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**The Thesis Committee for Daniel Patrick Moriarty  
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following Thesis:**

**Civil Resistance and Digital Media in Uganda:  
Hybrid Spaces of Resistance and Expression**

**APPROVED BY  
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Paul Adams, Supervisor

Caroline Faria

Bjørn Sletto

**Civil Resistance and Digital Media in Uganda:  
Hybrid Spaces of Resistance and Expression**

**by**

**Daniel Patrick Moriarty**

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## **Dedication**

To my parents, whose undying support has given me the confidence to continue to push myself.

To the Ugandans continuing the struggle for freedom. Your determination in the face of oppression is nothing short of inspirational.

To Specialist Anthony Whitten, US Army, 1997-2021. You will never be forgotten.



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## **Abstract**

# **Civil Resistance and Digital Media in Uganda: Hybrid Spaces of Resistance and Expression**

Daniel Patrick Moriarty, MA

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Supervisor: Paul A. Adams

This research explores the ongoing political resistance in Uganda under the guise of the National Unity Platform (NUP) and its leader Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, popularly known as Bobi Wine. The NUP, in its efforts to challenge the 37-year long rule of President Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM), has mobilized millions of young Ugandans through the adaptive use of various social media platforms. Evolving from a social movement into a formal political organization, the NUP's resistance strategy has shifted into continued digital engagement and physical outreach into Uganda's hinterlands.

Taking a mixed-methods approach, this work seeks to present a trans-scalar view of the intersections between digital and physical spaces of political expression and resistance inside (and outside) Uganda today. The use of GIS to interrogate the relationship between telecommunications infrastructure and political unrest at a national scale presents an introductory context to the research. Content analysis of newspaper archives on the formalization of the People Power Movement into the NUP and forty surveys on the use of digital media and political action gradually "zoom in" the scale to



focus on the emergence of the NUP and the environment which it finds itself. Proceeding to qualitatively focused methods, interviews with several members of the NUP (to include several of Wine's chief lieutenants) highlights key themes of a digitally mediated resistance movement struggling to ground itself in rural territories. Lastly, a novel attempt at visualizing digital spaces in relation to a resistance movement is operationalized through participatory mapping.

This research explores the unique ways in which Uganda's political history and human geography affects the ongoing struggle for democratic reforms. Thematically, this work also grounds the NUP's struggle in the global geopolitical competition between authoritarianism and pro-democracy movements, at times aligned or against neoliberal democratic states.

## **Table of Contents**

List of Tables .....	13
List of Figures .....	14
Introduction.....	15
1.1 Overarching Argument .....	15
1.2 Introduction of Study Site.....	18
1.3 Bobi Wine and the National Unity Platform .....	21
1.4 Research Questions, Methods, Structure, Author Positionality .....	24
2. Literature Review.....	31
2.1 Civil Resistance .....	31
2.2 The Impact of Social Media on Resistance .....	36
2.3 Participatory Mapping, Counter-mapping, Visualizations of Digital Spaces.....	41
2.4 Contemporary Contentious Politics in Uganda .....	44
3. Geographical Analysis of Ugandan Civil Unrest and ICT Infrastructure.....	47
3.1 Introduction.....	47
3.2 Literature on ICT and Political (non)Violence .....	47
3.3 Ugandan ICT Infrastructure.....	49
3.4 Political Violence in Uganda since 2016.....	53
3.5 Spatial Patterns and Correlational Relationship .....	57
4. Newspaper Archives and Kayunga Surveys .....	62
4.1 Introduction.....	62
4.2 Newspapers.....	65
Theme 1: State Repression.....	66

Theme 2: Parallel Continuation of People Power and NUP .....	68
Theme 3: Shifting Political Loyalties and Coalitions .....	70
4.3 Survey analysis .....	73
Forms of Media.....	74
Political Activity .....	76
Media and Political Activity .....	79
4.4 Discussion/Conclusion.....	81
5. Interviews with members of the National Unity Platform.....	83
5.1 Introduction.....	83
5.2 Narratives, Themes and Insights.....	87
1. Intra-movement Dynamics of The National Unity Platform .....	87
Balancing Between Security and Participation.....	88
Mechanisms for Feedback, Subordinate Autonomy .....	90
Coordination between Party and Movement.....	94
2. Mobilization and Recruitment Through Social Media .....	96
Diversity of Platforms and Uses .....	97
Utilization of Pre-existing Networks .....	99
Transnational Linkages to Diaspora and Global Allies .....	102
3. Physical Communication and Barriers of Repression .....	108
Legacy Media and Relationships with Ugandan Media .....	108
Importance and Challenges of Physical Access.....	110
Alternative Institutions.....	112
5.3 Conclusions.....	113

6. Visualizing Digital Spaces of Resistance Through Participatory Mapping.....	114
6.1 Introduction.....	114
6.2 Networked Protest and Development of Digital Resistance Map .....	115
6.3 Summary of Findings.....	122
6.4 Implications .....	134
7. Conclusion .....	136
7.1 Intersections and Implications .....	136
7.2 Future Interventions .....	139
7.3 Potential Scenarios.....	141
7.4 Closing Thoughts.....	147
8. References .....	148

## **List of Tables**

Table 3.1: Conflict Events by Region, Events per Region Population.....	57
Table 3.2 Top six hexagons of conflict-to-ICT ratio .....	60
Table 4.1: Use of social media platforms .....	75
Table 4.2. Survey responses on likelihood to participate in political activities.....	77

## List of Figures

Figure 3.1: Nationwide ICT 2G/3G/4G infrastructure (L); density of reported cell locations within 100 square mile hexagons (R).....	51
Figure 3.2: 2G/3G/4G infrastructure within Kampala metro area.....	52
Figure 3.3: ACLED-measured political unrest events, 2016-2022.....	55
Figure 3.4: Relationship between conflict events and ICT infrastructure .....	58
Figure 3.5: Conflict and lack of ICT infrastructure in Ugandan urban peripheries.....	59
Figure 4.1. Correlation between media usage (digital and legacy) and political participation .....	80
Figure 5.1: Ghetto TV coverage of NUP Guild marches at Makerere University .....	101
Figure 5.2: Bobi Wine in Kyiv, Ukraine.....	106
Figure 6.1. Proposed taxonomy for resistance movement structure and ability to operate in digital and physical settings. ....	117
Figure 6.2. Digital resistance map .....	122
Figure 6.3. Digital Resistance Map, NUP organizer. ....	124
Figure 6.4. Digital Resistance Map, NUP Student Leader .....	126
Figure 6.5. Digital Resistance Map, NUP supporter .....	129
Figure 6.6. Digital Resistance Map, NUP supporter .....	130
Figure 6.7. Proposed composite map of NUP.....	133

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 OVERARCHING ARGUMENT**

Margaret Nattabi, a student at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, was set to campaign for the university's vaunted Student Guild presidency for 2023-2024 term. A student of agriculture, Nattabi is also one of many politically active students at Makerere, serving as the secretary general for the university's National Unity Platform (NUP) chapter (Nattabi, n.d.). The NUP, Uganda's primary political opposition party, has found large bases of support amongst the country's youth and university students; NUP-affiliated students at Makerere have built on this support, holding the position of Guild President since 2019. Nattabi's campaign, however, was thrown into question on April 7, 2023, when university administrators suspended her candidacy over allegations that a campaign event led to the beating of a student (Matovu, 2023). While administrators have suspended NUP-affiliated students previously (Maberi, 2022), this case marked a departure on April 10 when, while attempting to conduct a press conference to challenge the circumstances of the suspension, Nattabi and several other students were violently arrested by Ugandan police and detained in the Wandegaya prison (@HEBobiwine, 2023). Commentators from within and outside the NUP have pointed to the incident as evidence of a further shrinking space for civil society in Uganda, a country currently at a crossroads between continued illiberalism and struggling pro-democracy reform movements.

While political violence and social movements struggling against authoritarianism have long been observed and practiced across human history (see Goodwin and Jasper, 2015), the current geopolitical climate has led to many arguing the world has entered a new Cold War-style competition between liberalism and authoritarianism (see Biden, 2022; Freedom House, 2022). In Ukraine, this competition is waged through conventional military conflict, as Vladimir Putin ambitiously seeks to overthrow the democratically elected regime of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and consolidate control for the Russian Federation's oligarchy. In Myanmar, what started as a nonviolent campaign of civil disobedience has descended into a civil war, as a loose coalition of pro-democracy and ethnic minority groups struggle against the military junta that seized control of the country in 2021 (The Associated Press, 2023). In Sudan, veterans of the much-lauded peaceful revolution in 2019 continue their efforts in the face of a similar military coup that has taken control of the country. Elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, military coups have taken control of states on the brink of democratic transition, while others still continue to operate under anocratic regimes (Tharoor, 2023). Such political struggles have also occurred in the purported bedrocks of democratic norms, such as the democratic backsliding in the United States, Brazil, and Hungary (Diamond, 2021).

While the responses to authoritarian aims range in levels of violence, this study focuses on the tactics and nature of nonviolent or civil resistance campaigns operating across physical and digital spaces of resistance. While resistance movements have utilized digital media since its outset (Bob, 2005), such as the Zapatistas' early adoption of the internet for its political messaging, much of the popular discourse began to focus



on it following the 2011 “Arab Spring,” wherein civil unrest and use of social media platforms allowed discontented populations to coordinate and challenge longstanding authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere in the Middle East (Tufekci, 2017). Authoritarian regimes have since adapted to the increased importance of social media in coordinating political dissent and resistance; Singer and Brooking (2019) detail how autocratic states have responded to the surge in digitally-mediated social movements, using new tactics to curtail dissent; bot-farms of government supporters, blocking access to social media sites or the internet writ large, deliberate use of disinformation, and other strategies have been observed in recent years. Tufekci also describes how adaptive regimes have deployed “digital armies” to suppress and confuse the coordination and mobilization efforts of would-be protestors. In *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*, Tufekci argues that these regimes’ repertoires of repression have greatly developed since the 2011 Arab Spring. Likewise, Tufekci points to the faltering success of digitally-centered social movements as evidence that an over-reliance on social media hamstring overall movement vitality. Comparing movements such as the Occupy Wall Street movement and 2013 Gezi Park protests in Turkey to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, Tufekci contends that the affordances of digital media (Adams, 2015) serve as shortcuts to the mechanisms for movement growth and action, such as the physical networking and organizing that pre-digital movements like the Civil Rights Movement had to rely on. As a result, Tufekci and others (see Chenoweth, 2019; Edwards et al., 2013) argue that social movements struggling in autocratic settings should balance the affordances of digital media with a focus on

building physical networks capable of carrying out a variety of resistance actions. These conditions are present across various political contexts, from liberal democracies to authoritarian regimes, but are especially relevant in anocracies. Anocracies, defined by Fearon and Laitan (2003) as regimes that feature both democratic and autocratic features, serve as battlegrounds where social movements, having tenuous access to digital media and civil society organizations, continue to struggle against regimes seeking to maintain political control. How social movements in these settings manage to achieve their aims arguably has ramifications for the vitality of global democracy, and therefore merits specific study across disciplines. Uganda represents one such case; by providing a brief introduction to the location of this research, I aim to provide initial context on the chosen study site and ground the research into uses of digital media for political organizing and resistance.

## **1.2 INTRODUCTION OF STUDY SITE**

Uganda, a country of approximately 46,000,000 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2023) in East Africa, is located at a critical intersection between multiple regions that have had a profound impact on its political history and current demographics. Physically, its location in the Lake Victoria Basin has served as a transitional zone between Congolian rainforests to the West and bushlands to the East in Kenya and Tanzania. A landscape conducive to agriculture supported the development of numerous ethnic groups and indigenous tribal kingdoms that existed for hundreds of years prior to the arrival of British colonists in the late nineteenth century (Green, 2010).

Uganda's time as a British protectorate from 1894 until independence in 1962 was a critically important period for its development as a polity and for the spatial characteristics of the country's natural and built environments. Electing to pursue a strategy of indirect rule, the British gained the support of the tribal kingdom of Buganda whose support was critical to the colonization project. Through the cooperation of Buganda and the area's other hierarchical tribal kingdoms, the British developed Uganda's physical landscape to support extractive agriculture of crops like coffee, as well as developing patterns of state violence that coerced the cooperation of a diverse array of ethnic groups and tribes (Cavanagh and Himmelfarb, 2014). These economic legacies of colonialism continued past the departure of the British, as agriculture currently employs 72% of the Ugandan workforce; coffee production remains vital, accounting for 16% of the country's total exports (Central Intelligence Agency, 2023). The effects of British colonization, however, were not limited to Uganda's agricultural sectors or hinterlands; Faria et al. (2020) detail how colonial mechanisms of governance and urban planning necessitated the bordering of certain parts of Kampala City, creating a system of surveillance and control of personal mobilities that continue to today as Ugandan authorities displace populations to support neoliberal development. Ugandan scholars such as Mukwaya (2016) likewise explores how the surveillance regime in Kampala has been deployed against numerous social movements in the capital, while Omolo-Okalebo et al. (2010) presents archival and contemporary evidence of the continued effects of colonial thinking on Kampala's spatial arrangements.

Following its independence from the United Kingdom, Uganda entered a long period of political violence marked by civil wars fought for control of the country as well as long periods of oppression, like the reign of Idi Amin, whose purges and ethnic cleansing are thought to have killed almost 500,000 Ugandans (Keatley, 2003). Amin's ousting from power in 1980 led to the Ugandan Bush War, a civil conflict that was fought until 1986, when Yoweri Museveni consolidated control of the capital and proclaimed himself president. While violence continued through certain parts of the country, particularly in Uganda's northern region where the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) of Joseph Kony waged a years-long insurgency, Museveni's victory in 1986 marked a turning point in Ugandan politics. Museveni's political maneuvering and coalition-building have been credited by many as one of the main reasons he continues to serve as President thirty seven years later (Lindemann, 2011). Due to Museveni's politicking and use of state violence against would-be challengers (see Tapscott, 2021), Uganda has been largely viewed as one of the most relatively stable countries in the region since the decline of the LRA between 2006-2011 (Day, 2019; Tracy, 2021). However, despite the decline in armed violence in the country, instability persists as many Ugandans are restless with the continued rule of Museveni. Part of this may be explained by the country's extremely young population; with an average age of 15.7 years, the majority of Ugandans have not seen another leader besides the incumbent president (Central Intelligence Agency, 2023). The Museveni regime maintains stability through a pattern of systemic violence, such as the arbitrary use of force against civilians, intimidation and arrest of dissident journalists, and tight control of internet access. As a result, political

opponents and would-be challengers have to date been unsuccessful in unseating Museveni at the ballot box, with perennial challenger Kizza Besigye of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) losing to Museveni in four consecutive elections (2001, 2006, 2011, 2016) (see Wilkins et al., 2021). Unsurprisingly, much of the foundations of Uganda's political development and clientelism is found in its colonial history and legacy of indirect British rule (see Lange, 2004; Mamdani, 1996).

### **1.3 BOBI WINE AND THE NATIONAL UNITY PLATFORM**

It was from this environment that Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, better known as Bobi Wine, rose to fame as Uganda's most prominent opposition leader. Friesinger (2021, 133-135) and others (Wilkins et al., 2021) have charted Wine's rise to prominence, first as an educated resident of one of Kampala's many slums, who then began a musical career that would see him become one of Uganda's most popular hip-hop artists. Wine's music, much of which fueled by political fervor, struck a chord with many of Kampala's poorer residents. Wine would pivot to politics in 2017 and start what would in 2020 become the National Unity Platform (NUP). After a tense campaign to unseat Museveni as president in Uganda's 2021 presidential elections, the NUP now finds itself at a crossroads; occupying several seats in Parliament and other bodies of government while also continuing a campaign of political resistance throughout Kampala and Uganda's other population centers. In the summer of 2022, Wine and the NUP forged a partnership with Besigye and the FDC, attempting to build a coalition of Uganda's political opposition parties. The loose NUP-FDC coalition has since coordinated electoral

strategies in a series of parliamentary by-elections, seeking a unity strategy to defeat local NRM candidates.

With regard to Bobi Wine as an individual figure and activist, Osiebe (2020) captures much of the existing analysis to create a picture of how the hip hop star rose to fame and eventually pivoted to a career in politics. Beginning his career as a rapper from the Kamwokya slums, Wine's musical focus soon transitioned to a more activist approach, directing much of his themes to the political and economic grievances of Ugandans. These calls for justice and political reform struck a chord with many Kampalans, as well as many of Uganda's smaller peripheral cities and towns. Wine soon gained the moniker of "The Ghetto President," and in 2017 started the People Power Movement with his initial candidacy for a MP position (Kakaire, 2018). Wine stressed to Ugandans that the movement was not a political party but indeed a popular movement; it would actually not be until the lead up to the 2021 presidential election that the People Power Movement would actually coopt the National Unity Platform in a move that some saw as political maneuvering to circumvent NRM restrictions on political parties (Wilkins et al., 2021: 638-639). Wine's charisma and personal leadership was frequently pointed to by interview subjects as a major strength of the movement, and call to mind scholarship on the importance of messaging and "branding" for political resistance movements (see Bob, 2005).

The 2021 campaign was marked by protests, violent crackdowns, internet shutdowns by the regime, eventually culminating in a contested reelection of Yoweri Museveni in January 2021. At the height of the violence, between 37 and 54 Ugandans

were killed during protests over Wine's arrest by police for violating draconian COVID-19 restrictions (Athumani & Wroughton, 2020; Wandera & Bwire, 2020). Despite these protocols banning large gatherings, Wine and the NUP staged several large rallies throughout the country. These gatherings served not just as calls for support but also as outright acts of defiance of the NRM's rule. The violent crackdowns of such gatherings only served to strengthen the resolve of existing NUP supporters and make non-affiliated Ugandans more likely to support Bobi Wine's campaign (Curtice & Behlendorf, 2021: 183-185). Wilkins et al. (2021) notes how "Bobi Wine's campaign was straight out of the defiance playbook." With the Wine-led NUP still in its infancy, the presidential campaign's support was driven through grassroots organizing and the use of multiple forms of media. Sharing and dissemination of images of repressive government tactics was widespread over various social media platforms and traditional media outlets. The impact of such media was arguably one of the driving reasons for the Ugandan government enforcing stricter controls on social media following the election (Wilkins et al., 2021: 640). Following the violent campaign and the NUP's implicit acceptance of their defeat, the party has since shifted to the more structural resistance noted previously, as opposed to a dual approach of defiance and participation. As discussed, since the summer of 2022 the NUP has focused its efforts on building grassroots support across the country while improving its coalition with the FDC.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODS, STRUCTURE, AUTHOR POSITIONALITY**

This study addresses the aforementioned challenges in organizing effective networks of civil resistance through social media, and illuminates spatial patterns of resistance observed as networks attempt to expand across ethnic, economic, and digital divides in the context of a semi-authoritarian state. Four research questions were developed to cover these themes:

R1. How are places of political resistance shared and expanded across communities through digital and traditional media?

R2. How do leaders of an urban, digitally-connected resistance movement alter strategies to build support in rural populations?

R3. To what extent are subordinate resistance leaders practicing autonomy across ethnic, economic, or digital divides?

R4. To what extent does access to Information/Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure affect diversity or intensity of resistance activity?

Methodologically, I have pursued a mixed-methods approach to this work, seeking to use a variety of techniques and scales so that the complexity of contemporary political resistance in Uganda might be accurately explored and situated. While previous training and familiarity with qualitative research drives the body of this work, quantitative techniques were also used primarily for the coarser scale analysis of Uganda at a national scale.

First, a literature review examines four themes relevant to the selected research questions. These include the body of work on civil resistance as a tactical approach for



social movements; the proliferation of social media as a “liberation technology” used by social movements; the visualization of digital spaces, to include spaces that are both representative of physical space and wholly digital; and a recent political history of Uganda’s social movements and development of oppositional political movements up to and including the rise of Bobi Wine.

