business community is still very much in hock with government: they need to keep their position clean in terms of the old man [Museveni].’

As a result, no structural investments are made in sustainable (business) infrastructure. Instead, businesses thrive—or not—based on their relative closeness to the regime. As one analyst noted: ‘The lobby for where the economy needs to be going is always weaker than those arguing for tax exemptions, land, and other things’.<sup>13</sup> In other words, in the words of another analyst, ‘there are no businesses who demand investments in good infrastructure of the wider economy (...) what is needed is a structural transformation of the economy, independent of the state.’

### 2.1.3 Changes in the system

Changes in the nature of politics, Uganda’s demographic development, and the ‘succession question’ have accelerated these dynamics in recent years.

From the mid-2000s onwards, **the increasingly competitive nature of politics has intensified**

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12 ‘I was misled into funding 2011 polls, says Mutebile’ (2021, November 12). *Daily Monitor*. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/i-was-misled-into-funding-2011-polls-says-mutebile-1590724>

13 Interview analyst, December 2021.

**patronage dynamics.**<sup>14</sup> As Museveni became frustrated with formal institutions' inability to deliver on his campaign promises, he 'increasingly brought mainstream policy functions within State House and circumvented formal institutional mechanisms to reach out to people directly' (Hickey et al. 2021). In doing so, he chose policies that were politically attractive but made no sense from a development perspective. Other factors intensifying the patronage system include the reduced influence of international actors such as the World Bank or International Monetary Fund from the mid-2000s, the discovery of oil, and the growing role of Chinese investments—all of which made the regime less dependent on Western donor funding and its governance conditionalities. Combined, these factors diminished the influence of institutions once considered the 'pockets of effectiveness' in the Ugandan state, such as the Ministry of Finance, the Bank of Uganda, the Uganda Revenue Authority, or the Kampala City Council Authority. These entities were central in the (partial) process of state-building of Uganda in the second half of the '80s and '90s. This trend is visible in the growth of parliament, public administration, districts, and presidential advisors over the years. For example, the number of districts has grown from 56 in 2000 to 146 in 2022.<sup>15</sup> Many of these districts are created in the run-up to the elections (Green 2008; 2010; Titeca 2019b). The number of Members of Parliament (MPs) has grown from 295 in 2002 to 529 today.

In this same period, **Uganda's generational changes moved the regime to increasingly rely on its patronage system.** The 'liberation argument' continues to play an important role in Uganda's politics,<sup>16</sup> but this argument holds little sway with young people who were born after Museveni came to power. After the Arab Spring and the 2011 walk-to-work protests,<sup>17</sup> the regime tried to control young people—through both coercion and patronage (Reuss & Titeca 2017). The latter has become a major way in which the regime tries to build legitimacy among this significant group (Reuss & Titeca 2017): 80 percent of Ugandans are below the age of 30, many of whom are un- or underemployed. Electoral politics have become monetised; candidates are expected to (literally) hand out money, as Museveni did in 2013 with his 'brown envelopes' or 'sacks of cash' (Titeca 2014), when he reportedly gave a youth group in Eastern Uganda \$100,000.<sup>18</sup>

The number of young politicians whose principal claim to legitimacy has been their loyalty to the President is on the rise. One example is Evelyn Anite, the State Finance Minister. These politicians' main constituency is the President, and his goodwill. A related category are young cadres, who are either mentored by older actors from within State House, or are relatives or associates of the (post-)liberation elites. There has been a growing collaboration between young NRM cadres and the Special Forces Command (SFC) crop around Muhoozi Kainerugaba,

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14 The 2003-2005 'third term' debate was a watershed moment in that regard. Those who dared to criticise Museveni were strongly criticised in public (Barkan et al., 2004:28). Old guard members were replaced by 'individuals who are inclined to go along with whatever Museveni wants, even if they disagree with his decisions' (Barkan et al., 2004: 28). As a result, the President has been largely surrounded by 'sycophants' (Barkan et al., 2004:29), with loyalty taking precedence over competence.

15 As of September 2020. Source: Electoral Commission (n.d.). *Electoral Commission Statistics*. <https://www.ec.or.ug/electoral-commission-statistics>

16 This argument neglects that the North and East of Uganda were affected by conflict until 2006, but many people in the economically and politically stronger southern regions of the country—not to mention the international community—were unaware of how severe these conflicts were because the regime was careful to control the flow of information.

17 In which the defeated Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) party organized peaceful demonstrations against the inflation caused by the regime's money-printing spree in the runup to the just-concluded elections.

18 BBC. (2013, April, 22). 'President Yoweri Museveni's sack of money sparks Uganda row.' <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22245873>

President Museveni's son (referred to as Muhoozi in the rest of the report) (Rolls 2021, 88)

Youth are dominant in public administration as well. While the older generation had a 'normative tendency to uphold bureaucratic standards,' with feelings of patriotism influencing their behaviour,<sup>19</sup> these sentiments are different in a younger generation. In the words of one analyst, youth are a product of their environment: 'they have never experienced the government setting rules for public gain, only for private gain. And the top cadre is pretty old, what happens if they disappear? The calibre of people is going down, and the experience of a rule-based system working towards development'.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, growing awareness of an inevitable transition (as detailed in section 3 of this report) has ironically strengthened the patronage system. As one member within the administration put it: 'People are now worried: the next five years are not clear, he [President Museveni] is old; so people grab more and more; because what's the plan B? There is no plan B, there's plan A and this is it: people try to cash out their retirement in year one. They say: oh my god, I don't know what the political scene in the next four years will be, and they grab, grab, grab'.

## 2.1.4 The lack of accountability: Janus-faced corruption measures

Publicly, corruption is a major focus of the regime. For example, in 2021, Museveni addressed the topic in two high-level speeches, his Martyrs' Day<sup>21</sup> and State of the Nation<sup>22</sup> remarks. In those speeches, he strongly condemned corruption and emphasised his government's commitment to fighting the problem. Over the years, an arsenal of anti-corruption laws<sup>23</sup> and government agencies<sup>24</sup> have been established.

Yet research shows that **corruption not only persists but has been fostered by the regime.**

From the mid-2000s onwards, a wealth of literature documents corrupt actions at the highest levels, and the lack of political will to address (Amudsen 2006; Harrison 2001; HRW 2013; Tangri & Mwenda 2006; 2008). A 2012 report argued that 'corruption in Uganda is endemic and deeply ingrained; it shows no sign of subsiding and may be getting worse'—both for grand and petty corruption, with impunity particularly for high-level officials (De Vibe 2012, 1). These analyses continue. The most recent Afrobarometer survey shows that, since 2005, dissatisfaction with government efforts to reduce

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19 Peterson (2021) shows how this also occurred during the Amin regime.

20 Interview analyst, December 2021.

21 'I wish on this day to decry the growing social ills of corruption, defiance and social diversionary teaching of political elements. The NRM government hates such actions and will not tolerate such situations. We stand for a universal push to transform our world as opposed to parasitic arrangements where only a small portion of humanity benefits.'  
The Independent Uganda (2021, June 3). 'Museveni reiterates call against corruption in his Martyrs' Day message.'

22 Parliament of the Republic of Uganda. (2021, June 5). 'Museveni buoyant on security, warns corrupt officials.' <https://www.parliament.go.ug/news/5139/museveni-buoyant-security-warns-corrupt-officials>

23 the Inspectorate of Government Act (2002), the Leadership Code Act (2002), the Public Finance and Accountability Act (2003), the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act (2003), the Access to Information Act (2005), the Audit Act (2008), the Anti-Corruption Act (2009), the Whistle Blowers Protection Act (2010), and the Public Finance Management Act (2013) (Gumisiriza & Mukobi, 2019; Kakumba, 2021).

24 Such as the Inspectorate of Government (IG), the Office of the Auditor General (OAG), the Directorate for Public Prosecution (DPP), the Directorate for Ethics and Integrity (DEI), the Anti-Corruption Court, and the State House Anti-Corruption Unit (Kakumba, 2021, p. 1).

corruption has grown significantly (52 percent [Kakumba 2021, 2). 77 percent of Ugandans currently believe that reporting corruption risks negative consequences (Kakumba 2021).

High-ranking regime members have been accused of corruption including theft of resources and improper procurement (Human Rights Watch 2013): The higher-placed and/or better linked to power brokers, the better access to resources. A striking manifestation of this corruption is the ‘ghost’ phenomenon, in which non-existing units are created to reap financial benefits, through ‘ghost health centres,’<sup>25</sup> ‘ghost pensioners’ (Inspectorate of Government 14), ‘ghost refugees,’ ‘ghost soldiers,’ and so on.

**High-ranking perpetrators consistently escape prosecution;** as a Human Rights Watch (2013) report described it, ‘let the Big Fish swim.’ Many high-ranking government members have been implicated in corruption, including ex-Security Minister and ex-Prime Minister/Secretary-General of the NRM Amama Mbabazi,<sup>26</sup> former Vice-President Gilbert Bukenya,<sup>27</sup> ex-Minister for Health Jim Muhwezi,<sup>28</sup> and ex-State Minister for Health Mike Mukula. All escaped conviction and are generally considered ‘untouchable’.<sup>29</sup>

**Tackling corruption has not only suffered from a lack of political will to prosecute or secure evidence, but is undermined by interference from the highest levels** (Human Rights Watch 2013, 38).<sup>30</sup> There have been ‘tacit signals to witnesses, prosecutors, and in some cases, judges,’ (Human Rights Watch 2013, 16) undermining the message by anti-corruption agencies such as the Inspectorate of Government.<sup>31</sup> The case against Gilbert Bukenya, for example, was withdrawn after the President publicly declared him innocent.<sup>32</sup> This lack of accountability sends a clear message to society. As one businessperson summarised: ‘All these cases of corruption, all these cases in which it was clear which individuals were involved: the message which people get is, you don’t get punished for this. It shows you can buy your way out of anything, really anything (...) the culture of this country is broken.’

Over the years, **high-level corruption has been handled in strikingly similar ways.** First, after major cases emerge, ‘endless zero-tolerance promises’ (Human Rights Watch 2013, 11) are made by high-level actors and institutions. More specifically, promises are made for accountability. Then, the ‘waiting game’ starts: a variety of delay tactics, including continuous appeals, mean that cases drag on.<sup>33</sup> Another tactic is a lack of

25 Namutebi, J. (2010, February 7). ‘Uganda: Ghost health centres found in Kampala.’ Reliefweb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/uganda-ghost-health-centres-found-kampala>

26 Accused in 2011 of corruption with funds from the National Social Security Fund.

27 Accused in 2011 of corruption with funding from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

28 <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/high-profile-corruption-scandals-registered-under-nrm-1536538>

29 *The Independent*. (2013, January 20). ‘The untouchables.’ <https://www.independent.co.ug/the-untouchables/>

30 Uganda Debt Network, “Graft Unlimited?”

31 Uganda Debt Network, “Graft Unlimited?”

32 *The Independent*. (2013, January 20). ‘The untouchables.’ <https://www.independent.co.ug/the-untouchables/> At the same time, in cases where prosecution of corruption does happen, it largely functions as a political tool to keep its cadres in line, as part of political calculations (Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 40).

33 <https://www.independent.co.ug/the-untouchables/>

information: After having slowed down a case, the government never provides clear information about what happens to it. Eventually, charges do not materialise, are dropped, or the accused are acquitted—with the help of powerful supporters lobbying the President behind the scenes (Human Rights Watch 2013, 17). Finally, the officials involved either remain in office or resign temporarily. 'Ministers are censured by parliament, lose their positions, are prosecuted and acquitted, and then are reappointed' (Human Rights Watch 2013, 36), in what one donor called 'a game of musical chairs'.

## **2.2 COERCION AND REPRESSION**

Though vital to the Museveni regime, the patronage system does not benefit the large majority, posing a major risk for the stability of the country. As a result, the regime not only relies on the carrot, but also the stick: coercion and repression.

### **2.2.1 The role of the military**

**The military plays a central role in Museveni's regime.** Museveni came to power through the military, and the military is essential to his long stay in power. Over the years, this dynamic has led to what a recent editorial called 'a troubling trend of militarisation of the civil service'.<sup>34</sup> The military's uses have consistently grown—from manning key positions in immigration, police services, and state broadcasters, to managing 'Operation Wealth Creation' (an agricultural extension programme), to even organising the Miss Uganda beauty contest. Figure 2 details the continuous increase in military spending in Uganda's budget. The army also has historically played a role in raising funds for the Museveni regime—most evident during the Congo wars, but extending beyond this period (Tangri & Mwenda 2003).

