

UGANDA

by Ivan Ashaba and Karolina Werner

1. INTRODUCTION

This chronicle covers political events in Uganda in 2019, a year which saw a cabinet reshuffle, a university strike, growing tensions within the opposition, the announcement of presidential candidacies, and an ongoing spat with Rwanda.

Regionally, Uganda has been in a low-level conflict with Rwanda which has resulted in a closed border even after an agreement between Museveni and Kagame was signed in Angola. As Uganda heads to general elections in 2021 President Yoweri Museveni will certainly be the candidate of the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party, although opposition figure Bobi Wine is garnering international fame, both through the media and his music, and has seemingly become a viable alternative particularly to younger Ugandans.

Less visible, but certainly no less significant with elections approaching, are signs of freedom of expression being curtailed, from the social media tax instituted in 2018, to the increase in gag orders for the press, the new legislation on cyber harassment which has resulted in the arrest of academic and activist Stella Nyanzi, as well as ongoing discussions about the regulation of lyrics.

The chronicle offers an overview of these and other events beginning with everyday governance in the country, to an examination of the regional tensions, and the ramping up of preparations for elections in 2021.

2. EVERYDAY POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

2.1. Museveni's countrywide prosperity tours: Early campaigns?

Museveni's numerous countrywide tours were ostensibly aimed at sensitising Ugandans on the creation of wealth and jobs. The tours emphasised four sectors: commercial agriculture, agro processing, services and ICT. The president's message revolved around combatting archaic methods in subsistence farming. Museveni has long been contemptuous of what he often dismisses as producing for the stomach. In August Museveni announced that he had concluded his sensitization tours of 20 zones across Uganda, warning that the country cannot persist in subsistence farming "when the Americans

are celebrating 50 years of going to the moon and coming back. It is suicidal”.¹

Political analysts have always interpreted these tours as early campaigns.² For example, the opposition FDC party slammed the president’s 2019 tours as costly to the taxpayer. The party’s spokesperson argued that the money would have been better spent on an agriculture bank from which farmers can access credit.³ It has also been noted by some critics that while the president travels around the country promoting himself as a leader, his opponents are effectively barred from campaigning under a public order law often cited by the security forces in blocking public events organised by the opposition. For example, Bobi Wine’s countrywide consultations have continuously been foiled by police even when the Electoral Commission cleared him.⁴

2.2. Fight against corruption: From walking the talk to just walking

On 6 December 2019 Museveni led government officials in a street march against corruption. The walk was aimed at raising awareness about official graft and there was talk that perhaps a million Ugandans would join the march. In the end only hundreds attended, and instead many Ugandans on social media mocked the president’s planned walk, asking pointed questions about the aim of the walk and against whom it was being held. Their scepticism stems from the fact that the president was set to walk alongside other leaders that many Ugandans feel have stolen from the government or associate freely with suspects. In Uganda there is a widespread perception that certain powerful but corrupt officials cannot be touched by law enforcement. This is most clearly witnessed when judges give lenient sentences to those convicted of corruption, especially when they are believed to be close allies of the regime. This leaves the president trapped and in fear of losing power.⁵ Thus, many see the so-called war on corruption in Uganda as rather a ruse only meant to hoodwink donors and development partners that the government is doing something to tackle the problem. There has been scholarly engagement on how the fight against corruption in Uganda is driven by external pressures from aid donors

¹ State House of Uganda, “Subsistence farming a disaster for African families – Museveni”, 12 August 2019.

² “Early campaign or call of duty? A look at Museveni’s countrywide tours”, *Daily Monitor*, 22 February 2015.

³ “Museveni draining the treasury with his countrywide tours, says FDC”, *PML Daily*, 22 July 2019.

⁴ “Uganda police detain Bobi Wine, foil meeting with supporters”, *Associated Press*, 6 January 2020; “Bobi Wine to petition EC as police foil his 3rd consultation Meeting”, *Chimp Reports*, 8 January 2020; “EC, police to meet Bobi Wine over foiled consultations”, *The Independent*, 9 January 2020.

⁵ “Museveni is incapable of wiping out corruption in Uganda - Muntu”, *Nile Post*, 26 November 2019.

as part of their good governance agenda.⁶

When Museveni captured power in 1986, he promised that his victory was not a mere changing of the guard but rather a fundamental change in the politics of Uganda.⁷ Change was highly welcomed because it promised a new era in a hitherto tumultuous political environment characterized by abuse of public office and gross impunity. The seventh point on the Ten Point programme of Museveni and his rebel National Resistance Army (NRA) group focused on the elimination of corruption and the abuse of public office once and for all. Indeed, the Ugandan government has over the years established several bodies to fight corruption and the abuse of office. The Inspectorate of Government, the Office of the Auditor General and accountability committees in the National Assembly are some of the institutions set up to prevent financial malfeasance in the government. But as some have argued, “political elites have managed and manipulated anti-corruption institutions, particularly in situations where senior state officials have been accused of corrupt behaviour”.⁸ A year ago, the president created the State House Anti-Corruption Unit headed by Lt. Col. Edith Nakalema, whose office has recently claimed credit for launching dozens of investigations that led to the trials of some suspects.⁹ Yet even that unit, by the mere fact of being under the control of the presidency, operates under the suspicion that it is unfair in its activities and vulnerable to being used for political purposes. Nakalema’s unit is yet to indict a prominent suspect, a failing that leaves many Ugandans in doubt of its seriousness. For a president with immense executive power and overwhelming support in the National Assembly, Museveni would be expected to take action against the corrupt if that is what he really wanted. Under his watch, however, the nation has reeled from corruption scandal after scandal in the last 34 years as many Ugandans despair over a lack of opportunities and a widening income gap. Ugandan officials who have been involved in some of the most notorious scams, which range from buying junk military helicopters to stealing from the sick and the dead, have largely been able to walk scot-free.¹⁰

It has been said many times that corruption supports regime survival as rents and clientelism perpetuate Museveni’s incumbency. Ministers

⁶ FLANARY, K. and WATT, D., “The state of corruption: a case study of Uganda”, *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 20, n° 3, 2016, pp. 515-536.

⁷ “Rebel sworn in as Uganda president”, *The New York Times*, 30 January 1986.

⁸ TANGRI, R. and MWENDA, A. M., “Politics, donors and the ineffectiveness of anti-corruption institutions in Uganda”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 44, n° 1, 2006, pp. 101-124.

⁹ “Nakalema lauds drop in Uganda’s corruption rank”, *Uganda Radio Network*, 26 January 2020.

