LESSONS FOR THE 2021 SCIENTIFIC ELECTIONS IN UGANDA: 2020 ELECTORAL EXPERIENCES FROM AROUND AFRICA

By
Luwemba Musa
Islamic University in Uganda
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Department of Political Science
Email:luwemba20@gmail.com
Phone: (+256)774386554/705295758

Abstract
Elections are a critical democratic metric for determining a country's level of democracy and democratization. Uganda is set to hold scientific elections in 2021, but it will be a difficult time for the country as it deals with the global corona virus epidemic (Corvid-19). Ugandan voters, as in other African countries, must vote in presidential, parliamentary, and local council elections. At least 22 African countries will have elections in 2020, with the first taking place in the Comoros in January and the last in Ghana in December. However, all of these countries are aware that Corvid-19 represents a serious threat. COVID-19 was detected for the first time in Africa.
Key words: Elections, Corvid-19, Uganda, voting, International Community, Africa, Experiences

Introduction

Elections[1] in any country are a basis for democratization as people feel they are the safest and most peaceful means through which any government can be changed .people are always patient till such times which in most African countries come after 5 years with exception of countries like Rwanda which have up to 7 years reign. As most countries tend towards the years 2020 and 2021, these are years of elections for most Africa countries but (un)fortunately, not only Africa but the entire world has been affected by Corvid-19 which in all ways has changed our expectations of the modes of electoral behaviors. This is why countries like Uganda have come up with what they have called 'scientific elections[2]. The nature of corvid-19 pandemic and how it is transmitted calls for dynamics in conduct as well as entire operations before, during and after the electoral processes.

---

[1] An election is a formal group decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual or multiple individuals to hold public office. Elections have been the usual mechanism by which modern representative democracy has operated since the 17th century. Elections may fill offices in the legislature, sometimes in the executive and judiciary, and for regional and local government

[2] 'Scientific elections' was a term coined to imply elections conducted in the corvid-19 period with many dynamics and thus conducted differently from these usual /normal elections say no rallies to be held at any level ,social distancing e.t.c

Vital of these is that overcrowding at polling stations, contact with infected surfaces by numerous individuals, and increased health risks to the elderly and immune-compromised individuals represent among others the major obstacles to safe elections. This explains why elections should be given due consideration as their link to democracy is very important. (Snyder, 2000; Mansfield & Snyder, 2005) This implies that some countries have been forced to give up on elections while others have chosen to go ahead with them. Africa's 2020 elections are clustered in West Africa (with 6 elections), the Horn (Ethiopia and Somalia), and the Great Lakes (Uganda, Burundi and Tanzania). Ten of the 13 elections are scheduled for the latter half of the year. This suggests that 2020 will be a dynamic period of manoeuvring by key actors seeking to advance not only their individual interests, but also their vision for the future of their countries—and governance norms for the continent as a whole.

As it has been reported,

"Elections have facilitated the emergence of democratic governments in Benin, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mali, Senegal, and South Africa. Following autocratic regimes and protracted civil wars, more stable societies have emerged in Guinea, Liberia, Niger, and Sierra Leone. In some cases, however, elections have been manipulated to legitimate autocratic regimes or to ensure dynastic successions on the continent. Violence still plagues approximately 20 to 25 percent of elections in Africa.2 In recent times, high-profile electoral crises in Kenya (2007-2008), Zimbabwe (2000 and 2008), and Côte d'Ivoire (2010-2011) have collectively led to at least four thousand deaths and hundreds of thousands displaced. Electoral violence can erode a people's faith in democratic processes. Additionally, countries with a history of electoral violence often experience a recurrence of such violence, as has been witnessed in Kenya, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe."

It is on this background that Uganda called for scientific elections which are yet to be conducted in 2021[3]. The validity and reliability of such elections is still questioned but the government seems committed to have them by all means necessary. Uganda, currently has over 2000 confirmed cases

[3] Simon Byabakama, the chairperson of the Electoral Commission told reporters that the presidential, parliamentary and other local council elections will be held between Jan. 10 and Feb. 8. Nominations will take place between September and November 2020 while campaigns will be held between November 2020 and January 2021.

of the corona virus (as on 03.09.2020) as reported by the MOH and has been slowly easing restrictions/lockdown and emphasizing measures of social distancing for all activities in the country. To this, the electoral commission says it is bound by Article 61 (2) of Uganda's constitution which tasks it to organize elections within 120 days before the expiry of the term of president, parliament or local government.

