



UGANDA'S POLITICAL TRANSITION SCENARIOS TO 2026 AND BEYOND

*The Crested Crane, the Storm in the Teacup or
the Warrior Mad King?*



Godber Tumushabe | Job Kijja

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Email: job.kijja@ideaug.org

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Introduction

In 1986, Uganda's President, Yoweri Museveni, proclaimed in his inaugural address that the problem of Africa was leaders who overstay in power. Fresh from fighting a 5-year guerilla war waged mainly in the jungles of present day "greater" Luwero, the arrival of Mr. Museveni and his rag-tag army – the National Resistance Army (NRA) – was a breath of fresh air in a country where there were clear symptoms of a failing state. By the time the NRA captured Kampala, the central command of Uganda's security forces had disintegrated, the army had overthrown Apollo Milton Obote. Insecurity and impunity reigned supreme and the economy was a smouldering ruin.¹

Swearing-in as Uganda's new president at the parliamentary building on January 26, 1986, Mr. Museveni declared that his ascendance to power was "not a mere change of guards but a fundamental change." Like the men before him who had "captured power" through violence, Museveni suspended the constitution, declared himself President and promised to lead a transition government that would organize elections in a period of 4 years. He went on to put together a fairly broad governing coalition, co-opting leaders from political parties, religious formations and Uganda's multi-ethnic groups. To his credit, for more than a decade, with the exception of eastern and northern Uganda where violent armed conflict persisted, his government went on to establish a sense of security and stability across most parts of the country, engineered a rebound of economic and business activity, and built both the legality and legitimacy of his government.

Thirty-five years later on May 12, 2021, a new president Yoweri Tibuhaburwa Museveni was sworn in to succeed Yoweri Kaguta Museveni.² However, with the exception of the change in name, the new President Tibuhaburwa inherited the attributes of the former president Kaguta. Both President Kaguta Museveni and President Tibuhaburwa Museveni came to power following highly contested elections characterized by extreme levels of violence. Kaguta Museveni fought himself into power in a deadly 5-year war where over half a million Ugandans reportedly lost their lives. Tibuhaburwa Museveni came to power following a contested

¹ For a detailed analysis of the state of Uganda's economy prior to 1986, see Frank Warnock and Patrick Conway (1999), *Post-Conflict Recovery in Uganda*, World Bank Institute.

² For purposes of this paper, the two Musevenis are used to describe the transformative Museveni of 1986 who spoke strongly against leaders who overstay in power and now the transactional Museveni who rationalizes his continued stay in power and has continued to change his character and identity by adding an extra name or a variety of pseudo name at almost every election cycle.

election in which more than 100 Ugandans were extrajudicially killed by Ugandan security forces while hundreds of others were illegally arrested, kidnapped, and tortured.³ In 2026, both Tibuhaburwa Museveni and Kaguta Museveni will have lived in the official residence of the President of Uganda commonly known as State House for a period of 40 years. If they will still be alive, they will both be 81 years old going by the official count.

The purpose of this paper is to map out potential political transition scenarios for Uganda over the period to 2026 and beyond. It is argued that Uganda is at a point of unprecedented domestic polarization. Following the January 14, 2021 presidential and parliamentary elections, Mr. Museveni was declared winner and was subsequently sworn in for another 5-year term of office(2021 - 2026).

Like the 24 years (1962-1986) before he came to power, the 35 years of Museveni's rule are defined by the fact that since independence in 1962, Uganda has never had a peaceful transition of power from one president to another or from one ruling political party to another. As he digs in to entrench his rule and extend his stay in power like the many other African leaders he referred to in his 1986 inaugural speech, the prospect of a peaceful democratic transition wanes and hence the need to reflect on how the future of Uganda's politics could unfold. The evidence from the last 35 years and Museveni's posture in the run up to and after the January 2021 elections point to at least three alternative political transition scenarios for Uganda's future: the *crested crane scenario*; the *storm in the teacup scenario*; and the *warrior mad king scenario*.

The first part of this paper provides a background to our analysis of these scenarios. In the second section, we explain these scenarios and how they may manifest. Section three of the paper identifies the potential driving forces that may shape these scenarios.

³ The movie-style execution of Isaac Ssenyange aka Mando Zebra by what Mr. Museveni described in cavalier fashion as "highly trained units of the army" in his December 31, 2020 address epitomizes the excesses of the security forces under his command. See <https://youtu.be/cRC-A59mp1s>.



Methodology

In effect, a paper of this nature that tries to peer into how the future may look like is inherently a subjective exercise often informed by the objective conditions of the author. To overcome these inherent subjective biases, we employed three methodological approaches – direct observation, process tracing by reviewing relevant literature and policy documents, and unstructured interviews with selected key informants. We also invested in providing qualitative and quantitative evidence to support our analysis, scenarios, and conclusions..

First, this paper draws from our personal observations and experiences of the past two decades. At different stages, we followed the process that gave birth to the 1995 constitution and the euphoria of putting three decades of post-independence violence and constitutional instability behind us. With our memories fresh from the historical challenges that have bedeviled the country for years on end, safeguards to life presidency, executive excess and rights violations were built into the new dispensation. Thus the 1995 Constitution was promulgated under the aegis of then (and now) incumbent. Yoweri Museveni..

Upon his being elected through adult suffrage for the first time under this new constitution, it was confounding to see the very man who had signed Uganda's new compact--the 1995 Constitution--able to engineer its amendment before the ink had dried. Immediately after being sworn in, within a year of promulgation, Museveni's first major policy decision was to appoint more ministers than permitted by the Constitution. It was evident from then that rather than build on the economic successes that he had triggered in the first 10 years of his presidency, he was choosing to placate Uganda's myriad constituencies to pursue populist politics as opposed to politics of development and transformation. Since that time, we have spent countless hours observing his actions, reading his lips, books and letters, and observing his changing dress code to read into what all this means for political transition planning in the country.

In this respect, we reviewed Museveni's political and policy speeches over the years to examine the changes in language, tone and public posture. Another important piece of literature that forms a basis for our analysis and conclusions are Museveni's letters: who they are addressed to;⁴ how they are signed off; the timing of some of the letters; and in some cases, the subject matter that he chooses to write about in these letters.⁵

4 For example to the bazukulu: <https://www.africatembelea.com/musevenis-letter-to-bazukulu-on-legitimate-public-assemblies/>

5 See for example addressing COVID-19 as nominations for the 2021 elections draw closer; <https://nr-munder35.co.ug/president-musevenis-letter-to-countrymen-countrywomen-and-the-bazukulu/>



Finally, the paper draws from the insights and critiques of a variety of informal forums, platforms and focus group discussions (FGDs). The analysis presented here derives inspiration from the pioneering work of the Uganda Transition Scenarios Thought Leadership Group (UTSTLG) – a dedicated informal study reference group on Uganda’s transition politics.⁶ The original version of the paper was first presented and benefited from the annual Uganda civil society leaders retreat of 2021. Finally, the paper enriched by reviews of selected academics and policy practitioners with extensive knowledge of both Uganda’s political processes as well as the domain of scenario building. The thought-provoking insights and questions from the reviewers sharpened the analysis.

6 For details about UTSTLG, visit: <https://glissafrica.org/transition>



Background and context

On October 9, 2021, Uganda celebrated her fifty-ninth independence anniversary. That these fifty-nine years can be described as a cocktail of hope, despair, broken promises, unfulfilled commitments and measurable progress" is a more succinct way to write this sentence. The post Independence 1962 constitutional compromise collapsed in less than a decade following the attack on the Kabaka's palace, a phenomenon that remains a key defining factor in Uganda's post-independent history. The collapse of the Independence compromise later culminated into the overthrow of Apollo Milton Obote's government by Gen. Idi Amin in 1971. Amin went ahead to institute a reign of terror in the country characterised by arbitrary arrests, kidnappings, torture and extrajudicial killings until he was overthrown in 1979 by a combined force of the Tanzania Peoples' Defense Forces (TPDF) and Ugandan exiles.

For sixty-eight days after the overthrow of Idi Amin, Uganda was governed under what is generally referred to as the Moshi Consensus which had been arrived at by Ugandan exiles involved in the anti-Amin liberation struggle meeting in the Northern Tanzania town of Moshi. The successive short-lived governments of Yusufu Kironde Lule, Godfrey Lukongwa Binaisa and the Military Commission under Paul Muwanga lasted until December 1980 when elections were held. The 1980 elections in which Uganda People's Congress (UPC) was declared winner, ushering in a second presidency of Apollo Milton Obote, were heavily contested. One of the losing candidates – Yoweri Museveni – rejected the outcomes and went on to wage a five-years guerilla war in which an estimated 500,000 Ugandans were killed.

