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Identifying the Threat to Museveni's Manufactured Legitimacy:
The Puzzle of Uganda's 2021 Elections

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On January 14, 2021, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda won his sixth re-election after thirty five years of control, marking the end to a severely contentious and violent presidential campaign.¹ Defined by civilian unrest, authoritative violence, and unprecedented competition, this election calls into question both the current stability of Museveni's regime, and the puzzle of autocratic development in an increasingly modernized world. As autocratic states continue to strengthen within a modern and economically developing world, it can no longer be inferred that development alone leads to democratization; nor can it be expected that nations will develop with democracy as an end goal. Modern case studies like Uganda suggest that democratization can be made a means to an authoritarian end, subverting pre-existing ideas of democracy and authoritarianism as antithetical to each other. The results of Uganda's 2021 election offers important insights into the methods and practices of democratization in autocratic regimes. A nation with a complex history of colonialism, military violence, and political upheaval, Uganda's political culture has been largely defined by structural developments implemented by Museveni: a pattern of cultivating systems of institutional multiplicity through the promise of democracy. But if democratization has been a key strategy of Museveni's claim to power, why would he risk such overtly authoritarian practices during the 2021 elections? In addition, how has civil society continued to strengthen their mobilization in elections despite Museveni's systems of autocratic oppression, and the continued failure of electoral competition?

This paper seeks to understand Museveni's regime strategy as a balancing act of pseudodemocratic institutions and discrete methods of institutional multiplicity that empower autocratic state development. I argue that Museveni's hybrid regime has utilized superficial democratization as a means of manufacturing legitimacy. However, as evident in the fallout of the 2021 elections, I believe there has been a significant shift in the balance of Museveni's practice of multiplicity and hybridization. Although political science has opted to analyse Uganda through its institutional development, this shift is unlikely to be understood through institutions and isolated actors alone. A complex understanding of civil society as a major political actor under the conditions of autocracy is essential to understand the political future of Museveni and his party, and the development of global autocracies.

Literature Review

I. The Emergence of Hybrid Regimes

The "third wave of democratization" in the mid 1970s appeared to usher in a new era of hope for supporters of democracy: roughly 85 authoritarian regimes came to an end, and about 30 of the regime changes ended in relatively stable democracies.² However the proliferation of hybrid political regimes across the globe following the Cold War combined "democratic rule with authoritarian governance," dramatically shifting political science concerning patterns of

¹ "Untangling Post-Election Uganda," *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, 8 February 2021, africacenter.org/spotlight/untangling-post-election-uganda/.

² Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1999. 2:115-44.

democratization and state development.³ Many African nations transitioned or developed in an authoritarian direction, but this was juxtaposed with the emergence of democratic institutions embedded in state-building initiatives. Recent scholarship has pivoted to focus on the emergence of hybrid regimes, producing a large variety of labels for the different states, including “competitive authoritarianism” (Levitsky and Way 2002), “semi-authoritarianism” (Goebel 2012), and “illiberalism” (Gilbert and Mohseni 2012).⁴

Since the 1990s, regional studies have analysed the emergence of hybrid governments as the product of “traditional” governance with “modernized” institutions, explaining hybridization as the combination of democratic and precolonial state institutions, or a “process of mutual adaptation and transformation.”⁵ These definitions suggest hybridization as a product of incomplete transition, a concept grounded in Western hegemony and modernization theory. Although African regional literature parallels scholarship focused on the emergence of competitive authoritarian states in nations such as Hungary, the examination of hybridity as the process of “democratic backsliding” fails to consider the starkly different conditions of state development within African nations.⁶ First, Uganda has not experienced a “democratic backsliding,” as it was never a democracy to begin with. Nations like Uganda transitioned from hegemonic to competitive authoritarian rule, and there is little to suggest that its transition was due to a substantive ideological shift of the regime.⁷ Gilbert and Payam Mohseni discuss the emergence of hybrid regimes through the context of increasingly blurred “tensions and boundaries” between democracies and authoritarianism.⁸ This suggests a transitional element to hybridity, where the clash of democratic institutions and autocratic governance is suggestive of *either* democratization or authoritarianism.⁹ Uganda has developed institutions to be purposefully democratic and authoritarian, an intentional hybridity where the utilization of democratic institutions by a non-democratic ruling body indicates a relationship between methods of democratization and the survival of autocratic governance.

In addition, discourse has emerged in African comparative literature concerning the vagueness of defining states as hybrid or psudeodemocratic, suggesting a focus on hybridization is inadequate in conceptualizing the conditions of political development in post-colonial states.¹⁰

³ Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. "Elections without democracy: The rise of competitive authoritarianism." *Journal of democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51-65.

⁴ Ottemoeller, Dan. "Popular Perceptions of Democracy: Elections and Attitudes in Uganda." *Comparative Political Studies* 31, no. 1 (February 1998): 98–124. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414098031001005>.

⁵ Ottemoeller, Dan. "Popular Perceptions of Democracy: Elections and Attitudes in Uganda." *Comparative Political Studies*.

⁶ Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. "Elections without democracy: The rise of competitive authoritarianism." *Journal of democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51-65.

