



Working Paper No. 135

**MUSEVENI AND THE 2011 UGANDAN
ELECTION: DID THE MONEY MATTER?**

by Jeffrey Conroy-Krutz and Carolyn Logan

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AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS

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September 2011

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ABSTRACT¹

In February 2011, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni further extended his already twenty-five-year tenure by winning a resounding re-election victory. In the aftermath of the vote, which many had earlier predicted would be competitive or even result in an opposition victory, analysts and opposition supporters ascribed Museveni's victory to his government's massive pre-election spending on public goods, and to supposedly widespread vote-buying practices. While the opposition clearly could not compete with Museveni and his National Resistance Movement in terms of access to resources, our analyses of survey data—from two pre-election surveys conducted by Afrobarometer in November/December 2010 and January 2011, and a three-wave pre- and post-election panel study—find little evidence that Museveni benefited significantly from practices such as public goods outlays, district creation, and vote buying. Additionally, we find little evidence that fear and intimidation are responsible for the results, and more support for hypotheses that Museveni's re-election was driven by an uninspiring opposition slate, widespread satisfaction with macroeconomic growth, and an improved security situation, particularly in the Northern Region.

¹ We would like to thank Helen Lee for valuable research assistance for this paper.

INTRODUCTION

On February 18, 2011, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni won a resounding re-election victory, extending his tenure until 2016, some 30 years after he first seized power in Kampala. The length of Museveni's reign is striking even by African standards, particularly in light of the promise he offered at his first inauguration in January 1986, that "We [his National Resistance Army] shall be here for only four years, after which we shall hand over power to a free and fairly elected civilian government." Museveni is in many ways a study in contradictions. He has been lauded at home and abroad for his path-breaking universal education, anti-HIV/AIDS, and decentralization programs, yet criticized for his long record of anti-party sentiments, links to corruption, and, most recently, his harsh crackdowns on nascent public demonstrations. Certainly it is this mix of the carrot and stick that has made Museveni one of the most durable rulers in post-independence Africa.

In the run-up to the most recent electoral campaign, however, many of Museveni's opponents sensed that his days might finally be numbered. Steadily growing support for opposition candidates over the course of the last several elections, well-publicized corruption scandals, deepening rifts within the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM), and increasing anti-regime disquiet amongst key ethnic groups seemed to augur poorly for the incumbent. However, when the Afrobarometer publicly released data from a pre-election survey in Uganda on 16th December 2010 revealing that nearly two-thirds of Ugandans intended to vote for the incumbent president, the news was met in some quarters with anger or even outright disbelief, followed by accusations regarding both the loyalties of the Afrobarometer, and its methodologies. Several subsequent surveys, however, produced very similar findings, and the results of all of these efforts were ultimately confirmed by the eventual outcome of the election: President Museveni held on to his post after securing some 68.4% of the vote, while his main challenger, Kizza Besigye, garnered a disappointing 26.0%.

Rather than emerging from this resounding victory with renewed confidence and a strengthened hand, however, Museveni's hold on power now seems more tenuous than perhaps at any other point in his two and a half decades in office. In the months since the election, Kampala and other urban centers have been roiled by periodic demonstrations. Opposition supporters have taken to the streets, joined by lawyers, women's groups, and – perhaps most worrisome for Museveni – the merchant class, primarily (though not exclusively) to protest skyrocketing prices for fuel and basic commodities.

Ironically, the roots of these troubles, as well as the constraints on the state's capacity to mitigate them, may lie in the president's successful – but very expensive – re-election campaign. By all accounts, Museveni, his government, and the NRM spent lavishly during the campaign. State resources were re-directed toward the purchase of everything from extensive advertising, to public goods and reported attempts to buy the political support of powerful local brokers and individual voters themselves through simple cash disbursements (Izama 2011: 67-8). In the aftermath of the election, many politicians, citizens, and observers (foreign and domestic) attributed Museveni's comfortable win to this spending, which, they contended, severely tilted the political playing field in favor of the incumbent. Only this spending, many seemed to argue, could explain Museveni's unexpectedly robust performance in the face of such strong headwinds.

However, while this "monetization" of Ugandan politics clearly amounted to an inefficient and undemocratic use of state resources, we find little evidence in public opinion data from before and after the election to substantiate claims that the NRM essentially "bought" Museveni's re-election. Rather, we find that the February outcomes can best be attributed to widespread satisfaction with sustained economic growth, and especially with the peace dividend enjoyed in the north, alongside discontent with a fractionalized and what turned out to be an uninspiring slate of opposition candidates. Self-reported beneficiaries of vote-buying attempts and recently distributed public goods are not significantly more likely to have supported Museveni than their counterparts who report no such largesse. In other words, the unprecedented level of campaign spending may not have yielded significant electoral gains for Museveni, but the massive and sudden infusion of cash into the Ugandan economy very likely exacerbated the inflationary pressures that are now the source of so many of the president's woes. At the same time, severely depleted state coffers constrain the

government's capacity to respond. The paradox – and tragedy – of recent months is that in the wake of the government's harsh crackdowns on protests and increasing discomfort with dissent, Uganda now appears to be backsliding democratically just months after an election that was perhaps the most peaceful and representative of the people's voice in several decades.

The Run-Up: Opposition Optimism

It is well known that electoral turnovers have been relatively uncommon in Africa, especially when incumbents are running. At the time of the Ugandan elections, only 18 of the nearly 150 presidential elections held in sub-Saharan Africa since 1990 had resulted in an incumbent or his party losing and handing over power to the opposition. Only five elections in the previous five years had resulted in any executive turnover. And an incumbent president had been turned out of office via an election only in Ivory Coast (and there only after a lengthy and bloody standoff), although the re-elections of a number of others have been conspicuously fraudulent. In spite of this poor track record for African oppositions, going into the 2011 elections, many opponents of Ugandan President Museveni and his National Resistance Movement (NRM) held high hopes that Museveni's days as president were numbered. Many Ugandans, particularly elites and urbanites, were convinced that the indicators of an impending electoral turnover were positive.

This optimism stemmed from three key factors. First, Museveni's support had tracked a clear downward trajectory during the course of three previous elections. When the first presidential elections were held in 1996 under the Movement system, which did not allow parties to compete in elections, Museveni won a commanding 75.5% of the vote. But his share dropped to 69.3% in 2001, and fell substantially further to 59.3% in 2006, in the first elections held following the 2005 referendum that restored full multiparty competition (in a deal that also eliminated presidential term limits). Although the opposition in Uganda has remained divided, the fact that the country uses a two-round system meant that, like Senegal in 2000, holding the incumbent's share below 50% would provide an opportunity to unite in a second round and achieve victory. Many in the opposition believed that this downward trajectory indicated that the public was tiring of Museveni and the NRM, and might finally be ready for change.

Second, opposition adherents also thought they saw an opportunity in what appeared to be a growing rift between Museveni and the Baganda, the country's largest – and most politically and economically important – ethnic group.² Museveni had won the allegiance of many Baganda when, as commander of the National Resistance Army (NRA), he fought Milton Obote's government and brought an end to the government-sponsored campaign of violence against the Baganda in the Luweero Triangle during the 1980s bush war. Museveni's status among the Baganda was further cemented when he restored Uganda's traditional kingdoms in 1993; invited the Kabaka (Buganda king), whose late father had been exiled by Obote in 1966, to return to the country; and then allowed for the restoration of the Lukiko, the Buganda parliament, and other traditional cultural institutions. As a result, the Baganda, who live primarily in the Central Region of the country around Kampala, have typically thrown the bulk of their support behind Museveni at election time. In 2001, he won 64.6% of the vote in Buganda³; in 2006, he took 57.4%.

However, two developments that occurred in rapid succession in late 2009 and early 2010 opened what many perceived to be a growing schism between Museveni and the Baganda. First, in September 2009, the government blocked the Kabaka from attending a ceremony in Kayunga District, arguing that since parts of the district had recently announced, unilaterally, their secession from Buganda, the King's presence might spark violence. The government's perceived insult to the Kabaka was met with outrage on the part of many Baganda, resulting in days of rioting in Kampala and other areas, and leading to several dozen deaths. Tensions were further exacerbated when the

² According to the 2002 census, Baganda comprise 16.9% of the total population. The next largest ethnic group is the Banyankole, who comprise about 9.5% of the population.

³ "Buganda region" is equated with Central Region. Afrobarometer surveys find that approximately three-quarters or more of residents in this region identify themselves as Baganda.

government closed the Kingdom's radio station, CBS FM – which consistently ranks as the most popular in Central Region – arguing that it had encouraged the violence. The station was only allowed to re-open in October 2010, shortly before the official opening of the election campaign. Tensions subsided following a meeting between the Kabaka and the President at State House in late September 2009, but many Baganda, particularly the monarchists who have never fully acceded to the Ugandan state's authority over Buganda, continued to resent Museveni's perceived meddling in Buganda affairs.

Potentially even more damaging to the relationship was the burning of the Kasubi Tombs in March 2010. As the burial place of four Kabakas (and a UNESCO World Heritage Site), the tombs are a revered cultural symbol among the Baganda. Their loss was seen as a terrible – and suspicious – blow to the Kingdom. When Museveni tried to visit the site the following day, angry protesters initially blocked his passage, and two people were killed in the subsequent violence. An investigation quickly attributed the burning to a lone, deranged individual, and Museveni promised full support for rebuilding, but many nonetheless regarded the event as a serious blow to relations between the Ugandan state and Buganda.

Citing long-term deterioration in the relationship even prior to these events, Tripp suggests that “by 2009, relations between Mengo [the seat of the Buganda government] and Museveni's government had reached an all-time low,” and that “the handling of the riots [in Kayunga District and Kampala] by government forces has seriously undermined Museveni's electoral base among the Banganda, a base that he needs to win presidential elections” (2010: 120-121). Soon after the Kasubi stand-off, Andrew Mwenda, editor of the *Independent* magazine and an influential Ugandan political commentator, expressed a similar view, blogging that:

Mengo has emerged, quite inadvertently, as the major pillar of opposition to Museveni...Without Baganda support, neither Western Uganda nor his rigging machinery can pull off a victory for him except a pyrrhic one i.e., at a very high cost. Therefore, in locking horns with Mengo, Museveni may finally be laying down the foundation of his eventual downfall (Mwenda 2010a).

A few weeks later, Mwenda wrote that he was “inclined to believe that recent events in Uganda, like the burning down of Kasubi Tombs, signal the coming fall of Yoweri Museveni” (Mwenda 2010b).

A parliamentary by-election in Mukono North, near Kampala, in May 2010, just weeks after the Kasubi fires, came to be seen as a bellwether for how Museveni might fare in Buganda in 2011. The Democratic Party (DP), the most pro-Mengo opposition group in the country, ran Betty Nambooze, a former CBS FM host and fervent critic of Museveni, who referred to herself as *Omukungu wa Kabaka*, or the “Kabaka's loyal envoy.” Her NRM opponent, Rev. Peter Bakaluba Mukasa, warned voters that, “If you vote for Nambooze, it will be a vote of no confidence in President Museveni,” and Museveni made several campaign visits in an attempt to save the seat (Kiggundu 2010). After Nambooze claimed victory with nearly 53% of the vote, some 40,000 supporters marched in the caravan taking her from Mukono to Parliament for her nomination, a 20-kilometer journey that took close to eight hours (“Betty Nambooze—The Woman from Mukono,” 2010). The Mukono North results made many in the opposition increasingly bullish about their 2011 prospects for taking on the NRM in the critical Central Region.

