

**On the Role of Democracy in Uganda's Move to
Universal Primary Education**

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1. Introduction

Uganda's establishment of free universal primary education has been a particularly dramatic, and widely acclaimed example of a government devoting increased resources to basic service provision. The announcement and successful implementation of the UPE program has resulted in a sizeable increase in primary school enrolment rates, and in particular in rural areas of the country. While some might question whether Uganda's "big bang" approach to improving primary education has been the most efficient way to proceed, the recent experience with UPE also raises a more fundamental question: why has Uganda been successful in devoting increased resources to primary education when other governments have so often failed to achieve the same goal? In seeking an answer to this question, it is difficult to ignore the fact that the Ugandan government's decision to abolish primary school fees was first announced as a manifesto commitment made during a presidential election campaign. Within a few months of his election in May 1996, President Museveni made good on this commitment by announcing that primary school fees would be abolished for four children in each Ugandan family. This apparent link between an election and a new education initiative suggests that electoral competition may be a powerful force in prompting governments to deliver public services. It is also noteworthy that, in recent years, leaders in Tanzania (2001), Kenya (2003), and Malawi (1994) have also announced the abolition of primary school fees, fulfilling manifesto commitments following presidential elections. However, there is a problem with drawing a swift conclusion about the link between democracy and education spending, because candidates in African election campaigns have often promised greater spending on primary education and then failed to deliver once elected. In some cases campaign promises have not been translated into policy, while in other instances, initial increases in education expenditures have not been sustained.

The goal of this paper is to focus on Uganda's recent move to free universal primary education in order to ask whether the success of the UPE program can be attributed to democratic politics.

While my primary objective is to explore the Ugandan case in order to ask when and where a move to competitive elections will result in increased government spending on education, it is clear that additional factors have been equally critical in leading to the success of UPE. The Ugandan government has been able to meet its objectives in the area of primary education, because as a prior condition it established macroeconomic stability. It has also developed an exemplary set of budgetary institutions that have allowed a reorientation of expenditures towards sectors that are announced as priorities. Attempts by other democratically elected African government to implement universal primary education programs are unlikely to succeed unless they also follow the broader example set by Uganda in the area of public sector management. Because other contributions, such as the recent survey by Bevan (2001), have already described in detail how Uganda's "medium term expenditure framework" and related budgetary institutions have been successful in generating both macroeconomic stability and a reorientation of expenditures towards education, I will nonetheless devote the bulk of this paper to investigating the less well understood issue of the link between democratic politics and UPE.¹

As a final introductory point, it should also be emphasized that I do not intend in this paper to ask how close Uganda today is to being an 'ideal' democracy, and in particular

¹ For an assessment of Uganda's experience with the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework written by one of its architects see Tumusiime-Mutebile (1999).

whether remaining restrictions on political parties should be dropped.² This is clearly a critical issue for the future of democracy in Uganda, but it is not a debate that should preclude asking whether democratic practice in Uganda today, imperfect as it may be, has already had an impact on policy.

In the remainder of the paper in Section 2 I first consider general propositions about democratic politics and government policy choices. Section 3 turns to the Ugandan case, presenting the events leading to the announcement of the UPE initiative in 1996, while also discussing subsequent implementation. In Section 4 I then consider in depth whether existing evidence shows that democratic politics can explain why UPE was announced and why it has been successfully implemented. Section 5 briefly considers complementary explanations for UPE's success, and in particular the role of macroeconomic stability and reforms to budgetary institutions. Finally, Section 6 concludes and considers the broader implications of the Ugandan case.