However, one should understand the dynamics of an election. There are three stages to this that is pre-voting, voting, and post-voting. Each of these phases has a number of elements[4]. However, one should know that all these stages are directly under the responsibility of the Electoral commission.

a) Pre-voting: In the pre-voting phase, electoral frameworks as well as road maps may be developed or refined. Boundaries are defined to ascertain voter eligibility. During this phase, voter and civic education, voter registration, party nominations, and electoral campaigns also take place.

b) Voting: In addition to the casting of votes, this phase also includes vote counting and the entire verification of the electoral process as well as the presentation of results.

c) Post-voting: The post-voting period includes a list of the activities that ideally occur between elections. This may include voter lists to be updated and also the post-election reviews which may take place in which electoral laws and institutions are analyzed to determine how they can be strengthened. Finally, in this stage, procedures may then be put in place to strengthen those laws and institutions that pertain to elections. At a fundamental level, the electoral system must be seen by all candidates as fair and equitable, without any basis on identity that is religion, class, ethnic- or regionally-based discrimination. The reason for this is that for candidates, the manipulation of voter lists is an acute sign that the system has been corrupted but yet voter registration cum forms should be reliable and consensual. Civic and voter education helps to empower voters so that they feel a greater stake in the outcome and, more fundamentally, understand how to cast their vote.

---

[4]https://portalanterior.ine.mx/archivos3/portal/historico/contenido/Fundamental_stages_and_activities_of_the_Electoral_Process/

It is therefore clear that the proper management and conduct of elections is pegged to those who manage elections. Election management bodies (EMBs) say the Electoral Commission[5] for the case of Uganda should be impartial and competent, and embrace transparency and inclusivity in their composition and mandate (Goldsmith, 2015; Harish & Little, 2017). To discharge their duties effectively, EMBs should be further endowed with sufficient staff and financial resources. Domestic mechanisms to resolve election-related disputes likewise help to mitigate the possibility of tensions deteriorating into violence (Goldsmith, Arthur A (2015). Uganda's vase is tricky here as most of the electoral commission officials are appointed in the best interest of the executive especially the president. This questions the neutrality and objectivity of this institution.

In the case of scientific elections in Uganda, it is clear that the observation and the monitoring of elections will in many cases, play an important role in ensuring that electoral processes is and goes on well and is conducted in a fair manner and in detailing and raising awareness of violations when they are not. The media (radio, television or even print media like newspapers or magazines) at this point shall become a very important institution in dissemination of information to the masses. In the same line, it is clear that both the quantity and quality of local and international observers will be key factors in determining the effectiveness of the observation and monitoring processes. This is why the different scholars who are interested in elections and electoral management but exist outside the Western world have long been interested in the subversion of electoral processes through practices such as clientelism[6], vote-buying, political violence and intimidation (Birch, 2007, 2011; Mares &Young, 2016; Norris, 2014; Schedler, 2013). The unfortunate bit is that it's been made clear that Research from the African context suggests that harassment and intimidation are more common than lethal violence (Straus & Taylor, 2012). However, we need to expand inquiry into other arenas of violence. For example, social media forms a space for threats and intimidation during election periods so as to ensure positive communication and dissemination of electoral information. (Muchlinski et al.2019). Whatever has happened elsewhere seems to be

---

[5] The Electoral Commission is mandated by the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (1995), Article 60, to organize, conduct and supervise elections and referenda

[6] Clientelism is an informal political institution, consisting of interpersonal relationships and exchanges between patrons and their clients (Van de Walle, 2003). Taylor et al (2017) examine the subject theoretically, arguing that clientelism should cause electoral violence if an incumbent is running for office, however they do not analyze opposition actors, nor supporters of either incumbents or opposition actors who also have a chance of enforcigng violence during such times.

evident in Uganda. The censorship of the press as well as harassment of the opposition leaders are key indicators here. 19ᵗʰ April 2020 saw the attack on Honorable Francis Zaake held for distributing food is a pertinent example here.

On August 13, 2018, Ugandan police and military arrested and beat six opposition members of parliament, at least two journalists, and 28 other people in advance of the August 15 by-elections in the northwestern town of Arua. In recent days, protesters took to the streets in Kampala, Mityana, and other areas to decry the arrests and violence.[7]

Given the proliferation of national, sub-regional, regional, and international actors who seem to have interest in being engaged in election observation and monitoring, coordination of, and coherence among, all of these actors will help to avoid the duplication of efforts and ensure that consistent standards are applied. However, the condition is that their operation will desire a free and fair as well as non-interventionist political system. This is very rare in Africa and thus Uganda shall have to prove itself in this.