⁷ Magaloni, Beatriz and Kricheli, Ruth, "Political Order and One-Party Rule," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 13, pp. 123-143, 2010, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1691289>

⁸ Gilbert, L., Mohseni, P. "Beyond Authoritarianism: The Conceptualization of Hybrid Regimes." *St Comp Int Dev* 46, 270 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-011-9088-x>

⁹ Gilbert, L., Mohseni, P. *Beyond Authoritarianism: The Conceptualization of Hybrid Regimes*. 28

¹⁰ Tom Goodfellow & Stefan Lindemann, "The Clash of Institutions: traditional authority, conflict and the failure of 'hybridity' in Buganda," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 51:1, 2013. 3-26.10.1080/14662043.2013.752175

Colonial incursion embedded severe legacies of violence, ethnic tension, and political disruption that heavily marked the first few decades of independence, and created a political culture that enabled autocratic leaders and authoritarian development.¹¹ The development of Uganda's hybrid regime was not a reaction to liberalism, but the product of an authoritarian agenda built from the ruins of a military dictatorship.

II. *The Practice of Institutional Multiplicity*

While hybridization informs our understanding of institutional autocracy, Scholars Goodfellow and Lindemann argue that the term “institutional multiplicity” best describes the development of the informal and formal powers essential to autocratic regime stability.¹² Goodfellow et. al describes institutional multiplicity as the development of a “multiple rule system” that engages with economic, political, and civil actors to provide “distinct and different normative frameworks and incentive structures in which they act.”¹³ Unlike hybridity, which implies the “direct mixing and melding of institutional arrangements into new and distinct forms,” institutional multiplicity addresses the discreet political strategies of regime legitimacy developed by autocracies.¹⁴ The practice of electoral corruption, systemic coercion, and civil repression are acknowledged but frequently overlooked in scholarship analysing the conditions of persuasion and co-optation that systematically restructured Uganda to aid Museveni’s regime.¹⁵ Informal uses of state power, such as fear mongering and nationalist rhetoric, have been essential to the sustainable legitimization of the hybrid autocratic institutions. A comparative perspective on informal and formal methods of regime legitimization can synthesize the theories of important scholars like Levitsky and Way and Gandhi and Przeworski to best dictate the importance of institutions in preserving autocratic regimes with the writings of Goodfellow and Lindeman in understanding the “soft” powers dictated by institutional multiplicity.¹⁶

III. *The Missing Link: Civil Society*

I agree with Goodfellow and Linderman that an institutional perspective is essential to accurately understand the development of Uganda’s political system, and the conditions that have empowered Museveni’s thirty-plus years of power. However, little of the regional and political science scholarship have focused on the relationship of civil society and political institutions within Uganda as relational in both directions; while Goodfellow et.al discuss the

¹¹ Ottemoeller, Dan. “Popular Perceptions of Democracy: Elections and Attitudes in Uganda.” *Comparative Political Studies* 31, no. 1 (February 1998): 98–124. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414098031001005>.

¹² Tom Goodfellow & Stefan Lindemann, “The Clash of Institutions: traditional authority, conflict and the failure of ‘hybridity’ in Buganda,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 51:1, 2013. 3-26.10.1080/14662043.2013.752175

¹³ Tom Goodfellow & Stefan Lindemann. The clash of institutions: traditional authority, conflict and the failure of ‘hybridity’ in Buganda.”

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Tom Goodfellow & Stefan Lindemann, “The Clash of Institutions: traditional authority, conflict and the failure of ‘hybridity’ in Buganda,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 51:1, 2013. 3-26.10.1080/14662043.2013.752175

role of institutional multiplicity in manipulating social contracts, civil society itself is rarely empowered as an independent political actor. While the development of civil society is almost certainly shaped by the political structures of a nation, the recent instability of Museveni's regime legitimacy may be a product of a changing public that defies the conditions of the State's institutions. Uganda has experienced a significantly divided demographic of voters, the details of which have been difficult to obtain.¹⁷ Data concerning the values and political participation of Uganda's civil society is incredibly limited, a shortcoming due to both logistics and the government's use of intimidation and oppression. Information on election results have been tracked since their start in 1996, and statistics on regional demographics has been calculated both by the Ugandan Census and international surveyors like the World Bank.¹⁸ However, much of the data has focused solely on the economic development of the nation. An economic analysis of Uganda proves to have little implication on the calculation of genuine democratization; despite predictions by international groups on the democratic prospects for Uganda following the promises and successes of Museveni, the nation remains intentionally hybridized. The global focus of gross domestic product as a numeric representation of state development fails to acknowledge the wealth of scholarship on hybrid regimes like competitive authoritarian states, whose economic wealth only aids autocratic legitimacy.

Roberto Stefan Foa's theory of the "modernization trap" may be a piece of the puzzle, as he seeks to explain the forces that demand autocratic development and consolidation through the lens of civil society.¹⁹ However, while the modernization trap focuses on political participation and the "performance legitimacy" of an economically developing nation, the changing demographics of Uganda shows a uniquely divided public. In addition, Museveni has not opted for autocratic consolidation to appeal to the public, but a severely violent and abusive response that seems to directly oppose decades of the strategic differentiation of his regime from the violent dictatorships of his predecessors. Changes are clearly occurring within the political culture and structures of the nation, but the cause and effect of such developments remain unclear.

