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

**THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

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## INTRODUCTION

Who will succeed Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, and under what circumstances? Given Museveni's advanced age—he turns 78 later this year and has been in power for 36 years—this is no longer a purely theoretical debate. Although this 'transition question' is on many people's minds and is the subject of much informal speculation and debate, it is barely discussed publicly—except through a discussion of the 'Muhoozi project', the way in which Museveni's son, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, is being pushed forward as a candidate.

In this situation, there is no real debate on the transition issue under the Museveni regime. At best, discussions on the transition are not welcomed; at worst, those who dare to address it or who harbor their own presidential ambitions are punished. According to one journalist, 'the conversation is absolutely muted. People think it's not worth having a conversation about; you'll be taking the wrong side'.<sup>1</sup>

The transition question highlights the increasingly authoritarian nature of Museveni's regime: political space has been increasingly closed off; state institutions have been structurally weakened and replaced by a largely personalised system of governance, and the prospect of change via the ballot has become increasingly unlikely.<sup>2</sup>

Given these dynamics, Uganda is heading to a major political crisis, with a high potential for violence among groups competing for power—a process which will bring ethnicity further to the foreground. The donor community, and the European Union (EU) in particular, must account for this reality in their policies as they relate to Uganda. A business-as-usual approach will only further entrench these dangerous features of Uganda's political system.

This policy paper is a summary of a longer report, which was based on: 72 interviews with key informants, including Ugandan analysts, civil society representatives, journalists, and national and international officials (diplomatic and non-diplomatic); a literature review of the relevant issues; and previous research in Uganda over the past two decades.

First, the paper describes the current dynamics of the Museveni regime. Next, it examines the ways in which the transition could unfold. Finally, it describes what the impending transition means for the international community and the EU in particular.

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1 Interview international actor, December 8, 2021.

2 This lack of prospect of change through the ballot was predicted by a World Bank report in 2004: 'Yet as the experience of the 2001 elections made clear, there is no real prospect of a change of government via the ballot.' Joel Barkan, Saillie Kayunga, Ndung'u Njuguna, Jack Titsworth, *The Political Economy of Uganda: The art of managing a donor-financed neo-patrimonial state*, Background paper commissioned by the World Bank in fulfillment of Purchase, 2004, p. 26. This has only become more pronounced.

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MUSEVENI REGIME

The Museveni regime has long been considered a ‘hybrid regime’ at the crossroads between ‘democratisation and authoritarianism’.<sup>3</sup> Both in academic and policy circles, economic and political governance in the Museveni regime was viewed as a ‘two level game’ with authoritarian tendencies on the one hand—corruption, violence, and a narrowing political space—and efforts for political and economic liberalisation on the other, including a free press, active civil society, and macro-economic reforms.

This consensus has quickly evaporated in recent years<sup>4</sup> as the regime’s authoritarian tendencies have overshadowed all others. The next sections describe the key aspects of this authoritarian rule: patronage and corruption, state violence, and a narrowing political space.

### Patronage and Corruption

Patronage, or the exercise of power through patron-client relations, has historically been a feature of the Museveni regime as a source of political legitimacy.<sup>5</sup> But this feature has further intensified over recent years.<sup>6</sup>

Patron-client relations permeate all sectors of state and society, creating both wealth and political legitimacy for those involved. Opportunities for wealth creation come from association with the president and other regime insiders.<sup>7</sup> 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 Museveni and his regime.<sup>8</sup>

Patronage functions as a pyramid-like system. At the top is the first family, described as a ‘monarchy, with a strong military influence’ with ‘near absolute control over the state and vital sectors of the economy held by Museveni and his extended family’.<sup>9</sup>

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- 3 Aili Mari Tripp, *Museveni’s Uganda: Paradoxes of power in a hybrid regime*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010, p. 1; Henni Alava, Jimmy Spire Ssentongo, ‘Religious (de)politicisation in Uganda’s 2016 elections,’ *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 2016, volume 10, issue 4, pp. 677-692. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2016.1270043>; Eloïse Bertrand, ‘Opposition in a hybrid regime: The functions of opposition parties in Burkina Faso and Uganda,’ *African Affairs*, 2021, volume 120, issue 481, pp. 591-610. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adab023>; Jeffrey Conroy-Krutz, Carolyn Logan, ‘Museveni and the 2011 Ugandan election: did the money matter?’ *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 2012, volume 50, issue 4, pp. 625-655. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X12000377>; Roger Tangri, ‘Museveni’s Uganda: paradoxes of power in a hybrid regime,’ *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 2011, volume 29, issue 2, pp. 233-235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2011.562005>
  - 4 Eg. Rita Abrahamsen, Gerald Bareebe, ‘Uganda’s 2016 elections: not faking it anymore,’ *African Affairs*, 2016, vol 115, issue 461, pp.751-765. doi:10.1093/afraf/adw056; Rita Abrahamsen, Gerald Bareebe, ‘Uganda’s fraudulent election,’ *Journal of Democracy*, 2021, volume 32, issue 2, pp. 90-104. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0021>
  - 5 Nelson Kasfir, ‘Uganda,’ in ‘Countries at the crossroads, 2004; a survey of democratic governance,’ Freedom House, 2004 pp. 419-435; William Reno, ‘War, debt and the role of pretending in Uganda’s international relations.’ Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen, 2000, [https://teol.ku.dk/cas/publications/publications/occ\\_papers/reno2000.pdf](https://teol.ku.dk/cas/publications/publications/occ_papers/reno2000.pdf)
  - 6 Sam Hickey, Badru Bukenya, Haggai Matsiko, ‘Pockets of effectiveness, political settlements and technopols in Uganda: From state-building to regime survival,’ Working Paper 172, Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID), 2021.
  - 7 Kristof Titeca, ‘Its own worst enemy? The Ugandan government is taking desperate measures to control rising dissent,’ Policy Brief, Egmont, January 15, 2019, <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/ugandan-government-its-own-worst-enemy/>
  - 8 Lisa Rolls, ‘The shadow state in Africa: DRC, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe,’ *Democracy in Africa*, 2021, pp. 71-85, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354605732\\_The\\_Shadow\\_State\\_in\\_Africa](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354605732_The_Shadow_State_in_Africa)
  - 9 Ibidem, p. 70.

State budgets play an important role in these patronage dynamics: Funds from different ministries and government agencies are used for political and electoral purposes<sup>10</sup>, particularly around election years.<sup>11</sup> There is an overall consensus that access to major budgets offers opportunities for rent-seeking but also comes with an obligation to contribute funds to the regime.<sup>12</sup> Beneficiaries include permanent secretaries of ministries, heads of revenue-collecting agencies, and so on. These actors are able to acquire enormous personal wealth, which in turn makes them further dependent on the regime.