2. Electoral competition and public service provision

The most basic reason why democratic governments may provide services like education to a wider segment of the population than do autocrats involves the different incentives that elected leaders face. For an autocrat who is interested in remaining in power, regardless of whether he or she is motivated strictly by material benefits or by some broader sense of what is "good" for society, the primary threat to consider is that of being overthrown as a result of a coup, riots, or similar extra-constitutional action. As a result, autocrats must consider how the policies they choose will be received by those groups in

² Assessing this aspect of Uganda's "no party democracy" has been a primary goal in much recent work by political scientists on Uganda including Kasfir (1998), Carbone (2001), Ocitti (1996), Bratton and Lambright (2001), and Ottemoeller (1998).

society that can pose a credible threat of extra-constitutional overthrow. In democracies leaders must also frequently consider the risk of violent overthrow, but, in addition, they need to be concerned about being voted out of office. If the risk of being voted out of office is real, then one can expect democratically elected governments to choose policies that are designed to satisfy an electoral majority. This may include ensuring that a broader segment of society benefits from public spending. It may also imply that democratic governments are more responsive to more basic citizen interests such as eliminating famine (Sen, 1981). Given that only narrow social groups will generally have the capacity to overthrow a government by force, the above distinction between democracies and autocracies provides a basic reason why one may expect policies of democratic governments to be more oriented towards pleasing an electoral majority.

While the incentives faced by leaders in autocratic and democratic systems may clearly differ, the precise effect of moving from autocracy to democracy will undoubtedly vary depending on the specific country and policy one is considering. In the case of autocratic African governments, classic work by Robert Bates (1981) suggests that during the 1960s and 1970s policies tended to be particularly unfavorable to the rural groups that made up the majority of citizens but which posed the least plausible political challenge to governments. Policies were instead more targeted towards benefiting urban groups that could pose a more credible threat through unrest. Others have argued that policies of African governments have been more specifically targeted at benefiting members of the state elite itself (van de Walle, 2001). As many African countries have begun to elect their leaders in contested elections, one can argue that the situation described by Bates (1981) may have changed. In particular, democratically elected African governments may have a greater

incentive to take demands of both urban and rural groups into account when choosing policies.

When it comes to public spending on education, African rural voters are likely to be particularly concerned about provision of primary education, both because levels of primary enrollment in rural areas lag below those in urban areas, and because primary education is most frequently the only level of formal education that rural dwellers receive. A recent study demonstrates that levels of spending on primary education in African countries are, on average, higher in countries where leaders have been selected in elections contested by multiple candidates.³ However, this overall result masks the fact that the experience of democratically elected African governments with education spending has been a heterogeneous one. While the 'average' democratic government has spent more on primary education, nearly a third of the democratically elected African governments in the sample used in Stasavage (2002) have spent less than 1% of GDP on primary education each year. There are a number of factors that might explain this outcome. First of all, public spending on education might be a secondary concern for voters when compared with other issues. If voting choices depend above all on positions with regard to constitutional questions, regional issues, or other economic policy choices, then candidates may gain little by promising increased education spending, and incumbents will know that they will not ultimately be judged on their performance in this area. Second, voters may lack information about government performance. This too would weaken incentives for elected officials to devote significant resources to education. Finally, even if voters are dissatisfied with an

³ See Stasavage (2002). Recent empirical evidence shows that democratically elected governments in Latin America have also devoted greater resources to health and education than have their authoritarian counterparts (Brown and Hunter, 1999; Kaufman and Segura-Ubierno, 2001).

incumbent performance with regard to education, they may be unconvinced that challengers would be any more effective in this regard.

3. The UPE initiative and the Ugandan elections of 1996

Recent debates about primary education funding in Uganda were initiated by a government appointed Education Policy Review Commission, which issued a report in 1989 that called for the universalization of primary education (UPE) by the year 2000. The Commission's recommendation, while non-binding, carried significant weight because of the association of a number of its members with Makerere University, Uganda's premier academic institution. The Ugandan government subsequently appointed a second committee, which in 1992 issued a Government White Paper on education that also recommended moving to UPE, although by a slightly later date of 2003. Despite this early initiation of policy discussions, as a recent Ugandan government report acknowledges, there was no immediate increase in government commitment to primary education during the early 1990s.⁴ In fact, Uganda's Constituent Assembly in 1994 rejected a proposal that free primary education be established as a constitutional provision. Even as late as January 1996 a World Bank report noted that the issue of user charges in education were "currently under discussion" and that decisions about education costs might best be left to the local level.⁵ Some authors, such as Foster and Mujimbi (2002), point to a July 1995 "Forum on Poverty" as having been a critical moment when new support was gained for increased spending on primary education, but apparently this did not trigger a change in attitude at the presidential level. During this period, President Museveni was clearly reluctant to commit to a primary education strategy that would involve a significant increase of public expenditures in this