Third, opposition hopes were boosted still further by the perceived high caliber of several of the candidates who had stepped up to challenge Museveni. First among them was Kizza Besigye, who was making his third attempt at the presidency. A former NRM stalwart and personal physician to Museveni during the bush war, Besigye had split with the Movement in the 1990s, and has been Museveni's most consistent and prominent opponent ever since. In contrast to Museveni, he had steadily gained traction through the course of the two previous elections, increasing his share from 27.8% in 2001 to 37.4% in 2006. The Senegalese experience again seemed apt. There, a perennial

opposition candidate, Abdoulaye Wade, was finally able to dislodge the long-ruling *Parti Socialiste* on his fourth attempt.

Others were excited about the candidacies of Olara Otunnu, Uganda's former ambassador to the United Nations and a noted human rights advocate, who ran under the banner of the Uganda People's Congress (UPC), and Norbert Mao, a smooth-talking lawyer, who clearly tried – with some success (Nalugo 2010) – to present himself as Uganda's Obama. Mao, who managed to win the nomination of the traditionally Buganda-centered DP, had the perceived advantage of being from mixed parentage, with an Acholi father and Munyankole mother, a potentially significant asset in an environment in which ethnicity is perceived to play an important role in vote choice. In a pre-election interview published on the DP website, Mao said:

The same way that Obama has been a bridge between black people and white people in America, many people believe that my ethnic mix gives me a better advantage in being a bridge to unite the north and south, to heal that long divide that we have been having. Obama challenges us to aspire to a greater future and I am also challenging Ugandans by telling them that we can't do anything about the past, but we can change the future (“An Interview with Mao on Election Eve,” 17 February 2011).

There were abortive attempts at opposition unity and an effort to field a single candidate under the banner of the Inter-Party Coalition (IPC), which had signed an alliance protocol in 2009. The IPC brought together several major opposition parties, including Besigye's Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), the UPC, the Justice Forum (JEEMA), and the Conservative Party (CP). The effort largely collapsed, however, over the selection of a presidential flag bearer, as well as questions over whether to participate in elections without first winning major changes in the composition of the Electoral Commission, which was filled with Museveni appointees (“Otunnu, Besigye Fallout” 2010). Otunnu, whose successful return from a 23-year exile might not have been possible without the wide support of the IPC, eventually pulled out of the Coalition because of these issues (Mubangizi 2010), while the DP never signed on. Nonetheless, many in the opposition likely calculated that the two-round system reduced the need for a pre-election pact; rather, the voters could decide who Museveni's final challenger – and thus, hopefully, the next president of Uganda – would be (“The Museveni Machine Grinds into Gear,” 2010).

The Result: A Resounding Opposition Defeat

The opposition's confidence waned during the course of the campaign, and it was apparently seriously shaken by the release of the December Afrobarometer survey, which marked the first survey released during the campaign. Besigye lagged with just 12% of intended votes in the survey, Mao and Otunnu languished in the low single digits, and several other candidates barely registered any support (with undecideds – or those unwilling to say – making up 14%) (Afrobarometer 2010).⁴ Although the shocked opposition and some media commentators dismissed the findings and questioned the methodologies and the loyalties of the Afrobarometer (Among 2010; Mulondo 2010; Kalyegira 2010, 2011; Mugerwa 2011), a second Afrobarometer survey conducted in January 2011 (Afrobarometer 2011), as well as surveys commissioned by the state-run *New Vision* newspaper (Olupot 2011), and by the opposition itself (Olupot 2010), all confirmed the low standing of the opposition, putting Museveni ahead with a seemingly insurmountable 65-70% share of the intended vote.

These results were borne out on election day with a remarkable degree of accuracy, when Museveni took 68.4% of the vote, an increase of over nine points from 2006. Besigye captured just 26.0%, a decline of 10 points from the previous election, while Mao and Otunnu took 1.9% and 1.6%, respectively. None of the other four candidates – Jaberu Bidandi Ssali of the People's Progressive Party (PPP), Abed Bwanika of the People's Development Party (PDP), Beti Kamyu of the Uganda Federal Alliance (UFA), or independent and former-DP member Samuel Lubega – claimed over one

⁴ The question read “If a presidential election were held tomorrow, which party's candidate would you vote for as president?”

percent. The president led in 105 of the country's 112 districts, winning over two-thirds of the vote in over half (65 districts), and a crushing 90% in 13. Even in Kampala, long an opposition stronghold, Museveni came within 4000 votes of topping Besigye, a difference of less than one percentage point. In the meantime, Besigye claimed just four districts: Kampala and three – Kaberamaido, Serere, and Soroti – in Teso sub-region. And Mao won only his home district of Gulu and two neighboring districts, Amuru and Nwoya. In fact, the opposition did so poorly that all seven candidates combined won fewer votes in 2011 than Besigye alone had won in 2006, despite the fact that the vote totals were almost ten percent higher in 2011. Besigye does appear to have won the votes of many of those who reported themselves to be “undecided” in the Afrobarometer and other surveys – he overperformed the pre-election surveys by an average of eleven points – but this was clearly not enough to put him within striking distance of Museveni. Even though turnout was not robust by Ugandan standards – some 59.3% of registered voters cast a ballot, as opposed to 69.3% in 2006 – the results demonstrated a resounding victory for the incumbent and the NRM.⁵

None of the opposition presidential candidates accepted the results. In a press conference, Besigye called the election a “sham” and accused the government of organizing a “well-planned electoral rigging that we have never seen before” (Bareebe 2011). Otunnu said the results were indicative of “subjugation and suppression” and quickly called for protests (Khisia 2011). And in a long post-election statement, Mao characterized Museveni as “an obstacle to democracy” under whom “elections have become a meaningless ritual,” and called for “a campaign of defiance to say ‘NO! ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!’” (“Mao Speaks Out on February 18 Polls” 2011). Within a week, these three candidates, along with Lubega, were calling for peaceful protests to challenge the results. They sought to take advantage of the cracks that appeared in the armor of many long-time incumbents in the wake of the prolonged protests in Egypt's Tahrir Square, which had succeeded in ousting Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak only a week before the Ugandan election. Otunnu, for example, described Museveni as “100 times worse than the ousted Tunisian president and 300 times worse than Mubarak of Egypt,” and called him “the old Pharaoh of Uganda” (Emojong and Wanambwa 2011).⁶ But these early protests were not sustained, and did little more than create some hours of inconvenience in Kampala.

In contrast to these opposition complaints, the Ugandan public was relatively sanguine, at least prior to the election, about the campaign environment and the quality of the electoral process. In the January 2011 Afrobarometer survey, some 61% said they expected the election to be either completely free and fair, or free and fair with only minor problems. Similar majorities believed that the electoral commission was unbiased in its work (57%), and that the security forces were performing their duties in an impartial and neutral manner (60%). An even higher 70% reported that, on the whole, media coverage of all candidates and parties during the election campaign had been either “somewhat” or “very fair.” And the police got especially high marks for their effectiveness in “maintaining a secure environment for the elections” (85% fairly or very well), and for acting fairly in “regulating public demonstrations and campaign rallies” (81% “somewhat” or “very fairly”).

It is, however, troubling, though not especially surprising, to find that Ugandans were sharply divided on these issues along party lines. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of Museveni supporters saw the electoral commission as unbiased, but those intending to vote for the opposition saw things much differently: just 22% perceived the Commission as largely unbiased, compared to 75% who believed it “makes decisions that favour particular people, parties or interests.” Very similar patterns are evident in views on the neutrality of the security forces (75% of Museveni supporters saw them as

⁵ Uganda undertook a major updating of the voter register during 2010, leading to an increase in registered voters from 10,450,788 in 2006, to 13,953,296 in 2011. Thus, the total number of voters in the 2011 election was substantially higher than in 2006, although turnout as a proportion of registered voters was down significantly.

⁶ The Uganda Communications Commission asked telecommunications companies to block the sending of any text messages on Election Day containing 13 words or phrases, including “Egypt,” “Tunisia,” “Mubarak,” “dictator,” “tear gas,” and “People Power” (Biryabarema 2011)

more neutral than biased, versus 29% among backers of the opposition), and with regard to the expected quality of the election outcome (75% of Museveni backers anticipate that the election will be mostly or completely free and fair, compared to 33% of opposition supporters). In short, it is clear that fairness was largely in the eye of the beholder; popular views of the quality of the election environment were significantly shaped by respondents' political allegiances.

The post-election findings of several international observer missions, as well as the domestic observer coalition, DEMGroup, with regard to the quality of the elections were decidedly mixed. All agreed that election day went considerably better than in 2006. The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM) further noted that the campaign was "conducted in a fairly open and free environment, in which the freedoms of expression, assembly and association were generally respected" (EU-EOM 2011a: 2). The Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) pointed to the "extremely active national campaigns", which attracted large crowds and were conducted in a generally peaceful environment, in notable contrast with the 2006 campaign (COG 2011: 17).

Observers were also consistent in noting, however, that the voting process was in many locations marred by significant administrative problems. These included inadequately trained staff and poor management of some polling centers leading to inconsistent implementation of procedures, voters with cards being turned away because their names could not be found on the register, shortages or late delivery of voting materials at many stations, and similar problems. Concerns were also raised about the large deployment of security forces on voting day and the potential intimidation of voters. None suggested, however, that these problems were widespread enough to affect the final tally significantly, or that the eventual outcome in any way failed to reflect the will and intentions of Ugandan voters as of election day. Several reports in fact specifically cited the transparency of the vote counting process (EAC-COMES-IGAD 2011; AU Observer Mission 2011), while DEMGroup noted in its press release on the voting process that "Despite Challenges, DEMGroup Finds that the Final Vote Count Reflects Ballots Cast" (DEMGroup 2011b), and concluded that election day was "mostly free and somewhat fair."

At the same time, most observers fell far short of endorsing the election, and the EU and Commonwealth observers, in particular, strenuously objected to what they described as the "abuse of incumbency," the "monetization of the election" and the "commercialization of politics" (COG 2011; EU-EOM 2011b). Describing the elections as Uganda's "most expensive ever" (EU-EOM 2011b: 19), observers saved their strongest critique for the what was perceived as the rampant (mis-)use of state resources on the part of Museveni, his government, and the NRM, and the fundamental failure, as a result, to establish a level playing field for all candidates. Observers describe a variety of problems, ranging from blatant vote buying and distribution of "vast amounts" of money and gifts, to "other more subtle forms of buying allegiance" (EU-EOM 2011b: 19), including the use of government projects to secure support for the NRM, as well as the creation of new districts – sometimes announced by Museveni during his campaign rallies – as outlets for additional patronage (COG 2011: 25-26).

Although concrete examples of these practices are relatively limited, the observers' reports offer a few details concerning the suspicions and accusations that were widely circulating about the role of money in the elections, including:

- In January 2011, just half way through the fiscal year, parliament approved a Supplementary Budget of 602 billion Ugandan Shillings (US\$) (approximately US\$260 million), of which 85 billion shillings (US\$37 million) was assigned to the presidency (EU-EOM 2011b: 24). There were widespread suspicions that these funds were allocated largely for campaign purposes.⁷

⁷ Just a few weeks later, in fact, just days before the election, Finance Minister Syda Bbumba told journalists that the government was nearly broke and would be forced to undertake emergency cost-cutting measures (see <http://newafricaanalysis.co.uk/index.php/2011/03/ugandandemocratic-legitimacy/>).

- As part of this supplementary budget, each Member of Parliament (including opposition members) received a disbursement of US\$ 20 million (approximately US\$8700). According to the EU-EOM, “though the payment was intended to be allocated for the monitoring of government programmes in their constituencies and not for the elections, it engendered suspicion and was widely criticized by opposition MPs and civil society organizations” (EU-EOM 2011b: 20). There were reports that a handful of MPs, mostly in the opposition, returned the funds.
- According to the EU-EOM, it was “widely reported that most NRM candidates used government projects such as the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) and the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) as tools to press voters to adhere to the NRM should they wish to benefit from such projects” (EU-EOM 2011b: 24).
- In addition to resource distribution, the EU-EOM also cited the “persistent fusion of the state and the ruling party during the campaign” (EU-EOM 2011b: 25), with the vast resources of the state – including candidate and campaign coverage by state-owned media, use of vehicles, and allocation of personnel – being devoted to supporting Museveni’s re-election.