Throughout the electoral process, continuous and inclusive dialogue may be helpful in attenuating tensions that arise during elections. When National resistance Movement (NRM) held its party elections for the flag bearers, violence has been evident across the country though with less military and police interventions[8]. Many of the contestants have had their issues of discontent solved at the party offices and questions are already arising as to what will happen come 2021.Taking a closer look, Ghana's transformation into a stable democracy has been one of Africa's success stories. It is likely that the establishment of mechanisms that foster dialogue among different political and ethnic groups— including the Inter-Party Advisory Committee established in 1994 and the National and Local Peace Councils established in 2006—have contributed to broad acceptance of the results of recent elections. The question is whether Uganda can adopt such an institutional framework as it drives further to democracy.

---

[7] https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/21/uganda-attacks-opposition-figures-media
[8] 2020 NRM primaries in Uganda to select party flag bearers largely degenerated into violence. Candidates and their supporters clashed with opponents leading to the shedding of blood. Some people died. The army and police were called in to keep the peace. There was massive rigging. Some people were surprised that such violence and fraud had happened. I was personally surprised it was not as violent and widespread. In 2010 and 2015, we witnessed worse incidents. I have been expecting the situation to get much worse before it gets better

The above narrative therefore poses questions for the 2021 scientific elections in Uganda which seems to be manned with a lot of complications. In this initiative, aspirants at all levels will only be able to conduct campaigns electronically via television, radio and social media, since open-air public rallies have been banned. This is because electoral activities involve public gatherings and hence pose high COVID-19 risk of person-to-person and object-to-person transmissions. Violence may be an expected outcome of this. Violence may be used in the post-election period, either to protest the election result and thereby weaken the legitimacy of the election which could for example cause re-election, or to crack down on such protest. It can thus be used both to change election results and to minimize the risk of election results to be changed (Taylor et al, 2017). As it has happened in many other countries, Uganda also may experience the above form of violence as it has already been expressed by the opposition aspirants who seem to foresee it.

Voting itself is to be conducted normally that government can effectively ensure social distancing and other precautionary measures at polling stations. The president once said that,

"… the gathering for the elections themselves, can be safely managed with hand-washing, social-distancing or leaving gaps of the necessary meters between voters in line," Museveni said.

This would remove the uncertainty that would be created by the postponement of the elections but also ensure that elections are held safely, however, this has been seen with mixed reactions across the board. While the ruling National Resistance Movement[9] (NRM) has welcomed the proposal and says it will adjust its programme accordingly, many in the opposition say the commission is playing into the hands of incumbent Museveni and other powerful NRM politicians. The opposition politicians from key parties in Uganda like Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), Democratic Party (DP) and the rest accuse the electoral commission of not consulting them as it drafted the revised election roadmap. According to the popular legislator and presidential hopeful honorable Robert Kyagulanyi aka Bobi Wine (Member of Parliament for Kyandondo East-elect), the scientific elections cannot deliver free and fair results and hence are questioned.

---

[9] NRM is the ruling party in Uganda and has been in power since 1986.

"What we are going for are elections provided for within the law. We shall hold public rallies, talk to the people and move from one district to another because there is no reason whatsoever for us to hold scientific elections," Honorable Robert Kyagulanyi has said on several occasions.

"An election is about getting people to interact with voters and also ensuring the voters have every opportunity to make an informed decision. This proposal by the EC about scientific elections undermines everything about free and fair elections," Democratic Party president general Norbert Mao said.

"President Museveni destroyed all safeguards for peace and crippled institutions and now he has brought this kind of campaign method. His stolen term ends May 2021; Uganda continues," opposition FDC veteran Kizza Besigye said. On august 23rd 2020, Police arrested two journalists from NTV, Herbert Zziwa and Ronald Muwanga, as they reported live from the area where Kawuma was killed. The journalists were charged with malicious damage to property and incitement of violence. (https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/21/uganda-attacks-opposition-figures-media)

Uganda therefore faces a harder time ahead of the elections because of the intricacies therein. There will be a massive planning and implementation of the electoral rules and regulations especially given the fact that there is an inadequate system for dispute resolution Lack of trust in electoral, management bodies like the electoral commission, being filled with inadequate operational planning and poor financing which seems to be inadequate especially for the security arrangements. The situation will be made worse by the contested electoral law especially with regards to the electoral commission and the lack of adequate "ground rules.

Additionally, there are chances of politicized security sector actors, regional weak state presence and control Neighboring violence which has the potential to spill over borders.Presence of non-state armed actors, access to small arms and light as well as misuse of such weapons, increased cases of forced displacement, rapid and prevalent arbitrary arrests and lack of due processes which has resulted into continuous violation of human rights. The other aspects have been limited media access, provocative media campaigning, provocative political party rallying and use of Provocative and violent actions by political parties. Other countries like Mali and Burundi have also

experienced Deficit, destruction and loss of election materials, Lack of transparency re-special and external voting Problematic voting day, problematic ballot counting and result tallying, lost/destroyed tabulation forms coupled with many cases of Fraud suspected.