⁴ See Ministry of Education and Sports (1999).

⁵ See *Uganda: The Challenge of Growth and Poverty Reduction*, World Bank, 1996.

area, as he instead favored prioritizing road building and defense expenditure. Several senior Ugandan officials from this period report that on some occasions Museveni was actually disparaging about suggestions that more public resources should be shifted to education, referring to education as the “non-productive” sector of the economy.⁶

Given his earlier opposition to the idea, President Museveni’s decision in March of 1996 to make universal primary education part of his manifesto for the upcoming presidential election campaign represented a sharp break with existing policy. In a radio speech delivered on March 27th, Museveni promised that if re-elected, he would implement a plan giving four children per family access to free primary education (the plan would also apply to orphans).⁷ This education promise was, however, just one part of an overall election manifesto that included pledges concerning liberalization of the economy, road building, defense, and renewing East African cooperation. In fact, improvement in education was listed as only the fifth of seven bullet points on the back of Museveni’s published manifesto.⁸

Though free primary education was only one small part of President Museveni’s initial election manifesto, during the course of the campaign it soon became clear that the promise to abolish school fees was striking a chord with the electorate. Ugandan officials from the period recall that several of Museveni’s close advisors repeatedly sent messages to the Ministry of Finance after campaign meetings in order to emphasize how the UPE

⁶ Interviews with former Ugandan officials, December 2002.

⁷ Radio Uganda, Kampala 27 March 1996, as reported by BBC Summary of World Broadcasts and Panafrican News Agency.

⁸ See Yoweri Kaguta Museveni “Tackling the Tasks Ahead: Election Manifesto”, 1996

promise had struck a chord with the Ugandan electorate.⁹ As a result of these meetings the President and his advisors began to give increasing emphasis to UPE as an issue.

The May 1996 elections were Uganda's first free presidential elections since the military takeover by the National Resistance Movement in 1987. The elections were competitive in the sense that President Museveni faced a credible challenger named Paul Ssemogerere, who was the leader of the Democratic Party, in addition to a lesser known candidate, Kibirige Mohamed Mayanja. Ssemogerere was reputed to have been the true winner of the 1980 Ugandan presidential election that had been rigged by Milton Obote. Observers predicted that Museveni would be likely to hold onto power, but that this outcome was far from certain. According to one report, several foreign diplomats in Kampala predicted Museveni would win 60% of the vote, and a pre-election poll forecast a similar outcome.¹⁰ One atypical aspect of the Ugandan 1996 elections was that political parties were banned from supporting individual candidates. This restriction undoubtedly reinforced President Museveni's position, and a number of observers both inside and outside Uganda have been highly critical of this practice. Though this debate about full reestablishment of multiparty politics is clearly important for the future of democracy in Uganda, it should be remembered that the objective of this paper is to consider whether that electoral competition that has been established *so far* in Uganda has had a significant impact on policy.

During the week's leading up to the 1996 vote, Paul Ssemogerere campaigned on a number of key issues. For one, he promised to restore full multi-party politics to Uganda. He also promised to negotiate with the rebel movement in northern Uganda, and he

⁹ Interviews with former Ugandan officials, December 2002.

