



Chapter 5

Political Parties and Campaign Funding

Pages: 85-100



Chapter 5

FINANCING POLITICAL PARTIES FOR ELECTIONS

Political Party participation in Uganda General Elections 2021

A record number of 20 political parties out of the 26 registered with the Electoral Commission, participated on the 2021 general elections, and fielded a record 60,581 candidates on Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government electoral positions. This represents 78% of the registered political parties that participated in the 2021 elections, up from 42% that participated in previous elections (2016). The total number of nominated candidates was 92,015 of which 31,434 were independents. Thus, the NRM and independent candidates combined, contributed 82% of the total candidates nominated. The balance, a paltry 18% is what the rest of the 19 political parties combined, contributed. This begs the question, why are opposition political parties are unable to field more candidates? Why should they continue to punch below their weight?

The answer lies in the reality that whereas on paper Uganda returned to multiparty politics in 2006, the reality is that the mentality of the movement political system is still alive and well. Political parties, as it were during the movement system, are only permitted to organise and conduct activities around party headquarters in Kampala. The unexpressed rule is that they are not permitted to conduct party activities in the countryside. As a consequence, they have tended to be event based, coming alive only during an election and returning into abeyance afterwards.

The dominant political party NRM is hellbent on constraining the space for political parties in the opposition. Activities of political opposition, have been intentionally criminalized by the Uganda Police Force and other security institutions. It is recalled that while swearing in for his fifth term as president, Gen. Yoweri Museveni vowed to ensure that there will be no opposition political party in Uganda come 2021. In criminalizing the activities of political opposition, the security institutions are perhaps ostensibly implementing the directives of the commander-in-chief.

The lack of access to political finance put the opposition political parties in a considerably disadvantaged position where they could not mount a meaningful challenge against the ruling NRM party. As a consequence, the opposition parties were not able to field candidates in every available electoral position, and also found it difficult to convince (or even reach) the electorate in all the 2,008 sub counties with their manifesto messages.

The NRM party fielded 44,167 candidates in over 97% of the electoral positions available at all levels countrywide. The biggest opposition party – FDC managed to field only 6,549 candidates followed by the emergent NUP party which fielded 4,964. Combined together, FDC and NUP could only manage a quarter of the candidates fielded by the NRM. Going by the above numbers,



it is clear that Uganda's democracy is experiencing a dominant party system which is a major factor on how Uganda's politics functions.

Details are illustrated in the table below.

Table 18: Number of Nominated Candidates by Political Affiliation

NUMBER OF CANDIDATES PER POLITICAL AFFILIATION		
Snr	Political Affiliation	No. of Candidates
1	National Resistance Movement	44,188
2	Forum for Democratic Change	6,560
3	National Unity Platform	4,967
4	Democratic Party	2,254
5	Uganda People's Congress	1,646
6	Alliance for National Transformation	745
7	Justice Forum	148
8	People's Progressive Party	59
9	Ecological Party Uganda (EPU)	17
10	Conservative Party Uganda	10
11	Social Development Party (SDP)	8
12	Uganda Economic Party (UEP)	5
13	Republican Women and Youth Party (RWYP)	4
14	Revolutionary Peoples' Party (RPP)	3
15	Action Party (AP)	2
16	Congress Service Volunteers Organisation (COSEVO)	2
17	Forum for Integrity in Leadership (FIL)	2
18	Liberal Democratic Transparency (LDT)	1
19	Peoples Development Party (PDP)	1
20	Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM)	1
21	Independents	31,443
	TOTAL	92,066

Source: Electoral Commission Reports



The Political Finance Power of NRM Party

The National Resistance Movement (NRM) is the only one with the wherewithal to operate party offices at subnational level and across the country. It is the only party whose observable pre – campaign spending exceeded UGX 100 billion (\$27.7 million). This expenditure included the 68,733 bicycles that were procured for the chairpersons of the party's village structure. The market price for these bicycles at the time of their procurement was UGX 360,000 (\$100), thus the party's estimated total spending on bicycles was UGX 24.7 billion (\$6.9 million).