Patronage is characterised by a strong personalisation of government affairs and micromanagement by the president. Museveni is always considered to be the final—or only—authority on any issue or conflict. The president regularly intervenes in public administration or on particular policy implementation. Such personalisation not only undermines the power of the Ugandan institutional framework, it also has a major impact on the distribution of political power and influence: The number of national-level political figures with major influence in Uganda is limited and declining.<sup>13</sup> Many National Resistance Movement (NRM)—the ruling party—ministers are politically weak because their major source of power is their link with the president and their appointments part of a patronage strategy to gain power at the sub-regional level. The ruling

power lies elsewhere, with permanent secretaries, or actors within the state house—people whom receive direct orders from the president.

A similar dynamic exists between the private sector and the regime; there is a close connection between economic and political power in Uganda, with private sector entities expected to contribute financially to Museveni's regime in order to avoid problems<sup>14</sup>. A form of crony capitalism has emerged in which well-connected business benefit from state assistance, tax breaks, or access to land.

In Uganda, corruption, as Barkan et al. already noted in 2004<sup>15</sup>, is a central 'mechanism for regime maintenance,' which explains the 'unwillingness of the government to bring corruption under control'.<sup>16</sup> This reality explains the government's two-faced approach to corruption. Publicly, there is substantial attention to the problem; Museveni regularly addresses the issue in high-level speeches.<sup>17</sup> Behind the scenes, however, corruption has only increased. High-level actors consistently escape prosecution—as a 2013 Human Rights Watch report summarised, the regime 'let[s] the Big Fish swim.'

In recent years, these tendencies have only intensified, in part because of the increasingly competitive nature of politics<sup>18</sup> in the country. Frustrated at formal institutions' ability to deliver

10 'The Political Economy of Uganda: The art of managing a donor-financed neo-patrimonial state,' op. cit. p. 57.

11 'Pockets of effectiveness, political settlements and technopols in Uganda: From state-building to regime survival,' op. cit, p. 8.

12 'The shadow state in Africa: DRC, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe,' op. cit. p. 81.

13 The most prominent examples in recent years are former Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi and General Sejusa.

14 Roger Tangri, Andrew Mwenda, 'Change and continuity in the politics of government-business relations in Museveni's Uganda,' *Journal of East African Studies*, 2019, issue 4, pp. 678-697. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2019.1655879>.

15 Joel Barkan, Saillie Kayunga, Ndung'u Njuguna, Jack Titsworth, *The Political Economy of Uganda: The art of managing a donor-financed neo-patrimonial state*, Background paper commissioned by the World Bank in fulfillment of Purchase, 2004

16 'The Political Economy of Uganda: The art of managing a donor-financed neo-patrimonial state,' op. cit. p. 4

17 For example, in 2021, he specifically addressed the issue during two high-level speeches: his Martyrs day and State of the Nation speeches.

18 The 2003-2005 'third term' debate was a watershed moment in that regard. Old guard members were replaced by new ones, 'individuals who are inclined go along with whatever Museveni wants, even if they disagree with his decisions.' 'The Political Economy of Uganda: The art of managing a donor-financed neo-patrimonial state,' op. cit. p. 28. As a result, the President has been largely surrounded by what Barkan et al (op. cit. p.29) called 'sycophants.'

on his campaign promises, Museveni 'increasingly brought mainstream policy functions within State House and circumvented formal institutional mechanisms to reach out to people directly'.<sup>19</sup> In doing so, he insisted on policies that were politically attractive but made no sense from a development perspective.

Another factor is the changing demographics of the country. In Uganda, youth now constitute a large majority; 80 percent of the population is below the age of 30. Many of these young people are unemployed, and patronage has become a major way in which the regime has tried to build legitimacy among this group, especially since its members were born after Museveni came to power and therefore have no ideological ties to him.<sup>20</sup> Electoral politics have been increasingly monetised, with candidates literally distributing money to individuals or groups.<sup>21</sup>

Among young politicians, a principal claim to legitimacy has been their loyalty to the president and his patronage capacity.<sup>22</sup> A similar dynamic has happened within the public administration. Among the older generation, there was a 'normative tendency to uphold bureaucratic standards' out of a sense of patriotism.<sup>23</sup> The younger generation is a product of their environment; as one analyst said, '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>24</sup>

Corruption in general and patronage in particular pose major risks for Uganda's stability; since political and economic favours can't be handed out to everyone, the majority of the country receives no benefit. But Museveni does not rely only on the carrot; the stick of militarisation and coercion are also instrumental to his staying power.

## State Violence Under Museveni

The military is central to the Museveni regime: it was instrumental in his rise to power and has been essential to his long tenure.

Coercion and repression by the security services historically has been used by the regime as a way to control dissent, particularly around elections. For example, long-standing opposition candidate Kizza Besigye has been arrested by the security services, often violently, on scores of occasions; he has also been held under house arrest. In recent years, the government has stepped up its use of force to suppress any opposition. The 2021 elections were a dramatic example: the brutal 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

19 'Pockets of effectiveness, political settlements and technopols in Uganda: From state-building to regime survival,' op. cit.

20 The 'liberation argument' has for a long time played – and continues to play – an important role in Uganda's politics, i.e. that President Museveni and the NRM brought peace and stability to a divided country. This argument was never really important for the youth group – they were born after President Museveni came to power. Anna Reuss, Kristof Titeca, 'When revolutionaries grow old: the Museveni babies and the slow death of the liberation in Uganda,' *Third World Quarterly*, 2017, volume 38, issue 10, pp.2347-2366.

21 This practice first emerged in April 2013 when the president gave a large sack of money to a youth group in Eastern Uganda (said to contain \$100,000). 'President Yoweri Museveni's sack of money sparks Uganda row,' BBC, April 22, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22245873>. See: Titeca, Kristof (2014) 'The Commercialization of Uganda's 2011 Election in the Urban Informal Economy: Money, Boda-Bodas and Market Vendors,' in: Perrot, Sandrine; Makara, Sabiti; Lafargue, Jerome; Fouéré, Marie-Aude (eds.) *Elections in a hybrid regime. Revisiting the 2011 polls*. Kampala: Fountain publishers, pp.178-207.

22 Titeca, K. (2019) 'Its own worst enemy? The Ugandan government is taking desperate measures to control rising dissent.' *Africa Policy Brief*, Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations.

23 Peterson (2021) shows that this also occurred during the Amin regime. Peterson, D., Vokes, R., Abiti, N., & Taylor, E. 'The unseen archive of Idi Amin: Making history in a tight corner.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2021, volume 63, issue 1, pp.5-40. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417520000365>

24 Interview analyst, December 9, 2021.

after the arrest of Bobi Wine—the main opposition challenger. Many of those killed were bystanders, deliberately targeted by the security forces.<sup>25</sup> From November 2020 onwards, around 1000 people were kidnapped, mostly from Wine’s National Unity Party (NUP). They suffered torture, beatings, and other abuses.<sup>26</sup> The extreme violence sent a strong message: Opposition to the regime comes at a hefty price.