There were also widespread accusations that the government’s spending spree during the campaign, and in the months leading up to it, included aggressive implementation of road-, school- and clinic-building projects, provision of agricultural implements and supplies, and other public-works projects aimed at securing last-minute support for the incumbent.

The EU-EOM concluded that “The power of incumbency and state resources were used to such an extent as to compromise severely the level playing field between the competing candidates and political parties” (EU-EOM 2011b: 5, 25). In short, while observers generally saw little to support the opposition’s claims of massive rigging throwing the election, EU and Commonwealth observers in particular did little to conceal their central conclusion that Museveni essentially used his virtually unlimited access to state resources to buy his re-election. DEMGroup likewise concluded that “the pervasive use of money *to decide* elections has become an entrenched norm in Uganda” [emphasis added] (DEMGroup 2011a: 10). And this view was by no means limited to the community of election observers. Angelo Inzama, an experienced Ugandan journalist, concludes that, “Clever campaign strategies notwithstanding, Museveni won mostly because he threw overwhelming state resources into his campaign” (2011: 68).

Explaining Museveni’s Victory

What went so wrong for the opposition, and so right for Museveni? Did the outcome really depend as much on money, resources, and “incumbent advantage” taken to the extreme as observers and many commentators seem to suggest? Or did other factors play an equal, or perhaps even greater, role? What of the opposition’s confidence in their slate of candidates, the seeming certainty of the public’s weariness with Museveni, and the perception of a deep Baganda rift? And had the administration really done nothing, as the opposition and the international community were wont to believe, to win the public’s loyalty rather than merely buying it?

To explore these questions and test various expectations and explanations for the eventual outcome of the election, we will draw here especially on data from two Afrobarometer pre-election surveys, as well as two waves of a more geographically limited panel study that focused primarily on Ugandans’ attitudes regarding candidates and the campaign, to evaluate several possible explanations for Museveni’s strong showing.

Afrobarometer Data

The Afrobarometer produces a comparative series of public attitude surveys on democracy, governance and living conditions in Africa. Each national survey – conducted in 20 African countries during “Round 4 (2008-9) – is based on a randomly selected national probability sample of a representative cross-section of adults of voting age. Both pre-election surveys in Uganda were based on samples of 2000 adult Ugandans, which yield a margin of sampling error of +/-2.5% at a 95

percent confidence level. All interviews were conducted face-to-face by trained fieldworkers in the language of the respondent's choice. Translations of the English-language questionnaire were available in Luganda, Lumasaba, Runyankole-Rukiga, Runyoro-Rutoro, Lusoga, Ateso, Luo, Alur, Lugbara, and Akaraimajong.

Fieldwork for these two surveys was conducted by Wilsken Agencies, Ltd., the Afrobarometer National Partner in Uganda. The first survey was conducted from 18 November to 6 December 2010; the randomly selected respondents came from 55 of the country's 112 districts. The second took place from 20-28 January 2011, with respondents selected from 54 districts. Earlier Afrobarometer surveys in Uganda were conducted in 2000, 2002, 2005 and 2008.⁸

Panel Study Data

The panel study was designed in part to assess Ugandans' attitudes toward political candidates and their personal experiences during the campaign. Approximately 120 respondents were randomly selected from each of nine constituencies selected from around the country.⁹ All four of Uganda's regions were represented, with the constituencies chosen randomly through a stratified process to ensure that all major ethnic groups would be significantly represented.¹⁰ Fieldwork was conducted by Synovate Uganda. We draw here on preliminary results from two waves of the panel. In the first wave, 1072 face-to-face interviews were conducted from 19-29 November 2010 in ten languages: Acholi, Ateso, English, Langi, Luganda, Lusamia, Lusoga, Runyankole, Runyoro-Rutoro, and Rwamba. Of these, 675 individuals were successfully re-interviewed shortly after the elections, between 20 March and 3 April 2011. While these data are not nationally representative, as the Afrobarometer data are, they nonetheless provide useful perspective on – and in some cases further confirmation of – Afrobarometer's findings.

In the sections that follow, we first consider the argument that Museveni's victory can primarily be attributed to the massive distribution of public and private goods in the run-up to the election. Contrary to many observers' and opposition leaders' conclusions, our survey data, from before and after the election, offer little evidence that individuals who were reported beneficiaries of such outlays – in the form of outright attempts at vote buying, increased provision of public goods, or yet another wave of district creation in the months before the election – were significantly more likely to report supporting or having voted for the incumbent. Rather, we find stronger evidence that Museveni's victory can be attributed to voter unease with the crop of opposition candidates, the robustness of support for the NRM in Buganda, and a very real sense amongst many Northerners that, in the aftermath of the conclusion of the war in the region against the Lord's Resistance Army, they are truly better off today than they were five years ago.

Buying the Election?

As the observer reports charge, Museveni clearly took full advantage of what many would term a normal, or at least quasi-normal, incumbency advantage to bolster his re-election prospects: his access to state resources. As noted, the NRM campaign is charged by opponents and observers with widely distributing everything from t-shirts, sugar and salt, to motorcycle helmets and envelopes filled with cash, while making use of robocalls, hiring celebrity campaigners, and employing other expensive tactics. Largesse was also allegedly distributed in the form of a rapid infusion of funds into community development projects in the months preceding the elections, and via the profligate designation of new districts. In likely preparation for the elections, the NRM increased spending in the 2010-11 budget by a robust 16% ("The Museveni Machine Grinds into Gear," 2010), and this is

⁸ More information on Afrobarometer, as well as Summaries of Results and other publications on Uganda and other countries, can be found at www.afrobarometer.org.

⁹ The survey, which was designed and implemented by Dr. Conroy-Krutz, was funded by the National Science Foundation (SES-1024031) and is not affiliated with the Afrobarometer project.

¹⁰ Selected constituencies included Bugweri in Iganga District, Gulu Municipality in Gulu District, Igara West in Bushenyi District, Katikamu South in Luwero District, Maruzi in Apac District, Ntoroko in Ntoroko District, Samia-Bugwe North in Busia District, and Soroti Municipality in Soroti District.

before the January 2011 Supplemental Budget is taken into account. About US\$1.3 billion of the government's budget was spent in just the month of January, while others find the government's withdrawal of some US\$ 740 million from the Bank of Uganda during the campaign to be highly suspicious (Izama 2011: 68). Some reports have cited NRM campaign spending figures as high as half a trillion Ugandan shillings, or about US\$200 million, and others go even higher.¹¹ But was it the government's unprecedented spending spree in the run up to 2011 poll that actually secured the president's victory? Did the NRM's no-expenses-spared campaign in fact stave off an otherwise all-but-certain defeat for Museveni? Our evidence suggests that this is not likely the case.

Vote Buying

We begin with an examination of vote buying, a practice that is illegal in Uganda, but reported by many observers to be extremely widespread. What do average Ugandans tell us about this practice, and what impacts on voting behavior can we discern? Does the evidence suggest, as DEMGroup argues, that this practice was indeed a decisive factor in Museveni's success?

To begin, we note that Ugandans themselves believe that the practice of vote buying is widespread. When asked by Afrobarometer in Nov/Dec 2010 how often they thought "candidates buy votes during elections in this country," 56% said they thought this occurred "often" or "always." When asked specifically about the prevalence of vote buying during the 2006 campaign, 61% said they thought it had happened at least "occasionally," and among those, 17% thought it was a "very frequent" occurrence.

Ugandans also clearly oppose the practice, though they are somewhat ambivalent about how harshly it should be dealt with. The same survey found that fully 49% identify it as a "wrong and punishable" act for *candidates to offer* money in return for votes, while another 38% rate it as "wrong but understandable." Just 7% are willing to say that they consider it fully acceptable. An equally high 85% consider it wrong for *voters to accept* money for their votes, although they are more inclined to find this understandable (52%) rather than punishable (33%).

But when asked whether they themselves had received a vote-buying offer in the 2011 campaign, the figures are far lower, though still substantial: early in the campaign, in Nov/Dec 2010, 14% said they had received an offer, rising slightly to 17% by late January 2011. Of course, there is likely to be some under-reporting of an activity that is considered at least somewhat illicit. Moreover, the pace of vote-buying offers is likely to accelerate as election day approaches. Thus, these figures almost certainly under-report the actual eventual level of vote buying. As a point of comparison, Bratton (2008) reports roughly similar levels of vote buying offers (12%) in Nigeria in February 2007, two months before the April 2007 election. But 28% of respondents in Nigeria thought *other people* in their neighbourhood or village had been offered something in return for their vote.¹² Bratton concluded that the "true" level of vote buying probably lay somewhere between these two numbers. We make similar assumptions in Uganda, concluding that roughly one-fifth to one-third of Ugandans likely received a vote-buying offer during the course of the campaign. This estimate is consistent with findings from the post-election wave of the panel study: approximately one month after the election, 18% of respondents reported that a candidate or party had offered them things during the campaign, while 43% said that they had witnessed such distributions.

¹¹ Andrew Mwenda claimed that "the incumbent president (NRM) spent more than 350 million USD on the campaign, using largely the public purse, supplemented by private contributions" (EU-EOM 2011: 25). The source for Mwenda's figures, however, is not clear.

¹² Respondents were asked "How often (if ever) did a candidate or someone from a political party offer something, like food or a gift, to people in your neighborhood or village in return for their votes?" This question reflects a common technique for assessing the actual prevalence of behaviors that respondents may be reluctant to admit engaging in themselves, but which they may feel more comfortable attributing to "others." This question was not asked in Uganda.

But in addition to the prevalence of vote buying, we must also examine its targeting, and especially its effectiveness as a political strategy, an issue still much debated among both politicians and political analysts. Several previous studies of vote buying in Africa have produced sometimes contradictory results. Kramon (2009) finds primarily motivational effects, arguing that vote buying boosted turnout in the 2002 elections in Kenya, and Vicente (2008) reports similar findings for Sao Tome and Principe. Bratton (2008), in contrast, finds that in the Nigerian election of 2007, vote buying likely depressed turnout by at least a small amount, but he concluded that the tactic was “effective” in the sense of at least modestly increasing the buyers’ vote share. Vicente (2008), in contrast, finds that the outcomes of vote buying specifically favor challengers over incumbents. The message, in short, is that even if vote buying appears to be relatively widespread, its impact cannot be taken for granted; rather, political and social contexts appear to shape the influence of vote-buying efforts on electoral outcomes (Kramon 2009).

Bratton (2008) has described voters’ options when faced with a vote-buying offer as either refusal (rejecting the offer), defection (accepting the offer and voting for the candidate of one’s choice, or not voting), or compliance (accepting the offer and voting as instructed by the buyer). When Afrobarometer asked Ugandans how they would respond to offers of money in exchange for their vote, fully three-quarters (76%) report that they would defect, while another 19% claim they would refuse the offer altogether. A mere 4% say they would comply, (Table 1). The figures shift slightly when respondents are asked what “*other people* in your neighborhood or village” would do, but the overall pattern is still very similar: two-thirds (66%) believe others would also defect, compared to only 7% who believe that others would comply. But 18% are unsure. Those who report actually receiving an offer are less likely to say they would refuse the money compared to those who haven’t received an offer, but no more likely to say that it would actually affect their vote.

Table 1: Popular Reactions to Vote Buying

If a candidate or party official offered YOU money for YOUR vote in the 2011 elections, would you:	You*			Others*
	Received No Vote Buy Offer	Received Vote Buy Offer	Total	
Comply (Take the money and vote for the candidate)	4	4	4	7
Defect (Take the money and vote for the candidate of your choice)	74	82	76	66
Refuse (Refuse the money and vote for a candidate of your choice)	21	12	19	7
Be unsure of what to do	1	1	1	2
Don’t know	0	0	0	18

Source: Afrobarometer, Jan 2011.