The Bicycles with a trademark – AFRO, procured from India by NRM and distributed to the party's village chairpersons. (Courtesy photo)

The party further procured new motorcycles (Bajaj Boxer brand) for its sub-county chairpersons. The motorcycles whose number was not disclosed, were procured from India, and were observed in December 2020 and January 2021 being used by the NRM party sub – county chairpersons. Uganda has a total of 2,008 Sub-counties. The market price prevailing in Uganda for a Bajaj Boxer Motorcycle at the time of this procurement was UGX 4.5 million (\$1,200). Below are some of the motor cycles that were procured by the NRM party.



Motorcycles procured for NRM Sub-County Chairpersons. Photo courtesy of The Independent.

NRM was the only party that had the capacity to finance nationwide primary elections, and the only one contributed campaign finance to her flagbearers in addition to refunding nomination fees. In addition, the party splashed cash on media estimated to be upwards of UGX 1 billion



(\$0.27 million) on media publicity. This included among others things; live broadcast for the party's delegates' conference and nominations for President Museveni as party flag bearer for Presidential elections.



*Supporters on the NRM Party
in Mbale, Eastern Uganda*

Sources of Campaign Finance for Political Parties

The Political Parties and organizations Act (as amended) allows political parties to access funds from local and external sources, but puts a cap on how much a political party can access from a single source. Political parties are free to raise funds from annual membership fees, organise fundraising galas and sell party paraphernalia. They further source income from monthly contributions by party flagbearers that were elected into political office such as Members of Parliament who remit a monthly fee to their respective political parties as a percentage of their monthly salary.

The standard sources of political party finance in any electoral jurisdictions, include:

1. Membership fees – the most democratic and legitimate form of party financing.
2. Nomination fees from party members seeking to contest in party primaries.
3. Income from property owned by the party.
4. Revenue from party activities such as the sale of branded T-shirts Newspapers, and other party publications.
5. Donations from wealthy individuals, corporations, interest associations, bilateral institutions, anonymous sources, etc.
6. Fundraising activities.
7. Party festivals and other social events.
8. Occasional public collections
9. Public Funding.

Inability to explore Available Avenues for Political Finance Sourcing

ACFIM observed that the political parties which participated in the 2021 general elections, have not been able to maximally explore all the above avenues for party income. As a consequence,



they are largely underfunded, under-represented, and understaffed. The parties that are represented in Parliament source their income largely from public funding from the national budget, donations from party leadership, contributions from elected officials holding the party flag, nomination fees from members seeking to participate in party primary election, and donations from a few private businesses and wealthy individuals among others. The parties without representation in Parliament depend mostly on funding from party leadership and well-wishers.

The political parties in opposition are unable to operate a well-oiled organizational machinery that can grow the party into a meaningful political challenger. Often, they rely on volunteer support and political enthusiasm for their survival. They have not been able to organically connect with the citizens/electorate, for example, the ideology and message of the National Peasants' Party (NPP) does not have a resonance with the peasants who constitute the biggest percentage of Uganda's population. Political parties in Uganda lack strong grassroots structures and have thus remained weak.

There are three main avenues through which political parties in Uganda raise income, namely; funding from party leaders, donations and public finance.

- a. **Funding from party leaders.** Political parties in Uganda including the ruling NRM party, are dependent on funding from founding members. The downside is that these individuals enjoy such a privileged position in the party that they cannot be sanctioned by the party's disciplinary system. At worst, this situation may result in party capture by a few individuals.
- b. **Donations.** Political parties access campaign finance from bilateral and private donors ranging from faith-based organisations to corporations and wealthy individuals among others. Some of the wealthy individuals act on condition that their donations remain undisclosed or anonymous. The downside is that if donations are undisclosed, they may be used to exercise undue influence on politics and subsequently undermine the integrity of elections.
- c. **Public finance.** Government of Uganda has been funding political parties since 2015, however this funding is ringfenced for only those political parties that are represented in Parliament.

Membership Fees – A Neglected Source of Political Party Finance

Whereas payment of membership fees is the most democratic and legitimate source of income for political parties in other electoral jurisdictions, in Uganda it is not yet operationalized. In fact, for parties like the NRM, membership is free, in other parties it is optional. ACFIM observers reportedly observed some members of the electorate with membership cards for more than one political party. This means that one person can be an NRM member in the morning and FDC member the following day, and vice versa. The reason one person can have membership cards for two or three political parties is because these cards are accessible free of charge.