¹⁰ For a summary of the corruption scandals, see “What’s in Museveni’s new strategy to fight corruption?”, *Daily Monitor*, 10 December 2018; “Nine corruption scandals to look back at”, *The New Vision*, 11 November 2012; “Uganda’s big corruption scandals”, *The New Vision*, 3 December 2019.

implicated in corruption scandals in the past are closely connected and related to the president. Political, economic and military power thus continues to be concentrated in favour of groups from western and central Uganda.¹¹ Uganda's most corrupt officials are so powerful and prosecuting them would threaten regime survival. Uganda loses large amounts of money through illicit transactions alone, with one common method being trade misinvoicing according to a report by Global Financial Integrity.¹² Other estimates show that Uganda loses as much money as it collects, notably through dirty procurement deals and inflated bills for infrastructure construction such as the exorbitant cost of surfacing the recently completed expressway linking Kampala to Entebbe. A look at just one example in the lands department provides a snapshot of systemic failure and abuse of office by public officials. A commission of inquiry into land matters has just concluded after hearings that stretched to 30 months.¹³ The committee, which uncovered multiple instances of official corruption in public hearings that often shocked Ugandans, will finalize its report and present findings to the president, another opportunity for him to take action against suspects.

2.3. Labour unrest: the case of Makerere University and others

One of the major challenges faced by the Museveni government was persistent labour unrest as his cash-strapped government struggled to keep the government running. The most prominent strike was staged by academic staff at public universities, including Makerere. Professors and other academics called off their weeks-long strike at the start of the academic year after a 13 August meeting in which Museveni reportedly complained that his administration was being blackmailed by workers seeking a pay rise and warned that "strikes must stop". Professors were striking because of a delay in implementing a presidential directive to raise wages of a university professor to the equivalent of nearly US\$4,000 per month.¹⁴

At the time of writing, university professors were yet to receive the pay rise promised by Museveni, raising the prospect of another struggle when the next financial year kicks in. Since the government is preparing for an election, authorities are likely to have even less money to bump up the salaries of agitated workers, one reason for Museveni's frustration with the endless salary demands personally made to him as the head of state. If the events in the past year offer any indication, it appears Museveni will be more dismissive

¹¹ See LINDEMANN, S., "Just another change of guard? Broad-based politics and civil war in Museveni's Uganda", *African Affairs*, vol. 110, n° 440, 2011, pp. 387-416.

¹² Global Financial Integrity, "Illicit Financial Flows in 135 Developing Countries: 2008-2017", Washington, DC, March 2020.

¹³ "Bamugemereire land probe winds up after 30 months", *Daily Monitor*, 6 November 2019.

¹⁴ "Pay Shs 15 million per month to University Lecturers, Museveni directs", *Nile Post*, 17 December 2019.

of salary demands and could resort to cajoling and threats to keep public servants doing their jobs. Mostly because he wants to appear magnanimous, Museveni usually has the last word on who gets a pay rise within the public service and even holds meetings with trade unionists representing everyone from teachers to medical workers. For Museveni, this is how the government works. His involvement in salary negotiations that could be left to bureaucrats underscores the patronage networks that support his long rule.

But the government is increasingly short of funds as the revenue authority fails to meet its monthly targets and authorities spend heavily on infrastructure projects. The commissioner general of the Uganda Revenue Authority Doris Akol recently said that the revenue body was performing well but the problem was unrealistic revenue targets set by government.¹⁵ As economic analysts have warned, this could mean that government is not operating within its means. In recent months there have even been reports that the government is borrowing heavily to pay salaries. Government has presented a loan request of \$600 million from Stanbic Bank Uganda Limited to fund the 2019/2020 budget revenue shortfall.¹⁶ With Uganda embarking on the construction of roads in the regions where oil will be extracted as a national priority, the government is ramping up borrowing from Chinese banks. This has led to concerns that Uganda's public debt is almost reaching unsustainable levels and that the country's oil wealth is being mortgaged even before production starts.¹⁷ The secretary to the treasury, Keith Muhakanizi, has urged austerity and called on the government to live within its means, including by reducing the ballooning cost of public administration and borrowing strictly for development purposes.¹⁸

It should be noted, perhaps, that one reason for rising salary agitation among government workers could be the curious example set by Museveni, who is known to travel with brown envelopes containing cash gifts he regularly hands out to his followers. The money is part of the billions of shillings allocated to him annually under presidential charity, a sum that is greater than what the government spends annually on the main referral hospital at Mulago, as the opposition FDC party has pointed out.¹⁹ Sometimes Museveni writes large checks for community-based groups and grassroots savings organizations. He doesn't have to account for the money. Despite the apparent good intentions, the largesse carries the whiff of corruption and may also fuel the belief that the president has enough cash to go around.

¹⁵ "Govt set unrealistic revenue targets, says URA", *The New Vision*, 19 January 2020.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ "Debt: Has Uganda mortgaged its oil with increased borrowing?", *Daily Monitor*, 28 June 2016.

¹⁸ "Secretary to the Treasury warns government on debt", *Daily Monitor*, 21 August 2019

¹⁹ "'Museveni hiding behind security budget to drain treasury', says FDC", *PML Daily*, 21 May 2019.

3. CABINET RESHUFFLE: BUSINESS AS USUAL?

On 14 December 2019, Museveni reshuffled his Cabinet, dropping some and bringing in new faces.²⁰ Reshuffles in Uganda are a routine and normal exercise of authority vested constitutionally in the president. Nevertheless, their timing often raises questions. In the last reshuffle, for example, Ugandan media had speculated that Museveni's new changes were in line with his renewed energy to fight corruption. But that does not appear to have been the case, with the president clearly rewarding loyalty above all.

There are interesting newcomers in Museveni's Cabinet. One of them is Beatrice Anywar, once a leading light in the opposition as a member of the FDC, who was appointed the new state minister for environment. As a former shadow environment minister, Anywar led popular protests against the government's proposal to give away part of the Mabira rainforest to an investor who wanted to cut down trees and plant cane. These protests led to her arrest in 2007 and earned her the moniker "Mama Mabira", after the forest whose integrity she had helped protect. Often seen alongside then-FDC leader Kizza Besigye, Anywar also was once seen as a reliable member of the opposition. But she shocked her party when, ahead of the 2016 elections, she supported former Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi instead of Besigye.²¹ After losing the primaries for the 2016 parliamentary elections under the FDC ticket, Anywar campaigned as an independent candidate and won. In 2017, during efforts to remove age limits on the presidency, Anywar voted with supporters of the measure, signalling her break with the FDC. Her appointment to the Cabinet, therefore, was not surprising and may even have been expected. It was yet another example of all the options available to Museveni as he constantly tries to weaken the opposition or keep it divided. In part because of this, there is such mistrust within opposition ranks that even the slightest praise of Museveni by an opposition figure will leave that figure exposed to accusations of selling out.

