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A POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS OF UGANDA'S POLITICAL AND LEGAL ELECTORAL REFORMS:

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1. Introduction

The end of the Cold War brought with it seemingly enormous changes in the structure and conduct of international politics. Old certainties were swept aside in what appeared to be a chaotic and insecure world as hopes for a new world order emerged against the backdrop of dramatic and dire warnings of a ‘coming anarchy’ (Kaplan, 2000). In contrast, and though often exaggerated, the trend towards democratic government that began in southern Europe in the mid-1970s swept like a fire through Latin America in the 1980s, and spread to many parts of Asia, the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Together with the collapse of Soviet-sponsored communism and the globalisation of the international economic system, it propelled the world from the post-war period into a new era. Nevertheless, the spread of democracy has by no means eradicated political repression or conflict, though it has tremendously increased freedoms and fostered the hope that the next century might be less fraught with political rivalry and ruination than the present one.

In Uganda, a short-lived multiparty political dispensation under Obote II in the early 1980s was replaced by the National Resistance Movement (NRM) under the command of General Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, who ascended to state power in 1986, promising ‘not a mere change of guard but a fundamental change’. Indeed, Uganda promulgated a new constitution in 1995 that ushered in what seemed a progressive electoral democratic order, with the provisions for regular elections and democratic checks and balances. Since then, the country has successfully held four¹ regular multiparty general elections, which in itself demonstrates a significant positive departure from the country’s chequered political past. However, Uganda’s electoral architecture and process have, throughout the new constitutional order, been replete with significant contestations regarding its quality and its response to the wider citizen aspirations. In the recent general elections (2020/2021), the ruling NRM presented the electorate with a dismal record of scandal, power of incumbency and widespread popular despondency. It was therefore expected that it would lose ground in the elections, though few believed that it would lose its longstanding majority in Parliament. But buoyed up by the personal popularity of its leader, President Museveni, who billed himself as a revolutionary, the NRM was again returned to political power. Although the result was NRM’s most controversial since the return to multipartyism in 2005, it ‘won’ with 59% of the popular vote. However, voter turnout was a paltry 57%.

In this political economy analysis, I explore ‘optimistic’ and ‘pessimistic’ interpretations of the 2020/21 general elections. Optimists conclude that, given the alternatives offered by NRM rivals, the electorate – even when it was cajoled – opted for the political centre. The implication is that, despite its challenges, Uganda’s democracy is maturing. The pessimists, though, argue that electoral statistics demonstrate an alarming lack of popular participation in the electoral process due to strategic manipulation, increasing political alienation and a shift in voting to the political extremes, and conclude that democracy is being hollowed out. Going forward, the competing merits of these explanations will be examined, with a view to assessing the prospects for political and legal electoral reforms in Uganda.

¹ *Multiparty elections have been held in 2006, 2011, 2016 and 2021*

2. Powerful Vested Interests in Uganda's Reform Path

Interests in politics are underpinned by sheer calculus and are guided by the belief that nothing will enhance those interests as effectively as the acceptance of realism. In connection with Uganda, this is more intense at the higher end of the political system as a small self-selecting elite have heavily fabricated politics. This is majorly due to the fact that politics in Uganda is characterised by executive dominance and quota representation. The strategies for using the quota system have evolved gradually over time in response to key political events, and the interests of group activists at the local and national levels with a vested interest in its survival. However, with Uganda having conducted numerous elections, it is time for a preliminary assessment. So far, the NRM has done relatively well in embracing the concept of elections, despite the several misgivings around the quality of delivery and respect for its opponents. On the bigger scale of things, the ruling NRM is stuck with its founding figure and current leader – Museveni. In fact, it has not managed to reduce the danger that regime apologists pose to a democratic culture. And this falls far short of helping to restore the citizens' trust in the idea of a democratic transition.

3. Fat Promises, Little Action for Reforms

Though the NRM administration has taken some measures to promote democracy, such as enacting partial electoral reforms aligned with recommendations of the Supreme Court and the run-of-the-mill 2018 constitutional amendments, the overall impact has fostered democratic stagnation. The situation is not any different in countries like Rwanda and Zimbabwe, seeing that the leaders there appear to be enjoying something of a popular renaissance. Above all, the rhetorical soundbites and unwillingness of the NRM regime to replace Museveni as the person at the helm has illuminated a paradigm shift in the NRM from a pro-reform outfit in the 1980s and 1990s to an anti-reform organisation currently. The delivery and administration of recent electoral contests are incontrovertible evidence that democracy in Uganda is slowly but surely stagnating.