**Table 19: Annual Membership Fees Structure for Political Parties**

No	Party	Amount in UGX	Amount in USD
1	NRM	Free	-
2	FDC	5000	1.3
3	NUP	1000	2 pence
4	DP	5000	1.3
5	UPC	5000	1.3
6	JEEMA	5000	1.3
7	ANT	3000	1.3

Source: Secondary Data

The Opacity Surrounding Political Party Financing in Uganda

Political parties in Uganda are yet to establish a transparent and well-functioning framework to control their income and expenditure, and exercise accountability to their members. Their top leadership does not demonstrate any interest in operating an open and transparent political finance system. To give them a benefit of doubt, it may also be due to a lack of financial management capacity. The downside is that this opaqueness provides a critical entry point for political corruption and its attendant effects on the political party's operation which may by extension afflict on the country's democratic progression.

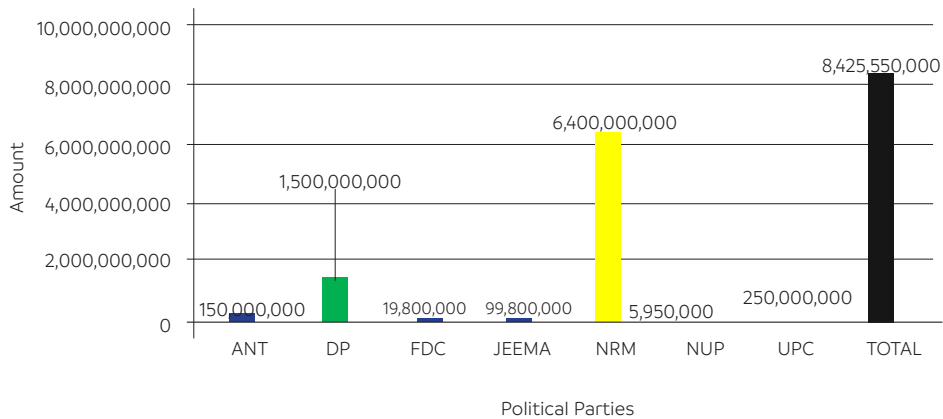
Political parties receive funds from anonymous sources both from within and outside the country. Private donors that bankroll opposition political parties, always prefer to remain anonymous for fear of political persecution by the regime in power. And most of the donations are in cash making it hard to trace them through the formal banking system.

Political Party Spending on Pre-campaign Activities

In line with the COVID-19 standard operating procedures (SOPs), the political parties conducted either virtual delegates conferences or district meetings with a small number of masked and physically distanced delegates. These included: In this section, ACFIM will focus on the five out of the 20 parties that participated in the general elections. The five are; NRM, DP, UPC, NUP and JEEMA. This is because these are the political parties whose activities ACFIM monitored and documented. All together the political parties spent an estimated minimum of UGX 8 billion (\$2.3 million) on the new format delegates conferences.



Figure 31: Distribution of Spending of the main Political Parties on Delegates Conference

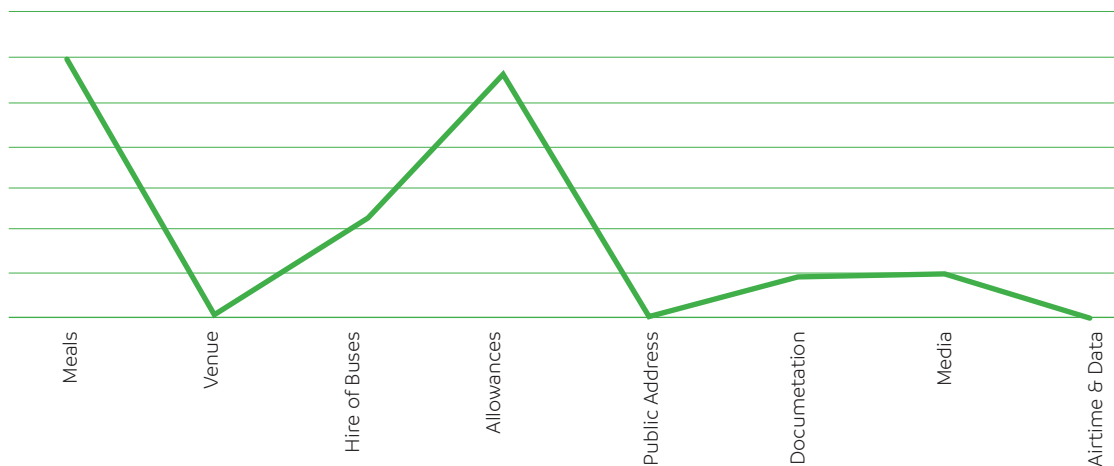


Source: ACFIM Campaign Finance Analytical Platform (2021)

