

ELECTIONWATCH

UGANDA



Uganda Pre-Election Watch: February 2011 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections

On February 18, 2011, Ugandans will go to the polls to elect their nation's president and parliament. These elections represent the second time since 1986 that Uganda will elect its leaders under a multi-party political system. After lengthy periods of dictatorship and insecurity, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) took power after winning a guerrilla war, and instituted a new system of no-party democracy in 1986 under current President Yoweri Museveni.

A 2005 constitutional referendum restored a multi-party system, and in 2006 the leading opposition candidate won 37 percent of the vote. Whether opposition parties can improve on the gains they made in the 2006 presidential and parliamentary elections remains an unknown. Both the conduct and results of the upcoming elections will be an important marker for determining whether Uganda has continued to make progress in institutionalizing multi-party politics.

Challenges Facing Uganda

Uganda, one of Africa's fastest-growing nations, has experienced significant economic growth, embarked on an effective decentralization process, held highly competitive elections at the parliamentary and local government level, has made considerable progress in combating HIV/AIDS, and has had success in empowering women in leadership. Despite these gains, Uganda still faces a number of challenges in establishing its credentials as a truly multi-party democratic state that practices good governance. Uganda has yet to witness the peaceful transfer of power from one leader to another. Patronage politics and massive corruption have weakened the ability of the ruling government to deliver services. Political parties are still weakly established as institutions and continue to rely heavily on the personality of their leaders as a means of differentiation from other parties.

To establish a multi-party democratic system with regular peaceful transfers of power, Uganda needs to build strong and internally democratic political parties that can provide stability during times of change in leadership. During 2010, all parties held primaries to elect leadership. These primaries were fraught with irregularities and resulted in protests from many of the unsuccessful candidates, especially in the ruling NRM. Candidates in the primary elections complained of intimidation, poor administration of primary election procedures, vote-buying, lack of ballot security and failure to verify eligible voters. Many of those unsuccessful in party primaries have gone on to contest as independents, against the regulations of their parties.

The level of contention in the party primaries suggests that internal democracy within parties and loyalty to the parties are still works in progress. Despite these challenges, parties have

shown increasing levels of organization during the current campaign period, with more sophisticated efforts to identify appropriate candidates, organize membership, and mobilize supporters to monitor the polls. The results of the elections will demonstrate to what extent the parties have grown and consolidated since their legalization in 2005.

Political Environment

In a petition on the 2006 presidential election results, Uganda's Supreme Court judged that there had been significant irregularities in the campaign and voting process, including bribery, intimidation and violence. The court also noted that a number of voters had been disenfranchised through lack of legal resources to appeal their erroneous deletion from the voters register. Finally, the court expressed concern about the involvement of security forces during the campaigns, partisan behavior by some electoral officials and lack of voter education. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court ruled that such irregularities did not substantially affect the outcome of the elections, effectively declining to overturn the 2006 results.

In 2011, the electoral environment in Uganda remains contentious, with some opposition leaders calling for the removal of the current chairperson of the Electoral Commission and the re-constitution of the commission in consultation with political parties. In recent weeks, there have been some rumblings of a possible boycott from the opposition, but despite these protestations, all major parties nominated presidential candidates and have continued to campaign.

Political parties did manage to secure a modest set of electoral reforms in early 2010. Reflecting a compromise between the ruling party and opposition parties, the changes now allow parties to verify the process of voter identification and accompany election results from polling stations to tally centers, among other reforms.

During the current campaign period, reports from the [Democracy Monitoring Group](#) (DEMG), a civil society consortium working to contribute to a freer, fairer and more transparent election landscape, have highlighted incumbents' use of government resources and personnel in campaigns and unequal access to media as key concerns. As in previous campaigns, government civil servants, especially resident district commissioners, continue to campaign publicly for particular candidates, despite laws prohibiting civil servants from taking part in partisan politics. DEMG observers also have reported use of government vehicles and other government resources to support campaigns contrary to Ugandan law. Similarly, significant restrictions were placed on opposition access to media during the 2006 elections, and while these have lessened in the current campaign, state-owned media still demonstrates considerable bias through disproportionate coverage of the incumbent at the expense of other candidates.

Nonetheless, most candidates report that they are relatively free to campaign, an improvement over previous election cycles. During the 2006 campaigns, leading opposition presidential candidate Kizza Besigye faced a series of trials for seemingly politically-motivated prosecutions, spending much of his campaign time in court or in prison. In comparison, during the current election cycle, Besigye has been largely free to campaign throughout the country.

The Presidential Election

Though the 2011 presidential candidate field spans eight parties and candidates, it is in

effect the third chapter in a decade-old race between the two leading candidates, President Museveni, incumbent since 1986, and leading opposition challenger Kizza Besigye, his former doctor and cabinet minister, both of whom contested for the presidency in 2001 and 2006. Besigye received 29 percent of the vote in 2001 and 37 percent of the vote in 2006, while Museveni's vote declined from 75 percent in 1996 to 69 percent in 2001 and 59 percent in 2006.

Nevertheless, it is widely expected that the NRM will retain the presidency, based on several recent polls, which place Museveni at about 65 percent of the vote and Besigye at approximately 15 percent. Besigye's slide in the polls, at odds with his increased popularity in 2006, may be attributed to the huge resources, especially in the media, dictated by an aggressive Museveni campaign, as well as to a weakening of Besigye's support in north and northeast, where security has improved considerably since 2006.

Though it is expected that Besigye's showing will improve in subsequent polls given the increased presence of his party's parliamentary campaigns, it seems unlikely that any gains will be enough to bridge the current gap. Recent polls place candidates Norbert Mao and Olara Otunnu in third and fourth place, with each drawing approximately three to five percent of the vote.

The current filed of candidate is as follows:

Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, NRM
 Kizza Besigye, Forum for Democratic Change
 Norbert Mao, Democratic Party
 Olara Otunnu, Uganda People's Congress
 Beti Kanya, Uganda Federal Alliance
 Jaberu Bidandi-Ssali, Peoples Progressive Party
 Abed Bwanika, People's Development Party
 Samuel Lubega, Independent



The Parliamentary Elections

The parliamentary campaigns have attracted an increased number of candidates during this election cycle, with as many as 14 candidates contesting for a single seat, and fewer NRM candidates running unopposed. This increasingly competitive field means that it remains difficult to predict the outcome of parliamentary races in many constituencies and districts. The ruling NRM is expected to retain most of the seats in the west and in several other strongholds. Independent candidates may increase their share of votes to increase their total from 26 seats currently held.

At present, there are three parties and one alliance serving in parliament as well as two non-represented parties contesting parliamentary seats. The main parties include the NRM, the Democratic Party and the Uganda People's Congress. The Inter-Party Cooperation, an alliance affiliated with leading opposition presidential candidate Besigye, is composed of the dominant opposition party Forum for Democratic Change, as well as several smaller parties: The Justice Forum, the Conservative Party, the Social Democratic Party, and Suubi, a pressure group aligned with the Buganda Kingdom, will field 296 parliamentary candidates. The two smaller non-parliamentary parties are the Uganda Federal Alliance and the Peoples Progressive Party.

Party	Current Seats	Candidates Fielded
-------	---------------	--------------------

National Resistance Movement	211	332
Inter-Party Cooperation	40	296
Democratic Party	10	103
Uganda People's Congress	9	131
Uganda Federal Alliance	0	61
Peoples Progressive Party	0	32

 **JOIN OUR MAILING LIST**  Facebook  Twitter