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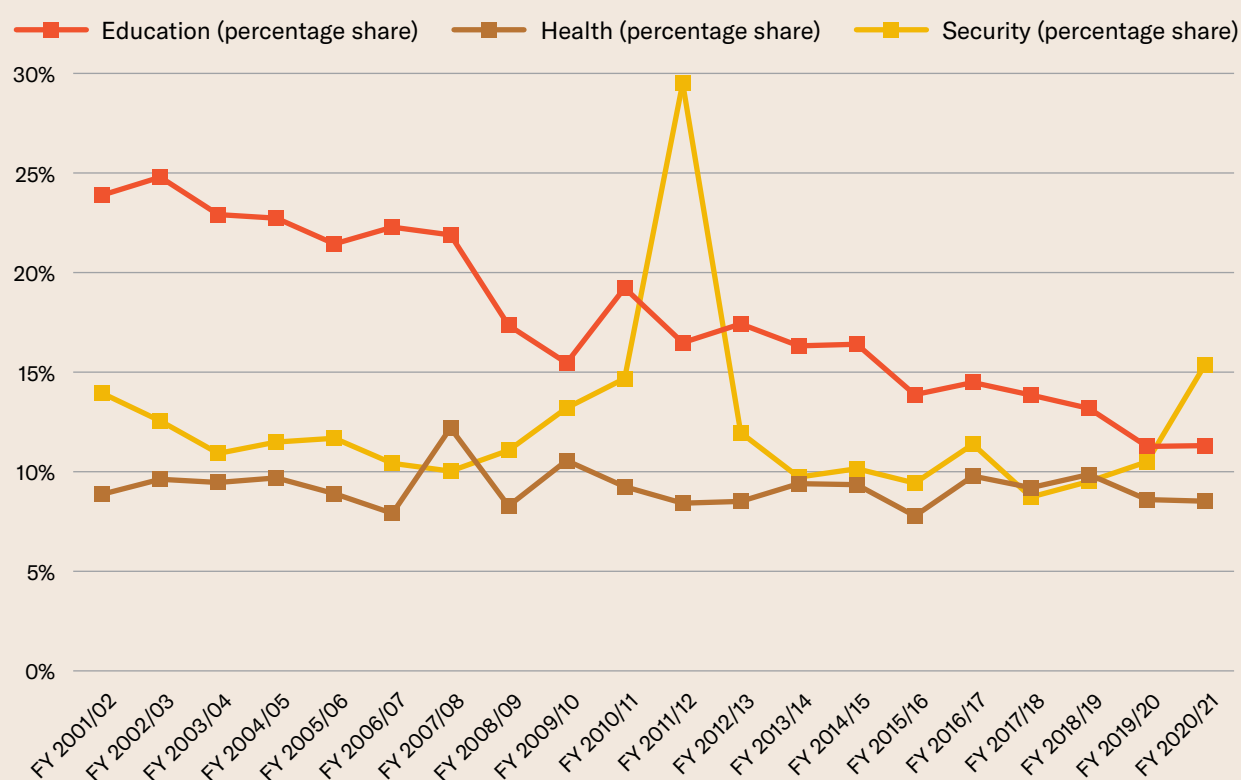
34 The Observer. (2021, November 2). 'The troubling trend of militarizing civil service.' <https://observer.ug/viewpoint/71709-the-troubling-trend-of-militarizing-civil-service>

## Box A | Uganda's military spending

In the last three decades, there has been a continuous shift in Uganda's spending away from social and economic sectors and towards public administration, security, and justice (IMF 2017, 30). The graph below provides an overview of the education, health, and defence budgets since financial year 2001-2002.

**FIGURE 1**

Evolution of health and defence budgets since financial year 2001/2002



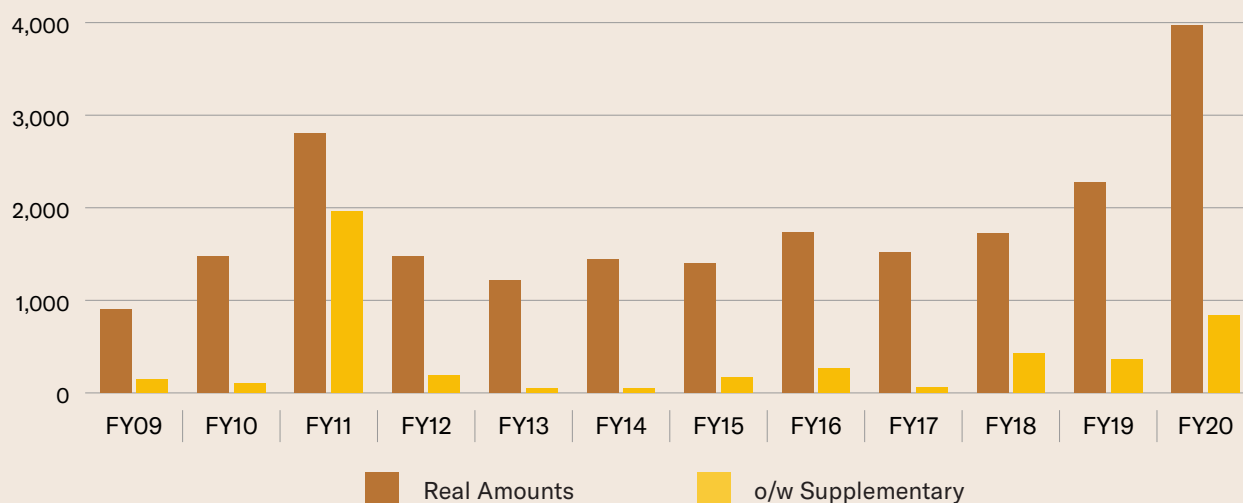
Source: Compiled by Daniel Lukwago (World Bank), based on Annual Budget Performance Reports and government sources, May 2022

After a reduction in the second half of the 2000s, the defence budget has been on the rise, particularly in the last four years. In relative terms, defence spending spiked in 2010-2011, following the July 2010 suicide bombings, and Operation Lightning Thunder.<sup>35</sup> Spending has increased strongly in recent years, as illustrated in Figure 2, showing a 46 percent increase in defence spending between financial years 2019 and 2020. Table 1 shows this was the strongest increase in military spending worldwide.

<sup>35</sup> Funding—at least officially—used to purchase equipment; cater for wage shortfalls; food; election security; and Operation Lightning Thunder capability enhancement.

**FIGURE 2**

Evolution of Defence spending, in real amount (in \$ billion)



Source: Compiled by Daniel Lukwago (World Bank), based on Annual Budget Performance Reports and government sources, May 2022

**TABLE 1**

Global military spending in 2020

RANK	COUNTRY	SPENDING (\$ Mn) 2020	INCREASE (%) 2019-20	COUNTRY	SPENDING (\$ Mn) 2020	DECREASE (%) 2019-20
1	Uganda	985	46	Lebanon	1,921	-59.0
2	Myanmar	*2,446	41	Bulgaria	1,247	-44.0
3	Chad	323	31	Sudan	934	-37.0
4	Montenegro	102	29	Togo	116	-34.0
5	Nigeria	2,568	29	Mozambique	154	-24.0
6	Morocco	4,831	29	Burundi	68	-23.0
7	Mauritania	200	23	Ethopia	461	-15.0
8	Mali	593	22	Angola	994	-12.0
9	Romania	5,727	21	Cameroon	393	-11.0
10	Hungary	2,410	20	Saudi Arabia	57,519	-10.0
11	Azerbaijan	2,238	17	Zambia	212	-10.0
12	El Salvador	372	17	Bahrain	1,405	-9.8
13	Afghanistan	280	16	Kazakhstan	1,733	-9.2
14	Rwanda	143	15	Niger	240	-9.0
15	Madagascar	87	15	Trinidad & Tobago	157	-8.8
	Sub-Saharan Africa (exclude Djibouti, Eritrea, & Somalia)	18,500	3.4			

\* uncertain estimate

Source: Compiled by Daniel Lukwago (World Bank), based on Stockholm International Peace Institute (IPRI) Military Expenditure Databade, April 2021



Although the health budget is in absolute terms at its highest in financial year 2020-2021, it is at one of its lowest points in relative terms, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Education budgets have reduced so drastically, to the point that donors have threatened to withdraw specific funding from the sector because of the government's lack of spending on schools.

Military spending, which is classified, has increased drastically: from financial year 2016-2017 to 2019-2020, the classified budget rose from UGX 441 billion to UGX 2,5 trillion, or an increase of 488 percent in four years.<sup>36</sup> Because military spending is a classified budget, it can also be used for other reasons—such as political expenditures, whenever the need arises.<sup>37</sup> Classified budgets are not public or accountable (to parliament or donors)<sup>38</sup> and have been described as functioning as 'President Museveni's slush fund'.<sup>39</sup> As one civil society activist summarised: 'The longer the President stays in power, the more important the army becomes. And for someone who has been in power for 35 years, it's clear that his own security is more important than the population's health: investing in the army is much more important than health'.

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36 Parliament of Uganda. A Minority Report on Supplementary Expenditure Schedule no. 2 Addendum 1 and 2 for FY 2019/20. April 2020, p.6 (Document on file with the author.)

37 Since 2000, there has been a widening gap between the resources allocated to public administration, security, and justice, and the actual spending in those sectors—a trend that strongly suggests the political use of the funds (Hicky et al., 2021, pp. 8-9 ; IMF 2017: 30).

38 Epstein, H. (2020, November 25). 'In Uganda, another Museveni crackdown.' *New York Review of Books*. <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2020/11/25/in-uganda-another-museveni-crackdown/>

39 (Barkan, Kayunga, Njuguna, & Titworth, 2004, p. 5); and Letter by Agnes N. Kaziba to David R. Malpass 'World Bank Loan Made to the Ugandan Government That May Be Financing Ongoing Human Rights Abuses', 11 June 2021. On file with author; and New York City Bar (2020, December 22). 'Letter raising concerns as to whether a recent World Bank loan made to the Ugandan government may be financing ongoing human rights abuses.' <https://www.nycbar.org/member-and-career-services/committees/reports-listing/reports/detail/uganda-world-bank>

To guard against opposition from within the military, **Museveni uses divide-and-rule tactics between different agencies.** He moved to restrain the 'old guard'—veteran commanders of the liberation war—instead grooming others to positions at the top of the military hierarchy. Museveni's son Muhoozi Kainerugaba was crucial here: first as commander of the Presidential Guard Brigade, which eventually evolved into the Special Forces Command, created in 2008.<sup>40</sup> The SFC, by far the most well-armed and resourced branch of the military, functions as Museveni's private army. It has grown in size and capacity and, at present, has de facto control of all strategic military assets (Rolls 2021, 73).

However, **this divide-and-rule strategy has led to increasing tensions.** Restraining the 'liberation veterans' eroded veteran loyalty while young generation yearning for power and change entered a lingering succession debate that centred on Museveni's son. In early 2013, General David Tinnyefuza (aka Sejusa)—a seasoned veteran National Resistance Army (NRA) commander and eminent figure in the security sector—openly accused the regime of not only grooming Muhoozi for the presidency but also of planning to eliminate all those (liberation) veterans in the ruling elite opposed to Muhoozi's quick ascendance.<sup>41</sup> The regime responded with a grand military reshuffle that affirmed the end of the veteran era and signalled an increasing concentration of power in the hands of the first family (Reuss & Titeca 2017).

Muhoozi has his own network of power. A new military aristocracy has emerged, concentrated around Muhoozi and the Special Forces Command, with many members from the broader extended family (Rolls 2021, 74). With Muhoozi in charge of

the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF)'s land forces since June 2021, the 'SFCasation' of the army is complete. In the words of one analyst:

'Ultimately Muhoozi has control over troops: there is not much wiggle room for anyone anymore. Other guys, older guys have been completely sidelined: they have been pushed out. There's others still in there, but they've been familiarised with what is to come [i.e. they will also be sidelined]. Chief of staff and deputy-staff of chief are of course with Muhoozi now. (...) Anyone who's now a division commander is now aligned with him; anyone who's now a senior commander is with him – no one will oppose him.'

At the same time, key actors from the older generation have been strategically sent into retirement, or into less powerful positions. It can be argued that there are now de facto two armies: the 'regular' armed forces, and the organisation and assets controlled by the First Son. As a result, formal policy prescriptions to bring the military under civilian control have become increasingly unachievable.

## **2.2.2 The 2021 elections**

**The authoritarian nature of the Ugandan regime revealed itself fully in the 2021 elections,** which were characterised by brutal violence and human rights abuses by the regime, including extra-judicial killings, torture, and kidnappings. As part of a crackdown on protests following the arrest of Bobi Wine on 18 and 19 November 2020, at least 54 people were killed, and hundreds of others were injured. Video footage shows indiscriminate shooting by security forces.<sup>42</sup>

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40 Without Parliamentary approval, as required under the UPDF Act.

41 The government's heavy-handed response to media coverage of General Sejusa's accusations—a 10-day shutdown of two major media houses—indicated how politically sensitive the regime viewed this conflagration of military and political grievances (Reuss & Titeca, 2017).

42 BBC. (2021, May 21). 'Uganda: Finding truth behind a killing spree in Kampala.' <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-57286419>

Also starting in November 2020, as part of a severe crackdown against opposition forces, so-called ‘drones’—the nickname for the SFC’s Toyota Hiace vans—started abducting people from their homes, usually late at night. Many of the victims were held incommunicado and tortured for weeks or months; many remain in detention, including children.<sup>43</sup> The kidnappers were sometimes in police uniform, but mostly in army fatigues or plain clothed.<sup>44</sup> Numbers vary, but over a thousand people were kidnapped in total,<sup>45</sup> and most of Wine’s close associates had been arrested and jailed.<sup>46</sup>

Those taken were mostly NUP organisers but also those only peripherally involved in politics. Although most have been released, there still has been no accountability for the perpetrators, and the ‘drones’ continue to operate, mainly against local-level NUP activists.