By bridging the scholarship on institutional multiplicity and regime hybridization in Uganda's development, I argue that Museveni has systematically manufactured legitimacy by developing a hybrid regime that utilizes democratization as a means of preserving autocracy, positioning democratic institutions as necessary to authoritarian survival in a modernizing world. In addition, I seek to better understand the relationship between Museveni's hybrid system of institutional multiplicity and civil society, and the changing variables of autocratic legitimacy through the case study of Uganda's 2021 election.

¹⁷ "The National Population and Housing Census 2014 –Main Report," Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016, Accessed 2 May 2021. <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/wphc/Uganda/UGA-2016-05-23.pdf>

¹⁸ "The National Population and Housing Census 2014 –Main Report," Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016.

¹⁹ Robert Stefan Foa, "Modernization and Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 29, Number 3, July 2018, pp. 129-140. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0050>

Background: Museveni's Thirty Years of Regime Legitimacy

To properly understand Museveni's intentional democratization as an authoritarian tool, we must address the conditions of his rise to power, and the political variables that have since enabled his presidency. Uganda did not gain independence from the United Kingdom until 1962, and by then British colonial incursion had heavily restructured the political, cultural, and economic composition of the territory.²⁰ In the years that followed decolonization, Uganda bore witness to a series of coups, military regimes, and unstable dictatorships as different authorities sought to reorganize and reestablish a formidable state. Four main political actors shaped the structure of power within Uganda: Milton Obote, Idi Amin, Tito Okello, and Yoweri Museveni.²¹ A series of other leaders had power as well, but their regimes never enjoyed more than a year of governance. A similarity between all four postcolonial political leaders is their ascendance to authority through violent resistance. Obote and Amin both secured their power through coups d'etat, Museveni through an armed insurgency.²² It is difficult to maintain stability after a violent transition, as the new regime lacks legitimacy beyond its use of force. Obote and Amin both failed to cultivate enough "hard" and "soft" powers to ease civil antagonism, forcing them to rely on a monopoly of violence to remain in power.²³ Obote and Amin positioned themselves as violent dictators at odds with their citizens, ensuring their eventual ousting by opposition. Their short stints of power were due to a failure to create a political settlement and supportive civil society, and their alienation of social and ethnic groups left them vulnerable to any opposition.²⁴

Upon seizing power in 1986, President Museveni and his National Resistance Movement were careful to learn from the mistakes of predecessors. The aim of any autocratic state is to preserve its power and dominance, but Museveni knew he had to be strategic to gain the necessary support. A reliance on terror, intimidation, and military rule- as seen in the dictatorships of Amin and Obote- increased internal vulnerability, encouraging fractionalization, civil unrest, and the emergence of moral-hazard problems. In order to sustain his authority, Museveni created a broad-based government that included leading figures from rival political parties. He sought to end the ethnic divisions that had defined Uganda's populace since colonialism with a resurgence of nationalist rhetoric, and a revitalization of the economic powers defined during colonialism to create a relationship between Uganda's political and economic bodies.²⁵ He appealed to internal demands for democratization by implementing an election that

²⁰ "Political Overview." *Uganda Country Review*. CountryWatch Incorporated, 2008.

<http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.ups.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=27898577&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

²¹ "Political Overview." *Uganda Country Review*, 2008.

²² Ibid.

²³ Frederick Golooba-Mutebi and Sam Hickey, "The master of institutional multiplicity? The shifting politics of regime survival, state-building and democratisation in Museveni's Uganda," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10(4):601-618, October 2016. 10.1080/17531055.2016.1278322

²⁴ "Political Overview." *Uganda Country Review*. CountryWatch Incorporated, 2008.

²⁵ Frederick Golooba-Mutebi and Sam Hickey, "The master of institutional multiplicity? The shifting politics of regime survival, state-building and democratisation in Museveni's Uganda," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10(4):601-618, October 2016. 10.1080/17531055.2016.1278322

would remain completely under the control of his regime. By organizing elections under a tight authoritarian control, Museveni has established a balance between “electoral control and electoral credibility,” situating his regime within a zone of structural ambivalence that allows for governmental malleability.²⁶ Back in 1986, when he had gained power through his armed resistance movement, Museveni had sought to distinguish his rule from his predecessors by using language of democratization to distill hope and support from Ugandans. As recorded by *New York Times* journalist Sheila Rule during the first of his presidential speeches, Museveni announced that “his first priorities would be the restoration of democracy and the protection of the security of individuals and their property.”²⁷ He promised the creation of improved national elections, and while resting his hands on a Bible, declared democracy as “the right of the people of Africa,” and that governments must not be “the masters but the servers of the population.”²⁸ For Museveni, democratization was a promise he could secure through the implementation of institutions while remaining in complete control of state scope, allowing him to mitigate opposition while superficially meeting the demands of civil society to sustain his leadership and differentiate his governance from his predecessors.

