

Polls created delusion about NRM popularity

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The outcome of the 2011 elections gave a false impression that the NRM's popularity has improved countrywide and penetrated opposition bastions, a collaborative academic study has concluded.

This is one of the findings in the draft report titled: Uganda's 2011 Elections: A Step Forward for Democracy, which is yet another indictment on the polls that handed Museveni a landslide against his closest rival, FDC party leader, Dr Kizza Besigye. Museveni won with 68.38 per cent, while Besigye garnered 26 per cent.

The research, funded by various donors in Uganda, was undertaken by Makerere University's department of political science, the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA), Antwerp University and Oxford University, in collaboration with the recently ended Deepening Democracy Programme.

Although the final report is still being compiled, Dr Sabiiti Makara, a political science lecturer at Makerere University who served as one of the lead researchers, told The Observer that this false impression "was as a result of the election engineering by the ruling party, whereby the politics of commercialization and patronage influenced the outcome."

"This anomaly created variables like propaganda, violence and vote-buying. This was the reality on the ground in 2011," Makara said.

Makara cites northern Uganda and, specifically, Teso sub-region, where vote-buying, subtle intimidation and violence slanted the vote in favour of the ruling party. Previously, since 1996, President Museveni had always performed dismally in the war-ravaged Acholi and Lango sub-regions. But in 2011, Museveni took at least 56.9 per cent of the votes in northern Uganda and reclaimed Teso sub-region, which had fallen to FDC in 2006.

The initial findings also fault the Electoral Commission led by Dr Badru Kiggundu.

"There was the refusal by government to listen to any reforms by the opposition, civil society and courts of law. These bodies all suggested that reforms take place," Makara argues.

The issue of the creation of new districts, which he says was tantamount to gerrymandering, also handed government an advantage.

"The demarcation of constituencies, which is supposed to be the work of the Electoral Commission and Parliament, was taken over by the regime," Makara says.

He further cites the failure to create a credible voter register and the questionable number of registered voters (13 million) as some of the flaws that the regime exploited to rig the election.

"Many people were missing on the voter register, and there was a strategic plan to put Museveni at the end of the ballot paper — which are all vote-rigging tactics. But you cannot forget the ballot stuffing as well."

The initial findings fault the security personnel, including the army, for playing a partisan role during the election. "We all witnessed the violence that played out in Budadiri and the threats Nandala Mafabi had to endure," Makara opines.

Additionally, according to the initial findings, there was politicization of public programmes. "For instance SACCOs, the youth fund were hijacked and interpreted to benefit voters for the ruling party," said Dr Julius Kiiza, one of the lead researchers.

The findings also revealed that change of government in Uganda is unlikely to occur through elections in the current political environment.

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