

NOMINATION VIOLENCE IN UGANDA'S NATIONAL RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Institutional explanations of intra-party violence rarely address political economy dynamics shaping the institutions in question, and therefore they fail to understand their emergence and their stability. Specifically, focusing on institutional factors alone does not enable a nuanced understanding of candidate nomination violence and why some constituencies are peaceful while others are violent. This article theorizes nomination violence in dominant-party systems in sub-Saharan Africa. Drawing on political settlement theory, it examines the nature of nomination violence in Uganda's October 2015 National Resistance Movement (NRM) primaries. We argue that the violence is a constitutive part of Uganda's political settlement under the NRM. Nomination procedures remain weak in order for the NRM ruling elite to include multiple factions that compete for access while being able to intervene in the election process when needed. This means, in turn, that violence tends to become particularly prominent in constituencies characterized by proxy wars, where competition between local candidates is reinforced by a conflict among central-level elites in the president's inner circle. We call for the proxy war thesis to be tested in case studies of other dominant parties' nomination processes.

'UNPRECEDENTED VIOLENCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHAOS' marred the parliamentary and district primary elections of the dominant National

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Resistance Movement (NRM) in Uganda in October 2015.¹ Election observers and the media reported incidents of fights between rival camps, in which weapons such as machetes or the destruction and burning of private property were common.² Candidate nomination in the NRM is more violent than in other Ugandan political parties. It is also more violent than is seen among most African political parties in general.³

The existing literature on African political parties tends to focus on party systems and does not offer much guidance on how to study intra-party violence.⁴ Looking instead to the literature on electoral authoritarianism, explanations of violence revolve around features of institutions,⁵ such as weak nomination procedures, and the nature of the party system. However, the weak institutionalization of nomination procedures is arguably a ‘symptom’ of deeper political incentive structures rather than an explanatory factor in its own right. Similarly, the party system reflects the underlying power balances in a society and in that sense is not in itself an explanation of nomination violence. The purpose of this paper is to offer an account of intra-party violence, which is based on an understanding of the underlying configuration of power in society. Our explanation accounts not only for the general level of intra-party violence but also for observed variations in violence across constituencies. Our second objective is, therefore, to understand why some constituencies are more violent than others.

Drawing on recent research on political settlement theory⁶ and on Ugandan politics,⁷ we make two interrelated arguments. First, the ‘organizational chaos and violence’ of the NRM primary elections are rooted

1. Andrew Mwenda, ‘Lessons from the NRM primaries’, *The Independent*, 8 November 2015, <<https://allafrica.com/stories/201511092151.html>> (15 August 2018).

2. CEON-U, ‘CEON-U pre-election observation report’ (Citizens Election Observers Network, Kampala, 2 November 2015).

3. Merete Bech Seeberg, Michael Wahman, and Svend-Erik Skaaning, ‘Candidate nomination, intra-party democracy, and election violence in Africa’, *Democratization* 25, 6 (2018), pp. 959–977.

4. Shane Mac Giollabhui, ‘Battleground: Candidate selection and violence in Africa’s dominant political parties’, *Democratization* 25, 6 (2018), pp. 978–995.

5. See, e.g., Andreas Schedler, ‘The new institutionalism in the study of authoritarian regimes’, *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* 6, 2 (2009), pp. 323–340; Hanne Fjelde and Kristine Höglund, ‘Electoral institutions and electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa’, *British Journal of Political Science* 46, 2 (2014), pp. 297–320.

6. Mushtaq Khan, *Political settlements and the governance of growth-enhancing institutions* (SOAS, London, 2010); Lindsay Whitfield, Ole Therkildsen, Lars Buur, and Anne Mette Kjær, *The politics of African industrial policy: A comparative perspective* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015).

7. See, among others, Sam Wilkins, ‘Capture the flag: Local factionalism as electoral mobilization in dominant party Uganda’, *Democratization* 26, 8 (2019), pp. 1493–1512; Rebecca Tapscott, ‘The government has long hands: Institutionalized arbitrariness and local security initiatives in northern Uganda’, *Development and Change* 48, 2 (2017), pp. 263–285; Frederick Golooba-Mutebi and Sam Hickey, ‘The master of institutional multiplicity? The shifting politics of regime survival, state-building and democratization in Museveni’s Uganda’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10, 4 (2017), pp. 601–618; Anne Mette Kjær, ‘Land governance as grey zone: The political incentives of land reform implementation in Africa’, *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 55, 2 (2017), pp. 1–19; Richard Vokes and Sam Wilkins, ‘Party,

in the way the NRM ruling elite stays in power and maintains its coalition within a fragmented political settlement.⁸ The ‘organizational chaos’ emerges out of the political incentive structure in Uganda’s current political settlement. Chaos and violence are expressions of the fact that, given a fragmented political settlement, the ruling NRM coalition includes multiple factions that compete for access and often let them fight out their own battles. Members of the ruling elite only intervene in lower-level factional struggles when they think it necessary to preserve power. In this way, a certain level of violence becomes inherent in how the ruling elites build and maintain the coalition.

Second, understanding the nature of factional struggles sheds light on how and when political competition in a constituency turns violent. In many constituencies, the so-called proxy wars in which central-level elites support opposing local candidates are fought. We argue that during primary elections, competition is likely to turn violent when proxy wars are fought between elite members belonging to the inner circle around the president.

We develop and evaluate these arguments on the basis of a multiple case study design. In order to explore the nature of nomination violence, it was necessary to obtain nuanced case narratives of instances of violence. We relied on the civil society election observation group CEON-U to identify three so-called ‘hotspots’ of nomination violence, which we define as areas where the number of violent incidents at party primaries was disproportionately high.⁹ In these hotspots, we carried out interviews with local NRM candidates, other politicians, campaign managers, and opinion leaders. We additionally spoke with members of the NRM electoral commission (EC), civil society election observers, Ugandan journalists, and election observers from Ugandan academia. In all, we conducted 43 interviews between May 2016 and September 2020.

We used the interviews to outline the sequences of violent events and their main protagonists. We were then able to use this information to search for media coverage of these specific events. We read the Ugandan media coverage of the NRM primaries (the main newspapers, TV, radio, as well as social media) both to supplement our general knowledge of the primaries and to understand the specific events described. On the basis of the three case narratives, we identified the ‘proxy war’ pattern. Subsequently, following a repetitive case logic,¹⁰ we identified a fourth constituency that, just like the three hotspots, was an NRM stronghold with fierce competition, which could have led to violence; however, in this district, violence

patronage and coercion in the NRM’s 2016 re-election in Uganda: Imposed or embedded?, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10, 4 (2016), pp. 581–600.

8. The ruling elite is a concept referring to individuals at the central level with (formal and informal) positions of power. The ruling coalition refers to the individuals and organizations who keep the ruling elite in power.

9. CEON-U was an association of human rights non-governmental organizations set up with the specific purpose of monitoring and observing the 2015 primaries and the 2016 elections.

10. Robert Yin, *Case study research: Design and methods* (Sage Publications, London, 1989).

did not occur. In the peaceful district, we were not able to identify a proxy war between inner-circle elites, which strengthens our proposed explanation. We thus have four cases of fierce candidate nomination competition, three of which turned violent and a fourth that did not. While the informal nature of the link between central elites and local violence makes it by its nature difficult to verify, the combination of a comparison with a mirror case and interviews pointing to a link makes it plausible. Finally, we ‘member-checked’ our four narratives in two ways:¹¹ first, we had six of the interviewees most familiar with the cases read and comment on a draft of the paper, and second, in February 2020, we presented the paper in a workshop with participants who were knowledgeable about the Ugandan elections. Both served to verify the narratives from the four constituencies.