Spending by the Democratic Party (DP)

The Democratic Party (DP) spent over UGX 1.5 billion to conduct a three-day national delegate’s conference in Gulu to appoint the party President flag bearer and the National Executive Committee (NEC) leaders. Feeding the delegates accounted for the lion’s share of UGX 588 million, followed by payment of allowances given to delegates (UGX 560 million). Each of the 2,800 delegates was facilitated with an allowance of UGX 200,000. The party hired 50 buses to transport delegates at a cost of UGX1.5 million each for 3 days, amounting to UGX 225 million. The publicity expenses cost the party UGX 100 million.

Figure 32: DP Budget for Delegates Conference



Source: Interview with DP Official.



DP Spending on Nomination of Flag Bearers

The Democratic Party fielded a total of 2,254 candidates at Presidential(1), Parliamentary(146) and Local Government(2,108) levels. DP failed to field candidates in for Member of Parliament in 53 out of 146 districts. The party paid the nomination fees for all its flag bearers and provided each with 3000 posters hence spending a minimum of UGX 525.6 million on this undertaking.

Table 20: DP's expenditure on MP nomination fees and contribution to posters

Item	No of flag bearers	Units	Fee/cost	Amount
Nomination fees	298	1	3,000,000	894,000,000
Posters	298	3000	200	178,800,000
Total				1,072,800,000

Source: Interview with DP Official

Spending by the National Resistance Movement Party (NRM)

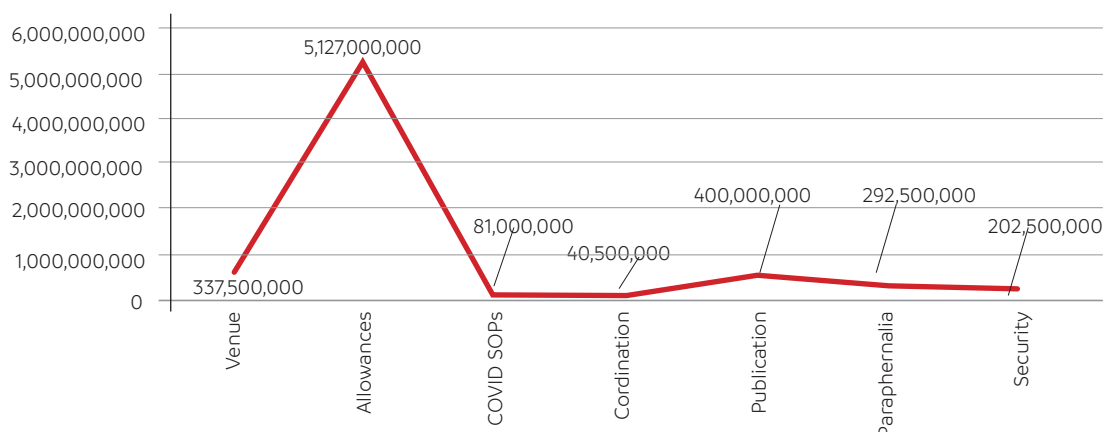
The National Resistance Movement (NRM) is Uganda's dominant party. The party's campaign spending started in August 2020, when it held the Delegates' Conference ahead to elect the Central Executive Committee (CEC) members. The delegates' conference was decentralized by region (central, western, eastern and northern) and conducted simultaneously but coordinated virtually, and was broadcast live on selected national television stations. Analysis of data on campaign spending reveals that the NRM outspent the rest of the political parties that participated in the elections.

