

Patronage, District Creation and Democracy in Uganda

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Abstract:

In recent years Uganda has experienced a near explosion in the number of districts, the highest level of local government, going from 39 to 79 in less than a decade. There have been many explanations for why so many districts have been created, from improved service delivery to gerrymandering, an inability to withstand local demands and an attempt to break up regional opposition to President Museveni's rule. I examine these potential reasons and conclude, through the use of election results, interviews and other data, that district creation has been primarily a source of patronage in the ongoing need for Museveni to win elections.

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Introduction

Since President Yoweri Museveni came to power in Uganda in January 1986, he and his ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) have enacted a wide range of reforms at all levels of government and society. One of the most significant of these changes has been the introduction of the Local Council (LC) system of local government, ranging from the village (LCI) to the district (LCV) levels.² The LC system has attracted a wide range of praise from both within and without Uganda, not the least for the re-introduction of local elections. However, one of the most important aspects of the LC system has drawn little attention, namely the creation of new districts. Since the early 1990s Uganda has seen a veritable explosion in the number of its districts, going from 34 in 1991 to 79 and counting in 2007.³ The country recently surpassed Thailand to hold the spot of fourth on the list of the world's largest number of sub-national administrative divisions per state,⁴ and, as demonstrated on Table 1, has far more sub-national provinces or people per province than any other large African state.

Table 1: Sub-National Administrative Divisions for Sub-Saharan African countries with a population of more than twenty million, by number (Source: CIA World Factbook, US Census Bureau)

Country	Name of Division	Number of Divisions	Population/Division
Uganda	Districts	79	383,071
Nigeria	States	37	3,563,784
Sudan	State	26	1,483,077
Tanzania	Region	26	1,555,923
Ethiopia	States	11	7,011,545
DR Congo	Province	11	5,694,182
Mozambique	Province	10	1,945,182
Ghana	Region	10	2,347,800
South Africa	Province	9	5,397,444
Kenya	Province	8	4,692,250

The purpose of this paper is thus to explain Uganda's flurry of district creation. I examine six reasons for the creation of new districts, namely 1) the improvement of service delivery, 2) ethno-linguistic conflict management, 3) gerrymandering, 4) the inability of the central government to resist local demands for new districts, 5) the removal of regional opposition, and 6) patronage and electoral politics. I explore each of these six reasons and conclude that most of them have some element of truth. I argue that the best explanation is the use of new districts as patronage due to Museveni's need to win presidential elections. Below I first detail the history of district creation in Uganda before exploring each of these reasons in turn. I then conclude with some wider thoughts on patronage and decentralization in contemporary Africa.

A History of District Creation in Uganda

² The LCs were formerly known as Resistance Councils until the 1995 constitution.

³ Such is the state of affairs in Uganda that there is even confusion over the number of districts that exist – the websites <http://www.statoids.com/uug.html> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Districts_of_Uganda list 77 and 80 districts, respectively, while Mwenda, A. M. (2007). "Personalizing Power in Uganda." *Journal of Democracy* 18(3): 23-37. lists 81. The reason for this confusion is undoubtedly due to the fact that the central government has often announced the creation of a new district months or even years before the new district's boundaries, capital and leaders have been allocated or elected. I list 79 districts here as that is the number of districts for which I have verified election data from the Ugandan Electoral Commission for district chairpersons; undoubtedly by the time this paper is in print the number of districts will have been raised once again.

⁴ The first three are Russia (83 federal subjects), the Philippines (82 provinces) and Turkey (81 provinces).

Under British colonial rule Uganda was divided into four provinces, namely northern, eastern, western and the kingdom of Buganda. These provinces were further divided into sixteen districts, which were overseen by British District Commissioners. Other than in Buganda most of these districts were created along 'tribal' lines, whereby each district was supposedly ethnically homogenous and was ruled through 'traditional' leadership.⁵ These districts were thus important in the subsequent formation of ethnic identity, for instance in the case of the Acholi and the Karamojong in the north and the Iteso in the east (Apter 1959). However, the British conception of African tribes as eternal and unchanging meant that new districts were very rarely created, and then only for explicit administrative purposes.

Upon independence in 1962 Uganda's provincial divisions were dropped with one exception, Buganda, which subsequently became a federal state. However, clashes between the then President of Uganda, the *Kabaka* (King) of Buganda, and Prime Minister Milton Obote led to the latter ousting the former in a coup in 1966, leading to the abolishment of Buganda as a governmental unit in Obote's 1967 constitution. Idi Amin, however, subsequently reintroduced ten provincial governments in 1974, this time under the rule of military Governors, while also almost doubling the number of districts to 37. As (Jørgensen 1981) notes, the reintroduction of the provincial level as well as new districts provided patronage posts for Amin's more ambitious soldiers, thereby relieving pressure on national politics and giving the new governors free reign to wreak havoc on the countryside. These new districts included the division in two of the former ethnically demarcated districts Acholi, Ankole, Bunyoro, Busoga, Kigezi, Lango, Karamoja, Teso and Toro.