¹⁰ See Ottemoeller (1998) p.100.

declared that if elected he would grant greater autonomy to the Buganda region in the south of the country, which had historically been an independent kingdom. Ssemogerere also declared that he would match Museveni's promise to provide free primary education for all. He suggested the program could be funded with cuts in military spending.¹¹ In the end, President Museveni was reelected in May 1996 by a large margin. His 74.2 percent of the votes cast exceeded initial expectations, and the election was judged free and fair by international observers.

Following his election victory, in December 1996 President Museveni announced the abolition of schools fees for four children in every family, a program that would begin immediately in January 1997. In practice, the announced UPE policy based on four children per family has subsequently evolved into one where all children receive free primary schooling.¹² One of the main reasons for Museveni taking this dramatic step involved the general perception that the President had achieved received such a high percentage of the vote precisely because he had made UPE a manifesto commitment. As one official subsequently reported, "State House [The President's office] told us 'look, we won the election because of the UPE pledge, so we have to come up with the money for it' ".¹³ Museveni's initial statement about UPE stipulated that the Ugandan government would be responsible for provision of tuition fees, textbooks, construction of classrooms, teacher salaries and teacher training.¹⁴ Parents would remain responsible for tuition in excess of four

¹¹ Sam Gonza, All Africa Press Service, 14 May 1996. Hugh Nevill, Agence France Press, 4 May 1996.

¹² There appear to be several reasons for the policy becoming universal by default. Families with fewer than four children have taken children of relatives to school. In addition, the luganda equivalent of "four children going to school free" (abaana bana basome) was deliberately shifted to "abbaana bona basome" meaning all children going to school free.

¹³ Interviews with former Ugandan officials, December 2002.

¹⁴ Radio Uganda report, December 12th, 1996. BBC Summary of World Broadcasts.

per family, for school lunches, for uniforms, and for exercise books, in addition to providing labor to construct new classrooms.

There is little doubt that since 1997 there has been a sustained shift of Ugandan public expenditures in favor of education, and in favor of primary schools in particular. Spending on education as a total share of government expenditures rose from an average of 20.2% in the three fiscal years preceding the UPE announcement to an average of 26.3% in the three years following the announcement.¹⁵ The bulk of this sustained increase has been due to the UPE program, and as already mentioned, this sustained shift in priorities has been made possible by the development of new budgetary institutions. In Uganda, total enrollment of students in primary schools has reportedly increased from 3.4 million in 1996 to 6.9 million in 2001.¹⁶ The Ugandan experience provides a striking contrast with Malawi, another country whose government announced the abolition of primary school fees following a presidential election in 1994, but which subsequently failed to provide a sustained increase in public funding. The share of education expenditure in the Malawian recurrent budget increased from 10.5% in 1994/95 to 21% in 1997/98, but this figure subsequently declined to 16% in 1999/00.¹⁷ This failure to sustain a shift in expenditures in Malawi can be attributed in part to the fact that Malawi has suffered from greater macroeconomic instability during the 1990s, but as I will argue below, it may also be due to the way in which political support for Malawi's current president has been concentrated in a single region of the country.¹⁸

¹⁵ Data as reported by Bevan (2001). The figure referred to for government expenditures here represents wage, nonwage, and domestic development expenditures. It excludes externally financed development expenditures.

¹⁶ "Achieving EFA in Uganda: the Big Bang Approach", World Bank, p.6.

¹⁷ "Malawi: Public Expenditures, Issues and Options", World Bank, Public Expenditure Review, September 2001.

¹⁸ It should also be noted that unlike Uganda, Malawi after 1994 funded increased education spending primarily through increased borrowing.