Another notable newcomer to Museveni's Cabinet is Raphael Magyezi, the ruling party parliamentarian who became the public face of efforts in the national assembly to remove age limits on the presidency. Magyezi was made minister for local government in what was widely interpreted as a reward for his role in the paving the way for a possible Museveni life presidency. Although there were some other new faces brought into the Cabinet, such as former policewoman Judith Nabakooba as the surprising choice for minister in charge of ICT, there is no evidence that Museveni was rewarding competence or punishing corruption. The old faces that have been by his side were largely

²⁰ "Who are the new faces in Museveni's cabinet?", *Nile Post*, 15 December 2019.

²¹ "Anywar's journey from FDC firebrand to Museveni's minister", *The New Vision*, 15 December 2019.

untouched, including Foreign Affairs Minister Sam Kutesa, who has resisted calls to resign over bribery allegations while he chaired the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

4. PERSISTENT TENSIONS BETWEEN RWANDA AND UGANDA

As noted in the conclusion to the previous edition of the *Chronicles*²², tensions between Rwanda and Uganda persisted through 2019. Despite indications that the two countries might be reaching an agreement and relations would improve following the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the two countries' presidents, the year ended with unresolved issues, and there are no signs of improvement at this time.

In February the Rwandan government started blocking Ugandan trucks from entering Rwanda at one of the main border crossings in Katuna, at first under the guise of civil works inside Rwanda. The blockade was then extended to other border crossings, effectively shutting down cross-border trade. The border was briefly reopened in June but then closed again by Rwanda a few days later.²³ Furthermore, Rwanda's foreign minister at the time, Richard Sezibera, issued an advisory that warned Rwandan citizens against travelling to Uganda due to security concerns. This has had a significant impact on the lives of people on either side of the border as many cross frequently to purchase food, medicine, and even to attend school.²⁴ While politicians have been counselling patience, arguing that the matter between the two countries will be resolved sooner rather than later, the people in the border towns are reported to be suffering shortages of certain items, including food in some remote Rwandan villages that depended on imports from Uganda. After the initial border closures, people resorted to smuggling goods across nearby bridges, but the Rwandan government destroyed those to prevent the smuggling operations from continuing.²⁵ The ongoing border closure has prompted Uganda to accuse Rwanda of effectively imposing a trade embargo on bilateral trade.²⁶

To prevent the conflict from escalating, and to normalize relations between the two states, Angolan President Joao Lourenco and Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi, brokered an agreement between presidents Kagame and Museveni

²² ASHABA, I. and TAODZERA, S., "Uganda", in: REYNTJENS, F. (Ed.), *Political Chronicles of the African Great Lakes Region 2018*, Antwerp, UPA, 2019, pp. 91-117.

²³ "Presidents of Rwanda and Uganda sign pact to ease tensions", *AlJazeera*, 21 August 2019.

²⁴ "How Kagame and Museveni became the best of frenemies", *The Africa Report*, 4 October 2019,

²⁵ ASHABA, I. and BAREEBE, G., "Closed borders and fighting words: Rwanda and Uganda's deepening rift", *African Arguments*, 12 March 2019; "Katuna border blockade persists despite Museveni, Kagame meeting", *Daily Monitor*, 25 October 2019.

²⁶ "Uganda accuses Rwanda of imposing trade embargo", *Daily Monitor*, 14 March 2019.

which resulted in the signing of the Luanda Memorandum of Understanding at the Angola Quadripartite Summit on August 21.²⁷ Officials from both governments met in Kigali in September again to discuss the implementation of the agreement. While the next meeting was scheduled for just a month later in Kampala, it was postponed on two occasions and did not take place until mid-December in Entebbe. In addition, just a day after the Luanda pact, the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) instructed Internet Service Providers to block online access to six Rwandan press websites. The UCC argued that this was in the interest of national security. Rwanda retaliated by blocking some Ugandan media sites.²⁸ While the media stand-off only lasted a few days, it illustrated the current 'tit-for-tat' mindset that seems to have permeated the conflict.

Despite hopes that the bilateral meetings would yield a plan for moving past the current animosity, after seven hours of negotiations at the most recent meeting in Entebbe in December, the parties emerged without a joint statement, referring the matter to the heads of state. One of two issues which remain at the centre of the disagreement for Rwanda is the allegation of arbitrary arrests of Rwandans and their detention without trial in Uganda, as well as Uganda's alleged support of Rwandan anti-government forces, specifically the Rwanda National Congress (RNC) and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR).²⁹ Uganda in turn suspects Rwanda of plotting high-level assassinations.³⁰ Ugandan authorities have also accused Rwanda of trying to infiltrate its security agencies.

In a March 10 letter from Museveni to Kagame that was published in the government-controlled press, Uganda's president acknowledged meeting "by accident" with a woman who represented the RNC opposition group and had come to talk about "the bad things that were happening in Rwanda". Museveni said in the letter that he explained to the woman, whose name was given as Mukankusi, that "what was happening in Rwanda is an internal matter of Rwanda". That letter also contained a denial Uganda was actively supporting the RNC and a firm refusal to shutter the Uganda-based businesses of Kagame critic Tribert Rujugiro. Interestingly, Museveni ended the letter by raising his own issue with Rwanda, saying it was "wrong for Rwanda agents to try to operate behind the government of Uganda"³¹.

Another ongoing issue which was seen aggravating relations between Rwanda and Uganda is the firing and arrest of the former Inspector General

²⁷ "Presidents of Rwanda and Uganda sign pact to ease tensions", *AlJazeera*, 21 August 2019.

²⁸ "Ugandan websites blocked in Rwanda as 'war' sucks in media houses", *The Observer*, 23 August 2019

²⁹ "Rwanda accuses Uganda of supporting rebels", *Reuters*, 5 March 2019.

³⁰ "Presidents of Rwanda and Uganda sign pact to ease tensions", *AlJazeera*, 21 August 2019.