As with incidents of corruption, the use of violence and coercion is characterised by a lack of accountability: no accountability has been provided for the November 2020 killings<sup>27</sup> or kidnappings<sup>28</sup>, notwithstanding promises by the government, including the president. Previous major human rights violations under Museveni have also gone unpunished, including the 2016 Kasese massacre (over 100 people killed<sup>29</sup>), the 2009 Buganda riots (at least 40 people killed<sup>30</sup>), and the 2011 walk-to-work casualties (at least 9 killed<sup>31</sup>). There was no accountability for any of these incidents; on the contrary, the commander in charge of the Kasese operation was promoted.<sup>32</sup>

## Narrowing Political Space

Political space is getting increasingly narrow, as was illustrated by the 2021 elections, which saw a severe crackdown against opposition candidates and Bobi Wine and the NUP in particular. The COVID-19 crisis unfortunately provided cover for the regime’s efforts to restrict opposition, control media, and stifle civil society.<sup>33</sup> The government also severely limited election monitoring activities for national and international actors, donors, NGOs, journalists, and other actors.

In general, the government has taken an aggressive stance towards civil society in recent years. In November 2019, around 12,000 NGOs were shut down in what was labeled a ‘chilling crackdown’ for failing to renew their status.<sup>34</sup> In August 2022, the NGO bureau, under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, suspended the activities of 54 NGOs found to be ‘non-compliant with the NGO act, 2016’.<sup>35</sup> As a result, many civil society organisations are in survival mode, with fewer organisations willing to take political risks by challenging the regime.

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- 25 ‘One Year Later, No Justice for Victims of Uganda’s Lethal Clampdown,’ Human Rights Watch, November 18, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/18/one-year-later-no-justice-victims-ugandas-lethal-clampdown>.
- 26 Taylor, L. & Wandera, D. ‘Mass abductions in Uganda: What we know and don’t know,’ African Arguments, May 25, <https://africanarguments.org/2021/05/mass-abductions-in-uganda-what-we-know-and-dont-know/>.
- 27 ‘One Year Later, No Justice for Victims of Uganda’s Lethal Clampdown,’ op. cit.
- 28 ‘Uganda: Hundreds ‘Disappeared,’ Tortured,’ Human Rights Watch, March 22, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/22/uganda-hundreds-disappeared-tortured>.
- 29 When the army attacked the royal palace of the Rwenzururu kingdom. Oryem Nyeko, «The Legacy of Uganda’s Kasese Massacre», Human Rights Watch, November 27, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/11/27/legacy-ugandas-kasese-massacre>
- 30 During two days of civil unrest after a Buganda kingdom delegation was denied access to Kayunga district «Uganda: Investigate 2009 Kampala Riot Killings», Human Rights Watch, September 10, 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/09/10/uganda-investigate-2009-kampala-riot-killings>
- 31 During protests against escalating food and fuel prices in the wake of the 2011 elections «Uganda: 5 Years On, No Justice for ‘Walk to Work’ Killings», Human Rights Watch, April 21, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/22/uganda-5-years-no-justice-walk-to-work-killings>
- 32 For example, as for Kasese, the commander in charge of the operation was promoted. «Commander of Kasese Attacks Elwelu Promoted to Lt General», Business Focus, February 8, 2019, <https://businessfocus.co.ug/commander-of-kasese-attacks-elwelu-promoted-to-lt-general/>.
- 33 ‘Uganda’s fraudulent election», op. cit.; «Managing elections under Covid-19 pandemic conditions: the case of Uganda,’ op. cit.
- 34 Alon Mwesigwa, ‘Uganda bans thousands of charities in ‘chilling’ crackdown,’ The Guardian, November 21, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/nov/21/uganda-bans-thousands-of-charities-in-chilling-crackdown>.
- 35 ‘Uganda: Uganda’s NGO Bureau suspends the activities of 54 NGOs in the country,’ International Federation for Human Rights, September 9, 2021, <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/uganda-uganda-s-ngo-bureau-suspends-the-activities-of-54-ngos-in-the>.

The government has also taken an increasingly hostile approach towards the international community, particularly since the 2021 elections. Museveni widely suggested that those who participated in the November 2021 riots in Kampala were 'agents of foreign interests'<sup>36</sup> and 'homosexuals'<sup>37</sup>, and he congratulated the army for 'defeating the insurrection that the traitors, with their foreign backers, attempted to stage a few weeks ago'.<sup>38</sup> The regime also expelled a number of foreign donor officials, and, in February 2021, suspended the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF), a donor initiative aiming to support democratic governance, peace, and stability in Uganda. In a letter written by Museveni, DGF, and its European funders were presented as wanting to overthrow the government

and inspiring armed resistance.<sup>39</sup> The DGF remains suspended up to today.

In the meantime, there has been a sustained effort to bring international aid under government control. For example, in September 2021, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development instructed development partners to channel their money 'through the Treasury instead of going directly to projects,' as doing so would ensure that 'there is no duplication of services'.<sup>40</sup> An earlier letter by the ministry indicated that all donor programs must be signed off on by the ministry, and that all programs and project should be jointly prepared and implemented with government agencies.<sup>41</sup>

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36 Isaac Mufumba, 'USA, European NGO chiefs deported over Bobi Wine,' Monitor, November 23, 2020, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/usa-european-ngo-chiefs-deported-over-bobi-wine--3207296>.

37 Misairi Thembo Kahungu, 'Museveni warns public on riots,' Monitor, November 20, 2020, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/museveni-warns-public-on-riots-3205012>.

38 Derrick Kiyonga, 'Museveni's 3 security duty bearers,' Monitor, January 3, 2021, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/museveni-s-3-security-duty-bearers-3246298>.

39 In his letter, Museveni accused the finance permanent secretary, Keith Muhakanizi, of having 'irregularly and unilaterally' licensed DGF to be operated with very limited involvement of Ugandans.' Isaac Mufumba, 'DGF-govt talks hit deadlock, hold up billions of cash,' Monitor, January 4, 2021, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/dgf-govt-talks-hit-deadlock-hold-up-billions-of-cash-3460846>

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

41 Ibidem.



## THE ROLE OF THE DONOR COMMUNITY

Donor aid cannot be seen as separate from these dynamics. In 2004, a widely publicised report<sup>42</sup> commissioned by the World Bank and leaked in the Ugandan press argued that donor aid was central to the corruption of the Museveni regime<sup>43</sup>, through budget support, allowing for discretionary spending, and going along with patronage dynamics. While the scale of budget support has declined since then, such funding continues, perpetuating these problems.