In January 1986, Museveni and his rebel formation – the National Resistance Army (NRA) - overthrew the short-lived government of Gen. Tito Okello Lutwa. He promised a four-year-transition period, a bargain that he never kept. Instead, his political formation – the National Resistance Movement (NRM) became the political vehicle through which he established political control superintended by its military-wing the National Resistance Army(NRA) and its successor, the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF).

To understand Uganda's political trajectory over the next five years and beyond, it is important to reflect on the ways in which Museveni approached the question of governance. This can be broken down into 4 distinct components.



First, Museveni established a generally inclusive regime based mainly on support of the people from western Uganda and Baganda. The so-called Movement System was the mechanism through which a carefully configured network of political leaders reflecting a wide range of ethnic, religious and political interests was put in place. Effectively, the so called "broad-based" government mechanism was established as an alternative to the traditional governance arrangements based on a liberal democratic state apparatus rooted in the winner-take-all arrangement.

Secondly, Museveni's government made attempts to strengthen some key political institutions whose ultimate effect would have been to limit the power of the president and government. This component was manifested in the establishment of a fairly functional legislature, an apparently independent judiciary, and deliberate attempts to create a system of government with various ethnic and tribal formations getting a sense of local control and representation.

Thirdly, Museveni sought to co-opt Buganda in his governance equation by restoring the traditional kingdoms through a decision of the Army Council in 1993. With hindsight, it is tenable to argue that by circumventing the constitutional making process and resolving one of the most contentious issues in Uganda's governance architecture, he knew that his power over the course of events did not lay so much with the people but with the military. Over the years, Mr. Museveni, and not the Constitution, presented himself as the giver and guarantor of these traditional institutions.

The final component of Museveni's governance formula was to tolerate the emergence of a seemingly independent civil society and free press. In effect, this perceived independent media and civil society were largely restricted around Uganda's capital city of Kampala. Across the country, their activities were carefully stifled through a series of administrative and machinations by local state agents and regime apparatchiks. Indeed, the evolving onslaught on civic organizing through a series of legislative controls, administrative fiat and financial obstruction points to reversals to the pre-1995 constitutional order. Article 39 is not applicable here. Perhaps Article 28 (on due process rights).

These elements of Museveni's governance construct were embedded in the 1995 constitutional framework, giving a semblance of a new governance consensus. However, the systematic erosion of the governance architecture enshrined in the 1995 Constitution and how the Ugandan population has responded over the years can give us a long term perspective into Uganda's political transition scenarios across the horizon.



Alternative political transition scenarios for the future

There is compelling evidence to suggest that there are at least three alternative political transition scenarios for Uganda: the *crested crane scenario*; the *storm in the teacup scenario*; and the *warrior mad king scenario*. As discussed in this section of the paper, it is tenable to suggest that Uganda's current political environment may be described as the storm-in-the-teacup scenario. It will therefore need extraordinary leadership to build bridges across Uganda's fractured society in order to move the country towards the flying crane scenario. In the absence of such leadership, there is a bigger likelihood that the country may degenerate and drift towards the warrior mad king scenario.

The descriptions of these scenarios, the evidence and the potential driving forces are discussed in detail in the sections below.

Scenario 1: The flying crane scenario

"The flying crane scenario" envisages a Uganda that emerges from the current whirlwinds into a fully-fledged democratic and peaceful country where there is shared prosperity. Named after Uganda's national emblem - the crested crane, the Flying Crane scenario is our desirable scenario. This scenario envisages a stable, democratic and prosperous Uganda emerging from an organized and managed transition of power from Museveni and the current order created over the last three decades. Driven by the broken promises of the 1995 Constitution, the 'flying crane scenario' envisages a new national consensus underpinned by the desire to build a stronger foundation for democracy, socio-economic justice, respect for human dignity and the rule of law, and shared economic prosperity.

The 'flying crane scenario' represents a change in the current state of affairs and apparent direction of the country. Under this scenario, the country is seen making deliberate steps to turn away from the unprecedented violence that characterize Uganda's elections.⁷ Deliberate structural and policy reforms to address the manifest economic exclusion and social injustices of the last six decades of independence are pursued with purpose and determination.⁸ The predatory and bloated political bureaucracy

⁷ Different accounts suggest that more than 100 Ugandans were killed extrajudicially and hundreds of others arrested and tortured in the periods running up to and during the 2021 presidential and parliamentary elections.

⁸ The most explosive form of social and economic injustice are the increasing cases of land grabbing and land evictions. It is envisaged that the cases of land evictions will increase with the current government policy to expand industrial activity, large scale commercial agriculture and the development of petroleum resources.



is considered a potential obstacle to development and hence there is commitment and action to reform it and create efficiency.⁹ Finally, the flying crane scenario presupposes that all necessary political will is mobilized to eliminate the cancer of corruption..¹⁰

In the flying crane scenario, it is envisaged that citizens get organized in their different formations – political, cultural, ethnic, religious, economic, and other civic formations to mount sustained and relentless demands for political, governance and economic reforms. In the period leading up to 2026, citizens' demand for reforms put pressure on Museveni and his allied elite patronage networks to negotiate wide ranging political, constitutional, electoral and economic reforms to relieve pressure off the system. Out of self-preservation, progressive elements within the military command exert influence on the growing radical elements within the security forces in the interest of upholding the “pro-people ideology” centeredness of the “original NRA”.¹¹

Generally, there are essentially two pathways to the ‘flying crane scenario’. In the short-term period up to 2026 - citizens’ pressure that trigger procedural and structural reforms of the electoral system or a comprehensive, non-partisan and inclusive national dialogue.

In the first instance, there is a likelihood that sustained citizens’ pressure may trigger procedural and structural reforms of Uganda’s electoral system hence creating a more transparent, accountable and credible electoral process. A sense of justice in the electoral system nurtures optimism and confidence thereby reducing political tensions and violent contestations while providing a basis for increased harmony. Through this pathway, Museveni exercises his right to contest in the 2026 elections but abandons his traditional use of the security forces to undermine fair competition. Because of a level playing field, the 2026 elections are generally considered free and fair and both winners and losers accept the outcome without acrimony. The tranquility produced by a non-contested elections therefore ushers in a renewed sense of national consensus and a shared vision for the future.

9 *A bloated political bureaucracy in the form of a large presidency, an oversize parliament and nearly dysfunctional local government system incapable of delivering quality public services is increasingly seen as a burden on taxpayers and the general citizenry.*

10 *There is now general consensus that systemic corruption is a cancer that is eating at the core of Museveni's regime. Tough talking but unable to take action, corruption remains the single biggest threat to Museveni's life presidency project and could galvanize pro-democracy seeking forces to demand for reforms of the political and economic governance of the country.*

11 *The National Resistance Army (NRA) whose name changed to Uganda Peoples Defense Forces under the 1995 Constitution was projected as a “peoples’ army” largely because of its projection of discipline as part of its core philosophy. In the last 5 years, in tense political situations, Mr. Museveni is found of make references to the “original NRA” and it is not clear whether his intentions is to appeal to its people-centered ideology or its loyalty to him as a rebel commander.*



The second pathway to the 'flying crane' scenario is a national dialogue process. Previous efforts at convening a national dialogue are rekindled and there is renewed commitment to address structural obstacles to Uganda's future transformation and prosperity. The idea of a national dialogue mainly promoted by elders and clergy is premised on the understanding that Uganda's contemporary obstacles are too important to be addressed in a partisan political environment.¹² A national dialogue is therefore necessary to galvanize national consensus on key national agendas covering politics, constitutionalism and the rule of law, national values, diversity, the economy, land and the environment, and the delivery of quality public services.¹³ Through this pathway, Ugandans are able to agree on a shared vision of the future, including guarantees for a peaceful and dignified retirement for the incumbent president Museveni.

However, indications of Uganda moving towards a flying crane scenario are sparse. Upon capturing power in 1986, what can be considered as evidence that a 'flying crane' scenario is possible?

There are at least four elements that one can point to in this regard. Upon capturing power in 1986, Museveni's continued references to his democratic credentials. Since coming to power, he consistently projected his record as a democrat and defender of Uganda's democratic progress. In his May 12, 2021 inaugural address, Museveni boasted of Uganda's 'unique democratic experiment' that he has presided over and castigated those who dare to lecture him on democracy. Upon capturing power in 1986, he established a brand of popular democracy largely defined by election day outcomes. It is a brand of democracy that emphasizes more of compliance with procedure but is devoid of the substantive content of democracy and democratic processes. It focuses on numbers rather than the quality of representation.

