

The Course of Political Development in Uganda and its Effect on Economic Development

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Since the decolonization of European colonies, development has been a buzz word in international relations. By exploring political, social, and economic development strategies implemented around the globe, scholars have tried to understand which policies are most effective and beneficial, as well as the causes of their successes and failures. Since the end of the Cold War, which marked the failure of most communist-based systems, and the emergence of capitalism as the world's dominant economic system, the connection between political and economic development has been of interest to many scholars. Specifically, what is the effect of political development on economic development?

Political development is traditionally defined as moving towards a more liberal democratic system based on free and fair elections, and the protection of citizens' civil rights. The path to such development is often hard to define because each state has its own history and therefore its own methods for moving towards this end goal. Many western scholars recommend that states establish institutions to promote democracy, hold elections, and adopt a multi-party system. However, the success of states' attempts at implementing these recommendations is debatable.

Economic development, on the other hand, has historically been defined as economic growth based on gross domestic product growth, increased international trade, industrialization, and integration into regional and global economies. Along these lines, the Washington Consensus has played a large role in prescribing policies for economic development in developing countries. Based on these terms, the Uganda case study provides a strong case for the relationship between political and economic development. Since independence from Britain in 1962, Uganda's economic development has been hindered by the lack of political development. It was not until recent political stability that Uganda has been able to experience economic development.

Colonial Uganda

To understand the political development in Uganda, it is important to examine the political atmosphere of independence. In 1860, Uganda was declared a protectorate under the British colonial system. As a protectorate, land rights were respected, despite the commonplace of forced labor and high taxes (Gakwandi 1999). A century later, Uganda was granted internal self-government, with its first elections held on March 1, 1961. This would later lead to full independence on October 1962. With the granting of self-rule, three major political parties formed in Uganda; the Uganda People's Congress (UPC), the Democratic Party (DP), and the Kabaka Yekka (KY). The main platform of the UPC was nationalist and the party strived to unite all Ugandans despite ethnic differences. The KY was mainly an ethnic party consisting of the Baganda people who were the most favored under British rule. An alliance between the UPC and KY gave them more collective strength than the DP and increased the UPC's leader, Milton Obote (Jørgensen 1981).

Post Independence Uganda

At independence in 1962, Obote was appointed Prime Minister by the British and selected Edward Walugembe Mutesa II, King of the Baganda people, and leader of the KY to serve as the President. A popular slogan among the Baganda people was, "Mutesa I invited the Europeans into Buganda and Mutesa II was going to order the Europeans out of Buganda" (Gukiina 1972, 100). However, Mutesa II served only as a figurehead of the central government. The 1962 constitution was modeled after the British system and Uganda held parliamentary elections for the first time. The UPC won a majority 37 seats, followed by the KY with 21 seats, and the DP won 24 seats (Jørgensen 1981). The alliance between KY and UPC gave them an upper hand in parliament. Despite these indicators of political development, strong ethnic divisions existed between and within parties. The main rivalry was between the Banyoro and Baganda groups and these divisions led to instability in Obote's administration (Gukiina 1972).

In 1964, discord within the UPC, as well as challenges from opposition parties threatened Uganda's political development and led to massive instability. In 1966, the UPC's Secretary-General, Grace Ibingira, accused Obote and his Deputy Army Commander, Idi Amin, of involvement in an ivory and gold scandal. Ibingira then organized a successful no-confidence vote against Obote, which was passed by the UPC's members of parliament. Obote responded by arresting Ibingira and others who opposed him. He then suspended the 1962 constitution, promoted Amin to Army Chief of Staff, and deposed Mutesa II. Obote proclaimed himself President and convened the national assembly to write a new constitution. This new constitution restricted the power of the Baganda people and created a strong executive branch. Obote declared a state of emergency and stormed the palace of Mutesa II. More than one hundred people died during the struggle, but Mutesa II managed to escape to London where he lived the rest of his life in exile. In 1967 Obote introduced his own version of the constitution which gave him even more power and abolished the kingdoms within Uganda. After an assassination attempt in 1969, Obote banned political opposition groups thus creating a single party state (*Hostile to Democracy* 1999).