In the following section, we first present the literature on candidate selection and demonstrate how political settlement analysis can help to understand intra-party violence. We then outline how the political settlement in Uganda gave rise to its dominant-party system, before proceeding to explore violence in three hotspots and the lack of violence in the more peaceful fourth case. The concluding section offers comparative perspectives on the Ugandan nomination violence dynamics.

The political settlement, factional struggles, and candidate selection

We know little about what explains intra-party violence in general and still less about within-party regional differences in violence. With regard to the first question—nomination violence in general—contributions have pointed to the degree of institutionalization of the party.¹² Institutionalization of candidate selection procedures reduces the opportunities for engaging in violence, because there are fewer opportunities to interfere with election procedures. Voters’ confidence that the process was fair and the right candidate won increases, and there is less violent protest. In addition, scholars have pointed to the nature of the party system as an explanatory factor.¹³ Dominant-party systems are seen to be more violent than multi-party systems, because in the former the dominant party becomes ‘the primary site of accommodation between competing social formations’.¹⁴ In control of the state apparatus, the dominant party is in a significantly better position to offer access to public resources than are

11. Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, ‘Judging quality’, in Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea (eds), *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn*, 2nd edition (Routledge, Armonk, NY, 2014), pp. 120–146, p. 135.

12. Seeberg et al., ‘Candidate nomination’; Frederick O. Wanyama and Jørgen Elklit, ‘Electoral violence during party primaries in Kenya’, *Democratization* 25, 6 (2018), pp. 1016–1032.

13. Seeberg et al., ‘Candidate nomination’; Shane Mac Giollabhuí, ‘How things fall apart: Candidate selection and the cohesion of dominant parties in South Africa and Namibia’, *Party Politics* 19, 4 (2011), pp. 577–600.

14. Mac Giollabhuí, ‘How things fall apart’, p. 577.

opposition parties.¹⁵ Hopeful politicians will increase their chances of winning a seat in parliament if they run on a ruling party ticket, so the quest to become the party's nominee is competitive. This increases the risk of violence within the party.¹⁶

These explanations certainly shed light on nomination violence, but they pay little attention to the underlying balance of power, which enables some institutions and disables others. Political settlement theory emphasizes how institutional approaches alone fail to capture the origins of institutions or explain why some institutions are stable while others are not.¹⁷

A political settlement refers to 'a combination of the structure of power and institutions at the level of a society that is mutually "compatible" and also "sustainable" in terms of economic and political viability'.¹⁸ In the clientelist settlements that characterize poor economies, there is often a great deal of fragmentation.¹⁹ Building a stable ruling coalition requires that elites are able to balance and accommodate powerful factions, and this will have implications for how rules are enforced.²⁰ Electoral institutions, seen through a political settlement lens, remain weak partly because the ruling elites benefit from their weakness. Weakly institutionalized candidate selection procedures reflect an underlying fragmented political settlement in which many groups must be accommodated, while at the same time, the individuals and factions who are seen as key supporters of the ruling elite must not be excluded.²¹ This balancing act can be achieved through a combination of inclusion and control: inclusion is enabled by maintaining unpredictability in who is nominated and allowing anyone who so wishes to run. At the same time, there is an element of control, because it may be necessary to intervene if a key supporter belonging to a powerful faction is not elected. Weak nomination procedures allow ruling elites—members of

15. Leonardo R. Arriola, 'Capital and opposition in Africa: Coalition building in multi-ethnic societies', *World Politics* 65, 2 (2013), pp. 233–272; Giovanni M. Carbone, 'Political parties in a "no-party" democracy: Hegemony and opposition under "movement democracy" in Uganda', *Party Politics* 9, 4 (2003), pp. 485–501, p. 488.

16. Mac Giollabhui, 'How things fall apart'; Andreas Mehler, 'Political parties and violence in Africa: Systematic reflections against empirical background', in Mathias Basedau, Gero Erdmann, and Andreas Mehler (eds), *Votes, money and violence: Political parties and elections in sub-Saharan Africa* (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, 2007).

17. Tim Kelsall, 'Towards a universal political settlement concept: A response to Mushtaq Khan', *African Affairs* 117, 469 (2018), pp. 656–669; Whitfield et al., *The politics of African industrial policy*; Abdul-Gafaru Abdulai and Sam Hickey, 'The politics of development under competitive clientelism: Insights from Ghana's education sector', *African Affairs* 115, 458 (2016), pp. 44–72.

18. Mushtaq H. Khan, 'Political settlements and the analysis of institutions', *African Affairs* Virtual issue 117, 469 (2018), pp. 636–655.

19. Lindsay Whitfield and Ole Therkildsen, 'What drives states to support the development of productive sectors? Strategies ruling elites pursue for political survival and their policy implications' (DIIS Working Paper, 2011:15), p. 15.

20. Khan, 'Political settlements and the analysis of institutions'.

21. Douglas C. North, John Joseph Wallis, Steven B. Webb, and Barry R. Weingast, *In the shadow of violence: Politics, economics and the problems of development* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009); Whitfield and Therkildsen, 'What drives states'.

the circle around the president—to make sure that ‘their’ intermediaries, or local mobilizers, are nominated.²²

Violence is not necessarily exogenous to a given political settlement. In fact, a ruling coalition may be partly reproduced, rather than destabilized, through violence.²³ For example, in order to remain in power, the ruling elite will have to make sure that factions do not get powerful enough to make alternative alliances that could disrupt the coalition. The ruling elite at the centre may benefit from (at times violent) factional competition within one constituency, because this prevents either of the factions from becoming too powerful.²⁴

With regard to the second question, explaining why some localities become more violent than others during candidate nomination processes, we have even less literature to go by. However, Edward Goldring and Michael Wahman demonstrated that in Zambia, constituencies with an incumbent candidate running for the party Member of Parliament (MP) post are less likely to be violent. They argue that this is because the incumbent candidate controls significantly more economic resources, and it would be costly and futile to instigate violence against the party’s nominee.²⁵ In dominant-party systems, however, incumbents tend to run in a large majority of constituencies, only some of which may have violent candidate nomination processes. In other words, incumbency may be more or less a constant in a dominant party’s primaries and thus cannot explain the variation in violence across constituencies. Goldring and Wahman also show that in Zambia, constituencies with low levels of interparty competition have a higher probability of nomination violence, because what matters is winning the locally dominant party’s ticket, and not the subsequent general elections, which candidates will be certain to win. A similar argument is put forward by Bryce Reeder and Merete Seeberg.²⁶ In many dominant-party systems, however, most constituencies are ruling party strongholds and thus have low levels of interparty competition, but again, only some of them witness violent fights. Thus, when applied to dominant-party systems, neither argument can explain variation in violence in candidate nomination processes.

22. Mushtaq H. Khan, ‘Markets, states and democracy: Patron-client networks and the case for democracy in developing countries’, *Democratization* 12, 5 (2005), pp. 704–724; Kimuli Kasara, ‘Tax me if you can: Ethnic geography, democracy and the taxation of agriculture in Africa’, *American Political Science Review* 101, 1 (2007), pp. 159–172.

23. Khan, ‘Political settlements and the analysis of institutions’; Markus Schultze-Kraft, ‘Understanding organized violence and crime in political settlements: Oil wars, petro-criminality and amnesty in the Niger delta’, *Journal of International Development* 29, 5 (2017), pp. 613–627.

24. Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey, ‘The master of institutional multiplicity?’; Tapscott, ‘The government has long hands’; Kjær, ‘Land governance as grey zone’; Tom Goodfellow, ‘Taming the “rogue” sector: Studying state effectiveness in Africa through informal transport politics’, *Comparative Politics* 47, 2 (2015), pp. 127–147.