In a May 15, 2017 and February 15, 2021 communication to the military's top brass, Museveni writes extensively against the meting out of violence against Ugandans. In an August 14, 2021 televised address, he decried the spate of human rights abuses by the security forces.¹⁴ Could this signal his change of heart from previous addresses? For example in his November 29, 2020 televised address, he rationalized extreme violence meted on Ugandans by the security forces as an exercise to maintain security and peace.¹⁵ Notwithstanding his tacit and overt endorsement of the use of disproportionate force over the years, these anecdotes point to the possibility that he may want to preserve his contrived reputation as a democrat as a democrat as opposed to a brutal dictator and life president.



12 In December 2018, Mr. Museveni issued a communique outlining agreed modalities for the convening of a national dialogue but failed to honor his commitments to provide public funding for the process.

13 See Uganda National Dialogue Framework Paper

14 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhLKZIk8fGE>

15 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQ-opqs-vA8>

The second pointer to the possibility of Uganda transitioning to a flying crane scenario is Museveni's consistent reference to his willingness to engage in a national dialogue. His continued projection of willingness to engage in a dialogue with his political rivals preserves the window for a more protracted citizen driven national dialogue process through which a transition to a flying crane scenario can be negotiated and secured.

Thirdly, in spite of the battering¹⁶ that civil society organizations have been subjected to over the last decade, they still remain one of the credible harbingers for reshaping Uganda towards a flying crane scenario. The breadth of civil society actors, including faith-based organizations (FBOs), professional bodies, women's organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the media and a growing network of citizens' economic formations may become important drivers for movement towards the flying crane scenario. Elsewhere around the world, citizens participate in the governance of their countries through a variety of these social, economic, and political formations. In the case of Uganda, growing extreme violence and systemic corruption, economic and political exclusion as well as increasing disaffection with the quality of public services may galvanize citizens to demand for governance reforms. A citizen-driven governance reform agenda has the potential to move the country towards a Crested crane scenario.

Lastly, the international community is heavily invested in Uganda in many different ways. Since the deployment of Uganda's military in Somalia to lead peace-support and peacekeeping operations, anti-terror war against Al Shabab, Museveni has comported himself as the tip of the spear in the West's global war on terror. The Americans and the Europeans see him as their most trusted ally in this global war on terror. However, the West also likes to project a Uganda that is democratizing, economically developing and stable. Following the 2021 violent elections, Museveni's hitherto Western cheer leaders responded with muted voices of disapproval¹⁷ and outright condemnation of the violence.¹⁸ In response, Mr. Museveni responded by suspending a multi-donor basket fund – the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF). The hardball negotiations to reopen the Fund provide a faint possibility that a beneficial engagement on democratic strengthening that shifts Uganda's transition trajectory towards a crested crane scenario is possible.

Besides, key institutions of state, including the security forces, parliament, the judiciary and interest groups such as civil society, religious leaders and other citizens' formations could mount increasing pressure over

¹⁶ *Civil Society in Uganda remains a victim of state repression through draconian legislation, arbitrary arrests of CSO actors on trumped charges, sieges on their office premises, freezing of their accounts, blackmail by the state as saboteurs, terrorists and agents of foreign interests among etcetera.*

¹⁷ *UK Foreign Secretary was forced to delete a congratulatory message*

¹⁸ *U.S was most out right -cite statement by State Department*



the coming years, creating opportunities for a flying crane scenario. The professional officers of the UPDF may prevail over the extremist elements in the security services, forcing the security forces towards 'strategic neutrality' in the electoral contest relating to transition politics. A 'strategic neutrality' posture has the immediate effect of tilting the balance of power towards the citizens and the Constitution and hence making a flying crane scenario plausible. In addition, an assertive parliament administration and members of parliament as demonstrated in the case of the illegal re-arrest of Makindye West Member of Parliament Allan Ssewanyana and Kawempe North Member of Parliament Mohammad Ssegirinya¹⁹ could act as a strong incentive for a negotiated political transition, hence making a flying crane transition scenario possible.

Scenario 2: Storm in the tea cup

Under the 'storm in the tea cup' scenario, the trajectory of Uganda's political, social and economic situation remains largely unchanged. First, the Ugandan story continues to be shaped by three dominant narratives. The optimists tell a story of a Uganda that is democratizing, economically transforming, socially prospering, and where peace and security reign. This group, largely comprised of diehards within the National Resistance Movement (NRM) group, avid Musevenists and the Descendants of the Resistance Army (DRA)²⁰ point to symbolic regular elections, positive economic growth figures and a UPDF projecting its muscle within the country and across the region as evidence of a transformed Uganda.

On the extreme end of the spectrum, there are Ugandans that see doom and gloom and a future that is highly unpredictable. This category of Ugandans point to the extreme violence and brutality that mar elections, the entrenched regime election rigging machinery, the deteriorating economic conditions, the worsening law and order situation and the breakdown in public service delivery as evidence of reversals that are a direct consequence of Museveni's over stay in power. The continuing kidnappings of young political activists and those caught in the crossfire by elements within the security forces and regime-aligned militias, continuous breakdown in law and order, as well as the extrajudicial killings of regime opponents and opposition sympathizers will combine to feed into the pessimistic outlook of many Ugandans.

At the centre of the pendulum is another group of people – the fence sitters. This group of people are mainly fence sitters and pacifists who hope they can make their contributions by being on both sides of the

¹⁹ <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/ssewanyana-ssegirinya-await-release--3560062>

²⁰ In his 2021 State of the Nation Address, President Museveni announced his new anti-corruption strategy of using a special class of citizens known as the Descendants Resistance Army (DRA) who will occupy strategic government positions. Accordingly, these are children of NRM fighters, who are already rich and won't be pushed into corruption to come out of poverty like the wretched would. This group has gone ahead to occupy strategic offices, and even runs social media pages as DRA.

political spectrum. They believe Mr. Museveni has played his role and should retire but they do not countenance any other Ugandan who can take the mantle. And end it there. They are alive to the reality of worsening economic exclusion, corruption and a mounting debt burden but for the time being, they don't see anybody else capable of leading Uganda other than Museveni. For the fence sitters, Museveni is both a good and bad man, but better the devil you know. They don't like the current situation but the alternative to Museveni can only be worse than the present. Close to the NRM hard liners and avowed Musevenists are other fringe groups comprised of mainly some Born Again sects, and other adherents who believe in a supernatural course of Uganda's political destiny. They operate mega prayer houses and makeshift churches mostly located in the poor neighbourhoods of Uganda's growing urban centres. They can turn their "pulpits" into campaign platforms for Museveni and NRM and they will not face the kind of blackmail that NRM cadres are always read to unleash on the clergy who challenge of the excesses of the regime. The most extreme example of these kind of groups is the "Prophet Emmanuel Ministries" located in the Kamwengye district of Uganda.²¹

The storm in the tea cup scenario is characterized by the continuing struggles between the pro-Museveni and anti-Museveni politics and the intangible influence of those fence sitters in the middle of the political pendulum. In the run up to 2026 elections, there is a likelihood of increased pressure on the regime to reform or negotiate a consensus of some shape. Yet, Museveni's current actions, such as the composition of his cabinet, change in command of the Uganda People's Defence Forces, the stuffing of the top leadership of the Ministry of Internal Affairs with senior military officials, the takeover of the command and administration of the police by the military and his overt deployment of the so-called DRA in strategic public service and security installations point to the possibility that he will dig in and oppose any attempts at reforms that are to be at odds with his pursuit of a life presidency.

The situation is not helped by the fact that most of the pro-democracy and pro-reform forces are uncoordinated, un-resourced, and isolated. Museveni and his well-resourced patronage network of loyalists and cheerleaders may not feel the pressure to change course. He is able to stay ahead of these forces through a series of legislative, administrative, economic and wide ranging of security manoeuvres to curb growing dissent. In this scenerio, Museveni increases his control of the legislature,²² the judiciary²³

21 Foot Note: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7MgnA6Db8tc>

22 He fended off resistance from former speaker Rebecca Kadaga to install Jacob Oulanya who has once called him Uganda's Jesus Christ and Anite Among, the opposition purchasing officer.

23 Inside the corridors of power, there is an unspoken belief that a pathway to appointment to the judiciary is through a group of Museveni's family loyalists. The current head of the judiciary, Mr. Alphonse Owiny Dollo is an acolyte of Museveni's, and has served him as Minister. The man who is known in both official and unofficial circles as Mr. Museveni's fixer – Kivanuka Kiryowa – was appointed Attorney General, giving him direct influence in shaping the legislative agenda and timbre of the country.



and the public service system.²⁴ The command of the security forces will further forces will further be splintered, as fringe groups of loyalists amass inordinate power and control.²⁵ In the storm in the teacup scenario, Museveni is able to deepen the narrative of “us” against “them”. You are either for NRM or against ‘us’. You either believe in the ‘mass line’ or you are part of the group of a reactionary elite who are up to no good.²⁶ This is evident in his growing use of derogatory words such as “pigs”, “opportunists”, and many others, in reference to opponents.

