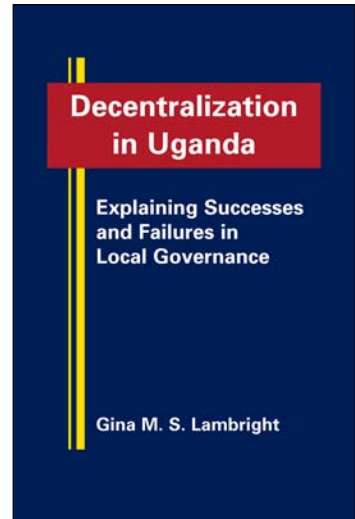


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# Decentralization in Uganda: Explaining Successes and Failures in Local Governance

Gina M. S. Lambright

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# 1

## Exploring Decentralization in Uganda

On April 6, 2001, the officials in the district council in Kasese district in western Uganda unanimously agreed to suspend the chief administrative officer (CAO) over allegations of financial mismanagement and misappropriation of funds.<sup>1</sup> District officials alleged that the CAO misappropriated over 11 million Ush (approximately \$6,077 at that time). In a similar situation in March 2002, district officials in Soroti district in eastern Uganda interdicted the chief finance officer (CFO) and the district development program officer.<sup>2</sup> They accused the two officials of stealing 17,585,000 Ush (approximately \$10,069 at the time) intended to fund projects under the District Development Program—a program funded by the Netherlands. Unfortunately these cases are far from unique. Local government officials in Uganda are routinely accused of corruption, misappropriation of funds, mismanagement, abuse of office, and nepotism. In fact, in 2000, Uganda's Inspectorate General of Government (IGG), the agency responsible for investigating and eliminating corruption in the government, received more complaints about corruption in local governments than any other government department or ministry.<sup>3</sup> Uganda's local governments ranked even higher than the police in the number of corruption allegations!

Despite the prevalence of complaints about local government corruption, Ugandans and residents in other African countries appear to be generally trusting and satisfied with the performance of local governments, although the situation may be changing as reports of corruption continue to dominate local press. In 2000, slightly more than 78 percent of respondents to the Afrobarometer national survey in Uganda reported that they trust the district council. Similarly, almost 70 percent of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the performance of their representative to the district council. Survey data from eleven other sub-Saharan African countries are quite similar. In fact, in only three of the countries surveyed did less than half of the population report that they were satisfied with the performance of their local government.<sup>4</sup>

## 2 *Decentralization in Uganda*

Respondents in South Africa, Zambia, and, not surprisingly, Zimbabwe were much more critical of the performance of their local leaders.

Many countries throughout the world have begun to implement comprehensive decentralization programs that are intended to promote democracy and development at the grassroots by empowering local governments.<sup>5</sup> According to Oxhorn (2004, 3), “Nearly every country in the world, regardless of its political system, geographical location, history, level of economic development and cultural traditions, is now experimenting with new forms of regional and local governance.” Some scholars and practitioners even promote decentralization as a necessary step in the democratization process.<sup>6</sup>

The performance of local governments in Africa has also grown increasingly more important in recent years as decentralization has recently risen to the top of many governments’ political agendas throughout Africa. Ndegwa (2002) notes that decentralization has gained prominence in African states in the 1990s and attributes this trend to the public sector reforms that comprised an integral part of structural adjustment programs and also to the recent moves toward political liberalization and greater democratization on the continent. African countries, such as Mali, Mozambique, South Africa, Uganda, and Ghana, among others, adopted some form of decentralization and increased, often dramatically, the responsibilities of local political institutions. The question remains, however, whether local governments in Africa that have historically been poorly funded and politically marginalized under authoritarian rule can actually perform this new role. This book sheds light on this important question by identifying the factors that contribute to good performance among local governments in Uganda.

The current emphasis on decentralization by African governments and donors appears to be a hopeful response to the problems and failures of the centralized political systems adopted by African countries shortly after independence. Most observers of African politics recognize that centralized decisionmaking failed to deliver the promises of economic development and democracy to countries that pursued such methods. Instead the result of extreme centralization of political decisionmaking has most often been the marginalization and further impoverishment of African populations. Many observers also believe that centralized decisionmaking sustained and facilitated patronage and corruption, which are commonly viewed as impediments to economic development in Africa. Proponents of decentralization are quite optimistic about what such policies can achieve.<sup>7</sup> The stated goals of recently adopted decentralization programs reflect the idea that decentralization cultivates

both grass roots democracy and development by shifting political power and financial authority to local levels (Smith 1979; Rondinelli 1981; UNDP 1993). For example, at a recent meeting in Uganda of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, President Museveni encouraged all Commonwealth countries to adopt decentralization.<sup>8</sup> Uganda's president equated decentralization to "good governance" and reportedly argued, "Central government is remote and bad, it is power far away . . . You need to have power where you are to defend your interests and get services."<sup>9</sup>