25. Edward Goldring and Michael Wahman, ‘Fighting for a name on the ballot: Constituency-level analysis of nomination violence in Zambia’, *Democratization* 25, 6 (2018), p. 4.

26. Bryce W. Reeder and Merete Bech Seeberg, ‘Fighting your friends? A study of intra-party violence in sub-Saharan Africa’, *Democratization* 25, 6 (2018), pp. 1033–1051.

In contrast, a political settlement approach can shed light on variation in cases of violence in dominant-party systems. Through a political settlement lens, intra-elite competition at the central level can reinforce and affect local factional struggles, which can lead to violence in constituencies with fierce competition. In theorizing about nomination violence, Goldring and Wahman²⁷ distinguish between horizontal conflicts among local elites and vertical conflicts between the ruling elite at the centre and local communities. But this distinction simplifies the intricate ways in which local factions are linked to central elites and are constantly re-negotiated. Ruling elites need to constantly ‘check existing patron-client networks by constructing new networks involving lower-level groups at the village or provincial level, who in turn thereby become powerful relative to other local-level groups’.²⁸ Nomination conflicts are rarely driven only from the centre, nor are they entirely local, especially not if they are conflicts between factions that are important to maintaining the ruling coalition. The intensity of conflict between two powerful individuals at the centre could fuel local-level conflicts and lead them to play out violently, in what could be called a proxy war. As is well known, the term ‘proxy war’ originates from the Cold War superpowers engaging in local wars by proxy. It can be defined as ‘indirect engagement by third parties in a conflict wishing to influence its outcome’ and has increasingly been applied outside of a Cold War context.²⁹ When electoral institutions are weak and the political settlement fragmented, the ability of ruling elites to juggle between factions becomes crucial for political stability. The president can do this in many ways, for instance through ‘divide and rule’ whereby two powerful individuals controlling two factions are kept in check. But a proxy war could also be between the president himself and a potential challenger. To sum up, we theorize that violence is more likely to occur in constituencies in which there are proxy wars between elites at the centre in the president’s inner circle.

Uganda’s political settlement: Inclusion, competition, and control

The NRM emerged as a broad-based grassroots movement around a militant leadership fighting against Milton Obote’s government of 1980–1985.³⁰ The very essence of the NRM was inclusion: when the National Resistance Army was in the bush during the civil insurgency in the early 1980s, so-called ‘resistance councils’ were established in the

27. Goldring and Wahman, ‘Fighting for a name’.

28. Mushtaq Khan, ‘Power, pacts, and political settlements: A reply to Tim Kelsall’, *African Affairs* 117, 469 (2018), pp. 670–694.

29. Andrew Mumford, *Proxy warfare* (Polity Press, Oxford, 2013), p. 11.

30. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1996).

conquered areas. Resistance councils were turned into local councils in a system with multiple layers, and at most levels, there would be popular elections for candidates within a broad movement system. Every adult Ugandan was by definition a member of the movement and could run for posts. Uganda's political settlement is heterogeneous, with factions based on religion, region, cultural institutions such as kingdoms or chiefdoms, or socio-economic dividing lines. Although there is an evident over-representation of President Museveni's south-western Banyankole people in government and public positions,³¹ the NRM has a far broader appeal, relying on a coalition that includes, among others, factions from central Buganda.³² The inclusive, so-called 'big tent' structure of the NRM was thus established very early on, and it has remained to this day.³³

The NRM ruling coalition, just as coalitions before it, was fragmented from its establishment around 1986. If anything, factional competition has increased since 1986, for at least three reasons. First, NRM has lost some of the initial legitimacy it enjoyed from establishing peace and winning the civil war. Therefore, the NRM ruling elite relies more heavily on patronage³⁴ and the use of state resources to buy legitimacy.³⁵ The increased reliance on patronage makes political posts more attractive, which increases competition. Second, the introduction of elections, first under the Movement system in 1996 and then under a multi-party system in 2006, has increased the power of lower-level factions, such as local NRM chairpersons, local security outfits, and local public officials such as the (centrally appointed) Resident District Commissioner (RDC).³⁶ The central ruling elite rely on these factions to organize support and mobilize votes. The ability of local factions to mobilize therefore increases with the importance of elections. Leaders of local factions then make an effort to demonstrate to the ruling elite that they are able to mobilize support.

31. Stefan Lindemann, 'Just another change of guard? Broad based politics and civil war in Museveni's Uganda', *African Affairs* 110, 440 (2011), pp. 387–416.

32. Parts of the North have through most of the period been more marginalized and with conflict in the Acholi region until 2006.

33. Vokes and Wilkins, 'Party, patronage, and coercion'; Sandrine Perrot, 'Partisan defections in contemporary Uganda: The micro-dynamics of hegemonic party-building', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10, 4 (2016), pp. 713–728.

34. According to Andrew Mwenda, President Museveni has literally crowded the opposition out through one of the most broad-based patronage systems ever witnessed in post-independence Africa. See Andrew Mwenda, 'The last word', *The Independent*, 9 September 2020, <<https://www.independent.co.ug/why-violence-in-nrm-primaries/>> (28 March 2021).

35. Moses Khisa, 'Managing elite defection in Museveni's Uganda: The 2016 elections in perspective', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10, 4 (2017), pp. 729–748; Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey, 'The master of institutional multiplicity?'; Anna Reuss and Kristof Titeca, 'When revolutionaries grow old: The Museveni babies and the slow death of the liberation', *Third World Quarterly* 38, 10 (2017), pp. 2347–2366.

36. Julius Kiiza, Sabiti Makara, and Lise Rakner, *Electoral democracy in Uganda: Understanding the institutional processes and outcomes of the Ugandan 2006 multiparty elections* (Fountain Publishers, Kampala, 2008).

Finally, the removal of presidential term limits and, later, the 75-year age limit³⁷ shows increasing authoritarianism, but this has not reduced the competitiveness of candidate nomination. On the contrary, the lack of competition for the highest post has enhanced, and maybe even necessitated, competition at lower levels.³⁸ The sheer number of candidates is an expression of the competitiveness of the primaries. The 2015 NRM primaries was a large undertaking, with 67,000 polling stations and millions of voters.³⁹ Two thousand and seven hundred candidates competed for nominations for 400 MP seats. Two hundred and sixty incumbent MPs ran in the primaries and 240 lost their seats; in other words, there is a good chance that a challenger candidate can unseat an incumbent.⁴⁰

There are high personal stakes involved in the campaigns, which contributes to the tense atmosphere. MPs earn high salaries; exactly how high is not known, but one estimate is about US\$6,600 a month or more than 50 times the salary of a primary schoolteacher.⁴¹ MPs also have access to a number of in-kind benefits, such as a car, and various allowances, so their seats are highly coveted.⁴² Candidates self-finance most of their expenses for primary elections. Since they invest a great deal, the stakes are high.⁴³ Estimated expenditures for an average MP candidate were about 400 million Ugandan shillings or about US\$120,000.⁴⁴ Hopeful candidates often sold their houses or cars or took loans with loan sharks at interest rates of 40–50 percent, which they then had to pay off later.⁴⁵ The higher

37. See, e.g., 'Uganda parliament scraps presidential age limit', *Africa News*, 20 December 2017, <<http://www.africanews.com/2017/12/20/uganda-parliament-scraps-presidential-age-limit-museveni-could-rule-till-2037/>> (6 February 2018); Salomon Arinaitwe, 'MPs are free to debate age limit, says Museveni', *The Monitor*, 17 September 2017, <<https://allafrica.com/stories/201709140780.html>> (5 July 2018).