³¹ "Museveni writes Kagame", *The New Vision*, 19 March 2019.

of Police Gen. Kale Kayihura.³² While he is currently out on bail, he continues to be under investigation by the military court for allegations of illegally repatriating Rwandan refugees.³³ In the meantime, the US Department of the Treasury announced in September that it was sanctioning Kayihura for his role in serious human rights abuses and corruption.³⁴ Kayihura denied the allegations³⁵ and Museveni has spoken out against the US sanctions, arguing that they should not be a cause of excitement for the opposition, and that all allegations against Kayihura will be handled within Uganda, not internationally.³⁶

There have been various smaller escalations between the two states primarily related to the border closure and suspicions of smuggling inside Rwandan territory. In May two Rwandan soldiers entered Ugandan territory in the southwestern district of Rukiga in pursuit of a suspected smuggler and shot and killed two people: a Rwandan suspected of smuggling when he resisted arrest and a Ugandan citizen who attempted to help. The Ugandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the violation of its territory and the brutal attack against unarmed civilians.³⁷ In November, in turn, the killing of two Ugandan nationals by the Rwandan police made national and international headlines, just days after Kagame announced that Ugandans were welcome in Rwanda.³⁸

As various incidents throughout the year created peaks and lulls in the ongoing spat between the two neighbours, there has been no real sign of de-escalation. The language between the heads of state and government representatives on both sides is loaded with cultural references to dignity, and references to historical circumstances which seem only to add to the increase in tensions. For example, Kagame noted in an interview in March 2019 that Uganda has been undermining Rwanda since 1998, referencing the 1998 war in the DRC and likely specifically recalling a clash between Rwandan and Ugandan soldiers in the eastern Congolese city of Kisangani in 1999-2000 after which Museveni sought compensation from Rwanda for the deaths of Ugandan troops.³⁹ Without naming each other, Museveni and Kagame have

³² ASHABA, I. and TAODZERA, S., "Uganda", *op. cit.*

³³ "U.S. sanctions former Uganda police boss for rights violations", *Reuters*, 13 September 2019.

³⁴ Press Release "Treasury Sanctions Former Ugandan Inspector General of Police for Role in Serious Human Rights Abuse and Corruption", 13 September 2019 (<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm775>).

³⁵ "Uganda's ex-police chief Kayihura slams US over sanctions", *The East African*, 15 September 2019.

³⁶ "Museveni speaks out on Kayihura USA sanctions", *The New Vision*, 22 September 2019.

³⁷ "Ugandan protests Rwanda military incursion on its territory", *Reuters*, 25 May 2019.

³⁸ "2 Ugandans shot dead by Rwandan army after Kagame says 'Ugandans are welcome'", *Softpower*, 12 November 2019.

³⁹ NANTULYA, P., *Escalating tensions between Uganda and Rwanda raise fear of war*, Spotlight, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, July 2019.

engaged in a war of words, with Kagame sending a thinly veiled message during a speech at a retreat for national leaders that “no one can bring me to my knees”, and Museveni responding in his own speech during the opening of a manufacturing plant: “Once we mobilise, you can’t survive”.⁴⁰

While Museveni has been tight-lipped when it comes to responding to queries from the press about the Rwandan situation, at the end of December he sent Ambassador Adonia Ayebare, Uganda’s permanent representative to the United Nations, as an envoy to Kigali with a special message to Kagame. The involvement of an envoy respected in Kigali highlighted the need for semi-informal efforts to back up the official diplomatic channels considering the deep mistrust and suspicion between Kagame and Museveni. Initial reports from the meeting were positive, and Museveni’s end-of-year message posted on Twitter included a commitment that Uganda would “...do its share of the normalization of the relations between our two countries”.⁴¹ Kagame, however, appeared uncompromising in his end-of-year interviews, maintaining that the two issues that have stalled the talks in the past remain on the table and have yet to be resolved. Although at the start of 2020 the Ugandan General Court Martial released seven Rwandans after withdrawing the charges for which they had been jailed in what the government said was a political move to help ease tensions, Rwanda called for more of its nationals to be released.⁴² This signals that détente may still be far off.

While the conflict between the two countries may not seem particularly volatile, it is affecting an increasing number of people, and is a thorn in Museveni’s side as he lays the groundwork to hold on to power for another term. Allowing his one-time friend and supporter in the liberation struggle Kagame to undermine him regionally is not something the president, whose popularity is falling, can turn a blind eye to. Between these regional struggles and the internal challenges of a rising opposition figure in Bobi Wine, Museveni will have to decide which fight to focus on.

5. BOBI WINE: THE POPULAR FACE OF OPPOSITION IN UGANDA

As noted in last year’s chronicle⁴³, singer and parliamentarian Robert Kyagulanyi, who is popularly known by his stage name Bobi Wine, has become

⁴⁰ “How Kagame and Museveni became the best of frenemies”, *The Africa Report*, 4 October 2019.

⁴¹ “Museveni breaks silence on Rwanda”, *The Independent*, 1 January 2020; Yoweri Museveni on Twitter, 31 December 2019 (<https://twitter.com/KagutaMuseveni/status/1212109346320072704>).

⁴² New Vision Uganda, Twitter, January 7, 2020 @ 12:14 AM <https://twitter.com/newvisionwire/status/1214460403650052096>; “Release other Rwandans in Uganda as well, Minister Nduhungirehe says”, *The New Times*, 8 January 2020.

⁴³ ASHABA, I. and TAODZERA, S., *op. cit.*

increasingly popular both at home and abroad as the energetic new face of the political opposition. Elected to represent a constituency just outside Kampala in 2017, he has since gained popularity by increasingly speaking out against what he sees as the excesses of the Museveni regime through his music and by leading protests such as the march in Kampala in 2018 against a tax targeting social media users. Kyagulanyi continues to attract intense media attention, a source of dilemma for a government that wants to limit the singer's public activities while also not paying him too much attention.

The year 2019 has been significant for Kyagulanyi, who won awards and citations that boosted his profile outside Uganda. Internationally, he was named male politician of the year by the Young African Leaders Summit, appeared on the Time magazine's list of the "100 Next" influential people, and made the Bloomberg 50 as one of the people who defined 2019. At home in Uganda, he has also made headlines. Most importantly, in July he announced his intention to run for president in the 2021 election even as he battled a range of criminal charges against him, primarily stemming from an incident in Arua in 2018 in which the president's convoy was attacked with stones.⁴⁴ The charges against Kyagulanyi include treason, with a more recent addition of a charge of the intent to "alarm, annoy or ridicule" the president⁴⁵, and another charge of alleged disobedience of statutory authority relating to his street march against the tax targeting social media users. Should he be convicted of any of these crimes, he would be ineligible to run for president.⁴⁶

Kyagulanyi, who was 4 years old when Museveni became president, belongs to a generation that has not experienced a Uganda with a government led by someone else. He has a strong following, with his "People Power" movement made up primarily of young people who like him are ready to see a change in leadership. In July 2019 he announced his intention to enter the presidential race, in a bid to create a "society which works for everyone"⁴⁷, calling for unity and the empowerment of all Ugandans.

Some analysts think that the announcement came too early, stretching Kyagulanyi financially and giving Museveni plenty of time to turn the opposition against him and poke holes in his campaign.⁴⁸ Yet announcing his ambitions to run for president has also meant that Museveni and the security apparatus have to tread lightly in terms of how they respond to Kyagulanyi due to his status as a formal opposition figure in the upcoming election. Kyagulanyi is no longer a private citizen, but a public figure who has officially declared his intention to run for president, and thus cannot be ignored or removed as

⁴⁴ Idem.

⁴⁵ "Bobi Wine charged with 'annoying' Uganda's Museveni", *BBC News*, 6 August 2019.