Second, GIS is used to contextualize the relationship between political unrest and digital media access in Uganda. Using publicly available information on cell-tower locations and mobile data reception, I present geographical representations of contemporary digital media access across the country. Incorporating research by the Armed Conflict Location Event Data (ACLED) project (Raleigh et al., 2010), acts of civil unrest are geolocated to explore where Ugandans have resisted expanding authoritarianism and how corresponding violence by state security forces has been deployed. From here, both data sets are analyzed in order to articulate the geospatial relationship between digital media infrastructure and acts of civil unrest.

Third, the scale is gradually “zoomed in” spatially and temporally. This fourth chapter begins by presenting archival research on several Ugandan newspapers’ reporting on the formalization of the People Power Movement into the National Unity Platform. Interrogating how Ugandan media outlets portray the establishment of the NUP as the rising start of oppositional politics further contextualizes the organization and individuals supporting it. Spatially, the chapter then focuses on a case study of Kayunga, a small town and district capital that was the site of political violence when police and security forces prevented the conduct of free and fair elections in 2021. Utilizing responses from

forty participants in response to a survey focused on political activities and mediums of communication, themes of mobilization and participation barriers are illuminated. From here, the subsequent chapters rely on qualitative work conducted during in-country research in Kampala.

Fourth, semi-structured interviews with a variety of NUP members at various echelons are presented in order to identify and discuss the major themes of a digitally connected resistance movement, one that continually renegotiates its place across physical and digital spaces as well as its tactical and strategic choices in resisting the Museveni regime. Interview subjects range from self described “foot soldiers” of the NUP to some of its senior leadership. Due to the political sensitivities of the questions and of my positionality (see previous section), offers to meet and interview Bobi Wine were declined. These interviews focused on questions of hierarchy and participation of movement members, as well as the role of digital media as compared to physical interactions between group members and potential supporters.

Finally, drawing inspiration from previous works on participatory or counter mapping, a novel framework for visualizing social movements across digital and physical spaces is used with interview subjects to foster dialogue on the roles of different forms of communication and collaboration. With these exercises, interview subjects articulate the challenges of expanding support for a social movement through participatory mapping of hybrid spaces constantly disrupted by forces of digital and physical suppression. Following this chapter, a brief conclusion reviews the comprehensive collected data and frames the research within ongoing work and potential future opportunities.

Before proceeding with this work, it is important to consider my own positionality as it relates to the research themes, study site, and interview subjects. This reflection on positionality will also consider intersectional identities in personal and professional contexts.

As a straight, white, male, I am cognizant of geography's history of domination by both whiteness and maleness (Kinkaid et al., 2021). Additionally, as a westerner, conducting geographic research in the Global South and particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa has made salient a number of considerations of colonialism, imperialism, and academic extractivism. Efforts to pursue more collaborative and participatory research included my relationship with the Center for Basic Research (CBR), whose affiliation fees went towards not just securing in-country research approval from the Ugandan National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST) but also funded continued work by the CBR's resident staff and scholars. Interview subjects were also included in the work through the provision of the participatory mapping tool (see chapter 6) for future use as a planning and communication aid.

Currently serving in the United States military also plays a role in how I have positioned myself and framed my research, to include in-country research conducted during the summer of 2022. Particularly, my service has complicated relationships with interview subjects and the focus of research; diplomatically, the United States' official position is one of support for the Museveni regime. Since 1986, the United States has supported the regime through economic and military assistance (Department of State, 2022). Much of the military assistance has been a result of regional instability and

Uganda's willingness to partner with the United States against extremist organizations like the LRA or Al Shabab in nearby Somalia (Demmers and Gould, 2018; Branch, 2012). With this history of military support to a regime known for violence against political dissent, I was confronted by a complex question of how to navigate my position as a member of the United States military. On the one hand, these connotations might have immediately precluded NUP members from speaking with me out of protest against the United States government's continued support for the Museveni regime. On the other hand, the "optics" of a special operations officer meeting with the primary political opposition could have very well caused a diplomatic incident if the Ugandan government misconstrued my research as surreptitious cover for some sort of covert action.

Continuing with this potentiality, concerns existed over the validity or reliability of subjects' statements had they presumed I was acting in an official capacity for the United States government. The simple fact of my status as an American was enough for one subject to half-jokingly ask for assistance in getting Elon Musk to deploy the Starlink system to Uganda a la Ukraine; had I disclosed my military affiliation, it was thought, subjects may have assumed I was establishing initial contact for potential U.S. support to destabilize or overthrow the Museveni regime. After deliberation and consultation with academic and military mentors, I pursued a personal policy of tactful transparency. All of my research questions and interview subjects were communicated to the U.S. embassy in Kampala, whose defense attache office granted approval and voiced no concern. When interviewing NUP leaders, I introduced myself as a graduate student from the University of Texas, and refrained from mentioning my military affiliation unless it was asked

about. Reflecting on this choice, I remain confident of my reasoning; the choice of study site and research questions was entirely of my choosing, with no input or requirement from the United States Military Academy, United States Army, or Department of Defense. While some scholars critique the use of deception in conducting fieldwork in politically sensitive areas (see Herrera, 1999; Smith, 2014), others contend that the inherent risk to both researcher and subject in conflict areas creates the need to selectively reveal information about oneself (see Chok, 2010 and Sou, 2021). In a piece reflecting on fieldwork in Pakistan, Dawar (2021) summarizes this complexity, arguing that “the problem with conventional methodologies derives from the assumption of an ideal field situation in which both the researchers and researched enjoy a safe and transparent environment, access to information, freedom of expression and mutual trust. The recurrence of violence, intimidation and forced disappearances in dangerous situations compel researchers to seek out strategies that acculturate the researcher to that particular context. Therefore, the ethics of dangerous fieldwork should be based on the analysis of situated dilemmas within the specific context in which they arise” (36-37). Based on the desire for subjects’ freedom of expression and the importance of data reliability, I saw tactful transparency as the result of analyzing Uganda’s “situated dilemma.” In order to prevent further misconceptions about U.S. support for the NUP, communications with subjects since the completion of fieldwork refrained from disclosing my military affiliation. This also aimed to protect interview subjects from the perception that they were working with the U.S. military.

With this in mind, the entity I felt most uneasy about was the Ugandan state; seeking approval to conduct in-country research, my submission to the UNCST refrained from specifically mentioning the NUP. This was due to consultations with academic mentors, several of whom advised that NRM influence would slow down or prevent work on the NUP from being approved. This directly influenced the level of precaution taken with digital security with regards to interview transcripts. Once interviews and mapping exercises were completed, files were emailed to the PI and then stored on the University of Texas Box server. Additionally, files were also saved on a cloud-based, password and Virtual Protected Network-protected server. Once files were confirmed sent, all local versions were deleted from my phone. The use of verbal consent in the place of written forms was articulated in this study's IRB protocol, due to the political sensitivities of both study site and chosen interview subjects.

## **2. Literature Review**

Due to the interdisciplinary approach taken for this research, the literature review centers on three major themes: civil resistance, social media's role in the development and proliferation of such resistance movements, and the visualization of digital spaces. Additionally, a consideration of contentious politics in Uganda provides context to the local conditions and history that have contributed to the development of the contemporary struggle.

### **2.1 CIVIL RESISTANCE**

The field of work on non-violent resistance, nonviolent action, or civil resistance (no singularly accepted term exists) has been studied by many disciplines and through many frameworks, to include the works of several geographers. Notable overlap exists with the interdisciplinary body of work on social movement theory. Schock (2013) captures the relationship between the fields of study, classifying similarities and differences. For one, social movement theorists typically have a more academic audience and focus primarily on the structural roots of movements or revolutions. Notable contributors to social movement theory includes Tilly (1978), McAdam (1999), and Jasper (1997), who has also edited a number of works with Goodwin (Goodwin and Jasper 2001, 2012, 2015). Tilly, McAdam, and Tarrow (2001) collaborated to author additional research on “contentious politics” that broke from previous, compartmentalized work. Drawing on political science and other sociological methodologies, social movement theorists examine the causes of mobilization like political opportunity (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004)

or resources (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). Civil resistance research, on the other hand, has historically focused more on the “applied” nature of such movements, illuminating the tactics and mechanisms for achieving change. The audience for civil resistance research also differs; the “applied” focus has led to many scholars writing works designed for modern practitioners (Sharp 2012; Ackerman 2021). Additional work by political scientists have sought to bridge the gap between these fields, using a systemic focus to examine the effectiveness of specific styles of nonviolent action or civil resistance in particular contexts, using expansive datasets (Cunningham et al., 2020; Chenoweth et al., 2018).

While the list of historical practitioners includes such figures as Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., notable contemporary authors include writers like Erica Chenoweth, Maria Stephan, Peter Ackerman, and Gene Sharp. Sharp in particular is noted for his “198 Methods,” made famous through his series *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Sharp, 2012). First published in 1973, Sharp’s series has since been translated into dozens of languages and disseminated to multiple resistance movements. Advancements in technology have also driven updated applications of some of these methods (Joyce, 2012; Edwards et al, 2013). The widespread popularity of the 198 methods highlights one of the fundamental components of civil resistance theory, the importance of high participation. Much of the success of civil resistance movements hinges on having high levels of participation from a diverse population, contrasting it with the much higher barrier to entry that violent resistance poses (Chenoweth, 2021: 95); given the mental and physical tolls associated with the use of violence (especially lethal



violence) and the training required to use most modern weapons, it is generally accepted that nonviolent action is easier for the average person to participate in. The momentum from mass participation traditionally comes from the early stages of a movement, when identity formation occurs and the use of inspirational language or images can stir populations to action (Ackerman and Duvall, 2000; 13-113). Another fundamental concept of civil resistance are the pillars of support; rather than overthrowing a regime in a coup, resistance movements focus on the “pillars of support” that uphold such regimes. These pillars consist of not just security forces but the civil servants, media organizations, religious, economic, or other leaders and organizations that afford legitimacy to the regime in power. Through earning defections from these groups, resistance movements have traditionally chipped away at regime support until it is no longer viable (Chenoweth, 2021; 100-107). This concept of defections links back to the importance of diverse participation, in that diverse groups of participants usually maintain nonviolent discipline better than movements comprised largely of young males; the ability to avoid pressures to turn to violent tactics in turn has a strong effect on eliciting security force defections (Stephan and Chenoweth, 2008: 34-36). A third element of civil resistance movements that is largely seen as fundamental is the ability to innovate and adapt to changing circumstances. Due to the dynamic nature of social conflict, regimes will shift tactics in order to suppress resistance movements; in order to continue to operate, movements must constantly adapt their tactics and approaches in order to both maintain the momentum of participants and prevent the dissolution of the organization by the state. Such innovations were observed in the US Civil Rights Movement’s adoption of boycotts, sit-ins, and other

tactics that pushed the boundaries and ended up eliciting extralegal violence from their opponents, which in turn led to the delegitimation of certain authorities (Adams, 1996; Agan et al., 2019; 122-123). The diversity of available tactics is great and varies greatly by local context and environment.

While the scholars discussed thus far have advanced the discourse on civil resistance as vocal proponents, other research has challenged these arguments of civil resistance's efficacy. One of the most salient critiques of the works by Chenoweth, Stephan, and others, has been the particularity of local contexts in determining resistance effectiveness; Manekin and Mitts (2021) represents one such case, arguing that "though a shift to nonviolence provides a large advantage to majority groups, for [ethnic] minority groups violent and nonviolent strategies have similarly low likelihoods of success...raising a major empirical puzzle: for whom is nonviolence more effective, and why?" (161). Far from the internal debates of geographers over the external validity of over-niched research (Murphy 2006), political scientists like those mentioned use cross-national datasets over large temporal periods for their models. Arguably, such wide scale research loses the importance of place that human geographers contend is essential to understanding complex human interactions like resistance.

Within the discipline of geography, there has been a lack of similar quantitative research on the effectiveness of resistance campaigns; noted work has come from non-geographers, like Butcher's (2015) research on the outcomes of civil resistance and geographical proximity to capital cities. Contributions from the field has come from sub-

disciplines of political, urban, and cultural geography. Mitchell and Staeheli's (2007) piece on how public spaces are defined, regulated, and contested is representative of similar works by urban geographers, who have examined the processes of knowledge production, place-making, and the contentious forms that these sometimes take; understandably, the work of these geographers on place-making has overlapped with scholars of urban planning and social movements who point to the importance of occupations of public spaces to resistance movements (see Adams, 1996; Feixa et al., 2016; Nicholls and Uitermark, 2016). Cresswell's notable 1996 contribution *In place/out of place: geography, ideology, and transgression* serves as another example of urban and cultural geographers capturing the spatial patterns of contentious place-making in urban settings and how such practices impact the development of resistance movements. In it, Cresswell uses the case of the Greenham Common movement, an organized occupation of space outside a British Royal Air Force base, to explore how the women taking space were portrayed as "out of place" and deviant from contemporary societal norms. The significance of occupations of high-profile public spaces relates directly to civil resistance movements' goals for recognition or legitimacy, seen even in smaller-scale movements challenging state militarism (Davis, 2017).

Geopolitical developments and military academic discourse have also made the literature on the relationship between civil resistance and armed or violent resistance more salient (Haynes, 2022; Petit, 2022; Meredith, 2022; Flanagan et al., 2019; van Baalen and Svensson, 2022). Schock (2013) again notes the debate between social movement theorists and civil resistance scholars on the relationship between violence and

nonviolence with respect to resistance movements' efficacy, noting that the latter tend to see it as antithetical. Indeed, scholars have argued that violent flanks can undercut the legitimacy of movements and make oppositional forces more likely to use violent repression (Chenoweth, 2021; Chenoweth and Schock, 2015). The shift from nonviolence to violence, and vice versa, has been subject to much debate and continued study (Dudouet, 2013; Schock and Demetriou, 2019).

Across these fields and research trends, several key takeaways emerge. Firstly, political scientists and sociologists have driven research on civil resistance in generally two directions; studies that fall under the scope of social movement theory continue to examine the emergence of movements, and more focused civil resistance research that examines the tactical variation and effectiveness of said movements. Geographers have contributed to both humanist and positivist approaches to the field, but have made notable advances in the study of cultural and political geographies that underpin the currents of resistance movements, to include the growing salience of digital geographies.

## **2.2 THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON RESISTANCE**

The impact of media on human discourse and social movements has been studied extensively by scholars from numerous disciplines. With respect to the impact of media (and in particular digital or social media) on social movements, work by political scientists in the early 2000's examined both the specific affordances provided by varied platforms (Vegh, 2003) and the "marketing" tactics that groups practiced (Bob, 2005). The topic of digital medias' role in social movements saw a surge in attention following

the 2011 “Arab Spring” protests, with renewed attention being paid to the so-called “Facebook Revolutions” (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012; Valenzuela, 2013; Edwards et al., 2013). For the purposes of this research, focus shall be put on the work done particularly by geographers and others on the specific ways in which it affects human relationships and the development of social movements and resistance. Adams (2013; 267) makes clear the reasoning behind such a scope of analysis, writing that

It is essential to work away from using ‘the media’ as an updated synonym for mass media... Theater, websites and popular songs slip out of the edges of our viewfinder if we do this, along with diaries, photo albums, graffiti and Twitter... critical geopolitical scholarship could benefit from attention to the particularities of media as socio-technical contexts and recognition that media are not just out there but in here.

As pointed out by Adams, the elements of media are much more than the conception of a monolith referred to as “the media.” The physical infrastructure, regulation, networks of distribution and consumption are all elements that reify the power of media in connecting populations. Understanding this is arguably a prerequisite to understanding the affordances that such media, most notably digital media, can provide. While the spread of each new major form of media brought with it major social transformations (Adams 2015, 395-396), the proliferation of digital media (to include social media platforms) has had arguably an outsized impact based on the specific affordances it allows users and the democratizing effect it has in raising individuals’

abilities to “achieve political goals, whether in terms of the articulation of grievances, discovery of opportunities, leveraging of resources, or formation of identities” (Ibid, 394). As it relates to the ultimate focus of this research, digital media has been critical in its abilities to circumvent state-sponsored or approved spaces for discourse, thereby providing subaltern or other marginalized populations the ability to organize and participate in counter-hegemonic “invented spaces” (Miraftab, 2009: 33). Adams (2015), building off this and other arguments developed by authors such as Valenzuela (2013) and Mamadouh (2003), proposes the three major affordances of digital media as social networking, information exchange, and dialogue/debate.

Social networking, itself a topic that has been studied considerably, has more meaning in the context of a hybrid or authoritarian regime where open dissent is often easily stifled. The ability of users to connect with each other and create digital spaces not only helps build organizational networks but helps overcome pluralistic ignorance in such settings where a silent majority may be prevented from voicing dissenting opinions; these networks also make mobilization for on-the-ground actions much more likely (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012: 374-377). The effects of such digital place-making can also be significant in settings where the overt displays of a community poses risks to its members; the use of digital media by the Revolutionary Afghan Women’s Association exemplifies such a situation, as documented by Fluri (2006).

Information exchange, the straightforward sharing of content between users and different digital media platforms, has been seen most clearly through social media giants

such as Facebook, Twitter, and messaging applications like WhatsApp. Again, Tufekci and Wilson (2012) demonstrates through data collected from participants in the 2011 Tahrir Square protests how the exchange of information through such apps, including the sharing of images and videos of state-sponsored violence, was highly correlated with decisions to take the risk and join the protests (see also Adams, 2015). These information exchanges arguably serve as the digital highways that connect the digital places created by users, in much the same way as geographers point to concepts of spaces and their relationship to ideas of place. Indeed, digital media has brought forward much research on its impact on place, especially with regards to contested places and places of protest (Adams, 2013: 6-7). Within Uganda and other African countries like Nigeria, the use of programs like WhatsApp has been widely practiced as a means of exchanging information about politics and social struggles by both opposition groups and the state (Bertand et al., 2021; Cheeseman et al., 2020; Muzee and Enaifoghe, 2020). Other researchers note, however, how these affordances can simultaneously operate as “liberation technology” and contribute to instability (Cheeseman et al., 2020; Manacorda and Tesei, 2020).

The final proposed affordance of digital media, dialogue and debate, can be seen as a byproduct of the first two affordances; within the social networks established by users, dialogue and debate is commonly held over the information being exchanged. Such discourse serves the same functions of identity formation and development of publics/counter-publics as physical spaces of communication (Adams, 2015; 396-397). Again, the explosion of popular protest movements during the “Arab Spring” of 2011

motivated a number of pieces that debated the role that social media played in allowing civil society networks to circumvent traditional barriers of surveillance and repression in order to better organize and mobilize supporters (see Howard and Hussain, 2013; Comunello and Anzera, 2012; Smidi and Shahin, 2017 for a review of related literature). In these spaces facilitated by digital media, movements can renegotiate meaning in real-time, such as the movement's ideology or the meaning of a shared place (Agur and Frisch, 2019).

Related to this discussion on the specific affordances of social media has been specific research on whether such technologies help or hinder the social movements that leverage them. In particular, work by Zeynep Tufekci (2017) examined how social media's "shortcuts" to organizing and mobilizing movement participants could at times hinder the ability of groups to shift tactics or adapt to changing circumstances. Work by Bennett and Segerberg (2013) also theorized the different forms of contentious political movements that social media could foster, delineating between traditional "collective action" movements and a newer "connective action" style of movement that prioritized individualized framing of political narratives. These conceptualizations have themselves contributed to numerous case studies on the specific uses of social media by social movements, whether classified as contentious politics, protest movements, or resistance networks (Khazraee and Novak, 2018; Muzee and Enaifoghe, 2020; Chibita, 2016). All in all, the literature on digital media's relationship with resistance movements has been extensive and pre-dates the mass proliferation of social media. Scholars have examined the unique affordances of varied platforms and have advanced discussions of how it is the



people using such technologies that drive disruption, rather than the programs themselves. These trends continue when scaled up to an entire movement, as geographers and other academics have pointed to the increased network capacity that movements have when equipped with tech-savvy participants.