*”And what about other people in your neighbourhood or village? If a candidate or party official offered them money for their votes in the 2011 elections, would they:”

Largely consistent with the prevailing storyline, Afrobarometer finds that the NRM is reported to be the source of a significant majority (67%) of all vote-buying offers, but fully 82% of those who reported receiving offers identified the NRM as at least one source (10% did not identify the sources; 25% reported multiple offers).¹³ FDC made another 20% of the offers (a total of 25% who received an offer identified FDC as at least one source), while UPC and DP trailed at just 5% each.

It is beyond the scope of this analysis to analyze the consequences of these vote-buying offers comprehensively. But the evidence suggests that efforts to buy electoral support may in fact be

¹³ For those respondents who reported that they had received at least one offer of something in return for their vote, the Afrobarometer followed up by asking first, “What did they offer?” and then “Which party or parties made the offer?” Respondents could name up to three parties.

relatively ineffective in Uganda (Table 2). As shown, those who reported receiving an offer from the NRM were actually slightly less likely to say that they intended to vote for the ruling party than those who had not received any offer (although the small N of the latter group comes with a higher margin of sampling error, so the difference is not significant). Those who said they had received an offer from FDC, in contrast, were more likely than others to say they would vote for the FDC, but also more likely to say they would vote for the NRM (and much less likely to refuse to answer the question). Thus, there is no conclusive evidence here of consistent effects from vote-buying offers, and in fact, there is nothing to suggest that its efforts to buy votes gave the NRM any significant advantage over its competitors at least in the presidential race. It may even have had the opposite effect.

Table 2: Voting Intentions Relative to Vote Buying Offers¹⁴

Voting Intention	Received no NRM vote buy offer	Received NRM vote buy offer	Received no FDC vote buy offer	Received FDC vote buy offer
Museveni / NRM	66	62	65	71
Besigye / FDC / IPC	13	23	14	19
Mao / DP	3	2	3	4
Otuunu / UPC	3	4	3	4
Bidandi	0	0	0	1
Kamya	2	2	2	0
Bwanika	0	0	0	0
Lubega	0	0	0	0
Would not vote	1	1	1	1
Refused to answer	10	6	10	1
Don't know	1	0	1	0
N (weighted)	1712	288	1916	84
N (unweighted)	1700	299	1909	90

Source: Afrobarometer, Jan. 2011.

“If a presidential election were held tomorrow, which party’s candidate would you vote for as president.”

“Other More Subtle Forms of Buying Allegiance”

Measuring both the distribution, and the effects, of public goods provision in a pre-election environment is no small task, and it is one that the Afrobarometer did not attempt. The post-election wave of the panel study did, however, capture some data on this topic, and the results are again interesting primarily for what they do *not* reveal, i.e., the lack of any demonstrable impact of public goods provision on voting intention. Respondents were asked whether their village or neighborhood had benefited from new or improved services in any of the following sectors in the previous six months: a) schools; b) health clinics; c) roads; d) water delivery; and e) sanitary facilities. While not completely comprehensive (it does not, for example, include agricultural machinery or inputs, or provision of vehicles), this list nonetheless captures many of the key categories of public goods that the Ugandan government is accused of providing as a means to secure the (voting) allegiance of local populations. The accusations that the distribution of funds for these “collective vote purchases” was widespread appear to hold up: among the 675 respondents on this question, fully 47% reported at least one improved service in just the previous six months, a remarkably high rate of investment in community development. One-third (33%) reported new or improved roads in their area, 18% schools, 14% water supplies, 12% clinics, and 9% sanitary systems. A majority (53%) reported not benefiting from any improved facilities, while 24% reported one improvement, 12% two improvements, and 11% three or more improvements (Table 3).

¹⁴ Only 22 (unweighted) respondents reported receiving offers from DP, and 25 from UPC, so the size of the sub-sample is too small to report on candidate choice for these groups.

But the effects – or near lack thereof – on vote choice are remarkable. Note first that although it is not nationally representative, the first wave of the panel study recorded a distribution of intended vote choice very close to that recorded in the Afrobarometer and other pre-election surveys, and to the actual vote tally. However, not surprisingly, on this post-election wave, the number who “recall” voting for Museveni jumps somewhat to 78%. This likely reflects a common “bandwagon effect” observed in post-election studies – people want to link themselves to a winner. But the important point for the purposes of this analysis is the lack of consistent effects of recent improvements in public services on reported vote (Table 3). Those who benefited from one improvement are actually slightly *less* likely to identify themselves as Museveni voters, and those who received two or more improvements are only marginally different from those who received none. We do note that, as shown in the fourth column, those who did not benefit from any community improvements may have been very slightly less likely to vote, so it is possible that receiving public goods had quite a modest mobilization effect. But in sum, while this analysis cannot claim to provide a definitive answer regarding the impacts of the public goods outlays that the government may have made in the run-up to the elections, it certainly offers *no significant evidence* that such spending an effective tool for boosting Museveni’s support. Rather, the evidence suggests that Museveni had a very solid support base even in the absence of providing any immediate, concrete benefits to local communities.

Table 3: Provision of Pre-Election Public Goods and Vote Choice

Number of Improvements Reported	N _{total}	%	% voting	Vote Share for Museveni*
0	357	53	82	78
1	165	24	89	75
2	79	12	89	77
3 – 5	74	11	88	83
All respondents	675	100	88	78

Source: Panel study, post-election wave, March/April 2011

“In the last six months, has your village or neighbourhood benefited from any of the following: a) a new or renovated school; b) a new or renovated health clinic; c) new or improved roads; d) new or improved water delivery; e) new or improved sanitary facilities?”

*This is the vote share only among those in this group who say they did vote in the election.

“Districtization” and Vote Capture

In addition to vote-buying and targeted public goods provision, the NRM has also been accused of “purchasing” support through a rather innovative strategy: the proliferation of local district governments. Re-drawing district boundaries – the highest level of sub-national government in Uganda – appears to be a favorite pastime for Museveni. When he took office in 1986, there were just 33 districts, but in the last decade alone, his government more than tripled the number, from 56 in 2000, to 112 by the time of the 2011 elections. This rapid process of “districtization”, as Ugandans have dubbed it (Green 2011a), has made Uganda one of the most densely administered countries in Africa and in fact the world, with more first-level administrative units than any other country. While the government has argued that this allows it to provide services to communities more effectively, Green (2010) finds little evidence to support this claim. Rather, he argues that this proliferation of districts has served Museveni well, proving an effective means for expanding his patronage network, and so helping him to win elections (see also Tripp 2010). Green notes, in fact, that the pace of creating new districts appears to have increased in proportion to the decline in Museveni’s margin of electoral victory over the course of the last decade. Was rampant districtization between 2006 and 2011 a significant factor in the 2011 elections?

Since the 2006 election, 25 of the 80 districts that existed at that time were sub-divided (some more than once) into a total of 57 districts; the other 55 districts have been unaffected since the last election. Green (2010) argues that districtization creates patronage opportunities both in the form of new government jobs, as well as local construction jobs to build government offices in the new district centers, and even new donor and NGO jobs to help new government entities provide services. He

also suggests that while new districts will receive the greatest patronage boost, those in the “mother” districts also benefit, albeit less directly, since the existing patronage resources in the home base are now distributed across a smaller population (2011b).

But the evidence suggests that, in reality, the aggressive creation of new districts had only moderate impacts on vote choice. Table 4 shows the change in Museveni’s vote share across “new,” “mother,” and “old/unchanged” districts between 2006 and 2011.¹⁵ While there was a large increase in Museveni’s average vote share across all three groups, it appears that his vote share increased by approximately an additional 5 percentage points in new and mother districts relative to districts that saw no change. Since just over one-third (37%) of the all registered voters live in new or mother districts, this translates at the national level into a roughly two-point increase in Museveni’s national vote share due to districtization, out of a total increase of 9.1 points. In short, districtization and the commensurate expansion in the distribution of patronage benefits that it supports helped Museveni, but the effects were quite modest, and there is nothing to suggest that he wouldn’t have done quite well even in the absence of the districtization program. As with vote buying and public goods outlays, the evidence does not support the contention that these investments played anything like a decisive role in Museveni’s re-election.

Table 4: Effects of Districtization on Vote Share

Type of District (N)	Museveni’s 2006 Vote Share	Museveni’s 2011 Vote Share	Change in Museveni’s Vote Share, 2006-2011
Old/Unchanged (55)	58.9	66.0	+7.1
Mother (25)	49.5	62.4	+12.9
New (32)	56.1	68.3	+12.2

In sum, we find only very limited evidence in the available data to suggest that the vast sums of money being cast about in Uganda during the election campaign actually had any significant effect on the outcome of the Ugandan presidential election. Only the creation of new districts seems to have offered modest returns at best. Outright vote buying, as well as efforts to secure support through provision of public goods, while quite common in practice, both appear to have yielded limited if any benefits for the NRM. The assertion that Museveni held on to power purely, or at least primarily, by dint of his unprecedented spending spree does not hold up to scrutiny. We thus contend that this evidence demonstrates that the foundations of Museveni’s 2011 success lie elsewhere. Money might have flowed freely, but it certainly did not play the decisive role in the outcome that critics suggest, and in fact, might have had relatively little effect on the final outcome, at least at the presidential level. We now turn to an exploration of several alternative explanations for Museveni’s success and the opposition’s failure, beginning with an examination of the opposition’s own weaknesses.

Weakness of the Opposition Candidates and Parties

In considering other explanations for the opposition’s poor performance, perhaps the most likely starting point is to ask whether the opposition was really fielding as strong a slate of candidates as it hoped. And the results of our surveys for the opposition are not especially encouraging.

The first hurdle for any non-incumbent is, of course, name recognition. This is something that can be a problem for opposition candidates in almost any political environment, but it is probably particularly acute in sub-Saharan Africa, where independent mass media still tend to be underdeveloped, and opposition parties are often not sufficiently funded to mount serious advertising campaigns. Control of public media and state resources often mean that incumbents are able to flood the media environment with (positive) coverage of themselves, while opposition candidates can find it hard to generate any coverage at all, leaving the playing field noticeably slanted.

¹⁵ County- and sub-county level election results from 2006 were used to construct the vote share for the “new” and “mother” districts in that election.

In fact in Uganda, given the relative strength and number of independent media outlets, the deck may not have been stacked quite as decisively against the opposition as in many other countries. In the print sector, the privately owned *Monitor* (daily) and *Observer* (weekly) compete with the state owned *New Vision* (daily). And especially in Central Region, but elsewhere in the country as well, dozens of private radio and TV stations fill the airwaves, offering Ugandans a wide array of alternatives to the state-run Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC) stations.

At first glance, it appears that the opposition took advantage of the flourishing independent media and has achieved considerable success in terms of name recognition. The first Afrobarometer survey asked respondents to name up to three presidential candidates, and the results were somewhat encouraging. Fully 91% could name two candidates, and 66% could name three. However, given the number of candidates on the slate (eight), this does not necessarily reflect the awareness of any particular candidate. In fact, while 93% not surprisingly named Museveni, and 79% named Besigye, just 23% named Mao, and 21% Otunnu (14% named Kanya, 12% Bidandi, 11% Bwanika, and less than one percent Lubega). Of course, since respondents were only asked to name three candidates these figures do not fully reveal all candidate awareness. Nonetheless, it is evident that none of the candidates other than Museveni and Besigye could claim sufficient name recognition to be considered serious contenders for the presidency.