Simultaneously, the 2021 elections saw **increased and unprecedented hostility toward foreign actors**. The case-study in Box B below (page 20) illustrates this development. Wine was profiled in international newspapers and magazines; Museveni portrayed him as a ‘stooge of the West’<sup>47</sup> and said that ‘amongst the fools that support Bobi Wine are the Europeans’.<sup>48</sup> Museveni widely suggested that those who participated in the November protests were ‘agents of foreign interests’<sup>49</sup> and ‘homosexuals’.<sup>50</sup> He congratulated the army for ‘defeating the insurrection that the traitors, with their foreign backers, attempted to stage a few weeks ago’.<sup>51</sup> His Security Minister, General Elly Tumwine, has echoed such language, calling protesters ‘agents of foreign forces who want to destabilise African counties for their own interests’.<sup>52</sup> This was not just rhetoric: a number of foreigners have been deported or refused (re)entry to Uganda, although no evidence has been produced to suggest wrongdoing on their part.<sup>53</sup>

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- 43 Burke, J. and Okiror, S. (2021, 15 November) ‘Ugandan children held in prison for months after crackdown on opposition.’ The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/15/ugandan-children-held-in-prison-for-months-after-crackdown-on-opposition>
- 44 Taylor, L. (2021, 3 March) They came in plainclothes with guns: ‘Abducted’ by Uganda’s army. Al Jazeera: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/3/3/they-came-in-plainclothes-with-guns-abducted-by-ugandas-army>
- 45 Taylor, L. & Wandera, D. (2021, May 25) Mass abductions in Uganda: What we know and don’t know. African Arguments: <https://africanarguments.org/2021/05/mass-abductions-in-uganda-what-we-know-and-dont-know/>
- 46 The COVID-19 measures played a major role in this: it provided a cover to restrict opposition, control media and stifle civil society (Abrahamsen & Bareebe, 2021; Cheeseman, 2021).
- 47 Katusiime, I. (2018, 25 October) ‘COMMENT: Bobi Wine and American Support’. The Independent: <https://www.independent.co.uk/comment-bobi-wine-and-american-support/>
- 48 <https://twitter.com/933kfm/status/1340895448513589249>
- 49 Mufumba, Isac (2020) ‘USA, European NGO chiefs deported over Bobi Wine’, *Daily Monitor*, 23 November 2020 <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/usa-european-ngo-chiefs-deported-over-bobi-wine--3207296>
- 50 Kahungu, T.M. (2020, November 20) ‘Museveni warns public on riots’, *Daily Monitor*: <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/museveni-warns-public-on-riots-3205012>
- 51 Kiyonga, D. (2021, January 03) ‘Museveni’s 3 security duty bearers’, *Daily Monitor*: <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/museveni-s-3-security-duty-bearers-3246298>
- 52 Uganda Media Centre. [@UgandaMediaCent]. (2020, November 20). ‘Tumwine: We have evidence that most of these people are agents of foreign forces who want to destabilize African counties for their own interests. For someone who is contesting to lead Uganda, are you admiring what has happened in Libya & other countries? What a shame #SecurityUG’ [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/UgandaMediaCent/status/1329765259201146880>
- 53 Mufumba, I. (2020, November 23) ‘USA, European NGO chiefs deported over Bobi Wine.’ *Daily Monitor*. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/usa-european-ngo-chiefs-deported-over-bobi-wine--3207296>

## Box B | Case-study: the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF)

The DGF is a donor-initiative that aims to support democratic governance, peace, and stability in Uganda by providing support to state<sup>54</sup> and non-state actors, particularly civil society organisations. It is supported by seven countries: Austria, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the EU.<sup>55</sup>

In the run-up to the 2021 elections, the regime launched a targeted campaign against the DGF. Starting in March 2020 articles appeared in Ugandan tabloids targeting DGF and its staff.<sup>56</sup> These tabloids, a number of which are tied to regime-affiliated political elites, argued that the DGF was plotting Museveni's downfall through violent undercover operations, including 'mobilising the young population to attack key government installations at an appropriate time during the election period'.<sup>57</sup> Next, the DGF's programme manager in charge of election coordination (Marco De Swart), was barred from re-entering Uganda (upon returning from holiday in the Netherlands).<sup>58</sup> Then, in January 2021, Museveni wrote a letter to the Ministry of Finance, questioning the DGF's ability to operate. In the letter, which appeared in the press in February, Museveni stated that a 'big percentage of these funds have been used to finance activities and organisations designed to subvert Government under the guise of improving governance.' Security reports

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54 The DGF funds the following state institutions: the Parliament, the ministries of Internal Affairs, Lands, Housing and Urban Development; the Law Development Centre (LDC), Makerere University, and the Inspectorate of Government (IGG). Mufumba, I. (2021, July 4). 'DGF-govt talks hit deadlock, hold up billions of cash.' *Daily Monitor*. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/dgf-govt-talks-hit-deadlock-hold-up-billions-of-cash-3460846>

55 Democratic Governance Facility (n.d.). *What is DGF?*. <https://www.dgf.ug/page/what-dgf>

56 A number of interviewees suggested that these stories originated from state actors and from disgruntled NGO members who had lost funding or had corruption cases against them.

57 A similar suggestion was eventually made by Museveni in his letter in early 2021. Red Pepper (2020, August 26). *EXPOSED! Why EU Diplomats are visiting Political Parties*. <https://redpepper.co.ug/2020/08/exposed-why-eu-diplomats-are-visiting-political-parties/>; *The Nile Wires*. (2020, September 9). 'Uganda declares DGF Boss Marco De Swart Persona Non Grata.' <https://thenilewires.com/news/uganda-declares-dgf-boss-marco-de-swart-persona-non-grata/>

58 One tabloid wrote that he was expelled because of his undercover operations to overthrow the government: 'He had apparently travelled to the Netherlands for a holiday but it is believed he was actually meeting his handlers. Intelligence agencies discovered that he helped organize the massive demonstrations in Cairo's Tahrir Square that brought down the government of former President Hosni Mubarak.' *Kampala Post*. (2020, October 13). 'Security services monitoring foreign elements ahead of 2021 elections.' <https://kampalapost.com/index.php/content/security-services-monitoring-foreign-elements-ahead-2021-elections>

accused the DGF of aiming to incite violence before, during, and after the elections.<sup>59</sup> The DGF and its European funders were presented as aiming to overthrow the government and inspire armed resistance.<sup>60</sup>

Since then, the fund has been suspended, and negotiations to reopen it have been continually postponed. Because of the suspension, no disbursements to DGF partners have taken place, which means no DGF-financed public activities can take place (either by NGOs or government actors).<sup>61</sup> There was a growing concern that the DGF might never be allowed to resume its activities; but in June 2022—a year and a half after its suspensions, and six months before the end of (this phase of) its activities—the President lifted the ban<sup>62</sup>

The government's actions toward the DGF are symbolic, and serve to show its power over the international community more broadly. In the words of someone involved, 'through the negotiations, the government wanted to show who called the shots: we determine what you are able to do or not'.<sup>63</sup>

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59 Pat, M. (2021, March 1). *DGF Saga: How top NGOs are involved in subversive activities*. Kampala Post. <https://kampalapost.com/index.php/content/dgf-saga-how-top-ngos-are-involved-subversive-activities>

60 Pat, M. (2021, March 1) *DGF Saga: How Top NGOs are involved in Subversive Activities*, The Kampala Post, <https://kampalapost.com/index.php/content/dgf-saga-how-top-ngos-are-involved-subversive-activities>

61 Salaries were resumed but no new activities could be undertaken.

62 Daily Monitor (2022, June 23) 'President Museveni agrees to lift ban on DGF', *Daily Monitor* <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/president-museveni-agrees-to-lift-ban-on-dgf-3856944>

63 After negotiations, the Ugandan government went from having one seat on the board of DGF to three.

### 2.2.2.1 Election Monitoring

Throughout the 2021 electoral period, **election monitoring activities of national and international actors, donors, NGOs, journalists, and other actors were structurally disrupted.**

The DGF is a crucial example, but not the only one. In October 2020, the National NGO Bureau halted the activities of National Election Watch Uganda (NEW-U), a civil society coalition of election observers—declaring it was operating illegally.<sup>64</sup>

In December 2020, without any evidence, the bank accounts of the NGO Forum and the Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) were suspended on accusations of 'terrorism financing activities' and money laundering in a clear attempt to stop their election-monitoring activities.<sup>65</sup> Their accounts were reopened in February, well after the elections.<sup>66</sup>

The election monitoring accreditation process was undermined, too. Many local civil society organisations (CSOs) did not get accredited; many were rejected without explanations. And those that were accredited did not receive the necessary badges/tags in time.<sup>67</sup> Overall, respondents estimated that two-thirds of election observers did not get an answer or were rejected, leaving only a third of the planned observers able to participate.<sup>68</sup>

Foreign observers were treated similarly. Two foreigners working for international organisations were deported;<sup>69</sup> a range of others were banned from entering Uganda.<sup>70</sup> The United States (US) cancelled its diplomatic observation of the elections, as 75 percent of its requested accreditations were denied.<sup>71</sup> The EU decided not to send any electoral observers because no progress had been made on any of their previous recommendations.<sup>72</sup>

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64 *The Independent*. (2020, November 6). 'CSOs vow to defy NGO Bureau ban on NEW-U coalition.' <https://www.independent.co.ug/csos-vow-to-defy-ngo-bureau-ban-on-new-u-coalition/>

65 *The Independent*. (2020, December 13). 'CSOs condemn gov't for freezing NGO accounts.' <https://www.independent.co.ug/csos-condemn-govt-for-freezing-ngo-accounts/>

66 Kazibwe, K. (2021, February 27). 'Govt unfreezes accounts of NGOs accused of terrorism funding.' *Nile Post*. <https://nilepost.co.ug/2021/02/27/govt-unfreezes-accounts-of-ngos-accused-of-terrorism-funding/>

67 *The Independent*. (2021, January 13). 'Amb Brown explains why US will not observe Uganda polls.' <https://www.independent.co.ug/amb-natalie-brown-explains-why-us-will-not-observe-ugandas-elections/>

68 Others were refused entry in key areas, such as Museveni's home region of Ankole.

69 Simon Osborn, who worked for the EU and had been director of the National Democratic Institute (NDI); Isaack Othieno, a Kenyan national and the head of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. 'Mr Othieno was reportedly picked up from Sheraton Kampala Hotel where he had been staying temporarily, bundled onto a police vehicle and driven to Busia border with Kenya.' Mufumba, I. (2020, November 23). 'USA, European NGO chiefs deported over Bobi Wine.' *The Independent*. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/usa-european-ngo-chiefs-deported-over-bobi-wine--3207296>

70 Roseline Idele, the acting country director of NDI in Uganda; Lara Petrivevic, the director of the International Republic Institute (IRI); Marco De Swart, Democratic Governance Facility (DGF)'s program manager on elections. Mufumba, I. (2020, November 23). 'USA, European NGO chiefs deported over Bobi Wine.' *The Independent*. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/usa-european-ngo-chiefs-deported-over-bobi-wine--3207296>

71 *The Independent*. (2021, January 13). 'Amb Brown explains why US will not observe Uganda polls.' <https://www.independent.co.ug/amb-natalie-brown-explains-why-us-will-not-observe-ugandas-elections/>; Brown, N.E. (2021, January 13). *Statement by U.S. Ambassador Natalie E. Brown on cancellation of U.S. diplomatic observer mission of Uganda's elections*. U.S. Embassy in Uganda. <https://ug.usembassy.gov/statement-by-u-s-ambassador-natalie-e-brown-on-cancellation-of-u-s-diplomatic-observer-mission-of-ugandas-elections/>

72 It instead organised a 'diplowatch' exercise (i.e. without recommendations). Also here, a number of EU diplomats were refused accreditations.

For journalists, the government introduced a range of new measures complicating their accreditation.<sup>73</sup> In December 2020, the Ugandan Media Council issued all practicing journalists—national and international—a seven-day ultimatum to re-register; failure to do so would mean no access to the elections but also criminal charges.<sup>74</sup> A few days later, police commanders were instructed to enforce the guidelines.<sup>75</sup> The government used a strategy to—in the words of a journalist—do ‘everything possible to bar more foreign journalists coming to the country’.<sup>76</sup> There also was unprecedented violence and harassment against journalists covering the elections (Abrahamsen & Bareebe 2021), especially those covering opposition politicians.<sup>77</sup> The Inspector General of Police Martin Ochola infamously argued the police would continue to ‘beat you [i.e. journalists] for your own safety’.<sup>78</sup>

To block additional scrutiny, the regime orchestrated an internet shutdown, which lasted around 100 hours.<sup>79</sup> Social media was blocked for much longer.<sup>80</sup>

Those involved in election monitoring—both national and international actors—described an atmosphere in which international donors were at best hesitant to be associated with election monitoring activities,

particularly financing. In the words of an actor involved: ‘The Western countries lost confidence in the product (...) they felt they didn’t have the resources or the impact. There was a sense like: there’s not a lot we can do; it’s been like this for a long time.’ In other words, the international community felt their effort was not worthwhile—a feeling shared by many Ugandans. One international actor said: ‘What’s the point [of election missions]: we produce reports, we ask them to take action, and nothing happens; you can read the EU and Commonwealth reports, they’re basically the same every election, and nothing changes.’

**The overall result, of course, was fewer eyes on the ground, exactly the intention of the Museveni regime.**

### 2.2.3 Weakened civil society

This crackdown continued after the elections. On August 20, the NGO Bureau, under mandate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs suspended the activities of 54 NGOs. Recent moves to control foreign aid (see Box C, page 24) also signal that donor support to civil society will become increasingly difficult in the future.

73 On election day, the court ruled this measure was illegal. *The Independent*. (2020, December 22). ‘Tougher conditions for foreign journalists to cover 2021 general elections.’ <https://www.independent.co.ug/tougher-conditions-for-foreign-journalists-to-cover-2021-general-elections/>

74 *The Independent*. (2020, December 10). ‘Media council issues ultimatum to journalists to register.’ <https://www.independent.co.ug/media-council-issues-ultimatum-to-journalists-to-register/>; Muhindo, C. (2020, December 11). ‘Uganda’s media council issues directive on registration of journalists; timing questioned.’ African Centre for Media Excellence. <https://acme-ug.org/2020/12/11/ugandas-media-council-issues-directive-on-registration-of-journalists-timing-questioned/>

75 *The Independent*. (2020, December 15). ‘Journalists who don’t re-register to face criminal charges.’ <https://www.independent.co.ug/journalists-who-dont-re-register-to-face-criminal-charges/>

76 *The Independent*. (2020, December 22). ‘Tougher conditions for foreign journalists to cover 2021 general elections.’

77 Committee to Protect Journalists. (2020, December 11). ‘Journalists attacked, deported ahead of January elections in Uganda.’ <https://cpj.org/2020/12/journalists-attacked-deported-ahead-of-january-elections-in-uganda/>

78 *The Independent*. (2021, January 8). ‘We shall continue beating journalists and have no apologies.’ <https://www.independent.co.ug/we-shall-continue-beating-journalists-and-have-no-apologies-igp-ochola/>

79 Bhalla, N. & McCool, A. (2021, January 20). ‘100 hours in the dark: How an election internet blackout hit poor Ugandans.’ *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-uganda-internet-rights-trfn-idUSKBN29P1V8>

80 BBC. (2021, January 18). *Uganda election: Internet restored but social media blocked*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55705404>

## Box C | Case-study: the Government's bold new measures to control aid

The government's recent actions to control aid illustrate the increased scrutiny of foreign aid, and the centralisation and politicisation of relations with the international community, framing them as hostile actors.

In May 2021, Uganda's National Planning Authority proposed that all foreign aid go through the government to be reflected in the national budget. The international community was concerned but felt the situation would blow over as similar ideas had been suggested by Ugandan politicians in the past but never acted on.

Nevertheless, in a September 2021 letter, Uganda's Finance Minister said all donor programmes needed to be signed off on by his ministry and jointly implemented with the relevant government ministries. The spokesperson for the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development later instructed that development partners should channel their money 'through the Treasury instead of going directly to projects' to ensure 'there is no duplication of services'.<sup>81</sup> A January 2022 letter repeating a similar message was sent by the Ministry of Finance to international donors.