### **2.3 PARTICIPATORY MAPPING, COUNTER-MAPPING, VISUALIZATIONS OF DIGITAL SPACES**

Related to the alternative spaces created through social media, participatory mapping or counter-mapping have been used as techniques to empower marginalized communities and assert their agency. Beyond even the connection between counter-mapping and digital spaces of resistance, maps as a distinct form of media have been widely studied by historians and geographers alike (see Crampton, 2001). Due to the bordering and dissection of territory created by cartographic practices, scholars such as historic geographer J.B. Harley (1988; 1989; 1990) have commented on the inherently political effects caused by mapping processes. Closely linked to this discussion is the debate within geography of what actually constitutes a map or the act of mapping. Edney (2019), in challenging the entire discipline of cartography, deconstructs the Cartesian and positivist roots of modern maps as tools of imperial conquest. Harley (1989), referring to foundational work by Foucault on the role of discourse in the construction of power, also critiqued the cartographic standards that dictated what maps were. This study therefore continues in the tradition of challenging hegemonic conceptions of maps and mapping, and argues that the subsequent interventions represent a novel form of “mapping” collective visualizations of digital and physical terrain.

As a response, participatory and counter-mapping emerged as a technique for indigenous or other marginalized communities to stake their own claim. Major contributions came in the 1990s and continued through the early 2000s, as scholars documented indigenous practices of counter-mapping against state-driven cartography in places like South Asia and Central America (Peluso, 1995; Wainwright and Bryan, 2009); these acts of counter-mapping served to provide indigenous communities alternative visual representations of their traditional lands in order to contest state-driven cartographic processes. In doing so, these communities often attempt to increase their recognition from the state or other “invited” spaces of governance (Miraftab, 2009). Further research has examined whether such techniques can be truly “participatory” in the context of neoliberal governance, engaging in a discussion over the dualism between the communities using counter-mapping practices and the states that such maps seek to challenge (Sletto, 2009; Hodgson and Shroeder, 2002; Parker, 2006; Bryan, 2011). As it relates to this research, such practices are relevant as launching-points for new research methods aimed to map digital spaces of resistance in Uganda and elsewhere.

Similar to this research on participatory methods of mapping, additional work has examined efforts to map or visualize digital spaces. Existing research on digital visualizations has largely focused on the construction of visual representations of already-existing data; Ng (2022) documents the various ways that the academy has visualized digital content, including both objective data and subjective representations of such media. With respect to social media, this has included work on social network analysis and positivist approaches to documenting interactions in such digital spaces

(Kim and Hastak, 2017). Critics, however, have noted how this approach risks overlooking cultural factors that may not be as easily observed through methods like data-mining or the use of GIS (Schwartz and Halegoua, 2015), with some calling for a renewed focus on “cyber geography” (Tsou and Leitner, 2013). Efforts at conducting participatory methods similar to those previously discussed have largely centered on the geographical centering of participants in online movements or organizations (see McLean et al., 2016), but gaps exist in engaging with individuals on their interpretations of the digital spaces which they inhabit, as well as how such spaces interact with physical environments and social networks. Similar attempts have likewise been termed “participatory diagramming” (Umoquit et al., 2008) in medical research or “participatory diagramming of digital spaces” (Gleason and von Gillem, 2018) in educational studies.

These trends and gaps drive this research’s development and use of mapping tools for digital and physical spaces of resistance. The deployment of a “hybrid space” mapping tool serves as an attempt to bridge the gaps between participatory mapping and subjective visualizations of social media spaces. This research therefore stakes a claim that such practices do indeed constitute a form of participatory mapping. While the discussed literature makes a point that participatory mapping may typically end with the delivery of maps to external audiences, the “hybrid space” map offers potential as such a tool for communicating resistance strategies to a wider range of Ugandans than those involved in the NUP’s struggle.

## **2.4 CONTEMPORARY CONTENTIOUS POLITICS IN UGANDA**

Finally, literature on contemporary contentious politics in Uganda must be considered. The significance and salience of the site remains one of the cornerstones of human geographical research, with scholars such as Tuan (1977) providing substantial humanistic analysis on how the concepts of “space” and “place” inform so much of existing academic research. Much existing literature has focused on the country’s post-independence struggles, including the Ugandan Bush War (1980-1986) that ended with Yoweri Museveni’s victory and assumption of political control, and the ensuing decades of violence waged by and against rebel groups like the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) (Lindemann, 2011; Tangri and Mwenda, 2010; Rubongoya, 2007). Ugandan politics since the 2000s has been defined by Ugandan and Western scholars as a struggle of pro-democracy groups against the further consolidation of political and social spaces by the Museveni regime. Major themes during this time have been the impact of Uganda and Africa’s surging youth population (Twikirize et al., 2021; Abbnik, 2021; Bosah, 2018; Sommers, 2011), the continued salience of ethnic and tribal identities (Conroy-Krutz, 2012; Habyarimana et al., 2007), and the impact of Ugandan culture on acts of resistance across urban spaces and marginalized communities (Mukwaya 2016; Abonga et al., 2020; Faria et al., 2021). Additionally, political scientists and conflict researchers have dedicated substantial effort on analyzing President Museveni’s political maneuvering that has enabled his continued rule for over 36 years (Tapscott, 2021). Foundational to this body of literature has been the work of noted Ugandan scholars; longtime scholar Mahmood Mamdani’s research on the political development of Uganda both before

(1975, 1994) and during the Museveni regime (1988, 2002) has explored colonial legacies and the contemporary development of “musevenism.” Moses Khisa’s (2013, 2019a, 2019b, 2020) exploration of civil society’s shrinking space and civil-military relations have likewise made notable contributions to Ugandan scholarship on the country’s political development.

As the most serious challenger to Museveni’s continued rule, Bobi Wine has been the subject of some research since his emergence into Ugandan politics in 2017. Scholars have examined the role that the Ugandan hip-hop industry has played in the evolving political ecology, as well as the performative impact of Wine’s lyrics on university politics (Friesinger, 2021; Kahyana, 2021). Social scientists have also compared Wine’s political career and 2021 presidential run to previous opposition campaigns led by perennial challenger Kizza Besigye (Wilkins et al., 2021). However, lacking from this body of literature has been an examination of Wine’s network of subordinate leaders and how the NUP has transformed itself from a popular social movement into a formalized political party with official (and unofficial) structures.

From this body of work spanning several fields and themes, the overarching theme of a digitally mediated resistance movement in Uganda begins to become illuminated. From previous research on civil resistance, common tactics and trends are established as fundamental to viable movements, drawing much theoretical foundation from social movement theory. Contemporary work on digital media and social movements likewise frames the ways in which new media platforms can enable

movements, from more theoretical affordances of dialogue or negotiating meaning to the very tactical uses of social media to mobilize protest actions. Lastly, considering the literature of contentious politics in Uganda vitally frames these themes geographically, attending to the role that place plays in how a movement is born and struggles against an adversarial regime. As discussed, gaps exist primarily in spatial analyses of Bobi Wine and the NUP's formalization as movement and organization. Assembling these various bodies of literature into a comprehensive case study of digitally mediated resistance movements in Uganda therefore addresses gaps across the presented fields, connecting theories of resistance and digital affordances to contemporary evidence of practitioners' struggles. From here, I begin the body of my research with a national scale analysis of telecommunications infrastructure and political unrest in Uganda.

### **3. Geographical Analysis of Ugandan Civil Unrest and ICT Infrastructure**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Before exploring the questions of Ugandan political resistance and digital placemaking through the qualitative methods described earlier, a quantitative analysis of the relevant data at a national scale will provide valuable context on the struggles of the NUP as it attempts to broaden its base of support beyond Kampala and diversify the members of its ranks. This chapter will first discuss relevant research on the relationship between the diffusion of ICT infrastructure and civil unrest (both violent and nonviolent forms), before introducing the datasets utilized. After presenting the respective spatial patterns of ICT infrastructure and recent civil unrest in Uganda, I will attend to the combined spatial patterns observed, highlighting the correlational relationship between the two. This analysis will support existing research on the relationship between mobile phone use and protest activities, while also presenting a novel visualization of the relationship as specifically observed in Uganda. Additionally, this chapter will examine observed outliers and discuss the ramifications for ongoing acts of resistance.

#### **3.2 LITERATURE ON ICT AND POLITICAL (NON)VIOLENCE**

Since the emergence of mobile phones as a major form of personal communication, limited but notable research has examined the relationship that such ICT has with various forms of collective action, to include the mass mobilization of protestors and the close coordination of insurgent violence. To ground this research, three studies

will be discussed that quantitatively and geographically analyzed ICT and “collective action,” viewed respectively through the lens of political violence, insurgent activity in asymmetric conflict, and nonviolent protest. Pierskalla and Hollenbach’s (2013) widely-referenced article in *American Political Science Review* utilized proprietary information from cell phone providers and publicly available data collected from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) to model the expansion of ICT and the emergence of new violent conflicts, utilizing  $55km^2$  cells across the African continent between 2008 and 2009. The authors’ found a statistically significant relationship, concluding that “across a wide range of empirical models...we find that cell phone coverage has a significant and substantive effect on the probability of conflict occurrence” (220), arguing that the previously referenced affordances of digital media enabled greater capacity for collective action organization and mobilization. These findings were later defended against criticisms of potential reporting bias (Pierskalla and Hollenbach, 2017) that emerged from related research on ICT and levels of insurgent violence. These works examined the relationship between expansion of ICT into conflict-stricken areas of Iraq and Afghanistan and their impact on insurgent activities, arguing that increased access to mobile phone coverage has a negative effect on violence, due to the increased anonymity and ease with which civilians could inform counterinsurgent forces on the whereabouts and activities of local insurgents (Weidmann, 2015; Shapiro and Weidmann, 2015).

Focusing on similar trends between ICT and nonviolent forms of protest, Manacorda and Tesei (2020) utilized the same ICT data as Pierskalla and Hollenbach, but



incorporated alternative conflict datasets that captured instances of nonviolent resistance, such as protests, strikes, and other forms of collective action that was not designed to use violence (notably, such datasets also include instances where nonviolent protests were met with violent responses from security forces). The authors found that “mobile phones are indeed instrumental to political mobilization, but this occurs in periods of economic downturn when reasons for grievance emerge or the opportunity cost of protest participation falls” (564). Berman et al. (2018), in a review of these competing attempts to understand the phenomenon of ICT-driven mobilization, notes that “the mobilization problem that cell phones help solve is similar across these three activities [political violence, insurgent activity, and nonviolent action]: you can bring together a sufficiently large group of people at a certain time and place without tipping off the authorities in advance (100).

These authors also note the salience of local conflict dynamics, in contrast to the continent-wide scale with which the previous pieces were written. Similarly, keeping a geographic focus on Uganda will illuminate the same trends between ICT and resistance activities, connecting from positivist, quantitative view to a humanist, individual-level analysis of how members of the NUP utilize ICT to expand their network of supporters.

### **3.3 UGANDAN ICT INFRASTRUCTURE**

Since most of the preceding literature on cell infrastructure and political violence relies on proprietary information such as the cell coverage datasets developed by the Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA) (see Manacorda and

Tesei, 2020), this research relied on open-source data derived from the OpenCellID project developed by Unwired Labs (<https://opencellid.org/>). OpenCellID, utilizing crowd-sourced mobile applications and a global community of users, has produced a robust dataset that visualizes the locations of cell tower base stations (BS) and areas of cell reception with reasonable accuracy. Johnson et al. (2020), using OpenCellID for the purpose of spatial analysis of crime patterns, succinctly describes the nature of the data and the manner of its collection,

“Users typically join to obtain location services information on their mobile devices without relying on GPS, as well as to research cell tower coverage. As users move around, the OpenCellID software collects information about where the users are, and which cells they are connected to. This allows for estimates of the locations of the cells themselves. Hence, the data represent cells in cellular networks, not the dynamic movements of OpenCellID users. Individual cells are serviced by base transceiver stations that use antennae fixed to cell towers to provide network coverage. Often, there are multiple antennae from multiple providers on a single tower. The size of the cell service area depends on a variety of factors, such as the number of users and the characteristics of the surrounding environment (e.g. topography, weather). Importantly, mobile telephone operators need to install larger number of cells in areas where there are large numbers of users, so they can be a useful proxy for the size of the ambient population. The data are cumulative, with user-identified cells being added to the database over time” (317).

OpenCellID, however, has been criticized by other scholars, who have pointed to potential issues with localization errors. Other potential biases include the selection of OpenCellID users who participate in the program, thereby limiting potential captures of cell locations in a given location (see Ulm et al., 2015). Still, given its open-source nature and geo-location of individual cells, the data set serves as the best resource for conducting spatial analysis of Ugandan ICT infrastructure and its correlational relationship with civil unrest. Figure 3.1 illustrates the current extent of ICT infrastructure in Uganda at a national level, with data collected as recently as June 2022. OpenCellID data is classified by the type of “radio” technology captured; GSM or 2G,

Universal Mobile Telecommunications System (UMTS) or 3G, and Long Term Evolution (LTE) or 4G.

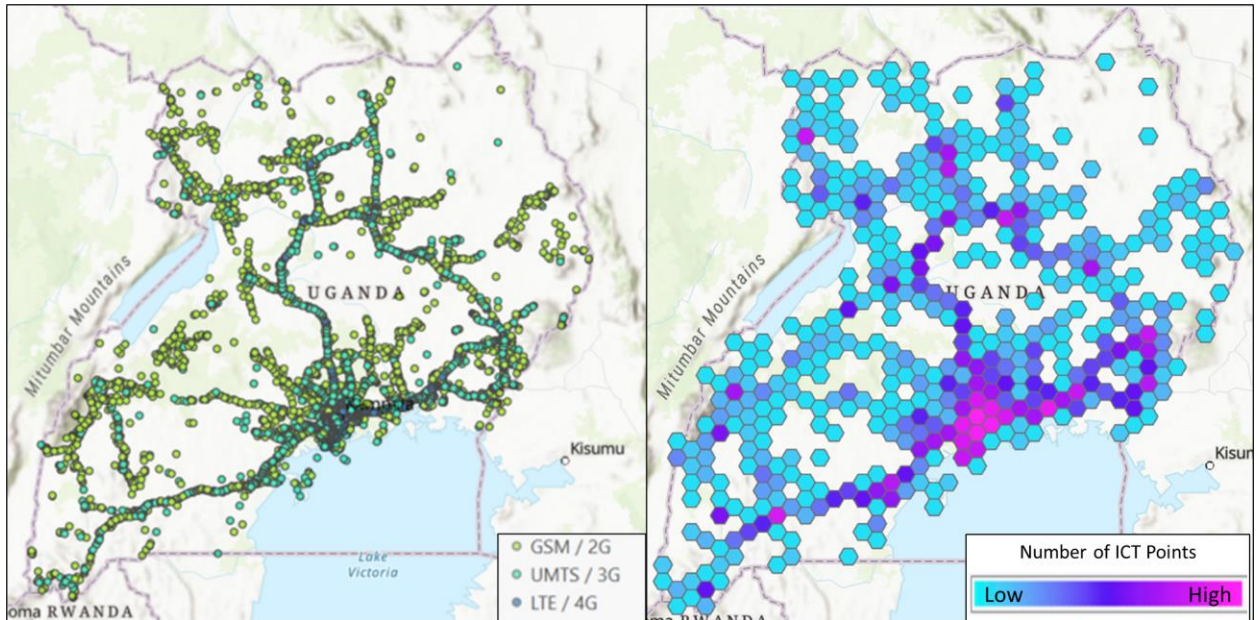


Figure 3.1: Nationwide ICT 2G/3G/4G infrastructure (L); density of reported cell locations within 100 square mile hexagons (R)

Unsurprisingly, the highest concentration of cells is within the Kampala metropolitan area. Figure 3.2 presents a snapshot of the density of OpenCellID captures within the metro area as well as the city center. When compared to the density of captured cells in Kampala, the remainder of the country's ICT infrastructure is largely limited to the roadways that connect the capital and Central region to the country's Eastern, Northern, and Western regions, as well as Uganda's smaller cities in said regions. Outside of Kampala, 4G coverage is almost entirely limited to these minor cities, with the road arteries being areas of 3G coverage to support domestic travel and overland shipping from Kenyan ports. In rural Uganda, referred to as "upcountry" by several



The diffusion and use of mobile data and cell phones throughout rural Uganda is reflective of similar trends across sub-Saharan Africa (see Mhiripiri and Moyo, 2016), and is also supported by recent surveys. The 2019 Afrobarometer survey (n=1,200) found that 73.8% of rural Ugandans owned a personal cell phone (compared with 91.5% of urban Ugandans) (Hatchile Consult Ltd, 2019). Chibita (2016) also discusses the implication of continued penetration of digital media into Ugandan politics across urban and rural spaces, commenting that “digital technology has had a liberating effect on a certain category of Ugandan society (mostly the young and educated). However, Ugandan digital activism is still plagued by...logistical and structural barriers...Most prominent among these obstacles has been government’s increasingly direct intervention to block access to and use of the social media at peak political movements” (90). As the following section will demonstrate, the increasing access to mobile phones has occurred alongside a period of increasingly contentious politics inside Uganda.

### **3.4 POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN UGANDA SINCE 2016**

Geographically-focused conflict research has largely relied on several notable data sets. In particular, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program Georeferenced Events Dataset (UCDP GED) (Sundberg and Melander, 2013) and the Armed Conflict Location Events Dataset (ACLED) (Raleigh et al., 2010) have stood out for their open access, size of data, and level of geographic precision. Comparisons of the two datasets have illuminated advantages and disadvantages of both, with neither emerging as singularly superior; rather, differences in the collection and organization of conflict events make UCDP GED

and ACLED valuable to researchers depending on specific criteria (Eck, 2012). ACLED, currently cited over 1,600 times, has been noted for its utility in researching nonviolent conflict (whereas UCDP GED only records events with reported fatalities), as it utilizes a global network of NGOs and media outlets to capture events and provide micro-level data that “allow researchers to rigorously test sub-national hypotheses and to generate new causal arguments that cannot be studied with country-year or static conflict-zone data” (Raleigh et al., 2010; 653). While other projects focus more specifically on nonviolent action or civil resistance (see Chenoweth et al., 2018; Cunningham et al., 2020), ACLED’s geographic precision of events facilitates the best spatial analysis. This precision, as opposed to datasets recorded at the national or movement level (as in yes/no occurrence of a specific tactic), matches well with the available datasets on ICT infrastructure.

Given this research’s focus on the continued growth of the NUP as Uganda’s leading opposition party, ACLED data was limited to the time between January 1, 2016 and September 1, 2022. Beginning in January 2016 allowed for the inclusion of protests and related instances of civil unrest as a result of the contested 2016 Presidential Elections, where President Yoweri Museveni defeated FDC candidate Kizza Besigye for the fourth time (Chibita, 2016; 85-86). The remainder of 2016 marked a transition in Ugandan politics, as Bobi Wine’s political career began in April 2017 with the announcement of his parliamentary campaign. Wine’s rise to political prominence thus represented a shift from Besigye as the perennial challenger to Museveni (Wilkins et al.,



2021; 629-630). From this initial time period, ACLED produced 2,923 unique events classified as protests, riots, or instances of violence against civilians (battles, IED detonations, or other events only involving armed actors were not included). Using actor-based filters and contextual notes provided for each event, the dataset was filtered of events that were unrelated to the resistance efforts of the NUP and FDC. Removing events such as those related to vigilante mob justice, land ownership disputes, cross-border raids by militia groups, and other extraneous themes, the dataset was left with 1,935 events. Figure 3.3 represents the spatial disposition of these events, as well as the density of conflict events captured within 100-square mile hexagons.