38. Reuss and Titeca, 'When revolutionaries grow old'; Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey, 'The master of institutional multiplicity'.

39. See Wilkins, 'Capture the flag' or David Mugambe Mpiima, 'Political party primaries: Was there method to the madness?', in Joe Oloka-Onyango and Josephine Ahikire (eds), *Controlling consent: Uganda's 2016 elections* (Africa World Press, Trenton, NJ, 2017), pp. 17–44. The number reported by the NRM secretariat is 10.2 million and may be exaggerated, but the real number was not far below 10 million.

40. Mpiima, 'Political party primaries', p. 39; personal communication, employee with NRM Electoral Commission, by telephone, 6 July 2018.

41. *The Independent*, 'Analysis: MPs salaries', 19 August 2019, <<https://www.independent.co.ug/analysis-mps-salaries/2/>> (29 May 2020).

42. Leonard Okello, 'A study on the potential risks of election related violence before, during and after 2016 general elections in Uganda' (Appraisal for the Democratic Governance Facility, Kampala, June 2015).

43. ACFIM, 'Extended study on campaign financing for presidential and member of parliament races: Final report' (Alliance for Campaign Finance Monitoring, Kampala, 2016).

44. We do not know exactly how much MPs spent, and the figures quoted may be high. We do know that the campaigns were very expensive for the candidates running. The figures are based on these sources: ACFIM, 'Extended study on campaign financing'; Sam Wilkins, 'Who pays for the pakalast? The NRM's peripheral patronage in rural Uganda', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10, 4 (2016), pp. 619–638.

45. Okello, 'A study on the potential risks'.

economic stakes intensified competition and made the primaries ‘a do or die’.⁴⁶

The NRM-EC, being poorly staffed and under-resourced, struggled to manage the often conflictual and violent situations. The NRM-EC had to register millions of party members prior to the 2015 primaries, which often caused confusion, with accusations of favouritism on the part of party registrars.⁴⁷ Moreover, after the polling, the NRM-EC’s new chairman had to withstand immense pressure from party elites to announce the nomination of ‘their’ candidate.⁴⁸ He would receive phone calls from ‘high-ups’ in the party pressuring him to affect primary election outcomes.⁴⁹ Intervention in nomination procedures could also happen through financial or vocal support for a local faction.

But direct intervention did not appear to be the norm; it only seemed to take place if there was an intra-elite conflict. President Museveni would generally abstain from publicly endorsing any candidates.⁵⁰ Hence, the president himself relied on a ‘certain aloof abstraction from the substance of local politics’.⁵¹ As one interviewee said to this author, ‘at the bottom it’s a free-for-all, as long as you don’t disturb the president’.⁵² ‘High-ups’, meaning the president and/or members of his inner circle, would normally accept the election results and ally with whomever won. But if a key supporter lost, they would intervene in his or her favour. In areas where intervention disfavoured a popular local candidate, violent protest would easily erupt.

In sum, Uganda’s dominant-party system with inclusive but unpredictable primary elections and occasional violence has materialized from the country’s fragmented political settlement. Still, intense violence only characterized some constituencies, and the next section examines whether constituencies characterized by a proxy war between two members of the president’s inner circle are more likely to be violent.

Violent hotspots in the 2015 NRM primary elections

The 27 October 2015 NRM primaries had numerous instances of competition between camps involving hate speech, burning of party T-shirts and party membership cards, fist fights between supporters of rival candidates, intimidation of voters, defacing of candidate posters, and burning of party

46. Stephen Kafeero, ‘Do-or-die fights expected among NRM leaders’, *The Monitor*, 27 September 2015, <<https://www.monitor.co.ug/Magazines/PeoplePower/Do-or-die-fights-expected-among-NRM-leaders/689844-2887182-uc27scz/index.html>> (3 July 2018).

47. Haggai Matsiko, ‘NRM in trouble over register, again’, *The Independent*, 31 May 2015, <<https://allafrica.com/stories/201506020319.html>> (2 June 2017).

48. Interview, Chairman of the NRM Electoral Commission, Kampala, 11 November 2016; see also Mpiima, ‘Political party primaries’.

49. Interview, Chairman of the NRM Electoral Commission, Kampala, 11 November 2016.

50. Angelo Izama and Michael Wilkerson, ‘Uganda: Museveni’s triumph and weakness’, *Journal of Democracy* 22, 3 (2011), pp. 65–78, p. 67; Vokes and Wilkins, ‘Party, patronage and coercion’, p. 586.

51. Vokes and Wilkins, ‘Party, patronage and coercion’, p. 586.

52. Interview, Researcher and observer of the primaries, Uhuru Institute, Kampala, 3 November 2016.

offices or vehicles.⁵³ However, the fights only escalated to violence resulting in personal injury in some areas. CEON-U, an umbrella civil society organization, installed observers at 1,322 polling stations (about 2.5 percent of all polling stations), and the observers reported violence in 168 (13 percent) of these. CEON-U especially pointed to Kamuli district in the Busoga region (east), Ssembabule district in the central region, and Kanungu district in Kigezi (the southwest), where their observers had reported many instances of violence, some resulting in personal injury.⁵⁴ In a fourth district, Sheema, there was fierce competition for the NRM MP candidacy, but violence did not erupt. All four of the districts were NRM strongholds (Figure 1).⁵⁵

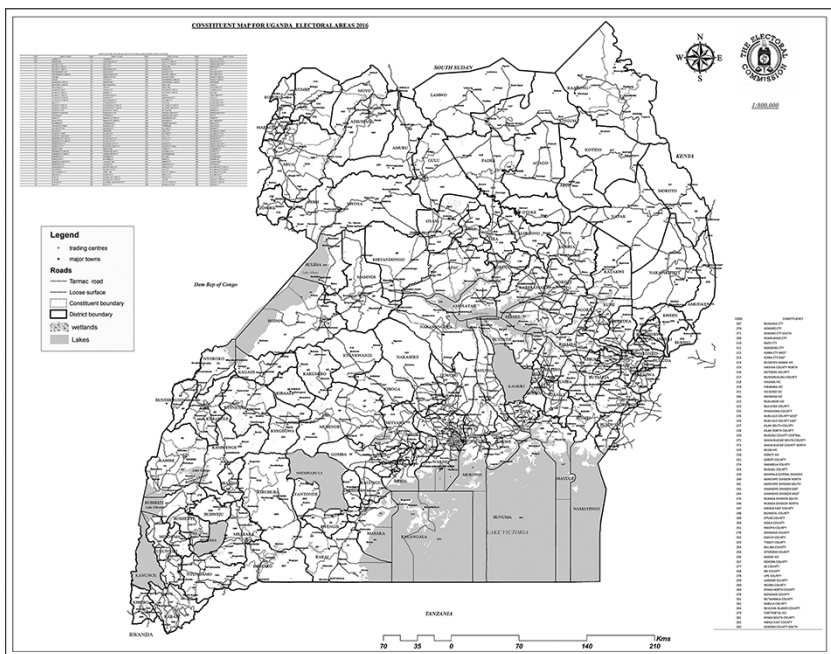


Figure 1

53. CEON-U, 'Pre-election observation report', 2 November 2015. 'CEON-U blows the whistle on election violence' (CEON-U, Kampala, unpublished report).

54. CEON-U, 'Pre-election observation report'. All three hotspots were not only mentioned in the observer reports and media but were also confirmed in interviews in 2016 by the head of CEON-U and by the NRM-EC chairman.