These developments raised concern, both in the international community and among Ugandan civil society, particularly in 'sensitive' like oil and gas,<sup>82</sup> LGBT rights, or governance-related issues.

But the international community's reaction has been inconsistent. In the words of a high-level political actor, 'there has been a lot of donor consultations on this. But the reaction on the issue differs. (...) Everyone saves their own skin.' There are different views. For example, the US is strongly against such a requirement, as all of its funding takes place outside the Ugandan government; other countries have worked in partnership with the government in the past—e.g. by signing multi-annual programs—and so do not see additional transparency on the donor aid delivered to the Ugandan government as per se negative. Still, as one donor official said, 'It is not that we don't want to communicate it, it is about the process of approval (...) it might challenge political sensitive support, such as for Chapter Four [prominent human rights NGO led by activist Nicolas Opyio]. If the Government could require this, it might become very difficult'.<sup>83</sup> One donor official stated, 'If this goes through, the whole system will come to an end'.<sup>84</sup>

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81 Draku, F. (2021, September 28). 'Govt moves to control donor funds, projects.' *Monitor*. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/govt-moves-to-control-donor-funds-projects-3565442>

82 Since its discovery in Western Uganda, oil has been a contentious issue, with civil society activists operating in difficult circumstances, as the oil money is particularly important for the regime.

83 Interview international actor, 15 December 2021.

84 Interview diplomatic actor, 7 December 2021



**This has left Uganda’s civil society sector is weaker than ever.** Many organisations simply stay away from controversial issues, making bold and innovative actions, such as the anti-corruption Black Monday movement<sup>85</sup> that emerged about a decade ago, seem impossible. In the words of one analyst [on the Black Monday movement]: ‘they were stronger, braver, they were doing edgier things, and they got away with it.’ Today, similar initiatives are immediately suppressed: ‘before anything larger can happen, the government goes after them (...) there’s lots of fear; the government is very effective in generating that fear.’ For instance, when activists placed a baby coffin in front of Kampala’s Mulago Hospital to protest the COVID-19 misgovernance and corruption (see Box E, page 39), the police immediately organised a ‘manhunt’,<sup>86</sup> and arrested them for ‘inciting violence’.<sup>87</sup> Civil society organisations working on governance and accountability feel particularly vulnerable after the recent elections, and are in survival mode. There’s a ‘[feeling] they have a target on their back; they’re playing it safe.’

Indeed, **the government has come to see civil society as a hostile entity.** This was evidenced by its suspension of the DGF, civil society’s main funding mechanism, and also by the August 2021 suspension of 54 NGOs which were found to be ‘non-compliant with the NGO Act’.<sup>88</sup> In the words of an actor working in the field: ‘The government believes these organisations are out to bring them

down. They talk and walk and say the same things that opposition does. It doesn’t matter they have a different name: if it walks like a duck, quacks like one—it is a duck!’

As a result, **civil society capacity to enforce accountability is weak.** Internal dynamics play a role here, too. Divisions and infighting within civil society affect the effectiveness of CSOs and complicate collaborations, making it harder to present a united front for election monitoring, for instance.<sup>89</sup> Tensions exist between established NGOs over leadership on particular issues, personal conflicts, or competition for funding, while a younger generation feels crowded out. A limited number of high-profile individuals are heavily relied on, causing a problem of overdemand. Limited knowledge of inside dynamics of the government further complicates civil society’s ability to address governance and accountability challenges.

## 2.3 THE GROWING ROLE OF ETHNICITY

Lastly, it is important to understand the role of ethnicity in the Museveni regime, and how Museveni’s narrowing regional and ethnic power-base activates underlying, but significant ethnic tensions (as will be further explored in relation to the transition question, in section 3).

85 Unwanted Witness. (n.d.). ‘What is the Black Monday Movement (BMM)?’ <https://www.unwantedwitness.org/campaign/black-monday/>

86 <https://www.independent.co.uk/anti-atwine-protestors-frustrated-over-case-delay/>

87 <https://howwebiz.ug/news/national/30338/two-arrested-for-dumping-coffin-in-protest-of-dr-dianas-reappointme>

88 International Federation for Human Rights. (2021, September 9). *Uganda: Uganda’s NGO Bureau suspends the activities of 54 NGOs in the country.* <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/uganda-uganda-s-ngo-bureau-suspends-the-activities-of-54-ngos-in-the>

89 Interview data CSO actors; international actors

Uganda's ethnic and regional divisions can be traced to colonial times, as the British colonial state introduced major inequalities in terms of economic development and access to state positions. In doing so, it also entrenched ethnicity, as well as regional differences, as socio-political identifiers.<sup>90</sup>

**These dividing lines persisted into the post-independence period** (Golooba-Mutebi & Hickey 2013). It led to major biases in the distribution of state power, as well as violent repression along ethnic and regional lines. Concretely, ethnic-regional groups in power used state power to violently repress other groups (Lindemann 2011, 394).<sup>91</sup>

When Museveni came to power, he sought to break this vicious cycle of ethnic exclusion and violence: A central point of the NRM's 10-point programme was the consolidation of national unity and eliminating all forms of sectarianism—ethnic, regional, and religious.<sup>92</sup> Multi-party politics were abolished, as it was believed this contributed to sectarianism. And, through the 'no-party system,' a broad-based government was established. In 1988, an Anti-Sectarian Law was established, criminalising the promotion of sectarianism.<sup>93</sup> Even after re-introducing multi-party politics (through a referendum in 2005, with the first multi-party

elections taking place in 2006), Museveni adhered to big tent politics, in which ethnicity had no place.

Yet, **ethnicity continues to play a central role in the Museveni regime**. For example, the creation of ethnic polities for marginalised ethnic groups became a central element of the Museveni regime, particularly through the use of districts and the recognition of kingdoms (Titeca 2018). As previously described, the number of districts skyrocketed during the regime—many of which were created along ethnic lines (Green 2010).

Particularly important is the ethnic and regional composition of the Ugandan state. A 2011 analysis based on a dataset of key administration staff from 1986 to 2008 is enlightening in this respect: NRM's government has had a clear overrepresentation of Westerners—the home region of the President. The Westerners are 'not only overrepresented in Cabinet, but also clearly dominated the inner core' (Lindemann 2011, 396). The NRM party, as well as key positions in civil service—such as the Permanent Secretaries—mirror this pattern. Similarly, parastatal agencies have largely been used to reward political and ethnic clients from the same region (Lindemann 2011, 405).

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90 Specifically, the Baganda received preferential treatment by the British, creating major tensions with other ethnic groups. The colonial state ruled indirectly 'through chiefs who headed native administrations that were organized along ethnic lines' (Lindemann, 2011, p. 392), entrenching ethnicity in state and society. This was further established through regional cleavages, in which development opportunities – such as cash crops, industry or posts in the civil service – were concentrated in the south (and hence, with the Baganda); whereas the north served as a labour reserve, and personnel for the Army and police (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999).

91 For example, the Amin government had an ethnically narrow power-base—principally consisting of the Nubian-Kakwa groups. The Amin administration largely favored the West Nile region, which was Amin's region of origin. The 1971-1979 Amin regime used its politico-military power to take revenge on the Acholi and Langi groups, which were the ethnic groups that were perceived to be supportive of the preceding Obote regime. Then, when Amin was ousted by Obote, the second Obote regime, together with Tanzanian forces, launched a brutal response, 'waging a campaign of vengeance against the Baganda, and, in the West Nile region, groups that had supported Amin's rule' (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999; Golooba-Mutebi & Hickey, 2013; Lindemann, 2011).

92 Kashambuzi, E. (2009, January 7). 'Anti-sectarian law was made to protect sectarianism.' *The Observer*. [https://www.observer.ug/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2067:anti-sectarian-law-was-made-to-protect-sectarianism](https://www.observer.ug/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2067:anti-sectarian-law-was-made-to-protect-sectarianism)

93 Defined as the 'practice of degrading or exposing to hatred or contempt or disaffection for anyone on the basis of religion, tribe or ethnic or regional origin'. <https://allafrica.com/stories/201307220745.html>

**This ethnic concentration of power also exists in the military.** Since the late '80s, there have been complaints about the 'Bahima/Banyankole/Banyarwanda hegemony' in the UPDF—the ethnic group(s) of the President. Indeed, data on key positions within the army to some extent confirm this: most of the top positions are held by Westerners. While attempts are made to reach out to other groups within the junior ranks, service members are eventually denied promotion (Lindemann 2011, 401-404).

This process is also seen in the Muhoozi-crop around the First Son. While there is a new generation of professional soldiers<sup>94</sup> emerging into mid-level positions from other regions, interviewees indicate these soldiers are disgruntled by a lack of promotion opportunities. For true advancement, they claim, the right ethno-regional identity is necessary. For example, promotions hinge on trainings, offered by foreign militaries. Within the army, there is a strong feeling that such trainings are only offered to the 'core' group of soldiers from the West.<sup>95</sup>

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94 Professional in the sense that their primary loyalty is to the institution of the Army, rather than to personalised patronage networks. At the same time, there are doubts on the impact of professionalization: as one respondent argued: 'it should be questioned if they are more tuned into liberal-democracy and civilian leadership than any other soldier in Uganda's history. Their professionalisation should not be confused with any inclination or willingness to submit themselves to civilian rule.' Interview analyst, December 2021.

95 When trainings are offered to non-Western soldiers, they primarily focus on issues such as battle tactics, which do not lead to promotion.

## 3. THE TRANSITION QUESTION

### 3.1 POTENTIAL SCENARIOS

In Uganda, the transition question is the 'elephant in the room'.<sup>96</sup> With political space tightly controlled, there is no real debate on the issue. For one, the President himself does not invite discussion. In the words of one analyst, 'The president is not very keen on this. He thinks it's a distraction, you waste time, money and effort'.<sup>97</sup> More than that, there is legitimate fear that those who dare address the issue, or have presidential ambitions, will suffer consequences. Former Speaker of Parliament Rebecca Kadaga's comments on Museveni's unopposed candidacy as the NRM-flagbearer helped her lose her seat as a speaker.<sup>98</sup> Former Museveni-ally and NRM-bigwig Amamani Mbabazi's candidature in 2016 was met with repression and political isolation.<sup>99</sup> As a result, according to an analyst, 'the conversation is absolutely muted. People think: it's not worth having a conversation about; you'll be taking the wrong side'.<sup>100</sup>

Although the transition is inevitable, it has not been dealt with by the international community either.

Current conditions leave little hope for change through the ballot, but alternative outcomes are insufficiently explored. **Two possible scenarios, with similar consequences, should be considered.**

In the first scenario—the 'president for life' option—the President remains in power until his death. In this case, Uganda's Constitution provides that the Vice-President assumes power, with elections to be held within three months. NRM will need to find a candidate; the military will want to have their say; and ethnic and religious divisions will come into play.

The question is whether Uganda will be able to handle these pressures, or instead resort to more disorderly, unconstitutional or violent means to reach a settlement. Potential consequences are unpredictable, and range from a more authoritarian state to regional conflict.

In a second scenario, Museveni's son Muhoozi would take over. Indeed, the regime has undertaken a rather aggressive campaign to promote Muhoozi as

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96 Interview EU official, 17-12-21

97 Interview international actor, 8 December 2021

98 Katusiime, I. (2021, May 22). 'Museveni succession plot in Oulanyah – Kadaga battle.' *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.ug/museveni-succession-plot-in-oulanyah-kadaga-battle/>; Atuhaire, A. (2021, June 28). 'Uganda: Kadaga denies having presidential ambitions.' *AllAfrica*. <https://allafrica.com/stories/201206281005.html>

99 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-uganda-politics-idUSKBN0U420Q20151221>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35582639>. Mbabazi later was rehabilitated by the regime, and re-inserted in Museveni's 'big tent'.

100 Interview international actor, 8 December 2021

Museveni's successor, possibly to test the waters to see how the idea is received. This includes a social media campaign in which a large number of Twitter accounts exist primarily to promote Muhoozi, Youth groups are created in his support, and various promotion material (posters, caps, etc.) are used to publicise Muhoozi's 2026 candidacy.<sup>101</sup> A country-wide birthday celebration tour for his 48<sup>th</sup> birthday in May 2022 was widely perceived as a way to prepare his presidential bid.<sup>102</sup>

Muhoozi himself also plays an active online role, making bold statements on both foreign and national policy. While some of these statements have been perceived as rather reckless (for example on the conflict in Ethiopia<sup>103</sup>), others—such as his reaching out to opposition leader Norbert Mao<sup>104</sup> or foreign ambassadors—seem aimed at giving him a statesman-like stature.

On his Twitter account, Muhoozi regularly posts photos of his meetings with foreign ambassadors. Such photos have a clear aim: to increase his national legitimacy by showcasing his international network. And by posing for the photos, foreign ambassadors sideline the formal military hierarchy, strengthen Muhoozi's position as a political figure, and further entrench the personalised military system in the

country. In the words of one analyst: 'Every time he puts out a tweet with an ambassador, it further sends the message: don't speak out against Muhoozi, he'll be the next President'.

In regional affairs, Muhoozi has presented himself as the face of Operation Shujja in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)—the Uganda-Congo joint military operation against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebel group, linked to the November 2021 Kampala bombings. More importantly, he has widely portrayed himself as the face of the recent reengagement with Rwanda, through meetings with President Paul Kagame. This led to a widespread media campaign, honouring his role. The Rwanda-visit was also widely perceived as a way to get Rwanda's blessing for Muhoozi's eventual succession of Museveni. Until recently, regional diplomacy by anyone other than Museveni himself, would have been unthinkable.

Critics of Muhoozi are met with force. Novelist Kakwenza Rukirabashaij, who had spoken critically about the First Son on social media<sup>105</sup> was arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and forced to apologise. His harrowing account<sup>106</sup> sent a clear message to his fellow Ugandans.

