

ABSTRACT

THE POLITICS OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN UGANDA: DONOR INTERESTS, DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES, AND INTRA-GOVERNMENTAL CONFLICT

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The process of democratic transition in Uganda has been explained by scholars with reference to either domestic or international factors: the political interests of the Museveni regime, and donor pressure for procedural democratization respectively. These positions are not mutually exclusive: the regime successfully resisted external pressure for years, until such time as executive interests aligned with donor demands, resulting in the shift from a 'no-party' democracy to a multi-party democracy. This paper explains these changing interests through case studies of conflict between Uganda's executive and its parliament over financial sector reform, central bank independence, and electricity sector reform. Uganda's parliament – the product of a previous round of procedural democratic reform designed to please donors – provided an opposition function, checking executive power and scrutinizing donor advocated development strategies. However, this form of substantive democracy created incentives for the executive to support a transition towards a more procedural, multi-party democracy where parliament might be better controlled. Uganda's resulting multi-party democracy therefore has overtones of a stronger and less accountable executive.

Procedural forms of democratization may better accommodate donor advocated development strategies, however, they have the potential to undermine existing, substantive forms of democracy. Conversely, Uganda's parliament under 'no-party' democracy demonstrates that procedural forms of democratization may nonetheless create institutional space for substantive forms of democracy to 'break out'. Accordingly, from a normative perspective broadly favorable to substantive democracy, democratization processes must be evaluated in terms of their substantive impact on democracy in specific institutional contexts. The tension between development strategies and substantive forms of democracy and democratization must be recognized both by donors, and by theorists of development and democracy.