The NRM Delegates' Conference

Information obtained from the NRM secretariat indicates that the party spent up to UGX 6.4 billion (\$1.8 million) to organize and conduct the delegates conference. Information available to ACFIM indicates that payment of delegates' allowances took the biggest percentage (79%) of their total budget for the delegates conference. The conference was understandably attended by 1,500 delegates and each delegate was paid UGX340,000 as allowance. Production of publications documenting the NRM milestones, NRM roadmap, NRM constitution, the Secretary General's report and a compilation of the National Chairman key speeches accounted for 6% of the budget. UGX 292million was spent on party paraphernalia for the conference in form of party branded masks, accreditation tags, notebooks, pens, pocket folders and party flag. To observe SOPs, the party utilized 1% of the budget (UGX 81 million) to buy sanitizers, soap, paper towels for the different regionalized meeting venues.



Figure 33: Expenses of NRM on the Delegates Conference



Source: ACFIM's Analyzed data sets (2020)

Party Contribution towards Nominations Fees of Flagbearers

The NRM reimbursed all the elected flag bearers their nomination fees paid during party primaries. The party paid an estimated UGX 1.7 billion to 660 party flag bearers for the position of directly elected MPs and LCVs including City and Division Mayors.

Table 21: Re-imbursement for nomination fees of NRM flag-bearers

Sn	Position	Number of flag bearers	Nomination fees	Amount
1	Presidential flag bearer	1	10,000,000	10,000,000
2	Constituency MP	353	2,000,000	706,000,000
3	District Woman MP	146	2,000,000	292,000,000
4	SIG MP	15	2,000,000	30,000,000
5	District Chairpersons	146	1,000,000	146,000,000
	Total			1,184,000,000

Source: Analyzed data sets (2020)

Spending by the Justice Forum Party (JEEMA)

Justice Forum (JEEMA) fielded 146 candidates at Parliamentary and Local Government levels. The party's spending began in with the Delegates' Conference on which an estimated UGX 100 million (\$27,027) was spent. This delegates conference resolved to extend the tenure of current party leaders to two and half years. The funds were spent on among other things hiring venue, payment for meals and refreshments, hiring transport refund for delegates, hiring tents and chairs, and public address system. A total of UGX 50 million (\$13,513) was spent on payment of transport refunds for the 500 delegates. JEEMA did not carry out party primary elections understandably because of financial constraints. Flag bearers were either selected or appointed by the party's leadership.



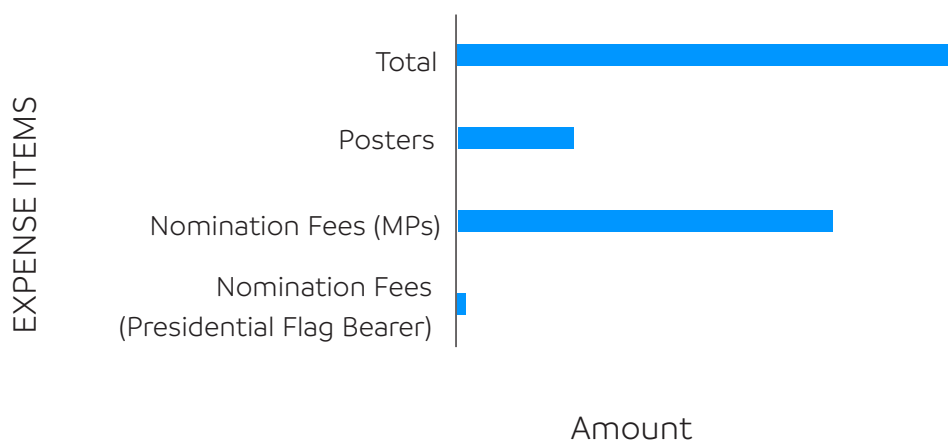
Spending by the Forum for Democratic Change Party (FDC)

Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) party fielded 6,549 candidates at Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government electoral levels. The party held her primaries in selected districts where they had strong competition between candidates such as Kalaki, Ngora, Busia, Mbale city, Rukungiri, Kasese, and Jinja city constituencies among others. Elsewhere, the party used the District Executive Committees to vet and appoint flag bearers. The National council comprising of membership of all FDC Members of Parliament, District LCV chairpersons serving and FDC party District chairmen endorsed party flag bearers. In some of the districts the party's flag bearers stood unopposed. The party held an extraordinary national council meeting at their offices – Najjanankumbi that cost approximately UGX 20 million (\$5,405).