⁴⁶ "Singer Bobi Wine says he will run for Uganda president in 2021", *Al Jazeera*, 15 July 2019.

⁴⁷ "Ugandan pop star-turned-politician says he's running for president", *CNN*, 24 July 2019.

⁴⁸ "Inside Museveni's war on the ghetto", *The Observer*, 6 November 2019.

easily as a private citizen might be. As such, it seems to have been a calculated risk on the part of Kyagulanyi's team.

For example, according to the Presidential Elections Act,⁴⁹ Kyagulanyi is allowed to travel across the country for the purpose of organizing consultative meetings with the people. While the government can, and has relatively easily been able to cancel all of his concerts, it will be much harder to justify cancelling every one of the consultative meetings during his campaign. He and his team have generally erred on the side of being open and transparent in terms of their plans and preparations, purposefully posting all details of upcoming meetings (including photos of receipts for booking venues), or other plans related to the campaign on their official Facebook page. Nevertheless, the first consultation planned for early January 2020 did not take place as planned after police swooped in and scuppered the event. The police arrested Kyagulanyi and fired tear gas and live bullets into the crowd, blocking people from accessing the venue.⁵⁰ According to multiple press reports, the police cited the Public Order Management Act, a lack of a sufficient number of toilets, and the fact that the meeting could not be held in an open space but needed to be in an enclosed venue.⁵¹ It remains to be seen if the other planned consultative meetings will be able to meet all the requirements and run as planned. However, considering that the election is nearing, it will be difficult for the government to justify blocking all of Kyagulanyi's consultative meetings.

Kyagulanyi's music concerts, which he says he stages in order to be able to earn a living, have effectively been banned by the regime. Museveni has called Kyagulanyi an "enemy of progress," accusing him in a BBC interview of going to the US to convince authorities there and the private sector to stop investing in Uganda.⁵² In justifying the actions taken against Kyagulanyi by the government, Museveni argued that Kyagulanyi's alleged actions were tantamount to a declaration of war, and that an enemy of progress in Uganda should not be able to take advantage of it.⁵³ As such, in an effort to limit Kyagulanyi's reach as much as possible, the government has implemented extreme measures. It has made it impossible for him to perform, blocking over 150 of his concerts,⁵⁴ citing various reasons from the Public Order Management Act to insufficient security and unmet health service precautions, as well as frequently placing Kyagulanyi under house arrest.⁵⁵ Associates of Kyagulanyi

⁴⁹ The Presidential Elections Act (Amendment) 2015.

⁵⁰ "Uganda police arrest Bobi Wine, stop opposition meeting", *Daily Nation*, 6 January 2020.

⁵¹ "Bobi Wine ahead of his first consultative meeting", *The Observer*, 6 January 2020.

⁵² "Uganda's president tells us: 'Bobi Wine is an enemy of progress'", *BBC*, 18 October 2019.

⁵³ *Idem*.

⁵⁴ "Uganda Pop-Star Bobi Wine Says Opposition Seeks Single Candidate", *Bloomberg*, 12 December 2019.

⁵⁵ "'My home is under siege', Ugandan opposition politician Bobi Wine says", *CNN*, 23 April

also have been targeted and have suffered arrests and detentions. In August a musician who was a friend and supporter of Kyagulanyi's movement, Michael Kalinda, popularly known as Ziggy Wine, was allegedly abducted, tortured, and later died from his wounds. The victim's family suspects that the abduction was state sponsored⁵⁶, even though the police insist they have evidence he was involved in a motorcycle accident.

In September the government outlawed the signature "People Power" red beret, designating it as an item of military clothing and stating that any member of the public found in possession of it risks life in prison. Kyagulanyi responded that while the red beret was a "symbol of resistance"⁵⁷, his movement was about "the desire for change. 'People Power' is more than a red beret, we are bigger than our symbol".⁵⁸ Kyagulanyi sees his movement as part of the "wind of change" that is blowing across the continent where opposition leaders are rising against aging dictators accused of restricting the constitutional freedoms of the people.⁵⁹

Kyagulanyi has continued to capitalize on his popularity as a pop star to deliver his message through his music, which he has termed "edutainment". Despite concert cancellations and radio bans, his music is widely shared on YouTube, Facebook and WhatsApp. Most of his recent songs are on topics which draw attention to brutalities perpetrated by the regime and urge unity. In April, after one of his concerts was cancelled and Kyagulanyi was placed under house arrest, he composed a new song entitled "Afande" (Swahili for officer) with colleagues at his home. The song's lyrics speak about how he is fighting to better the lives of everyone, including those of "our brothers and sisters in uniform".⁶⁰ According to him, despite the harsh treatment he has received from the police and other security forces in Uganda, he does not consider himself an enemy of the military. The lyrics include lines such as "before you became a soldier/police officer, you were an ordinary citizen" and "I am not fighting you, I am fighting for you".⁶¹ Uganda's foot soldiers are among the worst paid and many are said to live in poverty, the reason Kyagulanyi repeatedly suggests that the soldiers, too, have suffered under Museveni's long rule and should wish to see change.

2019; "Popstar Bobi Wine escapes house arrest in daring motorbike stunt", *CNN*, 9 October 2019.

⁵⁶ "Bobi Wine charged with 'annoying' Uganda's Museveni", *BBC News*, 6 August 2019.

⁵⁷ "'My home is under siege', Ugandan opposition politician Bobi Wine says", *CNN*, 23 April 2019.

⁵⁸ LEVER, C., "Politics and fashion: the rise of the red beret", *The Conversation*, 13 December 2019.

⁵⁹ "Bobi Wine: The people of Uganda will rise up if Museveni rigs the vote", *Talk to Al Jazeera*, 30 November 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tUqhQf4kdI>.

⁶⁰ "Bobi Wine vs. Uganda's 'Dictator': It's dangerous to sit down and resign to fate", *NPR*, 16 November 2019.

⁶¹ Robert Kyagulanyi, Twitter, April 25 2019, 9:46AM.