101 One poster reads 'For peace, unity, transparency and supersonic development, Vote President Muhoozi Kainerugaba 2026-2031.' Mutaizibwa, E. (2022, February 2). 'How President Museveni planned his succession.' *The Observer*. <https://observer.ug/news/headlines/72643-how-president-museveni-planned-his-succession>

102 <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/muhoozi-s-birthday-launch-of-the-project-3800066>

103 Muhoozi Kainerugaba [@mkainerugaba]. (2021, September 20). 'I don't know why my brothers in Ethiopia are fighting me? It makes me sad. You are now fighting my tribe in Tigray. Tigrayans are part of us. God is the one who protects us!' [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/mkainerugaba/status/1439775084336586753>

104 Calling him 'the most brilliant opposition leader' with 'Presidential skills'. Muhoozi Kainerugaba [@mkainerugaba]. (2022, February, 3). 'My big brother @norbertmao is the most brilliant opposition leader in Uganda today. He has Presidential skills.' [Tweet]. Twitter <https://twitter.com/mkainerugaba/status/1489057626482786306>

105 He called Muhoozi 'obese, drunk, bad-tempered, and a rotting corpse of a future president.' *The Observer*. (2021, December 31). 'Writers, poets condemn arrest of novelist kakwenza.' <https://observer.ug/news/headlines/72325-writers-poets-condemn-arrest-of-novelist-kakwenza>

106 Muyobo, K. & Wesaka, A. (2022, February 7). 'Kakwenza narrates torture ordeal while in detention.' *Monitor*. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/kakwenza-narrates-torture-ordeal-while-in-detention-3707776>

**The consequences of a Muhoozi presidency—in the case of the sudden death of the President, or by an arranged transition—are unpredictable.**

Earlier campaigns for the First Son put the Ugandan political establishment under serious pressure—such as during the abovementioned 2013 Tinyefuza/Sejusa scandal, when UPDF General (and Bush War veteran) publicly voiced his concern about the plan to groom Muhoozi as a successor, and had to flee in exile.

Muhoozi does not have his father's popularity or constituency. Indeed, interviewees point out that his candidature is not uniformly welcomed in the administration; it inspires 'fear and disdain' among some. In the words of one analyst: 'Many are disquieted by the prospect; they do not want Muhoozi to land the job; and they fear a disorderly succession.' Many voice concerns about his personality, particularly about his often-erratic tweets, expressing radical viewpoints, for example on his personal plans—such as his March 2022 announcement that he was retiring from the army (which did not materialise).<sup>107</sup> Especially his tweets on foreign policy raise concern, which included

support for the Tigrayan rebel forces or for Russian President Vladimir Putin. Muhoozi's messages have been criticized by current and former diplomats for usurping the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and complicating diplomatic relationships.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, after his tweets on Ethiopia, the Ugandan ambassador was summoned by the Ethiopian government<sup>109</sup>; and because of his numerous tweets in support of Kagame and Rwanda, the Congolese national assembly announced it wanted to stop the ratification of agreements with Uganda, accusing him of having betrayed the DRC.<sup>110</sup>

This also led to major tensions within the Ugandan army: in late June, it was placed on Standby Class 1—the highest level of combat readiness—necessitating the President's intervention: the latter ordering all top military commanders, including Muhoozi, to stop commenting about security and foreign policy issues on social media platforms.<sup>111</sup> And indeed, since that day, Muhoozi's polemic twitter account has been silent.<sup>112</sup> In an until that point unprecedented move, the Army and Ministry of Defence distanced themselves from Muhoozi's tweets.<sup>113</sup>

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107 <https://twitter.com/mkainerugaba/status/1501146903249141763>

108 Bagala, A. (2021, 8 November) 'Winnie, Muhoozi clash on Ethiopia war tweets', *Daily Monitor* <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/winnie-muhoozi-clash-on-ethiopia-war-tweets-3611682>

109 Titeca, K. (2022, 27 May) 'The 'Muhoozi Project' in Uganda: Testing the water or preparing the ground?', *Democracy in Africa*, <https://democracyinfrica.org/the-muhoozi-project-in-uganda-testing-the-water-or-preparing-the-ground/>

110 Muamba, C. (2022, 14 June) 'L'Assemblée nationale accuse le fils de Museveni d'avoir trahi la RDC et annonce la suspension du processus de ratification des accords signés avec l'Ouganda' *Actualité.CD* <https://actualite.cd/2022/06/14/lassemblee-nationale-accuse-le-fils-de-museveni-davoir-trahi-la-rdc-et-annonce-la?s=09>

111 Butagira, T. (2022, 30 June) 'Museveni stops Muhoozi social media security talk', *Daily Monitor* <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/museveni-stops-muhoozi-social-media-security-talk-3864562>

112 Concretely, in late June, the Deputy Chief of Defence Forces (Lt Gen. Peter Elwelu) placed Uganda's military on Standby Class 1 – the highest level of combat readiness. This was however soon countermanded by Muhoozi for the troops under his command (the land forces), and in doing so, contradicting the orders of his superior (the Deputy Chief of Defence Forces) – prompting President Museveni to return from a trip to Rwanda. Although it was not officially confirmed that the tensions evolved around Muhoozi – and particularly around his erratic communication style on twitter – the measures following these events confirmed this (i.e. the order to stop commenting on foreign affairs on social media). Butagira, T. (2022, 30 June) 'Museveni stops Muhoozi social media security talk', *Daily Monitor* <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/museveni-stops-muhoozi-social-media-security-talk-3864562>

113 Bagala, A. (2022, 6 July) Defence ministry distances itself from Muhoozi tweets, *Daily Monitor* <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/defence-ministry-distances-itself-from-muhoozi-tweets--3870786>

A potential takeover by Muhoozi might also create tensions with other groups in the army and party, likely along ethnic/regional lines. Many would perceive his takeover as a further concentration of power in the West. Such tensions are largely suppressed under Museveni, but they might break out into the open in a transition. Another potential scenario is an intervention by other actors out of concerns for Muhoozi's leadership style—for example if it would jeopardise the country's oil money, which is considered vital to Uganda's economic future.<sup>114</sup> A Muhoozi presidency would likely lead to further reliance on coercion, deepen Uganda's authoritarian turn, and risk open conflict, potentially drawing in its neighbours.

### 3.2 FLASHING WARNING SIGNS

As previously discussed, **the inner core of the regime is becoming narrower**, with powerful positions increasingly dominated by people from the Western region, especially within the army. This concentration of power along ethnic lines has raised concern for a while. In 2011, political scientist Stefan Lindeman wrote how many think 'the country may be sitting on a 'time bomb' and predict genocidal violence against members of Museveni's ethnic core constituency if the imbalances are not redressed' (Lindemann 2011, 416). A similar sentiment is expressed by former opposition figure Beti Kanya, in 2008:

'But where is Museveni's heart? Where does he yearn to go, and if nowhere, why destroy the only country that he knows? Can't he see that this sectarian thing he is nurturing is not only dangerous but unsustainable? Does one need to be soothsayer to see that he is leading Uganda to a terrible genocide, with only one community [the Bahima] eligible for State House scholarships, lucrative jobs, land allocation, control of security organisations and the country's finances in 20 years?'<sup>115</sup>

**Ethnicity also played an important role in the 2021 elections.** For the first time in multi-party elections under Museveni, the main opposition candidate—Bobi Wine—was not from the West, but from Buganda (in the central region).<sup>116</sup> As the largest ethnic group of the country, the 'Buganda question' historically has been important in Uganda politics (Mutibwa 2008).<sup>117</sup> As Wilkins et al. (2021, 630) note, Museveni and his allies portrayed 'Bobi Wine (a Muganda) as an essentially sectarian figure who awoke the old 'Buganda nationalism' that once featured prominently in national politics.' His NUP party was portrayed as an ethnic—Baganda—party and a threat to peace: If they were to take over power, it was said by the regime, 'non-Baganda would be chased from their land, they would lose their properties—it would be history repeating itself.' According to another interviewee: 'The NRM would say: I'm the one protecting you: what they [the Baganda] want is Federo';<sup>118</sup> they want to kick everyone out. Non-Baganda feel insecure that their

114 The Lake Albert region is estimated to hold between 1 and 1.4 billion barrels; consisting of the projects Tilenga, operated by TotalEnergies, and Kingfisher by CNOOC (China National Offshore Oil Corporation). On 1 February 2022—in the midst of the ongoing operations—a final investment decision was signed on the oil project, worth over \$10 billion, and signed by President Museveni, Tanzanian President Suluhu Hassan and TotalEnergies CEO Pouyanné. Congo Research Group (2022) 'Uganda's Operation Shujaa in the Democratic Republic of Congo: fighting the ADF or Securing Economic Interests'. New York University, June 2022.

115 Beti Kanya, 'Where is Museveni's heart?', The Monitor, 28 January 2008. <https://twitter.com/kizzabesigye/status/1417391131550158848/photo/1>

116 Buganda is the region, Baganda the people (plural: Baganda, singular: Muganda).

117 The inclusion of the Baganda were central in Museveni's 'big tent' strategy, through the awarding of government positions, as well as by restoring the Buganda kingdom—albeit as a cultural kingdom, and not a political institution. Yet, the relation between the Museveni regime and the Baganda has gradually been unravelling: due to a number of issues, the Baganda felt excluded from power, leading to separation, mistrust, eventually culminating in open conflict in 2009 during the 'Buganda riots', in which over 40 people died. Goodfellow and Lindeman (2013); Green (2008); Hickey et al (2016).

118 Federal status, which the Baganda have been advocating for. <https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1097006/federo>

property will be destroyed (...) These are dangerous and inciting tactics: what they say on the podium is very different from what their teams on the ground'. While NUP overwhelmingly won the vote in the Buganda region, they lost in all other regions.

Ethnicity has become a prominent feature of life in Uganda. It is hotly debated on social media, for example when Bobi Wine called out the tribalism of the country's government.<sup>119</sup> Also 'ordinary' political events are increasingly seen through an ethnic lens. The death of Speaker of Parliament Jacob Oulanyah, for example, devolved into a discussion around ethnicity and tribalism.<sup>120</sup> This happened in various ways. A number of prominent Acholi—Oulanyah's ethnic group—suspected poisoning as his cause of death, which they felt were targeting Acholi elites. One Member of Parliament explained that 'any time an Acholi was appointed to a high position, they died'.<sup>121</sup> Many Acholi—including Members of Parliament—also argued for the position of Speaker of Parliament, to be 'ring-fenced for Acholi'.<sup>122</sup> When US-based Ugandans protested the fact that public funds were used to treat Oulanyah abroad (in Seattle)

before he died, while Uganda's health system is in a dire state, Uganda's Chief Justice Alfonse Owiny Dollo brushed off this critique along ethnic lines, dismissing the protesters as disgruntled Baganda.<sup>123</sup> This statement led to much uproar, and the Chief Justice was forced to apologise to the Kabaka (the Buganda's king).<sup>124</sup> The newspaper *The EastAfrican* wrote on this occasion of '[feelings] of tribalism, Uganda's festering wound that is unacknowledged, unaddressed and ignored. But the rot and stench are just below the surface'.<sup>125</sup>

### 3.3 ETHNIC TENSIONS

An important characteristic of Uganda's history has been the use of violence to settle political scores. Regime change has historically been accompanied by violent revenge on those ethnic and regional groups ousted from power.<sup>126</sup>

**Past events show how ethnic tensions can erupt into violence.** In the September 2009 'Buganda riots',<sup>127</sup> Banyankole were violently targeted based on

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119 Bobi Wine [@HEBobiwine]. (2022, March 7). 'Museveni built his hate campaign against Amin and Obote accusing them of tribalism, sectarianism and nepotism. Since then, he accuses all his challengers of the same vices. Yet, he practices them OPENLY. When we call him out, a small clique of beneficiaries get uncomfortable.' 1/2 [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/HEBobiwine/status/1500709045723930624>

120 Kiyonga, D. (2022, February 27). 'North-South differences flare up Uganda's body politic.' *Sunday Monitor*. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/north-south-differences-flare-up-uganda-s-body-politic-3730792>

121 <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/uganda-tribalism-north-south-divide-3768678>

122 <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/in-oulanyah-s-death-tribalism-rears-its-ugly-head-3762014>

123 At Oulanyah's vigil, he stated how "Your ethnic leader was transported in a presidential jet to Germany using public funds he was not entitled to. You did not demonstrate. Is it because Oulanyah is an Acholi? Is it because Oulanyah does not speak your language? Only a wicked person can fight a person fighting for his life" <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/uganda-tribalism-north-south-divide-3768678> He later had to apologise to the Baganda.

124 <https://observer.ug/news/headlines/73222-chief-justice-owiny-dollo-rushes-to-bulange-to-seek-kabaka-forgiveness>

125 <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/uganda-tribalism-north-south-divide-3768678>

126 For example, the Amin government had an ethnically narrow power-base—principally consisting of the Nubian-Kakwa groups. The Amin administration largely favored the West Nile region, which was Amin's region of origin. The 1971-1979 Amin regime used its politico-military power to take revenge on the Acholi and Langi groups, which were the ethnic groups that were perceived to be supportive of the preceding Obote regime. Then, when Amin was ousted by a rebel force led by Obote, and supported by Tanzanian forces, the second Obote regime launched a brutal response, 'waging a campaign of vengeance against the Baganda, and, in the West Nile region, groups that had supported Amin's rule' (Doom & Vlassenroot, 1999; Golooba-Mutebi & Hickey, 2013; Lindemann, 2011).

127 In two days of protest by the Baganda, at least 40 people were killed. Human Rights Watch. (2009, October 1). 'Uganda: Investigate use of lethal force during riots.' <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/10/01/uganda-investigate-use-lethal-force-during-riots>



their appearance or accent.<sup>128</sup> And there have been worrisome events more recently: In January 2021, buses<sup>129</sup> coming from Western Uganda into Kampala were attacked in Wakiso district by local youth, who started to throw petrol bombs at them. These attacks were believed to be a violent retaliation against the West, as the regional and ethnic heartland of the Museveni regime. The attacks happened on the same day as the election results were announced, as well as the day that it was (falsely) believed<sup>130</sup> that NUP MP and Bobi Wine ally Francis Zaake was shot dead, after he was arrested in the same district, trying to access Wine's home.<sup>131</sup>

Westerners in Uganda are particularly concerned about a violent ethnic conflict. As one interviewee said, 'I have a lot of friends, who, like me, are from the West, and they all fear. They hope that the big man [i.e. President Museveni] does the sensible thing. We have failed to understand what his plan is; and how he plans on going. But the moment he goes, all of us will become a target: that's our biggest fear.' Numerous other interviewees expressed similar sentiments.<sup>132</sup>

Calls on social media make one fear for the worst. In March 2022, a Ugandan Twitter account with over 12,000 followers, tweeted: 'I will say it for those who fear to say it. When things change, as they will, there needs to be a quick purge of all this Musevenism ilk. Recep Erdogan kind of purge of Gullenists in 2016. It must be violent & final. Bone and blood. That's how this country will move on stronger'.<sup>133</sup>

President Museveni has the (patronage) networks and legitimacy to manage these tensions, and hold the political settlement together—but he is the only one in his highly personalised regime. There is a major risk that these tensions flare up during a transition. As history and dynamics in the country and region—such as current events in Ethiopia—show, **warning signs can easily deteriorate into something existential**, with violence and instability in the wider region.