Contribution to Party Flag Bearers

The Forum for Democratic Change fielded a Presidential flag bearer and 316 candidates for Member of Parliament races. The party has spent close over UGX 1.3 billion shillings on contributions towards nomination fees and printing of posters for the candidates. The party convened an extra ordinary council meeting to endorse Patrick Oboi Amuriat (POA) as the presidential flag bearer 2021 for the party for which an expenditure of UGX 20 million was recorded.

Figure 34: FDC's Contributions to Flag Bearers



Source: Analyzed data sets (2020)

Spending by Alliance for National Transformation Party (ANT)

Alliance for National Transformation (ANT) is one of the young political parties that participated in the general elections. The party called off its National Delegates Conference after failing to secure clearance from the Electoral Commission, and instead held regional delegates meetings in 14 regions to endorse General Muntu as the Presidential flag bearer and identify flag bearers for other political positions. ANT spent UGX150 million (\$40,540) on the regional meetings. ANT fielded up to 741 candidates across all political positions including Presidential,



and contributed nomination fees at parliamentary level to only those candidates that were financially struggling. The study couldn't verify how many candidates received contributions for their nomination fees.

National Unity Platform (NUP)

The National Unity Platform (NUP) fielded the third biggest number of candidates after NRM and FDC. The party fielded a total of 4,967 candidates at all electoral levels including Presidential and considers the meeting in which the party changed its name from National Unity, Reconciliation and Development Party to National Unity Platform (NUP), and its leadership from Moses Nkonge Kibalama to Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu as its delegates conference. It was during that meeting that the party leadership endorsed Hon Kyagulanyi Ssentamu as its presidential flag bearer and adopted a new party symbol and color. The delegates' conference was held at Kakiri Gardens Hotel in Wakiso at an estimated have cost of UGX 6,000,000 (\$1,621). NUP's operated a highly concealed campaign finance system.

Table 22: Breakdown of NUP Spending on Delegates Conference

	Item	Unit	Unit cost	Amount
1	Venue	1	500,000	500,000
2	Public Address System	1	500,000	500,000
3	Meals Refreshments	50	15000	750,000
4	Transport refunds	50	50,000	2,500,000
5	Advert for delegates conference	1	1,500,000	1,500,000
6	Coordination	1	300,000	200,000
	Total			5,950,000

Source: Analyzed data sets (2020)

Spending Uganda People's Congress (UPC)

Uganda People's Congress spent an approximate of UGX 250 million (\$67,567) on the delegates conference to endorse party flag bearers, the party president, and approve the party manifesto 2021-2026. UPC was part of the four political parties⁸ that benefited from the support from the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) under the Political Parties Capacity Support Project. UPC received UGX 100 million (\$27,000) towards strengthening the party's internal democratic processes. The party contributed nomination fees for its parliamentary flag bearers. The party which was twice in government and deposed as many times, spent UGX 141,000,000 (\$40,285) nomination fees for her flagbearers at Parliamentary level.

8 DP, UPC, JEEMA, FDC



Public Financing of Political Parties in Uganda

Issues and Challenges

Political parties are charged with two major strategic roles in modern democracy namely; First, identifying, incubating and nurturing leaders through youth leagues and women leagues among others, who are later presented to the electorate on Election-Day to choose from and cast the vote for; Second, to keep in check the party in power through alternative policy articulation, mobilizing and projecting the needs and interests of the citizenry, and providing the wheels that move democracy. These roles among others are done in public interest and for public good, thus they should receive public funding for performing them. In addition, political parties being governments in waiting, are entitled by Uganda's laws to receive public funding so that they get accustomed to the principle and practice of transparency and accountability in managing public funds.

In 2010, Parliament of Uganda reformed the country's political finance system by amending the Political Parties and Organisations Act, 2005 (PPOA), to provide for the use of Government or other public resources for political party or organisation activities. The amendment improved section 14 as follows:

- a. registered political parties or organisations shall be funded by Government under this Act in respect of elections and their normal day to day activities;
- b. in respect of elections, Government shall finance political organisations and parties on equal basis
- c. in respect of normal day to day activities, funding shall be based on the numerical strength of each party or organisation in Parliament;
- d. the funds provided to political parties and organisations under this Act, shall be subjected to audit by the Auditor General.