The fulfillment of these stated goals ultimately depends on the performance of newly empowered local governments. It is not clear whether local governments are equipped to handle these new responsibilities and whether the record of local government performance will be better than that of central governments in Africa. My principal aim in this book is to identify the factors associated with better local government performance in Africa. Under what circumstances, do local governments perform well? I present an interesting answer to this question, one that builds on existing literature in African politics and the growing literature on decentralization in developing countries. The evidence I present in the subsequent chapters sheds considerable light on *when* and *why* some local governments perform better than others in Africa.

### **Outline of Argument: The Big Squeeze**

Decentralization theorists expect that society will hold leaders accountable. The two examples that started the chapter raise questions about whether and to what extent local leaders are responsive and accountable to local constituents. For example, did district politicians in Soroti and Kasese feel pressure from the community to punish corrupt administrators? How is society involved in decisions and activities of local governments in Africa generally? The research I present in this book indicates that the impact of society on the performance of local leaders and local political institutions is conditional. The ability of local communities to influence the decisions and actions of local leaders and to hold these leaders accountable depends to a considerable degree on the nature of the political relationship between the local government and the central government.

"Central-local relations" refers to the formal administrative and informal political linkages between the central government and local governments. Central-local relations matter and, in Africa, where governance has historically been quite centralized, the weight of the

center persists and determines the success of decentralization and the extent to which local governments respond to local needs. This book demonstrates that central-local relations, especially the informal political linkages between the center and local governments, influence what local governments do and how they perform directly and indirectly. When local government leaders' attention and accountability are directed primarily to outsiders, whether representatives of the central government or important party officials, the influence of local communities is eroded. As a result, the performance of local governments suffers and African communities do not receive the services they desperately need.

Many advocates and scholars of decentralization expect that societies will hold leaders accountable through political participation and civic engagement, thereby promoting better institutional performance. The influence of the central state on local leaders garners little attention within this literature. In the following chapters, I develop a theory that acknowledges and documents the simultaneous and interactive role of society and the central government on the behavior and performance of local leaders. Throughout the book, I highlight the conditions under which each set of actors influences local political outcomes. I do not take society's influence as a given, but rather investigate the conditions under which local populations are able to shape the performance of their local governments. I find that the informal political linkages between the center and a local area influence how local leaders respond to local populations. The attention in this book given to the role of the center and the potential influence of tight central-local relations highlight the importance of the political context in which decentralization is adopted and some of the very real roadblocks to successful decentralization in Africa.

In exploring how central-local relations affect the performance of local governments, this study presents an institutional analysis of local government performance, examining the role of both formal and informal institutions in shaping the choices and behavior of local officials. My analysis considers both formal institutions, such as the mechanisms of central government monitoring and oversight, as well as informal institutions, such as patronage networks, that shape central-local relations. My analysis demonstrates that informal political linkages—the central explanatory variable in this study—are powerful to explain differences in performance across local governments. While formal administrative linkages have some effect on the performance of local governments, their effect is considerably weaker and mediated by politics. This study departs from much of the current literature on African politics by investigating the influence of informal institutions,

such as patronage networks, and detailing both the positive and negative ways in which informality shapes local government performance, rather than simply taking for granted that the presence of informal institutions leads to undesired or less efficient outcomes. I examine two dimensions of informal political linkages: top-down linkages and bottom-up linkages. Top-down political linkages describe central government support to local governments, which is most often defined by political patronage. Bottom-up political linkages describe popular and elite support within a community for the central government. As expected, my analysis highlights the various ways in which top-down political linkages, particularly patronage, undermine the performance of local institutions. Yet, my analysis also reveals that informality is not entirely harmful to local institutions. For example, bottom-up political linkages are associated with better institutional performance. Moreover, central oversight over local governments also appears to be more effective when officials are flexible in their enforcement of the guidelines. And when formal mechanisms for participation do not work as planned, informal linkages to local officials provide an important alternative.