Funding during the pandemic provides one example. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank provided \$491.5 million and \$300 million<sup>44</sup> (and an additional \$44.9 million through other programs) respectively. But the bulk of the money was not used for its intended purposes and did not directly benefit the most vulnerable.<sup>45</sup> For instance, in April 2020—a month before the World Bank announced its budget support for the pandemic—a supplementary classified expenditure budget of approximately

the same amount was approved by the Ugandan government.<sup>46</sup> Classified budgets are not public and are considered ‘slush funds’.<sup>47</sup> At least part of this classified expenditure is understood to have been used to finance security forces for the 2021 elections; in other words, World Bank funds facilitated major human rights violations.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, shortly after the IMF loan, all 317 MPs who supported the removal of the presidential age limit from the Constitution, were awarded \$10,800 each.<sup>49</sup>

In general, the government did not adhere to accountability and transparency commitments required by the IMF or World Bank; quarterly audits of the COVID-related budget spending were promised but not provided.<sup>50</sup> These organisations were aware of the dangers and difficulties yet did nothing to ensure proper use of the money. In the words of a diplomat, ‘until today, there has not been any form of accountability on how the Ugandan government has spent the funds—this has led to

42 ‘The Political Economy of Uganda: The art of managing a donor-financed neo-patrimonial state,’ op. cit.

43 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.’ The Political Economy of Uganda: The art of managing a donor-financed neo-patrimonial state, op. cit. p.66.

44 ‘Uganda: World Bank provides \$300 Million to Close COVID-19 Financing Gap and Support Economy Recover,’ World Bank, June 29, 2020, <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>

45 ‘Where did Covid 19 money go? International finance institutions’ funding to Uganda,’ Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER), 2021.

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

47 ‘The Political Economy of Uganda: The art of managing a donor-financed neo-patrimonial state,’ op. cit. p.5; 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; Letter from the New York City Bar raising concerns as to whether a recent World Bank loan made to the Ugandan government may be financing ongoing human rights abuses, op. cit.

48 Letter from the New York City Bar raising concerns as to whether a recent World Bank loan made to the Ugandan government may be financing ongoing human rights abuses, op. cit.; ‘In Uganda, another Museveni crackdown,’ op. cit.

49 Kristof Titeca and Anna Reuss (2021) ‘Museveni and the West. Relationship status: It’s complicated,’ African Arguments, 7 January 2021.

50 ‘Where did Covid 19 money go? International finance institutions’ funding to Uganda,’ op. cit. pp. 9-10).

large frustration, as nothing has happened.’ Despite that, the IMF approved another COVID disbursement in July 2021—a three-year (zero-interest) loan of about \$1 billion with no indication that increased accountability will be forthcoming.<sup>51</sup>

Another example comes directly from the EU, which provides budget support to a number of sectors in Uganda’s government, including the Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS), for which it has been providing €60 million for three fiscal years starting in 2018-2019<sup>52</sup> (other bilateral donors to JLOS include Austria and the Netherlands).<sup>53</sup> While a total of 17 institutions are supported through JLOS, ‘frontline’ institutions such as the police, prisons, Department of Public Prosecution, and courts receive most of the funding.

The EU’s goal for such funding is to improve the human rights compliance of service delivery in the JLOS sector and reduce public sector corruption (including ‘grand corruption’).<sup>54</sup> But, in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, when the police received 44.9 and 47.7 percent of JLOS funding, it—and other security services—committed major human rights violations, especially during the 2021 elections.

These are not isolated examples but rather fit into a historical pattern in which donor aid—and budget aid in particular—is used to entrench corruption.

Nevertheless, research has shown the limited reactions of donor countries to corruption scandals involving donor aid in Uganda.<sup>55</sup> Although small amounts of foreign aid have been suspended on occasion, funding has always resumed, even when high-level actors were not held to account and reforms were at best ‘largely cosmetic’.<sup>56</sup> This continues up to today; the ‘refugee corruption scandal’ being the most recent example<sup>57</sup>: in November 2018, it emerged that Uganda’s refugee response had suffered from major corruption—including large numbers of ‘ghost refugees’, whose profits were pocketed by government officials. None of the high-level government officials has been held accountable; with most of the donor aid having resumed.<sup>58</sup>

Reaction to large-scale human rights violations has been similarly muted: an initial push for accountability, which does not materialise, followed by expressions of concerns—until the issue eventually disappears from the agenda.<sup>59</sup> After the

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

52 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 that ‘the Sector registered an overall absorption rate of 98.6 percent of the released budget,’ Annual report 2019/2020, Justice Law and Order Sector, p. 15.

53 Uganda Country Strategy 2019-2025, Austrian Development Cooperation, May 2019.

54 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), Annual report 2019/2020, op. cit. p.34-36). Proponents of budget support to this sector argue how it allows to make progress on technical benchmarks, such as for example court case backlog. While it in this way ‘buys’ particular technical outcomes, it does raise a series of fundamental questions, particularly about support to the police.

55 ‘The Political Economy of Uganda: The art of managing a donor-financed neo-patrimonial state,’ op. cit; ‘Change and continuity in the politics of government-business relations in Museveni’s Uganda,’ op. cit

56 “Letting the big fish swim”: Failures to prosecute high-level corruption in Uganda,’ Human Rights Watch, 2013, p. 55.

57 Titeca, ‘Whom depends on whom.’

58 Titeca, ‘Whom depends on whom.’

59 This was the case for the (abovementioned) events such as the 2009 Buganda riots, the 2011 walk to work casualties, and the 2016 Kasese massacres.

November 2020 killings of the protestors, the EU made a call for ‘full and independent investigations’<sup>60</sup>, but it did not link that demand to any specific consequences.<sup>61</sup>

One reason for this apparent indifference is geopolitics; the Museveni regime is politically useful as a refugee-hosting country<sup>62</sup> and as a key military ally in the region, particularly for the US. The Museveni regime has proven to be very skilled at tapping into priorities of the international community.<sup>63</sup> There is a consensus that donors don’t want to risk their strategic relationships with Uganda for the sake of democratic reforms or accountability.<sup>64</sup>

But failing to confront the Museveni regime does have consequences for donors.

First, their continued business-as-usual engagement with Museveni hurts their reputation, both among Ugandans and within their home countries. Civil society leader Godber Tumushabe described international donors in the *Washington Post* as the ‘biggest enablers of Museveni’s authoritarianism’<sup>65</sup> while retired Ugandan diplomat Harold Acemah described the EU as having ‘bent over backwards in order to accommodate the NRM and Museveni’.<sup>66</sup>

Second, donors’ inaction in the face of corruption sends a message to the Ugandan government.<sup>67</sup> As one journalist summarised, ‘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.’

