

## **Uganda's Presidential election 2016: A foregone conclusion**

By Samuel Kasirye\*

### **1. Results**

On Saturday 20th February, shortly before 4pm East African time, retired army general, Yoweri Museveni, Uganda's 71 year old incumbent president was announced winner of the much contested 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016 Uganda presidential general election amid violence and allegations of vote rigging. Mr. Museveni garnered 60.8 percent of the total votes cast while his main challenger Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) candidate Dr. Kiiza Besigye came a distant second with 35.3 percent of the vote with the other presidential candidates failing to raise above single digit figures.

**Fig 1: Uganda Presidential Election results**

<b>Candidates</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yoweri Kaguta Museveni	National Resistance Movement (NRM)	5,617,503	60.75%
Kizza Besigye Kifefe	Forum for Democratic Change (FDC)	3,270,290	35.37%
Amama Mbabazi	Independent	132,574	1.43%
Abed Bwanika	Peoples Development Party	86,075	0.93%
Baryamureeba Venansius	Independent	51,086	0.55%
Maureen Faith Kyalya Waluube	Independent	40,598	0.44%
Benon Buta Biraaro	Farmers Party	24,675	0.27%
Mabirizi Joseph	Independent	23,762	0.26%

Source: <http://www.ec.or.ug/?q=presidential-election-results-2016>

---

\*Samuel Kasirye is Programme Manager at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Please note that this election report only reflects on political processes until 25th February 2016. The views and opinions expressed in this brief are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

**Fig 2: The 2016 General Elections Statistics**

<b>The 2016 General Elections Statistics</b>	
The number of nominated candidates for Presidential Elections	8
The number of registered political parties and organizations in Uganda	29
The number of districts in Uganda	112
The number of counties in Uganda	249
The number of constituencies in Uganda	290
The number of sub counties in Uganda	1,403
The number of parishes in Uganda	7,431
The number of villages in Uganda	57,842
The number of polling stations in Uganda	28,010
The estimated number of pages of the National Voters' Register (hard copy)	600,000
The number of registered voters in Uganda	15,277,198

Source: See more at: <http://www.ec.or.ug/?q=content/2016-general-elections-statistics>

Earlier on Saturday before declaration of the results, election observers from the African Union, European Union, the Commonwealth, and the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), among others, released their initial findings judging that the overall elections suffered from democratic shortcomings, although still remaining largely peaceful. Former Nigerian President Obasanjo, the head of the Commonwealth observer team noted that "These elections fell short of meeting some key democratic benchmarks ... namely, the increased prevalence of money in politics, the misuse of state resources, which led to significant advantages for the incumbent, and the confidence, credibility, and ability of the electoral commission to manage the process effectively and impartially."<sup>1</sup>

The EU election observer statement noted that "The Electoral Commission (EC) lacks independence, transparency and the trust of stakeholders. The EC narrowly interpreted its mandate by limiting it to the organisation of the technical aspects of the elections. Moreover, the EC lacked transparency in its decisions and failed to inform the voters and contestants on key elements of the electoral process in a timely and comprehensive manner"<sup>2</sup>.

However, in a sudden twist, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC) commended the Uganda's Electoral commission for "conducting free and fair elections".

In a press conference held by President Yoweri Museveni at his country home on Sunday 21st February, he said that the National Resistance Movement (NRM) had earned the mandate of the people and anyone who disputed the election would be defeated. He vowed to put a "political end" to the Ugandan opposition in his new five year term branding them a bunch of liars who had no vision for Uganda. When the president was probed about the negative election observer's reports, he said that the European Union has no audacity to preach democracy to him, questioning their knowledge of Uganda's history.

---

<sup>1</sup> See, The African Union election observation mission to the 18 February 2016 general elections in the republic of Uganda press statement Kampala, 20 February 2016

<sup>2</sup> See, <http://www.eueom.eu/files/pressreleases/english/PreliminaryStatement>

## **2. The aftermath**

As results trickled in from the different parts of the country, violence erupted in the capital Kampala on 19th Friday, when police stormed FDC's party offices in Kampala, arrested Dr. Besigye with several party leaders under concerns of illegally running a parallel vote-counting centre. The detention of FDC's presidential candidate sparked widespread rioting in the capital with gunfire and teargas used to disperse crowds.

In a statement released from his home, Besigye noted that; "We have just witnessed what must be the most fraudulent electoral process in Uganda. We participated in this process to highlight and show the world quite how fraudulent this military regime is. The Electoral Commission is not independent and its technical incompetence and partisanship has been made clear for all to see. The voting material was not delivered in time. People were unlawfully removed from the Voters' Register whilst ghosts were wantonly added. Freedoms of assembly and expression were wantonly curbed. We were not free to carry out our campaigns without intimidation and interference from the partisan Uganda Police Force and the NRM's militia dubbed the Crime Preventers"<sup>3</sup>.