In January of 1971, Obote left Uganda for a conference in Singapore, and his Army Chief of Staff, Idi Amin, staged a military coup (Jørgensen 1981). Amin and his forces were upset with Obote for his constant consolidation of power in the executive, so they overthrew his administration in a guardian coup (Clapham 1985). He stated, "I am not an ambitious man, personally, I am just a soldier with a concern for my country and its people" ("Idi Admin Dada Oumee" 2003). Those in opposition to Obote originally welcomed the coup and Amin's government. However, this changed when Amin himself began to consolidate power and by implementing his own set of radical policies.

Amin suspended the constitution and declared himself President for life. He violently suppressed all political opposition and created the Public Safety Unit and the State Research Bureau to carry out this suppression. One of Amin's first acts was to separate the military along ethnic lines and have most of those in the Acholi and Lango groups killed because they were perceived as pro-Obote. Under Amin's rule, between 100,000 and 500,000 people were killed, including his Chief Justice

Benedicto Kiwanuka, former head of government and leader of the banned DP, and the Anglican Archbishop Janani Luwum. In 1972, Amin ordered all Ugandans of Asian descent to leave the country. He claimed their business success was a hindrance to Africans and when the 70,000 Asians left the country, he gave their businesses to friends and family (*Hostile to Democracy* 1999). Amin's administration alienated most diplomatic friendships with Uganda which brought a halt to foreign aid. Most skilled Ugandans fled the country in fear of their lives, and the infrastructure collapsed (Kreimer 2000).

Despite the strong crackdown on opposition, the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) was able to form and operate from surrounding countries. Due to these activities, and the presence of Obote in Tanzania, Amin ordered troops into Tanzania and attempted to annex 1,800 square meters known as the Karega salient. President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania sent military forces to defend the invasion into Tanzanian land. They were joined by the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), the military force of the UNLF, and together ousted Amin in April 1979. Amin escaped alive and lived in exile in Saudi Arabia until his death in August 2003 where he was never held accountable for the atrocities of his rule in Uganda (*Hostile to Democracy* 1999).

The UNLA appointed Yusef Lule, the chairperson of the political wing of the UNLA, as the new president. His government lasted for sixty-eight days. Lule was perceived as having a pro-Muganda slant, which was not appreciated by all members of the UNLA. Due to tension between the military and political branches, the UNLA ousted Lule in a guardian coup and replaced him with Godfrey Binaisa in June of 1979. During the year of his rule, political parties were banned and Obote returned to Uganda and began gaining support in the UNLA. Pro-Obote forces in the UNLA removed Binaisa from power in May 1980 and promised democratic elections would take place in December. An interim Presidential Commission was put in place before the elections. It consisted of three men from different ethnic backgrounds, Wacha Olwol, David Musoke, and Polycarp Nyamuchoncho (*Hostile to Democracy* 1999).

During the interim period, the UPC and DP, reemerged and regained support. In addition, two new political parties, the Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM) and the Conservative Party (CP), had emerged.

The elections were held in December as promised and Obote had appeared to have won the presidency. However, the political opposition parties and some observers from the international community accused the pro-Obote military of rigging the elections. Obote succeeded in temporarily consolidating his controversial victory, but not without escaping the threat of a civil war.

Yoweri Museveni of the UPM formed the National Resistance Army (NRA), and stood on a platform of radical change. Museveni argued that his call to arms was a legitimate response to undemocratic practices, and pointed out that “Once again, a minority, unpopular clique was imposed on the people of Uganda, leaving them with no option but to take up arms in defense of their democratic rights” (*Hostile to Democracy* 1999, 34). It was estimated that Obote’s government exceeded the brutality of Amin’s rule when dealing with opposition. During the five years of civil war, hundreds of thousands of Ugandans were killed by the Obote regime.