After Amin was overthrown the Uganda National Liberation Front government of 1979-1980 reduced the number of districts to 33, where it remained through Obote's second Presidency and Tito Okello's brief rule. Museveni's aforementioned Commission of Inquiry into the Local Government system – whose members were largely composed of academics, including current Prime Minister Apolo Nsibambi – deliberated about the creation of new districts. It was, by implication, very critical of the proliferation of districts under Amin, arguing that, 'quite often, the response of governments to popular demands for a more responsive administration (e.g., better services) has been to create new and smaller units... There is no doubt that the multiplication of administrative units is a costly affair' (Government of Uganda 1987: 117). In principle, the Commission, noted,

We were hesitant to recommend the creation of new and additional administrative units, bearing in mind that these would increase unproductive costs of administration, both in terms of creating an administrative infrastructure and payment of personnel... Given our strong view that the exercise in creating new districts over the past decade and a half has been arbitrary, haphazard and hardly defensible, we would have recommended a review of the status of all existing districts with a view to de-grading those which do not meet minimum criteria... Should such a review be undertaken in the present circumstances, it would undoubtedly result in a large number of the newly created districts losing their existing status (Government of Uganda 1987: 121-123).

After spending several months touring the country, the Commission accumulated eleven requests for the creation of new districts, of which it only recommended four. Yet, while Museveni failed to pursue the review of existing districts as recommended by the Commission, he nonetheless withheld the creation of any new districts, only relenting on the case of Kalangala (comprising the Ssesse islands in Lake Victoria) in 1990. The next year, however, he undertook the other three recommendations of the Commission and added another, the aforementioned district of Kiboga. As Table 1 demonstrates, Museveni continued to add districts in 1994, 1997 and 2000 before announcing the creation of 22 new districts in 2005, the largest ever increase in Uganda's history.⁶ Thus Uganda now has 79 districts, more than twice as many as when Museveni took office and more than four times

⁵ Exceptions included ethnic sub-districts like Madi which were considered too small or backward to sustain themselves; Kasfir, N. (1976). *The Shrinking Political Arena: Participation and Ethnicity in African Politics, with a Case Study of Uganda*. Berkeley, CA, University of California Press.

⁶ The districts were created in two sets, with thirteen new ones inaugurated in 2005 and another ten – minus two that were announced in 2005 (Maracha-Terego and Tororo County), plus three that were not (Bududa, Bukedea and Lyatonde) – in 2006. The reasons why Tororo County has yet to be created are detailed below; in Maracha-Terego local leaders could not agree on where the new district capital was to be located.

as many as when Amin took office in 1971. While the number of people per district, at around 379,000, is still considerably more than in 1974, it is nonetheless close to 50% less than the number of people per district before Amin's reorganization or before the creation of five new districts in 1997.

Table 2: District Creation in Uganda
(Sources: Government of Uganda 1987, (Ocwich 2005), US Census Bureau)

Year	Number of Districts	Population per District
1959	16	443,000
1962	17	456,365
1968	18	513,711
1971	19	526,853
1974	37	292,211
1979	33	368,115
1990	34	513,412
1991	38	476,474
1994	39	514,256
1997	45	455,718
2000	56	427,786
2005	70	402,843
2006	79	383,071

By 2007 district creation had become such a large issue that, while this researcher was there for the month of July, scarcely a day went by without an article in one of the two main newspapers about the creation of or a public demand for a new district. Yet most discussions of decentralization in Uganda have largely failed to discuss district creation (Devas and Grant 2003; Francis and James 2003; Onyach-Olaa 2003; Wunsch and Ottemoeller 2004; Dauda 2006), while those that do (Golola 2001; Goetz 2002; Crook 2003; Hickey 2003; Saito 2003; Mwenda 2007) have only discussed district creation in passing and largely fail to examine the variety of reasons why so districts have been created in recent years.

There are a wide variety of potential reasons behind district creation, only some of which are plausible for Uganda. For instance, the idea that districts are reverting to their previous incarnations, as could plausibly be applied to Libya, Nigeria or Vietnam (Ejobowah 2004), makes no sense in Uganda inasmuch as districts have only once ever been cut in number, from 37 to 33 in 1979, only to surpass their previous high by 1991. Over the rest of the article I therefore examine six potential reasons behind district creation, namely 1) the improvement of service delivery, 2) ethno-linguistic conflict management, 3) gerrymandering, 4) the inability of the central government to resist local demands for new districts, 5) the removal of regional opposition, and 6) patronage and electoral politics, each of which I assess in order.

1. The Improvement of Service Delivery

The standard reason for creating new sub-national units in developing countries is to improve service delivery and developmental outcomes, as seen in the rhetoric from Nigeria and Vietnam, among others (Akinyele 1996; Malesky 2005). In Uganda Article 179 of the 1995 constitution allows for the creation of new districts based on 'effective administration and the need to bring services closer to the people.' Indeed, local councilors have often praised the creation of new districts as effective in promoting service delivery, even among those districts that have only recently created. For instance, Amuru district leaders claimed that, only a year after it had been created, the advantages of a new district has been obvious in more boreholes, schools and roads and better coordination and easier monitoring among government officials.⁷ More generally NRM cadres like Ofwono Opondo make claims that district creation and development have gone hand-in-hand in Uganda, in that 'Uganda is more developed today than 25 years ago when it had only 39 districts or indeed four decades of only 18 districts' (Oguttu and Opondo 2007).

⁷ Interviews with District Chairman Anthony Atube Omach and Chief Administrative Officer Alia Seraphine, Amuru, 16 July 2007.