Broadly speaking, the pressure on Museveni’s regime may likely come from three fronts. First, absent any structural reforms, the economy is likely to remain constrained by both bureaucratic inefficiencies, unmitigated corruption and general absence of a clear transformation agenda capable of triggering labour mobility labor mobility from the current low productivity agriculture to new forms of economic activity such as industry, services, and the knowledge-based economy. The economic situation will be exacerbated by a mounting foreign and domestic debt burden.²⁷

In recognition of the dismal impact of a wide range of patronage programmes such as the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), Prosperity for All (PFA), Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), and “emyooga”, Government recently introduced a new scheme dubbed the Parish Development Model (PDM). The scheme is billed as the panacea for the current economic doldrums.. However, while the PDM scheme may galvanize the local political and bureaucratic elite hoping to cash in on public resources availed through the programme, it may also provide temporary sedative for citizens and divert them from demanding for more accountability from Government. The projected signing of the Final Investment Decision (FID) for the Lake Albert Oil Project expected sometime in the first half quarter of 2022 with a projected investment of over USD 10 billion could also shift the economic narrative and relieve economic pressures from the regime, making the storm-in-the-teacup scenerio more plausible.

The continuing distortions in the public service delivery system will also be a source of pressure on the regime to reform. No matter the amount of

24 *In his June 2021 State of the Nation Address, Museveni announced a “new” policy strategy to fight corruption by deploying the ‘Descendants of the Resistance Army’ in strategic public sector positions. While the announcement sounded shocking to many people given Museveni’s declared anti-poverty posture, the DRA policy has been employed in Uganda’s public service most likely since the establishment of the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) in 1991..*

25 *A close observation of the trajectory of appointments in senior command positions of the UPDF point to a trend where more highly educated officers with both academic and military training are being replaced with officers with less academic training although they may have appropriate credentials based on their military training.*

26 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ir9HyPs_lus&t=235s

27 *Total debt is currently estimated at USD 16.9 Billion, consuming close to 50 percent of domestic revenue collections through debt repayments and interest.*

these pressures, the regime will only be able to make marginal concessions giving the international community, civil society and other actors an imaginary sense of victory while in real terms, Museveni remains in overall control of the direction of Uganda's political transition trajectory.

Two critical pressure points may also create conditions for a storm-in-the-teacup scenario. First, potential discord within the security forces can create crisis conditions that lead to more uncertainty for both country and region. Over the years, the UPDF has transformed from its insurgent posture and assumed a more professional poise with highly educated professionals. Its current engagement in international peace support and peacekeeping operations has also raised its credibility as a force of influence within the region. It is envisaged that a highly educated, trained and internationally exposed force may object to being used as a militia force in domestic law enforcement, political campaigns and elections manipulation operations. Potential tensions between the progressive and radical extremist elements in the military may foment conditions for a storm-in-the-tea cup scenario.

Finally, there remains a remote possibility that the young people within the NRM can create a cohesive force and successfully advocate reforms that transform the NRM into a structured and accountable political entity. Over the years, NRM has evolved as an outfit owned by its Chairman and Vice Chairman who remain permanent fixtures in their respective positions. With the exception of Museveni and a few of his peers, there is an apparent generational transition within the NRM where younger and politically ambitious young people are emerging. The umbilical cord connection between this generation of young people and NRM is its chairman. Even in their privileged positions, they gladly accept Museveni's patronizing reference to them as *Bazzukulu (grandchildren)*. These young and politically ambitious politicians may trigger internal transition discussions within the NRM and provoke potential backlash from its hitherto undefined leadership.

The storm-in-the-teacup scenario envisages that there will be sporadic protests by aggrieved or disenchanting citizen groups but they will be quelled with extreme violence. The regime onslaught on civil society will continue and will be scaled up through security, financial, administrative and regulatory harassment. Buganda Kingdom and the Catholic Church will be increasingly seen as counterrevolutionary or reactionary groups which must be targeted for neutralisation through overt and covert offensive operations. Going by its current posture, the Anglican Church top leadership will adopt a policy of "strategic ambiguity" implying that they will either remain silent or issue statements of neutrality in condemnation of violence against citizens. A combination of elements of democratic practices such as elections to mask the deepening authoritarianism, personal rule, and monarchical tendencies are the defining characteristics of the storm in the tea cup scenario.



Scenario 3: The warrior mad king scenario

Across the horizon is a third scenario, the warrior mad king. Its timeline spills beyond 2026. It is the least desirable, but perhaps the most likely scenario, given Uganda's political journey since the post-election violence of 2006.

It may not be easy to determine when violence as a tool for political control became the defining character for the architects of the NRM regime. However, from the available evidence, it is apparent that violence sits at the core of its identity.²⁸ The leadership of the NRM captured power after a five-year insurrection that left more than half a million Ugandans dead. This culture of violence continued for over two decades as the regime sought to suppress insurgencies in Eastern and Northern Uganda with extreme violence.

As early as 2001, this culture of violence was introduced into Uganda's politics and the electoral process. The violence escalated through the 2006 and 2011 elections reaching epic levels during the 2016 and 2021 elections. In the recent times, violence continues to resurface in the operations of the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF). It has been on display during the Kayunga riots,²⁹ the attack on the Rwenzururu palace in 2016³⁰ and the Arua municipality parliamentary by-election in 2018 which acted as the dress rehearsal for the 2021 general election violence.³¹ These cases provide compelling evidence that violence has become one of the main weapons against organized political dissent to Mr. Museveni's four-decade-reign. In effect, elections are conducted as a deadly contest between the NRM group and opposition political actors. It is against this background that a warrior mad king scenario becomes an inevitable possibility as one considers the political trajectory to 2026 and beyond.

The 'warrior mad king' scenario is premised on the apparent evidence that: i) Mr. Museveni's mental programming is to be the president of Uganda for life and he will be on the ballot as long as there are elections; ii) he does not see anybody capable of leading Uganda other than himself. Right or wrong, he sees himself on a selfless mission of transforming Uganda and believes that no other Ugandan can manage; iii) he alone should determine who

28 <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/tracing-history-of-violence-in-nrm-elections-1937992>

29 *There are no official accounts of how many people were killed during these riots. But the scale of the violence by both the rioting mobs and Ugandan security forces reshaped the regimes protocols on handling public protests.*

30 *Official accounts from this operation suggests that more than one hundred Ugandans including women and children were killed. Another more than 100 women and young people were arrested and held incommunicado for over 4 years until they were released in 2021.*

31 *The elections were held on January 14, 2021 after close to a year of planning and 2 months of campaigning.*



may succeed him whenever his tenure terminates whether by not offering himself to contest in future elections, by losing an election or even by the unavoidable course of nature.³²

In addition, there is also a growing trend across the African continent where authoritarian rulers are reconfiguring the state apparatus to guarantee transfer of power to their children or chosen successors. The axis of monarchical military rule extends across the continent from N'Djamena through Yaounde to Kampala, Kigali and beyond. There are already “success stories” of African countries that have evolved into “military monarchies”³³ In all these cases, the military is the primary instrument that ensures that the children or kin of the rulers have a fast track to becoming presidents, either through farcical elections or palace coups. In some extreme cases like in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) or Chad, the formal institutions of state are weakened so that the children of the rulers are seen both domestically and internationally as the only potential source of “stability” in the event of a coup, or sudden incapacitation of the incumbent.

The warrior mad king scenario envisages a trajectory of extreme violence as the defining character of the political transition politics to 2026 and beyond. To keep his transition plan on course, Museveni will attempt to pursue at least two critical constitutional amendments of significant economic and political consequence. These amendments are likely to trigger protests among citizens and across the political spectrum and the regime may be tempted to respond with violence as it did with regard to the amendment to repeal the provisions on age limit.