Dr. Besigye of the FDC and the third-placed Candidate Amama Mbabazi under the now popular "Go Forward" Slogan have consequently rejected the results and the former has called on his supporters on to march to the Uganda Electoral Commission headquarters on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> February to deliver a petition against the results. On the other hand, Museveni in his victory press statement stated that he had mobilised 80,000 service men from the police and army, adding that no one had the capacity to cause chaos in Kampala or Uganda.

## **3. Uganda electoral system and electoral reforms**

The 2016 election marked the 3rd time Uganda was holding the election under the Multi- Party dispensation. From 1986 to 2005, Uganda was under the NRM, a one party political system. This system applied the principle of individual merit to those aspiring for political office, in essence, every Ugandan was by law a member of the Movement and candidates stood on their own merit and campaigned as such. A referendum on change of political system was held in July 2005 and Ugandans chose multi-party political system. The Political Parties and Organizations Act, No.18 of 2005 (PPOA) was passed against the background of a successful transition from the movement to the multiparty political system.

As is for all election cycles in Uganda since 2006, they were early calls for constitutional reforms to ensure a smooth voting process and to forestall the violence that has bedeviled the past elections. A cross section of civil society organisations and opposition political parties has been traversing the country drumming up support for constitutional amendments before 2016. The government has also weighed in bringing proposals that they say are expected to consolidate the democratic gains that have been registered over the years since 1986.

---

<sup>3</sup> For full statement, see, <http://www.howwe.biz/news/politics/10719/kizza-besigye-rejects-polls>

It is interesting to note that even with few months to the elections, Uganda's opposition political parties and civil society organizations were still demanding for electoral reforms underlining the need for a new electoral management system before presidential vote. The opposition Forum for Democratic Change, the Uganda People's Congress, the Conservative Party, the Democratic Party and the Justice Forum also insisted for a new, independent and impartial Electoral Commission. The parties also stated that there should be no involvement of security forces in the electoral process and the role of police should be strictly to ensure public order. On the contrary, activities of those parties were being routinely blocked. Other demands included a new voters' registry, removal of security forces and militias from the election process, clear demarcation of electoral boundaries, reforming how election presiding officers are selected, establishing a new system of adjudicating election outcome disputes among others.

Curving under pressure, Parliament voted on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2015 to pass the controversial Constitution (amendment) Bill 2015. The only notable changes were allowing Independent Members of Parliament to cross to political parties of their choice a year ahead of elections and the change of the name of the electoral body into Independent Electoral Commission. Others demands were subsequently not considered in the August house where the ruling NRM has a majority.

## **4. Deciding themes for the elections**

### **Media, access to information and the internet shut down**

To add to the frustrations witnessed on voting day, the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) on 18th February 2016 blocked access to social media platforms like WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook via mobile phones and the popular mobile money network over concerns about "national security" during the election period.

The actions committed by the UCC are engrained in numerous regressive laws have been enacted in recent years by Uganda's parliament. The Regulation of Interception of Communications Act 2010, the Anti-Terrorism Act 2002, Anti-Pornography Act 2014, the Public Order Management Act 2013 and the Anti-Homosexuality Act 2014 (later annulled by the constitutional court) have drawn criticism from human rights activists both locally and internationally due to their severity and infringement on privacy, access to information and freedom of expression online and offline. These laws generally impede citizens' rights granted by the constitution under the guise of safeguarding national security or protecting public decency.

Sarah Jackson from Amnesty International in a statement described the shutdown of social media as a "blatant violation of Ugandans' fundamental rights to freedom of expression and to seek and receive information"<sup>4</sup>.

### **Violence and intimidation**

Violence in the Uganda presidential election to many observers has been identified with the so called "crime preventers". The concept of crime preventers was first introduced prior to the 2011 elections through the community policing framework. The crime preventers, who are mostly youths, underwent training in community policing courses

---

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.monitor.co.ug/Elections/UCC-shutdown-of-social-media-backfires>

aimed at empowering them with self-defense skills, ideological orientation, crime prevention and patriotism. In various parts of the country, the incumbent President Mr. Museveni passed out thousands of passing out these cadets, many in yellow T-shirts which is the symbolic party colour for the NRM.

The crime preventers have been accused of intimidation of opposition politicians, voter bribery and being partisan in their execution of their duties.