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

61 Also among the international community, this inaction led to a large degree of frustration. As one policy official summarised: “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.” While the calls for accountability keep being raised on a diplomatic level, they have not yielded much impact.

62 Adam Branch, ‘Displacing human rights: War and intervention in northern Uganda,’ Oxford University Press, 2011; Helen Epstein, ‘Another Fine Mess: America, Uganda, and the War on Terror,’ *Columbia Global Reports*, 2017.

63 Jonathan Fisher, ‘Managing Donor Perceptions: Contextualizing Uganda’s 2007 Intervention in Somalia,’ *African Affairs*, 2012, volume 111, issue 444, pp. 404–423.; Jonathan Fisher, ‘Some More Reliable than Others:’ *Image Management, Donor Perceptions and the Global War on Terror in East African Diplomacy*, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 2013, volume 51, issue 1, pp. 1–31.

64 The only cost has been the public telling off by Museveni and a range of uncomfortable meetings with ministers (when pushing for accountability for the November riots).

65 Max Bearak, ‘In Uganda, Museveni steamrolls to a sixth term. Billions in U.S. aid help him stay in power,’ *The Washington Post*, January 16, 2021, [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)

66 ‘Inside Uganda, EU standoff over election observers,’ op. cit. Similar concerns are shared among many other actors (including within the international community), whose principal concern is the lack of red lines by international community.

67 One analyst summarised: ‘They [donors] might think it works now; but when things go bad, it will harm, as it has done in the past, and as it will do in the future. There’s no scenario in which these institutions [the security institutions] will adhere to human rights practices; you’ll be fooled when you think this is happen.’ In other words: By largely continuing business as usual, the donor community is facilitating further governance transgressions. One international actor described current political dynamics as a ‘road which is getting more and more deadly, with the international community pursuing the same strategies of empty talking points, just going for the motions.’

## POTENTIAL TRANSITION SCENARIOS

Broadly speaking, there are two possible scenarios for the transition, each of which has similar consequences.

In the first scenario, the president-for-life option, Museveni remains in power until his death. Technically, in that case, the Constitution calls for the vice president to take over and for elections to be held within three months, a period in which the NRM would need to find a candidate. But, given the highly personalised nature of rule, the country's fragile institutions, and a lack of political space for potential candidates, the party's success in that endeavour would not be guaranteed. A variety of constituencies would have a say in that process, including (but not limited to) the military, and different factions within the NRM, including regional, ethnic, and political factions. It is doubtful if the Ugandan political settlement will be able to handle these tensions: there is a high risk of a disorderly, unconstitutional, and violent clash over a potential candidate; the consequences of such a clash are unpredictable and could range from the establishment of a more authoritarian state (in a best-case scenario) to regional conflict in a worst-case scenario.

In a second possible transition, Museveni's son Muhoozi Kainerugaba would take power. Muhoozi has over the years rapidly risen through the ranks of the Army: initially as commander of the Presidential Guard Brigade, which eventually evolved into the Special Forces Command (SFC), created in 2008<sup>68</sup>, and currently as the commander of the Army's land forces.<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, recently, the principal way in which the 'transition debate' is held is through a rather aggressive campaign to promote Muhoozi, including through an active social media campaign and his increased regional political role (e.g. through meetings with Rwandan President Kagame). The most plausible explanation for this campaign is that the president is testing the waters to see how a Kainerugaba candidacy would be perceived.

If Muhoozi becomes the successor—in the case of the sudden death of the president, through an arranged transition, or through (flawed) elections—the consequences are equally unpredictable: the 'Muhoozi project' previously put the Ugandan political settlement under serious pressure, as during

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68 Without parliamentary approval, as required under the UPDF Act.

69 The SFC, which is by far the most well-armed and resourced branch of the military, has grown in size and capacity and at present has de facto control of all strategic military assets 'The shadow state in Africa: DRC, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe,' op. cit. p. 73.

the 2013 Tinyefuza/Sejusa scandal – when liberation veteran General David Tinyefuza (aka Sejusa) in early 2013 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 the quick ascendance of the son. The regime responded with a grand military reshuffle that affirmed the end of the veteran era and signaled an increasing concentration of power over the military and the state in the hands of the first family.<sup>70</sup>

Muhoozi does not have the popularity or constituency of his father. Interviewees point out that his candidature is not uniformly welcomed in the state administration, as it leads to ‘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.’

Notwithstanding his power in the military<sup>71</sup>, a potential takeover by Muhoozi could create severe tensions with other groups within the Army and party, who equally eye the Presidency and/or who feel uncomfortable with the ‘Muhoozi project’. These tensions—which play out along a variety of lines, including ethnicity, which is described in the next section—are largely suppressed under Museveni. The latter still has sufficient political legitimacy—largely through his patronage networks—to hold the Ugandan political settlement together, but they might break open in a transition. In any case, the ‘Muhoozi project’ will lead to increased reliance on the use of coercion, ultimately leading to an unpredictable escalation and in a worst-case violent conflict with regional implications.

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70 Anna Reuss, Kristof Titeca, ‘When revolutionaries grow old: the Museveni babies and the slow death of the liberation in Uganda,’ *Third World Quarterly*, 2017, volume 38, issue 10, pp.2347-2366.

71 It can be argued that Muhoozi and his contemporaries have taken over key positions within the Army, which some describe as the ‘SFCasation’ of the Army. At the same time, key actors from the older generation have been strategically sent into retirement, or into less powerful positions, particularly since the 2013 Sejusa affair. Muhoozi’s influence goes beyond his formal position; he is able to make decisions and represent the army in ways that go against the hierarchy.

## THE ROLE OF ETHNICITY IN THE TRANSITION

There is a consensus that ethnicity will play a central role in any eventual transition. Ethnicity—and ethno-regional cleavages in particular—are a key socio-political factor in Uganda’s postcolonial history. This section does not aim to offer a complete overview of the importance of ethnicity for Ugandan politics but aims to highlight the main issues for the upcoming transition.

As in many other African countries, ethno-regional cleavages can be traced back to colonial times. The colonial state introduced major inequalities, entrenching ethnicity and regional differences as socio-political identifiers.<sup>72</sup> This trend continued in Uganda’s postcolonial history as subsequent governments were unable to overcome these dividing lines.<sup>73</sup> Ethnicity and region were central in the ‘unabated biases in the distribution of state power, accompanied by violent repression and civil war’.<sup>74</sup>

Initially, Museveni wanted to break with this vicious cycle of ethnic exclusion and violence: A central point of the NRM’s 10-point program was the consolidation of national unity and elimination of all forms of sectarianism—whether ethnic, regional, or religious.<sup>75</sup> For example, Museveni abolished

the multi-party-political system upon coming to power, and passed an Anti-Sectarian Law in 1988, criminalising the promotion of sectarianism (ethnic, regional and religious)<sup>76</sup>. After re-introducing multi-party politics (through referendum in 2005, and multi-party elections in 2006), Museveni adhered to a ‘big tent’ political philosophy that aimed to transcend ethnic boundaries.