First, he will resurrect the efforts to amend Article 26 of the 1995 constitution which guarantees the right to property and constitutes the fundamental prohibition against unfair deprivation of property. In a predominantly nature-based agrarian economy like Uganda's, ownership of land is the most recognized and perhaps the most sustainable form of property ownership. Previous attempts at grabbing land under the guise of promoting investments and public infrastructure projects met unyielding resistance from the population and critical institutions such as the church and cultural institutions that own large tracts of land. The removal of Article 26 from the Constitution has the potential to disenfranchise millions of Ugandans, perpetuate mass poverty that feeds into building political patronage, thereby undermining what remains of the efforts to build a prosperous democracy. There is also a possibility that the land amendment may be introduced as a decoy or potential bargaining chip for the consideration of the second and perhaps more consequential amendment

³² While addressing a rally in Muhanga Town Council in 2015, Museveni was quoted by the media to have said that he could not hand over power to Opposition politicians whom he described as, “wolves waiting to tear Uganda apart. See for example <https://twitter.com/nbstv/status/557403774688710656>

³³ In the case of Chad, it became so apparent that the material conditions in the country would not allow the mandated constitutional process of succession to be followed. In the event, My. Deby's son Mahamat Idriss Deby Itno alial Mahatma Kaka, was installed as his successor.



- the change of the system of government.

Secondly, it is envisaged that as part of managing the political transition and succession process, Museveni will engineer a carefully orchestrated plan to change the system of government from presidential to parliamentary system, thereby abolishing universal adult suffrage for presidential elections. The unprecedented violence unleashed on citizens to secure a constitutional amendment to remove age limit and legalize his running for president in 2021, the effort he invested in defeating former Speaker of Parliament, Rebecca Kadaga and installing a deeply loyal squad of leaders comprised of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of Parliament and appointment of a cadre as Leader of Government Business all point to how serious and personally he views the business of the eleventh Parliament. In a parliamentary system of government, a president who has absolute control over the public purse is able to procure the presidency either for himself, for a member of his family or any chosen 'fisherman' by deploying money to ensure that his ruling party has a parliamentary majority.

This scenario also envisages that there will be a wide range of civic and political actions to forestall the proposed constitutional amendments which will then be met with extreme violence from security forces, allied paramilitary groups and other armed formations. In the face of mounting opposition to these amendments, Museveni's regime will adopt vicious repression against pro-democracy activists in political parties, civil society, academia or any other group that try to organize and campaign against these constitutional amendment schemes. More restrictive legislation narrowing down the options for financing while at the same time imposing more stringent regulatory, licensing and permitting restrictions on operations of civic organizations will be instituted. Indeed, in August 2021, the Bureau for Non-Governmental organizations published a list of fifty four NGOs who were ordered to halt operations for a variety of both legitimate and imaginary reasons.³⁴ In September 2021, one of Uganda's leading newspapers reported that Museveni, acting on a decision of his cabinet, had directed that all ministries, agencies and departments (MDAs), and district authorities should exercise vigilance and get involved in the operations of NGOs operating within their mandates and jurisdictions.³⁵ All this evidence points to the fact that the overt and covert actions of the regime to overcome growing resistance against increasing authoritarianism will become more brutal, comprehensive and sustained, making the incumbent president behave like a warrior mad king. Generalized and targeted violence in form of arbitrary arrests, kidnappings, disappearances, torture and violent crackdown on protests will become commonplace.

³⁴ <https://ngobureau.go.ug/en/news-and-notice/operations-of-54-ngos-halted>

³⁵ <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/museveni-tightens-the-noose-on-civil-society-3549374>

6. Key drivers of the scenarios

The driving forces that will shape the direction of Uganda's transition scenarios may be clustered into at least five categories: political, demographic; economic, geopolitical and technological drivers. The scale of impact of these drivers will also be affected by the nature of the interactions between the state, markets, civil society and the incumbent regime.

Political drivers

The most significant drivers of the direction of Uganda's transition are essentially political in nature. The political drivers have multiple elements that interact to shape the politics of the country towards any of the scenarios. The most significant of these elements is Museveni's own mental state regarding the future of his presidency. As already explained elsewhere in this paper, all evidence suggests that Museveni's mental programming leans towards being president for life. In the alternative, he is actively working to ensure that he is either succeeded by a member of his family or a person chosen by him. In a series of high profile local and international interviews,³⁶ Museveni vehemently denies the "accusations" that he is grooming his son to succeed him. There is no single case where a sitting African president admitted that they were engineering a political transition process. In fact, they all deny that such a scheme ever existed. The standard response for all autocratic rulers is that "the people will decide", largely because they know they can organise and determine the results of what passes for elections. Indeed, the evidence that any president is doing that is only apparent once you examine how such rulers undermine or patronize state institutions, the configuration of the structure and command of the security forces and the shifts in the ownership of the means of production, among others.

Indeed, in the pursuit of this life presidency project, Museveni has effectively re-written Uganda's constitution, weakened all the institutions of state, built an elaborate political patronage network of elected and appointed political leaders, reconfigured the media landscape of the country, created unprecedented fear among Uganda's working class and professionals, and is on a mission to dismantle what remains of civic organizing by subjecting NGOs to harassment. In the run-up to 2026, he will use his parliamentary majority and the elaborate network of local elected and appointed officials to pursue unpopular constitutional amendments and enact other restrictive laws. By working to actively demobilize the former Speaker of Parliament and ensuring the election of his loyalists as Speaker and deputy Speaker completes the aggressive takeover of parliament since the raid on parliament by the elite forces--the Special Forces Command (SFC). In Speaker Jacob Oulanya, Deputy Speaker



Anita Among and Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanjja who is the head of Museveni's cabinet of "fishermen"³⁷, the takeover of the legislative branch of parliament by the executive is effectively complete.

The citizen's resistance that crystallized around the attempts to amend Article 26 on protection against deprivation of property (especially land) and the amendment of Article 102 (b) to remove presidential age limits from the constitution is likely to take centre stage in the work of the Eleventh Parliament. Efforts to break the resistance against such amendments is likely to result into unleashing of extreme violence beyond the level of the 2021 elections and effectively push Uganda towards the warrior mad king scenario or the storm in the tea cup scenario at best.

The 'unholy' Trinity and the shifting centres of power

The trajectory of Uganda's political transition process will considerably be shaped considerably by the architecture of the power centres that continue to emerge and evolve. In emerging and established democratic and peaceful societies, the locus of power is determined by established norms and principles often laid down in national constitutions. In this regard, executive power rests with the executive arm of government and is generally exercised by the president and the cabinet. Legislative power rests with the legislature or parliament – a representative body comprised of elected representatives. Parliament is the locus of legislative power and authority. The leadership of parliament and the collective body of legislators exercise this power through their core functions of legislation, representation of constituency interests and oversight over the executive and arms of the state. The judiciary is vested with judicial authority to adjudicate between citizens as well as limiting the exercise of absolute power or abuse of authority by the legislature and the executive.

However, evolving narratives and evidence show that the power of state has been captured and has been gradually shifting from these institutions to a trinity of individuals - Father, the Son and the unHoly Spirit. The unholy trinity has been able to achieve this through the control of the military and allied security agencies and outfits.

Executive authority is increasingly concentrated in President Museveni – the Father. By controlling all state resources, his patronizing power over individual citizens as well as every other institution of state and civil society is felt across the board. The tacit approval of the attack on the High Court by the infamous Black Mamba Urban Hit Squad of the UPDF on Wednesday November 16, 2005³⁸, the stopping of the parliamentary inquiry into the

37 *Explaining his confounding choice of cabinet appointments--many of whom were greeted with public skepticism and ridicule, President Museveni likened himself to Jesus Christ who chose his disciples from all walks of life, in an apparent show of solidarity with the ordinary citizen. See for example <https://www.newvision.co.ug/article/details/123209>*

38 See <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/black-mamba-s-raid-on-kampala-high-court-how-it-happened-1678378>, accessed on July 6th 2021

2016 killings in Kasese, the rationalization of extrajudicial executions of protestors during the 2021 elections and the outright tampering with the election of the Speaker of Parliament, all point to the concentration of power in one man who is able to act without restraint. Increasingly, Museveni likes comparing himself to God, and at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, converted State House into a multi-denominational shrine summoning all clergy for “prayers” against a stealth virus³⁹. A recent directive by the new “fishermen ministers” in the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives requires every office in the ministry to have a portrait of president Museveni.⁴⁰ All strongmen, from Mobutu Sese Seko, Daniel arap Moi, Muammar Gaddafi to Robert Mugabe often decree the display of their portraits in public offices.

The power of the security forces is being reconfigured in many ways. The dominant narratives and actions point to a trajectory where power is slowly shifting to Museveni’s only publicly known son Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba – a Sandhurst trained military officer who made four-star-general at lightning speed. There are several narratives and actions that project this shifting power architecture within Uganda’s security forces. First, it is no coincidence that increasingly, Museveni refers to Uganda’s military as the NRA rather than as the UPDF which is its constitutional title. The NRA was Museveni’s fighting force but retained the same name upon capturing power in 1986 until the promulgation of a new constitution in 1995. The change of its name was a deliberate attempt to revise what was on account of historical reasons, a rebel outfit into a national army. Museveni’s continued reference to the UPDF as the NRA suggests that the transition of the military into a national army as envisaged under the Constitution is far from complete.