Various people have commented on such electoral processes with lessons from elsewhere.

Opposing scientific elections while at the same time expecting the electoral commission as it is to organize and deliver a free and fair election is a waste of time. An election being unscientific doesn't mean it will be free and fair. Save your energy for more important things.

— JongoBravin (@jongobravin) June 22, 2020

I really don't know what is scientific election? Who brought that proposal without parliament? Who is electoral commission? Which power does he have in this country minus consulting parliament? Ugandans stay warn for accepting system which is not in law of Uganda

— Opio Phillips (@OpioPhillips1) June 24, 2020

The move by the electoral commission is already facing legal challenges including one from a journalist and pastor, Joseph Kabuleta.

The Presidential, Parliamentary and LC Elections Act do not allow for 'scientific' elections. For the EC to consult with Museveni then seek to dictate to other candidates is mockery of an election process. Candidate M7 has to be equal to all other candidates. We are off to court. pic.twitter.com/jp7tkhgOBY

— Joseph Kabuleta (@JKabuleta) June 17, 2020

"I have already instructed my lawyer to take the Electoral Commission to court. We shall defy, we shall go ahead with the normal way of campaign by carrying out our rallies but putting into consideration the guidelines put in place by the Ministry of Health," Elton Joseph Mabirizi, an aspirant in the 2016 presidential election said.

The fact that many radio stations across the country are owned by politicians who will be vying for office has also led many to question the viability of fair play during campaigns.

This explains how tricky the Ugandan case is as far as scientific elections are concerned.

The point is simple but complicated. Uganda must reposition itself in this case as a unique country that is health considerate without impeaching on the rights of the people. The implication here is that while each country may have to ultimately make the decision based on social economic and political national needs as well as the legislative frameworks, the bigger picture shows that many governments are focusing on saving lives by strengthening their COVID-19 response and managing the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on the lives of people. The challenge is thus bigger than presumed. (Fielding, David: 2018) This is because the countries choosing to go ahead with elections in this era of the pandemic are bound to face a balancing act of managing the virus and mobilizing the necessary financial, human and other resources and materials to conduct credible elections safely. In all, no fewer than 12 countries are scheduled to hold elections later this year. The question is whether they should go ahead as planned and under what conditions, given the increasing spread of the virus.

The challenges confronting Uganda's democratic experiments seem to be quite many and complex especially at this time when the country is divided between supporting Bobi Wine and the incumbent president Museveni and include entrenching constitutionalism, political economic challenges and the reconstruction of the postcolonial state; ensuring that the armed forces are permanently kept out of politics, instituting structures for the effective management of natural resources; promoting sustainable development and political stability; nurturing effective leadership, and safeguarding human rights and the rule of law. These thus call for an open, flexible and transparent system of governance that promotes pluralism and multi-cultural politics.

Countries that have had elections in this period of the pandemic have been challenged as they realized after their elections that SOPS cannot easily be enforced in situations where people have converged in one place. This is a test too for Uganda. According to the United Nations and political analysts and experts, providing sanitation stations and clear directions for maintaining social distancing, and requiring or supplying personal protective gear are some of the many efforts that

could help make in-person voting as safe as possible. Following guidance from health officials is a priority and this has been widely emphasized by the Ministry Of Health in Uganda though people seem not to be taking this seriously as the same guidelines get to be de-emphasized by the politicians and other government high ranking officials.

The need is thus real. Inclusion of, and dialogue with the less disadvantaged masses of the community like the women and other potentially marginalized groups like children or the elderly, and transparency in keeping the public informed about election changes and adjustments related to COVID-19 would be essential in this pandemic period as these are the most affected groups of people as per the records from WHO (2020). In 2018, Ebola hit hard on DRC however, the presidential election in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) went ahead to be conducted, even in some Ebola-affected areas, following ministry of Heath Standard Operating Procedures(SOPs) as well as precautionary measures being put in place at polling stations including temperature screening and hand sanitization. (Fjelde and Hanne: 2020) Similarly, critical legislative elections took place in Liberia in 2014, with voters having their temperature taken, advised to maintain distance from each other and to wash or sanitize their hands before and after voting. These are all lessons for a country like Uganda.