### **Defining Decentralization**

The popularity of decentralization is problematic given the complexity of the concept. Decentralization is often imbued with various, often quite contradictory, meanings and interpretations. For example, a distinction can be made between horizontal and vertical decentralization. Horizontal decentralization distributes power among political institutions within the same level of government, while vertical decentralization distributes power to political institutions between two or more levels of government (UNDP 1993; Regan 1995).

Many scholars further distinguish between different types of vertical decentralization. For example, deconcentration or administrative decentralization merely shifts representatives of central government ministries to branch offices at the local level (Manor 1998; Regan 1995; Rondinelli 1981). With deconcentration there are limited changes in the distribution of power. Local administrators can make few decisions without consulting the central government ministries. In such circumstances, the central government maintains full discretionary power over the decisions of local administrators. Fiscal decentralization concerns the transfer of limited influence over budgetary and financial decisions to lower levels (Manor 1998). On the other hand, devolution shifts full decisionmaking and financial authority to local levels and, thus, is often referred to as democratic or political decentralization.<sup>10</sup>

Because devolution limits the extent to which local governments must consult with the central government in making decisions, it constitutes “the strongest form of decentralization” (UNDP 1993, 67).

Yet, as Oxhorn (2004) notes, decentralization outcomes are often uncertain and ambiguous, despite what the policy stipulates on paper. Recognizing the “fundamental ambiguity” of decentralization outcomes, Oxhorn suggests a definition of decentralization that acknowledges the dynamic relations between levels of government and the fact that “levels of autonomy can vary by issue area” (2004, 5). My interest in the various ways in which central-local relations shape and condition local government performance similarly suggests that levels of autonomy are dynamic across time and across subnational governments within a single country. Formal institutions may award subnational governments a certain level of autonomy, while informal institutions, such as patronage, or informal political relations may in reality offer local leaders a wholly different level of autonomy. Thus, in my analysis, I rely upon the minimal definition of decentralization promoted by Oxhorn in which decentralization is defined simply as “the transfer of power to different subnational levels of government by the central government” (2004, 7).

### **The Context: Decentralization and Institutional Performance in Uganda**

Uganda provides an excellent case in which to explore these issues, given its adoption of a comprehensive decentralization policy in the 1990s. A recent study of the extent of decentralization among thirty African countries characterizes Uganda’s policy of decentralization as among the most advanced on the continent (Ndegwa 2002). In fact, Uganda earned among the highest scores on the indices of political, administrative, and fiscal decentralization (Ndegwa 2002).<sup>11</sup> District councils in Uganda are now responsible for decisionmaking and policy implementation in several important policy areas, including: education policy through secondary school; health policy, especially concerning hospitals in the district; water policy; road policy, excluding major roads for travel between districts; and agricultural extension (Uganda 1997a). Local councils (LCs) have also been given the responsibility to monitor and supervise the activities of civil society organizations (CSOs) in their areas (Uganda 1997a).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, district councils have substantial financial authority, including the power to “levy, charge and collect fees and taxes, including rates, rents, royalties, stamp duties, personal graduated tax, and registration and licensing fees” (Uganda 1997a, 35).<sup>13</sup> Thus, it is possi-

ble to compare the performance of Uganda's district councils and identify those factors that are associated with good performance.

Like so many other countries in Africa and other parts of the developing world, Uganda's political system is hybrid. Democratic features, such as elections, coexist with authoritarian tendencies. Understanding how decentralization operates and the challenges local governments face in Uganda can shed light on the likely success of decentralization reforms in other hybrid and democratizing regimes.

To examine these issues, I conducted subnational analysis within a single country—Uganda. Subnational comparison is particularly useful because it holds constant features of the political and social context while recognizing and explaining important variation across local governments within a single country. My research design employs mixed methods and combines quantitative analysis of over forty-five Ugandan districts with in-depth case study analysis. This includes analysis across the forty-five district councils that existed at the time I conducted my initial fieldwork, as well as subsequent analysis that includes many of the new district councils that were created before 2003.<sup>14</sup> I collected the data used in this study during two years of extensive fieldwork (1998–1999 and 2000–2001) and subsequent fieldwork in 2005, 2006, and 2008. The research strategy enabled me to track the experiences of these districts across time, which deepens our understanding of the dynamics of decentralization and how performance changes across time.

The aggregate analysis across the forty-five Ugandan districts is based on an original dataset I created. In compiling the dataset, I collected data to create many original indicators, such as the number of presidential visits to the districts, the number of letters exchanged between the local governments and various ministries in the Ugandan central government, and the number of registered NGOs operating in each district. I combined these original indicators with data drawn from numerous other sources, including census data, election results, and various Ugandan government reports.

