

President Museveni and the politics of presidential tenure in Uganda

Abstract:

There are various reasons why President Museveni is so determined to hold on to power in Uganda. These are similar to the ones motivating other African presidents seeking to entrench themselves in office. Museveni believes he is indispensable for Uganda's stability and prosperity, especially in a country devastated by bad leadership in earlier post-independence decades. Moreover, Museveni and his close allies are fearful of being prosecuted under a new president for alleged wrongdoings. Opposition to Museveni's continued stay in power has come from within the ruling party, as well as other parties and the Buganda kingdom. But, as elsewhere in Africa, the opposition is too weakly developed to challenge Museveni effectively. Also, presidential manipulations, election rigging, and coercive measures have helped to secure Museveni's grip on power. In particular, Museveni has used the military to entrench himself in office. Moreover, as in some African countries, international pressures to force Museveni to relinquish power are limited. In fact, donors have propped up a quasi-authoritarian regime with large amounts of resources. Museveni has overseen a prolonged period of economic and political stability and donors argue he deserves their support, even when his record on democracy and good governance is tainted. In Africa, presidential incumbents who have stepped down have done so because of the strength of domestic and international pressures. Where political opposition is organised and united or where international donors use their aid to promote greater democratisation, then leaders are more likely to abandon plans to stay in power. It is the absence of such conditions and pressures that are leading to the creation of a life presidency in Uganda.