55. Uganda Electoral Commission, '2016 electoral map', <<http://www.ec.or.ug?q=electoral-map-uganda>> (15 June 2018).

Kanungu district

Kanungu district is located in western Uganda, bordering the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is part of the Kigezi sub-region, one of the most violent regions during the 2015 NRM primaries. The former prime minister and NRM secretary general, Amama Mbabazi, was one of the elected members of parliament representing Kinkiizi West Constituency in Kanungu. Mbabazi is one of the so-called NRM historicals, i.e. individuals who took part in the NRA bush war. Since 1986, he has held many significant posts. Mbabazi was the NRM secretary general and the prime minister until he was removed from office in 2014. In June 2015, Mbabazi, still an NRM MP and NRM member, announced he would be running against President Museveni. The president then quickly took measures to co-opt or remove Mbabazi's supporters, which, to use a Ugandan expression, eventually 'dis-organized' him. In the presidential election, he only managed to win 1.4 percent of the vote.⁵⁶

This fallout between a long-standing NRM power figure and the president had an impact on the election campaigns in Kanungu.⁵⁷ There were violent incidents, and the police and army intervened on several occasions. Most notably, a popular local NRM candidate for MP and local council chairman, James Kaberuka, known to be loyal to Mbabazi, was assaulted several times by supporters of an opposing candidate, the former MP Jacqueline Kyatuhair, an outspoken Museveni supporter.⁵⁸

The first attack on Kaberuka took place after a meeting with the NRM-EC chairman, a meeting in which it was decided to re-list him as a candidate running in the primaries. The second and more severe attack happened after the polling where the chairman of the Kanungu EC declared the first runner up, Ms Kyatuhair as winner, in spite of the fact that Kaberuka had won over 75 percent of the vote.⁵⁹ The announcement instigated loud protest by the Kaberuka camp. Over 5,000 residents stormed the Kanungu district headquarters, many threatening to quit the party if the correct candidate was not declared.⁶⁰ Kaberuka was attacked by supporters of Kyatuhair, a group that included local security officers,

56. Khisa, 'Managing elite defection'.

57. Timothy Kalyegya, 'The making of ex-premier Amama Mbabazi's image', *The Daily Monitor*, 12 October 2014, <<http://www.monitor.co.ug/Magazines/PeoplePower/The-making-of-ex-premier-Amama-Mbabazi-s-image/689844-2483018-42b6ouz/index.html>> (6 July 2018); Alfred Tumushabe, 'Museveni-Mbabazi rivalry divides Kanungu leaders', *The Daily Monitor*, 22 October 2014, <<http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Museveni-Mbabazi-rivalry-divides-Kanungu-leaders/688334-2482734-cx7jb4/index.html>> (29 June 2018).

58. Interview, election observer, Kampala, 31 October 2017.

59. Interview, candidate for MP, Kanungu, 24 June 2016.

60. Deo Okoodi, 'Kanungu NRM supporters dispute reconciliation committee', *Uganda Radio Network*, 2 November 2015, <<https://ugandaradionetwork.net/story/kanungu-nrm-supporters-dispute-reconciliation-committee>> (9 July 2019).

and he subsequently had to be admitted to a hospital.⁶¹ The officers had allegedly been directed by the local NRM party registrar and the Kanungu RDC, who was accused of systematically harassing candidates believed to support Mbabazi in several of the constituencies in the region, using her authority over security personnel.⁶²

Until then, the president had not publicly intervened in the conflict. However, it became evident that voters in Kanungu supported Kaberuka with such an overwhelming majority that it was hard to ignore. President Museveni then appointed a team to investigate how the primaries were conducted. But, as this dragged on, Kaberuka threatened to go to court. The mounting pressure on Museveni led to ‘behind-the-scenes negotiations and compromises’⁶³ that eventually ended when Kaberuka was announced the rightful winner.

Subsequently, Kyatuhairu ran against Kaberuka in the general elections as an independent and lost.⁶⁴ She also ran a campaign in Kanungu in support of lifting the 75-year age limit on the presidency in the autumn of 2017. Kaberuka, on the other hand, was opposed to the lifting of the age limit. In sum, the conflict between the two local NRM candidates can be characterized as a proxy war in which the race between Kaberuka and Kyatuhairu turned violent because it was fuelled by the fallout between the president and his former prime minister.

Kamuli district

Kamuli district is located in eastern Uganda and is part of the Busoga region, which for years has been characterized by an intra-elite conflict between the speaker of parliament, Rebecca Kadaga, and Kirunda Kivejinja, the second deputy prime minister and Minister of East African Affairs in Museveni’s cabinet. Kadaga is popular in her home region and is known to be able to mobilize large numbers of votes. Kadaga was suggested as someone who would be able to challenge President Museveni.⁶⁵ However, Kadaga herself has never publicly said she had any plan of

61. Interview, candidate for MP, Kanungu, 24 June 2016.

62. Interviews, candidate for MP, a competitor candidate for the NRM, and a local NRM supporter, Kanungu, 24 June 2016; Interview, NRM Youth Council member from the region, Kampala, 2 November 2016; Perez Rumanzi, ‘MP aspirant assaulted’, *The Daily Monitor*, 22 October 2015, <<http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/MP-aspirant-assaulted/688334-2924382-format-xhtml-kclfszw/index.html>> (6 November 2016).

63. Interview with a member of the NRM Committee in Kanungu district, 9 August 2019.

64. Many NRM candidates who lost the primaries subsequently ran as independents.

65. Yasin Mugerwa, ‘Will Kadaga listen to the “people’s call” and run for presidency?’, *The Daily Monitor*, 6 January 2014, <<http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Will-Kadaga-listen-to-the-people-s-call-and-run-for-presidency/688334-2135430-15c3cmq/index.html>> (15 August 2018).

running against the president.⁶⁶ On the contrary, Kadaga has used her popularity to successfully negotiate for the post of speaker of parliament, in spite of the president's resistance. After the 2015 primaries, there were some allegations that Kadaga had sponsored violence in Busoga.⁶⁷ Kadaga's rival, Kivejinja, is an NRM 'historical', who acted as the chief mobilizer while the NRA fought the bush war. Kivejinja has close ties to the president, who publicly supported him in the 2000s when he was seeking elected posts.⁶⁸ Kivejinja was promoted to second deputy prime minister and Minister of East African Affairs in 2016, a move seen as 'aimed at trimming the political popularity of Kadaga as the two politicians in question don't see eye to eye on matters of Busoga politics'.⁶⁹ The rivalry between Kadaga and Kivejinja thus goes back a long time and can be traced to their support of different candidates within Busoga kingdom. The president tolerates Kadaga, but he has supported Kivejinja, so as to prevent her from building up too strong a base. At a party executive committee meeting in April 2016, for example, the president supported a different candidate for the position as speaker of parliament.⁷⁰ While acknowledging that the rivalry between Kivejinja and Kadaga has caused tension and disorder in Busoga,⁷¹ it is interesting to note that Museveni has 'kept' them both close to him and in powerful positions since 1986.

A candidate in Busoga is considered to have a good chance of winning if she has Kadaga's support.⁷² During the 2015 primaries, Kamuli was marred by unrest in many constituencies, and there were several instances of violence, with fights between supporters of the two opposing Kadaga and Kivejinja camps. The most serious fights involved the use of weapons such as pangas or sticks, and there were several reports of serious injuries.

66. Usaku Kashaka, 'Kadaga scoffs at Kyalya', *The New Vision*, 10 February 2016, <https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1416827/kadaga-scoffs-kyalya> (29 June 2018).