The findings of the nine-constituency panel study further suggest that, at least in the early stages of the campaign, aside from Besigye, name recognition was a major problem for all of the other opposition candidates. Respondents were asked to name as many candidates as they could, without any limit to the number.¹⁶ Nearly everyone (96%) named Museveni, and three-quarters (74%) could identify Besigye. But just 36% of respondents named Otunnu as a candidate, and 33% identified Mao, trailed by Kanya at 29%. Thus, at a point just over two months from the election, most of the opposition candidates were not widely enough known to have presented a serious challenge to Museveni on their own. This still did not rule out, however, their ability to collectively unseat him.

But the news for the opposition gets worse. In order to be successful, a challenger needs not just name recognition, but a positive public image as well. Yet generally speaking, opposition parties in Africa have not enjoyed significant levels of public trust; they are often ranked as among the least trusted institutions in Afrobarometer surveys, falling well behind ruling parties (Logan 2008). And Uganda, with its history of multi-party competition dominated by ethnic and sectarian divisions that have repeatedly spiraled out of control into violent conflict, has been no exception. In fact Museveni pointed directly to this history as the justification for creating the “no party” Movement system of government that prevailed for the first two decades of his rule (Carbone 2008).

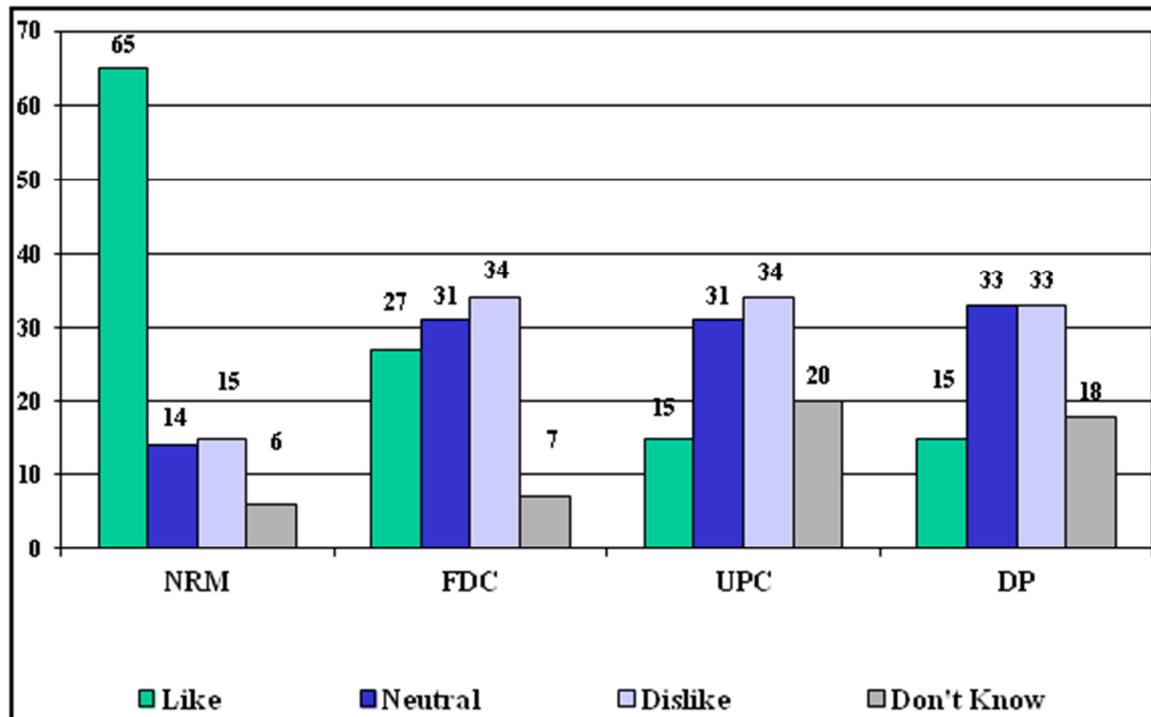
While the country restored full multiparty competition with the 2005 referendum, an Afrobarometer survey that same year found that even though 72% said they trusted the ruling party “somewhat” or “a lot,” less than half that number (35%) had the same confidence in the opposition. By 2008 trust in the ruling party dropped to a low of 45%, but the opposition was not a significant beneficiary, with trust climbing just 3 points to 39%. In the run up to the 2011 election, the ruling party regained some of its earlier standing – 60% expressed trust in December 2010 – while the opposition had made no gains whatsoever, remaining stalled at 39%. The reasons for this trust gap still demand further exploration, and may range from poor organization and outreach by opposition parties, to risk aversion (i.e., favoring known ruling parties over unknown opposition), and/or cultural predispositions that favor incumbents (see Logan 2008). But regardless of the sources, it is clear that this trust gap represents a significant hurdle for the opposition to overcome.

And this does not appear to be a case of some distrusted opposition parties ruining it (or, at least, ruining the trust ratings) for the others – none of them fare well, even on their own. Afrobarometer respondents were asked to say whether they liked, disliked or felt neutral about each of the major parties contesting the elections. The dismaying results for the opposition are shown in Figure 1: no

¹⁶ “Regarding the presidential election, which of the contenders have you heard of?”

more than one-quarter of respondents express a liking for any of the major opposition parties, and for both UPC and DP the numbers are far lower – and far below the portion who express dislike. The only possible piece of good news for the opposition in these numbers is the relatively high number who say they are either neutral, or that they don't know how they feel. This suggests that many Ugandans have still not formed opinions about specific opposition parties. But it is nonetheless clear that they have an enormous deficit to overcome when compared with the NRM.

Figure 1: Popular Assessments of Ruling and Opposition Parties

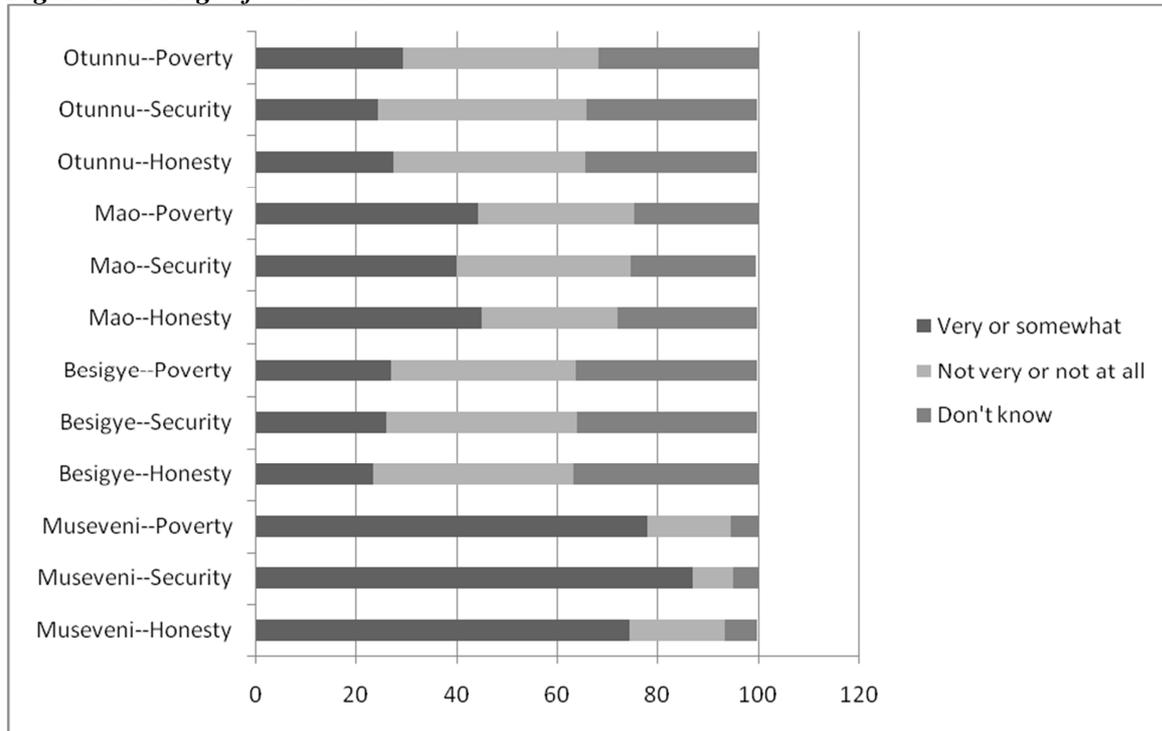


Source: Afrobarometer Uganda Round 4.5.1 survey, Nov./Dec. 2010

*"What do you think about each of the political parties participating in the forthcoming elections? Please say whether you strongly dislike, dislike, feel neutral about, like, or strongly like that party."

These results are largely confirmed by the findings of the first panel wave. If respondents could name a candidate, they were then asked to rate how effective that candidate would be at reducing poverty and improving security, and they were also asked how honest they thought the candidate was. The opposition candidates consistently fare far worse than Museveni (Figure 2 reports results for the four leading candidates: Museveni, Besigye, Mao, and Otunnu). Two things stand out. First, even among those respondents who named the opposition candidates, there were very large numbers who could not express an opinion about their honesty or abilities. Second, most of the opposition candidates started the campaign with net negatives, i.e., more people rated them unfavorably than favorably on these grounds (Figure 3). Mao was the only exception.

Figure 2: Ratings of Candidates



Source: First wave of panel study, Nov. 2010. Figures reflect the views (percent) only of those respondents who could name a given candidate.

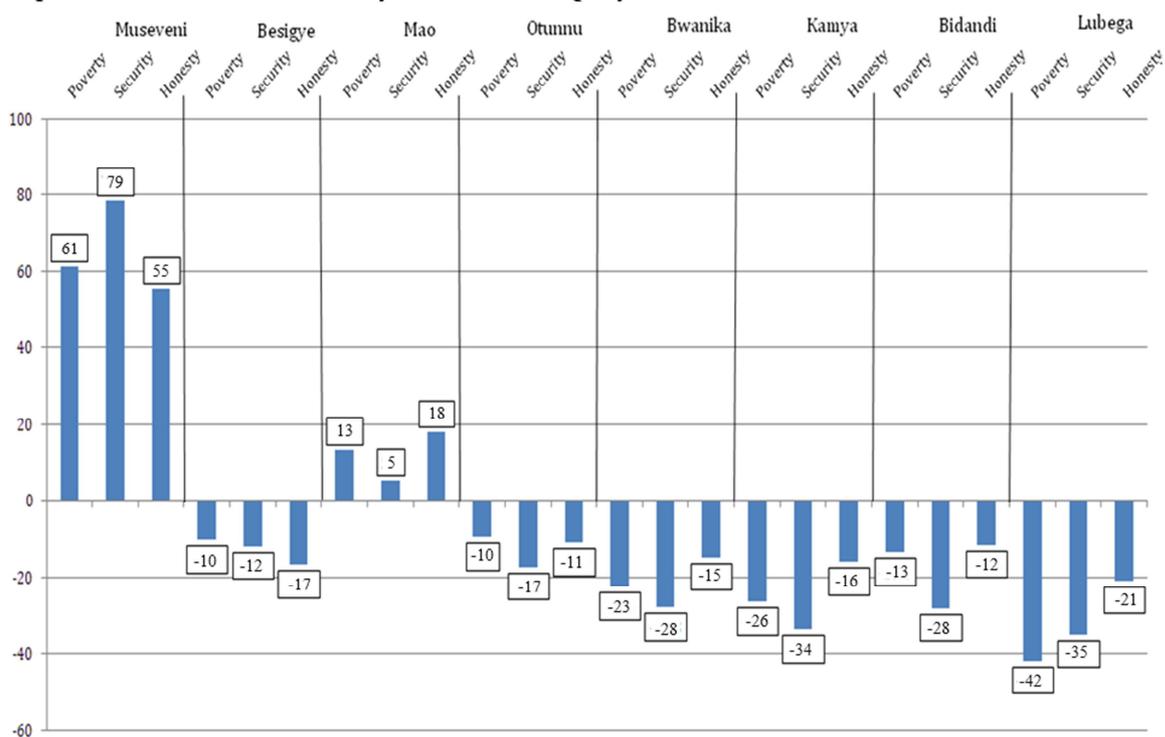
“In your opinion, how capable of reducing poverty is [named candidate]?”