There is, however, little concrete evidence that the creation of new districts has benefited citizens. One source of evidence comes from the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG)'s annual assessments of district government performance, which monitor local governments according to the guidelines set forth in the 1997 Local Government Act. Specifically, if a district does not meet a certain minimum set of requirements in such areas as accounting, auditing, capacity building, monitoring and gender mainstreaming, it will fail to procure various types of grants. In its evaluations the MoLG has repeatedly shown that older districts invariably outperform newer ones in meeting its minimum conditions of governance. For instance, in 2004, compared to a Ugandan average of 58.9%, only 50% (8/16) of districts created since 1997 passed these minimum standards, with an even lower score of 45.5% (5/11) for those created since 2000 (Uganda 2004). Despite an overall improvement, in 2007 81.5% (38/44) of older district governments were able to meet minimum conditions while only 66.7% (22/33) of the districts created since 2000 were able to do the same (Uganda 2007).

Indeed, when pressed upon this issue, district leaders often admit that the creation of new districts creates as many logistical and administrative problems as it solves. In following the principle that district headquarters are to be located in the geographical middle of a district, district offices are often located far away from any sizeable town or village, thus making district officials commute long distances over unpaved roads to their offices and thereby spend less time in their actual offices. (In Amuru district in northern Uganda, this meant commuting from Gulu, a 90-minute drive away.⁸) More importantly, important files and documents often linger for years in rump districts before they are separated and sent along to the new district headquarters. For example, Kiboga district (northwest of Kampala), which was created in 1991, still had not received all of its relevant land office files from Mubende district in 2001, according to its district land officer at the time.⁹

Furthermore, if district creation did lead to better service delivery through the creation of smaller government units, we should be able to see it quantitatively. More specifically, we should expect to find a negative and significant correlation between service delivery and either population size or geographical size (or both). If we use immunization rates as a proxy for public service delivery, as is common elsewhere (Khaleghian 2003), we find that linear regressions of immunization rates from 2004 and 2005 (the latest years for which data is available) for three types of vaccines (BCG, Measles and OPV3) yield both small correlation coefficients and no significant results for any variable.

2. Ethno-Linguistic Conflict Management

Arguments for decentralization and the creation of new sub-national units are often based on the management of ethno-linguistic conflict (Treisman 2007), as seen for instance in the example of India (Corbridge 2002). In Uganda, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government, Vincent Ssekono, similarly claims that the creation of new districts has enabled ethnic minorities who were formerly marginalized to obtain their own district. As an example Ssekono gave the Aringa ethnic group of northwest Uganda who formerly shared Arua district with their Lugbara neighbors. This resulting 'problem of communication' was alleviated by the creation of Yumbe district in 2000, which allowed the Aringa to speak their own language at council meetings and articulate their specific development priorities.¹⁰

However, Ssekono's explanation falls flat in explaining district creation across Uganda for two reasons. First, despite his claim that new districts not created along ethnic lines like Nakaseke or Nakapiriprit are exceptional, there is no evidence that ethnicity has played the primary role in the creation of new districts over the past two decades. Of the 46 districts created over Museveni's reign, only 13 or 28.3% have led to a minority group becoming a majority in either the new or the rump district. Moreover, this figure does not change significantly if one breaks down the result chronologically: for the periods 1988-1997, 1998-2002 and 2003-2007 the numbers are 27.3% (3/11), 27.3% (3/11) and 29.2% (7/24), respectively.¹¹

⁸ Interviews with District Chairman Anthony Atube Omach and Chief Administrative Officer Alia Seraphine, Amuru, 16 July 2007.

⁹ Interview with District Land Officer Francis Kabanda, Kiboga, 16 November 2001.

¹⁰ Interview, Vincent Ssekono, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government, Kampala, 13 July 2007.

¹¹ There is some more regional variation, with the east receiving the largest number of ethnically-demarcated districts (37.5% or 6/16) and Buganda the least (11.1% or 1/9).

Secondly, far from alleviating ethnic tension and spurring development, it is clear that the creation of new districts has led in many cases to increased levels of ethnic conflict. For instance, the demands of many Bakiga and Batagwenda inhabitants of Kabarole district for their own district in the late 1990s led to a reaction from the Batoro elite in the district, who were worried both about losing control to local resources as well as the future viability of the local Toro kingdom if the new districts refused to support the kingdom financially.¹² Tensions between the two sides grew so high that, according to noted reporter Andrew Mwenda, 'people [in the region] are even arming themselves for a possible war', which subsequently led to intense talks between various military and security leaders from Kampala and local leaders (Mwenda and Mugisa 1999). Similarly, the Tororo district of eastern Uganda, which had been dominated by Itesot before the creation of the Itesot-majority Pallisa district in 1991, is currently dominated by members of the Japadhola ethnic group. As such, a number of minority Itesot residents in Tororo county have petitioned the government for their own district. While the Commission of Inquiry appointed by the central government agreed to create the district, it failed to assign the current district capital, whose residents are both Japadhola and Itesot, to the new district. The rift led to ethnic divisions in the February 2006 parliamentary race, with many local Itesot supporting the Ugandan Asian candidate Sanjay Tanna against the incumbent MP for Tororo Municipality, Yeri Ofwono. After winning the election, Tanna escaped a petrol bomb attack at his residence in April, while in August Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF, the Ugandan army) soldiers forcibly broke up a meeting of Tororo county councilors on the behest of the LCV chairman. More recently, in October 2006 the UPDF was deployed in town after rumors that local Itesot extremists were planning on burning down the district headquarters.¹³

3. Gerrymandering

In his analysis of province creation in Vietnam, (Malesky 2005) posits that the central government created new provinces in order to placate conservatives whose power was otherwise being whittled away by privatization and other economic reforms. As suggested by (Malesky 2005), this process was very similar to the old American practice of gerrymandering, whereby sub-national political units are altered in size or shape in order to alter the majority/minority status of certain political, racial or ethnic groups; in the Vietnamese case, the boundaries of the new provinces were drawn as to make them less dominated by state-owned enterprises than their predecessors. Whether in Vietnam, the United States or elsewhere, gerrymandering is often marked by the creation of oddly-shaped political units, inasmuch as the groups in question do not inhabit geographically compact areas.