Overall, interviewees expressed an overwhelming feeling that Uganda is headed to a fundamental crisis, and that there is a lot to lose—with the country's history of civil wars and violent take-overs coming to mind, and with ethnicity playing a potentially lethal role in this. The urgency of this issue is insufficiently addressed, including by Uganda's international partners.

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128 New Vision (2009, September 11). *More deaths in Kampala riots*.

129 Reports range from one to four buses. Opio, J. (2021, January 21). 'Evidence: Hooligans attacking buses from Western Uganda used iron nails in petrol bombs.' *TrumpetNews*. <https://trumpetnews.co.ug/evidence-hooligans-attacking-buses-from-western-uganda-used-iron-nails-in-petrol-bombs/>

130 The news started to spread among local youth, and on social media and news sites, e.g. <https://timesuganda.com/is-francis-zaake-dead-death-rumor-escalates-after-allegedly-being-shot/>

131 <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/60-arrested-over-attack-on-bus-bobi-detained-at-home-3260410>

132 "For us, people from the West, the others think that we have profited. We as individuals seem to represent what has happened on a bigger scale in this country. For us, people from the West, this keeps us up at night. What is coming is ethnic cleansing. If there is a big issue, there will be cleansings. Remember the September 2009 events with the Baganda? It just takes one small thing, and see the reaction. The truth is: we're sitting on a time-bomb, we're paying time. People are very concerned."; "Other people are angry at us, and with a reason, I think. We're in a constant pause, and we don't know what to do."; "These kind of tensions happened before: It happened under Amin's time, it happened during Obote's time. Banyonkole are fearing, and that's the word on the street. It is not in the open, but the feeling is deep: people have that feeling: it is becoming more and more pronounced now." A non-Westerner argued: "these people [Westerners] they are right to fear. They come to our villages, they take our land under false pretenses; and they have been in power for way too long. They should think what this means for them."

133 <https://twitter.com/Samwryri/status/1502496168466595847?t=ZLFkWaRoMvIYPPI2nPXGXw&s=09>. Accessed March 2022.

# 4. THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The international community is no neutral bystander in Uganda's authoritarian turn. As financiers of the Ugandan state and government, part of this cost is carried by international donors. It is unclear to what extent donors take the transition question into account in their programming, and how they are preparing for potential crisis scenarios. What is clear, is that its political and development engagements have direct and indirect impacts on Ugandan national political dynamics. Does it want to encourage an orderly transition, or consolidate current dynamics? In case the President unexpectedly passes on at some, Uganda's formal institutions will be under severe pressure during a transition. What will be done in case these mechanisms are not respected?

Uganda's international partners have a range of options between two scenarios at opposite ends of the spectrum. In a maximalist scenario, foreign countries would play an active role in Uganda's transition, for example as mediators in the process. In a minimalist scenario, countries would focus strictly on what an ultimate transition means for their donor dollars. In either case, an internal conversation on the transition and Uganda's authoritarian turn is needed.

## 4.1 THE (LACK OF) A REACTION BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

### 4.1.1 Reactions to the elections

Disturbing developments around the 2021 elections did not receive a forceful response from the international community.

The US was the only donor to take explicit action. In April 2021, the country announced 'visa restrictions on those believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic process in Uganda, including during the country's January 14 general elections and the campaign period that preceded it'. Ned Price, the US State Department spokesperson, had earlier announced the possibility of a 'range of targeted options to hold accountable those members of the security forces responsible for these actions [the election violence]'.<sup>134</sup> Nevertheless, the sanctioned individuals were not named, and no asset freezes or other penalties were issued, which was perceived as anti-climactic by pro-democracy groups.

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134 <https://www.independent.co.ug/joe-biden-warns-uganda-on-2021-election-irregularities/>

The EU made a call in late November 2020 for ‘full and independent investigations into the 18-19 November violence’,<sup>135</sup> but did not signal any consequences. After the elections, it released a similar statement without consequences.<sup>136</sup> No EU member state issued a strong statement. The United Kingdom (UK) issued a particularly weak statement, welcoming a ‘relatively calm passing’ of the election and acknowledging Museveni’s win.<sup>137</sup>

By contrast, the European Parliament adopted a strong resolution in February 2021, which included a call for sanctions against human rights violators during the elections.<sup>138</sup> There however was no meaningful follow-up on the resolution from diplomatic missions, reaffirming the perception that the EU does not see Uganda as a political priority, and is unwilling to take action.

Following the elections, various donor officials emphasised their continued efforts in pushing for accountability through—in the words of one diplomat—a continuous ‘calibration of public engagements and private ones’.<sup>139</sup> One donor official said, ‘We continue pushing it behind the scenes. Every single engagement we have, with government, or military, we are raising these very same issues. It’s something you don’t see a direct result of. You don’t

see it in the paper. We are raising it consistently—we are not letting it go; we are not walking away; we still raise it every opportunity we see’.<sup>140</sup> As one diplomat said, ‘accountability remains important, but we remain realistic about what we can reach’.<sup>141</sup>

As a result, the dominant view is that the Museveni regime ‘got away’ with the human rights violations, with little or no consequences.

#### 4.1.2 Response to corruption

The international response to corruption scandals is similarly lax, despite aid money often being implicated in such incidents, as elaborated in Box D (page 36) and Box E (page 39). At most, strong statements are made, which on some (rare) occasions are accompanied by (very) modest aid cuts. At the same time—and as Tangri and Mwenda wrote in 2008—donors place ‘much faith in Museveni’s repeated declarations of his intention to tackle corruption in Uganda’. Yet, ‘they rarely hold him to his word’ (Tangri & Mwenda 2008, 189-190). Even when small amounts of foreign aid have been suspended, payments are always resumed, even when high-level actors were not held to account and reforms were at best ‘largely cosmetic’ (Human Rights Watch 2013, 55).

135 Mufumba, I. (2020, November 29). ‘Inside Uganda, EU standoff over election observers.’ *Monitor*. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/inside-uganda-eu-standoff-over-election-observers--3213214>

136 Council of the EU. (2021, January 20). ‘Uganda: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union on the elections.’ [Press release] <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/01/20/uganda-declaration-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union-on-the-elections/>

137 Deutsche Welle (2021, 20 January) ‘Uganda elections: Museveni tests patience of international allies’, <https://www.dw.com/en/uganda-elections-museveni-tests-patience-of-international-allies/a-56284767>

138 <http://nilepost.co.ug/2021/02/12/full-report-eu-issues-19-resolutions-on-ugandas-elections-condemns-harassment-of-the-opposition/>

139 Interview EU official, 17-12-21

140 Interview diplomat, 3-12-21.

141 Interview international actor, 15 December 2021. Some are more optimistic about the impact of diplomatic efforts, for example highlighting the effect on police accountability: ‘In the meetings, police does react well on it: people are fired, judged, and so on.’ Another interviewee pointed out that diplomatic pressure led to the police report released in the summer of 2021 although it should be noted that the report provided no accountability for the November 2020 events.

## Box D | Examples of corruption with aid money, and the lack of accountability

- In 2005, health ministry officials embezzled more than \$4.5 million from the Global Fund (to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria). \$200 million in donor funds was suspended. Eventually, aid flows were resumed and lower-level actors were prosecuted (Human Rights Watch 2013).
- Also in 2005, three Ministers and a State House official were accused of swindling up to \$420,000 (UGX 1.6 billion) from the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisations (GAVI). In 2012, all but one of the suspects were acquitted.<sup>142</sup>
- In 2008-2009, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) audits identified \$44 million in inappropriate expenditures, with little action taken by the Government of Uganda. In 2009, a 'line in the sand was drawn', with 11 budget support donors cutting a collective 10 percent in budget support. Although high-level officials stepped down, none of the politicians were prosecuted, and eventually all resumed high-level positions (De Vibe 2012; Hayman 2011, 685).
- In mid-2012, over €12 million of donor aid had been defrauded from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM).<sup>143</sup> The affected countries—Ireland, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark—immediately suspended their aid, as did other donors. In total more than \$300 million was suspended. A whole range of measures were demanded, but never fulfilled (Human Rights Watch 2013, 49; Swedlund 2017, 459). In June 2013, the accountant working for OPM—Geoffrey Kazinda—was convicted and sentenced to five years for abuse of office (Human Rights Watch 2013, 48-49). There ultimately was a repayment by the Ugandan government to the affected donors of \$12.7 million.

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142 *The Independent*. (2013, January 20). 'The untouchables.' <https://www.independent.co.ug/the-untouchables/>

143 Swedlund (2017: p. 459) argues it was \$11 million.

- In 2015, a report documented abuses in a World Bank-funded road construction project, including child sexual exploitation, disappearances (possibly related to trafficking and child marriages), and child labour (Joy for Children, Uganda; Bank Information Center 2015).<sup>144</sup> The bank suspended funding in October of that year. In December, the \$265 million project was cancelled, as neither the Government of Uganda nor the government contractor took corrective steps.<sup>145</sup> As *The Guardian* wrote, ‘The World Bank has suspended funding for projects before, but it is rare for it to completely cancel funds. At least a third of the money had been released’.<sup>146</sup> The bank subsequently reviewed all projects, and, by the end of December 2015, two more projects were suspended.<sup>147</sup> The president of the World Bank was particularly scorching in his statement: ‘The multiple failures we’ve seen in this project—on the part of the World Bank, the government of Uganda, and a government contractor—are unacceptable (...) It is our obligation to properly supervise all investment projects to ensure that the poor and vulnerable are protected in our work. In this case, we did not’.<sup>148</sup> In January 2016, the World Bank suspended the disbursement of funds for two other civil works projects in Uganda.<sup>149</sup>

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144 Joy for Children, Uganda & Bank Information Center. (2015). The impact of the World Bank funded Kamwenge-Kabarole road construction project on children. Joy for Children, Uganda & Bank Information Center. <https://kipdf.com/queue/the-impact-of-the-world-bank-funded-kamwenge-kabarole-road-construction-project-5b0409138ead0e6d4d8b463a.html>

145 World Bank. (2015, December 21). ‘World Bank statement on cancellation of the Uganda Transport Sector Development Project (TSDP).’ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2015/12/21/wb-statement-cancellation-uganda-transport-sector-development-project>

146 Mwesigwa, A. (2016, January 12). ‘World Bank cancels funding for Uganda road amid sexual assault claims.’ *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/jan/12/world-bank-cancels-uganda-road-sexual-assault-claims>

147 Mwesigwa, A. (2016, January 12). ‘World Bank cancels funding for Uganda road amid sexual assault claims.’ *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/jan/12/world-bank-cancels-uganda-road-sexual-assault-claims>

148 World Bank. (2015, December 21). ‘World Bank statement on cancellation of the Uganda Transport Sector Development Project (TSDP).’ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2015/12/21/wb-statement-cancellation-uganda-transport-sector-development-project>

149 Bank Information Center (n.d.). ‘Uganda Transport Sector Development Project (TSDP).’ <https://bankinformationcenter.org/en-us/project/uganda-transport-sector-development-project-tdsp/>

There are several reasons to help explain the lack of donor response. First, donor attention in Uganda is characterised by a focus on the short-term. Between donors and government officials, '[a]n imbalance in the dialogue between short-term corruption scandals and long-term systemic challenges [exists] with the latter issue largely being neglected' (De Vibe 2012, 2). Second, there is, as one interviewee put it, a 'complete lack of connection between technical and political impact'. Development partners have invested extensively in technical reforms, which have had modest, but largely positive results. But these reforms and trainings have been unable to produce larger effects because of Uganda's political situation (Amundsen 2006). In other words, there is 'poor inter-linkage between the technical and political aspects of the dialogue' and development collaboration in general (De Vibe 2012). But political corruption calls for a political solution: it cannot be tackled by a technical approach alone (Amundsen 2006, 2). Third, donor credibility suffers from a lack of follow-up. As one international actor described it, 'First there's a lot of virtue signalling; then it is like: 'let's spend more money!''.

### **4.1.3 The problem with budget support**

The EU and other donors do not only turn a blind eye to both governance transgressions and corruption, but facilitate these developments through their aid programming.

Budget support—aid given directly by donor countries to a recipient government<sup>150</sup>—to Uganda was the dominant mode of aid for many years, but largely stopped after 2012, when it emerged that the Office of the Prime Minister had embezzled up to \$13 million in aid money. In response, many donors suspended their budget support. Others, including the EU, have continued, including in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (see Box E, which details the misuses of COVID-19 relief funds).

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150 This can be general budget support—which is general and unearmarked—or sectoral budget support, which focuses on sector-specific priorities. Budget support is different from project aid, which is given to specific projects, and with the donors in control of financing and management.

## Box E | COVID-19 money mismanagement

International financial institutions (IFIs) provided various funds to cushion the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The IMF's Rapid Credit Facility provided \$491.5 million; the budget support of the World Bank totalled \$300 million<sup>151</sup> (with an additional \$44.9 million through other programmes); and the African Development Bank (AfDB) financed \$31.6 million through its Crisis Response Support Program (CRSP) (Initiative for Social and Economic Rights 2021, 2).