In addition to the aggregate analysis across all Ugandan districts, I present case study analysis based on in-depth field research in three representative districts: Bushenyi in western Uganda; Mpigi in central Uganda; and Lira in northern Uganda (see Figure 1.1).<sup>15</sup> I purposely chose the districts using a least similar approach in order to reflect variation on several important characteristics, including region, distance from the capital city, the date the district was decentralized, level of economic development, and rural/urban status. The three districts represent three of Uganda's four regions and exhibit high degrees of

variation on the principal variables of interest. Most importantly, these districts reflect variation on the key explanatory variable in this study, informal political linkages. The political relationship between the central government and each district varies quite significantly. For example, the three districts exhibit different levels of popular and elite support (i.e., bottom-up political linkages) for the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government and also vary in terms of the nature and levels of political and financial support provided by the center to each council (i.e., top-down political linkages).<sup>16</sup> As a result of the variation in the informal political linkages between the Movement government and the three districts, these case studies help to clarify how informal political linkages shape the performance of Uganda's local governments generally.

Bushenyi district in western Uganda represents a predominantly rural district that lies 350 kilometers from Kampala. The population of Bushenyi, like that of the other districts in western Uganda, tends to strongly support President Museveni and the Movement. Historically Bushenyi comprised five counties: Buhweju, Bunyaruguru, Igara, Ruhinda, and Sheema. Of the three districts included in this study, Bushenyi district was the smallest—only 4,026 square kilometers. Nevertheless, Bushenyi district still exhibited diversity. For example, the two northernmost counties of Bunyaruguru and Buhweju were among the poorest and the most isolated parts of the district.

As has occurred to most districts in Uganda, the boundaries of all three districts have changed during the period of investigation. No doubt Bushenyi's size and political influence explain why the district avoided division until recently. In May 2010, Uganda's parliament approved the division of Bushenyi into five districts. Once the new districts go into effect in July 2010, Bushenyi district will comprise only Igara County. The other counties of the former Bushenyi district will be divided across four new districts.

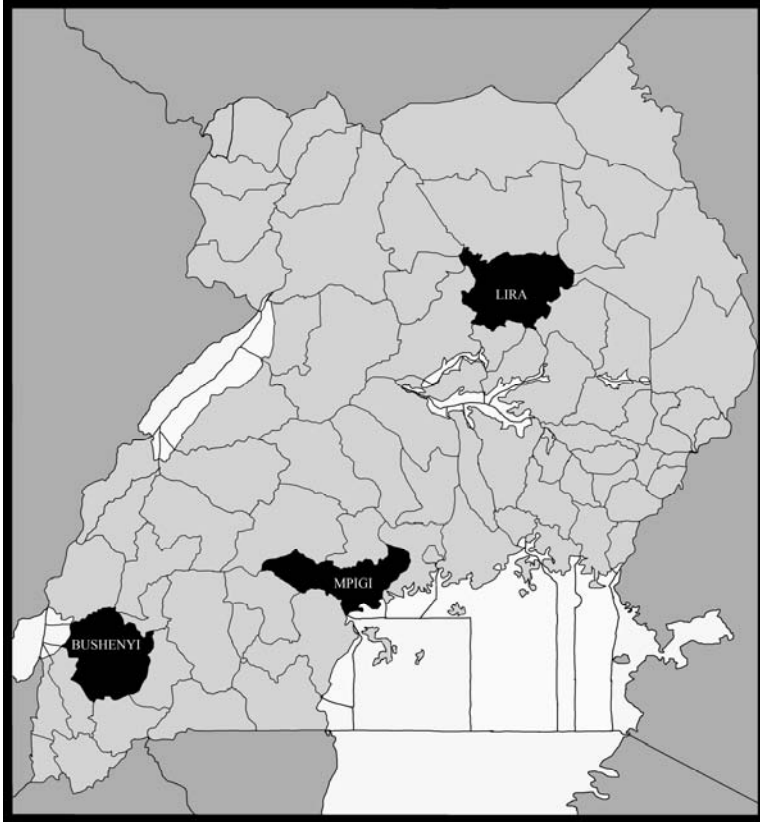
Unlike Bushenyi and other districts in the western region, Lira district provides a good example of the sentiment toward the central government among the districts of the north. Historically, the districts in northern Uganda have opposed the Museveni regime, and Lira is no exception. Following the announcement of the contentious results of the 1980 presidential election, in which Yoweri Museveni and numerous others felt that President Milton Obote and his Uganda People's Congress (UPC) had stolen the election, Museveni organized and led the National Resistance Army (NRA) against the Obote regime. Obote was a Northerner from the former Lango district, which included Lira district and neighboring district, Apac. Museveni's guerrilla war resulted in the