A defining factor of competitive authoritarianism and hybrid regimes is the use of unfair elections as a means of securing regime legitimacy and stability.²⁹ Elections offer autocratic regimes an opportunity to modernize their state building to reflect the needs and wants of their populace- albeit superficially- through the cultivation of institutions.³⁰ But while many nations have experienced a democratic “backsliding” within the electoral institution, Uganda developed *into* its hybrid regime after the fall of a brief military dictatorship headed by general Tito Okello. Elements of elections existed, but held no legitimate authority. All leaders, including Museveni, earned their position as head of state through armed resistance and/or violent upsurge.³¹ Museveni’s move to create a functioning parliament and election was not an incorporation of one structure to another as hybridization alone might suggest; it was the creation of “multiple rule systems” that provided “distinct and different normative frameworks and incentive structures” for the political elite and civil society.³²

To implement both the “hard” and “soft” powers of institutional hybridization and multiplicity, Museveni had to ensure that his process of democratization did not threaten his own authoritarian leadership. Knowing that multiparty elections can disrupt the totality of a regime, Museveni moved to create a single-party state, an increasingly common choice among

²⁶ Schedler, Andreas. "Elections without democracy: The menu of manipulation." *Journal of democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 36-50.

²⁷ Sheila Rule, “Rebel Sworn in as Uganda President,” *The New York Times*. January 30, 1986. <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/01/30/world/rebel-sworn-in-as-uganda-president.html>

²⁸ Rule, “Rebel Sworn in as Uganda President,” *The New York Times*.

²⁹ Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. "Elections without democracy: The rise of competitive authoritarianism." *Journal of democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51-65.

³⁰ Levitsky and Way, "Elections without democracy: The rise of competitive authoritarianism."

³¹ Tom Goodfellow & Stefan Lindemann, “The Clash of Institutions: traditional authority, conflict and the failure of ‘hybridity’ in Buganda,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 51:1, 2013. 3-26.10.1080/14662043.2013.752175

³² Goodfellow & Lindemann, “The Clash of Institutions: traditional authority, conflict and the failure of ‘hybridity’ in Buganda.”

authoritarian nations.³³ Scholar Beatriz Magaloni argues that the intentional decision of leaders to opt for the development of a party rather than a “personal-network strategy” allows the state to broaden its control beyond individuals.³⁴ For Museveni, the creation of a single party nation was a tactical move to utilize democratic rhetoric within an authoritarian agenda while simultaneously distinguishing himself from the military dictators of the past. Democratization became a method of implementing authoritarian legitimacy within the institutional structure of Uganda, changing the social and political norms of the nation to match Museveni’s agenda, and secure both the formal and informal powers of his regime.

All of these decisions illuminate Museveni’s “double-pronged strategy for dealing with his past and would-be-future opponents.”³⁵ First, Museveni created institutions that would work both to secure his authority and satisfy the interests of both Uganda’s civil society, and any potential political opposition. Second, Museveni created a culture of multiplicity that allowed for the normative desires of authority to co-opt his own institutions, and deploy the soft powers of autocracy that are harder to notice. This interplay of formal and informal strategies for authoritarianism utilized ideas of democratization to secure legitimacy on the ashes of the violent dictatorships that had long defined Uganda.³⁶ As Museveni’s regime continued to develop, the role of hybrid institutions and multiplicity only heightened, as his intentional democratization of institutions has paired with a reliance on patrimonialism and coercion that inform our understanding of Uganda’s political culture prior to the 2021 election.

A Shift in Power and Museveni’s Autocratic Reaction

Despite Museveni’s institutional cultivation of legitimacy, the results of the 2021 elections demonstrate a significant shift in the landscape of Ugandan contentious politics and civil society, suggesting that change is underfoot within the political structure of the nation. For the first time since establishing elections and securing his presidency, Museveni lost his stronghold on Central Uganda (historically known as Buganda), the most populous region within Uganda, and the hub of the nation’s political, economic, and cultural forces.³⁷ He also lost Busoga, a city that acts as the economic center of Eastern Uganda. Both regions voted in favor of the National Unity Platform’s (NUP).³⁸ After Buganda had been established as the economic powerhouse of the nation by British imperialists in the Buganda Agreement, the nation has

³³Magaloni, Beatriz and Kricheli, Ruth, “Political Order and One-Party Rule,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 13, pp. 123-143, 2010, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1691289>

³⁴ Magaloni, Beatriz and Kricheli, Ruth, “Political Order and One-Party Rule.” *Annual Review of Political Science*.

³⁵ Frederick Golooba-Mutebi and Sam Hickey, “The master of institutional multiplicity? The shifting politics of regime survival, state-building and democratisation in Museveni’s Uganda,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 10(4):601-618, October 2016. 10.1080/17531055.2016.1278322.

³⁶ Frederick Golooba-Mutebi and Sam Hickey, “The master of institutional multiplicity? The shifting politics of regime survival, state-building and democratisation in Museveni’s Uganda,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies*.

³⁷ “Untangling Post-Election Uganda.” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, February 8, 2021. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/untangling-post-election-uganda/>.

