

May marks the end of the two rainy seasons in Uganda each year however, there are also sunny days between the rains, and the temperature is a comfortable 25 degrees.



Carp Streamers decorated at Japanese Embassy in Uganda

In last month's column, I introduced the Ugandan Constitution. This month, I would like to talk about elections, which are inextricably linked to the Constitution, and in particular how presidential elections to choose the country's leader have been conducted since independence in 1962.

I have divided the history of elections since independence into the following three periods. I am not sure if this division is appropriate, but it is my own understanding. I would like to explain according to this division.

1. From independence to 1980
2. Elections after the enactment of the new constitution in 1995
3. 2006 election: The current electoral system is established

1. From independence to 1980

The first presidential election was held upon independence from Britain in 1962. Due to the circumstances at the time, a presidential election by the people was not held. After achieving independence, Uganda was governed by a coalition of the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) and the Buganda Royalist Party (The King Alone). The Parliament at that time elected the first President and Prime minister, but this was a division of power

that reflected the political situation in Uganda at the time. Thus, the first president, Edward Mutesa II (King of Buganda, the largest kingdom in Uganda, who led the Buganda Royalist Party) and Prime Minister Milton Obote (UPC) were born.

The second President was Milton Obote, who had served as the first Prime minister, but a period of turmoil followed, represented by the Idi Amin era. It can be said that there was no opportunity for the country's leader to be chosen through democratic procedures. In 1980, a second presidential election was held, albeit with restrictions. The main parties involved were the UPC, led by Milton Obote, the first prime minister and first president, and the Democratic Party (DP) of Dr. Paul Ssemogerere.

The election results declared a UPC victory, and Milton Obote was once again elected president. This can be seen as an attempt to establish a new political system after a period of nearly 20 years of turmoil. However, other parties, including the Uganda Patriotic Movement (led by the current president, Museveni), the Conservative Party (a party that followed the royalist line), and other opposition parties did not accept the results, claiming that the election was fraudulent.

Therefore, the historical evaluation of the 1980 presidential election is low to this day. In fact, it was the denial of this election that triggered another five years of civil war in Uganda. The current president, Museveni's forces, began their movement to seize power from the forest, which is why it is called the Bush War. Conversely, it can also be seen that the 1980 election led to the establishment of the current Museveni government. Therefore, it is undeniable that the 1980 election was a turning point in subsequent history. It should be noted that the current ruling party, National Resistance Movement (NRM), was formed in the process of fighting the Bush War.

2. Elections after the enactment of the new constitution in 1995

The Museveni government enacted Uganda's fourth constitution in 1995. This was mentioned in the April column. Based on this new constitution, Uganda's first direct election by the people was held in May 1996 to elect the president. However, the 1995 constitution did not recognize a multi-party system and stipulated that Uganda's political system would be decided within five years. Therefore, all presidential candidates were considered independent.

The election results were as follows (according to the Electoral Commission):

Elected: President Museveni (74.2% of the vote, 4.42 million votes)

Runner-up: Paul Ssemogerere (23.7% of the vote, 1.41 million votes)

In March 2001, the second election after the new constitution was held. The election results were as follows (according to the Electoral Commission):

Elected: President Museveni (69.3% of the vote, 5.12 million votes)

Runner-up: Dr. Kizza Besigye (27.8% of the vote, 2.05 million votes)



State House in Entebbe

3. 2006 election: the current electoral system is established

As mentioned in last month's column, parliament abolished the presidential term limit in 2005. The decision to introduce a multi-party system was also made by referendum in 2005. These developments led to the establishment of Uganda's current electoral system.

The presidential and parliamentary elections held in 2006 were the first in Uganda in over 20 years (since 1980) to be held under a multi-party system. This election was also the first in which the National Resistance Movement (NRM), the current ruling party, had to compete with other parties.

The results of the elections since 2006 are as follows (according to the Electoral Commission):

February 2006 election

Elected: President Museveni (59.2% of the vote, 4.10 million votes)

Runner-up: Kizza Besigye (37.3% of the vote, 2.59 million votes)

It should be noted that the Ugandan Supreme Court ruled in April 2006 that the February presidential election was not free and fair and that the Electoral Commission had not conducted the election in accordance with the law, a unanimous decision by all judges. However, it was not enough to annul the elections.

February 2011 election

Elected: President Museveni (68.3% of the vote, 5.42 million votes)

Runner-up: Kizza Besigye (26.0% of the vote, 2.06 million votes)

3rd place: Norbert Mao (DP) (1.8% of the vote, 140,000 votes)

February 2016 election

Elected: President Museveni (60.6% of the vote, 5.97 million votes)

Runner-up: Kizza Besigye (35.6% of the vote, 3.50 million votes)

February 2021 election

Elected: President Museveni (58.3% of the vote, 6.04 million votes)

Runner-up: Bobi Wine (Kyagulanyi Sentamu Robert) (35.0% of the vote, 3.63 million votes)

4. Main opponents of President Museveni

As mentioned above, incumbent President Museveni has been elected six times in a row with high vote percentages. This is the fourth consecutive election since the multi-party system was adopted in 2006. Below are the main opponents who have contested presidential elections in the past.

● Kizza Besigye

- A doctor who joined the UPM led by Museveni. During the civil war, he served as President Museveni's personal physician.

- In 1990, he criticized Museveni's leadership within the NRM and opposed him. He has run for president four times since the 2001 presidential election, coming in second each time. During this time, he has been imprisoned and lived abroad before returning to Uganda.

● Bobi Wine

- He gained popularity in Uganda as a singer. He was elected to parliament in 2017.
- He ran for president in the 2021 election but came in second.

● Norbert Mao (current Minister of Justice)

- He has been the leader of the DP, the oldest party in Uganda, since 2010.
- He ran for president in the 2011 and 2021 elections but lost.
- In July 2022, he signed a cooperation agreement between the NRM and the DP. Since then, he has served as Minister of Justice in the Museveni government.

It should be noted that political parties in Uganda have continued to exist since independence, albeit with twists and turns. I believe that the characteristic of these parties is that their formation is based on race or religion, not ideology. Ugandan society may have a culture that values local ties, blood ties, and practical benefits.

(End)