However the precise mandate, command structure is still vague since there is no legal statute establishing the program. The Prime Minister, Hon. Ruhakana Rugunda noted that government would later table a bill in parliament as there was insufficient time before the elections for parliament to adequately debate such a law.

### **Money and the commercialization of politics**

In 2010, the President of Uganda signed into law the Political Parties and Organisations (Amendment) Act, which sanctions public funding of political parties in the country. This is in addition to public funding of presidential candidates in elections as previously provided for under the Presidential Elections Act (2005).

However, there is a custom of political candidates offering motivation in cash and in kind to voters in return for their support. Reports by civil society organisations note that some political parties and numerous political candidates have spent extraordinary amounts of money on things and services that are clearly intended to induce citizens to support their candidature.

According to Alliance for Election Campaign Finance Monitoring (ACFIM) observers, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) party candidates are leading by far in terms of campaign spending. The party accounts for 87 percent of the total minimum observed expenditures reported by ACFIM in the months of November and December. NRM is trailed by Independent Candidates who have spent (7.9 percent), followed by other parties such as FDC (2.1 percent), Go Forward political group (1.1 percent), DP (0.5 percent), UPC (0.3percent) and other parties (0.3percent)<sup>5</sup>.

This scenario supports the argument from many stakeholders about the growing levels of commercialization of politics in Uganda which stands as a major bottleneck to the country's democratization process.

### **Main parties, developments and political alliances**

In June 2015, leaders of Uganda's major opposition political parties, several prominent political leaders and representatives of various civil society organisations announced the formation of a grand coalition called The Democratic Alliance (TDA) to challenge the NRM Party at Uganda's 2016 general elections. The TDA Protocol signed by all the parties who include, Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), Conservative Party (CP), Democratic Party (DP), Peoples Progressive Party (PPP), Uganda Federal Alliance (UFA), Uganda People's Congress (UPC), Go-Forward Pro-Change and Party of National Unity (PNU) had hoped for joint candidate to run in the general elections.

However the coalition was unsuccessful in reaching a consensus compelling the top organ the summit to ask the quartet of aspirants who included former vice president

---

<sup>5</sup> See, Alliance for Election Campaign Finance Monitoring: Monitoring Campaign Expenses During The Pre-Election Period. Progress report November – December 2015

Gilbert Bukenya, Former Head of the Democratic Party, Norbert Mao, Former Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi and Kiiza Besigye to choose among themselves the most suitable candidate. The four however failed to agree who among them was suitable and even after Bukenya and Mao stepped aside Besigye and Mbabazi could still not agree on who among them was better than the other to lead the coalition in the 2016 elections contest against the incumbent, President Yoweri Museveni.

However, according to a statement issued to the press, (CP) and Forum for Democratic Change FDC endorsed the candidature of Besigye while DP, Go Forward, People's Progressive Party (PPP), Uganda Federal Alliance (UFA) and Olara Otunnu's UPC endorsed the candidature of Amama Mbabazi.

Subsequently, the leading contenders in TDA, Dr. Besigye (FDC) and Amama Mbabazi (Go Forward) run on different platforms for the election while other parties like DP, CP, and UPC failed to enter candidates into the process at presidential level.

### **Civil Society, social movements and media**

One of the key social movements in the 2016 election is the Black Monday Movement formed under the ambit of the Uganda National Non-Governmental Organisations Forum. The movement has been responsible for mobilising citizens since 2012 to mount pressure against government injustice and corruption. The Movement includes local leaders from political parties, religious organizations, cultural institutions, the academia, business community, persons with disabilities, young people, women leaders, professional associations and civil society leaders.

The Black Monday movement has for the past three years seen one of the most formidable citizens' efforts towards building the momentum to advocate for free and fair elections in Uganda. The Movement came together to discuss the constitutional and electoral reforms from 2013 and these processes culminated in a National Consultative Conference that brought together stakeholders from all over Uganda who deliberated and agreed on a National Citizen Compact on Free and Fair Elections. Other efforts/groups that propagated from these actions include "Electoral Reforms Now" which was led by ruminants of the "Walk to Work" movement that was established after the disputed presidential elections in 2011.

The above actions by these actors were partly instrumental in raising awareness on civic and voter education, encouraging citizens to register and fully participate in the elections and calling for peace amongst opposition supporters and candidates. However, the actions of these social actors usually came into conflict with the State which led to arrest and harassment of these actors. At one point, the EC stopped the voter education activities of the Citizens' Coalition for Electoral Democracy in Uganda activities (CCEDU) accusing the organisation of being partisan, yet it was evident that the EC had failed to deliver on this particular mandate.