³⁸ “Untangling Post-Election Uganda.” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*.

directed the “largest share of capital and labor intensive projects to these regions.”³⁹ Their failure to comply suggests underlying opposition to the regime that goes beyond the grasp of Museveni’s institutions. This unprecedented opposition to the authority of the National Resistance Movement resulted in a loss of seats within both parliament and local government elections: 25 of the 30 cabinet ministers losing their parliamentary seats were NRM.⁴⁰ These numbers may still increase, as petitions concerning the election may resolve in the NUP’s favor.

The National Unity Platform appears to be gaining traction in Uganda. Although it was only just formed in 2020, it has been emboldened by its origins in the People Power Movement. One of the youngest countries, the majority of Uganda’s population are under the age of 35, with 8 million citizens between the ages of 18 and 30.⁴¹ Within this demographic, unemployment has skyrocketed to 70%.⁴² The People Power Movement in Uganda has drawn on the urgency of the economic crisis and appealed to the younger voters who are less easily swayed by Museveni’s reliance on rhetoric of historical legitimacy, and his actions of the past. Museveni’s controlled democratization may have secured the implementation of his hybrid regime, but he is losing his grip on the softer powers of governance, particularly over his younger populace. The longevity of Museveni’s regime has cultivated a growing sense of discontent from the younger generation, many of whom have never lived with another president, and are unfazed by the superficial democratic opportunities Museveni has presented.⁴³

Arguably the most contentious part of the 2021 election was the presidential vote itself. Museveni’s main opponent was popular musician-turned-politician Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, known as Bobi Wine. Wine, age thirty-nine, caught the attention of Uganda’s young population, inspired by his populist rhetoric. His campaign quickly became a symbol of national resistance, embodying a powerful message of change and mobilization.⁴⁴ Museveni’s response to such a strong opposition was one of violence and intimidation. Forced detention, torture, and severe censorship were just some of the methods utilized by Museveni and his military and security forces.⁴⁵ Museveni ultimately won the 2021 presidential election (a result Wine quickly rejected as fraudulent), but Bobi Wine’s success in mobilizing the public suggests an important shift in the political order of Uganda, and the role of competition in Museveni’s performative elections.⁴⁶

Museveni’s brash authoritarian response leading up to the 2021 elections juxtaposed decades of strategic democratic development and his pretense of national unity. His institutions remained intact; even with the loss of parliamentary seats, the NRM maintained its majority, and Museveni secured another presidential term. But his actions to reduce competition were

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ “Untangling Post-Election Uganda.” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, February 8, 2021. <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/untangling-post-election-uganda/>.

⁴¹ “Untangling Post-Election Uganda.” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Abdi Latif Dahir, “‘Everything Is Worth Freedom’: Uganda’s Opposition Leader Faces the Future,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/11/world/africa/bobi-wine-uganda.html>

⁴⁵ Dahir, “‘Everything Is Worth Freedom’: Uganda’s Opposition Leader Faces the Future,” *The New York Times*.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

reminiscent of the very dictators he sought to distinguish himself from, relying on censorship, violence, and intimidation to secure success.

Just one day before the Ugandan presidential vote, Museveni ordered a total internet shut down throughout Uganda, claiming it a necessary step to prevent fraud.⁴⁷ This move was highly suspicious, and national and international organizations were quick to doubt the accuracy of the 34,344 polling stations.⁴⁸ The Electoral Committee then decided to abandon its use of the polling equipment entirely, resulting in a manual count.⁴⁹ Since January, the EC has still failed to release the Declaration of Results from the different stations, as required by law, and has instead released results by region. The chairman of the EC, Simon Byakakama, has defended this move by resulting to nationalistic rhetoric, saying, “A presidential election has only one constituency, the whole country.”⁵⁰ Nationalism as a pardon to autocracy has significant precedent; Museveni’s decision to create a single-party election was grounded in an argument for national unity post decades of colonial incursion and political strife. But while it may have worked in the implementation of the institutions, it has lost its sway among the public today.

In addition to attacking the electoral institution and participation of the public, Museveni directly targeted Bobi Wine. During the ten weeks of the formal presidential campaign, state enforcement, known as the Uganda People’s Defense Force (UDPF), prevented all political rallies and gatherings in support of Wine.⁵¹ Museveni cited the Coronavirus pandemic as justification for disbanding public events, a rule he did not adhere to in his own campaign. The UDPF also repeatedly arrested and assaulted Wine, resulting in the death of at least one bodyguard, and multiple injuries among his campaign team. Violence then turned towards the public: in the worst instance, security forces fired their guns on dozens of civilians actively protesting Museveni’s attacks on Wine. At least fifty-four people were killed, and more than 600 arrested.⁵² Journalists were also victimized by Museveni’s military and security forces. At least ten journalists were reported to be hospitalized after attacks throughout the campaign, and those left were subject to decertification from Museveni’s Media Council, who required a federal registration prior to any coverage of the election.⁵³

⁴⁷ Nita Bhalla and Alice McCool. “100 hours in the dark: How an election internet blackout hit poor Ugandans.” *Reuters, Media Industry*. January 20, 2021.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-uganda-internet-rights-trfn/100-hours-in-the-dark-how-an-election-internet-black-out-hit-poor-ugandans-idUSKBN29P1V8>

⁴⁸ Bhalla and Alice McCool. “100 hours in the dark: How an election internet blackout hit poor Ugandans.” *Reuters, Media Industry*

⁴⁹ “Untangling Post-Election Uganda.” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, February 8, 2021.