The NRM administration has, while continuing to cooperate on shared interests such as the Interparty Organisation for Dialogue (IPOD), questioned the legitimacy of key democratic institutions, including the judiciary, the media and the National Electoral Commission that it regularly constitutes. Facts, evidence, due diligence, reasoned discourse – the essential elements of democratic political life – are disparaged daily. As a result, one must look long and hard to find any utterances by Museveni about the virtues of the nation's political traditions, as well as the accomplishments of liberal democracy. Even with regard to ensuring that the Electoral Commission is impartial, the NRM has been strikingly forthright that it must have a thumb on the weighing scale. On topics ranging from the professional conduct of security forces to the treatment of the opposition and civil society in the country, it has, despite strong pushback from donors and the international community, stood its ground without mincing words.

Furthermore, the NRM administration has taken insignificant steps when it comes to tackling the issues of electoral violence and human rights abuses. In particular, it has maintained some of the restrictive measures such as preventive arrests of opposition leaders, the disruption of opposition rallies using the Public Order Management Act (POMA), cordon sanitaire measures owing to Covid-19 as well as shutting down the internet. On the positive side, the NRM is conscious that human rights abuse is a redline and has instituted investigations and the prosecution of those responsible for such abuse. On the whole, however, it remains far from clear whether the Museveni administration will accompany tough words about torture with actions that are actually capable of keeping their power in check. It has, for example, quietly given up its willingness to commit itself on the non-involvement of the army in elections. Worse, it has so far proved unable to deter paramilitaries and the intelligence community from escalating threats against (what remains of) the opposition activities. Similarly, Museveni's policy on corruption and the use of state resources to campaign for political office has not succeeded in stopping the NRM and its partisans from accessing public coffers.

Moreover, the chaotic and corybantic way in which the 2020/2021 general elections were conducted has also undermined the fight against autocracy. Perhaps we should not underestimate the pleasures of giving up, however forbidden or shameful it may seem to be. Even though Uganda was never a truly free society, it remains too early to predict the extent to which last year's elections will hasten democratic backsliding. This *modus operandi* was a significant setback for the NRM's democracy agenda for three reasons. First, the Electoral Commission, through its many flaws like sanctioning iffy results, helped in instituting a nakedly autocratic regime and in the process eroded the progress Uganda had made on key democratic issues. Second, the manner of impartiality in the dispute resolution – including the Supreme Court's evident miscalculation about the NUP's strategy of petitioning and then walking away from a suit – has hurt the judiciary's credibility. Third, some of the administration's rhetoric over the post-election period, which effectively pretended that the NRM did not owe much of anything to Ugandans who had fought on its side for 35 years, raised questions about the steadfastness of Museveni's commitments. Even as the reporting on the ugly elections is slowly fading from the headlines, this has shaken international trust in the NRM's willpower and capacity to stand by its word. As a consequence, there is now a growing sense of concern about the future. The general tenor seems to be that the NRM's 'good face' is a façade.

4. Reform Actors, Interests and Outcomes

With respect to elections, the actors are primarily political parties (although this can apply to other types of groups), the interests are self-interest and survival, and the outcomes are determined by bargaining based on power. Those after power are deeply sceptical about the wisdom of pursuing moral objectives. Whatever sort of argument, the struggle for survival is about maximising power relative to the other actors in the ecosystem. The significant actor in any reform process in Uganda is President Museveni, who has quite often preached the hardness of Uganda's electoral system while at the same time undermining its key tenets such as the legislature and the judiciary. While there have been some democratic gains, such as regular elections as emphasised above, the NRM has not practised what President Museveni preached in 1986, but it has instead ratcheted up the politicisation of independent institutions pushing back against constitutional limits on his power.

In its agitations for reform, the political opposition seems to be merely preaching a change of guard. Here, too, the change of guard, if it ever happens, might not make a difference because many African countries have struggled with transfers of power after independence. It is, once again, clear that even the opposition is capable of consolidating power and entrenching itself in office through leveraging ethnic and other identities. The opposition and civil society's desire to engage in 'democracy protection' is not in doubt. What is less clear, however, is whether both actors have developed any meaningful strategy for accomplishing such a difficult task. We could go as far as saying that how they grow together or how they grow apart will determine the individual and collective fate of Uganda.