“In your opinion, how capable of improving security is [named candidate]?”

“In your opinion, how honest is [named candidate]? Very, somewhat, not very, or not at all?”

Response options: Very / Somewhat / Not very / Not at all / Don't know (percent)

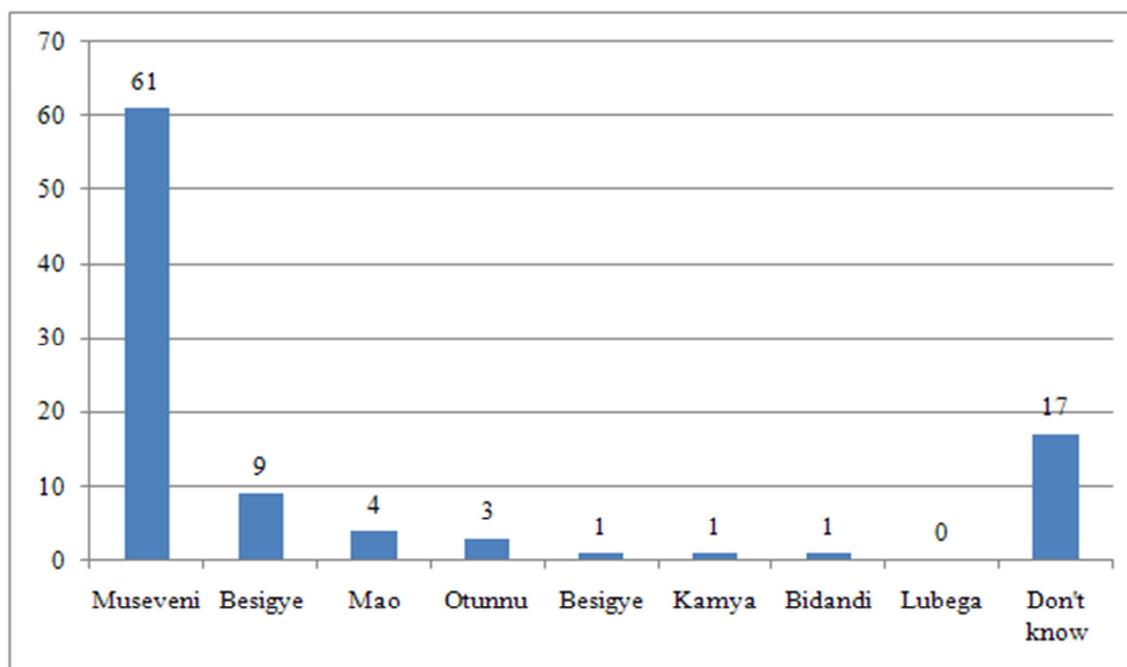
Figure 3: Net Favorable or Unfavorable Ratings of Candidates



Source: First wave of panel study, Nov. 2010. Figures reflect the views only of those respondents who could name a given candidate.

The panel respondents were also asked to name the most important issue facing the country, and then identify which candidate would be most capable of dealing with that issue. Here again, Museveni is the overwhelming favorite: 61% identify him as most capable of addressing their priority issue, while all other candidates fall below 10% (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Most Capable Candidate



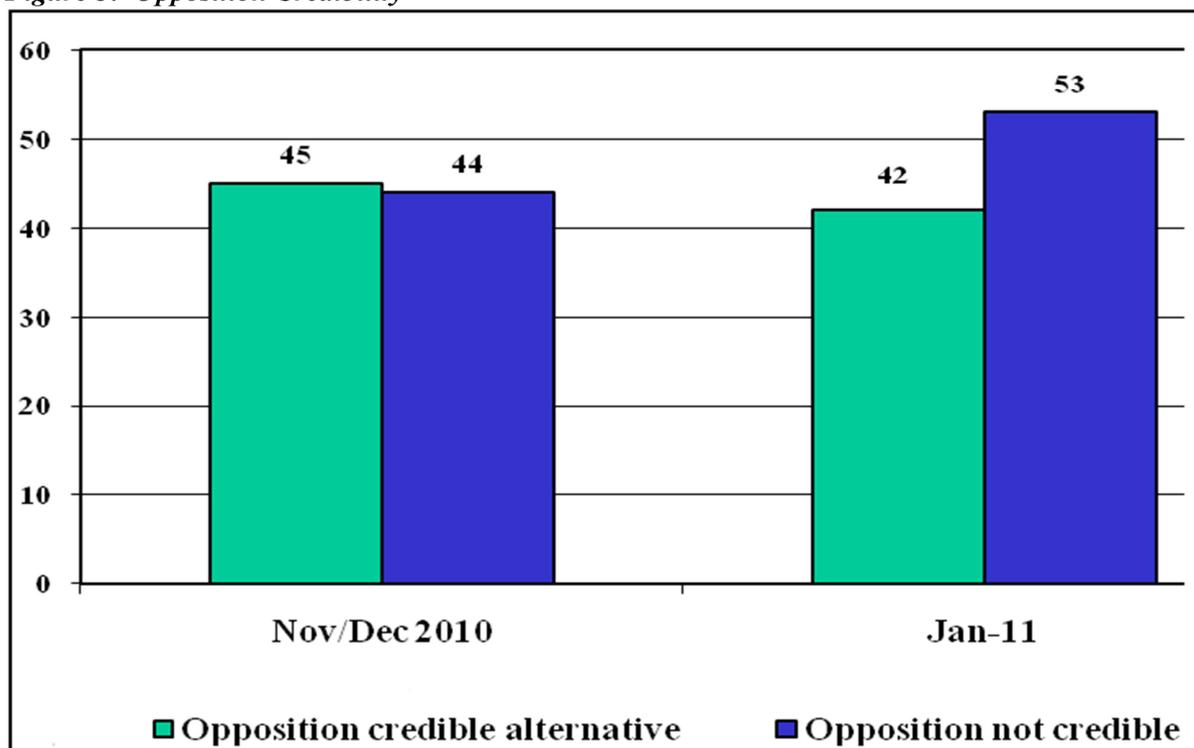
Source: First wave of panel study, Nov. 2010.

“Of the candidates who are standing for president in 2011, who do you think will do the best job on the issue you just named?” Respondents were previously asked “What do you think is the most important issue currently facing this country?” Those who did not name an issue were not asked the follow-up. Respondents were not read a list of candidates’ names.

Finally, the panel also asked respondents to name the party they trusted most to deal with certain specific issues. And on issue after issue – land reform, wealth distribution, fighting terrorism, creating jobs, public service provision, and controlling prices – the answer was: the Movement. On average, 64% named the NRM, compared to just 8% for FDC, and 3% each for DP and UPC – well below the 7% who said “none of them” (14% don’t know).

In sum, the opposition clearly started the campaign at a severe disadvantage in terms of public perceptions. And, over the course of the campaign, its candidates demonstrated little success in overcoming these deficits. In fact, they appear to have lost ground. Afrobarometer registered a small (in fact, statistically insignificant) drop in trust in the opposition between its first and second surveys, from 39% to 37%. But the overall credibility of the opposition alternative seems to have shifted downward by a more noticeable margin during this period. When Afrobarometer respondents were asked in the first pre-election survey whether “The opposition has presented a convincing vision and plan for Uganda”, or rather, whether “The opposition has not shown that it has the plans to solve the country’s problems,” Ugandans were roughly evenly split between the two positions (Figure 5). By the time the same question was asked again in January 2011, however, an 11-point gap had opened, and in fact a majority (53%) now reported that the opposition was not presenting a convincing alternative vision for the country. So the lack of campaign time alone cannot be blamed for the opposition’s poor showing: it is clear that Besigye, Otunnu, Mao and the others were having little success in convincing the Ugandan public that they were ready to take the helm.

Figure 5: Opposition Credibility



Source: Afrobarometer Uganda R4.5.1 survey, Nov./Dec. 2010 and R4.5.2. survey, Jan. 2011.

“Please tell me which of the following statements is closest to your view, Statement A, or Statement B:

Statement A: The opposition has presented a convincing vision and plan for Uganda.

Statement B: The opposition has not shown that it has the plans to solve the country’s problems.”

Several post-election commentators cited these issues as key reasons for the opposition’s dismal performance. Mwenda noted that Besigye failed to convince voters that he had solutions to their immediate, tangible concerns, while Museveni excelled at this:

Where Besigye projected himself as a national statesman, Museveni positioned himself as a local politician. Where Besigye articulated a grand, national vision, Museveni focused on mundane local issues. Besigye came across as idealistic with a high sense of morality; Museveni was realistic, pragmatic and practical if not opportunistic (Mwenda 2011).

A voter echoed this sentiment, suggesting that Besigye’s focus on possible electoral malfeasance was misguided: “Besigye forgot that he has to get the vote first before concentrating on protecting it” (Were 2011).

Further Trouble for the Opposition: Buganda Holds Steady for Museveni

In addition to excessive optimism about the quality of their candidates and their campaigning prowess, the opposition may also have significantly overestimated the depth of the rift between Museveni’s government and the Baganda community. Ultimately, Museveni won 22 out of 23 districts in Buganda, and his vote share there actually *increased* from the 57.4% he won in 2006, to 60.7% (although it was down from 64.6% in 2001). His vote share increased in all Buganda districts, save four.¹⁷ For the third election in a row, the best-performing opposition candidate in Buganda was Besigye, who won 30.5% of the vote there, down from 35.7% in 2006 and 32.0% in 2001. Museveni’s expected troubles among the Baganda may be somewhat evident in the fact that the increase in his vote share in Buganda (3.2%) was well below the average for the country as a whole

¹⁷ These include Rakai (down 0.2 points), Lyantonde (1.5), Gomba (2.5), and Mityana (3.1).

(9.1%). But it is nonetheless clear that whatever disaffection Baganda might have felt over the Kasubi Tombs or other issues was strongly outweighed by other factors.

While Besigye did not benefit from any Buganda-Museveni rift, the party perhaps best situated to capitalize on any anti-incumbent sentiments among pro-monarchists – the DP – also underperformed. It appears that the party’s nomination of Norbert Mao actually backfired. The DP had long been seen as a predominantly Baganda (and, more specifically, Baganda Catholic) party (Carbone 2008: 12-13). The selection of Mao, a non-Muganda, as the party’s candidate at a February 2010 convention in Mbale was therefore quite controversial within the DP leadership (Arikso and Kafuma 2010). In its choice of Mao, party leaders, splintered as they were, apparently made the calculation that Baganda would nonetheless migrate to the DP based on its strong pro-Kabaka reputation. They meanwhile hoped to pick up a significant new following among Northerners – who had been opposition stalwarts in previous elections – based on the “Ugandan Obama’s” Acholi heritage and experience as chair of Gulu District.

However, the DP’s strategy failed on multiple levels. First, and perhaps most crucially, the Baganda continued to register very high levels of satisfaction with Museveni’s administration. Second, the selection of a non-Muganda flagbearer severely exacerbated already existing schisms within the party. Many rejected Mao’s ascendance outright, with one DP leader, Samuel Lubega, defecting and running his own presidential campaign as an independent. Still others, led by MPs Betty Nambooze of Mukono and Erias Lukwago of Kampala, formed a pressure group known as *Suubi*, or “truth”, which advocated among the Baganda on behalf of Besigye and the IPC. Although Nambooze and others within *Suubi* claimed that their opposition to Mao stemmed mainly from his decision not to join the IPC (“Six Questions for Betty Nambooze,” 2010), suggestions that he was not an adequate advocate for Buganda had clear ethnic undertones. Many Baganda still associate Luo-speakers with Milton Obote, whose support base was in the North. Mao attempted to squelch these concerns: “I told them I am a Ugandan and I never filled any form to be a Mucholi (sic),” he told attendees at his first campaign rally, in Kampala. “I told them those who attacked the Lubiri [the Kabaka’s palace, which was attacked by Obote’s forces in 1966] did so before I was born” (Nalugo 2010). But in the end, Mao won only 2.2% of the vote in Buganda – down from the 2.7% that DP candidate John Ssebaana Kizito won in 2006. In vote-rich Kampala and Wakiso, he won only 3.0% and 4.3%, respectively, and even his best-performing district in Buganda, Masaka, only gave him 5.0%.