<https://africacenter.org/spotlight/untangling-post-election-uganda/>.

⁵⁰ Untangling Post-Election Uganda.” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*.

⁵¹ Chidi Odinkalu and Sandra Coliver, “Uganda’s Museveni Secured His Sixth Term in Office: What the International Community Can Do Now,” *Just Security*, February 9, 2021,

<https://www.justsecurity.org/74597/ugandas-museveni-secured-his-sixth-term-in-office-what-the-international-community-can-do-now/>

⁵² Chidi Odinkalu and Sandra Coliver, “Uganda’s Museveni Secured His Sixth Term in Office: What the International Community Can Do Now,” *Just Security*,

⁵³ “Untangling Post-Election Uganda.” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, February 8, 2021.

<https://africacenter.org/spotlight/untangling-post-election-uganda/>.

The violence and censorship that characterized this election suggests a significant disconnect in the intention and functionality of Museveni's electoral institutions and the institutional multiplicity that has long defined his regime. Similar coercive strategies were witnessed in the elections of 2011 and 2006, with the harsh handling of civilian unrest significantly reducing voter turnout. But the 2011 election revealed hints of a regime hesitant to rely on prior tactics of intimidation to dispel populist appeals, focusing instead on the coercive powers of the state, including bribery and patrimonialism.⁵⁴ Museveni knew that electoral fraud and violence would result in significant dividends, potentially harming his future prospects in maintaining his governance. In an attempt for moderation, Museveni reduced his restrictions concerning opposition in 2011 and 2016, allowing the other candidates to campaign more freely and citizens to rally publicly.⁵⁵ His strategic tolerance seemed to work: Ugandans seemed less inclined to participate, and without as much attention being drawn by the State's abuses of power, the presidential election resulted in an unsurprising victory for Museveni.

So what has changed? Why would Museveni opt for such authoritarian tactics in the election of 2021 despite his reliance on pseudodemocratic principles, nationalistic rhetoric, and strategic uses of the hard and soft powers of his regime?

Scholarship concerning the governmental development of Uganda has argued that Museveni's regime can be understood as a "continual process of recalibration and of balancing out across these strategic modes," whereby consistent negotiations of power must be held between the "public and the private, the formal and the informal, the illegal and the legal."⁵⁶ The shifts in political response to elections can be understood on face value by the ideas of institutional multiplicity, where hybridization is secured by the development of different yet collaborative institutional strategies and practices.⁵⁷ Museveni's reliance on violence and intimidation to secure his presidency and the significant losses within the NRM party suggests that the "balancing" act of pseudo-democratization and institutional multiplicity is failing to produce the necessary legitimacy. Nothing significant changed in the structure of the elections itself, and Museveni's process of democratic development and deconsolidation occurred prior. What the 2021 election demonstrated was a shift in the fundamental political order of civil society within Uganda. Civil society within Uganda is a major political actor often discussed as *subject* to institutional hybridization and multiplicity, and less so a catalyst for institutional change. The 2021 election, which involved the success of a pop star candidate and significant civil mobilization, illuminated significant gaps in the norms perpetuated by the formal and informal practices of multiplicity, and a regime that remains limited to the demands of an increasingly modernizing public.

⁵⁴ Izama, Angelo. 2011. "UGANDA: MUSEVENI'S TRIUMPH AND WEAKNESS." *Journal of Democracy* 22 (3): 64-78. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.ups.edu/10.1353/jod.2011.0044>.

⁵⁵ Izama, Angelo. 2011. "UGANDA: MUSEVENI'S TRIUMPH AND WEAKNESS." *Journal of Democracy*.

⁵⁶ Tom Goodfellow & Stefan Lindemann, "The Clash of Institutions: traditional authority, conflict and the failure of 'hybridity' in Buganda," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 51:1, 2013. 3-26.10.1080/14662043.2013.752175

⁵⁷ Goodfellow & Stefan Lindemann, "The Clash of Institutions: traditional authority, conflict and the failure of 'hybridity' in Buganda."

To combat and mitigate the power of the public, autocratic regimes develop institutions to redistribute political plurality, participation, and opposition. Museveni's single-party elections developed- both progressively and then regressively- with this intention. These events often took place under the guise of democratization and national unity, rhetoric that was readily accepted by a public bearing the legacies of political upheaval. The regime's softer powers, embodied by the practice of institutional multiplicity, rely on manipulation and coercion to control the conditions of democratization.⁵⁸ But since these soft powers are illegitimate by nature, a shift in their balance is a significant threat to the regime.

The lack of information concerning public values at first suggests a successful autocratic attempt to reduce the strength and presence of political plurality and public participation. The public reaction in the 2021 elections, however, suggests otherwise.