But ethnicity continued to play an important role throughout his regime.

First, ethno-regional balancing remained a central issue in the political settlement under Museveni. The Baganda are a clear example. As the largest ethnic group in the country, the ‘Buganda question’ historically has been important in Uganda politics.<sup>77</sup> The inclusion of the Baganda were central in Museveni’s ‘big tent’ strategy; he awarded Baganda individuals government positions and restored the Buganda kingdom (in a cultural sense, not as a political institution).<sup>78</sup>

Second, Museveni, in a form of patronage, prioritised the creation of polities for ethnic groups, particularly using districts and the recognition of kingdoms. The

72 Rudy Doom, Koen Vlassenroot, ‘Kony’s message: A new Koine? The Lord’s Resistance Army in Northern Uganda,’ *African Affairs*, 1999, volume 98, issue 390, pp. 5-36. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.afraf.a008002>

73 Federick Golooba-Mutebi, Sam Hickey, ‘Investigating the links between political settlements and inclusive development in Uganda: Towards a research agenda,’ *Effective States and Inclusive Development Research Centre (ESID)*, 2013.

74 Stefan Lindemann, ‘Just another change of guard? Broad-based politics and civil war in Museveni’s Uganda,’ *African Affairs*, 2011, volume 110, issue 440, pp. 387-416. p. 394, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adr023>

75 Eric Kashambuzi, ‘Anti-sectarian law was made to protect sectarianism,’ *The Observer*, January 7, 2009, [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)

76 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)

77 Phares Mukasa Mutibwa, (Ed.). *The Buganda factor in Uganda politics*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2008.

78 Inclusion of the Baganda was the result of what Golooba-Mutebi and Hicky (2016: 605) called a ‘pragmatic understanding of the politics of ethno-regional balance in Uganda, whereby Museveni’s own minority group from western Uganda recognised the need to build a solid alliance with Baganda as the most numerous and powerful group.’ Sam Hickey, Federick Golooba-Mutebi, F., Bukenya, B., Guloba, M., & Izama, A., *Uganda Horizon Scan 2016 Update*, DFID Uganda, 2016.

number of districts under the Museveni regime has increased from 56 districts in 2002 to 146 today.<sup>79</sup>

Nevertheless, the relationship between the Museveni regime and the Baganda has gradually been deteriorating because the Baganda felt excluded from power<sup>80</sup>, leading to separation, mistrust, and finally open conflict in 2009 during the 'Buganda riots', in which more than 40 people died.<sup>81</sup> Instead of reducing tensions, the creation of districts and kingdoms further entrenched and fuelled ethnic conflict<sup>82</sup>, the clearest example of which has been the Rwenzori massacre, in which more than 100 people were killed.<sup>83</sup>

Most importantly, power under the Museveni regime has become increasingly concentrated along ethnic lines. A 2011 analysis by Stefan Lindemann in *African Affairs*.<sup>84</sup> on the ethnic and regional composition of the Ugandan state (based on key staff from 1986 to 2008) shows that the NRM government has a clear overrepresentation of Westerners, which are 'not only overrepresented in Cabinet, but also clearly dominated the inner core'.<sup>85</sup> This dynamic is mirrored within the NRM party, civil service, and parastatal

agencies. Notwithstanding the NRM's emphasis on anti-sectarianism, there has been a concentration of power among groups from the West, particularly among the Banyankole/Bahima—the ethnic group of Museveni. Lindeman ends his article with a pessimistic note, fearing that 'the country may be sitting on a 'time bomb'<sup>86</sup>, particularly in terms of violence against the ruling region and ethnicities.

Since that report, the inner core of the regime has become even more homogenous, both regionally and ethnically. As one analyst pointed out, the more the regime has been under pressure, the narrower its power base has become, including within the government and security services.<sup>87</sup> While institutions might overall have a diverse ethnic base, that is not the case for the top positions, which remain firmly in hands of people of the West. In the Army, for instance, although there is a large proportion of officers from the North and East in middle-rank positions, many respondents point out the lack of promotion opportunities for these groups, resulting in feelings of disgruntlement.<sup>88</sup> A professional career only takes a soldier so far but ultimately does not allow for progression, for which

79 Kristof Titeca 'Decentralisation and regime control in Uganda', in: Wiegatz, Joerg, Martinello, Giuliano, Greco, Elisa (eds.) *The making of neoliberal Uganda: The political economy of state and capital after 1986*. London: Zed Books, 2019.

80 Elliott Green, 'Decentralisation and conflict in Uganda,' *Conflict, Security & Development*, 2008, volume 8, issue 4, pp. 427-450, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678800802539317>

81 'The clash of institutions: traditional authority, conflict and the failure of 'hybridity' in Buganda,' op. cit. p. 11.

82 'Decentralisation and conflict in Uganda,' op. cit; Elliott Green, 'Patronage, District creation, and Reform in Uganda,' *Studies in Comparative International Development*, volume 45, issue 1, pp. 83-103, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-009-9058-8>

83 Reuss, Anna and Kristof Titeca (2017) 'Beyond ethnicity: the violence in Western Uganda and Rwenzori's 99 problems,' *Review of African Political Economy*, 44 (151): 131-141.

84 Stefan Lindemann, 'Just another change of guard? Broad-based politics and civil war in Museveni's Uganda,' *African Affairs*, 2011, volume 110, issue 440, pp. 387-416, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adr023>

85 'Just another change of guard? Broad-based politics and civil war in Museveni's Uganda,' op. cit., p. 396.

86 *Ibidem*, p. 416.

87 A number of respondents mentioned reports of recruitments in the security services along ethnic lines—a program called 'receive and train,' in which Western groups are favored and fast-tracked. 'Uganda: Investigate use of lethal force during riots.' Human Rights Watch, October 1, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/10/01/uganda-investigate-use-lethal-force-during-riots>

88 A 2011 analysis from the UPDF shows that these groups are eventually denied training and promotion. 'Just another change of guard? Broad-based politics and civil war in Museveni's Uganda,' op. cit., a trend that has become even more pronounced in the past decade.

personalised relations are needed, and the right ethno-regional identity is key. Military promotions to a large extent hinge on trainings, offered by foreign forces. Within the army, there are strong feelings that these trainings are only offered to the 'core' group of people from the 'Bahima/Banyankole/Banyarwanda hegemony'.<sup>89</sup> Overall, respondents note an increasing unease within the Army with the rapid progression of certain actors and groups to the detriment of others.