Anthony Banbury who is the former head of the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER)[10] that was set up in 2014 while writing about elections in this pandemic period is reported to have said that,

'Planning for elections must start as early as possible; electoral administrators must work closely with public health authorities, security services, and other key state actors; and the public must be kept well-informed throughout the planning process so it understands the rationale for any changes made to voting processes'

The question to Uganda is whether there can be absolute peace and coordination between the coercive institutions of the country and the community at large as we move towards scientific elections. The experiences in the pre electoral period say otherwise as there has been a number of

---

[10] UNMEER, the first-ever UN emergency health mission, was established on 19 September 2014 and closed on 31 July 2015, having achieved its core objective of scaling up the Ebola response on the ground.

cases of violence imposed on the opposition politicians who must share the same electorate like the incumbent political officials[11].

The nature of democratization in African countries, is best summed up in their form of governance that is semi authoritarianism. This direct shows the link between elections and the nature of governance and thus provides us insights into how Uganda may or may not do well in the forth coming scientific elections. Looking at the political space, most of the countries in Africa operate under 'semi-authoritarian regimes' because they have the facade of democracy which means that they have political systems, they have all the economic, social and political institutions of democratic systems, they have elected parliaments, and they hold regular elections mostly after five years except countries like Rwanda that hold them after seven years. They have nominally independent judiciaries but whose appointment is 'presidential in nature'. They have constitutions that are by and large completely acceptable as democratic institutions but there are, at the same time, in a very nominal form- just followed when these favor our interests and on the hand other ad dropped when they cease to favor us and thus a hinderance in the proper functioning of the democratic system. Uganda directly fits this description.

Most of the Semi-authoritarian regimes[12] in Africa are very good at holding multi-party elections while at the same time making sure that the core power of the government is never going to be affected. This happens in the pre-electoral period as seen in arrest of opposition leaders, censorship of the press as well as labelling their supporters as violent and thus who should be worked on by either the police or the army. Semi-authoritarian regimes intimidate voters, as it happened in the recent elections in Zimbabwe. Semi-authoritarian regimes manipulate state institutions for self-

---

[11] Repressive and violent security forces who consider violence as the only option to counter opposition activities and protests before, during, or after elections can also contribute to violence. Police and security forces sometimes use lethal weapons to carry out the wishes of incumbent governments who want to remain in power, while opposition parties employ people armed with weapons to counter the violence of the security forces. This trend can escalate election violence, leading to more casualties.

[12] Semi-authoritarian regimes have a greater level of openness within political institutions, the economy and civil society. However, openness is much higher in democracies. Semi-authoritarian regimes can be divided into three main types: Dynamic regimes that may allow for incremental democratic change over time; equilibrium regimes that require profound changes to become democratic; and regimes in decay that are unlikely to democratize.

ends governments don't respect the constitution and don't work through available political institutions. Semi-authoritarian regimes amend constitutions anytime they want to suit their interests. Semi-authoritarian regimes will not introduce fully participatory, competitive elections that may result in their loss of power, and some are even unsure of how far they really want to go toward political pluralism in their countries.

If Uganda is to stand out unique in all this, the case is simple: it must work on ensuring that there is

'A strong and effective democratic process should be able to establish a functioning administrative structure; and address the issue of how leaders are chosen; the issue of how different institutions relate to each other; the issues of how officials should act, for example, how the judiciary should act, the independence of the judiciary from other branches of government, and the problem of how the decisions that are taken by these democratic institutions can be implemented'.

Elections are complex and tricks especially during times like these. Being part of democracy, it's not only required but also important that those who have authority use it for the public good; a democratic system of government begins by recognizing that all members of society are equal when it comes to elections which in essence should be free and fair. People should have equal say and equal participation in the affairs of government and decision making in society, because, in the final analysis, government exists to serve the people; the people do not exist to serve government. In other words, elections must enhance individual rights and not stifle their existence. Repressive electoral laws in many African countries' statute books against personal liberty and habeas corpus must be removed from the statute books.

It is clear therefore that Uganda's 2020 scientific elections face a huge challenge as it has been noted elsewhere in Africa. Whereas so far there is no clear evidence that holding elections has contributed to a spike in the number of COVID-19 cases, it is also a fact that in many of the polls done in other countries in Africa such as in Mali and Burundi, social distancing and other precautionary measures have not been duly observed.

2021 scientific elections in Uganda may be largely marked by a higher voter turnout. The possible justification for this is the increased yearning for change as well as the coming of

Honorable Kyagulanyi in the political space who has posed a very big opposition to the incumbent president Museveni. While COVID-19 may not be the only (major) factor, people's fear of contracting the virus is thought to have contributed to the low level of voter participation in other countries like Burundi or even Mali that have had their elections in 2020 .However this may not be the case for a country like Uganda.