Despite claims from (Piron and Norton 2004) to the contrary, however, gerrymandering cannot explain district creation in Uganda, for three reasons. First, there are fewer incentives for Museveni to gerrymander districts, whose leaders have no representation at the central government level, than in other countries like Vietnam where provincial leaders have seats in the regular Communist Party congresses (Malesky 2005). Moreover, while Article 63 of Uganda's 1995 constitution allows for the redistricting of parliamentary constituencies after a census, this power is given to the Electoral Commission, which is independent from the government and which has so far not pursued redistricting according to the 2002 census results. Indeed, in its initial version of the Constitution (Amendment No. 3) Bill of 2005 the Museveni government proposed to transfer power over the number of parliamentary constituencies from the Electoral Commission to Parliament; however, under pressure to prevent the 'mushrooming of constituencies,' the Attorney General removed this clause before the bill was passed.¹⁴

¹² After having been abolished by Milton Obote in 1967, four of Uganda's kingdoms (Busoga, Buganda, Bunyoro and Toro) were restored in 1993, albeit as cultural institutions with no power over taxation or administration. While districts thus do not currently contribute any funds to the upkeep of kingdom, Buganda monarchists have led the drive to create regional or federal tiers of government at the level of the kingdoms, which would then have both fiscal and political power. As LRA negotiators have also come out recently in support of a regional tier system, its eventual creation continues to look more and more likely, thereby creating a large incentive for kingdom governments to prevent districts under their nominal aegis from seceding.

¹³ Interview with MP Sanjay Tanna, 19 July 2007.

¹⁴ Ugandan National Assembly Hansard, 5 August 2005. There has in fact been only one new constituency created in Uganda since 1996 (with the exception of Women MPs), namely Bughendera county in Bundibugyo district, created in May 2001.

Secondly, if gerrymandering were occurring in Uganda, one would also expect to see oddly-shaped districts and a subsequent uproar as there has been in other countries where gerrymandering produces strange-looking political units. Yet none of Uganda's new districts are in any way comparable in their shape to the more outrageous examples of gerrymandered districts in the United States, which resemble such entities as a mosquito, snake, starfish or a wishbone (Hill 2003), nor have their shapes been controversial or even a topic for public discussion.

Thirdly and finally, there is no evidence that new districts in Uganda have been created along lines that would move local ethnic or political groups from majority to minority status or vice-versa. As noted above, new districts in Uganda have largely not been created along ethnic lines, and there is no evidence that districts have been created along political party lines, i.e., where NRM or FDC (Forum for Democratic Change) supporters have been hived off into the new districts. If this were so, one would expect to see an increase over time in the standard deviation of electoral support for Museveni by district, inasmuch as political parties would be increasingly separated into their own districts as they are in the United States and there would thus be wider variation in support for Museveni at the district level. Yet, as indicated in Table 1, the standard deviation in support for Museveni is considerably lower in the 2001 and 2006 elections than it was in 1996, the opposite of what would be expected if gerrymandering were occurring along political lines.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics, District-Level Support for Museveni in Three Presidential Elections (Source: Uganda Electoral Commission)

Year	Num. of Districts	Minimum (%)	Maximum (%)	Mean (%)	Std. Deviation
1996	39	8.5	99.8	74.9	27.8
2001	53	11.5	97.8	70.4	23.1
2006	69	7.9	92.6	61.5	24.3

4. The Inability of the Central Government to Resist Local Demands

A majority of those scholars who have discussed district creation in Uganda ascribe it to the central government's lack of ability to resist local demands for new districts (Golola 2001; Goetz 2002; Crook 2003; Hickey 2003; Saito 2003). More specifically, (Golola 2001) claims that district creation was done 'in response to the wishes of important pressure groups and political supporters of the central government,' while (Hickey 2003) worries that the central government 'has been unable to resist pressures from local elites' for new districts. On the surface this analysis appears plausible, inasmuch as Ugandans recognize the benefits of having their own district and are very vocal in expressing their desires. Indeed, these pressures often take bizarre forms of protest, as with both residents of Nakaseke district when they paraded with the skulls of those who had been killed and buried in the district during the civil war of the early 1980s, and those of Tororo who publicly ate rats in full view of President Museveni to demonstrate the seriousness of their claim (Buwembo 2005). These protests have even turned violent, most notably in the aforementioned cases of the split-up of Kabarole district in 1999-2000 and Tororo district in 2006, among others (Green 2007).