The growing resistance and mobilization of rebel groups against Obote, made it very difficult for the regime to wage a strong military campaign against the NRA (*Hostile to Democracy* 1999). In addition, fragmentation based on ethnic tensions began to grow in Obote’s UNLA. In May 1985, General Tito Lutwa Okello staged a coup and disposed Obote. Okello hoped to gain support on a platform of national reconciliation. As a gesture towards national reconciliation, he traveled to Nairobi, Kenya to draft peace accords. However, Museveni and the NRA refused to support Okello’s gestures and the peace accords were never implemented (*Hostile to Democracy* 1999).

Uganda under Museveni

In January 1986, Museveni successfully forced Okello and the UNLA to flee the country, and seized control of the country. Like his predecessors, Museveni banned political party activity. Museveni promised a four year interim period in which he would rearrange political and economic policies and create democratic institutions. However this period was extended for another five years in 1989. During this time he created democratic institutions at the local level which included elected councils (Bocquier 1999). Museveni’s government, like all those before his, faced internal

armed opposition and the suppression of this opposition led to accusations of human rights abuses from the international community. However, unlike his predecessors, Museveni did move towards a more democratic system as he had promised at the beginning of his interim administration. In 1989, the Odoki Commission, officially known as the Uganda Constitutional Commission, was formed to draft a new constitution. The Odoki Commission worked on outreach programs to the Ugandan public and received over 25,000 submissions of suggestions for the new constitution. A popularly elected Constituent Assembly debated the Odoki Commission constitutional outline from 1994-1995. On September 22, 1995, the Constituent Assembly adopted a new constitution, which included strong restrictions on political party activity (*Hostile to Democracy* 1999).

Democratic presidential elections were held in 1996. The main candidates were Museveni, Dr. Paul Kwanga Ssemogerere, and Mohammed Mayanja Kibirige. A no-party election, the candidates were to base their platforms on personal merit. Museveni campaigned on a platform of economic improvement, stability, and security, all of which he claimed had been absent in the regimes before him. Ssemogerere countered Museveni by saying that the new economic development benefited only a few Ugandans and he promised instead to eliminate poverty. Mayanja took a dependency theory approach and blamed the international system for Uganda's economic problems. Both Ssemogerere and Mayanja accused Museveni of increasing instability and insecurity with his suppression of political parties and opponents. Despite this, Museveni won with 75.5% of the popular vote. Although the losing candidates claimed the elections were rigged, international and third party monitors validated the election results. Along with the presidential election, parliamentary elections were held. Of the 271 seats, 214 were directly elected by the people. The remainder comprised of special representatives from the army, and trade unions, along with disabled people and women (Bocquier 1999). Museveni was reelected in 2001 and now looks hopefully toward the next election in 2006.

Political development in Uganda has gone full circle, from parliamentary democracy to years of dictatorships and military rule, and back to a parliamentary democracy. The democratic system in place today,

however, is more legitimate than the original parliamentary system left behind by Britain because the Ugandan people elected representatives at all levels and had a voice in the creation of the new constitution. Uganda is a success story for state-led democratization since the ruler, Museveni, was able to remain in power after the transition to elected government. Uganda has politically recovered and bloomed into a successful democracy. The political development in Uganda is a beacon of hope for other African countries plagued with military rule and dictatorships.

Economic Development in Uganda

Along with this full circle transition in political development, Uganda has also experienced a circular transition in economic development. “At independence, Uganda was more fortunate than most of its African neighbors, in that the country had promising economic potential...The industrial sector produced a wide range of commodities satisfying much of the domestic needs. The export sector was buoyant, especially with respect to cash crops such as coffee, cotton, and tea. Some minerals, including copper, were also exported” (Kreimer 2000, 17).

The high economic expectations of the post-independence period were soon destroyed by the governments of the first eight rulers. The original government, put in place by Britain under the leadership of Obote and Mutesa II, did not implement economic policies to promote strong development in Uganda. Instead, the economy remained tied to Britain in terms of exports. When Obote ousted Mutesa II and strengthened the executive, a lack of checks on his fiscal and economic policies occurred. Uganda’s economy was drained by increased military expenditures and administrative corruption. Development plans to improve the conditions of ordinary citizen’s and decrease poverty were largely ignored under Obote’s rule (Kreimer 2000).