The video accompanying the song “Afande” shows clips from various instances of police brutality against opposition politicians, activists, and citizens. Interestingly, the song is multilingual, with verses in English, Luganda, Swahili, Lusoga, and Luo, highlighting Kyagulanyi’s attempts to appeal to a wide section of Ugandans as he tries to present himself as a national figure and not the leader of a small group of disadvantaged people in urban slums. Swahili is often seen as the language of the security forces, and so the use of Swahili for the song was symbolic for this very reason.⁶² The inclusion of Luo, the mother tongue of people from northern Uganda, also was well received as Ugandans in that part of the country have historically felt left behind in national politics in the decades since Museveni took power. Considering Kyagulanyi’s message of uniting Ugandans, the use of multiple languages in the song was a reminder of how powerful and relevant such inclusion can be. The song was almost immediately banned from Ugandan radio, but was circulated via WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Another song by Kyagulanyi, entitled “Fiscal Policy”, outlines what seem to be his fiscal plans for the country. In March Kyagulanyi appeared on a televised political talk show *On the Spot* on NTV Uganda. After being asked about his plans for fiscal policy, he responded that he would abolish the tax levied on social media and fight against impunity. Due to the simplistic response and a seeming lack of understanding demonstrated by Kyagulanyi of what fiscal policy entails, the episode was embarrassing for the presidential hopeful. He was almost immediately lampooned, especially on social media.⁶³ In response Kyagulanyi composed a new song called “Fiscal Policy”, in which he outlines what he calls simple policy ideas he would implement in the event he were elected, including abolishing oppressive taxes, reducing prices, and raising salaries.⁶⁴ Despite Kyagulanyi’s best efforts, many Ugandans, including those who are sympathetic to his movement, say Kyagulanyi will have to do more to convince voters of his intellectual suitability as a presidential hopeful who until recently was best known as a cannabis-loving entertainer before he was catapulted to national fame as a political activist dangerous to the regime.

Kyagulanyi’s rise in popularity and plans as a presidential hopeful are happening amid significant changes within the opposition bloc as a whole. While Kyagulanyi has captured international interest as an intriguing new face of the opposition, garnering media attention that other contenders can only dream of, there are signs of intrigue and mistrust within the opposition, and a new political party has emerged. Despite what seems to be a renewed vigour among some opposition leaders to unite and offer a single presidential

⁶² ANONYMOUS, “Singing truth to Power”, *Africa is a Country*, 8 May 2019.

⁶³ “Bobi: I don’t have to know how to govern”, *The Observer*, 13 March 2019.

⁶⁴ “In wake of criticism, Bobi Wine composes new song on his fiscal policy”, *Softpower*, 14 March 2019.

candidate for the 2021 election, there continue to be substantial divisions within the bloc.

6. THE REST OF OPPOSITION: IS KIZZA BESIGYE STILL RELEVANT?

The leadership of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), including party leader Patrick Oboi Amuriat and ex-leader Kizza Besigye, has become increasingly convinced that the only way to cause political change is to put significant pressure on Museveni through civil disobedience and protests. They believe that only under such conditions can Museveni be forced to consider retiring. As such, after declaring 2019 as the year of action⁶⁵, Besigye has increasingly called on Ugandans to rise up against Museveni, believing that he cannot be defeated by elections alone.⁶⁶ This has created a rift between the FDC and the other opposition parties, which are prioritizing preparing for elections and mobilizing voters to register.⁶⁷ Even within the FDC there has long been disagreement about the best course of action.

Besigye continues to lead his “People’s Government”, which he instituted as a shadow movement against the government following the 2016 polls that he insists he won. In October Besigye launched a campaign he dubbed “Twerwaneko”, (Let’s defend ourselves in Luganda). Besigye said the campaign was inspired by Article 3 of Uganda’s Constitution which says under clause 4 that the people shall have the right and duty at all times to defend the Constitution, resist anyone who seeks to overthrow it, and do everything in their power to restore it if it has been suspended, overthrown, abrogated or amended contrary to its provisions. Furthermore, clause 5 states that a person or group that acts in defence of the constitution commits no offence. According to Besigye, the government and its security agencies have failed to protect the country’s citizens from injustice, crimes, and inequality, and it is now time for Ugandans to take matters into their own hands as they defend themselves.

As such, Besigye and members of his “People’s Government” have also launched a petition to the International Criminal Court that seeks to have Museveni and some senior military officials tried for alleged crimes against humanity. According to one of Besigye’s aides, they had gathered over 850,000 signatures in November, and by the end of 2019 Besigye stated that they had surpassed the two million signatures required by the ICC to submit the petition. He noted that they continue to collect signatures clandestinely

⁶⁵ “Besigye declares 2019 ‘year of action’”, *The Observer*, 21 December 2018.

⁶⁶ NEIMAN, S., “‘Sudan gives us confidence’: What is next for Uganda’s opposition?”, *African Arguments*, 9 May 2019.

⁶⁷ “Besigye’s rough road ahead”, *Daily Monitor*, 27 October 2019.

as the government tries to block them online.⁶⁸ Despite official protests by the government that the entire operation is a farce, police officers have been deployed to search FDC offices and have managed to remove some of the files with signatures. It is yet to be determined whether the petition will in fact be filed and if the ICC would find it compelling enough to act on it. In all these activities Besigye is seen displaying a pragmatism necessary for him to remain a credible player on the political scene in the time of Kyagulanyi, as many in the opposition are hostile to the idea of Besigye running again as a presidential candidate after four failed attempts. Besigye, the critics charge, is no better than Museveni if he shows the need to be on the ballot even as he complains that the process is rigged. At the same time, Besigye has over the years cemented his status as Museveni's most serious opponent and it is likely still true that any efforts to organize a solid electoral challenge to the regime are futile without his input.

In the meantime, a new opposition party has officially joined the fray after the defection from the FDC of retired Maj. Gen. Mugisha Muntu, a former army commander, along with several other FDC members in 2018. In May 2019, Muntu launched his new Alliance for National Transformation (ANT) party in an event that was attended by opposition figures such as Norbert Mao of the Democratic Party (DP), Ken Lukyamuzi of the Conservative Party, Jimmy Akena of the Uganda People's Congress (UPC), as well as Kyagulanyi and many other parliamentarians. While the leadership of the FDC and the NRM was invited, neither sent representatives to the ceremony. According to Muntu, one of the goals of the ANT is to empower Ugandans who have felt hopeless and are afraid of joining politics. As such, one of the immediate tasks the party will be undertaking is a nationwide mobilisation and recruitment campaign. Its policy agenda will focus on the removal of executive powers from the presidency and the strengthening of state institutions, as well as radical changes to the education and health sector, which are in dire need of improvements.⁶⁹

Other opposition parties are also preparing for the upcoming election year, with the DP managing to unite by signing a memorandum of understanding with the Social Democratic Party, the People's Development Party, and Truth for Justice. This has brought the four parties into one political bloc under the DP.⁷⁰ They have also recruited Joseph Mayanja, popularly known as Jose Chameleone, a musician who has in the past promoted Museveni and was a lead singer in his campaign theme song in the previous election. As Kampala's

⁶⁸ "Besigye's ICC signatures reach 870,000 as security blocks online petition", *PML Daily*, 30 November 2019.

⁶⁹ "Who is who in Gen Muntu's Alliance for National Transformation", *Daily Monitor*, 23 May 2019.