However, the idea that district creation has been driven primarily by local demands cannot be sustained for two reasons. First and foremost, the NRM government has been able to resist a variety of other local demands over the course of its reign, most notably in regards to the kingdoms of southern Uganda. While he allowed the restoration of Buganda, Bunyoro, Busoga and Toro kingdoms in the early 1990s, President Museveni halted the restoration of the Ankole kingdom on the grounds that it was divisive and unpopular.¹⁵ Despite continued support for the Ankole restoration among a section of the Banyankole population (Uganda 2003) and a dubious legal standing for denying the restoration (Oloka-Onyango 1995), the Ankole kingdom remains a fiction. Similarly, leaders of the Buganda kingdom have been demanding the restoration of their former federal state ever since the kingdom was restored in 1993, with an overwhelming support of the Bugandan population. Again, despite continued and possibly increasing support for federalism (locally known as *federalo*), the NRM

¹⁵ While a restoration of the Ankole kingdom may not have been very popular, in fact none of the kingdoms other than Buganda held large public support, according to the Uganda Constitution Commission which measured popular opinion on the subject in the early 1990s.

government has so far refused to acquiesce to the kingdom's demands. Certainly the ability of the central government to resist demands from the most numerous and economically powerful ethnic group in the country suggests that it could resist the creation of new districts if it so wanted.

Secondly, if district creation has been driven from below we should be able to explain a sudden popularity for new districts in the 1990s at the local level. We should thus be able to find a political or fiscal change of policy that led to this increased demand, something akin to the way the 1970 modification of the Distributable Pool Account in Nigeria started sending 50% of federal transfers over to states regardless of their size and thereby contributed to the explosion in demands for new federal states (Ekpo 1994; Nolte 2002). As regards Uganda, there has indeed been a significant change in local government budgets over the past decade, inasmuch as the former main source of local government revenue, the Graduated Personal Tax (GPT), was reduced from 10,000 USh to 3000 USh per year in 2001 and eliminated completely in 2005 (Therkildsen 2006). Yet, as noted in Table 2, district creation predates any change in local government budget structures, with 12 districts created in the 1990s. Moreover, upon its abolition the GPT was replaced with an increased transfer of conditional grants from the central government, which are tied to social services like education and health and thus, unlike in Nigeria, are dependent on district size and population. In other words, the logic of state creation in Nigeria after 1970 does not apply to Uganda.

Rather, the incentives for demanding a new district have been constant throughout President Museveni's reign, as they are elsewhere. New districts are examples of what are called 'club goods' in the field of political economy, and their creation is an example of what (Lowi 1964) calls a 'distributive policy,' in that their benefits go to a small group of people but their costs are spread out across the entire population. As spelled out by (Olson 1982) in his analysis of special-interest organizations, such a policy is likely to encounter little opposition since its cost per capita is so low that those who pay for it have little incentive to organize collectively to combat it. In other words, the cost of creating each district per citizen is very small,¹⁶ and as long as new districts are not created along biased lines, all Ugandans have the potential to benefit from a new district in their own area. This logic does not, however, explain why there should have been such a sudden rush in the number of new districts since 1997, and therefore cannot be the primary factor behind district creation.

5. The Removal of Regional Opposition

Former Minister of Local Government Jaberu Bidandi-Ssali, who fell out with President Museveni over the lifting of presidential term limits in 2003, claims that the primary political goal for Museveni in recent years has been to remove any actual or potential opposition to his presidency; at the local level, this has meant the undermining of district independence from central control. The creation of new districts was thus part of a strategy to undermine the ability of local governments to both challenge the centre and build some fiscal independence for themselves. The result after the creation of so many new districts, according to Bidandi-Ssali, is that 'no district can stand on its own' and 'every district must look up to the centre for its sustainability.'¹⁷

In a similar vein the creation of new districts has also led to breaking up district caucuses.¹⁸ In addition to party and regional caucuses, district caucuses have existed since the election of the 6th Parliament in 1996 and, while naturally small by definition, they have nonetheless played a role in parliamentary politics, as when, upon the death of the former Foreign Affairs minister James Wapakhabulo in 2004, the Mbale Parliamentary Caucus was involved in discussions on his replacement (Osike and Etengu 2004). While not eliminating district caucuses, the creation of districts has significantly reduced their sizes. Despite the addition of one new Woman MP for every new district, the creation of new districts has nonetheless lowered the average number of MPs per district, as indicated in Table 2, from 7.4 in 1996 to 4.0 in 2008.

¹⁶ Each district costs the Ugandan state between 685 million and 1.03 billion Ugandan shillings in wages per year Ocwich, D. (2005). *Can Uganda's Economy Support More Districts?* *New Vision*. Kampala. With a current population at 28.8 million citizens, each district thus costs between 23.8 shillings (\$0.013) to 35.8 shillings (\$0.019) Ush per citizen per year. Even the higher figure of 1.3 billion Ugandan shillings proposed by USAID/Uganda (2001). *Problems Regarding the Formation of New Districts*. Kampala, USAID. only comes to 45.1 shillings (\$0.024) Ush per citizen per year.

¹⁷ Interview with Jaberu Bidandi-Ssali, Kampala, 13 July 2007.

¹⁸ I owe this point to Andrew Mwenda.

Table 4: Average number of MPs per district, 1996-2008
(Source: Parliament of Uganda)

Year	Number of MPs	Number of Districts	MPs per district
1996	288	39	7.4
1999	294	45	6.5
2002	305	56	5.4
2005	306	70	4.4
2008	330	80	4.1

Yet the evidence behind these two related reasons for breaking up districts is mixed. As regards district caucuses, the creation of new districts has not prevented district caucuses from working together, as in 2002 when members of the Arua and Yumbe district parliamentary caucuses issued a joint statement to the parliament on an alleged atrocity by UPDF soldiers in West Nile (Monitor 2002). Indeed, regional caucuses such as the Ankole, Buganda and Bunyoro caucuses, among others, allow MPs from different districts to work together.