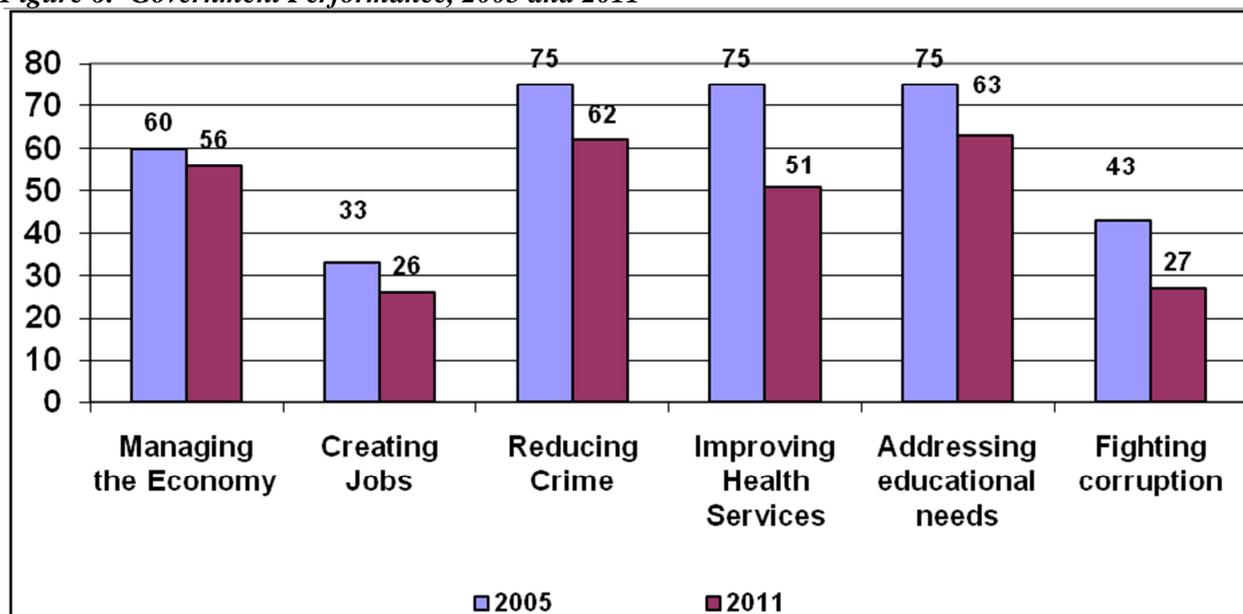
More War Weary than Museveni Weary

Finally, we recall the opposition’s hope that the downward trend in Museveni’s vote share over three previous elections suggested that the Ugandan public was growing weary of his rule. Data from the Afrobarometer suggest that this hope, too, was misplaced.

It is true that overall, popular ratings of government performance dropped between 2005 and 2011, often substantially (Figure 6). Across six key performance areas, ratings were down in all, and in some cases – especially health services and fighting corruption – by quite substantial margins.¹⁸

¹⁸ It is possible that these declining ratings reflect not a deterioration in government performance, but rather, rising popular expectations against which the government is being measured. Afrobarometer analysis of the state of democracy in Uganda, for example, has found that the demand for democracy in the country has risen substantially in the past decade, while perceptions of the supply have decreased somewhat. A similar pattern may be shaping performance ratings in these social service sectors, although complete analysis of this issue is beyond the scope of this paper. See Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 67, 2009, available at www.afrobarometer.org.

Figure 6: Government Performance, 2005 and 2011



Source: Afrobarometer

“How well or badly is the government handling each of the following matters, or haven’t you heard enough to say? (% fairly well / very well)”

At the same time, Uganda has continued to experience relatively strong economic growth despite the global economic downturn that took root in 2008.¹⁹ This is reflected, albeit relatively modestly, in improved popular ratings of the country’s general economic condition, as well as respondents’ assessments of their own economic status (Table 5).

Table 5: Ratings of Economic Situation, 2005-2011

In general, how would you rate:	May 2005	Nov./Dec. 2010	Jan. 2011
The present economic condition of this country?			
Fairly/Very Good	46	46	48
Fairly / Very Bad	41	38	34
Your own present living conditions?			
Fairly/Very Good	35	42	43
Fairly / Very Bad	50	42	41

(percent)

Meanwhile, ratings of Museveni himself also reveal mixed patterns. In 2005, 81% said they trusted him “somewhat” or “a lot”, while 78% gave him positive performance ratings. In 2011, his performance ratings have held steady at 80% approval, while levels of trust have dropped substantially, though nonetheless remaining very high at 69%. By contrast, however, the office of the president rates marked *improvements* in the perceived level of corruption. In 2005, 52% said “none” or “only some” of the officials in the president’s office were corrupt, but the figure increased to 61% by January 2011, despite the fact that, as we saw above, the government’s overall ratings for its handling of corruption have dropped sharply.

¹⁹ World Bank data shows annual GDP growth rates of 5.2% in 2001, 8.7% in 2002, 6.5% in 2003, 6.8% in 2004, 6.3% in 2005, 10.8% in 2006, 8.4% in 2007, 8.7% in 2008, and 7.1% in 2009. (source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?page=1>, downloaded 22 June 2011). CIA World Factbook estimates a somewhat lower but still respectable growth rate of approximately 5.0% for 2010 (source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ug.html>, downloaded 22 June 2011).

In short, performance ratings, either for the government generally or for the president and his office in particular, do not show a clear trend either for or against Museveni and his government. While the country's general economic successes likely favored Museveni, perhaps strongly, other aspects of performance were far weaker, and there appears to be more to the story that government performance alone cannot explain. Further analysis reveals the additional factor is likely Museveni's success, finally, in bringing the war in the North to an end.

The opposition had largely taken the North for granted, assuming that it would remain an opposition stronghold. The question – they thought – was more about whether the IPC or the DP would dominate there, not whether Museveni and the NRM would. In fact, many in the DP had hoped that Mao would bring a substantial block of Northern votes into its formerly Buganda-centered orbit. And to be sure, the DP performed slightly better in the North with Mao as its candidate than it had in previous elections. In 2006, John Ssebbaana, a Muganda, won only 2.0% of the Northern vote, while Mao captured nearly three times as much (5.9%). But Mao's victory over Museveni in just three Northern districts – only one of which, Nwoya, actually gave him a majority of its vote – certainly represented a disappointment for the DP. Even in his ethnic homeland of Acholiand Mao captured only about a quarter (29.4%) of the vote. Even though he had been elected Chairman of Gulu District under the DP banner, it's possible that just as the DP may have suffered in Buganda because of Mao's Northern background, his underperformance in his home region might stem in part from his party affiliation: in the two Afrobarometer pre-election surveys, just 8-11% of Northerners said they “like” or “strongly like” the DP, compared to 39-42% with negative views. In short, the DP strategy may have doubly backfired, undercutting the party's legitimacy amongst its Baganda base while limiting Mao's appeal even within his home region.

The opposition's woes in the North in 2011 extended much further than just Mao's underperformance, however. After all, it was Besigye, himself a Munyankole from the West, who had swept the entire region, save Karamoja, in 2006. In that election, Besigye took 58.7% of the vote in the Northern Region to Museveni's 36.4%. But in 2011, rather than splitting its vote between Mao, Besigye, and Otunnu, himself an Acholi from Kitgum, the North vote swung heavily to Museveni. Besigye's share plummeted by more than 50% to just 25.1%. He captured just three districts, a stunning setback after capturing nearly the entire region in 2006. Meanwhile, the UPC, with Otunnu – himself a northerner of Acholi heritage – at the helm, saw its share of the vote across the North increase only slightly, from the 2.8% that Miria Obote won in 2006, to 6.9%. But these slight regional gains were only enough to help the UPC move from the 0.8% of the nationwide vote it claimed in 2006, to 1.5% in 2011.

Museveni, in the meantime, saw enormous gains in his vote share in the North, taking a majority (55.6%) in the region for the first time. He won a plurality in the sub-region of Acholiland (37.7%, versus the 15.2% he won in 2006) and majorities in West Nile (55.8%, versus 38.1%) and Lango (53.5%, versus 12.3%). In fact, of the 94 districts across the country where Museveni increased his vote share in 2011, all of the five in which he increased his share by more than 40 points were in Lango.²⁰ Museveni's performance in Lango was a particular disappointment for the UPC, which has long counted the region as a base.²¹ The only sub-region of the North where Museveni did not increase his vote share was Karamoja, where his share declined from 80.0% to 73.8%. All three of his biggest district-level declines in the entire country occurred there.²²

Museveni's gains in the North (+24.2 points), which built upon what had previously been a very low base, were many times higher than his gains in the West and Central Regions (+2.5 and +3.3 points,

²⁰ These include Oyam (up 43.3 points), Alebtong (up 43.7), Dokolo (up 46.1), Otuke (up 51.4), and Kole (up 52.3, from 7.2% in 2006 to 59.5% in 2011).

²¹ Milton Obote, the party's founder in 1960, was himself a Lango, and his widow performed better there in the 2006 presidential election than in any other part of the country. All 10 of the UPC's parliamentary seats in 2011 are in the sub-region.

²² These include Moroto (down 21.1 points), Amudat (down 25.2), and Kotido (down 28.1 points, from 79.0% in 2006 to 50.8% in 2011).

respectively), and go a long way toward explaining his nationwide gain of 9.1 points over his vote share in 2006 (although he also gained substantially in the East (+12.6 points)) (Table 6). The second part of Table 6 is particularly revealing, as it compares the breakdown within the North between “new” or “mother” districts and old/unchanged districts. It is clear from the numbers that although districtization does have positive effects as we saw earlier (+5 points for “mother” districts in the North relative to old, and +9 points for new districts), the effects of being a Northern district (+21 points relative to being from Central or Western region) are significantly greater.

Table 6: Gains in Museveni’s Vote Share, 2006-2011, by Region

<u>Region (N)</u>	Museveni’s 2006 Vote Share	Museveni’s 2011 Vote Share	Change in Museveni’s Vote Share, 2006-2011
Central	57.4	60.7	+3.3
East	52.9	65.5	+12.6
North	28.9	53.0	+24.2
West	75.4	77.9	+2.5
Type of District (North Only)*			
Old/Unchanged	32.7	53.3	+20.6
Mother	24.4	49.9	+25.5
New	27.1	57.1	+29.9

This large “Northern effect” suggests that much of the explanation for Museveni’s success likely lies in the waning of hostilities against the Lord’s Resistance Army since 2006, and the sharp improvements this has brought about in the public’s well being. When asked by Afrobarometer in 2005 what the “most important problem” was that the government needed to address, 29% of Northerners identified the civil war in their first response. In December 2010, not one did. Instead, the popular focus has shifted to health, roads and infrastructure, and other social service concerns. And Afrobarometer evidence also suggests that levels of hardship in the region have dropped markedly since hostilities ended. In 2005, fully 46% of Northerners reported having gone without enough food “many times” or “always” in the past year, a figure that plummeted to just 7% in January 2011. Similarly sharp declines were evident in reported lack of access to clean water for household use (37% in 2005, down to 9% in 2011). Improvements in social service are not as marked, but still reflect radical gains: 49% frequently went without medicines or medical treatment in 2005, compared to 25% in January 2011. While these indicators reveal that life is still considerably more difficult in the North than in the rest of the country, these improvements are nonetheless reflected in significantly stronger pro-government sentiments in the region in 2011 compared to 2005. The Afrobarometer found, for example, that between 2005 and 2011, trust in Museveni among Northerners increased from 64% to 71%, while presidential approval ratings climbed even more sharply, from 63% approval to 79%. It seems that Ugandans were not so much weary of Museveni, as the opposition had hoped, but rather, that they were weary of war, and are basking in the newly established peace. Simply put, most Northerners could look back and say that their lives had in fact improved over the last five years, and they appear to have rewarded Museveni accordingly.