Besides, over the past two decades, the military took over the command and recently the administration of the Uganda Police Force (UPF). In 2001 Gen. Katumba Wamala was appointed as the Inspector General of the Police (IGP) becoming the first military officer to head the police force under Museveni’s reign. He was subsequently replaced by Gen. Kale Kayihura. These were followed by Gen. Sabiiti Muzeyi and Gen. Paul Lokech at the level of Assistant Inspector General of Police (AIGP). In 2019, Brig. Jack Bakasumba, Brig. Godfrey Goloba, Col. Jese Kamunanwire and Col. Chris Ddamulira were appointed to the top leadership of Uganda Police Force as Chief of Joint Staff, Director for Human Resource Development and Training, Director for Human Resource Administration and Director Crime Intelligence, in that order.⁴¹ In 2021, Gen. Kahinda Otafire, former Chief of Defense Forces (CDF) Gen. David Muhoozi and Gen. Joseph Musanyufu were appointed to the Ministry of Internal Affairs as minister, state minister

³⁹ <https://www.newvision.co.ug/articledetails/107191>

⁴⁰ <https://www.newvision.co.ug/articledetails/106047>

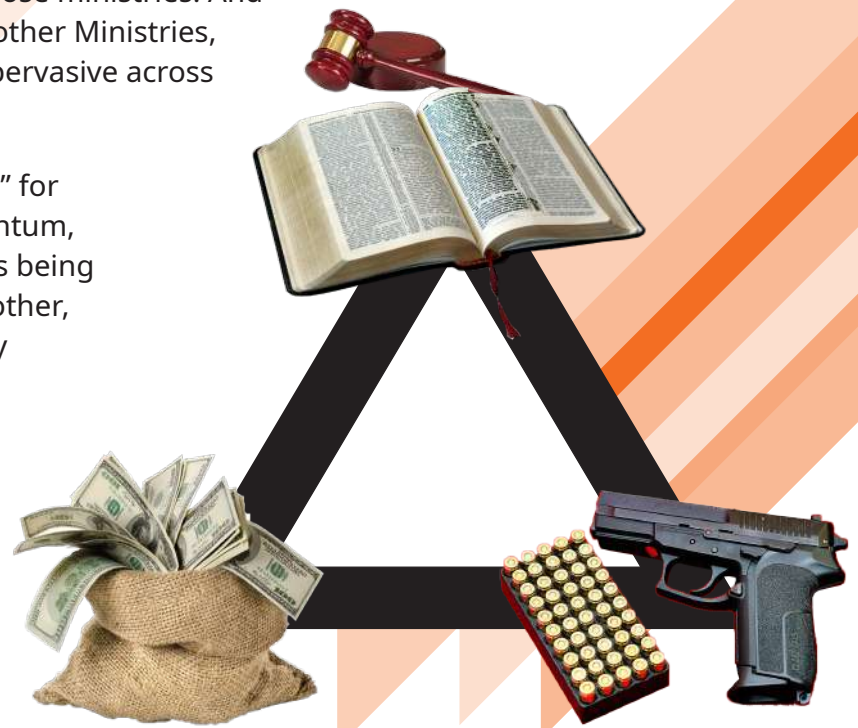
⁴¹ <https://www.upf.go.ug/police-welcomes-seconded-officers-2/>



and permanent secretary respectively. This followed the appointment of Gen. Aronda Nyakairima as Minister for Internal Affairs in 2013, an office he occupied until his death in 2015. The military occupation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries is effectively complete, with army officers taking over the political, policy and administrative control of those ministries. And the extension of military control over other Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) is pervasive across the board.

On social media, the "Project Muhoozi" for president seems to be gaining momentum, with a variety of social media accounts being created and competing against each other, showcasing their loyalty and proximity to the perceived power centres. The "Muhoozi Project" social media warriors may pass as some excited or idle people. However, the fact that their actions drag a serving senior officer of the military into the arena of partisan politics, in contravention of the Constitution and the Uganda Peoples Defense Forces, cannot pass as idle talk. More importantly, the silence of the Commander-in-Chief, Yoweri Museveni, amidst the growing chorus of tweets in support of Muhoozi Kainerugaba as heir apparent to the presidency, suggests the former's tacit approval of the social media blitz. The "Muhoozi Project" for president whether real or simply a figment of the fertile imagination of its proponents has implications for the balance of powers within the security forces and for the political transition process. As the country moves towards 2026 and beyond, this shift in the balance of power in the military to Museveni's son and heir apparent will be evidenced through overt national and intentional and appearances and the shadowing of whoever will be the CDF, in the event that Mr. Keinerugaba will not have been elevated to CDF.

The locus of bureaucratic power has continuously been shifting from the formal institutions of public service to a shadowy quasi military outfit called Operation Wealth Creation (OWC). This outfit is headed by one of Uganda's most celebrated "retired" military generals Caleb Akandwanaho (more popularly known by his nom de guerre, Salim Saleh), who is President Museveni's half-brother. A towering and generally likable figure across Uganda's political spectrum, Gen. Saleh, as he is fondly called, has a finger



in many pies, not least in the military, politics, and business.⁴² He had a stint as Minister for Micro-finance (2006-2008), brought the Ugandan military into the convening of the Miss Uganda Beauty Contest⁴³ bailed out a church community⁴⁴ and bailed out a section of Uganda musicians in financial distress as a result of the COVID-19.

Through OWC, Saleh is able to extend his reach and influence over all sections of the Ugandan society. He operates through mobile outposts extending influence especially in areas where the population seems to be shifting away from the NRM regime. He camped in Barifa Forest in Arua (2010)⁴⁵ following the 2006 elections where the opposition performed considerably well in the West Nile Region. In 2018, he spent nearly two months in Teso region following indications that the traditional loyalty of the region to the NRM was waning, following the acrimonious campaign to repeal the presidential age limit from the Constitution.⁴⁶ In 2019, he camped in Rwenzori sub region⁴⁷, first in Fort Portal and then in Kasese, apparently to defuse the animosity against the regime which was sparked by the military raid of a palace belonging to Rwenzururu Kingdom. He is reported to have pumped over 600 billion shillings(USD 170m), in a veiled OWC investment. In 2021, he was camped at the UPDF 4th Division Headquarters in Gulu, Acholi region⁴⁸ where he summoned leaders ranging from Vice President Jessica Alupo, Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja, Government Chief Whip Thomas Tayebwa, Buganda Royal Prince David Wasajja to ministers, presidential advisors, top executives of state agencies, and an American pop star, Aliaune Damala Bandara Akon Thiam, popularly known as Akon.

Gen. Saleh's roots in the Uganda military, his perceived personal likeability and the apparent trust that President Museveni has in him places him in a potentially strategic position to shape the trajectory of Uganda's transition. The fact that he is able to operate an informal and largely unconstitutional outfit and yet have access to unlimited public funds without being questioned or challenged by parliament and the formal institutions of state means that he towers over them and can influence the way they act in future political transition discourse. His apparent moderating influence could be Uganda's best insurance against a potential warrior mad king scenario. If he chooses, Saleh can lead Uganda's bet in trying to induce

42 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17531055.2012.664701>

43 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGMykgCLESM>

44 <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/i-didn-t-break-ndeeba-church-gen-saleh--1918898>

45 <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/saleh-named-in-arua-land-grab-1526102>

46 <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/special-reports/gen-saleh-camps-in-tooro-locals-wary-of-his-activities-1788964>

47 <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/saleh-s-shs600b-plan-for-rwenzori--1800106>

48 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30OqNAOUjD4>

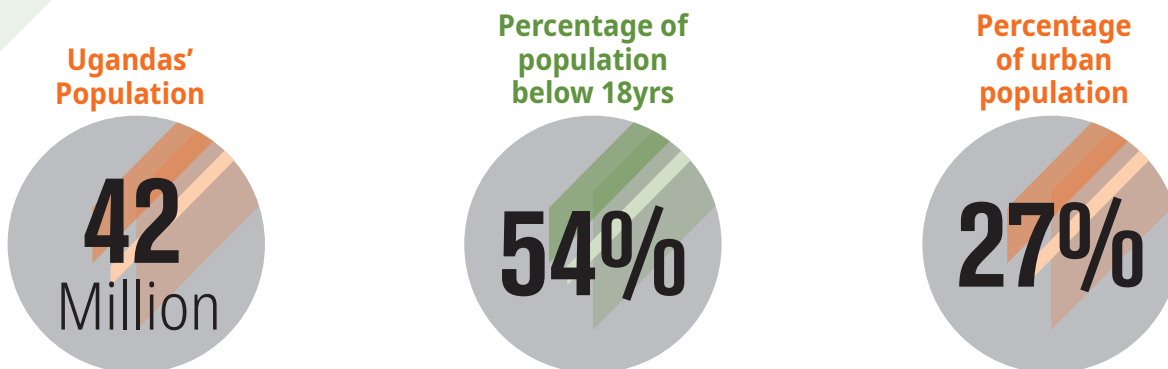


a non-partisan all inclusive national dialogue that can move the country towards the flying crane scenario.