While the above figures for enrollments and education spending in Uganda are impressive, it should be acknowledged that increases in spending in particular do not automatically imply a proportional improvement in delivery of services. Reinikka and Svensson (2002) show this quite clearly for Uganda in the years immediately before the establishment of UPE. Survey evidence indicates that between 1991 and 1995 local primary schools actually received only 13 percent, on average, of the grants they were due to receive from central government during this period. The remainder was captured by local officials. A recent World Bank report suggests that more recent surveys show that 90% of grants are now reaching local primary schools.¹⁹

One final important point regarding the development of Universal Primary Education in Uganda is that it has remained a topic of frequent political discussion. Even a brief survey of articles published in the last few years by major daily newspapers such as *The Monitor* and *The New Vision* shows that articles about implementation of UPE continue to appear with a high frequency. It is also significant that when President Museveni launched his re-election campaign in January 2001, he began it by reminding voters about his government's achievements in the area of primary education, and in particular that he had fulfilled his manifesto commitment from the 1996 election campaign.²⁰ In a campaign speech in March of 2001 the President once again stressed primary education as one of his government's chief accomplishments.²¹ In the weeks leading up to the 2001 election, education remained a prominent issue as both President Museveni and several opposition candidates discussed extending free education provision to secondary schools.²²

¹⁹ "Achieving EFA in Uganda: the Big Bang Approach", World Bank, p.12.

²⁰ *The New Vision*, Kampala, January 12th, 2001.

²¹ *The New Vision*, Kampala, March 9th, 2001.

²² *The New Vision*, Kampala, January 12th, 2001.

4. Did democracy make the difference?

Uganda's UPE initiative was announced during a presidential election campaign, and primary education has remained a prominent issue in Ugandan political discussions ever since. This immediately raises the question whether UPE has been achieved as a result of the revival of electoral competition in Uganda. The potential problem with any argument linking democratic politics and provision of primary education is that many African countries, and many developing countries more generally, have shifted from authoritarian rule to democracy in recent years without experiencing an increase in spending on primary education. Likewise, some democratically elected governments have announced and then implemented free primary education programs without providing a sustained increase in education expenditures. These contrasting experiences suggest that whether democracy leads to a reorientation of education spending depends on country-specific factors. In what follows I argue that the effect of democracy on education spending is contingent on the salience of education relative to other issues in national politics, and on the availability of information about government policy. In Uganda both of these conditions have been satisfied. I also provide evidence to show that the Ugandan government's performance with regard to education has had a significant effect on Ugandan voter assessments of the Museveni government's overall performance.

Salience of education as an issue

In order for election candidates to make promises regarding education spending, and to anticipate that they will be judged on whether these promises are fulfilled, education must be a salient issue for voters. In the Ugandan presidential election campaign of 1996 education was but one of several issues that might have swayed voters.

For one, President Museveni and his challenger Paul Ssemogerere proposed different solutions for dealing with the armed rebellion in the North of the country, with Ssemogerere more inclined to negotiate and Museveni more favorable to a military solution. Several authors have suggested that Ssemogerere's conciliatory attitude explains why he did so well in northern areas during the final vote.²³ Some rebels apparently actively campaigned for Ssemogerere. It was also alleged during the campaign that Ssemogerere promised to bring the former President, Milton Obote, back from exile, an initiative which did much to generate support in the North but which caused great anxiety for people in other areas of Uganda where the army under Obote in the early 1980s had committed numerous atrocities against civilians.

The question of autonomy for the Buganda kingdom in southern Uganda was also an issue during the 1996 campaign. Paul Ssemogerere actively supported the idea of giving Buganda, his home region, a greater degree of legal autonomy. President Museveni had previously taken the step of restoring the monarchy in Buganda, but he was reluctant to make any more concrete moves to increase autonomy for this region.

Finally, the 1996 campaign also involved constitutional issues, and in particular the debate whether restraints on activity of political parties should be lifted. President Museveni advocated maintaining Uganda's "no party democracy", where political parties were permitted, and multiple candidates could contest elections, but party organizations could not directly participate in the campaign. Paul Ssemogerere called for lifting the legal restrictions on parties. Support for full multipartyism was one reason that Ssemogerere formed a tactical alliance during the campaign with the Uganda Peoples Congress, the party of Uganda's former dictator, Milton Obote.