There is, however, some evidence to Bidandi-Ssali's claim. If he is correct, then we should be able to find areas of strong opposition to Museveni being broken into smaller districts and areas where he maintains support kept as larger districts. The 2002 census does indeed indicate, that, after Kampala, Museveni's home area of Mbarara, where he received 91.5% of the vote in the 2001 presidential election, was the only district to contain more than one million residents. Indeed, Bidandi-Ssali claims that Museveni did not want to break up Mbarara district but was forced to do so to appear being too biased towards his home district.¹⁹

Secondly, as seen in Table 4, district creation has not been uniform throughout Uganda: of the 46 districts created in Uganda since 1990, 16 have been in the east, 11 in the north, 10 in the west and 9 in the centre, to the point where each region has 24, 21, 19 and 16 districts, respectively. This trend of creating districts in the north and east, which has been especially prominent since 1996, has led to regional disparities in the size of the population per district, with the east and north considerably lower than in the west and centre. Museveni's support has long been in the southern/central and western half of Uganda, so it would seem here as if he were indeed pursuing a strategy of creating new districts in opposition areas.

Table 5: Districts and Population per Region
(Source: 2002 Census)

Region	New Districts since 1990 (1996)	Total Districts	Population (2005)	Population per District
East	16 (15)	24	6.8m	283,333
North	11 (11)	21	6.1	290,476
West	10 (7)	19	6.8	357,895
Centre	9 (7)	16	7.1	443,750

However, statistical tests fail to support this thesis. First, if Museveni's goal were to create unviable small districts in order to destroy or disrupt centers of local opposition and maintain large districts which continued to support him, we would expect to find a positive relationship between district size and electoral support in a statistical analysis. Yet linear regressions of Museveni's support in the 2001 and 2006 elections on district population actually show negative relationships between the two variables (although not much can be interpreted from the results as they are both insignificant). In other words, the larger the district the less likely its inhabitants were to vote for Museveni in the 2006 election, which is the opposite of what would be predicted by Bidandi-Ssali's analysis.

Similarly, if Museveni had created new districts in opposition areas as defined by those who failed to vote for him in the previous presidential election, we should be able to see this effect in a binary logistic regression. Yet there is no significant relationship between electoral support (as an independent variable) and district creation (as a dependent variable) for the 2001 election and subsequent new districts.

¹⁹ Interview with Jaber Bidandi-Ssali, Kampala, 13 July 2007.

6. Patronage, Job Creation and Electoral Politics

A final explanation for district creation is that President Museveni has used the creation of new districts to create 'a raft of new jobs, each one a patronage opportunity' (Mwenda 2007). This ongoing creation of new patron-client relationships can be seen as part of the same dynamic that has led to the ever-increasing size of the Cabinet and the Parliament, whereby potentially dangerous opposition leaders can be brought under the government payroll and thereby neutralized. Indeed, as (Goetz 2002) notes, the creation of new districts has been especially beneficial to women at the parliamentary level, since, as noted above, each new district brings with it a new Woman MP; the result is that Woman MPs as a percentage of all MPs with voting rights have gone from 14.0% in 1996 to 25.0% in 2008. This gender-biased patronage has not gone unnoticed in Uganda; for instance, in a Parliamentary debate on new districts MP Tiperu Nusura (Women, Yumbe) appreciated the 'many more Women Members of Parliament and jobs for the unemployed' (Parliament of Uganda Hansard, 20 July, 2005).

Yet the creation of new districts has not only created jobs in Parliament. While the creation of a district does not entail any new sub-district positions, it nonetheless leads to a significant number of new posts at the district level. First, a whole new set of technical and administrative staff must be hired, including a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), Resident District Commissioner (RDC), deputy CAO, deputy RDC, and a District Auditor, Clerk (and Assistant Clerk), Community Based Services Manager, Education Officer, Engineer, Extension Coordinator, Finance Officer, Director of Health Services, Information Officer, Inspector of Schools, Land Officer, National Agricultural Advisory Services Officer, Personnel Officer and Planner, among others. A new set of district councilors representing special interest groups (such as women, the youth and the disabled), averaging out to around 12 per new district, must also go on the payroll. Finally, a new district Chairman, earning 500,000 Ugandan shillings per month, and around six executive secretaries per district, are also needed. (USAID/Uganda 2001). The result of all of these new jobs at the district level is a cascading effect as lower level officials are promoted upwards, thereby creating new job openings at all levels of local government. Indeed, when asked about the benefits of district creation, sub-county councilors in Nakaseke primarily answered by noting the new jobs and promotions for locals who had previously been unemployed by the previous Luwero district administration.²⁰

Moreover, district creation has also led to the creation of non-governmental jobs. As many donors in Uganda have increasingly interacted directly with district administrations since 2000, the creation of new districts has led to donors setting up office in the new districts and thereby both creating new jobs and, through budget support of conditional grants to the districts, adding to potential local patronage opportunities (Walford 2006). Indeed, as the number of districts has grown, so has the coverage of the main bilateral donors: for example, due to district creation the USAID-supported Uganda Program for Human and Holistic Development expanded its coverage from 20 to 34 districts in recent years.²¹ In addition to donors, NGOs have also increased their presence in new districts; in Nakaseke councilors noted the added presence of both World Vision and the Adventist Development Relief Agency in particular.²²