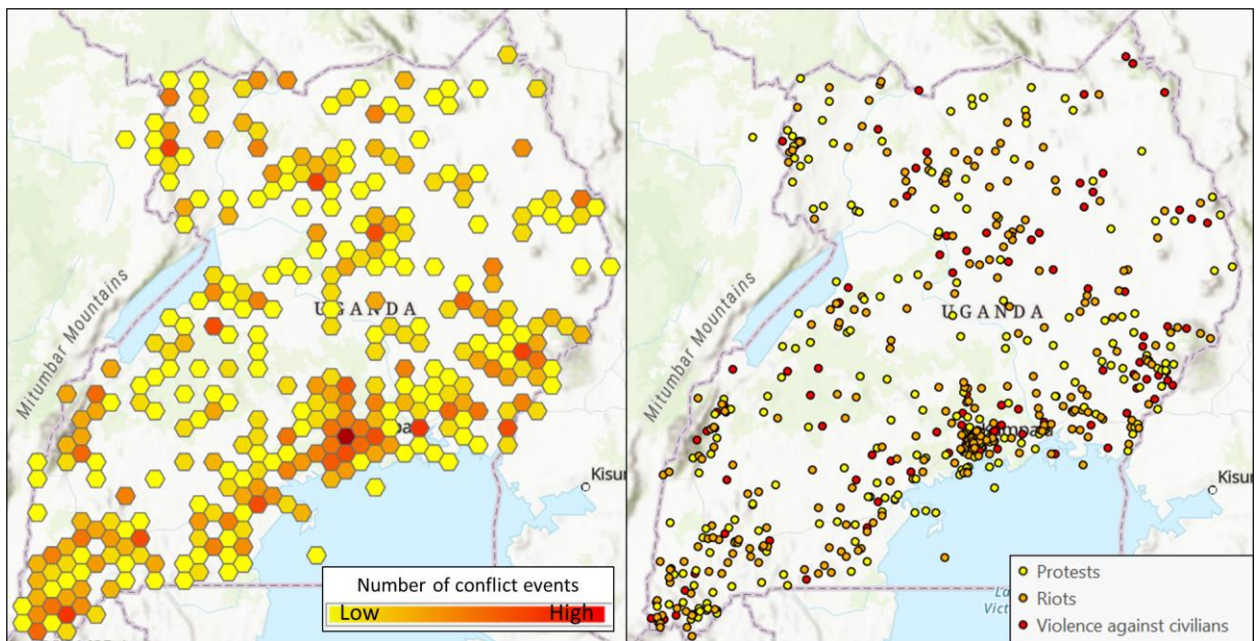


Figure 3.3: ACLED-measured political unrest events, 2016-2022

Over the course of the time period in question, the most instances of unrest occurred within Uganda's Central Region, which has long served as the base of support

for Bobi Wine and the NUP (Wilkins et al., 2021). The Central Region also coincides with the kingdom of Buganda, one of the country's several historical tribal polities that continues to exercise social capital and limited political influence. Clashes over the independence of Buganda have been a source of periodic unrest, most notably during the 2009 "Buganda Riots" (Mukwaya, 2016; 202-204). During interviews, NUP leaders acknowledged the continued salience of tribal affiliations and the attempts to establish connections with other tribal political organizations as a means to expand anti-Museveni support beyond the Central Region.

Beyond the Central Region, the spatial distribution of conflict events indicates continued struggles in the rest of the country. Northern Uganda, still recovering from decades of violence between Ugandan security forces and rebel groups like Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army, has been a site of continued protest and clashes between local communities and security forces seeking to maintain dominance. The struggles of civil society organizations and informal networks to protest against the regime has fostered innovative approaches, such as the use of nakedness in public spaces (Abonga et al., 2020). Much of the recent political unrest in the west, President Museveni's home region, has been a result of the NUP and other opposition parties meeting stiff acts of repression in their attempts to challenge the incumbent regime. The strength of the local NRM party machinery in the Western Region is partially evidenced by the data; only 14.4% of the events recorded were classified as violence against civilians, as opposed to 22.9% of events recorded in the Central Region. Supporting previous research on the



ability of local NRM offices to mobilize supporters and prevent opposition parties from expanding (see Wilkins, 2019), the data suggests that regime forces have not needed to rely on violence in order to maintain NRM control. Finally, Uganda’s Eastern Region features a level of conflict close to that of the north, and has been the site of recent violence over disputed elections (see The Observer, 2022). Table 3.1 presents baseline statistics on the captured data from ACLED, organized by the aforementioned regions.

ACLED Events, January 2016 - September 2022						Events Per Region Population (2021)	
Region	Protests	Riots	Violence Against Civilians	Grand Total	% Grand Total	Population (Million)	Events / Pop
Central	422	234	195	851	43.98%	12.44	68.40836
Eastern	148	134	63	345	17.83%	11.62	29.690189
Northern	147	125	65	337	17.42%	9.23	36.511376
Western	190	154	58	402	20.78%	11.34	35.449735
Grand Total	907	647	381	1935			
	Central	Eastern	Northern	Western			
Protest	49.59%	42.90%	43.62%	47.26%			
Riots	27.50%	38.84%	37.09%	38.31%			
Violence Against Civilians	22.91%	18.26%	19.29%	14.43%			
Total	1	1	1	1			

Table 3.1: Conflict Events by Region, Events per Region Population

### 3.5 SPATIAL PATTERNS AND CORRELATIONAL RELATIONSHIP

When taken together, the relationship between telecommunications infrastructure and civil unrest in Uganda begins to appear. Figure 3.4 represents a simple bivariate relationship between the measured conflict events and captured ICT locations from OpenCellID (referred to as “ACLED/ICT”), with the mean value (0.266) serving as the center of the color scale. Areas with a higher ratio of conflicts to ICT are colored red, while the inverse relationship is denoted by blue.

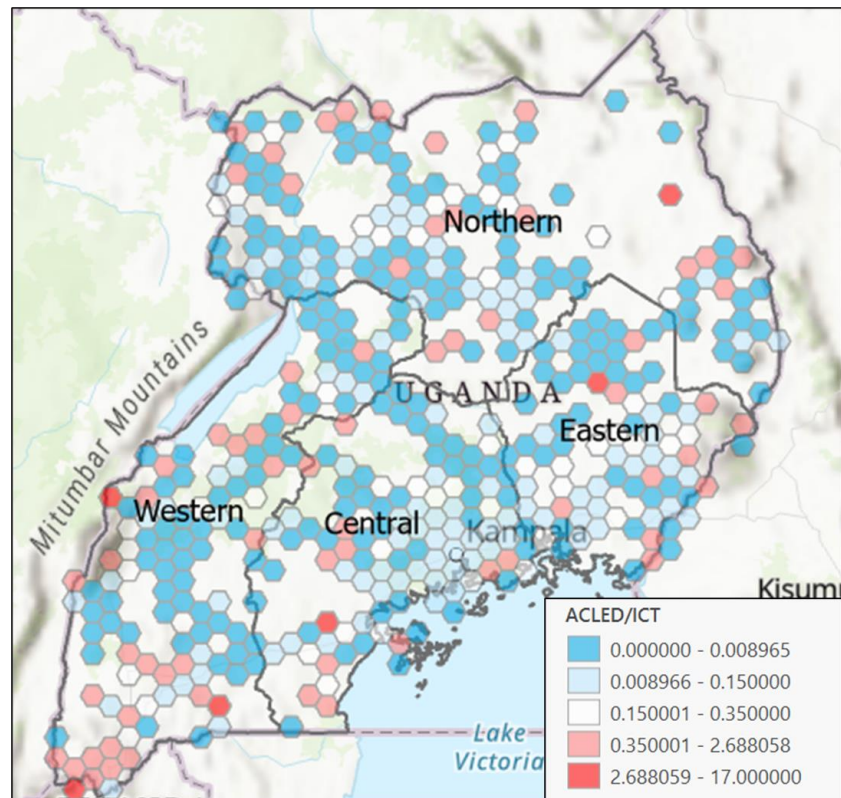


Figure 3.4: Relationship between conflict events and ICT infrastructure

Supporting much of the preceding discussion, the areas of highest unrest are those in the southwest, along the border with Rwanda and the DRC, as well as the country's urban areas in and outside the capital. Notably, though, several of these urban areas of highest conflict/ICT ratios are found on the peripheries of Ugandan cities. Soroti, Mbarara, Masaka, Fort Portal, and Gulu all reflect this trend, as seen in Figure 3.5. While the areas within the urban centers themselves have high levels of unrest, the contrast between the centers and peripheral settlements highlights the continued struggles of Ugandans living in marginalized areas with little infrastructure or service provision.

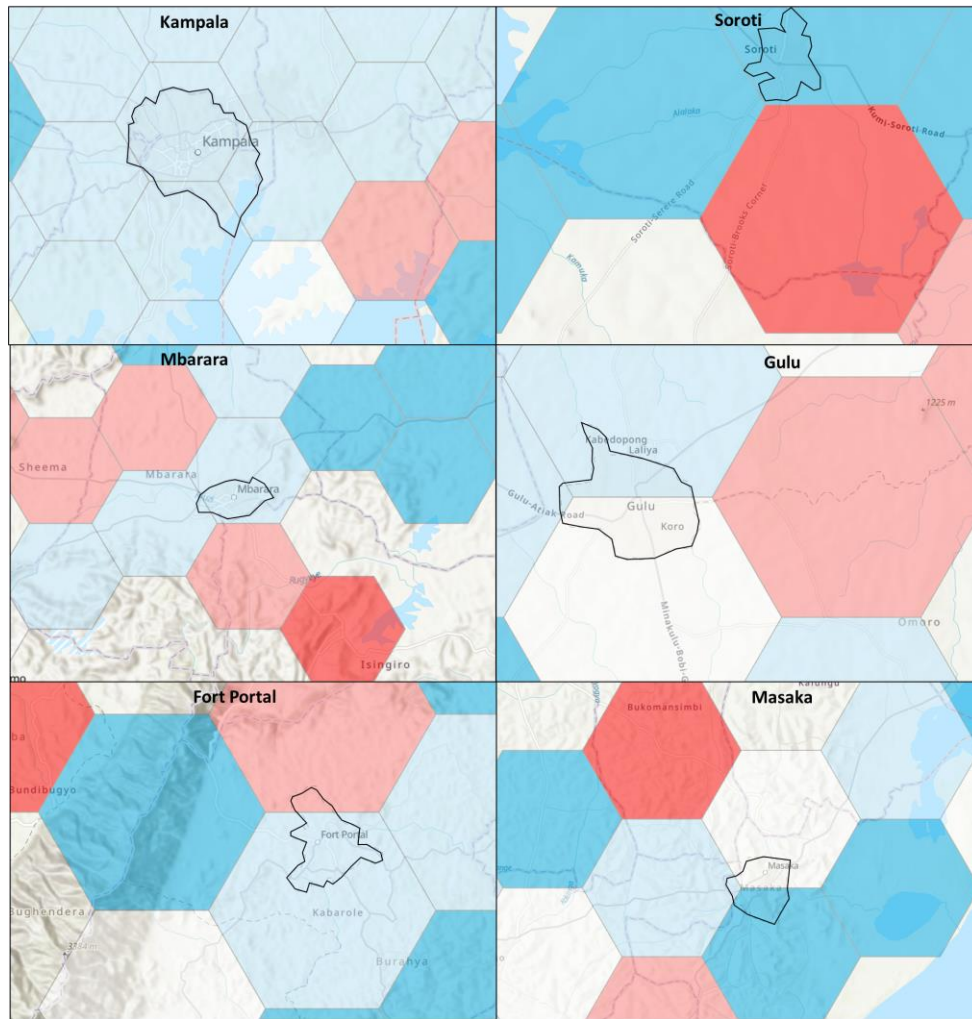


Figure 3.5: Conflict and lack of ICT infrastructure in Ugandan urban peripheries

Conversely, the areas of lowest conflict to ICT ratio largely coincide with the country's highway system. These road networks connect Kampala to the surrounding regions, especially its areas of eco-tourism, illustrating the Ugandan state's attempts to attract international investment and tourism (see Boonabaana, 2014). The corridor of blue hexagons running northwest from Kampala, falls along the Kampala - Masindi Road and Kampala - Gulu Highway, connecting the capital to Aswa Lolim and Murchison Falls

Game Parks. This area is also the location of recent projects aiming at developing the Ugandan petrochemical industry. Notably, the Kingfisher Project, a joint venture between the Ugandan National Oil Company and the China National Offshore Oil Company, opened operations off the coast of Lake Albert, expecting to produce 40,000 barrels per day by 2025 (Al Jazeera, 2023). This relationship can likely be explained by the infrastructure constructed to connect Kampala to such industrial sites, passing through less-densely populated areas.

Reviewing these interactions, several overarching trends are identified. In terms of absolute occurrence of events, population centers in the Central Region (far and away Kampala) and Western Region saw the most conflict. These regions also remained the hot spots when considering the ratio of conflict events to prevalence of ICT infrastructure. However, population centers across the country also had high levels of conflict-to-ICT occurrence. Five of the top six areas of highest conflict-to-ICT occurrence were located within 22 miles of an urban center of at least 60,000 people (see Table 3.2).

Nearest Village	ACLED/ICT	Nearest City/Town	City Population	Distance (miles)
Kotido	6	☞ Kotido	22,900	9
Opiyai	4.75	☞ Soroti	60,900	8
Kagologolo	4	☞ Masaka	103,829	13
Isingiro	4	☞ Mbarara	195,013	18
Bwamba	4	☞ Fort Portal	60,800	19
Kibanga Port	2	☞ Kampala	1,680,600	21

Table 3.2 Top six hexagons of conflict-to-ICT ratio

While the geospatial analysis presented here does not seek to challenge existing research on the relationships between telecommunications technology and civil unrest, it does serve to illustrate the nature of such interactions within Uganda itself. Much in line with previously referenced studies on the relationship between ICT infrastructure and political unrest, the spatial arrangements and areas of highest conflict-to-ICT ratios suggest that access to digital media may have a positive effect on political mobilization and resistance on populations most in proximity to evidence of economic disparities, conditions that in large part describe residents of informal settlements or slums where the NUP has found the most support. The subsequent chapters will use this framing to delve deeper into the lived experiences of Ugandans who have been witnesses to and occasional participants in these same struggles.

## **4. Newspaper Archives and Kayunga Surveys**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

From this nationwide view of telecommunications infrastructure and acts of political resistance, we next take a step in scale down to the People Power Movement and its transformation into the National Unity Platform. With the context of a digitally connected and politically energized population explored in the previous chapter, I will attend to the early struggles of the People Power Movement to find its footing and adopt the NUP as its political wing. Doing so will illuminate the struggles of a movement to formalize and transform its structure as a means to challenge the Museveni regime. Additionally, this chapter will inform subsequent discussions on the evolution of the NUP as both a movement and a party, as seen through the eyes of its members. One of the recurring themes raised during interviews (seen in the following chapter) with NUP members was the relationship between the People Power Movement and the NUP; discussing the short history of the movement not only informs the interviews but also highlights Ugandan perspectives on opposition movements like People Power and their role in creating spaces of democratic expression. Additionally, this chapter will move from the emergence of the NUP to examine one of several recent flashpoints in the group's electoral campaign of resistance, the parliamentary by-elections in Kayunga.

Kayunga District, located in Central Region along the Nile River that divides Central from Eastern Region, has a population of approximately 420,800 (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2022), of which approximately 30,000 live in the namesake town

that serves as the district capital (citypopulation.de, 2022). The town and district also serve as the eastern border of the Buganda kingdom; the proximity of the neighboring tribal kingdom of Busoga has at times been a source of conflict, such as the 2009 “Buganda Riots” that erupted over Kayunga leaders’ indications of desires to secede from Buganda in favor of the eastern neighbor (Mukwya, 2016; 202-204). Kayunga town itself has been called “The United Nations of Uganda” for the high number of sub-tribes and ethnic groups represented in its population, with some local officials claiming that tribal identity thus carries less salience in elections (Daily Monitor, 2018).

Kayunga entered Ugandan national headlines most recently during its parliamentary by-elections in late 2021. As one of the first opportunities for the NUP to compete following the bloody presidential elections in January, Kayunga was highlighted in social media messaging by Bobi Wine and other NUP leaders as an opportunity to renew the resistance against the Museveni regime through electoral means. However, the NUP was met with stiff resistance from the regime as NUP polling agents were arrested along with local journalists attempting to observe the vote; Bobi Wine meanwhile was temporarily placed under house arrest by Ugandan security forces, preventing him from canvassing for the local NUP candidate (Muwonge, 2021; Kyagulanyi, 2021). Since Kayunga, similar events have occurred in other regional elections, such as Soroti in Eastern Region (The Observer, 2022), Omoro in Northern Region (Onyango, 2022), and Kasese in Western Region (Idd, 2022). For this reason, Kayunga was selected as a case study to examine how Ugandans living in electoral battlegrounds are using mobile phones for different forms of political activity. In May 2022, forty surveys were

completed by Ugandans living in the town of Kayunga; respondents were recruited through a local research assistant using snowball sampling and were paid \$2.50 USD for their participation. Participants varied in age and gender, and were asked about their personal uses of mobile phones and social media platforms in daily life. Additionally, respondents were asked to detail their likelihood of participation in a number of different forms of political activities, ranging from attending town hall meetings to staging strikes or protest marches. Through these responses, one can begin to understand the nuanced ways in which Ugandans living in rural settings with increased access to digital media navigate complex spaces of political participation and opportunity.

This chapter will proceed as follows. First, using newspaper archives from leading Ugandan outlets, it will examine the political formalization of the NUP from the People Power movement, connecting the findings to literature in political geography on the forms that resistance can take and how such formalization may affect the organizational culture or spatial properties of a social movement like the one led by Bobi Wine. Next, survey data from Kayunga will facilitate a discussion of how Ugandans living outside the major urban hub of Kampala utilize mobile phones and digital media to participate in politics. Finally, the two themes will be connected by discussing how the formalization of the NUP and its shift in strategy to an electoral approach may be mismatched with the populations it is targeting in areas like Kayunga.



## 4.2 NEWSPAPERS

With the critical assistance of local researcher Kasfuh Birungi, nineteen articles from seven local newspapers were gathered and analyzed for common themes relating to the NUP's formalization as a political party and the challenges it faced from the Museveni regime. Based on available funding and an emphasis on equitable remuneration, archival work was limited to nineteen articles. Periodicals included the major mainstays of English-language Ugandan journalism, *New Vision News*, *The Observer*, and *The Daily Monitor*. *New Vision*, a pro-government outlet established by the National Resistance Movement, remains the most circulated English-language paper (recent figures showed a circulation of 23,636 copies in the final quarter of 2019), followed by the independent *Daily Monitor* (averaging 16,169 copies in the same time) (Uganda Business News, 2019). The *Monitor's* independent leaning has gained it more favor from pro-opposition Ugandans, as well as added surveillance and pressure from the regime (Draku, 2022). Other periodicals included smaller independent organizations such as *Nile Post News*, *The Independent*, and the local office of *VOA News*. Finally, several articles were included from the popular tabloid *Red Pepper News*, whose gossip columns have earned it both wide popularity and multiple shutdowns by the Ugandan government (The Independent, 2018).

The articles ranged in date from July 2020, when the People Power Movement reached an agreement to adopt the mantle of the preexisting National Unity, Reconciliation and Development Party (NURP) and rebrand as the NUP, to June 2022, when the original NURP founders began to claim they were unfairly usurped from the

party by Wine and other People Power leaders. Focusing the archival research on this specific theme of the NUP's resistance efforts, the evolution from a social movement into a political party and the resulting obstacles, illuminates additional insights into the organizational evolution of the People Power Movement. While not directly related to this research's focus on digital media and spaces of resistance, the research nonetheless sheds light on both how the movement has adapted to Uganda's geographies of repression as well as how it has been characterized by the legacy media environment in Kampala. As the interviews with NUP leaders and members discuss in the following chapter, this relationship between the movement and Ugandan media personalities and organizations has been a continued struggle to manage. Using these articles, common themes were identified, with three standing out as the frequently mentioned or referenced: state repression, parallel continuation of the People Power Movement, and shifting political loyalties and coalition formation. The following discussion will highlight each and examine the relevance to the movement's continued navigation of physical and digital environments.