Ethnicity played a particularly important role in the 2021 elections. For the first time in multi-party elections under Museveni, the main opposition candidate, Bobi Wine, or Robert Kyagulanyi, did not originate from the Western region, but from Buganda. As Wilkins et al<sup>90</sup> 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 party, the National Unity Platform, was portrayed as an ethnic Baganda party and as having profoundly ill intentions towards other ethnic groups. The Museveni regime accused NUP of promoting 'sectarianism'.<sup>91</sup> In this narrative, Baganda were portrayed as the biggest threat to peace: If they were to win, 'non-Baganda would be chased from their land, they would lose their properties – it would be history repeating itself,' in the words of one

journalist. According to a businessperson, 'the NRM would say: I'm the one protecting you: what they [the Baganda] want is Federo<sup>92</sup>; they want to kick everyone out. Non-Baganda feel insecure that their property will be destroyed. (...) These are dangerous and inciting tactics: what they [the NRM] say on the podia is very different from what their teams on the ground.' The extent to which these narratives influenced the election is open for debate, but while NUP overwhelmingly won the vote in the Buganda region, they overwhelmingly lost in all other regions.

The overall situation is potentially explosive, with ethnicity coming increasingly to the foreground, and with a continuing concentration of power in the Western region. Ethnic tensions are hotly debated on social media: Bobi Wine called out the tribalism of the Ugandan government.<sup>93</sup> Political events are increasingly seen through an ethnic lens: the discussion around the legitimacy of the health treatment abroad of speaker of parliament Jacob Oulanyah devolved into accusations of tribalism.<sup>94</sup> Land conflicts are also increasingly seen along ethnic lines, for example in the Buganda region. Moreover, the Baganda feel that recent violence, including the November 2020 riots (in which at least 54 people were killed) and the political kidnappings, specifically targets them.<sup>95</sup>

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89 When trainings are offered to non-Westerners, they primarily focus on issues such as battle-tactics, not areas that could lead to further promotion.

90 Sam Wilkins, Richard Vokes, Moses Khisa, 'Briefing: Contextualizing the Bobi Wine factor in Uganda's 2021 elections.' *African Affairs*, 2021, volume 120, issue 481, p. 630. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adab024>

91 Frederic Musisi, 'Why Buganda slipped out of NRM grip,' *Monitor*, January 25, 2021, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/special-reports/elections/why-buganda-slipped-out-of-nrm-grip-3268874>

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

93 Bobi Wine, '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,' Post on Twitter, March 7, <https://twitter.com/HEBobiwine/status/1500709045723930624>

94 Derrick Kiyonga, 'North-South differences flare up Uganda's body politic,' *Monitor*, February 27, 2022, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/north-south-differences-flare-up-uganda-s-body-politic-3730792>; Timothy Kalyegira, 'In Oulanyah's death tribalism rears its ugly head,' *Monitor*, March 27, 2022, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/in-oulanyah-s-death-tribalism-rears-its-ugly-head-3762014>; 'Oulanyah's death exposes strains in the thread that holds Ugandans together,' *The EastAfrican*, April 2, 2022, <https://www.htsyndication.com/the-east-african/article/oulanyah-s-death-exposes-strains-in-the-thread-that-holds-ugandans-together/59687945>

95 The minister of Internal Affairs, Gen. Jeje Odongo, had to explicitly state in parliament how 'Buganda is not being targeted'. These feelings among the Baganda also how ethnicity intersects with the above question of the 'youth bulge': the combination of the strongly growing youth population and grim economic situation further entrenches ethnicity as a political lens and identifier. See also: 'Uganda: Why Buganda Slipped Out of NRM Grip', *Daily Monitor*, 25 January 2021, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202101260064.html>.



The concern is that ethnic tensions could erupt into something more lethal, as they did in the September 2009 ‘Buganda riots’<sup>96</sup>, during which there were cases of targeted violence against the Banyankole, who were targeted based on their appearance or accent.<sup>97</sup> More recently, in January 2021, there were reports that between one<sup>98</sup> and four busses<sup>99</sup> coming from Western Uganda— President Museveni’s home region—were attacked in Kampala, on the same day as the announcement of the election results and the false report that NUP MP and Bobi Wine ally Francis Zaake had been shot dead. It therefore is particularly Westerners, which have major concerns (including many Western ethnic groups are not part of the ‘ethnic core.’) As one businessman argued:

‘For us, people from the West, the others think that we have profiteered. 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.’

A wide variety of other Westerners echo similar feelings. A journalist phrased it in the following way:

‘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.’<sup>100</sup>

In this context, there is a major risk that these ethnic tensions will flare up during any eventual transition, particularly a disorderly one. One Ugandan Twitter account with more than 12,000 followers, tweeted on March 12: ‘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 and final. Bone and blood. That’s how this country will move on stronger’<sup>101</sup>. One analyst said: ‘I hope we do not degenerate into ethnic tensions. But that will depend on the organisational capacities [of the state]. I believe the opportunity is still there, but it is more than high time. I fear institutions have become too weak to handle this.’ While President Museveni might have the networks, reach and legitimacy to transcend these divisions, and hold the political settlement together, this seems unlikely without him.

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96 With two days of protest by the Baganda in which at least 40 people were killed. ‘Uganda: Investigate use of lethal force during riots,’ op. cit.

97 ‘More deaths in Kampala riots,’ *New Vision*, September 11, 2009.

98 Interview journalist and diplomatic actor, Kampala.

99 James Opio, ‘Evidence: Hooligans attacking buses from Western Uganda used iron nails in petrol bombs,’ *TrumpetNews*, January 21, 2021, <https://trumpetnews.co.ug/evidence-hooligans-attacking-buses-from-western-uganda-used-iron-nails-in-petrol-bombs/>

100 A number of other quotes are useful to illustrate these concerns: “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. Banyankole 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.”

101 Chaos Theory, post on Twitter, March 12, 2022, consulted on March 13, 2022, <https://twitter.com/Samwyri/status/1502496168466595847?t=ZLFkWaRoMvlYPPi2nPXGXw&s=09>

## THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IN ANY TRANSITION

Although the transition question is looming over much of Uganda's day-to-day politics, the international community has not begun to appropriately address the issue.<sup>102</sup>

Of course, the Ugandan population will determine its own future, but other countries—and donor countries in particular—have a role to play as well. Importantly, the international community should be aware of its direct and indirect impact on national political dynamics, and any eventual transition. Muhoozi's recent efforts on the international stage are a good example of the role foreign governments play in shaping Uganda's political climate. On Twitter, Muhoozi regularly posts photos of his meetings with foreign ambassadors. These posts (and photos) have a clear aim: to increase his national legitimacy by showcasing his international network (e.g., one tweet<sup>103</sup> described the Italian ambassador as 'My best European Ambassador. He is my brother.'). By meeting Muhoozi, these ambassadors side-line the formal military hierarchy, strengthen Muhoozi's position as a political figure, and further entrench the personalised form of governance in Uganda. The photos present Muhoozi in a statesman-like manner, bolstering his position politically and giving him an advantage over other potential candidates. 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.'