ousting of Obote in a coup organized by generals in the Ugandan army from another northern part of the country. Less than a year later Museveni's guerrilla army took Kampala. President Museveni and his NRM government have held power since. Museveni has been reinstated three times, in the presidential elections of 1996, 2001, and, most recently, 2006. The sentiment among many Ugandans from the north is anger and frustration focused on Museveni, as the individual who stripped the north of political power and control, and the NRM government he heads. Logan et al. describe Northerners as "outsiders" who feel "deeply disaffected with the political and economic system" (2003, ii). The political alienation of the north is key to understanding the performance of local governments in that region.

Lira, like Bushenyi, is predominantly rural and lies approximately 360 kilometers north of Kampala. With over 7,000 square kilometers, Lira has historically been one of the geographically largest districts in Uganda. But in 2005, Lira was divided and Kyoga County formed the new district of Amolatar. The district was subsequently further divided and Dokolo County became the new Dokolo district. Today Lira district comprises three counties (Erute, Otuke, and Moroto) and Lira Municipality (see Figure 1.1). Insecurity from activities of the rebels of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) or the cattle-raiding Karamojong from neighboring districts plagues much of Lira district. The historic insecurity and what Lira residents see as the inability or lack of desire by the central government to ensure their safety further erode support for the NRM government in Lira.

In addition to insecurity, local governments in northern Uganda face an additional challenge of low levels of economic development. Districts in northern Uganda are considerably less developed than their counterparts in other parts of the country, especially those in the western and central regions. For example, the Human Development Index (HDI) score for Lira district is only .44 compared to .51 in Bushenyi and .52 in Mpigi district (UNDP 2005). Much of the disparities across regions in Uganda can and have been traced to the inequitable strategies of development instituted by the British colonial government, but perpetuated under postcolonial governments. The lack of concern for economic development or the provision of public services by most of the regimes in Uganda's postcolonial history combined with decades of fighting has meant that regional imbalances that emerged at independence were institutionalized and today are difficult to erase.

**Figure 1.1: Location of Bushenyi, Lira, and Mpigi Districts (2008)**



*Credit: Kenneth Somodevilla*

Political insecurity at the hands of the LRA or Karamojong cattle rustlers and the low level of economic development certainly challenge Lira's district council. Yet, as I argue below, neither factor fully accounts for Lira district council's poor performance. Thus, Lira provides an interesting counterpoint to the high levels of stability, security, and development in Bushenyi, and also its close political allegiance to not only the Museveni government, but to most of Uganda's regimes since independence. While Lira and other northern districts have tended to be marginalized politically since Obote was forced from power, Bushenyi has a history of close political alignment with whatever government happens to be in power. To paraphrase much of what interview respondents said to describe Bushenyi's unique

political position in Uganda's history, the district seems to have played the role of true politician extraordinarily well, linking closely to those in power regardless of the ethnic group, religion, or region from which the leader was drawn.

**Table 1.1: Economic Development, Institutional Experience, and Ethnic Diversity in Bushenyi, Lira, and Mpigi**

	<b>Bushenyi</b>	<b>Lira</b>	<b>Mpigi</b>
<b>Economic Development</b>			
HDI score (1996)	.415	.350	.497
HDI score (2000)	.456	.405	.530
HDI score (2004)	.510	.443	.520
Percent of population in poverty (2003)	31.1	33.2	27.5
<b>Institutional Experience</b>			
Age of district (years) (2008)	34	29	34
Years since decentralization (2008)	15	16	16
<b>Ethnic Diversity</b>			
Ethnic fragmentation	.3045	.1572	.3426
Linguistic fragmentation (2000)	.2075	.0996	.2068
Linguistic fragmentation (2002)	.353	.0461	.2319

*Source: Data collected or compiled by author from various sources. HDI and poverty data from UNDP (1998, 2002, 2005). Ethnic and linguistic fragmentation data calculated from Afrobarometer data (2000 and 2002). Age of districts calculated by author.*

In some ways, Mpigi district falls neatly between these two districts—in the level of political support for the current government and its linkages to previous regimes. Yet, in other ways, Mpigi is certainly unique. Like Lira, Mpigi is also an older district and, historically, one of the country's largest, comprising over 6,000 square kilometers. Until its

division in 2000, the district contained both urban and rural area extremes. In 2000, Mpigi district was divided into two separate districts: Mpigi and Wakiso. The predominantly rural counties of Gomba, Butambala, and Mawokota remained in Mpigi district. The urban counties of Kyadondo and Busiro, which includes Entebbe Municipality, formed the new Wakiso district. Like Bushenyi, Mpigi will be divided further in 2010.

