Election thieves are like any thief

There is a distinguished American eccentric who does not have an exactly flattering view of Africans. Whether peeping through a pinhole, or surveying the continent across a huge window, he recently saw the Somalis as having low IQ's.

Hardly a year before, the whole continent had struck him as a copy of a ... well... a body-waste disposal outfit.

All right, the American exaggerates a little bit because he has a big mouth whose border is sometimes not properly secured, but are we not doing things on whose account we can only be despised?

How we attack the mountains of food at funeral events. The thunder we raise with street loudspeakers because we are selling the Gospel or some other merchandise.

How we recklessly speed along a new road, forgetting the lives of other road users, then scream when we bump-and-crawl after road humps are laid everywhere.

How we govern, forgetting the things that happened before we got power, or can happen after we lose it. How we get re-elected to keep it. How badly we reason when supporting evil-doers. And so on. Why should we not be despised?

Two weeks ago, I listened to a bunch of pastors at a radio talk-show. They sounded very excited about President Museveni being announced winner. They went on endlessly explaining how Museveni and his political functionaries had scoured every corner in the campaign for his votes. According to the pastors, the effort had paid off, enabling Museveni to get more than 70 percent of the cast votes.

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Alan Tacca

On the Mark



I waited for a comment on how the relentless militarised persecution of President Museveni's main challenger affected Bobi Wine in a similar campaign for votes, but such basic honesty was too hard for these men of God.

But intimidation, violence and obstruction were only some of the many ways the voting exercise was seriously damaged, diminishing the relative value of the resulting figures.

NRM officials often cite examples of opposition politicians who have won elections as proof that no rigging takes place at all.

The reasoning is as defective as saying that since Mukasa's car was not stolen in Ntinda last night, Opio and Kagezi's cars could not have been stolen in Kawempe on the same night.

Election theft is like other kinds of robbery. It does not have to happen everywhere. But questions at the presidential, parliamentary, district and other levels are too many to dismiss casually.

Elections under NRM rules have so degenerated that the competence and intentions of the Electoral Commission are now suspect, with allegations of massive vote stuffing and blatant victory swaps engineered and supervised by different descriptions of electoral functionaries and security operatives.

And if you ask the Russians, the Chinese or the North Koreans, several generations of autocracy and fake democracy have produced only more autocracy and more fake democracy. In Haiti, the nightmare of Papa Doc and Baby Doc left a legacy of pure anarchy.

In a world that has become impatient with exiles from failed nations, even if you do not cherish Uganda as much as you love your raw stomach, you have to be afraid.

For as the horrendous stealing of public resources under NRM seems destined to remain and grow, the stealing of elections could persist and expand with the same impunity, making real the threat of more cycles of chaos.

And just as the incurable *mandaazi* thief is despised in his neighbourhood, our serial election thieves could return Uganda fully to the heap of Africa's more despised nations.

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