67. See Parliament Watch, 'Rules committee meets with minister Namuganza', (no date) <<https://parliamentwatch.ug/committee/rules-committee-meets-with-minister-namuganza/>> (19 March 2021); see also Timothy Sibasi, 'Kadaga camp plots attacking Namuganza supporters outside Busoga', 18 August 2020, <<https://africandossier.press/kadaga-camp-plots-attacking-namuganza-supporters-out-side-busoga/>> (19 March 2021).

68. See, e.g., The Vision Reporter, 'Museveni asks Kivejinja rivals to quit', *The New Vision*, 11 December 2007, <https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1213630/museveni-kivejinja-rivals-quit> (15 August 2018). Kivejinja was ageing then, and in 2020, his faction is now represented by Persis Namuganza. See the concluding discussion.

69. Interview with presidential advisor, Kampala, 9 September 2019.

70. Edris Kiggundu, 'Museveni to NRM CEC: Here is the speaker I want', *The Observer*, 29 April 2016.

71. Moses Nampala, 'Kivejinja plots my fall, Kadaga reveals', *New Vision*, 26 August 2007, <https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1158252/kivejinja-plots-fall-our-kadaga-reveals> (5 July 2018).

72. Interviews with eight different MP and Local Council V candidates in Busoga, 4–10 August 2016.

There were also instances in which sugarcane plantations were set ablaze or candidates' cars were burned or damaged.⁷³

In one constituency, many people were injured as a result of the fierce competition between the two opposing candidates, incumbent MP Martin Muzaale and challenger Isaac Musumba. The challenger is himself a powerful figure in the community, having been a member of Uganda's 1994 constituent assembly and a member of parliament from 2001 to 2011, as well as a period as State Minister for Foreign Affairs. He lost his seat to Muzaale in the 2010 primaries (which also saw bursts of violence in this constituency) and was seeking to regain it. In this round, Musumba had the support of Speaker Kadaga, while his opponent was supported by Kivejinja.⁷⁴ The chief campaigner for Musumba argued, when interviewed, that 'they used pangas and sticks to attack whoever was suspected to be supporting Hon. Isaac Musumba'.⁷⁵

On the day of the primary elections, there were fights between supporters of the two camps. Musumba reported that many of his supporters sustained severe injuries. The Kamuli district NRM chairman and speaker of council was attacked by Muzaale supporters when campaigning for Musumba in an area dominated by Muzaale. He was severely injured and left for dead, as the police apparently stood by.⁷⁶ Musumba won the primaries as well as the subsequent general elections.

The conflict between the two candidates for MP was, in sum, exacerbated by each side being supported by opposing members of the NRM inner circle. The long-standing feud can be seen to be to the president's benefit, as it prevents either camp from becoming powerful enough to be a threat to the president's position.

Ssembabule district

Ssembabule district is located in the central part of Uganda and in the western part of the larger Buganda kingdom. Ssembabule is characterized by a long-standing rivalry between Sam Kutesa and Theodore Ssekikubo. Sam Kutesa is often pointed to as one of the richest men in Uganda. He was a member of the 1994 constituent assembly and became Minister for Foreign Affairs in 2005, a post he has held ever since. Kutesa's late wife was the first lady's cousin, and his daughter is married to President Museveni's

73. CEON-U, 'Pre-election observation report'.

74. Vision Group, 'I am the most fought person in Uganda – Kadaga', Vision Group: Uganda election 2016, 2 February 2016, <<http://www.elections.co.ug/new-vision/election/1416133/fought-personality-uganda-kadaga>> (5 July 2018).

75. 'They' meaning supporters of Muzaale. Interview, Chief Campaigner in Buzaaya Constituency, 4 August 2016.

76. Moses Mukata, 'Kamuli: NRM chairman beaten up', *The Daily Monitor*, 3 November 2015, <<http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Kamuli-NRM-chairman-beaten-up/688334-2940320-53rkda/index.html>> (15 August 2018).

son.⁷⁷ Ssekikubo, for his part, is the son of a man who acted as a so-called ‘traditional’ doctor for Museveni during the bush war. When his father died, Ssekikubo loudly lamented Museveni’s absence from the funeral ceremony, and over the years, Ssekikubo has been able to openly criticize the government.⁷⁸ Some argue his criticism may be to the president’s advantage because Ssekikubo’s popularity and ability to mobilize make him a good counterweight to Kutesa, thus keeping the Kutesa faction in check. In fact, at a special NRM retreat in 2013, MPs asked President Museveni to explain his special relationship with Ssekikubo, who is said to have at times lived and worked in the State House.⁷⁹

In 2001, Uganda was still operating under a movement system, so anybody could challenge the incumbent members of parliament in the general elections. For the 2001 elections, Ssekikubo, then a relatively unknown candidate, challenged the incumbent MP Sam Rwakoojo, who is Kutesa’s cousin and who received substantial support from Kutesa.⁸⁰ In spite of the fact that his opponent was backed by Kutesa, Ssekikubo won, and feuds between the two have prevailed in the district ever since, at times even paralyzing the work of the local council. During the primary elections of 2010 and again in 2015, competition between the two camps affected the nomination of, e.g., the candidate for local council vice—chairman, the candidate for woman MP, and the regular MP candidate. After the 2011 elections, Ssekikubo became known as one of the so-called ‘rebel MPs’ because of his outspoken criticism of corruption in government, particularly regarding the management of oil, in which Kutesa was implicated. Ssekikubo was then ousted from the party along with three other ‘rebel MPs’ in 2013.⁸¹

Throughout the years, President Museveni has seemingly preferred not to become involved in the conflict, but at times he has intervened. Prior

77. Interview, election researcher at the Department of Political Science, Makerere University, Kampala, 10 November 2016.

78. Sadab Kitatta Kaaya, ‘Museveni bashed at Ssekikubo father burial’, *The Observer Uganda*, 5 June 2014, <<https://observer.ug/news-headlines/32112-museveni-bashed-at-ssekikubo-father-burial>> (15 August 2018).

79. Sadab Kitatta Kaaya, ‘Museveni taken to task over Ssekikubo’, *Uganda News Releases*, 23 January 2013, <<https://observer.ug/news-headlines/23305-museveni-taken-to-task-over-ssekikubo>> (28 March 2021); Badru Bukenya and Fredrick Golooba-Mutebi, ‘Political settlements and the delivery of maternal health services in rural Uganda’ (ESID Working Paper No. 113, University of Manchester, 2019).

80. Sadab Kitatta Kaaya, ‘Sembabule, Ssekikubo, Kutesa: Portrait of a conflict intractable’, *The Observer Uganda*, 27 June 2016, <<https://observer.ug/news-headlines/45039-sembabule-ssekikubo-kutesa-portrait-of-a-conflict-intractable>> (15 August 2018); Lydia Namubiru, ‘Kutesa, Ssekikubo divide Sembabule’, *The New Vision*, 19 December 2009, <https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1230439/kutesa-ssekikubo-divide-sembabule> (15 August 2018).