As I carefully document in Chapter 3, by most measures Bushenyi district council performs better than Mpigi or Lira. I selected these cases in order to focus on the explanatory power of political variables and rule out structural factors to account for the observed differences in the performance of the district councils. (In Chapters 7 and 8, I examine the explanatory power of societal factors, such as levels of political participation and civil society activism and demonstrate that these factors are insufficient to account for Bushenyi's better performing district council.) While the three districts do vary in level of development, economic variables cannot fully explain why Bushenyi's district council outperforms Mpigi and Lira. Lira district in northern Uganda is certainly less developed than Mpigi or Bushenyi (see Table 1.1), a gap likely to widen in the future given the effects of the conflict in northern Uganda on the district's economy. The low level of development in Lira certainly creates challenges for the district council. Yet, as I document in Chapter 3, there are numerous shortcomings in the capabilities and performance of Mpigi's district council and, by most measures, Mpigi is the more developed district among the three. In fact, Mpigi consistently earns higher HDI scores and reports a lower percent of the population in poverty than Lira or Bushenyi (see Table 1.1).

Moreover, while the conflict in Lira affects council activities and performance, the conflict cannot explain the observed differences in council performance. In fact, much of the evidence of Lira's poor performance predates the LRA's push into Lira in 2002. While Lira suffered LRA attacks before 2002,<sup>17</sup> at that time the conflict was concentrated primarily in the Acholi districts of Gulu and Kitgum. One member of parliament (MP) from Lira explained that "2003 was the worst with the LRA [in Lira]. Before that there was a bit of activity in Otuke [county] and Oromo [subcounty], Apac [district] and Acholi."<sup>18</sup> In 2002, the Ugandan government launched "Operation Ironfist," a military campaign to push the LRA out of their camps in southern Sudan. In response to the increased pressure from the Ugandan military within Sudan, the LRA pushed back into northern Uganda and even moved further south into districts that had been spared much of the fighting previously, such as the Lango districts of Lira and Apac and the

Teso districts of Soroti, Katakwi, and Kaberamaido, prompting massive displacement of local populations in those districts.<sup>19</sup> The security situation in Lira continued to deteriorate and in early 2004, LRA rebels attacked several internally displaced person (IDP) camps in the district, including an attack on the Bar Lonyo camp that killed over three hundred people. By early 2006, approximately one-half to two-thirds of Lira's population was displaced.<sup>20</sup> However, by March 2008, the security situation in Lira and Apac had improved and all of the IDP camps in Lango subregion had closed.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, there is little reason to believe that Lira's experience with the LRA fully explains the district council's poor performance. Similarly, Mpigi district has not been a victim of the LRA conflict or any other recent violent conflict, and yet the performance of the district council also falls well below that of Bushenyi. Moreover, among the seven districts whose performance on a recent assessment falls more than one standard deviation below the median, only one of these districts, Adjumani, has been affected by the ongoing LRA conflict.<sup>22</sup>

These three districts also vary little in terms of their policy and institutional experience. All three districts were created about the same time (see Table 1.1). Each has nearly two decades of experience with decentralization. In fact, Lira and Mpigi were among the first thirteen districts brought into the decentralization program in 1993. Decentralization was introduced to Bushenyi, which currently hosts the better performing council, the following year. Thus, institutional experiences does not account for the differences in performance across the three councils.