### FIGURE 3

Multilateral international financial institutions' COVID-19 funding to Uganda (in \$ billion)

#### SOURCES OF FUNDING

AfDB

31.6

IMF

491.5

World Bank

344.9

Source: Initiative for Social and Economic Rights 2021, 2

But the bulk of this money was not used for its intended purposes and did not directly benefit the most vulnerable (Initiative for Social and Economic Rights 2021). Many activities that had been announced to target the poor—such as the Urban Cash for Work Programme—have not been implemented due to ‘a sheer lack of commitment by the government to ensuring social protection’ (Initiative for Social and Economic Rights 2021, 5).<sup>152</sup> The funds were not earmarked for specific uses, giving the government greater flexibility but also increasing the risk of mismanagement (Initiative for Social and Economic Rights 2021, 10).<sup>153</sup>

In April 2020, a supplementary classified expenditure budget of UGX 1,401 trillion was approved by the Ugandan government. A month later the World Bank announced a loan of a similar amount (\$300 million) to combat COVID-19.<sup>154</sup> With knowledge of these new funds coming in (ostensibly to combat COVID-19), the

151 World Bank. (2020, June 29). ‘Uganda: World Bank provides \$300 Million to Close COVID-19 Financing Gap and Support Economy Recover.’ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/29/uganda-world-bank-provides-300-million-to-close-covid-19-financing-gap-and-support-economy-recover>

152 The IMF's loan was not used as an economic stimulus but for plans designed long before the pandemic (Initiative for Social and Economic Rights, 2021, p. 4).

153 In the words of a civil society activist: ‘What happened with these grants is beyond understanding: this money came in with basically no strings attached to it, and could have been life-saving. It wasn't, and it's outrageous.’

154 New York City Bar (2020, December 22). ‘Letter raising concerns as to whether a recent World Bank loan made to the Ugandan government may be financing ongoing human rights abuses.’ <https://www.nycbar.org/member-and-career-services/committees/reports-listing/reports/detail/uganda-world-bank>

Epstein, H. (2020, November 25). ‘In Uganda, another Museveni crackdown.’ *New York Review of Books*. <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2020/11/25/in-uganda-another-museveni-crackdown/>

Government of Uganda transferred a similar amount to a classified, undisclosed budget.<sup>155</sup> It is assumed that at least part of this classified expenditure was used to finance the security forces ahead of the 2021 elections, which engaged in major human rights violations.<sup>156</sup>

There has been little to no accountability for these COVID-19 funds. The government did not adhere to the accountability and transparency commitments made to the IFIs, such as quarterly audits (Initiative for Social and Economic Rights 2021, 9-10). Uganda's Auditor General report for 2019-2020 highlighted that almost all COVID-19 funds for that year had accountability issues (Initiative for Social and Economic Rights 2021, 12). The World Bank called the follow-up 'mixed' in February 2021.<sup>157</sup>

Interviews with both international actors and civil society show large frustration both in the way in which the funds were spent, as well as the lack of reaction of the IFIs, which have not pushed for accountability. While aware of the risks associated with these funds, the IMF nonetheless approved another COVID-19 disbursement in July 2021—a three-year (zero-interest) loan of about \$1 billion. It is unclear how accountability measures are strengthened, if at all, under this disbursement.<sup>158</sup>

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155 Barkan et al. (2004, p. 5); and Letter by Agnes N. Kaziba to David R. Malpass 'World Bank Loan Made to the Ugandan Government That May Be Financing Ongoing Human Rights Abuses', 11 June 2021. On file with author; New York City Bar (2020, December 22). 'Letter raising concerns as to whether a recent World Bank loan made to the Ugandan government may be financing ongoing human rights abuses.' <https://www.nycbar.org/member-and-career-services/committees/reports-listing/reports/detail/uganda-world-bank>

156 New York City Bar (2020, December 22). 'Letter raising concerns as to whether a recent World Bank loan made to the Ugandan government may be financing ongoing human rights abuses.' <https://www.nycbar.org/member-and-career-services/committees/reports-listing/reports/detail/uganda-world-bank>  
Epstein, H. (2020, November 25). 'In Uganda, another Museveni crackdown.' *New York Review of Books*. <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2020/11/25/in-uganda-another-museveni-crackdown/>

157 World Bank. (2020, March 14). 'Uganda COVID-19 crisis response and recovery budget support to mitigate COVID-19 pandemic.' <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2021/03/14/uganda-covid-19-crisis-response-and-recovery-budget-support-to-mitigate-covid-19-pandemic>

158 IMF. (2021, July 12). 'IMF country focus: Supporting Uganda's recovery from the crisis.' <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2021/07/01/na070121-supporting-ugandas-recovery-from-the-crisis>



The EU provides budget support to Uganda in a number of sectors, including the country's Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS). In this area, the EU provides budget support of €60 million, for three fiscal years from 2018-2019 onwards (with an annual average disbursement of €20 million).<sup>159</sup> Other bilateral donors to JLOS include Austria and the Netherlands, allocating €22.5 million (for 2019-2025)<sup>160</sup> and €6.4 million (for 2019-2020), respectively (JLOS 2020, 187).

In Uganda, 17 institutions are supported through JLOS (many of which are underfunded by the state), but most funding goes to the police, prisons, Department of Public Prosecution, and courts.<sup>161</sup> The programme's stated objective is to improve the human rights compliance of service delivery in the JLOS sector and to reduce public sector corruption (including 'grand corruption'),<sup>162</sup> through anti-corruption trainings, hotlines, and other formal measures (JLOS 2020).

Budget support in this sector does offer advantages. It has allowed Uganda to make progress on mid-level technical support issues, such as reducing court case backlogs (JLOS 2020; 2021). The question is whether these advantages outweigh the disadvantages, which are significant.

While donors in interviews emphasise they only fund the Ugandan Treasury through budget support, in reality **a substantial amount of donor funds ends up with the police, an institution with a highly problematic human rights and corruption record.**<sup>163</sup> The 2019-2020 annual report shows that 44,9 percent of the sector budget went to the police (UGX 813,20 billion or \$232,4 million).<sup>164</sup> In 2020-2021, those numbers were even higher: 47,7 percent of the budget went to the Uganda Police Force, or \$273,6 million (UGX 957,38 billion).<sup>165</sup> In other words, **JLOS funding to the police was at its highest during the 2021 elections when law enforcement committed major human rights violations.**

According to a 2020 report of Uganda's Inspectorate General, Ugandans consider the police the most corrupt of government agencies (Inspectorate of Government 2020, 75-81). 2020 human rights reports show the excessive and lethal use of force by the police. During the COVID-19 pandemic, public health has been used as a pretext for repression, in which freedoms of expression, assembly, and association were restricted and opposition figures were harassed and arrested. In the aftermath of the 2021 election campaign violence, Security Minister Gen. Elly Tumwine said, 'Police has a right to shoot you and kill you if you reach a certain level of violence. Can I repeat? Police has a right or any

159 ANNEX of the Commission Decision on the Annual Action Programme 2017 in favour of Uganda to be financed from the 11th European Development Fund Action Document for Justice and Accountability Reform (JAR), p. 20-21. JLOS annual reports show these funds have also been disbursed and absorbed. The annual report of financial year 2019/2020 argued how "The Sector registered an overall absorption rate of 98.6% of the released budget" (JLOS, 2020, p. 15)

160 Austrian Development Cooperation (2019) Uganda Country Strategy 2019-2025. Vienna, May 2019.

161 Police, Judicial Service Commission, Human Rights Commission, Directorate of Public Prosecutions, Law Reform Commission, Ministry of Local Government (responsible for Local Council (LC) Courts, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (responsible for Probation and Juvenile Justice), Law Development Centre, Tax Appeals Tribunal, Uganda Law Society, Centre for Arbitration and Alternative Dispute Resolution, Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control, and, the National Identification and Registration Authority. ANNEX of the Commission Decision on the Annual Action Programme 2017 in favour of Uganda to be financed from the 11th European Development Fund Action Document for Justice and Accountability Reform (JAR), p. 7.

162 ANNEX of the Commission Decision on the Annual Action Programme 2017 in favour of Uganda to be financed from the 11th European Development Fund Action Document for Justice and Accountability Reform (JAR), p.34-36).

163 Police bribes are widespread. In one study, 75 percent of respondents had to pay bribes for police assistance, and perceptions of widespread corruption among government officials and police continue to increase (e.g. when compared to 2012) (Kakumba, 2021).

164 UPS (14,2 percent), MoJCA (10,9 percent) and Judiciary (9,7 percent) (JLOS 2020: 183-184).

165 Of this, \$265 million was released, and \$264,1 million spent.

security agency if you reach a certain level, they have a right'.<sup>166</sup>

All of this paints a highly problematic picture of budget support to JLOS by donor countries that claim to support human rights, and explicitly include it as a condition for JLOS budget support.<sup>167</sup> As one respondent noted, 'You know that if you invest in budget support, government use it as they wish; it's wishful support. If you give budget support to JLOS, you fund extra-judicial killing'.

## 4.2 THE COST OF BUSINESS AS USUAL

Donor responses to corruption or governance transgressions share a common thread. At best, international donors are repeating a strategy that has been used for years: publicly pushing for accountability, which does not materialise; then ignoring the problems, which are exacerbated in part by donor funds. In other words, concerns are 'communicated' to the government without consequences; and no red lines exist.

The same playbook was used in response to previous crackdowns, such as the 2016 Kasese massacre (over 100 people killed when the army attacked the royal palace of the Rwenzururu kingdom<sup>168</sup>), the 2009 Buganda riots (at least 40 people killed during two days of civil unrest after a Buganda kingdom delegation was denied access to Kayunga district<sup>169</sup>), or the 2011 walk-to-work casualties (at least 9 killed during protests against escalating food and fuel prices in the wake of the 2011 elections<sup>170</sup>). In the end, no accountability was provided for any of these events.<sup>171</sup>

At worst, donors are even more willing now than before to overlook the governance transgressions of the Museveni regime. The corruption cases between 2005 and 2012 mentioned in Box D above, such as the Global Fund or CHOGM corruption cases, triggered more forceful reactions than the 2021 elections. The arrest of Kiiza Besigye, for example, led to budget support cuts amounting to \$73 million; the World Bank reduced its planned disbursement by 10 percent (Hayman 2011, 677).<sup>172 173</sup> In 2013, in response to the 'anti-gay bill',<sup>174</sup> donors cut \$100 million in foreign aid (Swedlund 2017, 459). In contrast,

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166 In this video: NTVUganda. (2020, November 20). 'UPDF to back policy in enforcing the 9:00pm curfew.' [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0UTbAkkA28> Also here: Amnesty International. (2020, December 14). *Uganda: Stop killings and human rights violations ahead of election day*. [Press release]. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/12/uganda-stop-killings-and-human-rights-violations-ahead-of-election-day/>. The JLOS funding also goes the CCTV camera system (JLOS, 2020, p. 145; 2021, p. 89), which have been used to crack down on opposition. Kafeero, S. (2020, November 27). *Uganda is using Huawei's facial recognition tech to crack down on dissent after anti-government protests*. Quartz Africa. <https://qz.com/africa/1938976/uganda-uses-chinas-huawei-facial-recognition-to-snare-protesters/>

167 "In case of a significant deterioration of fundamental values, budget support disbursements may be formally suspended, temporarily suspended, reduced or cancelled" ANNEX of the Commission Decision on the Annual Action Programme 2017 in favour of Uganda to be financed from the 11th European Development Fund Action Document for Justice and Accountability Reform (JAR), p. 22.

168 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/11/27/legacy-ugandas-kasese-massacre>

169 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/09/10/uganda-investigate-2009-kampala-riot-killings>

170 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/22/uganda-5-years-no-justice-walk-work-killings>

171 For example, the commander in charge of the Kasese attacks was promoted. 'Commander of Kasese Attacks Elwelu Promoted to Lt General', Business Focus, Feb. 8, 2019, available at <https://businessfocus.co.ug/commander-of-kasese-attacks-elwelu-promoted-to-lt-general/>.

172 *NewsWire Newsletter*. (2006, January 22). 'World Bank allots \$135M to Uganda in 2006.' Devex. <https://www.devex.com/news/world-bank-allots-135m-to-uganda-in-2006-47602>

173 *NewsWire Newsletter*. (2006, January 22). 'World Bank allots \$135M to Uganda in 2006.' Devex. <https://www.devex.com/news/world-bank-allots-135m-to-uganda-in-2006-47602>

174 This bill criminalised sexual activity between people of the same sex; and promotion of this by individuals, NGOs or governments.

recent governance transgressions and human rights violations have not led to any serious donor reaction.

**By accepting the short-term consequences of their inaction, donor countries overlook the medium- and long-term costs of this business-as-usual approach.**

First, the international community's reputation is damaged by their business-as-usual engagement with the Museveni regime, both among Ugandans and within their home countries. In Uganda, the lack of a credible response is widely perceived as a legitimisation of the Museveni regime. Civil society leader Godber Tumushabe described international donors in the *Washington Post* as the 'biggest enablers of Museveni's authoritarianism',<sup>175</sup> while retired diplomat Harold Acemah described the EU as having 'bent over backwards in order to accommodate the NRM and Museveni'.<sup>176</sup> On social media, donors are referred to as 'friends of the dictator' by regime dissidents.<sup>177</sup> This lack of response also isolates reform-minded elements in the ruling NRM, and raises the cost of expressing disagreement from within.

There are feelings of frustration internationally as well, with one donor official saying, 'After the many killings, the reports from the mortuaries, the kidnappings, and the fraud: normally with these numbers you have political demarches, and forms of accountability: none of this happened'. Another international actor said, 'People will talk about red lines: but you have thousands of people held incommunicado, with evidence that they've been tortured, held in horrible conditions. They'll never become involved in politics again. And what did the international community do or say? Nothing'.

Second, the limited reaction sends a powerful message to the regime. As one observer said, 'As Museveni realises he can rule with free reign, he is becoming more and more extreme: look at what happens in the recent elections compared to the last three. The regime becomes more and more free: extra-judicial killings happened in broad daylight, and there was NO reaction from donors.' In the words of an international donor official: 'The regime learns what they're doing by learning, and since the donors aren't reacting, they are facilitating it'.

## 4.3 UNDERSTANDING DONOR ACQUIESCENCE

There are a few ways to help explain the lack of urgency amongst donors to address these issues, and to understand the lax position taken on recent governance transgressions and human rights violations. Some of these are internal to the workings of the donor community, others are external.