The Fear Factor

We have seen that money likely did not play the decisive role in the election that many attribute to it, and that instead, the negatives of a weak opposition slate, and the positives for the government of achieving peace in the North while fostering continuing economic progress, appear to be far more powerful explanations for Museveni’s surprising success. But before closing, it is worth taking a brief look at one other factor that some believe shaped the outcome in Uganda: fear. With respect to the 2006 campaign and election, “intimidation” is a keyword that comes up all too frequently. Numerous instances of campaign violence were reported, including disruption of the oppositions’ rallies and targeting of their supporters, and government harassment of opposition candidates was commonplace. By all accounts, the environment in 2011 was markedly different, with the NRM

replacing its “fear and loathing” tactics with more of a “hearts and minds” campaign. Although observer reports and political analysts have noted some concerns about the excessive visibility of security forces, for the most part fear and intimidation are not viewed as decisive factors in 2011 the way they may have been in 2006.

But does this perhaps paint an overly rosy picture of the 2011 environment? Overt violence and intimidation were certainly far less evident than in 2006. But ominous rumors circulated during the campaign that NRM stalwarts were making lists in each community of who supported the NRM, and who did not. And what lessons might Ugandans have been learning from their Kenyan neighbors and their Ivorian cousins about what would happen in their country if Museveni lost? Could fear of the implications of an opposition win have led Ugandans to opt instead for ensuring stability by extending the president’s tenure?

Significantly, evidence from the Afrobarometer surveys suggests that the public was certainly concerned about the possibility – indeed, a perceived likelihood – of post-election violence, and a significant minority expressed fear of intimidation during the campaign. But also importantly, we observe few measureable effects of these concerns on planned vote choice. And perhaps most importantly, Ugandans expressed extremely high confidence in their freedom to vote as they choose, a critical indicator of the quality of the campaign environment.

When asked in the January 2011 Afrobarometer survey “how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence,” 45% said not at all, and this was *up* from 33% just 6 weeks earlier (Table 7). But 37% feared such victimization either “somewhat” or “a lot” – a not insubstantial figure. And the number rises to 48% for opposition voters, although even one-third (32%) of those intending to vote for Museveni were significantly concerned.

Table 7: Fear of Political Intimidation or Violence

	January 2011 Survey			Nov/Dec 2010 Survey
	Museveni supporters	Opposition supporters	Total	Total
A lot	25	36	28	27
Somewhat	7	12	8	12
A little bit	14	22	16	21
Not at all	53	29	45	33
Don’t know	1	1	2	6
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Afrobarometer Jan. 2011

“During the campaign for the 2011 elections, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?”

But importantly, the evidence does not suggest that fear was leading people to switch their votes to Museveni. Table 8 shows the vote choices of those who expressed no fear, compared to those who reported high levels of fear of intimidation. Those who were concerned about political intimidation were significantly *more* likely to plan to vote for the opposition – i.e., the opposite result from what we would expect if fear and intimidation were forcing voters into Museveni’s arms against their wishes.

Table 8: Effects of Fear on Vote Choice

Preferred Candidate	How much fear victimization			
	Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	A lot
Museveni	76	56	57	58
Besigye	10	22	21	17
Mao	2	2	4	6
Otunnu	2	5	4	3
Others	1	2	4	3
Refused	7	12	9	11
Don't know / would not vote	2	2	1	3

Source: Afrobarometer, Jan. 2011

As of January 2011, a total of 8% of Afrobarometer respondents said that they had in fact been personally threatened with negative consequences to coerce their vote, and 12% thought that this had happened to others in their neighborhood or village. But the findings again show that these threats appear to have had little effect on voting intentions (at least if we assume that in general it was the NRM doing most of the threatening), since those who said they had been threatened were substantially more likely to say they would vote for the opposition, not for Museveni

What about fear not of personal consequences, but of the potential implications for the country of a Museveni loss? Ugandans had been close observers of the appalling aftermath of Kenya's closely contested 2007 elections. The disputed outcome threw the country into a tailspin of inter-ethnic violence that claimed some 1500 lives. And more recently, the violent aftermath of incumbent Laurent Gbagbo's sustained refusal to accept his clear defeat at the hands of challenger Alassane Ouattara in Ivory Coast's November 2010 run-off election was still being played out at the time of the Ugandan election. Did Ugandans take these "warnings" to heart, and rally behind Museveni not because they thought he was doing a good job or otherwise preferred him as their leader, but because they believed that he might not step down willingly, leaving them little real electoral choice if they did not want to follow the same chaotic path as Kenya and Ivory Coast?

The Afrobarometer surveys asked respondents about the perceived likelihood of trouble in the aftermath of the elections. In the first survey in Nov/Dec 2010 – before any other surveys had been released indicating a strong likelihood that Museveni would win by a wide margin – 73% said they thought it was somewhat or very likely that losers would refuse to accept the official election results, and fully 59% felt it was somewhat or very likely that there would be violence in the country after election results were announced. By January these numbers had moderated somewhat – perhaps as the likelihood of a resounding Museveni victory was increasingly being recognized. But still, at this point, 63% thought the losers would reject the results, while 50% feared a violent aftermath. But yet again, we find that, rather than driving voters into the arms of the incumbents, these are views that tend to be expressed more often by disgruntled supporters of the opposition. Those who thought violence was likely following the election were in fact almost twice as likely to say they would vote for the opposition (30%) as those who were less concerned about violence (16%). Yet again, this suggests that opposition supporters were perhaps more fearful, or more disgruntled about the election environment, but that they nonetheless stuck with their intentions to vote for opposition candidates despite these concerns.

Finally, we turn to one of the most solid indicators we have of Ugandans' own confidence in the security and fairness of their voting environment: in January 2011, a resounding 91% say people are either somewhat (15%) or completely (76%) free to "choose who to vote for without feeling pressured." This suggests that, whatever other problems and concerns they felt about the election environment, especially on the part of opposition supporters, the vast majority of Ugandans have a remarkable degree of confidence in their ability to make their own choices and express them through their votes.

CONCLUSION

The “story” of Uganda’s 2011 election, from the perspective of the press and election observer missions, has been the money. The “unprecedented” quantities of funds dumped into election spending, broadly construed, have produced descriptions focused on the “monetization”, “commercialization”, and, in short, the purchase of the campaign and its outcome. The clear implication has been that were it not for Museveni’s and the NRM’s rampant abuse of their incumbency advantages, Museveni might well by now be the former president of Uganda.

The evidence from public attitude surveys, however, tells a significantly different story. In this story, the NRM’s distribution of largesse was not a deciding factor in rallying voters to Museveni’s side, but rather, icing on the cake for a strong contingent of supporters already committed to extending the president’s tenure for a variety of other reasons. Museveni’s success in (finally) settling the war in the North, and in keeping the economy largely on track, had not just preserved his status among Ugandans, but enhanced it considerably, especially in the North. At the same time, the Ugandan opposition failed to convince the public that it was either a credible or a preferable alternative. The press, Ugandan elites, and much of the international community might have grown weary of Museveni, but the average Ugandan has not.

Northerners in particular were weary of a war that had dragged on for decades. However culpable Museveni might have been for the war’s long duration, he nonetheless appears to get credit for its resolution, and the return, finally, of peace and relative prosperity to the North. Put simply, Northerners’ lives have improved over the last five years, perhaps dramatically, and they rewarded Museveni accordingly. This appears to be the largest single factor that allowed Museveni not just to hang on in 2011, but to gain considerably relative to his performance in 2006. At the same time, faced with an unconvincing slate of alternatives, alongside continued stability and steady growth in the economy, the rest of Ugandans likewise opted to preserve the status quo rather than take a risk on an unproven alternative. This does not mean that they do not see the weaknesses and failures of Museveni’s government – witness the declining performance ratings he receives for fighting corruption and providing social services amidst rising popular expectations. But the evidence suggests that despite whatever failures they attribute to Museveni or his government, and whatever drawbacks they might see to extending his reign, overall, in the public’s eyes the balance still comes out very much in Museveni’s favor.

In the end, rather than playing the starring role assigned it by many – especially among those who are unhappy with the outcome – the large quantity of cash that Museveni, the government and the NRM dumped into the election was merely a bit player. While vote buying may indeed have been fairly common, the evidence suggests it had limited impact on the election’s outcome. It appears that Ugandans have enough confidence in the secrecy of the ballot box to accept these “gifts” and then vote as they please. And the massive disbursement of community development funds in the six months prior to the election likewise had little obvious effect on voters’ decision making. Museveni’s substantial investment in new districts, in contrast, appears to have paid off in a marginal increase in his share of the vote – perhaps enough to have mattered had the election been close, but hardly a decisive factor given his wide margin of victory. Ironically, his profligate – and evidently unnecessary – campaign spending may now be undermining Museveni’s more important strength: his ability to manage the economy over the long term. The cash infusion has likely contributed to local inflation. And if there is any truth to the claims that the government is now nearly broke and may soon be unable to pay its bills, Museveni’s ability to buffer the impacts of the rising global food and fuel prices that have recently threatened so many governments is constrained.

And it is clear that despite his large margin of victory, Museveni is indeed deeply disconcerted by the public dissatisfaction being expressed over these issues. By April, protests over rising food and fuel prices, dubbed the “Walk to Work” campaign, were gaining momentum. All three of the leading opposition candidates were arrested and detained at least briefly. Besigye was detained several times, was shot in the hand during scuffles with police at one of these events, and beaten at another. The heavy-handed response bespoke a surprising lack of confidence for a government that had just

secured a resounding re-election victory. Although the Walk to Work campaign itself never attracted a mass following, it has been followed by further, albeit sporadic, urban protests, particularly in Kampala, over issues such as democratic freedoms and inflation. Still, the collapse of Museveni's regime hardly seems imminent.

But what does the campaign and its outcome tell us about the state of democracy in Uganda more generally? The outlook is very mixed. From the perspective of his challengers, and local and global democracy activists, the fact that the opposition has lost ground rather than gained it in this election might not bode well for Ugandan's development as a competitive, multiparty democracy. While that is certainly in significant part due to the opposition's own failures, and to the particular advantages that Museveni enjoyed in this election cycle, it also reflects just how entrenched and hegemonic the Museveni regime has become, and just how divided and inept the opposition remains. The prospects for change in the near future seem limited at best, a prediction that, for opponents of Museveni and his 25 years of rule, is discouraging, to say the least.

But there are also reasons for democrats to be more sanguine about this outcome. First, we cannot discount the 2011 election result without acknowledging that it reflects the fact that many Ugandans – in fact, probably a solid majority – do think Museveni has made (and continues to make) their lives better. The evidence clearly suggests that Museveni won the election not because of fear and intimidation, or because of the abuse of his office, misuse of government resources, and profligate vote buying, but because Ugandans wanted him to. Although Museveni's re-election raises many questions, it is of critical importance that despite everything, the vast majority (91%) of Ugandans – including most of those who planned to vote for the opposition – reported that they were indeed free to vote as they please. It appears that, by and large, on February 18 Ugandans were voting their own hearts and minds, not their fears, and not the preferences of others.

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