81. Robert Muhereza, ‘Voters back rebel MPs against party’, *The Daily Monitor*, 14 September 2013, <<http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Voters-back-rebel-MPs-against-party/688334-1991362-yqfnjrjz/index.html>> (5 July 2018).

to the 2015 primaries, the president reconciled with Ssekikubo, perhaps to ensure that Kutesa's faction was kept in check. Ssekikubo then publicly declared his support for Museveni, calling for 'Kutesa to go, but Museveni to stay'.⁸² He also complained to the president that Kutesa had ordered security to beat up his supporters.⁸³

In the 2015 NRM primaries, Ssekikubo ran against Patrick Nkalubo, who was a long-time opponent of his and a supporter of Kutesa. There was a great deal of tension in Sembabule, and, having learned from prior elections, police were equipped with tear gas and weapons. There were several cases of disappearing poll registers, which was one of the reasons for postponing the primaries.⁸⁴ There were also several instances of fights between the camps and missing names from registers.⁸⁵ On one occasion, motorcycle drivers protested against Ssekikubo at a rally in which several people were injured. In Sembabule town, the NRM headquarters were set ablaze.⁸⁶

As in Kanungu and Kamuli, security personnel were involved in violent incidents. The day before the actual polling, Ugandan television featured Ssekikubo saying, 'You have constables and officers of the security forces who have been identified, and they have been participating in elections. The constables and the crime preventers, they are not neutral'.⁸⁷ Ssekikubo won the primaries, despite the fact that Kutesa used his influence (by telephoning the commission chair) to have the NRM-EC announce Nkalubo as the winner. Ssekikubo subsequently campaigned against the removal of the presidential age limit but has not been expelled from the NRM, which may indicate that he is tolerated by the president because he serves as a counterweight to Kutesa.

The violence in the three hotspots reflected what some interview respondents called "'proxy wars", where "high-ups" sponsor candidates against their colleagues and vice versa'.⁸⁸ As a prominent election observer put it:

82. Edris Kiggundu, 'Drama as Ssekikubo dares Museveni on minister Kutesa', *The Observer Uganda*, 3 February 2016, <<https://observer.ug/news-headlines/42400-drama-as-ssekikubo-dares-museveni-on-minister-kutesa>> (5 July 2018).

83. See 'Sekikubo u-turn on Museveni shocks public', *Uganda News*, 13 July 2015, <<http://news.ugo.co.ug/ssekikubo-u-turn-on-museveni-shocks-public/>> (16 November 2017).

84. Iliisa Aligga, '100 poll registers go missing in Sembabule', *Daily Monitor*, 29 September 2015, <<http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/100-poll-registers-go-missing-in-Sembabule/688334-2889344-11di8w1z/index.html>> (15 August 2018).

85. 'Sembabule: Ssekikubo, rival fight over electoral officials', NBS Uganda TV, 27 October 2015.

86. 'Violence mars NRM primaries in Sembabule and Luweero', NBS Uganda TV, 15 October 2015.

87. 'Tension continues to rise in Sembabule ahead of NRM primaries', NBS Uganda TV, 26 October 2015.

88. Interview, NRM legal officer, Kampala, 10 November 2016.

‘the links (between inner-circle elite conflicts and local violence) are evident. You just look at the candidates and the violence- they go together’.⁸⁹ It is not likely that there was a direct presidential order in any of these cases, but all of the hotspots were ones involving powerful rival factions of the ruling coalition, many having links to security forces. The president in all hotspots appeared to have a favourite candidate but was careful enough to appear non-partisan. In the Kanungu case, it is clear from the interviews that the president’s interest was to have all politicians aligned to Amama Mbabazi defeated. The Busoga and Ssembabule cases are a little different. Kadaga and Kutesa are said to have presidential ambitions but have, unlike Mbabazi, never declared it openly. It became clear from interviews that the president is comfortable having Kutesa’s and Kadagas’s rivals win.

Sheema district

Sheema is a district in the south-western region of Uganda. Since the late 1980s, Sheema has been one of the strongholds of the Museveni government. In 2015, two cabinet ministers in the Museveni government were Sheema politicians—Ephraim Kamuntu, the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, and Elioda Tumwesigye, the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovations. Historically, election conflicts in Sheema have been relatively non-violent, even if competitive. Competition for political positions have centred on religious denominations (Catholics and Protestants) backing different contenders for political positions.⁹⁰ But in spite of the fact that the 2015 NRM primaries were highly competitive for all the constituencies in Sheema, this competition did not lead to physical violence. The most competitive campaigns in 2015 were for the woman MP post. One candidate was Catholic (Nyakikongoro Rosemary) and the other Protestant (Jacklet Atuhaire).⁹¹

Nyakikongoro was backed by one of the Sheema ministers, Prof. Kamuntu, and was supported by the Catholic establishment who acknowledged her record of championing their interests nationally and locally.⁹² Atuhaire, a relatively new entrant in Sheema politics, was backed by the other Sheema minister, Tumwesigye, and the Protestant establishment in

89. Interview, Election Observer and director of large Ugandan NGO, by telephone, 25 September 2020.

90. ‘Religious differences in Sheema intensify’, *MK Newslink*, 26 February 2019, <<https://mknewslink.com/religious-differences-in-sheema-intensify-you-are-the-worst-shepherd-i-have-seen-district-chairman-kabigumira-to-fr-vicent-mucunguzi/>> (7 September 2020).

91. Zaddock Amanyisa, ‘Sheema’s Anglican-Catholic power race’, *Daily Monitor*, 5 June 2016, <<https://www.monitor.co.ug/Magazines/PeoplePower/Sheema-s-Anglican-Catholic-power-race/689844-3232206-6xova7/index.html>> (19 March 2021).

92. Interview with a local councillor in Sheema district who supported Nyakikongoro in 2016, 9 August 2019.

Sheema, who accused Nyakikongoro of not respecting them and working only for the Catholic community.⁹³

Atuhaire's offices were set on fire during the run-up to the primaries, and about 80 computers meant to be allocated among members of the constituency to improve computer literacy were destroyed. The incident was allegedly orchestrated by supporters of Nyakikongoro, who the Sheema NRM Registrar declared the winner of the primary elections. However, the incidents did not devolve into physical fighting or the sustained presence of the army and police. Unlike in Kamuli, Kabale, and Ssembabule, in 2015, Sheema had 'no powerful politician with resources and a national appeal'.⁹⁴ Although the district boasted of two cabinet ministers who both supported their preferred candidates, they were said not to be influential or connected to the inner circle around the president. The two opposing candidates thus both mainly mobilized locally and with no interference from the top party leadership. Atuhaire, claiming that she was cheated during the primaries, subsequently ran for MP as an independent with the backing of several local Protestant NRM politicians and eventually won the seat overwhelmingly.

In the peaceful Sheema, then, there was a proxy war too, but one that did not involve presidential inner-circle elites. The two cabinet ministers both offered support for their favoured candidate, but they did not attempt to intervene with procedures or draw on contacts, e.g., the RDC, the national security apparatus (the army and police) or other district officials who could affect electoral outcomes. The church leaders who backed their respective candidates emphasize that they 'do not have a connection to security and prefer to use church structures in campaigning than mobilising army and police to support their candidates'.⁹⁵

Conclusion: nomination violence and proxy wars in comparative perspective

We set out to understand the nature of the NRM's violent candidate nomination procedures. We showed, first, that violence is a constitutive part of Uganda's political settlement under the NRM; second, that violence in NRM primaries tends to be particularly prominent in constituencies characterized by 'proxy wars', where a conflict among inner-circle elites fuels a fight between opposing local candidates. Examining nomination violence through a political settlement lens helped us reach these explanations, where institutional approaches were incomplete. In this

93. Amanyisa, 'Sheema's Anglican-Catholic power race'.

94. Interview with senior researcher on electoral politics at Kabale University, 9 August 2019.

95. Interview with a former head of laity in church of Uganda West Ankole Diocese and a national politician and former MP in one of the constituencies of Sheema district, 22 September 2020.

section, we end by shedding some comparative light on each of these two findings.