²³ See Ocitti (1996) for example, as well as Sam Gonza, All Africa Press Service, May 14, 1996.

One common aspect of the above three campaign issues – parties, the northern rebellion, and Buganda autonomy, is that they involved questions where voter opinion was split along regional lines. Support for negotiating with the northern rebellion was strongest in northern Uganda, advocates of Bugandan autonomy were most frequent in Buganda itself, and proponents of lifting restrictions on political parties were also more common in these two regions. To the extent these issues determined voting decisions, then we would expect support for President Museveni and Paul Ssemogerere to have split along regional lines. In fact, while there was a clear regional pattern to voting in the 1996 election, President Museveni's election victory, was not dependent on a single regional base of support. Museveni did receive over 90% of the vote in Uganda's western region, where he was most popular, and in contrast he received only 26% of votes in the North.²⁴ But, significantly, Museveni won 74% of the votes in Paul Ssemogerere's own home region (Central). Within this region, it was seen as particularly significant that Museveni won 55% of the vote in the town of Masaka in Buganda, which was thought to be a bellwether constituency.²⁵ Museveni also received 72% of the vote in Uganda's eastern region.

The fact that Museveni's victory was not dependent on support from a single region suggests that his promises of new initiatives on national issues like education was a key determinant of his electoral success. As already noted, this fact was not lost on presidential advisors, who judged that the scope of the election victory was due in large part to the promise of free primary education. This also gave the Museveni government an incentive to deliver on this promise to the extent it hoped to continue to hold office after any future Ugandan election. While Paul Ssemogerere had made an attempt to match Museveni's

²⁴ based on data reported in *The New Vision*, May 13, 1996.

²⁵ Hugh Nevill, Agence France Presse, Kampala, May 10th 1996.

promise of free primary education, there was apparently less confidence that he would be able to deliver on such a commitment.

Recent electoral experience in Malawi provides a clear counter-example to Uganda, as the winning presidential candidate made universal primary education part of his manifesto, but voting was much more polarized along regional lines than was the case in Uganda in 1996. Under these conditions, it seems likely that the winner would have had an incentive to continue to cultivate a regional base of support, rather than to deliver on a national issue like universal primary education. While President Museveni and his advisors might reasonably conclude that they won the 1996 election on a mandate to deliver free primary education, in Malawi it was clear that voting was almost perfectly correlated with region. In the 1994 presidential contest the election winner, Bakili Muluzi of the UDF party, won 78% in the South of the country but he received only 27.5% of the votes in Malawi's central region, and only 4.5% of the votes in the North.²⁶ In contrast, the principal opposition candidate received 87.8% of the votes in the North but only 7.5% in the Centre and only 5.2% in the South (Wiseman, 2000). Voting in Malawi's subsequent presidential elections of 1999 remained equally polarized along regional lines.

Information

The link between electoral competition and progress with primary education in Uganda has also depended critically upon information.²⁷ Ugandans have had access to a number of different sources of information about implementation of the UPE initiative, and this information has made it possible for them to evaluate to what extent the government

²⁶ See Chirwa (1998) and Posner (1995) for discussions of regionalism in Malawian politics.

²⁷ Besley and Burgess (2001) have recently investigated the importance of information for public goods provision.

has made good on its election promises. For one, major national dailies, such as *The Monitor* and *The New Vision*, have continued to give very prominent coverage to UPE issues. The government has also made it a common practice to discuss progress in UPE with relevant civic associations. In addition to making clear whether central government has remained committed to UPE, one important informational initiative in Uganda has also helped keep the public informed about the extent to which local government authorities have delivered on primary education commitments. The Ugandan government now regularly publishes in newspapers the value of grants for primary education given to local authorities. This increased transparency may be one important reason why the extent to which such funds are siphoned off by corruption appears to have been reduced in recent years. Finally, the most important source of information for Ugandan voters has been the simple observation whether their children are able to attend primary school without fees, and whether the government has provided the necessary financial resources to maintain educational quality in the absence of fees.