Guinea is a living example of a Corvid-19 electoral experience. It has been reported that,

"The first election held on the continent during COVID-19 was in Guinea, where President Alpha Conde forged ahead with his controversial plan to combine legislative elections with a referendum to amend the constitution to allow him to run for a third term later this year. The elections and referendum took place on 22 March and were marred by violent protests, as well as several deaths. According to official results, the constitutional amendment received over 90% approval, and the ruling party won a two-third majority (79/114 seats) in the National Assembly."[13]

From this, Uganda must expect violence as well as massive deaths of people as the free and fair elections seem to be far from reaching. The same experience has been seen in Mali. In Mali, legislative elections were held on 29th March 2020 in a very violent and tense atmosphere, marked by ongoing instability in the northern and central parts of the country. Soumaïla Cissé, the country's main opposition leader, was kidnapped by jihadi insurgents while campaigning in the central region, something which caused wide spread protests and uprisings. Mali has seen sustained protests over the past months over the country's poor governance, including corruption and embezzlement, as well as the results of the legislative elections. President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta has been put under increasing pressure to institute fundamental political and economic reforms, with protesters demanding his resignation. The call for a coalition government has also been in high gear.

Uganda may opt for options like many other countries outside Africa that have either postponed, held or are planning to hold elections in 2020. They also must have look at Special Voting Arrangements (SVA) as an option that can allow elections to take place during a time of contagion.

---

[13] https://reliefweb.int/report/world/covid-19-further-complicates-holding-free-and-fair-elections-africa

For example, local EMBs in Bavaria, Germany and the USA have introduced postal voting for sub national elections. Otherwise, it becomes tricky. While the infrastructure in Uganda may not support postal and online voting, other SVAs could be considered. South Africa and some other countries have SVAs for the elderly, the invalid and persons on election duty. The special voting allows these vulnerable voters to vote in advance (two days earlier) and it also provides the possibility of home visits. Such SVAs could allow for staggered voting to reduce the pressure on voters on Election Day. However, in the context of the pandemic, the home visits that Uganda can adopt partly, should be modified to reduce the human contact between the officials and the voters who are at risk of contracting the virus. Uganda can also borrow from Mauritius which has voting by proxy in order to potentially extend the SVA to the elderly or persons who are infected by COVID-19.

In this period of the pandemic, the other alternatives need to be given chance so that they are tried out through a strength/ weakness opportunity and threats analysis. Uganda may need to look into these ones also so that neither elections nor health of the citizens is compromised. This includes campaigning through Internet or via social media platforms or voting by post or online through a computer or mobile phone application. If postal or online voting is deemed inappropriate (Uganda may not have the requirements for this in form of data/internet access, stability in network and cyber literacy on the side of the masses), then other in-person arrangements can be made in order to decrease the risk of contagion. This includes either introducing advanced voting or extending advance voting arrangements to a larger group of people if the election code allows. In March 2020, International IDEA published a technical report consisting of some of the alternative mechanisms of campaigning and remote voting methods and this included campaigning through Internet or via social media platforms or voting by post or online through a computer or mobile phone application. If postal or online voting is deemed inappropriate, then other in-person arrangements can be made in order to decrease the risk of contagion. This includes either introducing advance voting or extending advance voting arrangements to a larger group of people if the election code allows. The question is whether Uganda can adopt this with absolute commitment and trust from the masses.

To this, the challenge is bigger. If new voting arrangements are to be proposed for use in such periods, or enacted, good practice dictates that new laws need to be agreed upon typically between

six months (as spelt out in per article 2 of the ECOWAS protocol on Good Governance) to one year (as per Venice Commission, code of good practice in electoral matters) before elections take place, in order to uphold the principle of electoral law stability. Uganda thus becomes late to this endeavour and hence cannot turn the clock back to make this happen. Our immediate neighbour, Burundi also has lessons for a country like Uganda. Burundi's presidential and legislative elections took place on 20 May, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The government downplayed its significance and few preventative measures were taken against the spread of the virus. Following former president Pierre Nkurunziza's decision not to run for a fourth term, his chosen heir and the ruling party's candidate, Évariste Ndayishimiye, won in the first round, without much of a surprise. Political tensions around the elections were compounded by concerns over the government's response, or lack thereof, to COVID-19.

Africa's democratization history has however been challenged by Malawi. Meanwhile, Malawi made a turn back after opposition candidate Lazarus Chakwera defeated incumbent Peter Mutharika in a re-run of the May 2019 presidential elections which had been annulled by the country's High Court in February 2020. Under Mutharika, the government's response was characterized by a significant degree of denial about the existence and seriousness of the corona virus and thus the society was convinced that there was no health threat whatsoever. This was a shock to many African countries but also a lesson. When one looks at the mentioned cases, the common fact is the fact that election- and governance-related issues have been there before the COVID-19 outbreak. Malawi's democratic institutions have shown remarkable independence in pressing for a transparent tally for this election cycle and by resisting Mutharika's attempts to subvert executive oversight. As a result, Malawi's 2020 presidential elections were highly consequential, not only for choosing Malawi's president for the next 5 years, but for upholding democratic standards in the region and across the continent.

