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Museveni casting his vote in the last presidential elections

A new book authored by political scientists backs Col Kizza Besigye's view that it is impossible to oust President Museveni through elections he organises and controls.

Titled *Elections In A Hybrid Regime: Revisiting The 2011 Ugandan Polls*, the book by local and international researchers comes to the conclusion that an election is unlikely to cause political change or bring about democratisation in Uganda under the current circumstances.

"It appears a distant possibility that elections per se will change the top leadership in Uganda under the existing institutional framework," the book claims.

Launched on January 7 at Hotel Africana, the book analyses Uganda's evolving electoral democracy, issues that shape it, voters' behaviour and how elections are managed.

The 495-page book is a product of a joint academic research project that aims to encourage a better understanding of the 2011 elections in Uganda.

The authors include Makerere University political science lecturers; Dr Sabiti Makara, Dr Julius Kiiza, Dr William Muhumuza and Dr Paul Omach.

2011 elections

It would be erroneous to conclude that President Museveni and his NRM's victory in the 2011 elections represents a strengthening of political authority and legitimacy, the authors state. Their argument is that the election outcome was explained by several reasons as inferred from the analysis of voter behaviour and the political environment.

These reasons include a high rate of voter abstention, massive distribution of financial and material incentives, and application of at least subtle violence. According to the researchers, there was an attempt through subtle violence and other means to send a message to the electorate that the regime is still in charge at least in the short run or medium term.

"Regarding this last point, we argue that the electorate...rejected the opposition for fear of political or economic marginalisation - a position that raises essential questions about what it means to be in the opposition in contemporary Uganda," the book states.

"Our argument is not that the elections cannot lead to an alternation of power, but that the electorate internalised the idea that it could not," the authors note.

NRM vs opposition

While acknowledging that the NRM victory is majorly explained by its fusion with the state apparatus, the authors note that opposition parties are weak, and thus unable to put up a formidable challenge.

"On its part, the opposition took it for granted that they had significant and growing support and therefore failed to address its internal weaknesses," the book states, pointing at the failure to

establish structures and lack of clear and sustainable sources of funding as some of the weaknesses.

The researchers define Uganda as a pseudo democracy, which in form has democratic institutions but in substance is authoritarian.

“Hybrid regimes like that of Uganda are interesting to analyse, not as renewed examples of authoritarian regimes but regimes that carry new forms of control and domination,” the book notes.

The authors point out that the 2011 elections were not marked by repression of the opposition as was the case was in 2001 and 2006, but note that the previous acts and the subtle violence against the opposition have “generated an internalised violence that has induced new behaviours.”

In their assessment of election management, the authors note that President Museveni’s appointed Electoral Commission is not competent to organise free and fair elections.

“Genuine, rule-bound competitive politics that produces respectable and acceptable results is still a pipe dream in Uganda,” argues Makara in Chapter 4.

“Greed for power and the unwarranted desire for incumbents to stay at the helm indefinitely rarely give rise to [a] full democratic process.”

The insights on election management in the book come at a time when the opposition and civil society groups have been agitating for electoral reforms. Among others, the activists want the Electoral Commission to be constituted by the Judicial Service Commission.

On the role of security forces in elections, the book notes that their role should be clearly defined. It also calls for the issue of campaign financing to be addressed.

Asked to comment on the book, Jotham Taremwa, the EC spokesman, said: “Where do they get the competence to evaluate the elections? Being a political scientist does not make one an expert on elections. We have organised elections that have put governments in place,” he said.

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