⁷⁰ "Highs, lows of Uganda's political scene", *New Vision*, 31 December 2019 ; "Opposition Parties Join DP to Form New Political Bloc", *Softpower*, 12 January 2019.

DP mayoral candidate for 2021, he is now officially part of the DP, although his presence has yet to be felt, and it is unclear whether his musical popularity will translate into votes for the DP.⁷¹

All opposition parties are dealing with difficulties in organizing conferences and meetings ahead of elections, with the police frequently citing alleged violations of the Public Order Management Act in blocking any efforts to hold political events. In addition to Kyagulanyi's concerts and meetings blocked by the police, a rally organized by Besigye in Lira was blocked by the police, who shot live bullets and fired tear gas into the crowds to disperse them.⁷² In September the police blocked an FDC rally in Mbale, arresting party leader Amuriat, and in November Besigye was once again arrested on his way to a press conference in Kampala.⁷³

Despite differing attitudes toward preparations for the elections, all parties and opposition candidates have been concerned about the very real possibility of the process being rigged. While Besigye has dismissed the elections and called for protests, Kyagulanyi has acknowledged that election rigging is likely and called for a revolution, saying that the population will have to rise up in response to such underhand tactics, while also noting that the struggle against the regime should be conducted by non-violent means.⁷⁴ There appear to be two issues opposition leaders agree on: that they should unite, because there is strength in unity, and that the elections will likely be rigged. They have not been able to agree, however, on how to deal with either of these two issues.

As such, the question on everyone's mind seems to be whether the opposition can unite for the 2021 polls. The feeling is that without such unity, there is no chance of defeating Museveni, who still enjoys a large following in some rural parts of the country, especially in the west. All opposition leaders have been publicly confirming the need for unity. Despite announcements from the DP that Mao will be a candidate in the election⁷⁵, and the fact that Besigye will likely run as well, there have been various references made to finding a single presidential candidate for the entire opposition bloc. According to Kyagulanyi, his group is in advance talks with opposition parties to agree on such a candidate, but there has been no agreement yet as to who it should be.

⁷¹ "How far can Uganda musicians drive push for political change?", *The East African*, 2 August 2019.

⁷² "Chaos as police block Besigye's rally in Lira", *PML*, 27 April 2019.

⁷³ "Besigye arrested as tear gas, bullets rock Kireka for hours", *The Observer*, 4 November 2019; HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, "World Report 2020: Uganda Events of 2019", January 2020.

⁷⁴ MUTYABA, M., "To beat or not to beat: Museveni's big Bobi Wine problem", *African Arguments*, 31 October 2019.

⁷⁵ "Mao rejects Museveni links, declares 2021 State House bid", *The Observer*, 20 March 2019.

Kyagulanyi hopes it will be him, calling for a generational change with youth on his side.⁷⁶

The FDC's leaning toward civil disobedience and protest, and away from a focus on elections, has been cited by the leaders of the other opposition parties and movements as the reason why they believe Besigye may not be the best person to be put forward as the single candidate representing the opposition.⁷⁷ The decision will not be a simple one. The opposition parties are deeply divided, as the bitter defection of ANT from FDC showed, and Besigye and Kyagulanyi have found it hard to agree on how to approach the upcoming polls even though they issued a joint statement affirming support for each other.⁷⁸

Because Kyagulanyi's "People Power" is not a party but an amoebic movement, he is free to work with whichever party he prefers. It might also mean that if he is chosen as the sole candidate for the opposition, no party leader would feel overlooked. This could work in his favour, but it also means that he does not have the support framework that a party might provide. What's more, he lacks the experience the opposition party leaders have.

7. MUSEVENI AND THE NRM: PREPARATIONS FOR 2021

Between the ongoing tensions with Rwanda and the upcoming election, Museveni has had a busy year. Early in 2019, the commander of Uganda's elite presidential guard at the time, Maj. Gen. Don Nabasa, suggested that there are external forces seeking to overthrow the president. He claimed that young people are easily influenced, potentially alluding to Kyagulanyi's impact, while also saying that people recently deported, such as the MTN executive from Rwanda, might have been among the people who attempted to undermine the president, possibly putting further strain on relations between Uganda and Rwanda.⁷⁹

In February the supreme organ of the NRM, the Central Executive Committee, met for a five-day retreat at the Chobe Safari Lodge and endorsed President Yoweri Museveni as the ruling party's sole candidate for the 2021 election, saying he is the only leader who can lead both party and state "as we eliminate the bottlenecks to transformation".⁸⁰ Following an endorsement by

⁷⁶ "Uganda pop-star Bobi Wine says opposition seeks single candidate", *Bloomberg*, 12 December 2019; "Besigye, Bobi Wine fail to plot against Museveni", *The Observer*, 13 November 2019; "Uganda's Bobi Wine confirms intention to run for president", *Deutsche Welle*, 10 April 2019.

⁷⁷ "Besigye's rough road ahead", *Daily Monitor*, 27 October 2019; "2021 polls: Besigye backs single opposition candidate", *Daily Monitor*, 31 December 2019.

⁷⁸ "Besigye, Bobi Wine join force to oust Museveni", *The Independent*, 8 May 2019.

⁷⁹ "External forces plot to topple Museveni, says presidential guards' boss", *The East African*, 12 February 2019.

⁸⁰ "CEC endorses Museveni as sole NRM candidate for 2021", *The Independent*, 20 February

NRM parliamentarians in March, Museveni accepted the candidature, saying that he was “still very able,” that he happens to be “among the most conversant with this journey”, and that he would be happy to serve.⁸¹ This would be the sixth term for the 75-year-old who still maintains a gruelling schedule as he travels extensively across the country and makes frequent trips abroad. In the eyes of his supporters he still looks fit, although in recent pictures Museveni has looked fatigued after undergoing what he says was a deliberate dieting regime.

In a country where 80 percent of the population is under the age of 35, reaching younger people in the election is critical. Having recognized the need to urgently connect with this demographic group in preparation for 2021, Museveni has been working to counteract the Bobi Wine effect by engaging with musicians of his own and significantly increasing his presence on social media. In October Museveni appointed musicians Catherine Kusasira and Mark Bugembe, a singer best known as Buchaman, as special presidential envoys in charge of Kampala and ghetto affairs respectively. Kusasira started her duties by meeting with people in the informal sector, including passenger motorcycle drivers and market vendors. She even called on Kyagulanyi to work with her to economically empower people in ghetto areas.⁸²

Museveni has also met with other musicians, including such popular names as Bebe Cool and Eddy Kenzo, offering some of them his prized cattle as gifts in his quest to have them mobilise support for him in the upcoming election.⁸³ Furthermore, the president, who has himself recorded a few songs in past elections, officially registered with the Uganda Music Association as a musician in October⁸⁴, and is working on an album for his re-election campaign. This all suggests Museveni is taking the threat from Kyagulanyi seriously.