One common explanation for changes in an authoritarian regime's control of the public is grounded in Roberto Stefan Foa's theory of the "modernization trap."⁵⁹ As middle-income authoritarian nations continue to develop, administrative and institutional practices seek to engage with an increasingly liberal economic framework, both to increase the success of the state, and meet the demands of the public they seek to control. As autocratic states modernize, "performance legitimacy" becomes a larger measurement of regime capacity: this juxtaposes the autonomy demanded by an autocracy. Foa's "modernization trap" discusses the rising demands of a populace that naturally arises from a successful state, as citizens demand more political participation, transparency, and bureaucratic efficiency from a stronger state.⁶⁰ This trap helps explain the civil upheaval as witnessed in the Arab Gulf and throughout Asia, as well as Brazil, Taiwan, and Spain, all of which have been forced to contend with increasing pressure to create a multiparty government.⁶¹ If Uganda is to follow a similar path towards political liberalization- a demand embodied by the campaign success of Bobi Wine and removal of NRM party leaders- the rising state capacity of the nation may inform a discussion on why Museveni's hybrid system of institutional multiplicity is losing its grip on its populace. Museveni grounded his first decade of power in the promise of revolution, and Uganda's economic progress helped ensure his performance legitimacy. The nation's post-1986 economic improvement led to a rapidly expansive education system and a higher demand for well-paying jobs, of which there are few.⁶² As one of the youngest-aged nations in the world, Uganda's educated youth have statistically increased their political engagement, and candidates like Bobi Wine appeal to their desire for a

⁵⁸ Frederick Golooba-Mutebi and Sam Hickey, "The master of institutional multiplicity? The shifting politics of regime survival, state-building and democratisation in Museveni's Uganda," *Journal of Eastern African Studies*.

⁵⁹ Robert Stefan Foa, "Modernization and Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 29, Number 3, July 2018, pp. 129-140. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0050>

⁶⁰ Foa, "Modernization and Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy*.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Wilkins, Sam and Richard Vokes, "Bobi Wine has already changed the Ugandan opposition. Can he change the government?" *The Conversation*. November 22, 2020

<https://theconversation.com/bobi-wine-has-already-changed-the-ugandan-opposition-can-he-change-the-government-150231>

post-Museveni era.⁶³ In addition, an increase in travel and the utilization of media has broken down logistical barriers that have isolated Ugandan citizens, encouraging municipalities, and expanding anti-Museveni campaigns to the most rural parts of the state.⁶⁴

Bobi Wine capitalized off of this changing demographic of voters. In one of his earliest campaign speeches, Wine publicly accused Museveni of crimes including corruption and dictatorship, and appealed to Uganda's individual ethnic groups by citing the ways that Museveni has actively betrayed identity groups.⁶⁵ His rhetoric weaponized Museveni's reliance on nationalistic rhetoric in legitimizing the development and consolidation of state institutions.

However: Museveni and his National Resistance Movement remain popular across the nation, particularly among older, rural voters whose experience of regime change has been severely haunted by Uganda's violent history.⁶⁶ The relationship between political change and chaos has encouraged voters to continue to vote in favor of Museveni, citing his economic success and relative period of peace as reasons for their support. Performance legitimacy remains a significant factor of civilian support.

Uganda's modernization trap, which has been exacerbated by the education and generation gap, is becoming increasingly salient. The overtly autocratic tactics used by Museveni to disrupt Bobi Wine's campaign suggests that he is all too aware of the increasing threat of his populace to his regime's legitimacy. The older demographics may rate Museveni's performance legitimacy as relatively successful, but younger voters are far more critical of Uganda's hybridity, and aware of his tactics of pseudo democracy.⁶⁷ Museveni's reliance on superficial democratization is no longer securing his legitimacy in an increasingly modernized state.

Another unpredictable challenge to Museveni's system of legitimacy can be explained through the rise of social media in mobilizing civil society. The internet has become an increasingly powerful force in promoting information, communication, and dissent among politicians, citizens, companies, and bureaucrats, facilitating its own social contracts between citizens and the state.⁶⁸ While a government can use social media to influence and co-opt public conceptions of their policies and actions, citizens can use social media both as a means of expressing collective dissent that would be otherwise too risky in an autocratic state. Museveni's hybrid regime does not completely restrict mobilization; his utilization of institutional multiplicity ensures state control over the conditions of civil engagement, making dissent possible, but ineffective. However, unlike the traditional internet, modern social media offers a less regulated space that may have a democratising impact on society that surpasses the

⁶³Wilkins, Sam and Richard Vokes, "Bobi Wine has already changed the Ugandan opposition. Can he change the government? *The Conversation*. November 22, 2020

⁶⁴ Wilkins and Vokes, "Bobi Wine has already changed the Ugandan opposition. Can he change the government? *The Conversation*.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Uganda Programme. "Assessing the Impact of Social Media on Political Communication and Civic Engagement in Uganda." Ed. Mathias Kamp, 2016. https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=95eec5bf-c11c-c4eb-f504-90a4e5a4d54d&groupId=252038

government's scope. In Uganda, social media users are mostly urban elite, students, youth, civil actors, and politicians, suggesting a correlation between the use of social media for news and communication and the demographic of active voters.⁶⁹