For the international community, there are two potential approaches that can be categorised as minimalist and maximalist. In the latter scenario, the international community plays an active role in discussions preceding the transition and/or during the transition, consisting of a dialogue with the key players at the national level.

In a minimalist scenario, the international community should speak among themselves about the transition and what it means for their presence and aid delivery. Such a conversation needs to go beyond the technical and tactical day-to-day planning and instead place the transition at the heart of every policy and decision: In what way can each country's projects and actions in Uganda contribute to an orderly transition, rather than a further escalating authoritarianism?

This points at a wider issue: it is important for the international community to urgently take the transition question into account in its political and development engagements: in what way do they help to lay the ground for an orderly transition, or in what way do they help to strengthen current dynamics?

The main risk of the international community's 'business as usual' strategy is that it further facilitates and entrenches ongoing authoritarian dynamics, further weakening institutions, and hence, a disorderly transition. As history and dynamics in the region show—such as the current events in Ethiopia—warning lights can easily deteriorate into an existential crisis, with violence and instability in the wider region.

A disorderly transition would bear enormous costs for Uganda but also for the development investments of other countries. The international community needs to act in some way or another; the failure to do so is a form of complicity, according to one analyst: 'If the EU and others keep as they are, and don't act to prepare a peaceful transition, they become complicit of a crisis post-Museveni'.<sup>104</sup>

102 One international analyst described the scenario-planning exercise of a major international donor this way: 'No one talked about the transition, it could not be mentioned. When I discussed this with the head, he argued: 'It is too difficult to have this on the agenda.'" Interview international actor, December 8, 2021. Some international actors have scenario plans in place but they are not reflected in actions.

103 <https://twitter.com/mkainerugaba/status/1431581380492894211>

104 Interview analyst, December 3, 2021.

## CONCLUSION

Given President Museveni's advanced age—he turns 78 later this year—his transition from power no longer is a purely theoretical debate. And although the issue looms over Ugandan politics, there is no real debate on the issue. Yet, the current institutional context—characterised by patronage, corruption, and a strong personalisation—makes this transition highly unpredictable, and potentially very costly. The key takeaways are as follows:

### **Develop a Strategic Approach to the Transition Question**

Foreign capitals have generally shown little interest in Uganda, except where the country aids their own geopolitical interests. This needs to change given the risk of a disorderly and violent transition. The current 'business as usual' approach strengthens the authoritarian tendencies of the regime, with the international community playing a direct and indirect role in this. The EU has a strategic role to play in Uganda, and is well-placed to provide support for, and help coordinate a peaceful transition. But this requires an honest reflection on how the EU uses its foreign policy tools to place a political solution at the centre of its engagement with the country. The transition needs to become a transversal issue for the international community, both in its political and development support to Uganda. It should develop a comprehensive scenario-based framework for engagement on the succession question, integrating development, diplomatic and security approaches.

### **Improve Clarity of Purpose**

Governance and democracy support require a political choice, and a deliberate strategy to incentivise stakeholders towards a peaceful transition. That strategy should be guided by good governance principles—transparency, accountability, inclusion, participation, and the rule of law. It requires the EU to be bold while recognising that supporting democracy is a political challenge that will take concerted commitment and perseverance. In the absence of an overarching EU policy framework for democracy support, the EU will need to spell out with greater clarity its political objectives in Uganda, and how it will use its diplomatic capital to achieve them. This is particularly important in a context where EU security and migration policies have been perceived as decoupled from its commitments to democracy. Being clear about the EU's political ambition would also improve coordination within EU services, as well as amongst other donors.

### **Broaden the Conversation**

It is crucial for the international community to take position, but any transition will need to be owned by Ugandan citizens. One way of doing so is by broadening the conversation on the transition and elevating other actors in Ugandan civil society, independent media and local communities. The EU should encourage initiatives by these groups to weigh in on Uganda's political future, and make special effort to include and reinforce women's, youth and groups based outside the capital.

### **Place Citizens at the Core of EU-Uganda relations**

Vibrant citizen action can pave the way for a new generation of politics but comes with a great risk in the highly repressive context that is Uganda. Such action deserves continued attention, solidarity and support, and the EU needs to articulate a more strategic approach to supporting civil society: particularly in the context of the increased crackdown on foreign support to civil society, it is increasingly important to continue this support in novel ways. The EU should look for ways to improve civil society's access to interact directly with donors on their needs. In the current environment of repression and intimidation, it should also strengthen its protection mechanisms for human rights defenders.

### **Better Track Aid Dollars**

Authoritarian trends should not be unintentionally reinforced. Budget support, which is especially vulnerable to misuse in Uganda's fragile democratic context, must be suspended in favour of other forms of aid. Other aid streams entrenching its antidemocratic tactics will need to be reviewed accordingly. A forensic understanding of the ways in which money is spent should be included in funding agreements from the start—not a common practice at present.

As major donors to Uganda, the EU and its member states can use their leverage to demand accountability. In case of persistent failure to comply—as described in this paper—they should spell out consequences for bilateral relations. Together with other international partners, it should build political will for the coordinated adoption of targeted sanctions through the EU’s Global Human Rights Sanctions regime.

## **Suspend Support to Security Services**

As a priority, support to the security services should be stopped, given their continuous, well-documented yet unaccounted involvement in human rights abuses. This includes funding to the JLOS program, which funds the Ugandan police. Failure to do so, in view of past malfeasance, is increasingly perceived as tacit approval of the Museveni regime, and risks contributing to a disorderly transition. It also undermines the credibility of EU external action by risking to diminish the very bonds between governments and citizens EU foreign policy professes to support

## **Improve Understanding of Intra-regime Dynamics**

To ensure aid dollars are appropriately spent, donors must invest in a better understanding of the Ugandan context, given the ‘warning lights’ identified in this paper. At the moment, this knowledge base is insufficient, partly due to the limited institutional memory in many diplomatic missions. Time and resources will need to be invested to remedy this. This particularly is the case for the role of ethnicity, and for dynamics inside the Museveni regime: the transition debate primarily is an intra-regime issue, and needs to be approached and analysed in this way.

One way of doing so, is to cultivate relationships with a more diverse range of actors in Uganda. For example, the EU Delegation does not have a military attaché, and understanding of the crucial role of the armed forces in Uganda remains limited. Ties to regional and ethnic leaders, beyond the capital, should be prioritised, too.