### **Theme 1: State Repression**

Twelve of the nineteen articles examined explicitly discussed the struggles of the People Power Movement or NUP to overcome repression from the NRM regime. Repression was embodied in many ways, from abduction of NUP supporters to security force violence against civilians, to bureaucratic obstacles to democratic participation. These various methods of the Museveni regime to clamp down on opposition politics

have been examined in numerous contexts, such as a tool for mobilizing NRM votes (Wilkins, 2019) or a tactic for selectively deploying security forces to prevent civil society or community defense groups from developing (Tapscott, 2021; Khisa, 2013). President Museveni's tactics of regime survival through a balance of "hard" and "soft" power has thus created a complex political terrain that opposition movements like the NUP and the FDC before it continue to struggle through (Golooba-Mutebi and Hickey, 2016). Several news articles quoted People Power Movement leaders as justifying the formalization of the movement into a party for this reason; due to the use of state violence at People Power marches and rallies, leaders saw an electoral strategy as the natural next step in its campaign to unseat Museveni from power. Since gatherings or acts of resistance were being quickly suppressed, expressing dissent through the ballot box (while at the same time legitimating a movement cast as young hooliganism by some critics) developed into the primary means of opposition.

This trend continued through the 2021 presidential elections and into the 2022 controversy over ownership of the NUP party. Moses Kibalama, the original founder of the NURP, claimed in June that he had been swindled by Bobi Wine and other People Power leaders into signing an agreement to declare Wine the president of the party and redesign its name and branding. However, other outlets reported on Kibalama recanting his accusations and instead claiming that the state coerced him into starting the controversy as a means to sow discord in the opposition. Articles unrelated to the Kibalama-NUP conflict also focused on the NUP's formalization as a response to NRM oppression, with varying degrees of optimism. This commentary and the other articles

discussing the forms of NRM repression illustrate some of Uganda's geographies of repression. Scholars have highlighted the arbitrary use of violence by security forces (Tapscott, 2021), political co-option and electioneering by the dominant party (Friesinger, 2021; Lindemann, 2011), and the lingering effects of colonialism as neoliberal development uproots informal communities (Faria et al., 2021). These conjure an image of an uneven and difficult-to-navigate political terrain in contemporary Uganda, one where opposition movements like the NUP struggle to find their footing.

## **Theme 2: Parallel Continuation of People Power and NUP**

The second most commonly observed theme was the parallel relationship described between the People Power Movement and the NUP. Several interviews with NUP leaders in the Ugandan press highlighted this, as their remarks indicated a deliberate strategy to oppose the Museveni regime through both electoral (NUP) and grassroots (People Power) means. The evolution of resistance movements into formalized political parties or alternative expansions into multiple forms of contentious politics has been studied widely by political scientists (see Ho and Huang, 2017) Personal interviews conducted with some of these party officials supported these views, as the subsequent chapter illustrates. But while this theme will be interrogated primarily through the personal interviews conducted with members of the NUP, it is important to consider the perspective of Ugandan media in characterizing this split between social movements and party politics. One journalist, in a critique of the institutionalization of the People Power Movement, contended that “On the ruins of NUP, a new force is going to rise and

redefine the struggle for freedom under Museveni...but...[has] to operate outside of institutionalisation. Yes, while the people have power in their hands, naturally, they need a symbol around which to mobilise. This cycle is repeated until light appears at the end of the tunnel. This then means that what we are witnessing now with NUP has little to do with the party itself, but the national condition of our politics.” This critique of institutional opposition was observed in other articles, with titles such as “Does getting a new party help or hurt Bobi Wine?” Similar tension was observed during interviews with NUP leaders during the fieldwork portion of this research; despite the efforts to capitalize on grassroots support for Wine through the launching of a parliamentary front in its opposition, several members of his staff expressed doubts of an electoral path to unseating President Museveni. The decades-long rule of the NRM and numerous failed campaigns of Kizza Besigye have in some (such as these particular journalists) produced a belief that oppositional politics in Uganda will remain Quixotic until Yoweri Museveni retires.

Recalling efforts by media geographers (see Adams, 2013) to describe the salience of the form of media in understanding the process of communication, legacy media like these newspapers reproduce conventional narratives of conservative Uganda, questioning the strategic choices of the newest opposition movement. In other words, the contention between legacy media and “new” media over how to frame the opposition is itself a struggle for social power, as newspapers seek to maintain their primacy and relationship with the NRM regime.

### **Theme 3: Shifting Political Loyalties and Coalitions**

The third most frequently observed theme was the shifting loyalties of Ugandan MPs both to and from the opposition, as well as the related sub-theme of the NUP's struggle to build an effective coalition. Such tactics of co-option have been well documented in Uganda, particularly in the context of Yoweri Museveni's post-civil war consolidation of political power through an effective patronage system (Lindemann, 2011; Vokes and Wilkins, 2016). However, despite the monopoly of political control, Museveni and the NRM have not been exempt from the effects of political defections; frequent defections and shifting political alliances between elites has driven the continuation of a patronage system, as the NRM offers favors to solidify its network of local power brokers and candidates (Khisa, 2016). With regards to opposition parties, the struggles of groups like the NUP (and the FDC before it) to build and maintain coalitions have been well studied; Beardsworth (2016), in an exploration of the construction and destruction of Ugandan opposition coalitions, argues that "[opposition] party weakness, resource constraints, repression and limited geographic spread" motivates the coalition strategy, while "intra-party factionalism, inter-party competition and distrust continues to hinder successful coalition formation." In other words, the often-times tribal or ethnic origins of parties (such as the NUP's birth and subsequent high levels of support in Buganda) and barriers to physical access across the country have created a situation where opposition parties at times act as "political fiefdoms" with little ability to expand their networks beyond areas of preexisting support. Such might be evidenced by recent coordination between the NUP and FDC in the elections in Soroti, where the NUP

elected to withdraw its candidate in support of the FDC, which had a history of performance in the eastern city. The limited geographic mobility of opposition parties also supports the political strategy of seeking defections or loyalty shifts in already-established candidates.

These narratives were likewise documented by Ugandan newspapers covering the formation of the NUP and the reactions from other opposition parties. Soon after the formalization of the NUP in 2020, several leaders from the Democratic Party (DP) shifted allegiances, rebranding themselves as NUP “flagbearers” in their local elections. This marked a shift from the previous round of elections when Bobi Wine ran simply as a representative of the People Power Movement; during the 2017 elections, several members of opposition parties like the DP or FDC maintained their party affiliations while also running as participants in the People Power Movement. The creation of the NUP was therefore seen by some newspaper outlets as a move to force the hand of these “fence sitters” who sought both the funding of formal parties and the ability to “ride the wave” of popular support behind Wine’s People Power movement, as well as an opportunity to capitalize in inter-party friction. This was exemplified in the shifting allegiance of several members of the Democratic Party (DP) in Masaka in 2020, with one explaining “as DP leaders, we have decided to back Mr Kyagulanyi because his support around the country and globe is enough to show that he will occupy the State House after elections in 2021.” The same article quoted non-defecting DP candidates as accusing these members as having pre existing opposition to the party leadership, before concluding for the reader that such friction is “perplexing...[as] most disagreements

usually occur at a time when members are expected to be together to fight for a common cause” (Kutamba, 2020).

Across the range of articles examined, these themes generally tell the story that at the same time marks a departure in Ugandan politics and shares many themes with previous attempts to oppose the NRM regime. The groundswell of support for People Power and its social movement approach to opposition politics saw many young Ugandans becoming politically active for the first time. As the movement transformed into the NUP, familiar struggles also became evident as the process of building and maintaining coalitions stymied Wine’s effort to unify the anti-Museveni opposition. These of course included the acts of repression by the NRM regime that have limited the geographic expansion of opposition parties, as well as the political tradition of local power brokers shifting allegiances between parties in order to curry favors and patronage. The tone of the coverage complements the themes, as many writers matter-of-factly describe the formation and breakdowns of coalitions between the NUP and local candidates. Put another way, these themes all support one another; the NRM repression reinforces a political geography where opposition parties are forced to build coalitions with one another but have historically been unsuccessful in unseating the NRM. As a result, the People Power Movement’s growth into both grassroots activism and electoral opposition represented a new stage in pro-democracy resistance in Uganda.

From the context of this development of the NUP from a social movement into a formal political party, a further “scaling down” of this research to the village of Kayunga will continue to illustrate the political geography of Uganda and how Wine’s movement



is seeking to capture it. Such a scale is critical as well because of the limited view held by most of the newspapers; focusing primarily on key leaders and institutions, many periodicals may miss nuances or insights gained from engaging with Ugandans not affiliated with any party.

#### **4.3 SURVEY ANALYSIS**

Engaging with Ugandans in Kayunga on social media and political activities serves several objectives in the context of this research. While existing research has documented nation-wide usage of social media and various forms of political expression (see Hatchile Consulting, 2020; Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2019), scaling to the village-level in Kayunga adds context to the political violence of recent elections. Surveys accordingly featured two sections; the first asked respondents about cell phone ownership and the frequency of use for several forms of media, including both digital (various social media sites, secure messaging apps like WhatsApp) and “legacy” (including radio, television, and newspapers). The second section asked respondents to assess their likelihood of participation in different forms of political expression. These were later categorized under “institutional” (voting, attending town hall meetings), “narrative” (spreading and sharing messages), and “disruptive” (marching, boycotting, strikes and other more confrontational forms of political activity); using these categories from Tufekci’s (2017) analysis of social movements and digital media allowed for an informative examination of how Ugandans in Kayunga interacted with various forms of media and whether such activity influenced the character of political expression. Point

values were assigned to the frequency of use reported for each platform, with subsequent analysis examining the response rates between various forms of communication.

Survey respondents were recruited through a local research assistant with professional networks in Kayunga, and were paid 7,500 Ugandan shillings (equivalent to \$2.50) for participating. The average age of participants (who were required to be at least 18), 24.5 years, whereas Uganda's median age is estimated at 15.7 years old (Central Intelligence Agency, 2023); another noted shortfall was the imbalance in gender; nearly 66% of respondents were female. When asked about education, the average respondent reported a level between the completion of secondary school and at least some university completion. Also notable was the rate of smartphone ownership; 92% of respondents reported owning or having regular access to a smartphone. This was a notable difference from national rates, captured in 2019 at 74% (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2021; 172-174). Reasons for this may include the rapid increase in cell phone availability in the country, as rates increased from 70% in 2018 (Daily Monitor, 2018b), as more younger Ugandans come of age and seek access to diversified media sources.

### **Forms of Media**

Overall, survey participants reported a higher use of digital media platforms than legacy, with WhatsApp standing out as the most frequently used application and newspapers the least. Important to note, however, is the continuing relevance of certain forms of legacy media, as radio and television saw a higher average response than Twitter. This supports both existing research on the role of shortwave radio in exurban

regions like Kayunga (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2021), as well as subsequent interviews with NUP leaders that highlighted the “elite” perception of Twitter among many Ugandans. In-person communication was also cited as more important to respondents than several forms of social media.

"Being part of a community means gathering and sharing information, planning group activities, expressing views and supporting others. Which media or forms of communication do you find most useful for being part of your community or group?" (Max Score - 4)	
Application	Average Response
WhatsApp	3.32
Facebook	2.74
SMS	2.66
In-Person	2.63
TV	2.61
Instagram	2.44
Radio	2.37
Twitter	2.18
Clothes/Banners	1.76
Newspapers	1.74

Table 4.1: Use of social media platforms

Also bearing consideration is the high rate of Facebook usage despite continued efforts by the Museveni regime to restrict access. In the wake of the 2021 presidential elections, Facebook has been blocked by government authorities, requiring Ugandans to download and use virtually-protected networks (VPNs) as a means to circumvent digital censorship (Mwine, 2021). This censorship also extends to secure messaging applications like WhatsApp, with the imposition of a social media tax in 2018 (implemented in the form of a daily surcharge on the use of platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook) causing the outbreak of civil unrest across the country (CBS News, 2018). The dependence on

WhatsApp for Ugandans across urban, rural, and exurban spaces like Kayunga is reflected in this continued high frequency of use.

### **Political Activity**

With respect to the second section of the survey, respondents demonstrated a noticeable lack of willingness to participate in political activities. While the recency of the political violence during Kayunga's parliamentary by-elections likely dampened participant enthusiasm for marches, rallies, or other sorts of political activity, the results themselves still hold value. With the exception of voting in an election, respondents were unlikely to participate in any of the presented forms of political activity. Table 4.2 displays the average responses for each presented political activity. Survey participants were asked to assess their likelihood to conduct the activities on a likert scale of "very unlikely," "unlikely," "neutral," "likely," and "very likely;" responses were assigned a corresponding numerical value (-2 for "very unlikely, -1 for "unlikely, and so on), for a maximum score of 2 for each individual activity.

There are many ways Ugandans can express their beliefs. Please rank how likely you are to do the following (Max score - 2)	
Action	Average Response
Vote	0.184
Boycott	-0.052
Debate with community members	-0.210526
Wear logos and symbols	-0.210526316
Participate in a march	-0.28947
Share political messages	-0.315
Attend a town hall meeting	-0.4736
Attend a rally	-0.6052
Go on strike	-1

Table 4.2. Survey responses on likelihood to participate in political activities

When compared to similar research on Ugandan political mobilization, these responses may represent an interesting outlier. The 2019 Afrobarometer survey (Hatchile Ltd, 2020), a nationally-representative survey of 1,200 adult Ugandans, included in its content a number of questions on similar political activities. While the responses show a similar trend in aversion to more confrontational actions (64.2% answered that they had not participated in a protest march within the past year and would never do so), responses on other forms of political actions reflected a higher likelihood of participation. 77.4% of Afrobarometer respondents indicated they had attended one or multiple town hall meetings, whereas Kayunga survey respondents rated it as one of the least likely activities. Likewise, 62% of Afrobarometer respondents answered that they had “got

together with others to raise an issue” one or multiple times, whereas Kayunga respondents showed a general unwillingness to do the same. The lack of willingness to participate in strikes might also be explained by the lack of organized labor in the district; Kayunga district’s main economic sectors (agriculture, fishing, and livestock farming) are particularly dispersed geographically and lack the presence of politically-active trade organizations (Kayunga District, 2022).

Similar research on Ugandan political activism by Curtice and Behlendorf (2021) argues that repressive tactics by Ugandan police only increases citizens’ grievances and likeliness to protest. However, due to the temporal limitations in the Kayunga survey, it is difficult to ascertain whether the reportedly low levels of political activity are any different than before the violent by-elections, and therefore merits future research for future electoral contests throughout the country. Also possibly affecting survey responses is the political sensitivity of the questions. As Kayunga was the first electoral contest following the violent 2021 presidential elections, the town and district saw a surge of attention from the NRM and state security forces eager to solidify the regime’s monopoly of power (Kafeero, 2021); the violence experienced by NUP or non-NRM affiliated Ugandans likely played a role in survey participants avoiding signals of political dissent, despite the anonymous nature of the survey. With the recent memory of marches and rallies being broken up by force, survey respondents were likely affected in their willingness to indicate support for such confrontational forms of political activity. Despite the levels of willingness expressed, the overall picture of Kayunga survey

respondents is one of a population that has yet to be politically mobilized by either side of the conflict.

### **Media and Political Activity**

Taken together, the relationship between media use and political activity can begin to be explored. Across digital and legacy forms of media, there exists a positive relationship between frequency of use and likelihood of participation in all forms of political activity. However, scatter plots of the responses complicate the relationship, as only a weak correlation was observed. Also complicating conclusions of “liberation technology” is that, while small, frequency of legacy media usage had a stronger correlational relationship with likelihood of political participation than frequency of digital media usage (see Figure 4.1). This may be explained by Kayunga’s spatial context as an exurban population center; as captured by previous research (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2019; BBC Media Action, 2019), legacy media such as shortwave radio and television remains the predominant form of communication and information transfer for Ugandans living outside major urban centers like Kampala and the previously mentioned cities. As a result, even younger survey participants likely relied on media gatekeepers like radio or television stations for receiving information from Kampala or other national concerns.

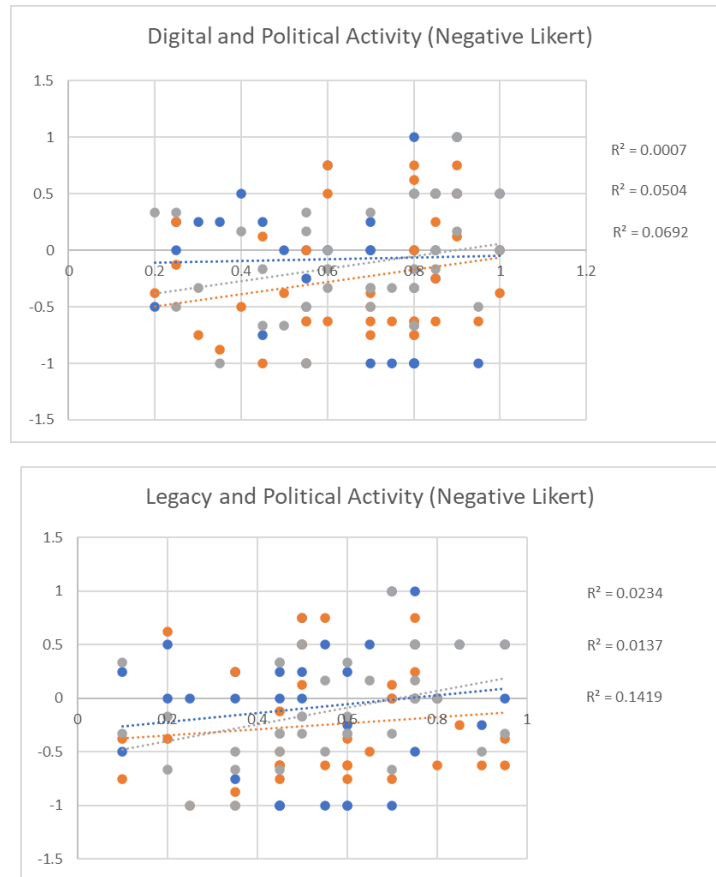


Figure 4.1. Correlation between media usage (digital and legacy) and political participation

The results thus help illustrate the complex human terrain over which the NUP and NRM are struggling for support. While the use of digital media by young Ugandans has been vaunted as a tool for liberation (Chibita, 2016), legacy media like radio and television remains critically important in the formation of narratives and fostering of political dialogue. As a result, resistance movements like the People Power/NUP are having to adapt strategies to both gain new supporters and mobilize existing ones. Such



findings represent evidence of R4, suggesting that positive relationships between ICT infrastructure and political resistance are dampened by acts of repression by state forces.

#### **4.4 DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION**

When held up next to local journalists and Ugandan academics, the data also suggests why Kayunga might have been such a contentious election. Beyond the election's much-hyped status as first post-presidential contest for the NUP (Kafeero, 2021), Kayunga's position within the Central sub-region also supports claims that the NRM sought victory there to challenge recent NUP gains in the predominantly-Baganda center of the country. With much of the Central sub-region demonstrating coethnic support for Wine, himself a Muganda,<sup>1</sup> the NRM sought to disrupt the narrative of a united Bagandan support for the opposition. For the NUP, the themes from previously examined newspapers also highlight the electoral strategy. Despite a surge in support in the 2021 presidential elections, the NUP struggled to establish itself in smaller population centers across the country. Efforts to physically campaign in Kayunga were met with acts of oppression as security forces arrested polling agents and journalists, a tactic repeated in several other parliamentary by-elections that have occurred since Kayunga (The Observer, 2022).

Future iterations of the survey could be improved through multiple deployments in the same location before and after elections similar to the one in Kayunga. As the

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<sup>1</sup> Buganda, the country's namesake tribal kingdom, has distinct naming conventions for its language (Luganda), collective people (Baganda), and singular member (Muganda).