The spirit of this amendment was to make an attempt towards equalizing the conditions for political competition between political parties that are represented in Parliament. The amendment however, did not ban political parties from receiving funds from private sources and this still gives advantage to the party that has capacity to mobilise more resources over and above public funding.

Government Reneged on Obligation to Finance Political Parties in Respect of Elections

The Electoral Commission (EC) in Uganda is also regulator of political parties and political finance. It was observed that the political finance provisions in the Political Parties and Organisation's Act (as amended) 2005, were selectively enforced by the Electoral Commission. Specifically, section 14(b) which provides that in respect of elections, Government shall finance political organisations and parties on equal basis, was ignored by the EC. Throughout the campaign period, whereas the funds for political parties were released by the Ministry of Finance Planning



and Economic Development, the EC kept applying the formula on numerical strength which favours the NRM because it takes the lion's share.

In October 2020, as general elections were only three months away, the Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) released funds to the Electoral Commission (EC) amounting to UGX 15 billion (\$4.2 million) in respect of Government funding to political parties represented in Parliament. The proximity of elections notwithstanding, the EC applied the numerical strength formula prescribed in section 14(c) (*"in respect of normal day to day activities, funding shall be based on the numerical strength of each party or organisation in Parliament of numerical strength"*). Thus, the NRM party once again took the lion's share of UGX 12 billion out of 15 billion translating into 80% of the total disbursement thus giving the ruling party an unfair political finance advantage over the parties in opposition.

The study infers that ignoring the formula prescribed in section 14(b) – equal basis – was done deliberately to avoid according financial strength to political parties in opposition during campaigns for the general election. Whereas section 14(b) of the Political Parties and Organisations Act (as amended) 2005 enjoins Government to finance political parties and organisations on equal basis, the provision has been ignored ever since the amendment came into effect. The Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development which appropriates the funds, and the Electoral Commission which is the de facto political finance regulator (PFR), have ignored this provision.

When the opposition JEEMA party complained about flouting of section 14(b) of the Act (PPOA), the Finance Minister Hon. Matia Kasajja, expressed ignorance about section 14(b) of the Act (PPOA) and promised to look for extra funds in respect of campaigns and thus shared on equal basis. Subsequently, an additional UGX 2.5 billion (\$675,675) was released days before Election Day. Surprisingly, the electoral management body still applied the formula of numerical strength in Parliament.

Extent of Harm suffered by non-financing of Political Parties in Respect of Elections

The persistent and perhaps also deliberate acts of ignoring the command of the law in section 14(b) of the Political Parties and Organisation Act (as amended) 2005 which provided for sharing the funds on equal basis in respect of elections, defeats the spirit of the amendment which intended to equalize the conditions for electoral competition between political parties represented in Parliament. By insisting on the formula of numerical strength, the electoral commission granted the NRM party undue advantage over the opposition political parties. By ignoring the formula prescribed in section 14 (b) the opposition political parties were denied funding that would have enabled them to field more candidates at different electoral levels. Needless to say, the right of opposition political parties to field candidates at different electoral levels, was violated.



By extension, the citizens of Uganda were denied the right to choose leaders from a wide range of options because on many electoral positions, it was NRM flag bearers competing with independent candidates who were often, NRM-leaning. Opposition political parties lacked the wherewithal to popularize their campaign messages in the media, deploy quality polling agents, and field more candidates at Local Government level.

ACFIM further observed that there is no proper release schedule for the funds appropriated for political parties and organisations represented in Parliament. For example, whereas the financial year 2020/21 commenced in July 2020, the funds were not released until October 2020 and January 2021. Often, the money comes as arrears and when it arrives it causes a mad rush within the political parties leading to possible mismanagement. The spending modalities for this money is equally unclear. unclear.. In addition, there are no guidelines in respect to eligible and ineligible expenditures.

It is the observation of this study that the formula of numerical strength in parliament which the Electoral Commission used to disburse public funding to political parties during the period of elections (October 2020 and January 2021), allotted over 80% of the funds to the ruling NRM party while the remainder of the funds – a paltry less than 20% is what was shared among the four opposition political parties. This imbalance in political finance among other factors, created and maintained an uneven playing field and undermined the fairness of campaigns.

Why Should Government of Uganda Continue Funding Political Parties?