The use of districts as patronage fits well into a political history of Museveni's Uganda, and explains why they began to multiply in the 1990s. Initially Museveni was able to buy off opposition through the creation of a broad-based government, which included such rivals as the then President of the Democratic Party Paul Ssemogerere, Second Deputy Prime Minister from 1988 to 1995. Yet as Museveni moved towards reintroducing national elections and eventually towards the re-introduction of political parties, he began to reduce the number of opposition cabinet ministers (Kasfir 1998). At the same time he was in the process of introducing a large number of political and economic reforms which were in part designed to formalize institutions and curb corruption. Through such measures as devaluing the Ugandan shilling, reintroducing direct local government and parliamentary elections, privatizing many large parastatals like the Uganda Commercial Bank and the Kampala Sheraton Hotel, reducing the size of the civil service and armed forces and eliminating the state marketing board monopolies over coffee and cotton, Museveni endeared himself to donors but simultaneously reduced his ability to use patronage to continue his rule (Tangri and Mwenda 2001; Mwenda and Tangri 2005).

²⁰ Interviews with Bushanda Peace and Kayigwa Sekesi, Nakaseke, 12 July 2007.

²¹ <http://uphold.jsi.com/About.htm>.

²² Interviews with Bushanda Peace and Kayigwa Sekesi, Nakaseke, 12 July 2007.

All of these changes were, however, countered in part through district creation as the number of new districts announced in the five years prior to national elections grew from five (1996) to sixteen (2001) to twenty-two (2006). Indeed, this increasing number of new districts, coupled with Museveni's diminishing electoral support over the years, fits in well with patronage theory that the more vulnerable an incumbent politician is, the more likely he/she is to use patronage to win votes (Stein and Bickers 1994). To gain maximum electoral advantage, in 2000 and 2005 Museveni chose to create new districts just a matter of months before presidential elections the following year, while in both the presidential elections of 1996 and 2006 he gave promises to create new districts after the election if citizens voted for him, leading to the creation of six new districts in 1997 and ten new districts in 2006, respectively. Museveni's use of new districts as an election ploy sits alongside his other election year promises and changes, including both a promise to reduce the level of graduated tax in the 2001 campaign and its abolition only months before the 2006 election, not to mention the creation of the Constitutional Review Commission four weeks before the March 2001 poll.

Museveni's expectation, as with any other source of patronage, has certainly been that residents in new districts would reciprocate by voting for him in future presidential elections, which indeed they did. As Table 6 clearly indicates, voters in new districts rewarded Museveni with votes in the 1996, 2001 and 2006 presidential elections, with 14.9%, 3.1% and 14.3% more support than the Ugandan average, respectively. Moreover, as Table 7 shows, voters gave the NRM significantly more support than other parties in the new districts in the 2006 elections for directly elected MPs and Women MPs, whether measured through the total number of votes across constituencies or the number of seats won by the NRM;²³ a similar analysis shows that voters also supported the NRM above average in district chairperson elections in new districts.

**Table 6: Presidential Election Results for New Districts
(Source: Uganda Electoral Commission)**

Election	Type of District	Museveni (%)	Other Candidates (%)
1996:	New Districts (6: 1990, 1991, 1994)	89.2	10.8
	Ugandan Average	74.3	25.7
2001:	New Districts (16: 1997, 2000)	72.5	27.5
	Ugandan Average	69.4	30.6
2006:	New Districts (13: 2005) ²⁴	73.6	26.4
	Ugandan Average	59.3	40.7

**Table 7: Parliamentary and District Chairperson Election Results, 2006
(Source: Uganda Electoral Commission)**

	Type of District	NRM Candidates (%)	Other Candidates (%)
Directly Elected MPs			
Total Votes	New Districts	66.7	33.3
	Ugandan Average	51.4	48.6
Proportion of Seats	New Districts	84.6	15.4
	Ugandan Average	66.0	34.0
Women MPs			
Total Votes	New Districts	61.7	38.3
	Ugandan Average	53.1	46.9

²³ As MPs operated under a no-party system up until 2005, it is impossible to judge how voters responded to district creation through older parliamentary election data.

²⁴ Of the 22 new districts which were announced by Parliament on 20 July 2005, only 13 had been created by the time of the February 2006 poll, inasmuch as the district was listed as extant by the Electoral Commission.

Proportion of Seats	New Districts	76.9	23.1
	Ugandan Average	71.0	29.0
District Chairperson²⁵			
Proportion of Seats	New Districts	76.9	23.1
	Ugandan Average	72.5	27.5

In light of the above evidence it is thus easier to make sense of Table 5, which demonstrated that Museveni had created more districts in the north and east than in the centre and west. Rather than suspecting that Museveni wanted to break up districts in opposition areas, it makes more sense to argue that the opposite, namely that he created districts in borderline areas in which he needed support in future elections. Indeed, as noted by (Mukholi 2006) in an analysis of the 2006 election,

Sources in the NRM said they were confident Museveni was secure in the west and parts of Buganda. So they had to contrive a strategy for the east, which was slipping away. While the FDC was running throughout the country, NRM research indicated eastern region was to decide Museveni's clear win.²⁶

Thus, of the 22 districts announced by Parliament in July 2005, a full ten, or 45%, were from the east, more than any other region of the country. Within the east, the Teso region was seen as one the most crucial battlegrounds before the election (Vision 2006), which goes some way to explain why three (Amuria, Bukedea, and Tororo county) of these ten new districts were created in Itesot-majority areas, more than for any other single ethnic group in the region. This strategy – whereby Museveni created more districts in politically marginal areas while also creating districts across the rest of the country to prevent 'great and obvious discrepancies' from jeopardizing his support elsewhere – is exactly what would be predicted by both patronage theory (Wilson 1961) and examinations of distributive policies elsewhere in the world (Ames 1987; Bickers and Stein 1996; Denmark 2000).