Taking the long view, there are many reasons the opposition and civil society's attempts at democracy protection have, so far, turned out to be relatively futile. One is that the totalitarian resurgence is, at least in the short run, giving pro-democracy actors a genuine strategic nightmare, making them more susceptible to pressure from the electorate for not doing much yet their hands are tied. The pro-democracy agents need to work with some of the countries that are experiencing the most pronounced forms of democratic backsliding to serve its key goals and interests, including the capture of power. The NRM, however, is well aware that many of their foreign partners continue to eye it with deep scepticism under Museveni's presidency, making them highly – perhaps overly – cautious about standing up for democratic institutions. Most decisively, the administration simply does seem to have a coherent plan for how to survive the eye of the storm.

5. Electoral Reform – Is There Light at the End of the Tunnel?

In the last several years, the euphoria that had resulted from what enthusiasts at the start of 1986 had called a democratic revolution – and not a mere change of guard – based on the NRM and Museveni's apparent intentions of genuine governance transformation has dissipated considerably. The happy headlines announcing that Uganda was shrugging off dictatorial rule and embarking on a democratic path have given way to an intermittent but rising stream of troubling and forlorn reports about mismanaged elections. Close on the heels of reports of flawed elections have been accounts about the shedding of democratic forms and the erosion of human rights in Uganda. There is still sometimes good news on the democracy front, such as NUP's emergence and how it annihilated the NRM's support in Buganda, but a counter-movement of stagnation and retrenchment is evident.

Given the relevance of democracy's fortunes, the new counter-movement raises significant questions, starting with the basic one of whether it is only a smattering of predictable cases of backsliding or whether it instead presages a major reverse trend. Furthermore, the rise of retrenchment and kleptocracy prompts an inquiry into where it is taking countries in which it is occurring, whether it signals the emergence of a new contender for the liberal democratic model, and what it says about when and why democracy succeeds.

Retrenchment also poses serious questions for Uganda's political journey because democratic stagnation has been most pronounced from the time term limits were dropped. The elections thereafter were a milestone, yet political life in Uganda is still only very partially democratic, and the surge away from one-party politics towards democracy has weakened. To foreground this, it should be mentioned that the dominant ideology that the NRM espouses is a form of state nationalism in which elements of pluralism mix uneasily with tyrannical structures.

Comparatively, entrenched strongmen like Paul Kagame and Emmerson Mnangagwa have manipulated or co-opted supposedly transitional elections so as to reconsolidate their power. Fraud, severe administrative disorder, or a lack of permitted opposition parties have marred many elections, as in Cote d'Ivoire and in Niger, where it took two electoral rounds to give the country a new leader when Mohammed Bazoom bamboozled his opponent and former president Mahamane Ousmane for the top job. Even where legitimate balloting has taken place, like in Benin, it was a roller coaster ride for Patrice Talon who won a re-election for a second term in the very first round of polls largely boycotted by the opposition. In Congo, President Sassou Nguesso extended his rule. Then Idris Deby of Chad got re-elected, but that win would be transitory as the strongman died in a battle against jihadists.

This being said, we cannot forget about Uganda because the NRM has a limited tolerance for opposition, while flirting with autocracy. Actually, in Uganda's case 'retrenchment' is an inadequate word for the political and human horrors that ravaged the country during the 2020/21 general elections. Consequently, the prospects for peaceful pluralism in Uganda remain extremely bleak in spite of internationally supervised national elections. This is compounded by an existing scenario where the country remains in a gray area between dictatorship and democracy. Subsequently, the question for Uganda is not whether democracy can be maintained in form but whether it can be achieved in substance, especially in the face of the severe deficiencies marking political life in the country – weak capacity and performance of government institutions, widespread corruption, irregular and often arbitrary rule of law, poorly developed patterns of representation and participation, and large numbers of marginalised citizens.

6. Same Old, Same Old

Pessimists (including sceptics) continue to talk about the fragility of democracy, political chaos and the imperfect nature of man as one of the reasons why democracy is a perishable product. Contrarily, optimists see democracy as an expected ‘market correction’. They even go further to argue that not all the trends are bad by pointing to Nigeria, which in May 2015 experienced the first truly democratic transfer of power – from a defeated ruling party to the opposition – in its history, or to Sri Lanka, which returned to electoral democracy in January 2015 after five years of electoral autocracy. The first Arab democracy in decades emerged in Tunisia, and in Myanmar (also called Burma), a democratically elected government now shares significant power with the military.

