

Uganda's macroeconomic evidence is encouraging and disturbing. Growth around 6.3%, inflation below 4%, a current account deficit near

surplus of about \$0.251 (sh23 trillion), including foreign direct investment of about \$3.338b (sh12.5 trillion) and portfolio inflows

message becomes relevant. If value addition is the cure, why does the disease remain stubborn? Why do industrial

liberal... were strengthened... were freed faster than factors...

Why it is prudent to retain a presidential form of government

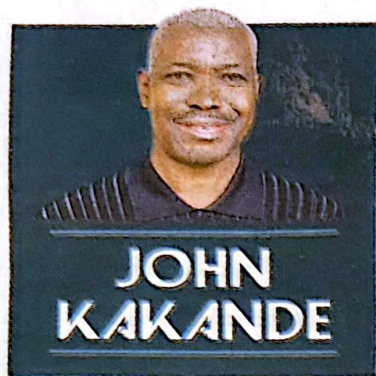
Early this week, President Yoweri Museveni was sworn in and began his seventh term as a directly elected president.

Instead of remaining within Uganda's institutions and public discourse, some actors appeal to foreign governments and international bodies in the hope that external pressure might reshape the country's leadership.

This idea has appeared repeatedly in Uganda's political conversation, resurfacing whenever domestic disagreements grow sharper and political frustrations deepen.

Museveni is so far the only person to serve as a directly elected president of Uganda. He holds the trophy as the President who has served the longest period in East Africa, surpassing by far both Kenya's founding president Jomo Kenyatta (15 years) and Tanzania's Mwalimu Julius Nyerere (24 years).

Nyerere and Kenyatta were among a handful of African leaders who were never toppled by the military, like the majority of post-independence leaders. In 1964, the newly independent states of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania



suffered army mutinies demanding higher pay, among other things. All three governments requested help from Britain, the former colonial master, to quell the mutinies.

In the aftermath of the mutiny, Nyerere and Kenyatta disbanded the colonial armies and replaced them with national armies. This has, in my view, contributed to the prolonged stability of the two countries. But Uganda's prime minister Milton Obote, unlike his colleagues, failed to provide strong leadership and gave in to the demands of the rebels, setting stage for the army's

overreach in Uganda's politics.

It took Uganda over two decades to achieve what Nyerere and Kenyatta did in 1964, eliminating the remnants of the colonial army. For this, Museveni must be given credit. I believe it is one of the key factors that have contributed to the prolonged stability of the country.

Furthermore, I believe the country's prolonged stability has been due to its comparatively democratic dispensation that has included regular elections for the president, Parliament, and local government councils.

Uganda's first president, Sir Edward Mutesa II, was elected by the National Assembly. Though he was the head of state, he was non-executive. The executive authority was instead exercised by the prime minister, Obote, the leader of the party that had the largest number of seats in the National Assembly.

In 1966, Obote deposed Mutesa and declared himself the executive president under a new constitutional order. The subsequent 1967 Constitution ushered in an "imperial presidency". All Uganda's presidents between 1966 and 1996

seized power through the barrel of the gun.

Although there were elections in 1980, Obote became president for the second time as leader of the Uganda People's Congress, the party that controversially won a majority of seats in Parliament. Obote was not required to contest for a parliamentary seat, as is the practice in many parliamentary governments. Unlike his rivals; Paul Ssemogerere, Yoweri Museveni and Mayanja Nkangi, Obote opted not to vie for a parliamentary seat. Obote, therefore, ruled without a popular mandate.

The 1995 Constitution introduced direct elections for the president. The constitution, in effect, introduced a presidential form of government while at the same time bolstering Parliament's oversight role. It is debatable, though, whether Parliament has so far effectively exercised its oversight role.

There have been murmurs in the political circles in favour of scrapping direct presidential elections and letting the party with the majority of seats in Parliament pick the president. The rationale is

that this would save the taxpayer from incurring a huge cost on the presidential elections.

Scrapping presidential elections, in my view, will be politically retrogressive. It is good for a president to govern with a popular mandate. Letting a parliamentary majority party pick a president could create political dynamics and complications that could ignite political instability.

The 1966 crisis, it should be recalled, followed political manoeuvres in Parliament that were principally intended to oust the prime minister, Obote, after he had a disagreement with the president, Edward Mutesa, over the lost counties referendum.

True, the elections are costing the country a fortune, and they are marred by violence. We need to critically examine the factors fuelling violence in the elections.

There is also a compelling case to examine the costs of the elections. A forensic audit of all the expenditures incurred on elections since 1996 could be a good starting point.

The writer is a journalist