

# NRM's political achievements

By Pascal Kwesiga

**W**hen Uganda attained political independence in 1962, there were high hopes among the population that the exit of the British colonial leaders from the country's political arena would entrench self-rule.

Two years down the road, signs of a political crisis began to appear, threatening the country's budding political independence. In the early months of 1964, there was a mutiny by the military, with soldiers demanding higher pay and rapid promotions.

The first post-independence Government led by prime minister, Milton Obote, who later became president, gave into the mutineers' demands, which saw a junior officer, Idi Amin, rise rapidly through the ranks.

Consequently, the military, which was deeply divided on sectarian grounds began to play a critical role in the politics of the country, becoming a major tool for political chaos later.

## Dark history

In 1966, Obote directed Amin to raid Kabaka Mutesa's palace in Mengo, triggering off a major political crisis.

This marked the culmination of the animosity that had developed between the central Government and Mengo, following the 1964 referendum on the question of the 'lost counties' of Buganda.

Amin's overthrowing of Obote in 1971 further entrenched the role of the military in politics.

Earlier, the three political parties that participated in the 1962 elections – Democratic Party (DP), Uganda People's Congress (UPC) and Kabaka Yekka (YK) to choose the first Government under self-rule, had complicated the political situation because they were formed on sectarian and religious lines.

## Ray of hope

By the time President Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army (NRA) rebel group took over power in 1986, just 24 years after independence, Uganda was grappling with a myriad of political problems.

Thirty years later, the NRA, which metamorphosed into the National Resistance Movement (NRM) organisation has made many political gains.

Upon capturing power, the NRM introduced the Movement political system, under which all Ugandans belonged. The Movement united Ugandans under one political system and partly cured the deep-seated sectarianism that has been sowed by the political parties. Political party activities were formally suspended in 1992.

But NRM's fight against sectarianism and efforts at political unification of Uganda had began way back during the bush war days (1981-1986) when it established the Resistance Councils as the grassroots political structures in the areas they had liberated.

After the initial political and economic reforms, the NRM, through



Museveni displaying the Constitution during the swearing-in ceremony in 2011

the elected National Resistance Council (NRC), in 1988 embarked on the road to the constitutional making process.

A bill was passed on October 24, 1988 establishing the Constitutional Commission to write a new Constitution. On February 25, 1989, nationwide elections were conducted to expand the NRC to offer representation to more sections of Ugandans.

## Elected leaders

Elected NRC representatives were sworn in on April 6, 1989 and a Cabinet approved on April 11. It is the NRC that later voted to extend NRM's transitional period to 1994. But the 1994 roadmap was not adhered to and the first elections under NRM were held in 1996.

The transitional period was initially supposed to end in 1990 for the country to elect a president, members of Parliament and local government leaders. Although political party activities had been suspended, the NRM continued to engage political organisations that were still active.

This explains why DP and the Conservative Party elected delegates to the Constitutional Assembly that enacted the Constitution on September 22, 1995. A year later, the country went to the polls on May 9, 1996 to elect the first president under NRM. Museveni won the election in which DP and CP fielded candidates. Elections for members of

the 6th Parliament were held on June 27, 1996.

## Return to multiparty politics

When Ugandans started clamouring for the return to multi-party politics, the Movement system chose a democratic path for the population to decide whether to remain under a single political system or restore a multiparty system – the 2005 referendum.

The referendum results were overwhelmingly different from the one in 2000 when Ugandans chose to remain under Movement system. Ugandans overwhelmingly voted for a return to multi-party democracy.

The 2005 referendum allowed the opposition to recruit and mobilise openly for the 2006 elections, which Museveni won again.

## Third term

When the Movement wanted to lift the presidential term limits from the constitution in 2005, it engaged the masses and Ugandans responded in the affirmative.

Four national elections have so far been organised under NRM in 1996, 2001, 2006 and 2011.

Museveni has emerged winner in all the elections, although the opposition has discredited the electoral processes and the political climate under which campaigns and polls have been conducted.

In the foreword to the 2016 NRM manifesto themed *Taking Uganda to modernity through job creation*

and *inclusive development*, President Yoweri Museveni, also the party flag-bearer, says the fifth policy document since the first 1996 elections under his Government, seeks to build on the achievements they have made so far across all fronts.

Museveni cites good governance and democracy as one of the core areas of focus of the manifesto. In the manifesto, NRM leaders list some of the strides the party has made in the area of good governance, democracy and security in the past five years. These are creation and maintenance of an environment in which people have a say in national issues, professionalising and equipping the army and Police, security, rule of law and periodic elections.

Others are people's participation, empowerment of women and youth and promotion of rights and freedoms.

## Constitutionalism

The NRM party deputy secretary general, Richard Todwong, says the NRA takeover of power and the constitutional making process that ensued marked the beginning of the journey to restore the country to constitutionalism and rule of law.

The national Constitution, he explains, established rights and freedoms Ugandans had never enjoyed before. The NRM party, Todwong, says is built on four core principals – nationalism, pan Africanism, socio-economic transformation and democracy.

## NRM has fought sectarian politics, says researcher

Golooba Mutebi, a researcher and political analyst, says the NRM leadership has been successful in undermining religious and sectarian politics, which defined the past regimes.

Golooba says there is no political party in the country today which can be defined through religious or sectarian lenses.

"Although there are attempts to define DP as a Baganda party, it is no longer for Baganda. UPC is no longer inclined to the people in the north," he argues.

A professor of political science at Makerere University, Sabiti Makara, identifies security, peace and stability as well as regular polls as NRM's major achievements on the political front. However, electoral violence, poverty and imperfections in the elections, he says, are threats to some of the Government's successes.

"Many Ugandans are still poor and this affects their political choices. Poverty is a serious political issue. Hospitals and schools need revamping," Makara adds.

"In terms of democracy, we have restored the rule of law and constitutionalism. The previous regimes were characterised by dictatorial tendencies and human rights were not respected," he adds.

## Decentralisation

The reintroduction of decentralisation which created local governments and introduced the concept of power sharing between the central and lower administrative units is another achievement, according to NRM leaders.

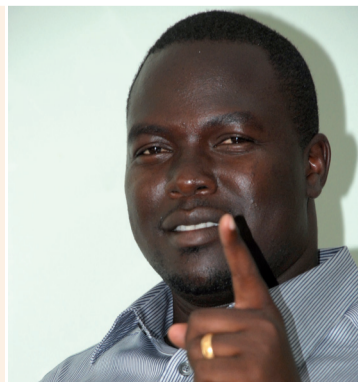
Decentralisation was reintroduced in Uganda in 1992 to enhance the participation of the masses at the grassroots in their governance and to take services nearer to the people.

However, the many administrative units that have been created in the name of decentralisation have also increased the cost of public administration and affected service delivery in some areas.

When NRM opened nominations for the October primaries for about 600 electoral positions across the country, it received a staggering 4,517 number of potential candidates.

"This shows how much people are interested in politics and some of them see politics as the only source of wealth, because it can employ anybody. We need to make politics less attractive and show the people money is in the private sector," Todwong says.

**NRA'S TAKEOVER OF POWER AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL MAKING PROCESS THAT ENSUED MARKED THE BEGINNING OF THE JOURNEY TO RESTORE THE COUNTRY TO CONSTITUTIONALISM AND RULE OF LAW**



Richard Todwong