In truth, however, democratic stagnation and retrenchment are likely to continue to the extent that they will not settle the impasse between optimists and pessimists. Therefore, in assessing Uganda’s ambiguous political climate, we must take cognisance of the fact that opposition groups have some latitude but little relative strength. This is because the state continues to use the media to its advantage. This is demonstrated by the fact that the newspapers and radios offer independent voices but the televisions – even where privatisation has taken hold – are state-dominated, trade unions are permitted but the government co-opts them, elections are plausible but preceded by campaigns in which incumbents enjoy a huge strategic advantage, the legislature contains heterogeneous forces but possesses nominal authority, and the judiciary operates with some independence at the local level yet is politically micro-managed at the top. Furthermore, Uganda lacks the rule of law; at best, it has rule by law, in which formal laws apply only to some. For most people, regardless of their social rank, violence targeted at them is endemic.

In addition, even when it is not novel, hybrid regimes like the NRM are highly personalistic in spite of the fact that Museveni draws his power from entrenched economic, cultural and political structures. What is more, Museveni continues to draw his power from militaries and/or internal security forces to ensure political stability. He rarely articulates much in the way of conservative or liberal ideology, but heavily relies on opportunistic nationalism and populism to sway the population.

Besides, Museveni, like all strongmen, such as Paul Kagame, has given up the pretence of presenting himself to the world as a democrat and the claim to be practising Asian-style ‘soft authoritarianism’ à la Singapore or Malaysia. He continues to posit that a strong hand is necessary for national development; he insists that democracy can come only after development. This line is often popular, at least initially, where flailing pluralism and increased crime, corruption and poverty that frequently come after political openings have left citizens disillusioned. The Singapore model also has appeal among Western advisers and observers, many of whom wonder whether developing countries are ‘ready for democracy’ and believe, without admitting it, that a strong hand is just what is needed.

Few, if any, of the many newly established or reestablished hybrid regimes, however, bear much resemblance to the soft dictatorial governments of Asia. Rather than building up meritocracy, the new semi-despots usually indulge in rampant patronage and clientele structures. Rather than investing heavily in education and healthcare and trying to minimise income inequality, they fritter away scarce revenues on pet projects of dubious value and allow elites to multiply their already disproportionate share of the national cake.

Be that as it may, instead of strategic discipline and earnestness of national purpose, they offer disguised improvisation and pompous eloquence. In the end, arguments for development before democracy are little more than attempted cover-ups for the dictatorial ambitions of autocrats like Aimé Henri Konan Bédié, of Cote d’Ivoire, and Museveni for that matter. Hence, the hollowness of their pretensions is underlined by the fact that no positive alternative to democracy has yet emerged in the post-Cold War world. Democratic retrenchment is not the consequence of the spreading allure of Asian-style repressiveness or of any newer contender to democracy; it only offers variations on old, unproductive patterns of authoritarianism.

7. The Case for Reform Agitation

The recent progress made by Uganda is far from all-encompassing owing to substantive causes and manifestations. This is largely due to the emptiness of the NRM's pretensions, which underlines the fact that there is no positive alternative to their 'no change' philosophy. This leads us to the question of what can be done to change the circumstances, knowing that the democratic trend of the 1980s and early 1990s 'appeared to go from the political equivalent of an arcane religious faith, attainable only after laborious study, to a pop religion spread through televangelism and mass baptisms.'²

However, stagnation and retrenchment brought all enthusiasts back to earth because as we have seen, throughout history, that democracy is difficult to achieve. The question I want to broach is not why we have not given up, but what needs to be done to turn the tide.

At first blush, we must contend with the fact that elites often reconsolidate their power after a political opening because of the political and economic resources they command and the weakness of fledgling opposition forces. This is as straightforward as it is inescapable if you closely look at how the NRM has conducted itself since the capture of power in 1986. By contrast, Krasner argues that Ugandan leaders would be more successful if they adopted a third theory of development: rational choice institutionalism. This theory emphasises the importance of elites and stresses that only under certain conditions will they be willing to tie their own hands and adopt policies that benefit the population as a whole. The sweet spot, in which the government is strong enough to provide key services but does not repress its people, has been achieved by only a few polities.