Since the financial year of 2015/16 when the obligation for government to contribute funds or other public resources towards the activities of political parties or organisations represented in Parliament started, up until January 2021, a total of UGX 70 billion (\$19.4 million) of which the lion's share of 80% (UGX 56 billion) or more, went to the ruling NRM party.

This study identifies three main reasons why Government of Uganda should continue to provide public funding to political parties, namely:

- a. To compensate for the growing cost of politics and inability of some political parties to source for political finance resources
- b. To guarantee some level of competition between the incumbent NRM party and parties in opposition
- c. To limit the potentially disruptive role of interested (quid pro quo) money.

There is no doubt that political parties are vital political institutions for entrenching sustainable democracy in Uganda. The parties need appropriate funding in order to carry out their core activities including administration of party structures and financing election campaigns. Availability of financial resources will enable young political parties to gain visibility, mobilise and socialise the general public in order to obtain political support for their ideas come 2026. In other words, political parties need to maintain functional party branch offices at grassroots level, to employ party personnel/staff, to conduct election campaigns and



to communicate with the electorate at large without being constrained. The question is whether the government in power is ready and willing to see this happen.

Opacity in Managing Public Funding to Political parties

There is no established framework to ensure the transparent utilisation of public funds disbursed to political parties that are represented in Parliament. The political parties do not publish any information whatsoever about how the public funds received are utilized and neither does the Electoral Commission. There are un answered questions about what the political parties use this money for? How is it accounted for? There is no guidance of eligible and ineligible expenditures. Political parties are not immune to corruption; thus, the lack of openness and transparency provides a fertile ground for the public funds to fall prey to corruption.

Interviews with Secretaries General of JEEMA and DP, revealed that there is also no clarity on how much every political party will get every quarter. There is a sense in which the responsible government institutions perceive the appropriation of public funding as a favor rather than an obligation to political parties. Conversely, save for a few times when a journalist stumbles on the story about the release, there is no formal mechanism of publicizing how much has been disbursed to which political party, and access to the annual returns submitted to the Electoral Commission is to say the least, difficult.

Between November 2019 and August 2020, Alliance for Finance Monitoring, in reference to the Access to Information Act (2005), wrote to the Secretary, Electoral Commission three times requesting to access information about annual returns submitted made by political parties represented in Parliament for the years 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018. On all occasions, those the requests for were not responded to. This situation points to two possible scenarios. First, the political parties do not submit timely the returns thus the Electoral Commission has no information to grant the public access to; second, the electoral management body is disobeying the command of the Access to Information Act which enjoins public institutions to respond in a timely manner, to formal public request to information in their custody with the exception of that which is deemed classified.

The need for transparency of political party and campaign finances is enshrined in the Article 7 of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), which states that countries should: *“consider taking appropriate legislative and administrative measures . . . to enhance transparency in the funding of candidates for elected public office and, where applicable, the funding of political parties”*. Uganda signed and ratified the UNCAC and thus, as a state party, is bound by its provisions.

Possible non-Auditing of Public Funding to Political Parties

Section 14(d) of the Political Parties and Organisations Act (as amended) 2005, enjoins the Auditor General, to audit such public funds disbursed to political parties. These funds are released to the Electoral Commission which doubles as the Political Party Registrar (PPR) and triples as the de facto Political Finance Regulator (PFR). A review of the Reports of the Auditor General



to Parliament over the past four financial years (2015/2016 – 2019/2020), gives no opinion on government funds disbursed to political parties. There is evidence in the annual reports of the Auditor General to prove auditing of public funds to political parties as prescribed by the law. Thus, it is impossible to tell whether or not those funds are utilized in accordance with acceptable standards of financial management.

The study infers that there is no rigorous reporting by the Auditor General on public funds provided to political parties and organisations under the Political Parties and Organisations Act (as amended) 2005. It is important that the Office of the Auditor General takes keen interest in enforcing section 14(d) of the Act. This is because, auditing rules are essential for the enforcement of controls on political parties' and candidates' income and expenses in respect of elections.

During the process of writing this report, ACFIM wrote two successive letters to the Auditor General requesting for a meeting (virtual or physical) to hear and understand the position and opinion of the Office of the Auditor General on this matter, but none of the letters was responded to and the subsequent follow up efforts were futile. The general observation is that the Office of the Auditor General seems to have signposted public funds disbursed to political parties as a politically sensitive matter.