The 2016 election had unprecedented media coverage and generally, the campaign atmosphere was largely free of severe media harassment. The most notable case of media infringement was the confiscation of broadcasting equipment and revoking the license of a local radio station *Endigyito FM* by the UCC, a day after hosting former Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi under the guise of unpaid license fees.

## **Left Parties in Uganda and their showing in the 2016 general election**

At present, only the Uganda's People's Congress (UPC) can be vaguely considered as a Left leaning party. In a number of its documents UPC has indicated that it is a Social Democratic Party. At the Delegates' Conference of the Party held in December 1969, the UPC promulgated the Common Man's Charter. Dr. Simba notes that UPC was constructed on a socialist foundation and the "Move to the Left" announcement in 1969 was the first ideological declaration marking the attempt by the party to set out a socialist agenda for Uganda. UPC's traditional support originally came from the working class, masses in the rural areas and intellectuals particular from Makerere University and other institutions of higher learning.

However, UPC has been embroiled in wrangles and leadership struggles between Olara Otunnu and Hon. Jimmy Akena, son of UPC's founding member Dr. Milton Obote and the Member of Parliament for Lira Municipality. There is still an ongoing court case to determine the actual President of the Party after a judge in December 2015 pronounced that Hon. Jimmy Akena's election was fraudulent and illegal.

Media reports indicated that Hon. Jimmy Akena had held meetings with President Museveni's ruling NRM for the former to offer support to the incumbent's 2016 re-election bid. Details of Hon. Akena's working arrangement with the NRM first came to light after the President told a press conference at Baralegi State Lodge in Otuke that the UPC group led by Hon. Akena was working with his people. Consequently, the UPC did not field a candidate for the 2016 presidential election with one splinter group led by Olara Otunnu supporting former Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi.

To contextualize the decline of the Left in Uganda and Africa in general, Dr. S.K. Simba in his commentary on politics in Uganda notes that ideology in politics decline. He explains that political parties in Uganda have been unable to live by their ideological expectations because they recruit people from different social backgrounds and ideological outlook which undermines their ability to focus on one particular ideology that is acceptable to all its membership.

## **5. Conclusion**

Uganda's transition into multiparty democracy has been encumbered with innumerable challenges since 2005. Key fundamentals of a multi-party dispensation i.e. the right to associate, right to information, freedom of expression among others has been severely eroded in Uganda. This has led to the persecution of opposition party leaders, civil society, media which has stifled their activities and the role they play in forming a democracy.

Reading from the numerous reports, it is clear that the electoral process leaves a lot to be desired. In the absence of vital electoral reforms particularly those in regard to the independence of the electoral commission, citizens will not have confidence in the institution and consequently this will undermine any democratic efforts. In the interim period, after such a disputed election, the security services are likely to remain on high alert, apprehensive of the chaotic events in the aftermath of the 2011 elections and the rise of the "Walk to Work" movement. The now prevalent militaristic approach to political conditions is more likely to intensify.

The opposition parties that formed the TDA are likely to put their election differences aside and continue to engage more intensely assembling to the common belief that the

concluded elections were fraudulent. The push for electoral and political reforms is likely to once more take precedence and it will be interesting if the NRM caucus will propose amendment to the presidential age limit in order to accommodate President Museveni in 2021. This is more likely than not.

The growing failure to facilitate the functioning of the multiparty system has further led to other auxiliary challenges especially in deepening democracy and maintaining the rule of law. Looking forward, the next five years of the NRM are likely to be challenging with growing irritation especially in urban areas and growing discontent in its rural base. Therefore, Uganda should take away the positives from this election i.e. the presidential debates which were attended by the President, to build a culture of tolerance and dialogue between opponents. Consequently, only dialogue will heal the deep wounds of conflict that have plagued Uganda's politics since independence.

## References

Alliance for Election Campaign Finance Monitoring: Monitoring Campaign Expenses during the Pre-Election Period. Progress report November – December 2015

Dr. S.K. Simba: Same Same but Different: Parties, Politics and Ideology in Uganda; Country report on electoral systems in Uganda by Uganda law reform commission 30th June, 2011

Emmanuel Kitamirike, Opiyo Nicolas, Morrison Rwakakamba, Godber Tumushable, Mukhone Bernard; Electoral politics and Electoral Law Reforms in Uganda.

Press statement: The African Union election observation mission to the 18 February 2016 general elections in the republic of Uganda, Kampala, 20 February 2016

[http://www.eueom.eu/files/pressreleases/english/PreliminaryStatement\\_20160220.pdf](http://www.eueom.eu/files/pressreleases/english/PreliminaryStatement_20160220.pdf)

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/12/uganda-suspend-crime-preventers>

<http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/-/688324/688324/-/b69tvd/-/index.html>