However, the electoral processes clearly made the observance of SOPs difficult. This is also likely to be the case with the elections scheduled to take place in Uganda. Whenever people converge in one place at a time, its very difficult to tailor them towards the MOH SOPs.

On 9th September 2020, the independent newspaper, a local newspaper in Uganda reported that

"The Standard Procedures include maintaining a social distance of at least two meters between persons, using hand sanitizers, washing hands with soap more frequently and wearing of facemasks while in any public space among others. But as NRM supporters went to the polls to vote for flag bearers for the district seat, none of the voters kept a distance, hand sanitizers, wore a mask of even washed hands. For example, at Sikanusu polling station, in Wobulenzi town council, crowds were gathered in one place with no fear or sign of precaution about the possible dangers of this to their lives. One of the voters Sharitah Nakalema says that they also ignored the guidelines because they did not find any provision at the polling Centres. Polling stations in the area did not have any hand washing facility in place. Instead, they had police constables manning security who, however, never restricted entry basing on SOPs as fully required. At Wobulenzi Kisaawe Polling station, it was only the electoral officials who were observed wearing facemasks."

The implication is thus simple. Uganda which gets close to the election period everyday must expect a tough lane ahead of it. If elections go ahead in Uganda, the relevant government institutions will have to ensure that they are held under optimal health security conditions and SOPS as directed by the MOH. This calls for all emphasizing on all the possible precautions to prevent the spread of the virus during the electoral campaign and subsequent electoral process. One of the biggest challenges for these elections, and therefore for their democratic nature, will be voter turnout. This is more important so far as these polls will, in principle, be a kind of referendum on the governance of incumbent regimes, and, more particularly and immediately, their management of the pandemic. Added to this is the fact that problems with, in particular, electoral commission will have to ensure impartiality as it builds confidence amongst the Ugandans. Many of the Ugandans have a credibility deficit because of their perceived partiality and bias in favor of the incumbent government. Electoral observers have always been keen here but it may be a trick this time around. Election observation missions, including those of the African Union (AU) continue to face it rough. These have shown their limits, as was recently the case in Malawi, where observers had given the 2019 polls a green light before they were judged irregular by the courts. No observers were present during the recent re-run, nor were there any present at the presidential polls in Burundi, owing to COVID-19. In other cases, these observer missions have failed on numerous occasions to point out massive electoral fraud for

reasons of fear of their lives or even lack of mandate implying that their relevance is being called into question more than ever before

One can consider another example. In another scenario, Seychelles is expected to hold its elections between October 22-24th of 2020. The Seychelles is expected to continue its steady strengthening of democratic institutions with the holding of presidential elections in October. While there are 12 registered political parties, the race is anticipated to come down to incumbent President Danny Faure of the United Seychelles party, who is seeking a second term, and Wavel Ramkalawan of the Linyon Demokratik Seselwa party, which controls a majority in the National Assembly. This year's elections are expected to benefit from the December 2018 creation of a permanent chief electoral officer to oversee the Electoral Commission secretariat and its operations. This official will be responsible for preparations, logistical support, and hiring and training of electoral staff. This arrangement, moreover, is expected to further ensure the separation of responsibilities between the oversight and the implementation tasks of the Electoral Commission.

Looking at Uganda from afar, it is clear that there are two possibilities. The first is what is called authoritarian opportunism and the second is democratic resilience. With authoritarian opportunism, leaders are advised to use the cover of the pandemic and COVID-19 to shrink political space even further and they do this by tilting the playing field for elections in a way that would favor either themselves or their preferred candidates. The political space says it all in Uganda now as NRM politicians freely defy Corvid-19 regulations at the expense of opposition ones.

In such a case, the executive remains the strongest arm of the government with all political, social and economic powers. On the other hand, democratic resilience which is the second current is seen flowing from the COVID-19 situation and is positive. There is thus need for all political parties to engage with citizens. Otherwise, the electoral process could become a very hollow process, and whoever gets declared as the winner may not have the legitimacy to be able to govern. This challenges democratization as well as the reliability and validity of the electoral results.