Demographic factors

A recently released UBOS report⁴⁹ contains important statistics that have significant implications for Uganda's political transition to 2026 and beyond. First, the report shows that Uganda is a nation of young people. An estimated 54 percent of Uganda's population of 42 million people is below 18 years of age. In addition, the majority of the population is under the age of 35 years. By implication, this age segment was born after Mr. Museveni captured power in 1986. Secondly, the urban population is also expanding rapidly and currently estimated at 27 percent of the total population. Thirdly, while net school enrollment is at an impressive 91 percent, the primary school completion rate stands at an average of 27 percent.

Economic and development policy practitioners positively look at a young population as a window of opportunity. However, a young population that is urbanizing, largely unemployed, or in many cases unemployable, is likely to make the political situation highly contested and potentially explosive.



The anxiety of young people caused by an uncertain political and economic future has the potential to generate resistance to a regime that has been in power for the rest of their lives. As Museveni and his cabinet of “fishermen” engage in constitutional and political manoeuvres to 2026 and beyond, the potential resistance by this largely young population will attract violent crackdown from regime allied security forces, paramilitary and militia groups. Like was witnessed in the campaign against removal of age limit in 2017, elements within the security forces are likely to step in on the side of the incumbent regime to subdue the resistance and inevitably move the transition trajectory towards the warrior-mad-king scenario.

Economic drivers

Another important driver of the three alternative scenarios are the economic conditions that Uganda may experience over the next years and beyond. After more than a decade of economic reforms championed by Museveni and his government, Uganda’s economy registered commendable levels of growth averaging about six percent for the period up to 2010. The policies pursued by the government, including wide ranging public service reforms, privatization of non-performing and inefficient state enterprises, returning the properties of departed Asians and generally controlling inflation through rigorous monetary policy and exchange rate controls, were able to resuscitate the economy. In the recent past, there has been a deliberate focus on investing in infrastructure including roads, railways and electricity generation infrastructure especially hydropower dams and solar gardens.





However, since 2010, the economy performed dismally and GDP growth declined consistently for a period of at least five years. The growth remains unevenly distributed across demographics and geographies. International nongovernmental organisation and charity Oxfam estimates that the economy is largely concentrated in the top 10 percent of the population. An estimated 3.3 million households are trapped in the subsistence economy while an estimated 8.9 million people (20.4%) live below the poverty line. The economy remains heavily reliant on rain-fed-low-output agriculture. Increased environmental degradation and climate change coupled with Uganda's low technological capacity will continue to negatively affect agricultural output while at the same time diminishing coping options available to households. Land enclosures, land grabs and land evictions will increasingly becoming a common occurrence pitting the poor against the 'rich'.

A bloated patronage system characterized by an extensive network of political actors at the national and local level⁵⁰ is likely to diminish the utility of any planned reforms and implementation of government programmes.

Mr. Museveni and his government will continue to parrot a zero-tolerance policy to corruption. However, both political and bureaucratic corruption will escalate with the parliament and the public service being the breeding

⁵⁰ For detailed data on the number of elective political positions at different levels, see the Uganda Elections Atlas, First Edition, <https://www.glissafrika.org/storage/publications/April2021/jhsdbwefoweivewfdsddd.pdf>



grounds for grand corruption and gerrymandering. With unmitigated grand corruption, petty corruption in the service delivery system will become prevalent and a generally acceptable practice of “something for something” will take root. Within the realm of public policy, the deepening cancer of official corruption will be manifested in the form of:

- Continuing reliance on classified expenditure and regular use of supplementary budgets;
- Political corruption evidenced by the creation of new constituencies, new administrative units and prebendalism;
- Regime driven and politically motivated land enclosures and evictions of communities from their land under the banner of promoting investments;
- Increased deficiencies in public service delivery;
- Tokenism and public appointments as political rewards for religious, ethnic and regional loyalty

Underneath, the public anger against official and unofficial corruption will continue to accumulate, further undermining the legitimacy of the regime which will then respond by attempting more schemes of inducements as well as covert and overt forms of violence.

Regional geopolitics

The geopolitics of the Great Lakes Sub-region are an important driver of the alternative scenarios for Uganda’s political transition process. Since the invasion of Rwanda by the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) and the genocide that claimed the lives of close to one million Rwandans,⁵¹ the Great Lakes Sub-region of Africa remains embroiled in conflict. The ‘New Breed of African Leaders’ (NBAL) – Kagame, Museveni, Zenawi and Afewerki – forming the Kigali, Kampala, Addis, Asmara axis turned guns at each other at one point or another. Today, Somalia remains at war, battling Al Shabab terror group with the help of AMISOM Forces where Uganda is a key player. Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains a hotbed of conflict. It is too early to predict how the new infrastructure of diplomacy between Uganda and DRC largely guaranteed by recent deployments of the Ugandan military will affect the conflict.

The common border between Uganda and Rwanda remains closed for more than two years today, since March 2019, and efforts to resolve the impasse remain unsuccessful. South Sudan is making progress in the implementation of the revitalized Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) but the fault lines remain. Ethiopia is at war with its Tigray region. Kenya is bracing for elections in 2022 but the judicial decisions regarding the unconstitutionality of the proposed amendments under the Building

⁵¹ See <https://survivors-fund.org.uk/learn/statistics/>



Bridges Initiative (BBI) is a basis for uncertainty given the country's history of ethnic-based election violence. Uganda has active operations in support of ailing Theodore Obiang Nguema kleptocracy in Equatorial Guinea although the status and extent of deployment of the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces remains unknown, and shrouded in secrecy. Most recently in a tweet, the President's son, and head of the Land Forces of the Ugandan military, Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba hinted on the possibility of attacking Guinea to oust the Guinea-Conakry forces that not so long ago deposed long time President Alpha Conde⁵².

Engagements among the Partner States of the East African Community suggest that the EAC regional integration project is more or less on the rocks, regardless of the diplomatic niceties between the region's leaders. Most of the major initiatives among the EAC leaders and countries are now being pursued on a bilateral basis.⁵³ For now, the EAC has proven incapable of navigating the strongman disease of Mr. Museveni and Mr. Kagame and hence the personal differences between the two will continue to shape the regional posture of Uganda's regime and political transition discourse for the foreseeable future.

Besides the regional geopolitics, competition for business opportunities and access to natural resources will be an important driver of Uganda's political transition scenarios over the short, medium to the long term. At the moment, there is fierce competition for business deals and economic opportunities. The countries to watch - China, France, Russia, Israel, Turkey and India - are breaking the traditional dominance of western powers on Uganda's economic landscape. China and France have shared interests in both Uganda and Rwanda. China is training the Rwandan military while France has been training Uganda's Mountain Brigade. Russia is investing in nuclear technology and nuclear facilities around the region. Turkey is increasing its presence in Somalia and its footprint in the East African region, including supply of military hardware.

This geopolitical competition creates a tremendous opportunity for Mr. Museveni to play the different countries against each other which may give him the latitude to trample upon fundamental rights and freedoms of Ugandans without any restraint from the international community. On the other hand, the United States under President Joseph Biden may rebuild the alliance of Western democracies and may increasingly push the Museveni regime to democratize or at least create space for political and civic organizing. However, strategic decisions by Museveni like the hosting

52 See <https://www.watchdoguganda.com/news/20210915/121564/musevenis-son-gen-muhoozi-reveals-he-is-ready-to-attack-depose-coup-leaders-in-guinea.html>

53 Kenya and Uganda on milk, maize and other products; Uganda and TZ on EACOP; Uganda and Tanzania on Sugar; Uganda, Tanzania and Burunda on the Rwanda bypass road.

of the Afghan refugees, as well as refugees from across the region, may make the western countries muted in their engagement with the regime on its democratic credentials and human rights record.

The evolving regional and global geopolitical landscape is likely to work more in Museveni's favor, providing him the cover necessary to maintain his current authoritarian posture at best or degenerating further towards the warrior-mad-king scenario at worst.