Museveni regime has repeated its tactics in subsequent elections, gaging Ugandans' willingness to participate in political activities before and after viewing or experiencing acts of repression might validate or challenge research on the "backfire effect" or regime violence (see Curtice and Behlendorf, 2021; Chenoweth, 2021). While some theories on the observed tepidity of respondents can be proposed, it is clear that any conclusions cannot be made without additional data.

Despite these limitations, we can continue to place the struggle of the pro-democracy movement in Uganda into greater context; the rapidly changing demographics of the country and expanding access to varied forms of media are opening up new avenues of outreach, coordination, and mobilization for political organizations like the NUP. These digital spaces offer a means to bypass physical barriers to outreach established by the regime, and as a result have been wholly embraced by the NUP as its main advantage against the NRM. In the interviews that follow, NUP leaders and members frequently contrasted the difficulties in physically reaching Ugandans in smaller villages and towns like Kayunga with the ease of digital outreach and coordination. Shifting now to a more qualitatively focused approach, I use the context of a continued electoral struggle as a lens to engage with NUP leaders, cadre, and supporters. Through these interviews, I highlight the evolving perceptions of digital spaces of resistance and how such environments are evolving alongside the People Power movement.

## **5. Interviews with members of the National Unity Platform**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

From this “snapshot” of Kayunga and the narratives of the NUP as characterized by Ugandan newspapers, this work will proceed now to a more individualized scale. While the anti-Museveni opposition consists of many groups, the NUP remains the most prominent as of 2022; Bobi Wine’s unsuccessful bid for the presidency in 2021 was the closest an opposition candidate has come to democratically unseating Museveni (Wilkins et al., 2021). However, despite Wine’s charisma and role as a inspirational leader (see Osiebe, 2020), much of this success has been due to the subordinate leaders and mobilizers within the NUP, who have been critical to the growth of the movement’s base and the formalization of People Power into the NUP. Accordingly, this research focused on the multiple activists and organizers who bring the People Power movement to life through their individual and collective actions. The structure of resistance organizations has been subject of much research across multiple fields, to include civil resistance scholarship (Chenoweth 2021, 121-125; Edwards 2021; Mirshak 2019), social movement theory (Goodwin and Jasper 2015, 155-196; Lee 2016), and military scholarship on special operations (Agan et al., 2019; Swedish Defence University and Special Operations Command - Europe, 2019). Internal structures and dynamics therefore offer key insights into how a movement may evolve or adapt to changing circumstances, sometimes highlighting differences between messaging to public audiences and the actual machinations of a subversive organization.

During a ten-day research trip to Kampala between July and August 2022, semi-structured interviews with seven members of the NUP were conducted, with the objective of capturing how the movement has grown and adapted its use of digital and physical spaces of resistance. Additionally, while the scope of the interview was designed to illuminate the spread of the movement across different domains, the range of the interviewees was deliberately designed to capture a variety of leadership or status positions inside the movement. Subjects were recruited through two sources; one of the NUP's social media managers, after being contacted through Twitter direct messages, provided WhatsApp numbers for several university students who were serving at a variety of leadership positions inside the party's institutions wing. Additionally, a local research assistant with personal networks in Kampala political circles coordinated for the participation of several party elites, including the NUP's secretary general and deputy spokesman. Interviews were conducted at a variety of sites, including the campuses of two major universities (Makerere University and Makerere University Business School) and the NUP party headquarters in the neighborhood of Kamwokya where Bobi Wine's hip hop career began (Friesinger, 2021; 132-133). Following the traditional interview portion, subjects then participated in the mapping exercise (to be discussed in the subsequent chapter). In total, seven interviews were conducted, with five subjects participating in the mapping exercise (the NUP's secretary general and deputy spokesman, given their limited time availability, were unable to participate).

The interviews covered three main topics, with a variety of questions and follow-ups based on the provided answers. First, interviewees were asked about the intra-

movement dynamics in the NUP. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the NUP grew from the grassroots popularity of the People Power movement, and thus has experienced organizational shifts as the movement has sought to formalize its structure and expand into Ugandan parliamentary politics in addition to its continued civil resistance efforts. While much research has focused on the organizational dynamics of non-state armed groups (see Dedouet, 2012) and how such entities have shifted structures to reflect changing tactics and environments, political scientists have also contributed much literature on the organization of nonviolent groups and social movements (see Kriesi, 1994). The second theme of questioning revolved around the NUP's use of social media in its efforts to both mobilize current supporters and gain new ones. Interviewees provided insights on their personal and collective use of platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok, describing the different ways that each was used by the party in its activities. Through these discussions, the relationship between the NUP inside the country and its supporters in the Ugandan diaspora was also illuminated. Lastly, in order to address the research focus on the bordering between digital and physical spaces of resistance, interviewees were also asked about the NUP's efforts to campaign and resist in rural parts of Uganda with less access or use of social media. Through these questions and follow-up discussions, the struggles of the movement to expand into physical spaces dominated by regime political and military forces were illuminated. As with the example of Kayunga, the Ugandan state has demonstrated a recent willingness to use extreme force to prevent the NUP or other opposition parties from actively campaigning in many parts of the country.

Before presenting the insights gained from these interviews, the positionality of the subjects must be attended to. By introducing the subjects' backgrounds and motivations for participating in the NUP's struggle, this discussion will become more grounded and allow for greater context when considering what can be taken away. Interview subjects ranged in age from 21 to 46 years, and filled a variety of positions in the NUP: two senior leaders of the party and chief lieutenants to Bobi Wine; one local mobilizer charged with gaining and retaining new supporters, and four university students serving in a variety of roles within the party structure. Of note, however, is the lack of gender diversity; only one of the seven interviewed was female. This gender imbalance was in-part a result of the brief length of in-country research; having additional time in future site visits, more deliberate parity would be pursued. It should be noted that women in Uganda occupy many political offices (ranking 48th globally in terms of percentage of female members of parliament) as a result of continued efforts by women's rights organizations and "political luck" of Museveni, who otherwise would have presented considerable obstacles, being personally supportive (Goetz, 1998; 244).

Geographically, interview subjects represented a small variety of regional and tribal backgrounds. Four of the seven subjects were originally from areas in the Central Region, including various areas of Kampala and Entebbe, and identified as members of the Baganda ethnic group that make up roughly twenty percent of the population. Two subjects were originally from the West Nile sub-region, and one identified as Banyakole, the country's second largest ethnic group, accounting for roughly ten percent (Central Intelligence Agency, 2023). Connections between the subjects and relatives in these

outlying parts of the country also emerged as a theme during several interviews, as shall be examined.

## **5.2 NARRATIVES, THEMES AND INSIGHTS**

In the following sections, the key narratives and themes that emerged from the interviews will be explored. Struggles over intra-movement coordination, the growth and evolution of digital spaces, and clashes over access to physical spaces of political expression dominated the discussions with each subject, and thus were organized into the major narratives. Within each, several themes also emerged that connect the NUP's movement to existing literature on civil resistance and digital media. For each narrative and sub-theme, quotes from each of the seven interview subjects are presented as an introduction and to give a direct voice to the participants.

### **1. Intra-movement Dynamics of The National Unity Platform**

*“The feedback is there. There’s communication from bottom to top and top to bottom. It is a two-way traffic organization. And the mindset of that is...how we engage our people is very important.”*

One of the driving research questions developed in the preliminary stages of this work was to illuminate how strategies of resistance are proposed, discussed, agreed upon, and carried out in an evolving organization like the NUP. As a result, subjects were asked to explain how they saw the decision making and strategy development process within the party and to describe the nature of the relationship between the party's elites and its

subordinate leaders and cadre. Due to the shifting political landscape in Uganda, the NUP's organization calls to mind literature on both civil resistance and contentious politics (Chenoweth, 2021; McAdam et al., 2001; Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). The parallel institutions of the People Power movement and the NUP as a political party also complicates the discussion. As opposed to a procedural formalization from one into the other, both continue to operate with significant overlap; the NUP's official Twitter account states that it is "the political wing of the @People\_Power\_Ug movement" (National Unity Platform, 2022). The distancing of the NUP from People Power was likewise a noted theme in several of the interviews, as the informal nature of the movement opened new avenues of access to potential supporters. Overall, a common narrative emerges from the interviews, one that shows the NUP and People Power as a movement dedicated to building its resistance capabilities through genuine transparency and participatory frameworks. This narrative was further supported by the themes that follow, each illustrated by the interview subjects' experiences and observations.

### ***Balancing Between Security and Participation***

*"If, for example, we decided to have a meeting to decide whether to protest and you have ten people, it is possible that two of the people will be speaking [or] reporting to the regime. So you find that the practical thing to do in Uganda under dictatorship like this is to really keep decisions and critical discussion to a very, very small group. And I think that's one of the reasons why we have survived this long that there are decisions which*



*are of course taken by larger groups of people which are not very sensitive, but on the most controversial or sensitive issues, we begin with a smaller group and then decides to escalate decision to bigger groups for fear of interception and all that”*

One of the primary concerns discussed by both senior NUP leaders was the fear of government surveillance and disruption of party activities. Government infiltration of opposition parties in autocratic or anocratic states is a well-documented tactic of repression, allowing access to confidential information as well as creating the potential through destabilization through bribing, intentional infighting, and other techniques (see Tufekci, 2017; 223-260). Uganda is no different, as President Museveni’s political acumen has been viewed as a critical component to his continued tenure as ruler since 1986 (Lindemann, 2011). The senior NUP officials interviewed shared concerns over such practices, and espoused similar acknowledgements that the threat of infiltration unfortunately necessitated restrictions in how participatory certain elements of the NUP could be. Rather than compromising the democratic ideals and calls for transparency that Bobi Wine or other elected NUP members campaign on, the occasional tightening of communication channels was framed as just such a concern for the security and longevity of the movement. Beyond sometimes limiting the numbers of participants in strategic discussions, other interviews highlighted the variety in platforms used. The local NUP mobilizer detailed the patterns of communication he would receive from party headquarters, commenting that sometimes instructions or plans were issued over calls, sometimes via text, but always over WhatsApp; for more serious matters, communications staff would contact mobilizers only with instructions to physically meet

in order to receive updates and discuss future campaigns. Concerns over government surveillance of major cell service providers was common throughout the interviews; during the entirety of the in-country research, all communication with subjects was conducted over WhatsApp, with any phone-calls quickly being terminated after being asked to instead talk over the secured messaging platform. Additionally, most interview subjects utilized the program's disappearing message function, deleting sent or received messages after twenty-four hours. While the use of WhatsApp as a primary means of communication largely relates to the interview theme of social media use, its encrypted nature and disappearing messages demonstrates the NUP's deliberate consideration of communications security and focus on minimizing government infiltration.

This prevailing wariness over government surveillance has likewise affected the organizational structure of the NUP. One senior leader commented on the overarching purview of the communications department, saying that all party positions, regardless of office, are held "under the supervision of the communications department." Given the continuing struggle for access to Ugandan audiences, the NUP as an organization considers its communication strategies one of the central elements to its overall resistance.

### ***Mechanisms for Feedback, Subordinate Autonomy***

*"So I as the president of NUP at [university], I cannot take a sole decision. You always inquire from others, because you do believe that if...each person [is] involved in*

*decision making, we shall get better ideas. So that's how we move and that's how we handle things."*

Given the charges of Bobi Wine and other opposition leaders against the lack of government transparency in the Museveni regime, it was important to understand whether such claims affected the organization and transparency within the party itself. All of the interview subjects, from senior leader to rank-and-file supporter, offered similarly positive views on the party's efforts to not only elicit feedback from its wings or local offices, but also grant high levels of autonomy to its candidates and representatives. Through both physical meetings, like planning sessions or leadership retreats, and digital discourses through WhatsApp groups, subordinate members of the party expressed a level of pride at being able to report to party headquarters and have their opinions genuinely considered when developing campaign strategies. Additionally, subordinate leaders had a shared appreciation of the autonomy granted to them by party headquarters during their campaigns. Both university NUP guild leaders described the lack of orders or instruction from party headquarters; indeed, the only main input NUP party headquarters had on the university guild elections was to provide financial and material support to their chosen candidates. One interview subject described the party relationship as: "extremely helpful, but only help where we ask them to be helpful...the party will only come in the financing bit..I felt like they were really a consultative body...but they give us the autonomy, absolute autonomy."

This was framed as a deliberate strategy by senior leaders, who were also candid about the downsides of such decentralization. Shifting loyalties between the opposition

parties and the regime has been well documented (Friesinger, 2021), and the NUP is no different. Senior NUP leaders recalled tense meetings with local representatives who were unhappy at the new strategy of joint NUP/FDC campaigning, particularly during the lead-up to the 2022 parliamentary by-elections in Soroti, wherein the NUP bowed out and actively campaigned for the more viable FDC candidate. As a result, the local NUP candidate broke ranks, criticized the party in local media outlets and joined the NRM. Interviewees expressed frustration at this practice of local representatives using their position to elicit bribes or buyouts from the regime, but were adamant that a continued pursuit of decentralization and empowerment of junior leaders was critical.

This culture of transparency and access to decision-making bodies is also embodied through the NUP's organization. Particularly, the party's mobilization committees and institutions wing serve as vehicles for the interaction and co-production of knowledge. The mobilization committees serve as the link between the NUP's supporters and party representatives; the party mobilizer interviewed detailed how these regular meetings allowed average supporters in his district to raise new concerns, such as a lack of economic opportunity, poor government services, or the abduction of relatives by unmarked government vehicles (referred to locally as "drones"). Mobilizers then distill and deliver local sentiments to meetings of the NUP's National Executive Committee. Key to note is the parallel work that these mobilizers perform alongside elected members of parliament from the party. As of 2022 the NUP holds 59 seats in Uganda's unicameral parliament (out of 529); in those areas where the NUP fails to win (often times as a result of NRM election rigging), candidates like the mobilizer

interviewed will continue their work in gaining and maintaining supporters. This function serves similarly to the “parallel institutions” pointed to by Sharp (2012) and others as a key element to resistance movements. The NUP mobilizer noted, however, that this relationship between party leaders and its cadre developed gradually, noting that “previously, that wasn’t there, because it was a new party, and everything was decided by the backup leadership. But right now...they have started asking us for our views, how we see things so that they make decisions accordingly.”

The NUP’s institution wing, meanwhile, serves as the organizing function of all party-affiliated student guilds at Uganda’s universities. Student elections in Uganda are intensely followed and regularly have high levels of participation (see Kahyana, 2019; Twikirize et al., 2021). Kahyana (2019) explains part of this intensity, describing how “the voters in the university come from different parts of the country, winning an election at a large public university like Makerere or Kyambogo secures significant political capital for the political party associated with the winner” (82). Also important to note is the relative lack of interference; several interviewed students agreed with the saying that “student elections are so important because they are one of the few places that genuine democracy is still practiced.” The NUP, capitalizing on this passion for student politics, uses its institution wing to both offer previously described financial and material support as well as vet and endorse rising student leaders.

While the positionality of the subjects and the interviewer undoubtedly affected the responses (i.e. party members wanting to give the organization a positive light to a Westerner with access to Western audiences), the recurring narratives that emerged

painted a picture of a party genuinely concerned with engaging and involving its subordinate members in the direction of the movement.

### ***Coordination between Party and Movement***

*“So we decided to...form a political party. Of course, that discussion we had it when we’re starting People Power around 2017, 18..our decision to go with NUP was really based on what we thought were the shared values and some ideas, but also the practical politics...our sense was that the leadership of [the] NUP at the time was better after doing an analysis of all political parties.”*

The distinction between the People Power Movement that began with Bobi Wine’s 2017 turn to politics and the NUP that became the movement’s vehicle for electoral politics was frequently made by subjects. Rather than a procedural transformation from the former into the latter, the People Power Movement and the NUP operate in tandem, serving complementary purposes as the opposition continues its struggle against the Museveni regime. The adoption of the NUP for campaign purposes, as described in the previous chapter’s examination of Ugandan newspaper coverage, provided Wine and his associates a new front with which to challenge NRM hegemony. However, party leaders describe a continued coordination between the activities of People Power and NUP as a means of evading government surveillance and repression. One interview subject elaborated on how the informality of the PP facilitates the continued growth of the NUP’s formal ranks, commenting that “whenever anything is formal, it’s very easy for him [Museveni] to penetrate it and take over...So to answer the

question, is that underground we have those informal people power youth structures that help us in identifying [future leaders].” Bobi Wine’s musical career was also described as having a role to play, as Wine’s digital fan bases have become digital sites of recruitment and networking between the PP and potential supporters.

The relationship between People Power and the NUP represents an example of social movement politics that has been studied heavily across social sciences. Almeida (2010), in reviewing the development of social movement politics in Latin America, describes the mutually-supporting relationships that develop between established oppositional political parties and emerging social movements; capitalizing on the access to institutional politics, social movements will form coalitions with parties, while the parties seek to access the large numbers of motivated supporters that social movements can mobilize. However, this pattern does not describe the nature of the People Power and NUP. Wine’s surge in popularity and the growth of the PP Movement was in part due to continued frustration with long standing opposition parties like the FDC. One interviewed student explained a common sentiment of young People Power supporters, that the continued failure of groups like the FDC or the Democratic Party (DP) to unseat the NRM from power had frustrated many Ugandans. Indeed, most of the NUP leaders interviewed detailed their previous involvement with other opposition parties, explaining the wave of popular support for Bobi Wine as a motivator in their shifting affiliations.

The People Power adoption of the NUP relates more to the development of certain social movement parties in Taiwan. The development of Taiwanese social movements in the late 20th century and the opening of civil society sparked the birth of

several political factions focused on specific movement objectives (see Ho and Huang, 2017). These parties, combining the tactical fervor of social movements with the electoral campaigning of political parties, were formed as a response to the unresponsiveness of existing parties. The field of research on such movement parties has been (in Ho and Huang's view) limited, as the intersection has not garnered the same level of attention that political scientists and sociologists have paid parties and social movements, respectively. The evolving relationship between the People Power movement and the NUP serves as additional case study material for this field, providing additional insights into the methods of contentious politics being pursued. Where the responsibilities of the People Power movement end and those of the NUP begin continues to be seen as fluid and evolving as leaders and supporters contend with shifting spaces of repression and expression in Uganda.

Overall, the interviews with various NUP members describes an organization that continues to experience rapid changes in structure and tactical focus, while maintaining a unified vision for bringing democratic reforms to Uganda.

## **2. Mobilization and Recruitment Through Social Media**

*"I feel like social media, its impact is limited by imagination. Even those of us who claim to know how far it can go have not fully comprehended how far it can actually go."*

As discussed in previous chapters, the role of social media in resistance movements has been well-documented over a number of different fields. Within



geography, scholars have examined social medias' abilities to enact digital place-making, offering many of the same spatial interactions that physical connections provide. These trends were all reflected in the interviews with the tech-savvy members of the NUP; from the rank-and-file supporter to the senior leadership, social media was held in high regard as the opposition's main tool to circumvent government suppression (recall previous examination of the high rate of cell-phone ownership). Relating to several of the affordances of social media described by scholars (see Adams, 2015; Tufekci, 2017; Vegh, 2003), the interview subjects commented on the various platforms and methods that such programs were used to recruit new supporters and mobilize existing ones, as well as strengthening the connections between the opposition and members of the Ugandan diaspora.

### ***Diversity of Platforms and Uses***

*"Our target is to maximize every capability of every platform. So we use it to the maximum. I don't think we have reached where we're supposed to be. I think we need to hit the ceiling. But we realize and understand that these platforms must be given priority, according to the outputs that they can give to the struggle."*

Common across the interviews was a description of an "all-out front" on various social media platforms. Subjects credited social media for both the NUP's growth inside Uganda and the growth in international attention directed towards it and Bobi Wine's personal role in leading the movement. WhatsApp was frequently highlighted as the most important platform used by the NUP for a variety of reasons. Recalling previous

discussion of security measures taken to avoid government surveillance, WhatsApp and other encrypted messaging applications like Telegram have become the primary means of communication, so much so that the implementation of state taxes on its use sparked widespread protests in 2018 (BBC, 2018). For coordination of collective action, the size of WhatsApp groups (currently limited to 512 people) was pointed to as essential in spreading messages and details for physical gatherings. However, other research has cautioned that WhatsApp's affordances can also benefit the regime's attempts to spread misinformation or stifle dissent, using the case of Nigeria's 2019 elections as an example of incumbent administration conducting a deliberate campaign over the application (Hitchen et al., 2019). One interview supported this claim, describing the tactic of regime supporters joining university WhatsApp groups and pretending to be NUP supporters before then using vitriolic language to paint the opposition in a negative light.