Assessments of Ugandan government performance

One final piece of evidence suggesting a link between democratic politics and UPE comes from survey assessments of Ugandan government performance. Data collected by the Afrobarometer project show that Ugandan's believe President Museveni has performed very effectively as President, and when rating government performance, they are most satisfied with education policy.

During the June 2000 survey in Uganda, 93% of respondents reported that they were either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with Yoweri Museveni's overall performance as President. Even when taking into account the fact that the average response for presidential

job satisfaction was relatively high across the twelve countries surveyed by the Afrobarometer project (64%), the Ugandan President's favorable rating seems exceptionally high.²⁸

In addition to suggesting that an overwhelming majority of Ugandan voters view President Museveni's performance as being satisfactory, data from the Afrobarometer survey also provide a strong hint that this evaluation is directly linked to the Ugandan government's achievements in areas like education. As part of the survey, participants were asked how they thought their government was handling a series of different economic and social problems. Figure 1 reports the percentage of Ugandans who responded that their government was handling a particular issue "fairly well" or "very well", and it compares this rating with the average response for all twelve African countries surveyed. For each of the seven issues listed below, a higher percentage of Ugandans than the African average viewed their government's performance positively. However, health, crime, and education were the three issues with the largest gap between Ugandan government performance and average African performance.²⁹ These were also the three issues with the highest score in absolute terms. Eighty-seven percent of Ugandans reported that their government was handling education issues well while the average across the twelve African countries was 59%. This is a strong indication that President Museveni's popularity is closely linked to his having initiated and implemented Universal Primary Education.³⁰ Given the above ratings, it is not surprising that President Museveni chose to launch his 2001 presidential re-election campaign by reminding voters of his performance in this area.

²⁸ The median for the twelve country sample was also 64%. See Logan and Machado (2002).

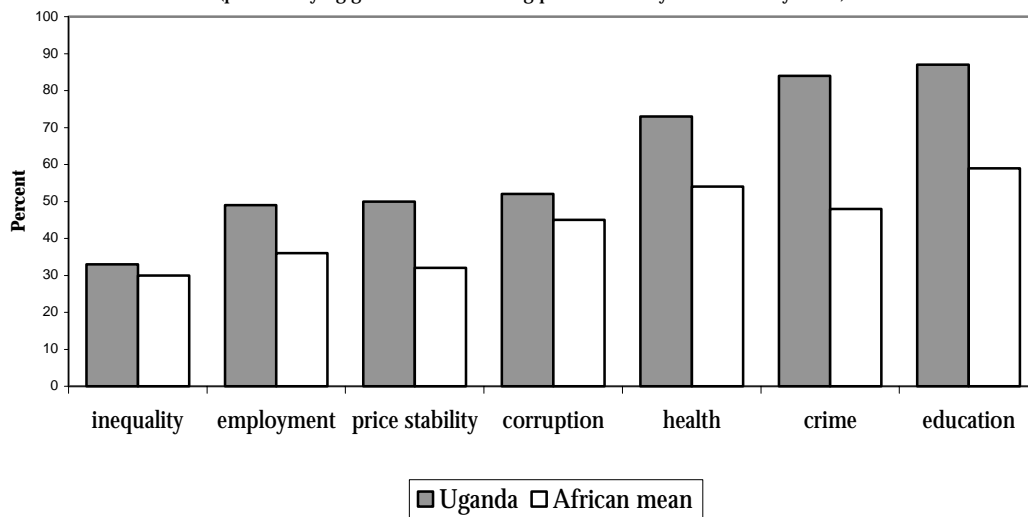
²⁹ The reference to the government's success in reducing crime should be distinguished from the government's record in reducing insecurity due to the northern rebellion. The Afrobarometer survey did not ask specific questions about insecurity of this type.

³⁰ See Logan and Machado (2002) and Bratton et al. (2000).