Amin, it can be argued, caused the most economic damage to Uganda of all the first eight administrations. High levels of corruption along with unrelenting spending quickly disabled the economy. Amin regularly printed more currency when the national treasury was empty, and had economic advisors killed who warned him of the harmful economic consequences. His gross violations of human rights and disregard for the

international community alienated western allies and discouraged foreign aid. Along with damaging investment and the treasury reserves, Amin destroyed human capital. He murdered his opposition, ordered the Asian minority business-owners to leave, and forced intellectuals and skilled workers to flee the country in for fear of their lives. Amin did not create any economic policies to promote development in Uganda (*Hostile to Democracy* 1999).

The three successive governments also failed to implement policies to promote economic development. The short-lived governments of Lule, Binaisa, and the interim Presidential Commission of Olwol, Musoke, and Nyamuchoncho simply did not have the time, resources, or stability to design and implement development strategies. Unrest within the political and military sectors of the UNLA led to this instability. When Obote returned to power the country was thrown into a civil war which not only created more instability in the country, but also destroyed the national infrastructure. The corruption that plagued the first Obote administration reappeared in his second administration. Okello took power through a coup, and placed legitimacy before any plans to address Uganda's economic situation. His failure to gain legitimacy during his rule translated into his failure to confront the country's economic circumstances. Civil war and lack of steady leadership made the six years following the overthrow of Amin unsuccessful in terms of economic development (*Hostile to Democracy* 1999).

After the failures of these first eight regimes, Museveni proposed new approaches to economic development. He created a centrally controlled economy, revalued the currency, and held tight control over imports and prices. Museveni was strongly opposed to policies that would unlock the flow of foreign aid because he feared Uganda would become economically dependent on the international community. However, these policies proved detrimental. Inflation increased rapidly and by May of 1987 it had tripled to 380 percent. The failure of these original policies led Museveni to agree to the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund in order to receive loans to rebuild the economy. He implemented tight fiscal and monetary policies, focused on trade and political liberalization, and reformed the civil service and financial sectors. These policies improved the situation temporarily, but inflation

returned (Harvey 1995). Despite this downturn, given more time, the policies began to steadily improve the Ugandan economy and the World Bank came to consider Uganda as one of its star examples (Kreimer 2000). The economy during the first seven years under Museveni achieved stabilization and growth was an average of 6 percent per annum (*Sharer, De Zoysa, and McDonald*1995). Uganda's impressive recovery can be attributed to political stability and Museveni's adoption of policies that took confronted the economic failures in the absence of structural adjustment.

Museveni and his current administration have many proposals for continued economic development in Uganda. They are promoting sound macroeconomic management, long term development strategies, creation of efficient energy, improvement of transport and communications infrastructure, stronger regional economic integration and increased human capital. The government is also working to encourage those Asian-Ugandans living in exile to return to the country, as this would greatly increase the human capital (*Uganda Vision 2025* 1999). These economic goals are within reach as long as appropriate planning, policies, coordination, and cooperation are implemented.

Conclusion

"A conducive political environment is the cornerstone of peaceful coexistence, economic prosperity, and sustained development" (*Uganda Vision 2025* 1999, 23). The stability of Museveni's administration has made the last fifteen years of economic development possible in Uganda. By following the relationship between the political development and economic development it becomes obvious that economic development is dependent on the political climate. The political instability present during the first eight Ugandan governments since independence directly correlates to the lack of economic development and eventual economic degradation and destruction.

The prime example of Uganda can be instrumental in answering the question of the relationship between political and economic development. As proven above, political development is of utmost importance to economic development. Economic growth and development is hindered by a lack of political development and stability.

The lessons learned from the destruction and reconstruction of both the economic and political systems of Uganda can be applied to other situations worldwide. Developing countries across the globe should focus on achieving and maintaining political development and stability in order to reach goals of economic development.

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