Beyond WhatsApp, Facebook was identified by several different interview subjects as the NUP's main platform for communicating to rural Ugandans. Facebook dominated Ugandan use of social media until the 2021 presidential elections, when it was permanently blocked by the Museveni regime (Dahir, 2021). While many still access the platform through the use of Virtual Protected Networks (VPNs), publicly available data shows a notable decline in percent of monthly page views from 41.55% in January 2021 to 17.91% in September 2022, being eclipsed by Twitter (GlobalStats, 2022). Facebook is also noted as having high penetration in the "upcountry" regions where the NUP seeks to expand its base of support. Facebook's "live" feature was also highlighted by NUP leaders as a mechanism for engagement with existing and potential supporters; during

times when physical or digital access to Ugandan radio and television programs is restricted by the regime, leaders like Bobi Wine and other NUP officials frequently utilize Facebook Live in order to conduct speeches, panels, and interviews with independent journalists. Likewise, YouTube was credited as a vital platform for broadcasting similar media engagements. Several students commented on the use of TikTok in efforts to campaign for supporters across the university, describing the use of viral dance moves as a means to gain viewers while also delivering politicized messages. Twitter, as shall be discussed later, was viewed as largely limited to elites and members of the Ugandan diaspora.

When asked about whether different strategies existed for each platform, interview subjects in leadership positions answered negatively, instead reiterating the previous quote that each platform was to be used to its fullest (without offering details as to how that would be measured). Subjects noted that their chosen measure of effectiveness was voter turnout, especially in the context of student elections where the electorate is overwhelmingly online.

### ***Utilization of Pre-existing Networks***

*“Now for here, we have different class groups. Because the program I did...business computing...[has] over five groups, that’s only one [class]...you might find that this institution has over three hundred plus groups on WhatsApp, meaning that you should have agents in each group. They were going to spread your message, they were going to be representing you there.”*

Social movements have long utilized pre-existing networks to recruit new members and supporters (see McAdam, 1998), and the NUP is no different. Specifically in the context of social media, these networks included both those grounded in physical and digital spaces. For example, as mentioned in the preceding quote, NUP guild members at major universities utilized WhatsApp groups that had been established for coordinating campus activities or providing classroom information. Additionally, many NUP supporters in urban centers like Kampala utilize familial connections through Facebook to disseminate party messages to relatives living in the rural regions of the country that state security forces regularly prevented NUP mobilizers from visiting. While these social networks were built off geographically bounded connections (i.e. individuals attending the same university or members of the same family), others were not, such as the fan bases that had grown with Bobi Wine's hip-hop career. One such group, "BOBI Diehards" with 143,000 followers on Facebook, has shifted from promoting Wine's music to almost exclusively documenting the continued efforts of the NUP to win elections (BOBI Diehards Facebook group, 2022). A second organization, "Ghetto TV," has several groups on Facebook under the same name (an adaptation to frequent suspensions or shutdowns by the regime), with over 170,000 followers. Originally started to cover Wine and other hip-hop artists from the slums of Kampala, Ghetto TV has since shifted into a space of oppositional politics, sharing live coverage of NUP events.

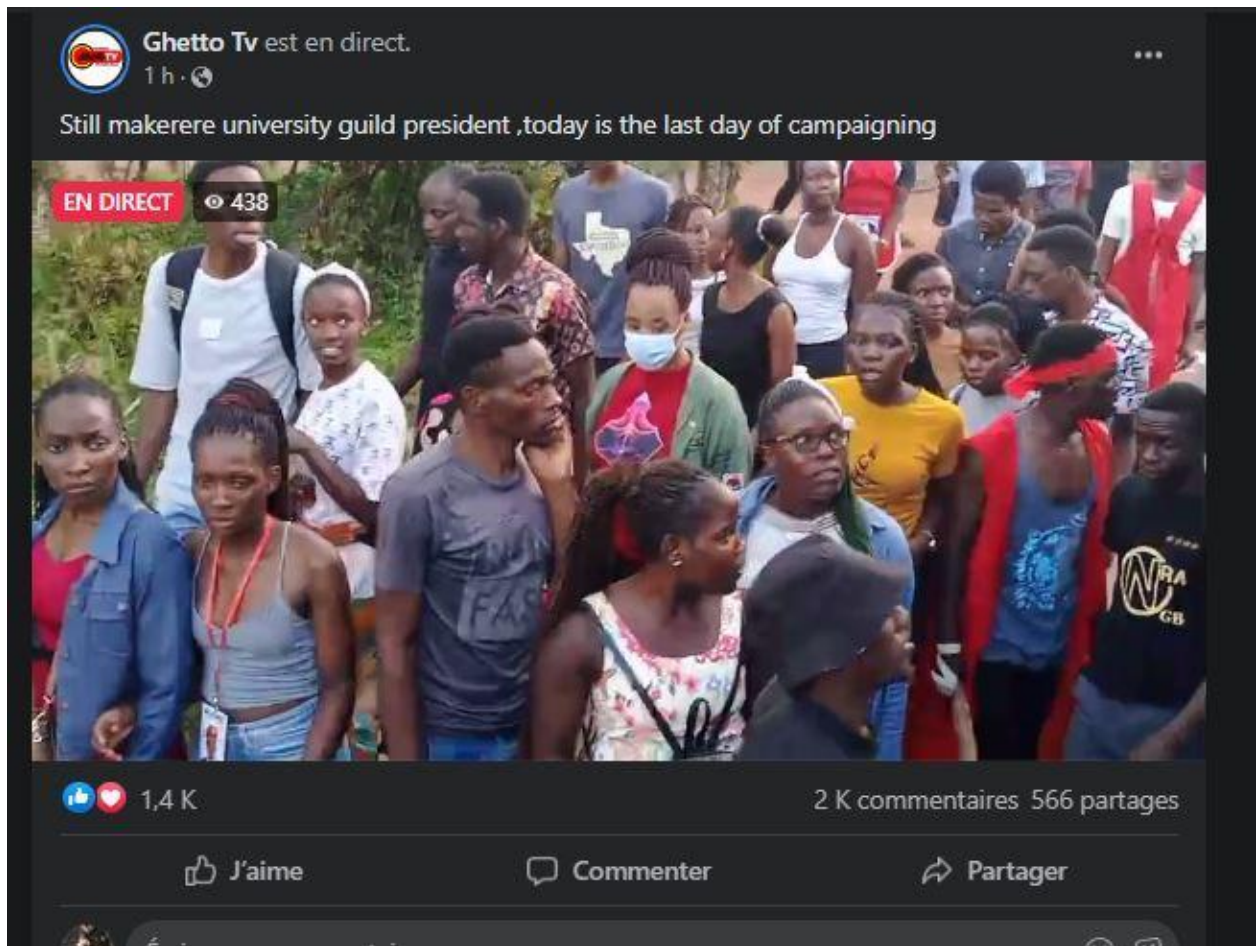


Figure 5.1: Ghetto TV coverage of NUP Guild marches at Makerere University

Both of these types of networks represent not just opportunities for tactical recruitment or marketing of the resistance, but create transgressive spaces of democratic expression that represent the idea of a free Uganda that the NUP and its allies strive to create. The connection between these networks in digital arenas and the physical acts of repression documented through shared images supports claims by geographers that social media allows users to create new spaces not otherwise possible (Adams, 2015; 397). As

the barriers to physically access segments or networks of Ugandan society remain (to be discussed in the following section), the NUP must rely on social media as the means to engage.

### ***Transnational Linkages to Diaspora and Global Allies***

*“The people in the diaspora have helped so much...it’s very encouraging to see people outside Uganda actually be part of the movement. So it’s a two way thing, there is this type of energy they give [the movement]...because we watch this on social media, we see them...so as we’re in Uganda, when we see them actually portray the NUP movement outside that it gives us more energy here to form.”*

As the interviews continued to examine the NUP’s use of social media, almost all of the subjects eventually brought up the topic of transnational engagement. This took the form of establishing regular connections with members of the Ugandan diaspora as well as forging stronger ties to foreign audiences for the purposes of solidarity and awareness, with the goal of increasing pressure on foreign governments to reduce support to the Museveni regime.

The Ugandan diaspora, estimated to total roughly 750,000 (AFFORD, 2021), has long been a population of interest in the NUP’s efforts. Contributing almost 4.6% of annual GDP through remittances, Ugandans living abroad also contribute critical financial support to the NUP. During their interviews, both senior NUP leaders expressed a sense of appreciation for the vital support that diaspora donations played in maintaining the NUP’s political operations, and acknowledged the importance of regular engagements

between NUP leaders and diaspora groups both online and in-person. Far from being unique to Uganda, the political actions of diaspora populations has also been well-studied. Baron (2018) describes the variety of ways in which these communities engage in the struggles or place-making in the homeland, such as the sending of remittances, the physical return for participation in armed conflict, and other forms of political participation that has been documented by numerous geographers, sociologists, and political scientists.

Due to the popularity of Twitter in typical diaspora destinations, these leaders frequently used the newly added Spaces feature to provide updates to and engage with Ugandans abroad. Twitter Spaces, added in late 2021, gained much popularity in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, when analysts and other users utilized the feature to host live audio discussions and coordination of developing situations with thousands of users (Spencer, 2022). Spaces themselves are temporary assemblages of users, circled around specific topics chosen by the hosts. Hosts can assign multiple co-hosts with speaking privileges, creating the feel of expert panels, while also receiving and accepting speaking requests from the audience. Such a medium of interaction between users represents several of the affordances of digital media proposed by geographers (see Adams, 2015) and political scientists (see Vegh, 2003). Twitter Spaces offer potential in all three of Adams' (2015) affordances: information sharing, networking, and dialogue and debate. The audio-broadcast nature facilitates rapid information sharing, while visibility of what users are present in the Space allows for increased networking and connections between accounts interested in the same topics; the

ability to have multiple speakers speaking simultaneously facilitates organic dialogue and debates depending on the topic.

With respect to Uganda, Spaces are frequently used as arenas for debate and engagement with audiences, more akin to radio call-in shows where listeners can be chosen by hosts to gain temporary speaking privileges. The NUP leaders interviewed expressed both an appreciation of the capabilities that Spaces offers, as well as a frustration at the mobile data requirements that such engagements require. As an emerging feature (as of October 2022, searches for peer-reviewed articles referencing “Twitter Spaces” shows only four results), Twitter Spaces represents a new opportunity for research in digital placemaking and social media’s ability to create spaces of political expression. Beyond the financial support and “constituent” engagement described by senior NUP leaders, the diaspora’s connections to the movement over Twitter and other platforms serves as an important mechanism of solidarity building. As described in the quote, NUP activists struggling within the confines of Uganda shared sentiments of motivation derived from the encouragement of their compatriots in the diaspora, through both messages and physical events conducted by organized groups of Ugandans abroad. These include protests at NRM-aligned diaspora events and protests against foreign travels of President Museveni, such as the general assembly of the United Nations in New York City. Such transnational displays of solidarity speak to the geographies of affect that tie the opposition within Uganda to its compatriots abroad, whose distance from the homeland often emboldens the passion for democratic reform (Thien, 2005).



Beyond Ugandans in the diaspora, interviewees viewed social media as a means to pursue transnational goals of raising awareness and solidarity with other pro-democracy movements. Discussed by scholars as both transnational and “translocal,” social media allows activists to weave a web of like-minded movements struggling against similarly draconian regimes (Davis, 2017). This was recently exhibited by the expressions of solidarity between the NUP and Ukraine, with Bobi Wine visiting Kyiv in September 2022. Wine (and other NUP accounts), sharing a pro-democracy message, saw the most tweet “favorites” since the January 2021 presidential elections wherein Wine was documenting his house arrest.



Figure 5.2: Bobi Wine in Kyiv, Ukraine

Some interviewees' comments shed light on more cynical potential explanations for the outreach efforts. When asked about the risks of the NUP's overreliance on an

internet that can and has been shut-down by government entities, one senior leader pointed to the deployment of SpaceX's Starlink satellite internet network over Ukraine, commenting "personally I have asked my president [Bobi Wine] [to] look for Elon Musk because I saw Elon Musk do it in Ukraine...as you realize [we] would love to have more applications that would assist us without the Internet." These narratives are not mutually exclusive; the NUP's social media engagements with foreign audiences can at the same time grow its translocal solidarity network of pro-democracy movements while seeking material support for its day-to-day operations.

Across the interviews, whether with senior party leaders or rank-and-file supporters, social media was identified as one of the strongest points in the NUP; such emphasis on communications and digital organizing would also be illustrated visually during the participatory mapping exercise. The adoption of these tools in the face of government repression was pointed to as a signifier of the movement's viability and its reflection of an increasingly young and digitally-connected Ugandan population. Notably, only two of the interview subjects admitted that the reliance on social media also represented a potential weakness. The doubters pointed to the government's control of ICT infrastructure and in particular the suppressive effect that the month-long internet shut-down had on NUP protests following the disputed January 2021 elections. Still, others dismissed the idea and instead emphasized the creative use of social media as an indicator of the movement's ability to tactically innovate, a critical element of any civil resistance (Chenoweth, 2021).

### **3. Physical Communication and Barriers of Repression**

*“You continue to use messages, for example, recorded messages, press conferences, which we hope can be captured by local radio stations, and our mobilization committees, we’ve tasked them to have someone in charge of communication, and we’re trying to see that, at least in every district, we have someone speaking on behalf of the party”*

One final theme that emerged from the interviews was the continuing struggle to physically access both potential supporters and the legacy media that such groups listened to. This is perhaps one of the main reasons why the NUP developed such tactical innovations and creative uses of social media, such as the infusion of political messaging into pre-existing networks. As evidenced in the preceding chapter’s discussion of the December 2021 parliamentary elections in Kayunga, the Museveni regime frequently deploys a variety of forces and tactics to suppress opposition parties’ electoral campaigns. Through the interviews, the party members described attempts to access media outlets like radio and television stations, the struggles to do so and to conduct outreach efforts to rural areas of the country. Additionally, certain interview subjects touched upon the future of the movement and the potential escalation in how the NUP conducts its campaigns.

#### ***Legacy Media and Relationships with Ugandan Media***

*“We use radio but even radio itself [we are] sometimes blocked from being on radio. So we resort to the elementary form of communication, door to door...leaflets.”*

While the role of social media in the NUP's growth and early successes was agreed upon by many interview subjects, others stressed the continued importance of radio as a means of accessing more rural populations. Despite the high levels of mobile phone ownership across the country, radio remains the primary source of information for more than half of the country (Hatchile Consult, 2019; Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2019). As such, conducting interviews, call-ins, and other engagements with national and local radio stations remains a priority for NUP outreach strategies. Interview subjects commented on the balancing act that had to be performed in managing relationships with Ugandan media outlets, with one subject describing the need for "glittery gloves" to properly handle certain organizations. The interviewees articulated the difference between rank-and-file journalists, who overwhelmingly supported the NUP's goals and the business elites who owned and managed the stations. While the former were described in positive terms, most of the subjects accused Ugandan media elites of varying degrees of corruption, at best fence-sitting during a societal conflict and at worst colluding with the regime to prevent fair coverage of NUP messages. Despite the affordances of social media, the NUP leaders at both party and university levels acknowledged the gatekeeping role that media houses played, and spoke to the politicking that had to be performed in service of the relationships with such organizations.

### ***Importance and Challenges of Physical Access***

*“It’s one thing to have the support, like, we’ve always had these people, right?*

*It’s another thing to convert that support into votes.”*

Across the board, one of the most common frustrations was the regime’s crackdown on NUP-sponsored events or even simple access to certain towns and locations. One senior NUP leader bemoaned the conditions, saying that the reliance on social media was in part caused by this, “especially in the context where you’re not allowed to hold rallies where you know, sometimes you’re blocked from radio stations.” While such confrontations have occurred in a number of places, one case that represents a poignant intersection of these themes was the November 2021 clash in Lira, a small city located in Uganda’s Northern Region. Rather than calling from Kampala, Bobi Wine traveled to the city (approximately seven hours by car) in order to conduct an interview at the city’s local radio station. However, the interview was canceled the morning of by the Ugandan Communications Commission (UCC), and the gathering of supporters was dispersed by Ugandan police with tear-gas and batons (Immaculate, 2021). An almost identical event occurred a few weeks later in Mbale in Eastern Region (Kitunzi, 2021). Such battles over access to the sites of production (broadcasting studios, printing facilities, networked computers, etc.) of various media exemplify Adams’ (2013) discussion of the geographies of communication, particularly the consideration of production and distribution networks (the institutions of Ugandan radio networks), administration and control (the UCC and security forces’ physical blocking of access), and the infrastructure itself (the local radio stations).

Beyond the high-profile clashes over Wine's access to Ugandan population centers, several interview subjects described personal experiences with government forces violently preventing NUP members from expanding its base of support to more rural parts of the country. Even within Kampala, certain physical movements or assemblies were described as highly regulated, one supporter asserting,

“We find ourselves in a ... scenario whereby you [aren't] allowed to move everywhere. You can't be allowed to just move on, you're not going to block me from tweeting, but I can't go to radio everyday, even here in Makerere [University]...NUP isn't allowed to just hold function. For example, if they saw ten people sitting here wearing berets, police would surround the entire area.”

The contest for access to public space in Uganda has been noted as a frequent site of conflict between the state and civil society. Mukwaya (2016), in documenting the most notable protest events in Kampala since 2000, illustrates how the capital's significance as a place motivates the militarization and securitization of the city. The 2011 Walk to Work protests, led by perennial challenger Kizza Besigye, further support the claim; walking through Kampala as both a strike against inflating transportation costs and as a protest against government inaction, Besigye and thousands of other marchers were met with violent crackdowns, including the beating and arrest of Besigye himself. This deployment of violence has been reproduced across Uganda today, as described by the interview subjects. The physical “closing-off” of towns and villages from NUP mobilizers illustrates the regime's concern towards any threat to its monopoly of power.

### ***Alternative Institutions***

*“I don't think this would be a strategy to share, but I can tell you that...”*

A final theme that can only partially be explored was the discussion of potential escalation in tactics and strategies that the NUP intends on pursuing. With the recent NUP-FDC coordination still dominating Ugandan political discourse during the period of in-country research, subjects were invariably asked for their opinions on the public debate on strategy between Bobi Wine and Kizza Besigye. While the actions of the NUP and FDC continue to demonstrate an electoral focus, the public statements by Wine, Besigye and other key NUP officials have included language that indicate a shift to alternative methods of unseating the NRM from power, with one NUP leader tweeting “when the people of Uganda resort to other means to reclaim their democratic rights, no one will be in doubt about the justification” (Rubongoya, 2022); the subtext from these proclamations is that more direct forms of nonviolent resistance may be required if continued electoral campaigns are stymied by vote rigging. While certain interview subjects shared some of these internal discussions, a consideration of reflexivity prevents further exploration; appropriation of resistance tactics and methods for the use of suppression has long been practiced by states, especially in recent years as states have adapted to the increased use of digital media by dissidents (Singer and Brooking, 2018; Tufekci, 2017). Instead, it should simply be noted that the interview subjects acknowledged the continued struggles of the NUP to actually win local elections, but exhibited a shared resilience and motivation that the movement would undoubtedly succeed.