The experiences of these three case study districts also provide little evidence that longer term political institutional legacies determine performance of district councils today. For example, Mpigi district, which by far had the most centralized political history as part of Buganda Kingdom, is not the star of this small group. While Lira district does perform worse than others and is based in a region with traditional political systems that were quite decentralized, there are reasons to question whether Lira's precolonial institutions actually hinder the district council's performance today. Some scholars, such as Ottemoeller (1998), argue that the legacies of the precolonial decentralized political system in Langi may have quite positive effects on politics today. Ottemoeller finds, in particular, greater feelings of political efficacy among the Lango in Lira than populations in districts in central and western Uganda. The traditional political system in Bushenyi, formerly part of Ankole Kingdom, falls in between the highly centralized Buganda and the more decentralized political organizations

in Lango. Ankole Kingdom was certainly not as politically centralized as Buganda and constituted a “looser” form of political organization found among kingdoms (Karugire 1980), and yet Bushenyi still outperforms Mpigi district.

The multivariate analyses I present in Chapter 4 also offer little evidence that differences in ethnic diversity explain variation in local government performance in Uganda. These three case study districts confirm this general finding. Lira, which performs worse than the other districts, is the least fragmented along ethnic or linguistic lines of the three districts. In fact, Lira district is among the least fragmented districts in Uganda.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Bushenyi district, the better performer, is as diverse or, by some measures, even more diverse than Mpigi district (see Table 1.1).

While structural factors fall short, I demonstrate in the following chapters that informal political linkages account for Bushenyi’s better performance. The overwhelming support for the NRM among voters and elites in Bushenyi offers local officials a degree of leverage in dealing with the center and weakens the effects of patronage. Similarly, the high levels of support for the NRM within the district enhance existing administrative linkages, making them more useful to Bushenyi district council. Mpigi and Lira, as subsequent chapters document, are not so lucky.

### **Organization of the Book**

In the chapters that follow, I lay out my theoretical argument and provide empirical evidence of the ways that central-local relations shape council performance. In Chapter 2, I review the history of local government in Uganda and describe the current system of local government. I also carefully describe the current political context and highlight those features of Uganda’s political system that influence local government performance. In Chapter 3, I document the performance—particularly the effectiveness and responsiveness—of Uganda’s district councils following decentralization. The chapter includes an analysis of performance across fifty-six district councils as well as an in-depth account of the performance in each of the three case study districts. I present empirical evidence that shows the significant variation in performance across the district councils in the country.

In Chapter 4, I present an overview of the book’s theoretical framework. I develop the central arguments of the book, highlighting the influence of both state and society on the performance of local governments. I also present results of multivariate analyses used to test

my central thesis of the book across fifty-six district councils in Uganda. I posit that informal political linkages have two dimensions: *top-down political linkages*, comprised of central government financial and political support that flows to local areas; and *bottom-up political linkages*, comprised of political support provided by an area to the ruling party. I demonstrate in the analyses in Chapter 4 that the two dimensions of informal political linkages have countervailing effects on local government performance. Bottom-up political linkages contribute to better performing local governments, while top-down political linkages undermine local government performance. In the final section of that chapter, I explore how the two dimensions combine to effect local government performance. I present three exemplars (central dominance, cooperative relations, and local autonomy) that detail the impact of different combinations of top-down and bottom-up political linkages on local government performance. From these three exemplars, I derive observable implications for what we would expect to see with respect to local government performance under each of the three different combinations of top-down and bottom-up linkages.

The remaining chapters focus on evidence gathered in the three case studies—Lira, Bushenyi, and Mpigi—and demonstrate how clear differences in the political relationship between each district and the central government help to explain the differences in performance across these three councils. In Chapter 5, I evaluate the influence on local government performance of the formal institutions that define central-local relations in Uganda. In particular, I analyze the mechanisms for monitoring and oversight of local governments by ministry officials and evaluate the ability and willingness of central government officials and ministries to mentor district councils toward better performance. In Chapter 6, I return to an examination of the informal side of central-local relations and turn to my key variable of interest, informal political linkages. I describe the nature of top-down and bottom-up political linkages between each of the three case study districts and the NRM government and discuss how the three exemplars introduced in Chapter 4 map onto the case studies. The chapter focuses, in particular, on the effects of top-down political linkages and carefully examines how local governments fit within patronage networks and then asks how patronage from the center affects local government effectiveness and responsiveness.

The existing literature usually assumes that decentralization increases citizen participation and the accountability of local leaders to the public. In Chapters 7 and 8, I evaluate whether decentralization succeeds in this goal. In these chapters, I examine the influence of

individual citizens on their local governments following decentralization. Chapter 7 explores the importance of local elections and the relationship between levels of electoral competition and the performance of local governments. In Chapter 8, I examine how participation outside elections relates to council performance. Finally, Chapter 9 generalizes the theoretical framework beyond the case of Uganda to other African countries. In this chapter, I reveal how decentralization reforms fit more broadly into existing political patterns in Africa and evaluate the impacts of decentralization reforms in relation to broader democratization reforms adopted throughout Africa in the 1990s.