### 4.3.1 Internal dynamics

First, there is **the life cycle of the diplomat**. Most diplomats and international actors arrive in Uganda with what one diplomat called an 'optimism bias': a widely held view that 'yes, democracy is imperfect; but the country is making progress, and shouldn't be judged too hard and/or according to 'our' standards'.<sup>178</sup>

Second, there is a **lack of institutional memory among international actors**, and particularly among the diplomatic missions, due in part to the high turnover of international staff, which rotate

175 Bearak, M. (2021, January 16). 'In Uganda, Museveni steamrolls to a sixth term. Billions in U.S. aid help him stay in power.' *The Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/uganda-election-museveni-bobi-wine/2021/01/16/9c7945ca-55c9-11eb-acc5-92d2819a1ccb\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/uganda-election-museveni-bobi-wine/2021/01/16/9c7945ca-55c9-11eb-acc5-92d2819a1ccb_story.html)

176 Mufumba, I. (2020, November 29). 'Inside Uganda, EU standoff over election observers.' *Monitor*. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/inside-uganda-eu-standoff-over-election-observers--3213214>

177 Needless to say, donors are uncomfortable with the 'friends-of-the-dictator' label. Musaka, R.S. (2021, October 20). 'What donors say about Museveni in private.' *The Observer*. <https://observer.ug/news/headlines/71585-what-donors-say-about-museveni-in-private>

178 Some argue this attitude changed after the 2016 elections and the 2017 constitutional amendment to change presidential age limits, when it became clear that Museveni was going for a life-time presidency.

after, on average, three years. This rotation comes at a cost. There is a steep learning curve for newcomers, creating a permanent asymmetry of information between diplomats and the Ugandan government. Some international actors claim the handover of contacts from one incoming diplomat to another is limited, or lacking.<sup>179</sup> Amongst international donors, coordination and contact is limited, too, including between the US and EU, Uganda's biggest donors.

As a result, the **knowledge base on power dynamics within the Museveni regime as well as the army is limited**—and carefully guarded by regime insiders. Among European countries, for instance, only France and Italy have a military attaché based in Kampala. The EU Delegation does not have one. In the words of an international actor: 'Because of this, we're a bit blind, for what in essence is a military regime'.

A third point relates to the **funding cycle**. There is an institutional incentive to spend available funding. It is bureaucratically difficult to stop aid, and failure to spend or cutting funds can make it very hard to regain original funding levels at a later date (Brown 2005; Swedlund 2017).

Fourth, for diplomats and international actors in general, Uganda is considered to be a pleasant and easy posting, with a good quality of life. Apart from the electoral period, it is easy to isolate from the political tensions in the country. Many international actors are stationed with their families, with school-aged children enjoying good-quality education in international schools. There is a **social incentive to not engage in provocative policies**, which might create difficulties such as expulsions. As one diplomat summarised, 'while it always goes a little bit worse, it isn't bad enough. As an expat, you have a very

pleasant living situation (...) From this perspective, the international community has an interest in keeping that status-quo. There's a very strong feeling not to rock the boat, to keep the status quo'.

### 4.3.2 Geopolitics

Other ways of explaining the relationship between Uganda and the international community are external, and geopolitical in nature: **the Museveni regime is 'useful' on many levels**. It has proven to be very apt in tapping into priorities of the international community, often making itself indispensable (Fisher 2012; 2013).

First, Uganda is currently hosting 1.5 million refugees. In media and policy circles, it is widely seen as a **role model for the 'most progressive refugee policies'**. Uganda is the flagship country for UNHCR's Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), and, certainly after the European 'migration crisis', is seen as an example of 'regional' countries capable of hosting large number of refugees (Titeca 2021).

Second, **Uganda is a key military ally in the region**, particularly for the US (Branch 2011; Epstein 2017). Since 2007, this particularly was the case through its participation in the AU Mission in Somalia, or AMISOM. The US Africa Command has three forward operating bases in the country where US forces train armies from around the world.<sup>180</sup> Beginning in the early 1990s, it also funnelled weapons through Uganda to the Sudan People's Liberation Army, then under international sanctions.<sup>181</sup> After 9/11, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was added to the US Terrorist Exclusion List,<sup>182</sup> and Uganda became the key ally fighting the LRA. The 2010 Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and

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179 Interview international actor, 8 December 2021

180 <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Volume-II-508-Compliant.pdf>

181 Epstein, Another Fine Mess 2017

182 U.S. Department of State. (n.d.). *Terrorist exclusion list : Bureau of Counterterrorism*. <https://www.state.gov/terrorist-exclusion-list/>

Northern Uganda Recovery Act<sup>183</sup> allowed for further military assistance to the country (Branch 2011; Titeca & Costeur 2014).

More recently, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Ugandan rebel group based in the DRC pledged alliance to the Islamic State and rebranded as the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP). This has become a key international priority, allowing the Museveni regime to (again) rebrand itself in the global war on terror, and tap into new sources of political and military support.

In this context, Uganda receives military support from a range of actors; the US provided security assistance worth \$104 million, \$80,5 million and \$688,000, in 2016, 2018, and 2020, respectively.<sup>184</sup> The US also provided military trainings worth \$9,8 and \$4,8 million to Ugandan military staff (in fields such as military professionalisation, human rights, peacekeeping, border security, and transnational threats).<sup>185</sup> The UK likewise provides military training to Uganda, such as military operations training, human security training, and counter IED training.<sup>186</sup>

Third, Uganda has long been considered **a beacon of stability in an unstable region** and is often called upon to act as a mediator in neighbouring countries (such as Burundi or the DRC). This view however largely ignores the various ways in which the Museveni regime has contributed to conflict in its neighbouring countries, e.g. through supporting armed groups in the Congo (Titeca 2011) or illegally supplying weapons to the South Sudan conflict (Epstein 2017).<sup>187</sup>

### 4.3.3 Suspending budget aid?

This begs the question why budget support has not been suspended.

First, donors may claim that it provides a '**seat at the table**', allowing them a degree of influence on government policies. Cutting or reducing aid would reduce avenues for dialogue, leaving the government isolated, in turn leading to a further deterioration of the situation.

A wealth of research contests this 'seat at the table' argument. It shows that that aid (and its concomitant opportunities for dialogue) has little impact on governance practices of recipient countries (Brown 2005; Brown & Raddatz 2014; Schraeder et al. 1998; Uvin 1998).<sup>188</sup> Interviews with civil society members, journalists, and international actors alike equally reveal frustration with the idea that access translates into influence. As one analyst summarised: 'If it's about getting a seat at the table, what are you doing at the table? If there's no red line to be respected—it can kill and abduct opposition members—you don't have a red line, you only dash out money to keep the regime going and your own administration going'.

Second, **political interests of donors influence their decision to withhold aid or not** (Brown 2005, Brown & Raddatz 2014, Dijkstra 2019). It also impacts their leverage, i.e. their credibility in demanding reform or accountability. It has been shown—for example in the case of Kenya—how donors make threats they are unwilling or unable to enforce (Brown & Raddatz 2014, 46). This is

183 U.S. Government Printing Office. (2010, May 24). *Public Law 111-172*. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-111publ172/html/PLAW-111publ172.htm>

184 Source: <https://securityassistance.org/>

185 US Department of State (2020) 'Foreign Military Training Report, Fiscal years 2019 and 2020. Joint Report to Congress, Volume 1). P.51.

186 The UK provides military training to Uganda, such as military operations training, human security training, and counter IED training. See e.g. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2018-10-08/176667>; <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2019-03-27/237710>; <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2018-10-08/176667>

187 <https://www.dw.com/en/ugandas-double-game-in-south-sudan-civil-war-revealed/a-46500925>

188 Research has shown that an increase in U.S. humanitarian aid actually decrease leverage over African countries (Lyman & Wittels, 2010, p. 83).

particularly the case for governance transgressions, where there is low donor commitment, and largely 'rhetorical endorsement of democratisation', given the strategic interests involved (Brown 2005, 186).

The geopolitical interests of the donor countries in Uganda and their unwillingness to act in response to governance transgressions hence further weaken donor countries' position at the table. The EU's recent decision to reduce its development funding by 10 percent, as shown in Box F, provides a striking example of this dynamic.

## **Box F | Uganda: the only country in Sub-Saharan Africa to have its EU aid reduced**

In October 2021, the EU announced that its development funding for Uganda<sup>189</sup> would be reduced by 10 percent, or €375 million, for the next four years.<sup>190</sup> Uganda was the only country in Sub-Saharan Africa where the EU reduced its aid,<sup>191</sup> despite equally or worse transgressions in other countries in the region. A number of diplomatic sources suggested that the reduction was a compromise between the European External Action Service's (EEAS) demand for a 20 percent reduction in response to the rapidly deteriorating political climate, and the European Commission,<sup>192</sup> which favoured maintaining current budget levels.

The outcome of this compromise was a decision to reduce aid, but not communicate this to the Ugandan government.<sup>193</sup> The problem with this arrangement is that if aid reduction is used as a political tool—signalling donor dismay over deepening authoritarianism—then not communicating its use defeats its very purpose. As one analyst said, 'If it's not communicated, what's the point in doing so? With this money, you can build a hospital in Karamoja, it could be used for many things'.<sup>194</sup>

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189 Under the Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation (NDICI) instrument: European Commission (n.d.). 'Global Europe: Neighbourhood, development and international cooperation instrument.' [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/global-europe-neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/global-europe-neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument_en)

190 General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union (2021) 'Letter to Working Party on Development cooperation and international partnerships' on 'NDICI-Global Europe programming: provisional country allocations.' Brussels, 21 October 2021.

191 An EU official argued the reduction was part of a seven-year package, with the overall amount still to be determined. He said the '10 percent figure was a mistake of someone who forget to delete the column, which was not for public consumption.' Interview EU official, 17-12-21

192 And particularly the Directorate General for International Partnerships

193 In the words of a high-level international actor, the way in which it was decided seems to have been 'in the best case they [the GoU] will not notice.' Interview high-level international actor, 3 December 2012.

194 Interview diplomatic actor, 7 December 2021

Academic literature on autocracies and political change makes a distinction between ‘high-stake’ and ‘low stake’ moments, which should inform donors on the best time to engage on reform. In the former, autocrat’s political survival is at stake—through mass opposition, or the use of high-intensity coercion; whereas the latter are moments of relative regime stability. During ‘high-stake’ moments, autocrats are much less inclined to change; whereas low-stake moments present political openings (Hackenesch 2015, 93-94; Ditrich and Wright 2012; Wright 2009).<sup>195</sup>

In Uganda, this plays out in a number of ways. When the President perceives an immediate threat, which could impact his political survival, pressure by the international community is of lesser concern: Donor countries are not keeping him in power. In fact, anti-international community rhetoric allows Museveni to shore up his own legitimacy, by uniting against a common enemy. In the recent elections, the President went to great lengths to provoke the

international community, suggesting he was not concerned with financial consequences, as long as he remained in power. This dynamic has a cyclical element. After severe crackdowns in politically contentious periods—mostly elections—Museveni tries to repair some of the damage; for example by making promises in the field of human rights.

In theory, Uganda is in a low-stakes moment. The president is sworn in and has a cabinet, and there are no immediate threats to his regime. Indeed, following his inauguration, he met with foreign ambassadors and a number of prominent human rights activists, softening his strong anti-foreigner rhetoric with a more reconciliatory tone. But in reality the question is whether the distinction between low and high stakes still holds in Uganda’s current circumstances. As described above, the regime continues to take a hostile stance towards the international community, indicating a downward authoritarian trend.

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195 Paradoxically, in high-stakes situations, donor countries are under severe pressure to act.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Authoritarianism has become dominant in Museveni's Uganda.

During his 36 years in power, Museveni has nurtured a complex system of patronage and corruption to secure political loyalty, which has intensified in recent years as pressure on the system built. Relying on the security apparatus, increasingly coercive and repressive tactics are deployed to quash opposition and silence dissent. The authoritarian nature of the Ugandan regime revealed itself fully during the 2021 elections, which were characterised by brutal violence and human rights abuses, including extra-judicial killings, torture and kidnappings, as well as increased and unprecedented hostility toward foreign actors. Perpetrators of these crimes continue to escape accountability.

The effects of Uganda's neo-patrimonial, militarised regime have come into starker relief in view of an impending transition of power. As the inner core of the regime is becoming narrower, ethnic tensions are building. Largely suppressed under Museveni, they might break out into the open in a transition—Uganda's history shows how warning signs can easily deteriorate into something existential.

With growing fear that Uganda is heading toward major crisis, the EU and other foreign donors are presented with stark choices. As financiers of the Ugandan state and government, part of this cost is carried by international donors.

Yet donor response to Uganda's authoritarian slide has been lax. By presenting Uganda as a useful partner to Europe, Museveni has created a situation in which the interests of international donors and the Ugandan government have become closely intertwined. As a result, Western diplomats are typically reluctant to express more than mild criticism of Museveni's government. But while Museveni continues to strategically play to donor interests, his government has become increasingly repressive and corrupt.

As donors need the success story of Uganda, they are quick to turn a blind eye to corruption scandals, abuses committed by Ugandan security forces either in-country or in regional missions, or the closing space for civil society and pro-democracy forces. In short, Museveni's Uganda escapes donor scrutiny and accountability as it would risk spoiling Uganda's—and, by extension, the EU's—image, allowing the Museveni regime to use donor support to protect its interests and grip on power.



Yet this carefully crafted, decades-long relationship of mutual benefit is becoming increasingly untenable.

Unprecedented repression has caused opposition leaders, analysts and civil society actors alike to criticise donor activities, cautioning the EU that they may be propping up a corrupt regime. At the same time, Museveni's government has targeted EU-financed democracy projects, and adopted an increasingly hostile anti-Western rhetoric of foreign interference and imperialism.

The EU's wait-and-see mode reflects its perceived limits to their maneuvering space: any critical statement may be used to substantiate the government discourse on interference by foreign backers. Moreover, there is a latent fear that cutting

off Museveni's funds may drive him further into the arms of Russia and China.

Being under pressure from two sides should prompt donors to rethink their position, especially as peace and stability are set to be more elusive in the years to come.

This growing legitimacy problem presents the EU and other donors with a dilemma. By accepting the short-term consequences of their inaction, donor countries overlook the medium- and long-term costs of their business-as-usual approach. But as long as the EU continues to frame its relations with Uganda in terms of regional stability, Museveni will not lose his persuasive power in the West. Yet short-term stability politics tend to eventually backfire.

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