Second, as seen in Central Europe and Latin America, openings often involve real shifts in the basic configuration of power following de-legitimation of old structures or mass popular mobilisation. In relation to Uganda, as soon as Museveni ascended to power, he rolled back all Uganda People's Congress (UPC) programmes regardless of their relevance. The death of cooperative societies and the closure of some trade unions cannot be ignored.

Third, is how despots do all they can to tilt the country's political bearings from the Western industrialised countries for social and political models to the Asian model of 'development first and democracy later'. However, this is a terrible lie because no country's culture, history or economic circumstances make democracy less useful to it.

Adding to the problem, democracy itself seems to have lost its charm. This is because many emerging democracies have failed to meet their citizens' hopes for freedom, security and economic growth, just as the world's established democracies, including the United States, have grown increasingly dysfunctional. In China and the stable countries in the Middle East, meanwhile, decades of economic growth have proved that a state need not liberalise to generate prosperity.

Supplementarily, as illiberal models of capitalism lose some of their shine, and as China's growth has slowed markedly and the plunge in oil prices has weakened Russia and other petro-states, adherents of democracy should act vigorously to make the most of these and other opportunities. For example, the right kind of support from the United States and its allies could unleash a new wave of freedom across the globe, particularly in Uganda, which heavily relies on donor funding. In reality, aid conditionality has worked best when focused on a single major goal, as when donors in 1992 pressured then-President Hastings Kamuzu Banda to hold a national referendum on Malawi's future political structure. Without that support, however, autocracies will continue to proliferate, leading to more instability and less freedom.

² Carother, Thomas (2010), *Critical Mission: Essays on Democracy Promotion* p.161

Finally, civil society and other promoters should push for good government that relatively allows an operative space for citizens to participate in and contribute to governance. In addition, trying to push for the rule of law and capacitating civil society actors to challenge draconian legal provisions, such as those enlisted in the POMA and the NGO Act, may provide the hope to push back against the shrinking space. However, activists need be aware that good government is not in the interests of the elites in most countries because rulers often reject or sabotage reforms that could diminish their hold on power.

8. What Nature of Reforms Are Likely to Breeze Through?

As we have seen time and again, the shutting down of communication is a case of cutting off the nose to spite the face. It is therefore important for democracy proponents to push for legislation that stops governments from becoming even less open, transparent and responsive to their citizens. This is because silencing online dissent through censoring, regulating and passing laws, for example those that require foreign companies to store citizens' data within the home country's borders, and arresting those they perceive as threats is an enabler of democratic retrenchment.

Consider this: Russia has built what the Internet Freedom Organisation Access Now (IFOAN) has termed a 'commonwealth of surveillance states', exporting sophisticated electronic surveillance technologies throughout Africa. China and Israel, too, have reportedly supplied Uganda with internet and telecommunications surveillance technology to help it repress and spy on its citizens.

Second, the pro-democracy enterprise should think beyond the online state because offline states are also constraining civil society by restricting the ability of organisations to operate, communicate and fundraise. In each case, success could generate significant spillover effects. Notably, since 2012, governments across the globe have proposed or enacted more than 90 laws restricting freedom of association or assembly. With reference to Uganda, the POMA and NGO Act (2016) continue to constrict the freedom to assemble without the permission of the nonpartisan police.

Third, there is need to fight the gerrymandering of districts, the flood of so-called dark money into election campaigns, and the ever-growing power of special-interest lobbies like the Kampala City Traders Association (KACITA) and Pentecostal assemblies that use their constituencies to monetise and polarise politics to an unprecedented degree, resulting in the passing of regime-leaning bills, a breakdown in bipartisan policy-making and regular government inefficiency.

Close to the above is the need to encourage reforms that invigorate political competition – for example, by ending gerrymandering, introducing ranked-choice voting (the so-called NRM queue) within parties like the NRM, and removing sore-loser laws, which prevent defeated primary candidates from running as independents in the general election. This silence speaks loudly.

Furthermore, civil society should hold its donors to the highest standards of democracy promotion. For example, whereas U.S. foreign assistance on democracy found that \$10 million of additional USAID spending produced a roughly fivefold increase in the amount of democratic change in a country based on the Freedom House scale, the United States has to a certain extent legitimised draconian regimes.