Access to new technological tools

Over the last decade, there has been increased access to new technology tools. Access to cellphones is currently estimated at 60.3% (28.1 Million connections)⁵⁴. The number of people using the internet has increased to 12.16 million people, representing internet penetration of 26.2%⁵⁵. There is more widespread use of social media platforms including Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook.⁵⁶ Increased access to new technological tools will influence the scenarios in a variety of ways. At the very basic level, more access to the internet and social media may drive the scenarios towards the crested crane scenario. At the same time, technology that gives government more power to control access, while acquiring surveillance capabilities can drive the scenarios towards our worst-case scenario (warrior mad king).

COVID-19 Pandemic politics: beyond the public health crisis

The declaration of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic by the World Health Organization in 2019 was an instant game changer. The range of measures to contain the spread of the pandemic including restrictions on international air travel, stay-at-home orders or domestic travel restrictions, and the breakdown in the delivery of critical Personal Protection Equipment (PPEs) triggered a near collapse of the global economic architecture, disrupting global supply chains and testing the limits of international public health diplomacy. Mounting public debt, pressures on public spending and vaccine nationalism are all new features of the COVID-19 emerging global economic and public health terrain.

For Uganda, the COVID-19 pandemic has far reaching implications for the political transition process. From the dawn of the "first" wave of the pandemic, Museveni approached COVID-19 both as a health emergency and a security matter. As a public health emergency, his regime was able to institute public health measures, including social distancing requirements, wearing of protective masks, regular washing of hands

⁵⁴ See <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-uganda>

⁵⁵ See <https://privacyinternational.org/state-privacy/1013/state-privacy-uganda>

⁵⁶ Officially, since January 2021, Facebook is currently banned in Uganda although Ugandans are able to by-



and use of sanitizers to enable the nation's health workforce and the public to guard against avoidable infections. As a security response, the regime instituted a raft of measures including restrictions on movement of people and vehicles, extended overnight curfews, and deployment of the security forces and allied militia groups that violently enforced lockdown measures. As the lockdown measures extended into the elections period, the pandemic gave Mr. Museveni perfect cover to impose restrictions on the campaign activities of his opponents and elections related civic mobilization.⁵⁷

The pandemic's first wave did not cause as much damage as was witnessed in many parts of the world. However, as the victory laps about the efficiency of the regime in controlling the potentially disruptive effects of the novel coronavirus were getting louder, a second wave of the more devastating delta variant attacked with a vengeance. A potentially avoidable wave of death and desperation from an overstretched health workforce and health facilities exposed the sheer lack of preparedness, gross corruption and outright inefficacies in Uganda's public health system. The cost of care in the private health facilities inhibited access to many who needed care and left many others in debt.

The full extent of the political implications of the COVID-19 pandemic are unimaginable. At the very basic level, the pandemic exposed the failures of Uganda's public health system and the inflated cost of private healthcare. More importantly, citizens now know that the Government has no capacity to mitigate the failures of the health system and everybody is on their own. Secondly, the acute shortage of critical care infrastructure, including Intensive Care Units (ICU) and High Dependence Units (HDU) facilities was laid



pass the ban by using Virtual Private Network (VPN).

⁵⁷ For details on the politics of COVID-19 pandemic, see Godber Tumushabe (2020), *Museveni's battle against the corona virus: A covid-iot's reflection on the future of Uganda's electoral democracy*. Great



bare before a helpless citizenry. This is despite the many assurances by the government about its readiness to handle any corona virus related emergencies. Museveni's own vulnerability was visible at the fourth prayer session as he questioned his officials about what happened to the procurement of 42,000 hospital beds for COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic also exposed the incapacity of the regime to deliver an effective economic policy response early as the impacts of the pandemic began to show. There have been legitimate attempts to provide a lifeline to businesses in distress through established financial delivery mechanisms such as Uganda Development Bank (UDB), Micro Finance Support Centre (MFSC) and patronage schemes such as Emyooga⁵⁸. Most of these response options either remain work in progress or they are held hostage by the traditional bureaucracies of these institutions. The country is sinking deeper into debt with millions of dollars of borrowed funds largely unaccounted for. At the peak of the first wave, the President himself picked at least a trillion shillings from the Consolidated Fund as classified expenditure to State House.

Finally, out of the lacklustre response of the regime to the pandemic, it is increasingly dawning on many Ugandans that "we are on our own". In many other countries, governments instituted a wide variety of measures to mitigate the disruptions to normal life and business caused by the

Lakes Institute for Strategic Studies, Kampala. <https://glissafrika.org/storage/transitions/May2020/ZhSz695nwhdFZjDjIA3Y.pdf>

58 Emyooga translation



pandemic. In Uganda, the president announced lockdown measures ordering people to stay in their homes. They had to figure out how to survive. Schools were closed and parents had to figure out what to do with their children because government had no capacity to deliver the promised online learning programmes. “We are closing your small business or your kiosks to save you from the pandemic but you also figure out how to hustle along” is the approach at play. The erosion of public trust and confidence in government exacerbated by this lacklustre response may further diminish the legitimacy of the regime and its capacity to govern.

Finally, since the declaration of the pandemic in March 2020, the corona virus was added to Museveni's toolkit of fear and violence by which he increasingly governs the country. In the period following the violent amendment of the Constitution in 2017 when he deployed the army to attack parliament and force through the amendment, Ugandans were beginning to overcome fear of the security forces. Attempts to use violence to force through electoral victories for his preferred candidates in Jinja, Bugiri and Arua were thwarted by the vigilance of ordinary, peaceful, but assertive citizens. The novel coronavirus arrived and handed the incumbent regime a much-needed new tool to instill fear in the public on the one hand or deploy the security forces to harass people and on the other hand disrupt civic activities under the guise of enforcing the COVID-19 standard operating procedures (SOPs).

Whatever angle one looks at it, the COVID-19 pandemic has profound implications for Uganda's political transition process in the short, medium and the longterm. In the short to the medium term, Mr. Museveni could inspire his new cabinet to ensure a more comprehensive, efficient, accountable and citizen responsive approach to handling the pandemic. Such a response would help salvage the legitimacy of the regime, giving Museveni more leverage in shaping the political transition trajectory of the country. The possibility of continued failure by government to get its act



together and handle the apparent public health delivery deficit, regulate the astronomical costs of private health services, and failure to deliver effective economic and livelihood response options will further undermine the regime and diminish Museveni's ability to shape the political transition in ways that he desires.

In the medium to the long term, people faced with an uncertain future sometimes overcome fear and choose to determine their destiny. The economic slowdown, the supply chain disruptions, and the long-term threats to livelihoods have the potential to increase uncertainty within the population over the long term. Uncertainty can induce passive overt resistance among the affected population groups. Confronting such resistance with force can trigger a chain reaction of events, producing more violence and further volatility. Progressive regimes can take advantage of such situations and engineer a new governance dispensation towards a flying crane scenario. On the contrary, authoritarian leaders often exploit such situations to unleash more violence, hence moving the country towards a warrior mad king scenario.



Conclusion

This paper represents preliminary efforts to build potential future scenarios with regard to Uganda's political transition process. It provides a basis for additional analytical work that may be needed to deepen our understanding of how the different internal and external factors may interact to influence the direction of the country towards any of the three scenarios.

For now, it is trite to argue that the Crested Crane Scenario represents the shared aspirations about the political direction of the country. This direction is expressed in the theme of Uganda's Vision 2040: "A Transformed Ugandan Society from a Peasant to a Modern and Prosperous Country within 30 years". This scenario also reflects the aspirations set out in a wide range of policy frameworks including the third edition of the National Development Plan (NDPIII). These official policy documents proclaim a national commitment to promote governance and strengthen the rule of law. The failure of Uganda's constitution to stand the test of time demonstrates the shaky foundation against which this commitment is built. The storm in the tea cup scenario has many of the elements common with the current status of Uganda's politics. Yet, unfolding political landscape and shifting centres of power have the potential to move the country towards a warrior mad king scenario.





The challenge for the country is to confront the 'elephant in the room' and openly debate these scenarios. The real elephant in the room is an apparent life presidency and the inescapable fact that the incumbent President has vested interest in determining who succeeds him. Indeed, the tragedy of countries that have been ruled by strongmen for decades from Angola through Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Uganda, all the way to Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Chad, Libya and Egypt is that it is difficult to discuss the future without the ruler being part of the central argument. It is therefore not by accident that while a future Uganda that is stable and prosperous without Museveni is possible, the identified scenarios can turn out different, depending on what he chooses to do or not do. In the final analysis, to note that a transition towards the crested crane scenario requires more statesmen than party cadres; more patriotism than ethnic nationalism; and more citizenship than patronage.



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