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<sup>1</sup> “Kasese District Interdicts CAO,” *New Vision*, May 9, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> “Soroti CAO Interdicts Officials,” *New Vision*, March 21, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Uganda (2001a, 17).

<sup>4</sup> The Afrobarometer merged dataset includes data from the following countries: Botswana; Ghana; Lesotho; Malawi; Mali; Namibia; Nigeria; South Africa; Tanzania; Uganda; Zambia; and Zimbabwe. Data available online at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Gélinau and Remmer (2006) on Latin America; Oxhorn, Tulchin, and Selee (2004) for a cross-national perspective.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Hadenius (2001).

<sup>7</sup> Semboja and Therkildsen (1994) makes this point clearly in their comment to Maro (1990).

<sup>8</sup> See “Embrace Decentralization, Says Museveni,” *The Monitor*, May 2, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in “Embrace Decentralization, Says Museveni,” *The Monitor*, May 2, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> See Hyden (1983); Regan (1995); UNDP (1993).

<sup>11</sup> Uganda’s reforms to empower local governments meets the limited definition of decentralization advanced by Oxhorn (2004) as well as many of the features of devolution as defined by Rondinelli (1981).

<sup>12</sup> Many terms are used to describe civil society organizations, such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), or private-voluntary organizations. These terms tend to refer to organizations that vary by size, location, and perhaps degree and source of funding more so than function. I use the more general term, civil society organizations (CSOs), aware that the use of this term combines groups that vary in size and function.

<sup>13</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2 in this volume, the graduated tax was abolished in 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Eleven new districts were created by an act of Parliament in November 2000. Between 2000 and 2008, the Ugandan government created twenty-four more districts, for a total of eighty (Uganda Districts Information Handbook, 2008). In 2009, seven new districts were created (“Government Names Fourteen New Districts,” *New Vision*, May 19, 2009). And on July 1, 2010, twenty-five

new districts were created, increasing the total number of districts to 112 (“Equip New Districts to Execute their Duties,” *New Vision*, July 4, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Within each of these districts, I interviewed both elected and nonelected local officials, conducted focus group discussions, carried out archival research, and conducted a survey of 612 local residents, using a combination of stratified and cluster sampling techniques (204 respondents in each of the three districts).

<sup>16</sup> I use the terms Movement and National Resistance Movement (NRM) interchangeably to refer to the ruling political organization. The Movement formally changed its name to the NRM-O as it transitioned from a movement into a political party in preparation for the 2006 elections, although many within Uganda continue to use the term Movement. Another important distinction, when Movement is capitalized, it refers to the political organization. When movement is not capitalized it refers to the NRM’s no-party political system.

<sup>17</sup> For example, on October 10, 1996, the LRA abducted 139 girls from the prestigious St. Mary’s College in Aboke, Lira district.

<sup>18</sup> Otuke County is the northernmost county in Lira district, bordering Kitgum district. Oromo subcounty is in Moroto County and comprises most of the southern border of Otuke County. Acholi refers to the districts that occupy the former Acholi district, which existed at independence, and is inhabited primarily by members of the Acholi ethnic group.

<sup>19</sup> Azam S. Ahmed, “Peace for Northern Uganda likely in the near future,” *United Press International (UPI)*, June 17, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> The UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Action put the number of displaced persons in Lira closer to 350,000 as of February 2006, which represents close to half of the district population. A district leader, on the other hand, estimated that during the height of the insecurity in the district close to two-thirds of the population was living in protected camps.

<sup>21</sup> “Uganda: Focus shifts to securing durable solutions for IDPs: A profile of the internal displacement situation,” *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre*, November 3, 2008. Available online at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org), see previous profile updates on the Uganda country page.

<sup>22</sup> The districts with Local Government Development Project (LGDP) assessment scores for 1999 that fall more than one standard deviation below the median include: Adjumani, Kalangala, Kapchorwa, Kasese, Moroto, Rukungiri, and Sembabule. See Chapter Two in this volume for a full description of this measure. Data compiled by author.

<sup>23</sup> For example, Lira’s score on the index of ethnic fragmentation based on the 1991 census (.1572) is more than one standard deviation below the average score for all districts (mean = .3999; SD = .2143). Data compiled by author from LGDP assessments.