Summary

I have argued here that there are three principal reasons to believe that the success of the UPE initiative in Uganda has been closely linked to the re-establishment of electoral competition. First of all, education was a salient issue in the 1996, presidential elections, and unlike the recent presidential elections in Malawi, voting decisions were not exclusively determined by region. Second, since the announcement of December 1996 Ugandans have had access to a number of different sources of information about the implementation of UPE. Finally, survey data show quite clearly that Ugandans rate President Museveni's performance in office highly, and in evaluating Ugandan government performance they have been particularly favorable to accomplishments in the area of education.

Figure 1: Satisfaction with Government Performance
(percent saying government handling problem "fairly well" or "very well")



Source: Afrobarometer project. See text for description.

5. Macroeconomic stability and budgetary institutions

While electoral competition may have given the Ugandan government an incentive to abolish fees for primary schools, as mentioned in the introduction, there are several additional factors that have been critical in leading to UPE's success. These include a stable macroeconomic environment and the development of effective budgetary institutions. The stable macroeconomic environment that has prevailed in Uganda since 1992 has greatly facilitated attempts to implement the UPE program. Stable conditions have undoubtedly made it easier to forecast government revenues and to program future government expenditures. In more unstable macroeconomic conditions other African governments, like Malawi in particular, have found it difficult to maintain a sustained commitment to increasing education expenditures. Macroeconomic stability has also helped to contribute to Uganda's high recent rates of economic growth, and one might argue that in a growing economy, with growing tax revenues, governments will find it easier to increase spending in a priority sector like education without implementing drastic cuts in other areas.

Uganda's macroeconomic stability since 1992 has itself depended on a series of reforms to its budgetary institutions. These have included the "cash budget" system, the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), and the Poverty Eradication Action Program. Bevan (2001) observes that while the Medium Term Expenditure Framework has provided a means of aligning resources with budgetary priorities *ex ante*, the cash budget system has helped ensure that overall fiscal discipline is maintained *ex post* in the case of revenue shortfalls.³¹ Within the MTEF, the Poverty Eradication Action Program is intended to be the device through which goals are identified for spending in key social sectors. As a final element in this institutional panoply, Bevan (2001) argues that in recent years the maintenance of a Poverty Action Fund has been a particularly effective mechanism for

³¹ On the functioning of the cash budget system in Uganda see also Stasavage and Moyo (2000).

ensuring that government spending priorities, such as primary education, receive needed funds. In sum, the shift in priorities in public spending in Uganda towards primary education has been accompanied by a great deal of innovation in terms of budgetary institutions, and it seems unlikely that UPE would have been a success without these changes.

6. Conclusion

The announcement and successful implementation of the Universal Primary Education program in Uganda have been heavily influenced by democratic politics. To begin with, Uganda's return to multi-candidate (if not multi-party) political competition in 1996 helped prompt the incumbent, Yoweri Museveni, to promise to abolish primary school fees. The emphasis on UPE became steadily more pronounced during the course of the 1996 campaign in response to positive public reactions. Subsequently, it was widely perceived that President Museveni's strong performance in the election was in part attributable to his UPE manifesto commitment. This outcome was possible in Uganda because the presidential vote was not exclusively driven by regional divisions as has been the case in recent African elections in countries like Malawi. Since 1996, democratic politics have also helped increase incentives for the Ugandan government to successfully implement UPE, because it was perceived that government performance would be judged on this basis. There is strong survey evidence that Ugandan voters evaluate their President's overall performance highly and that the UPE program is one of the major reasons for this positive evaluation. In this context it is not surprising that President Museveni chose to begin his 2001 re-election campaign by reminding voters of his government's accomplishments in the area of primary education. In the end, recent Ugandan experience shows that electoral

competition can prompt governments to improve provision of basic public services, but it also shows that this outcome depends upon a number of factors – voting must not be divided exclusively on regional lines, voters must have access to information about government policy, and finally, candidates must choose to make public services part of their campaign strategy.

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