The appointment of the new advisors has drawn mixed reactions from ruling party leaders, particularly those in Kampala who feel that their contributions are being overlooked and that the president is showing a lack of confidence in their ability to perform their functions.⁸⁵ Government officials have argued that the effectiveness of institutions is being undermined, with the role and responsibilities of the advisors unclear. Tensions between party

2019.

⁸¹ “74 year-old Museveni accepts proposal to run for sixth term”, *The Observer*, 19 March 2019.

⁸² “Will Museveni’s new friends win him Kampala?”, *The New Vision*, 5 November 2019.

⁸³ “President Yoweri Museveni gives musicians 30 cows each”, *SDE*, December 2019.

⁸⁴ “President Yoweri Museveni fires first shot at Bobi Wine, registers as a musician”, *SDE*, November 2019 ; “Museveni joins Uganda Musicians Association, set to launch own album”, *PML Daily*, 6 October 2019..

⁸⁵ “Museveni’s 20-year battle to win Kampala”, *Daily Monitor*, 18 November 2019; “Will Museveni’s new friends win him Kampala?”, *The New Vision*, 5 November 2019.

officials and the musicians, especially Kusasira, have flared, with Museveni compelled to hold a meeting with feuding NRM leaders in November to defuse the situation.⁸⁶ Since taking on the advisory position, Kusasira has faced a backlash, and was once chased off stage with stones and bottles being thrown at her. In an interview she recently indicated that she regrets having accepted the job.⁸⁷

8. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Throughout 2019 the Ugandan government has increasingly curtailed freedom of speech in various ways, despite this freedom being guaranteed in the Constitution. In April the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) directed 13 media organizations to suspend 39 journalists and submit all news and live-streamed content aired the day before, removing dozens of senior journalists from their roles over coverage of Kyagulanyi's arrest as he travelled to host an Easter concert at his privately owned beach resort.⁸⁸ The UCC claimed that the media incited the public, misrepresented information, and gave undue prominence to one individual.⁸⁹ In that same month, three radio stations were switched off in the districts of Kabale, Jinja, and Mubende during interviews with Besigye.⁹⁰

Around the same time authorities announced a new set of conditions to members of the Uganda Music Promoters and Venue Owners Network that had to be met if they wanted to continue pursuing their music careers and business, including the prohibition of songs which include political content, as they are deemed to be harmful.⁹¹ The government is also working on new legislation requiring musicians to not only register but also provide lyrics of all songs for approval by the government before studio recording.⁹² Similarly, the government introduced regulations requiring people to register blogs and websites. They are required to pay for a licence and are monitored under the Computer Misuse Act for cyber harassment and offensive communication. Punishments include fines and up to five years in jail.⁹³ In August one of the first high-profile arrests was made for cyber harassment under the Computer

⁸⁶ "Museveni holds crisis meeting over Kusasira, NRM leader's fights", *Daily Monitor*, 13 November 2019.

⁸⁷ "Kusasira: I regret Museveni's job", *The Observer*, 1 January 2020.

⁸⁸ "Uganda media in court after Bobi Wine coverage", *Al Jazeera*, 16 May 2019; "Uganda Censors Target 39 for Reporting on Bobi Wine", *VOA*, 2 May 2019.

⁸⁹ HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, "Uganda's continued attempts to gag the media", 2 May 2019.

⁹⁰ HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, "World Report 2020: Uganda Events of 2019", January 2020.

⁹¹ "President should not pick music for Ugandans", *The Observer*, 24 April 2019.

⁹² "Uganda plans restrictions on artists", *Reuters*, 21 January 2019.

⁹³ "'This is intended to create fear': Ugandans fear new online laws designed to stifle dissent", *The Independent*, 24 November 2019.

Misuse Act, with Stella Nyanzi, the academic and activist who criticized the president in a poem on Facebook, sentenced to 18 months in prison.⁹⁴

The steps being taken by the government aimed at curbing freedom of expression seem to be on the rise with the upcoming election year. This is a concerning trend given that opposition to the government is also growing in a country where many people hope that a change of government can lead to better opportunities for them. There is always the danger that overzealousness on the part of the regime's instruments of coercion can spark dramatic and violent encounters as the people try to force a reckoning.

9. CONCLUSION

As long as relations between Uganda and Rwanda remain strained, Museveni will continue to have a difficult time in power. In his Rwandan counterpart Museveni faces a formidable, younger opponent who is just as skilled in the mechanics of violence. For the opposition in Uganda, Museveni's feud with Kagame might be an opportunity as well as a liability. An opportunity because it keeps Museveni on his toes and perhaps unable to focus so much on his domestic threats. A liability because it could have the effect of making the Kampala regime even more inclined towards violence as it suspects some of its opponents at home of being in cahoots with Kigali. In September there were reports in the Ugandan press of a secret meeting in the US between Kagame and Besigye, an event Besigye said never happened.⁹⁵ In an interview with the Daily Monitor, Besigye noted that rumours of his meeting with Kagame provide "covering fire" but insisted he could legitimately meet any regional leader if he wanted.⁹⁶ Whatever the truth, the allegation of a secret meeting between Besigye and Kagame is an example of how relations between Rwanda and Uganda, for better or worse, will condition local politics for months, perhaps years, to come.

Internally, as Uganda heads toward elections in 2021, it seems the government is working to tighten its grip on all forms of expression, while limiting opposition consultations and rallies. Meanwhile, Museveni is spending significant time touring the country, both under the guise of the aforementioned prosperity tours and a six-day trek in January 2020 through

⁹⁴ HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, "World Report 2020: Uganda Events of 2019", January 2020; ASHABA, I. and TAODZERA, S. *op. cit.*; "Bobi Wine charged with 'annoying' Uganda's Museveni", *BBC News*, 6 August 2019.

⁹⁵ "What was the agenda? Besigye, Kagame hold private meeting in US", *PML Daily*, 29 September 2019; "Dr Kizza Besigye holds secret meeting with Rwandan president Kagame in America", *Kampala Post*, 26 September 2019.

⁹⁶ "I have every right to meet regional leaders, says Besigye", *Daily Monitor*, 17 November 2019; See also "Besigye: We will not let up in the fight for change, democratic space", *The East African*, 17 November 2019.

the jungle to commemorate the liberation struggle⁹⁷, both of which might be seen as early campaigning on his part. Assuming the trends visible this year continue and the predictions of the opposition regarding the rigging of the election come to pass, the next two years will be especially important in determining the future of Uganda's governance and its slide toward an even stricter authoritarian rule.

Antwerp and Palo Alto CA, February 2020

⁹⁷ “Museveni calls for pan-Africanism as 195km Bush War trek ends”, *Daily Monitor*, 10 January 2020.