Conclusion

Conclusively therefore, the COVID-19 crisis already is sparking political instability, with opposition parties and civil society groups accusing government security forces of human rights abuse and attacks in Uganda as it has been elsewhere in countries like South Africa, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and elsewhere. However, despite these challenges, political leaders, electoral officials, civil society, the media and all of the progressive forces must continue to look at   Africa vividly, work collectively to help the emerging democracies on the continent come out of this pandemic as strong economies and states. This will help Ugandans who are engaged in heated debates over the merits, possibilities and effectiveness of participating in what is being popularly referred to as a 'scientific election'. If it clear that the possibility of reliable and valid results which shall be accepted by the people are limited, then checks and balances have to be in place. There is need to integrate national early-warning mechanisms into election cycles to curb down possible violence. Uganda must also prepare well-trained and competent security forces that respect the public's civil and political rights and do not discriminate based on ethnicity, race, religion, or gender, to avoid escalations in addition to a credible and timely complaints process, which will enable citizens who feel that their rights have been violated to report their concerns. The role of the international community must not be undermined. All this is done because elections are complex processes. Beyond their potential to help countries shift from autocratic regimes to more democratic ones, emphasis should be placed on "transformation not transition." The participants at the roundtable highlighted the importance of political processes to ensure inclusiveness and the credibility of the electoral process, to assist political parties to overcome their disagreements, and to provide security to the contending parties.

REFERENCES

Abbink, J. and Hesseling, G. (2000) *Election Observation and Democratization in Africa*. London:Macmillan Press.

Adejumobi, S. (2000) Elections in Africa: A fading shadow of Democracy? *International Political Science Review*, 21 (1): 59-73.

Agenda: A Survey of Current Thinking and Practice'. ODI Report submitted to the Japan

Ake, C. (1981) "the State of Nigeria", presidential address, in C. Edogun (Ed.) Nigeria: the

Ake, C. (1998) Globalisation, Multilateralism and the Shrinking Democratic Space, in M

Almond G. A. and Verba, S. (1963) *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Amusan, L. (2016) "Social Sciences as Imperialism: Analysis of the Global Economic Crisis

Bekoe, D. (2010) 'Trends in Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa', United States Institute

Biennen, H and Herbst, J. (1996) the Relationship between Political and Economic Reform

Birch, Sarah & David Muchlinski (2018) Electoral violence prevention: What works? Democratization 25(3):385–403.

Birch, Sarah (2007) Electoral systems and electoral misconduct. Comparative Political Studies 40(12): 1533–1556. Birch, Sarah (2011) Electoral Malpractice. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Birch,Sarah & David Muchlinski(2019) The dataset of countries at risk of electoral violence. Terrorism and Political Violence

Bratton, M. and Posner, D. (1999) 'A First Look at Second Elections in Africa with Illustrations from Zambia', in R. Joseph (ed.), *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa*. Boulder. CO: Lynne

CALD (2002) *Political Parties in Asia*. Philippines: CALD.

Cammack, D., McLeod, D. and Rocha Menocal, A. (2006) 'Donors and the "Fragile States"

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Chambers, S. (1996) *Reasonable Democracy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Chomsky, N. (1991) 'The Struggle for Democracy in a changed World', *Review of African*

Clapham, C. (2001) Rethinking African states, *African Security Review*, 10 (3): 7-17.

Dahl, R. (1982) *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy*, New Haven: Yale University Press

Dahl, R. A. (1971) *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Eleazu, U.O (1977) *Federalism and Nation-building: The Nigerian Experience, 1954-1964,* Devon:

Eve´quoz, Aure´lien (2019) Electoral violence in authoritarian regimes: Locations and determinants of government coercion.

Fielding, David (2018) The geography of violence during a presidential election: Evidence from Zimbabwe. European Journal of Political Economy 55(December): 538–558.

Fjelde, Hanne & Kristine Ho¨glund (2016a) Electoral institutions and electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa. British Journal of Political Science 46(2): 297–320.

Fjelde, Hanne & Kristine Ho¨glund (2016b) Electoral violence: The emergence of a research field. APSA Comparative Democratization Newsletter 14(2): 8–11.

Fjelde, Hanne (2020) Political party strength and electoral violence. Journal of Peace Research 57(1): 140–155.

Goldsmith, Arthur A (2015) Elections and civil violence in new multiparty regimes: Evidence from Africa. Journal of Peace Research 52(5): 607–621.

https://www.independent.co.ug/covid-19-sops-defied-in-luweero-nrm-primaries/

Post- Communist Countries'. Working Paper No. 57. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment of

Schecter (ed.) *Future Multilateralism: The Political and Social Framework*, (179-195),

Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Young, Lauren (2020) Who dissents? Self-efficacy and opposition action after state-sponsored election violence. Journal of Peace Research 57(1): 62–76.