Larry Diamond, a senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, notes that President Barack Obama did just that during a July 2015 visit to Ethiopia, when he twice called its government 'democratically elected', even though it had held sham elections earlier that same year. When he visited Kenya on the same trip, Obama expressed the hope that its corrupt and semi-authoritarian regime would keep 'continuing down the path of a strong, more inclusive, more accountable and transparent democracy.' Regimes pounce on such language, using implicit U.S. endorsements to stifle free speech and activism at home.

9. Revisiting Interests and How Pro-Reformists Can Succeed

Worsening democratic stagnation and retrenchment compel all pro-democracy actors to reexamine questions not only of how much Uganda can actually foster democracy, but of how strong its interest in the matter actually is. The NRM claims that it has a blanket interest in the promotion of democracy, but such a policy line runs against increasingly harsh realities these days.

Accordingly, the pro-democracy enterprise must be wary of the chimera of instantaneous democracy, which reveals the difficulties and the significant chance of failure in democratic transitions. This is because electoral reform should evolve from superficial, in-and-out fixes to deeper partnerships with the voting population. Additionally, support for civil society must spread beyond simply aiding elites in national capitals. Efforts to promote the rule of law and the capacity of civil society to push back should also expand beyond the short-term technical training to focus on broader issues of legal challenge to the shrinking space, accountability and human rights. In the same breadth, civil society should clamour for consolidated democracy, in which the arbitrary power of the state is constrained and almost all residents have access to the rule of law.

Third, any policy to promote democracy must include bolder, smarter efforts to fight corruption, which sustains most arbitrary regimes. To that end, civil society and the media should influence legislation that identifies, tracks and seizes ill-gotten wealth – a crucial step in the war against abuse in campaign financing that can also advance democracy and human rights. John Ikenberry – an Albert G. Milbank Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University – posits that if the liberal democratic world is to survive, its champions will have to find their voice and act with more conviction.

Moreover, pro-democracy proponents should shift gears from outright competition to co-competition – the act of cooperation between competing actors – because, whereas authoritarian regimes are powerful, confident and sit tight, as is happening in Uganda today, it may seem as though such efforts are hopeless. However, most oppressive regimes have moderate and pragmatic actors who may see the need for political opening. The NRM is no different. The marginal moderates of today could well become the rulers of tomorrow.

Agitators should also exploit trade agreements to advance democracy. Academic studies confirm that when free-trade agreements are conditional on governments taking specific measures to protect human rights, meaningful improvements follow. The White House reports that the mere process of negotiating the Trans-Pacific Partnership induced Brunei to sign and Vietnam to ratify the UN Convention against Torture, while also encouraging other human rights improvements in these two countries and in Malaysia. How can Ugandan civil society capitalise on the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), seeing that Uganda is working on a plan to increase its exports to the US in the next five years?

Above all, any push for democracy should begin with high standards within the pro-democracy ecosystem. The sad fact is that the opposition no longer inspires admiration or emulation. The recent elections have revealed deep currents of alienation and anger among the public – currents the opposition appears unable to calm. These political failings have given ammunition to democracy's enemies.

10. Reaching the Summit

The NRM administration has emphasised to the point of incantation that its development and democracy policy agendas are deeply interlinked. But appealing as this rhetorical framing may be, connecting its commitment to transparent elections and to democratic renovation presents tough challenges.

The practical questions are difficult enough. Will the NRM reframe its policy on democracy issues? If so, how? New bureaucratic linkages are one possibility, such as establishing additional deliberative processes whereby the IPOD convenes regularly, or increasing the passage of reforms that will slow the speed of democratic backsliding. Another is integrating an endeavour in which all actors work collaboratively to develop solutions to the common challenges they face.

For pro-democracy advocates, the strategic questions are even more profound. If this framing means that civil society must succeed in pushing the passage of democratic reforms, the state of democracy in Uganda will deteriorate. On many fronts, the authority to propel democratic progress resides within institutions where blockages and countervailing currents abound – Parliament, the judiciary, and the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs). However, Uganda’s caustic political climate bodes poorly for any potential breakthroughs. Rather than tying the credibility of Uganda’s democracy support to success in advancing domestic reform, a better approach would be to emphasise that the strength of democracy strength is that it allows countries to correct their missteps and evolve to solve new problems – but that it also needs constant tending to live up to its potential.

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