In line with its pseudodemocratic hybridity, Uganda has enacted its national constitution in accordance with the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and international law that protects freedom of expression, which the courts have expanded to include free speech via technology.⁷⁰ Yet this is not the reality. Domestic laws on electronic communication have disproportionately limited citizens, activists, and politicians who critique the president and his party. In 2013, Museveni's security minister Muruli Musaka created the social media monitoring centre, with the aim of "weed[ing] out those who use it to damage the government and people's reputations."⁷¹ In 2018, the centre introduced a social media tax to "raise resources to cope with the consequences" of "gossip."⁷² Uganda's Computer Misuse Act has repeatedly pressed charges of harassment against online activists, and Museveni's Anti-Terrorism Act further limited online content that suggested governmental opposition.⁷³

These laws and policies legalized Museveni's internet shutdowns prior to the 2021 elections, a decision that confirms the media's potential to destabilize the existing regime. Museveni declared the shut down necessary to avoid outside interference, and national bans on social media platforms (which authorities claimed to be unbiased) extended beyond January.⁷⁴ Bobi Wine, who was placed under unofficial house arrest during and after the election, cited the shut down as evidence of a fraudulent election, refusing to accept the results of Museveni's extended presidency.

Although the rise of social media as a new platform for civil engagement may suggest democratization, a modernized autocracy has the potential to develop sophisticated censorship tools to utilize social media for their own benefit, disrupting civil mobilization and reducing information that could delegitimize the nation.⁷⁵ Uganda has surveillance ability, but the nation's agenda appears focused on censorship, not state manipulation. For a regime dependent on institutional multiplicity, it has struggled to co-opt social media. The contentious relationship

⁶⁹ Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Uganda Programme. "Assessing the Impact of Social Media on Political Communication and Civic Engagement in Uganda." Ed. Mathias Kamp, 2016.

https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=95eec5bf-c11c-c4eb-f504-90a4e5a4d54d&groupId=252038

⁷⁰ Ronald Kakungulu Mayambala, "How Uganda is using old and new laws to block activists on social media," *The Conversation*, September 8, 2019.

<https://theconversation.com/how-uganda-is-using-old-and-new-laws-to-block-activists-on-social-media-121823>

⁷¹ Mayambala, "How Uganda is using old and new laws to block activists on social media," *The Conversation*, September 8, 2019.

<https://theconversation.com/how-uganda-is-using-old-and-new-laws-to-block-activists-on-social-media-121823>

⁷² Mayambala, "How Uganda is using old and new laws to block activists on social media," *The Conversation*.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Nita Bhalla and Alice McCool, "100 hours in the dark: How an election internet blackout hit poor Ugandans," *Reuters, Media Industry*. January 20, 2021.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-uganda-internet-rights-trfn/100-hours-in-the-dark-how-an-election-internet-blackout-hit-poor-ugandans-idUSKBN29P1V8>

⁷⁵ Frederick Golooba-Mutebi and Sam Hickey, "The master of institutional multiplicity? The shifting politics of regime survival, state-building and democratisation in Museveni's Uganda," *Journal of Eastern African Studies*.

between social media and its potential for strengthening or weakening autocracy remains unknown, but if Uganda remains reactionary rather than progressive in its agenda, it may be at risk of losing significant power over its populace.

In Conclusion

Scholarship and literature concerning the rise of hybrid regimes, transitional governance within Africa, and the development of Uganda has focused significantly on institutions and “strong-man” governance. Uganda’s current political model can be best understood through its use of hybrid institutions and institutional multiplicity, where democratization is not an end goal for a transitional state, but an intentional tool of legitimacy for the existing autocratic regime. However, Museveni’s reliance on overtly autocratic principles in response to the contentious 2021 governmental election suggests an imbalance in the effectiveness and sustainability of the hybrid institutions and their practice of institutional multiplicity. Reasons for this shift are not yet clear, and the repercussions remain unknown. A major piece of the puzzle may rest in civil society itself, a major political actor that is not adequately empowered in political scholarship and regional studies, particularly in regards to Uganda. While the institutional structures and practices of the state are essential to understand current events, a changing public will have severe implications on the political future of Museveni and his National Resistance Movement. Civil engagement with an increasingly modernized world has changed the variables of performance legitimacy, encouraged civil unrest, and expanded reliance on modern technology and social media. These changes severely undermine the capacity of Museveni’s regime, which remains dependent on its ability to control the conditions of democratization and manufacture legitimacy to best suit his agenda. Institutions of multiplicity are only effective as far as they are embodied and interpreted. Political scholarship must develop to adequately address civil society not as dependent on institutional multiplicity and regime development, but as a political actor itself. Yoweri Museveni maintained his governance this January, but as civil society continues to demand change, future elections will only become more controversial. Understanding the relationship between hybrid regimes, legitimacy, and the role of civil society is vital to developing accurate and adaptable political science, and the development of global civil unrest.

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