Firstly, a growing body of literature on political settlements have improved our understanding of institutional and policy change in less developed countries by focusing on the political economy factors behind such changes. With their focus on power and interests, these contributions illuminate many issues of concern to academics and policymakers alike, such as corruption, education sector reforms, industrial policy, or the management of a country's natural resources.⁹⁶ Our analysis indicates that a political settlement approach is also valuable in the study of elections, and their processes and outcomes, an area dominated by institutionalism. Political settlement analysis, with its focus on how institutions are created, shaped, and enforced, can better explain how a particular party system functions or why an electoral body is weak. For example, Botswana and Tanzania are, as Uganda, dominant-party systems. Tanzania's Chama Cha Mapinduzi and the Botswana Democratic Party also have internal feuds, but they are not as violent as those in Uganda's NRM.⁹⁷ This difference is arguably not due to the dominant-party system as such but rather to the political settlement which reflects the balance between institutions and the underlying distribution of power. Botswana's and Tanzania's political settlements obviously differ, but none of them are as heterogeneous as Uganda's, their ruling coalitions are less fragmented and competitive than Uganda's, and their dominant parties have been able to institutionalize succession for the highest post, all factors that allow for greater predictability in candidate nomination procedures. An institutional lens would see Uganda's system as being similar to other dominant-party systems, and therefore it would fail to capture important differences. At the other end of the scale, in spite of having a multi-party system, Malawian political parties regularly experience violent primary elections.⁹⁸ There are four main political parties in Malawi that have a dominant-party character in different regions in the country, for example, Malawi Congress Party in the central region or Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in the south. Some

96. Kelsall, 'Towards a universal political settlement concept'; Whitfield et al., *The politics of African industrial policy*; Abdul-Gafaru Abdulai and Sam Hickey, 'The politics of development under competitive clientelism: Insights from Ghana's education sector', *African Affairs* 115, 458 (2016), pp. 44–72.

97. Zibani Maundeni and Kebapetse Lotshwao, 'Internal organization of political parties in Botswana', *Global Journal of Human Social Science* 12, 9 (2012), pp. 55–63; Zibani Maundeni and Batlang Seabo, 'Management and mismanagement of factionalism in political parties in Botswana, 1962–2013', *Botswana Notes and Records* 45 (2015), pp. 27–38; Goran Hyden, 'Top-down democratization in Tanzania', *Journal of Democracy*, 10, 4 (1999), 142–155; Emmanuel Nyamajeje, 'Tanzania in focus: CCM nomination intrigues and the road ahead', Africa UpFront, July 2015, <<https://africappractice.com/>> (5 July 2018).

98. Seeberg et al., 'Candidate nomination'.

Table 1 Summary of cases in 2015 NRM primaries and how they were mirrored in September 2020 NRM primaries.

NRM primaries	Kanungu		Ssembabule		Kamuli		Sheema	
	2015	2020	2015	2020	2015	2020	2015	2020
Inner-circle proxy war?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Competition turned violent?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes

of them have experienced violent intra-party feuds.⁹⁹ Such feuds are better explained by Malawi's heterogeneous political settlement than by the nature of the party system *per se*.

Secondly, as we have showed, a weak electoral body, or whether an incumbent runs, cannot explain why some areas have peaceful primaries, while in others, people suffer injuries. For this, we must understand the nature of factional struggles and how they are linked to coalition building efforts of the central elite. This will enable us to understand why electoral rules are enforced in some constituencies but not in others. Time has offered additional support for this explanation. The NRM carried out primary elections on 4 September 2020 to nominate candidates for the 2021 general elections. Table 1 summarizes our cases and how they were mirrored in 2020.¹⁰⁰

Factional struggles change and ruling elites must continuously juggle between different factions. In 2020, Kigezi was no longer violent because the Amama Mbabazi faction was no longer seen as a threat. Ssembabule district, on the other hand, was still characterized by a proxy war between the Kutesa and Ssekikubo camps. The police publicly identified it as a likely hotspot prior to the primaries, on those grounds.¹⁰¹ In Busoga, the ageing Kivejinja was no longer the leader of the camp against Kadaga, but other politicians have emerged as the centre of opposition against Kadaga.¹⁰² One is Persis Namuganza who draws many of the Kivejinja supporters. Namuganza is a princess who hails from Busiki in Namutamba district. She currently serves as Minister of State for Lands. She has become a force to reckon with in Busoga and has had several confrontations with

99. Nandini Patel and Michael Wahman, 'The presidential, parliamentary and local elections in Malawi, May 2014', *Africa Spectrum* 50, 1 (2015), pp. 79–92.

100. For obvious reasons, the 2020 instances could not be thoroughly researched, but we were able to interview three observers, as well as an election expert and a political adviser in September 2020. We also followed how the primaries were covered in the media.

101. 'Police maps out 15 hotspots ahead of NRM primaries', *The Independent*, 1 September 2020, <<https://www.independent.co.ug/police-maps-out-15-hotspots-ahead-of-nrm-primaries/>> (28 March 2021).

102. Kivejinja died of COVID-19 in December of 2020, 6 months after the 2020 primaries.

Kadaga. This explains why Kamuli this time was peaceful, whereas the neighbouring Namutamba district was violent.¹⁰³ In Sheema municipality, the rivalry in 2020 was between two Protestants linked to the inner circle, and religion did not play a major role.¹⁰⁴ It is striking that historically peaceful Sheema turned out violent the first time it was characterized not by religious competition but by an inner-circle proxy war.

NRM's primaries have been among the most violent in Africa, other dominant parties in sub-Saharan Africa have also experienced violent nomination procedures. The proxy war thesis is likely to be applicable in such cases also. It would be most likely to be able to explain differences in intra-party violence in systems with a heterogeneous social structure and a high degree of factional contestation. We would assume that in countries with a dominant party that has a congress-like catch-all character, such as in Zimbabwe's ZANU-PF, proxy wars would be more likely because they include many different factions and thereby internalize competition.¹⁰⁵ An observer organization in Zimbabwe notes, for example, how ZANU-PF's primary elections in April 2018 accounted for a rise of violence in the country as 'aspiring candidates competed for nomination'.¹⁰⁶ But proxy wars could also play out in multi-party systems in regions where a party has a dominant-party character and nominees are almost certain to win the general elections. For example, the 2017 party primaries in the regionally dominant Orange Democratic Movement were characterized by violent incidents in Western Kenya. In Malawi, the DPP party's primaries prior to the by-election for the Rumphi Central constituency in 2011, an area in which DPP dominates, escalated into violence, because party elites tried to intervene to change the results.¹⁰⁷ Based on a repetitive case logic,¹⁰⁸ this piece therefore invites more research on the proxy war dynamics of nomination violence through careful and detailed case studies of processes whereby candidates are elected in nationally or regionally dominant parties.

103. The Kivejinja faction spans several districts. There were also allegations that money and the Internal Security Organisation apparatus had been put at the disposal of Namuganza, who was in some areas presented by her political fans as the preferred NRM top leaders' candidate. *Daily Monitor*, 'How Kadaga beat Namuganza', 22 August 2020, <<https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/How-Kadaga-beat-Namuganza/688334-5612682-3tgi7u/index.html>> (18 March 2021).

104. Interview with a senior presidential advisor, 9 September 2020.

105. Mac Giollabhui, 'How things fall apart'; Shane Mac Giollabhui, 'Battleground: Candidate selection and violence in Africa's dominant political parties', *Democratization* 25, 6 (2018), 978–995.

106. Zimbabwe Peace Project, 'Monthly monitoring report', April 2018, <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ZPP%20April%20MMR%202018.%20.pdf>> (18 March 2021).

107. Interview with Malawi political scientist and election observer, Lilongwe, 7 October 2016. Carried out by Christian Bay-Andersen and Kristian Voss Olesen for their graduate research.

108. Yin, *Case study research*.