Yet the NRM government botched the creation of a new district for Tororo county, in that it recommended that Tororo municipality remain in the rump Japadhola-dominated Tororo district, leading to a win for Besigye in the area as well as a victory in Tororo municipality for the independent MP Sanjay Tanna over the incumbent NRM MP, Yeri Apollo Ofwono.²⁷ As with Tororo, residents of the other eight other districts which were announced in 2005 but had yet to be created by the time of the election in 2006 voted strongly against Museveni, with only 40.8% of their votes going to the President. In other words, Ugandan voters are clearly mistrustful of Museveni's election year promises and punish him when he fails to deliver on time. In the end, however, the positive response from the other 13 new districts overwhelmed these disappointed voters and Museveni collected 62.0% support from residents of the 22 new districts, and 59.3% overall across Uganda.²⁸

Conclusion

I have argued above that, of all the possible explanations for the creation of new districts in Uganda, the use of districts as patronage and a source of votes in elections is the most convincing reason. If this is so, we should expect to continue to see a further proliferation of districts as Museveni attempts to cling on for a fourth term; most recently the creation of Lamwo district was announced in July 2007, despite the claim from the current Minister of Local Government Kahinda Otafiire that there would be no new districts for a while as they were becoming 'unviable' (Mugerwa 2007). Indeed,

²⁵ Voting data for the 2006 District Chairperson elections broken down by political party is unfortunately poor, with 15 out of 69 districts missing data, so I have not included it in an analysis here.

²⁶ The eastern region did indeed end up as the most marginal in the 2006 election, with 56.0% support for Museveni, as compared to 61.8% in the centre, 29.6% in the north and 78.5% in the west.

²⁷ Interview with MP Sanjay Tanna, 19 July 2007.

²⁸ The use of more systematic statistical examinations here is limited by several factors, including the lack of more detailed parliamentary and district chairperson election data as well as the 'noise' that exists from not being able to run a field experiment: for an example of how such an experiment can show evidence of a link between patronage and voting behaviour, see Wantchekon, L. (2003). "Clientalism and Voting Behavior: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Benin." *World Politics* 55(3): 399-422..

district creation has been more successful than other types of patronage in maintaining Museveni's support while avoiding large-scale criticism. On the one hand, the Olsonian logic noted above (namely that as long as the costs of a patronage opportunity are spread among the entire population, potential opposition to district creation will be minimal), applies equally to all types of patronage like district creation and the creation of new cabinet posts and parliamentary constituencies. On the other hand, however, it was only the latter type of patronage which came in for near-universal criticism as wasteful and inefficient in the solicitations of the Constitutional Review Commission, whereas the reception of district was more mixed (Uganda 2003). It is not difficult to follow the reasoning behind this anomaly: whereas cabinet ministers and MPs can siphon off their salaries for personal reasons, the creation of a district necessarily brings money to the countryside and thereby benefits locals at least to some degree. Moreover, as districts have little say in policy formation in Kampala, Museveni can afford to create new districts in marginal and even opposition areas without the fear of local leaders later threatening his rule; this again marks a contrast to Museveni's more ethnically and regionally biased appointments in the cabinet and the armed forces (Green 2006).

This analysis also might explain why what is taking place in Uganda is extreme but not unusual across Africa, as there is some evidence that several presidents across the continent have used the exact same logic as President Museveni in recent years. In West Africa, President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso created 15 new provinces in 1997, in time for a parliamentary election that year and his successful first re-election the following year, while in Benin President Mathieu Kérékou doubled the number of his country's provinces from 6 to 12 in 1999, two years before his re-election. President Idriss Déby of Chad also doubled the number of his country's prefectures from 14 to 28 (and renamed them departments) in 1999, two years before his first successful re-election. In Anglophone Africa, President of Malawi Bakili Muluzi's government created three new districts in 1998, a year before his re-election, while in Sudan President Omar al-Bashir expanded the number of states from 9 to 27 in 1994, two years before his first election. Finally and most recently, the new constitution of the Democratic Republic of Congo increased the number of provinces from 11 to 26; while the provinces do not exist as yet the constitution came into force in February 2006, five months before the first round of the country's presidential elections. As with Uganda, in all six cases the Presidents were incumbents and, with the exception of the DR Congo, provinces had no official representation at the national level.

Certainly the analysis presented here would suggest that more research be done on the creation of sub-national provinces and districts across Africa; it is possible that, as in Uganda, democratization, liberalization and privatization have merely shifted the source of patronage towards local governments rather than eliminate it as was intended. As regards Uganda, it is questionable how long Museveni can continue to use district creation as an electoral strategy before cynicism overtakes any advantages he might gain. Already many Ugandans shake their heads and speculate that district proliferation will continue until every county/municipality, of which there are 160, has its own district; nonetheless it is clear that, as an electoral strategy, district creation has worked for Museveni and he has little reason to stop it. If nothing else, this article has at least hopefully delineated the reasons behind district creation so that Ugandans can better debate this issue and its political consequences.

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