### **5.3 CONCLUSIONS**

Viewing these themes and narratives as a whole, the story emerges of a dynamic assemblage of people, organizations, networks, and movements. The NUP's ranks of tech-savvy activists and supporters exude not a simple optimism, but instead a shared sense of determination to achieve a democratic future. The fluidity with which the movement communicates and resists across digital and physical spaces further illustrates how the imposition of physical barriers are bypassed and in the process new spaces of political expression and resistance are created. These findings serve as evidence for all of this study's research questions, in how increased access to and familiarity with digital medias allow the NUP to organize in ways that are commonly met with repression when conducted in physical spaces. Capitalizing on the insights from these semi-structured interviews, the subsequent chapter explores how these subjects visualized their movement across such environments and mediums of communication, through the use of novel participatory mapping methods.

## **6. Visualizing Digital Spaces of Resistance Through Participatory Mapping**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

As one of the primary research objectives of this work was to capture how members of resistance organizations conceptualize their movements across physical and digital spaces, it was critical to engage interview subjects in a way that allowed them to visually represent their views. Recalling the literature review, participatory mapping has been a well-established research method of empowering groups to visualize their communities in a manner that challenges conventional practices of geospatial representations. However, there are gaps in these participatory methods when applied to digital spaces or communities; I therefore present the digital resistance mapping framework as a means to both empower resistance participants' ability to ground their movement across digital and physical spaces as well as a novel method for visually representing communities that reach across said environments.

This chapter will proceed as follows. First, I present context on the dilemma of “networked protest” movements, drawing from literature by Tufekci (2017) and other scholars of the recent surge in digitally-connected protest movements. With this initial context, I introduce my digital resistance map, describing its structure and evolution from thought experiment to operationalized research tool. Next, I describe the findings from my participatory mapping exercises in Uganda using the tool, with images from a number of the interviews. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the implications for both the

specific case study of the NUP in Uganda as well as for future work on participatory mapping of digital environments.

## **6.2 NETWORKED PROTEST AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL RESISTANCE MAP**

The diffusion of media (digital, social, and even “old” media like non-smart cell phones) has made participation in protest actions easier for newcomers (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012) and has helped in the weaving together of translocal movements that tie together communities in their struggles (Davis, 2016). However, as discussed by Tufekci in *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*, the affordances of digital media can also serve to weaken nascent resistance movements. Tufekci contends that,

“I have also seen movement after movement falter because of a lack of organizational depth and experience, of tools or culture for collective decision making, and strategic, long-term action. Somewhat paradoxically the capabilities that fueled their [movements born online through social media] organizing prowess sometimes also set the stage for what later tripped them up, especially when they were unable to engage in the tactical and decision-making maneuvers all movements must master to survive” (xxvii).

Such conditions have been identified by local commentators in Uganda, as critics argue that the wave of excitement and support behind Bobi Wine and the NUP has since faded, with the NUP fumbling to maintain its momentum (The Independent, 2021; Wilkins et al., 2021: 641-643). Tufekci likens this phenomenon to a bodybuilder bypassing normal muscle development, wherein the affordances of digital media provide “shortcuts” for the organizational capabilities required of movements, rather than the methodical repetitions needed to “grow muscle” or

network internalities and thereby strengthen the movements' capabilities. These capabilities are categorized by Tufekci as *narrative*, *electoral/institutional*, and *disruptive*, with differing associated advantages or disadvantages of digital media. Narrative capabilities relates to movements' ability to broadcast messages to a variety of audiences beyond the physical site of protest, similar to Lipsky's (1968, 1970 via Adams, 1996) four social groups and the importance of protest constituents reaching not just protest targets but the reference publics that can influence them. Institutional capabilities refers to a movement's ability to apply pressure to adversarial regimes within its own structures, such as elections or the "invited" spaces of insurgent planning described by Miraftab (2009). Disruptive capabilities align most closely with many of Sharp's 198 methods (Sharp, 2012), including strikes, occupations of public spaces, and other actions that focus on actually disrupting the status quo. And while the dissemination of digital medias has made narrative capabilities easier to perform, Tufekci contends that the "shortcut" affordances may negatively impact the ability to perform the latter two. And while some have shown that digital media can facilitate these other capabilities (Mutsvairo, 2016), Tufekci's central thesis remains convincing; while digital media can facilitate the actions of already established networks, they may still hinder the adaptation and agility of movements born online.

Clearly, as these conditions evolve and movements grow and shrink, defining the boundaries of physical and digital resistance is difficult; developing a taxonomy to provide a mental framework of such "hybrid" resistance movements can not only

assist in the visual placement of such movements, but also help highlight weaknesses that may either be exploited by the state or addressed by the movement itself.

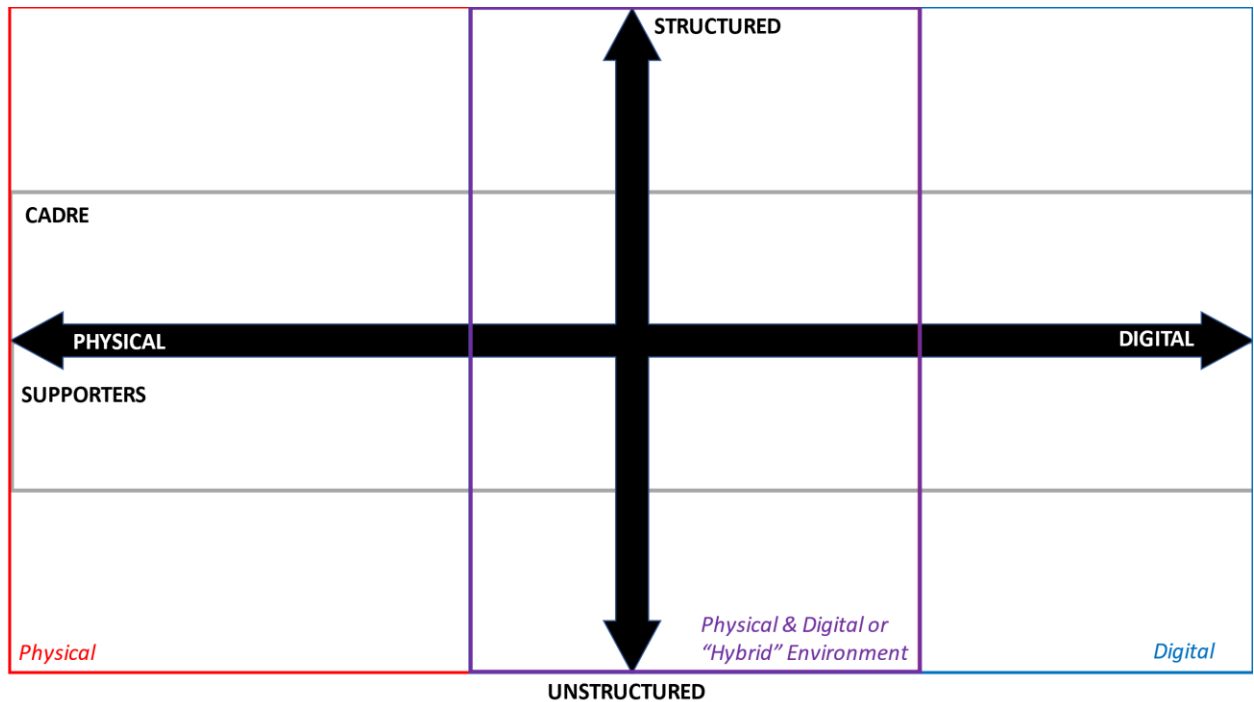


Figure 6.1. Proposed taxonomy for resistance movement structure and ability to operate in digital and physical settings.

Figure 6.1 represents an attempt at such a task. The two axes represent the heart of the dilemma presented by Tufekci and other authors; resistance movements as organizations will by definition be either more structured and hierarchical, or more unstructured and leaderless. Examples of structured movements include traditional examples like the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's, the Serbian anti-Milosevic Otpor movement, and the South African anti-Apartheid movement. Unstructured examples include the Occupy movement, the "hacktivist" Anonymous collective, and

the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement *at a national scale*. The example of BLM stands out in how it demonstrates the importance of scale in analyzing such movements; at a national level, BLM may appear as an unstructured and leaderless movement to national media outlets (Barron-Lopez, 2020; Keating, 2020). But when scale is brought down to a local or regional level, chapters or BLM affiliated organizations clearly exhibit an organizational structure and implement targeted strategies to enact change in their own communities. Chenoweth (2021) notes this distinction, framing BLM as having rather “moved away from individualistic leadership models, instead adopting a federated, coalitional structure that prioritizes active coordination” (125). Likewise, movements will occupy two dimensional spaces on the graph, demonstrating the relative fluidity that certain movements possess to conduct both structured and unstructured activities, as opposed to a single point or x/y coordinate that might reduce the viewer’s conceptualization. Again, recalling previous literature on the nature of mapping and critiques of euclidean geometries of mapping (see Green, 2020), this framework recognizes that any static map is merely a snapshot of a moment in time, and that movements continue to grow and contract or move across axes through time and space.

The horizontal axis represents movements’ relative domains or capacity to operate in such environments. The numerous typologies discussed already provide general benchmarks; the three affordances of digital media assist in understanding how able movements can operate through cyberspace, while Tufekci’s three types of capabilities (narrative, institutional, and disruptive) assist in framing physical actions.

Much like the spectrum of structure, movements are not ascribed a single x/y coordinate on the graph but will likely occupy varying portions of both spaces. The central portion of the graph, indicated as “hybrid,” illustrates how interconnected digital and physical spaces are becoming; hybrid space to the left represents the physical spaces with information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure, tying them to the internet and global digital environments; hybrid space to the right may represent digital spaces closely tied to the movements’ origin, such as global diaspora groups. To the far left, the non-digital and physical space is seen in those physical places that lack the information and communications technology infrastructure to be directly tied to the digital environment (the unevenness of which speaks to the relative prevalence or lack of ICT infrastructure). While movements could (and certainly do) plan and execute digital activities to affect these physical places (see Vegh, 2003), the delineation assists in framing the relative connectivity of populations to the wider digital community. Friction at this point has been evidenced in Uganda through the struggles of political campaigns in coordinating activities in the country’s more rural areas (Bertrand et al., 2021; 14-15). Conversely, the right side of the graph represents the global digital community not directly tied to the movement’s origin. Lastly, the “cadre” and “supporters” spaces speak to how movements interact with populations and attempt to pull them closer towards passive or actively supporting their goals, with the more “structured” members (performing leadership, planning, logistical, operational and other

functions) serving as the cadre, and the “unstructured” members representing the mass participants or supporters of a resistance.

Taking this framework from a thought experiment and operationalizing it into a research tool involved enhancing visual cues to aid in the participatory mapping process. To help participants ground the tool as a “map” and more easily distinguish its sections, natural colors were used to demarcate the left-right axis; blue was chosen for purely-digital spaces, yellow for purely-physical, and green for the physical and digital center (reinforcing the “hybrid” nature of a digitally-connected space within the physical borders of Uganda. In addition, icons were placed in key areas across the map to further help participants understand and interact with it. For instance, a laptop and globe were placed at the far right end, representing the digitally connected population not physically within Uganda; additional examples were provided to participants in the verbal walkthrough of the map, such as Ugandan diaspora communities across the world. On the far left, icons representing shortwave radio and rural road networks were placed to reinforce the concept of spaces and communities physically in Uganda that lacked regular access to the internet. On the top-to-bottom axis of movement structure, icons such as a raised fist and a person holding a loudspeaker were used to represent movement leaders, whereas groups of people clustered together were placed at the bottom to represent movement followers. To help participants navigate the spaces not directly on the axes, other icons were chosen to represent “structured, physical” people or institutions. For example, a church and traditional monarch icon were placed in the top left, illustrating entities with influence



that have historically done so without digital means. While these institutions, such as Ugandan religious organizations or the rulers of tribal kingdoms like the Kabaka of Buganda, have certainly adapted to the digital age and have presences online, I argue that their influence is predominantly outside digital spaces. Figure 6.2 represents the adapted version of the digital resistance map that was provided to interview subjects during the fieldwork portion of this research. Whether such an artifact constitutes a “map” or not recalls previous discussion by critical cartographers and geographers like Harley (1989), Edney (2019), and Wood (2010), whose work opens up the possibilities of what maps look like. Because this tool was deployed to demarcate the boundaries and “control” of the NUP over both physical and digital spaces, it is argued that applying the term “map” is appropriate.

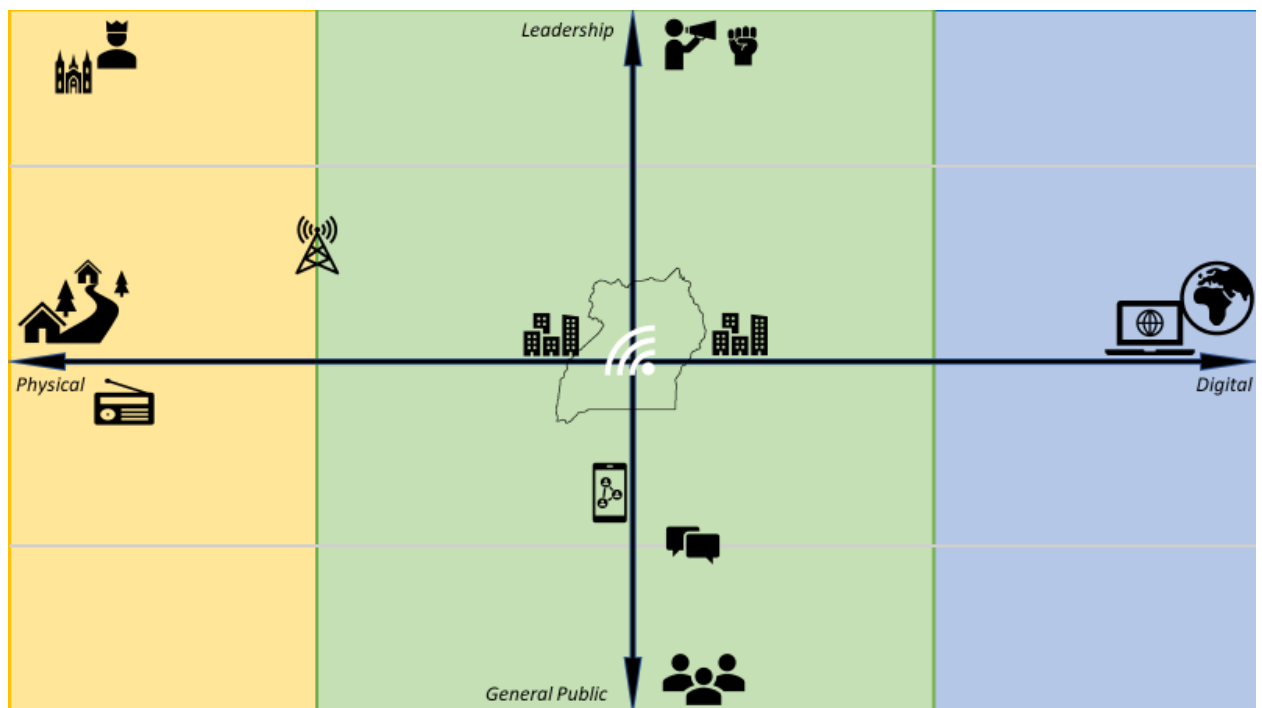


Figure 6.2. Digital resistance map

Indeed, keeping with Kitchin and Dodge's ontological critique of cartography, while the digital resistance map does not necessarily correspond to Cartesian coordinates within Uganda or elsewhere, it is "of the moment, brought into being through practices (embodied, social, technical), *always* remade every time [it is] engaged with...spatial practices enacted to solve relational problems" (2007, 335, original emphasis). Such categorization is further aided by the work of human geographers on what constitutes the "space" to be represented, such as Tuan's (1977) humanist work on spaces. Pickles' (2004) argument that "do not simply represent territory, but are understood as producing it" (146) holds relevance when seeking to define whether Figure 6.2 is indeed a map or a diagram. As the subsequent findings show, interview subjects used the figure to spatially represent their conceptualizations not just of physical but digital borders; the accompanying conversations illuminated the inscriptions, producing the territory of control and contest in physical and digital realms.

### 6.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Of the seven interviews conducted while in Uganda, five subjects participated in the mapping exercise (the two senior NUP leaders were unable to due to time constraints). The image was printed, laminated, and brought to Uganda to complement the interviews. Due to concerns on the political sensitivity of topics being discussed, pictures of the completed maps were taken and saved to a password-

protected cloud storage program before being deleted locally and wiping the maps clear. Subjects were first provided a walkthrough of the map, during which I provided an explanation of the two axes, examples of actors or institutions one might find in each area, and the goal of the exercise. Worth mentioning is how the verbal instructions evolved as I observed different subjects complete the exercise. At first, wanting to avoid influencing how subjects drew, I refrained from offering ideas of how to visualize or represent the “borders” of the NUP/People Power Movement, instead leaving it entirely to the subject. This, however, led to some confusion in certain subjects who were unsure of how best to transplant their ideas onto the map. Figure 6.3 shows the first iteration of the exercise, wherein the subject placed assessments of the movement (rating the leadership as “good” at the top) and discrete “attacks” being launched by the incumbent NRM regime. Subjects were also asked to describe their thought process behind how they drew on the tool, adding further context behind the placement of icons, lines, and other indications of how they visualized the resistance across different environments.



Figure 6.3. Digital Resistance Map, NUP organizer.

During the exercise, the subject used the elongated arrows extending to the right to describe efforts by both NUP leaders and supporters to reach out to the digitally connected populations outside of Uganda, namely Ugandan diaspora communities and Western audiences concerned with the repression of the Museveni regime. Orienting the arrow as unidirectional, the subject perceived these groups as outside the movement yet vital to its survival, as remittances and financial support from diaspora and foreign donors remains a critical sustaining effort to NUP efforts within the country (Ahimbisibwe, 2021; Baron, 2018). One recurring theme throughout the mapping exercises and interviews were attempts by the regime to prevent NUP members from conducting outreach efforts in rural Uganda. This first subject

described these struggles while drawing NRM-borne arrows moving from left to right at the border between the physical and “hybrid” center, preventing the NUP from expanding its borders. Despite the arrival at some of these insights, the decision was made to provide additional guidance to interview subjects during the walkthrough, in order to assist in the drawing process.

Following the initial iteration, subjects were provided with additional examples of how to visually represent their ideas during the walkthrough. This was to remove some of the guesswork from subjects and instead place more focus on the actual drawing process and conversation that it sparked. In order to maintain the connection between traditional maps of physical environments and the exercise, an emphasis on the “bordering” process was made to subjects; describing the NUP and People Power Movement as its own political entity with associated borders, subjects were then asked to ground the movement with its current borders and then to explore through military-style representations of where the NUP was “advancing” or being “attacked” by the regime. Figure 6.4 shows the second iteration of the mapping exercise. The subject, a leader of the NUP’s student chapter at a leading Ugandan university, identified the center of the map as the movement’s “core,” as it built much of its support of discontented young Ugandans with access to social media and the internet. Drawing the border around this core, the subject then described the many outreach efforts by the NUP, scaling them by their intensity or assessed level of success. For example, the outward arrows into the digital represented the aforementioned push for

diaspora and foreign support through social media. The downward arrow represented continued politicking by NUP members to gain new voters and supporters across digitally connected areas of Uganda, and the smaller leftward arrow again represented the struggles to make headway into the “uplands.”



Figure 6.4. Digital Resistance Map, NUP Student Leader

Using an in and outflow at the top, the subject described the politics of gaining and losing support of various elites in Ugandan society, such as those in the business, media, and political sectors. Interestingly, when asked why the borders of the movement did not contain this upper area when many point to the charisma of Bobi Wine as the NUP’s strongest quality, the subject reaffirmed the importance of the rank-and-file supporters and mid-tier leaders like himself, describing his work as vital

to expanding the movement's base of support across the country's major universities. Noteworthy as well was the subject's placement of plus symbols and lightning bolts, which were listed as potential markers during the introduction. Placing a multitude of plus symbols in the digital realm, the subject described how conducive the digital arena was for the NUP, recalling earlier discussions of diaspora support but also expanding on how the types of people using social media were more likely to be supporters of the NUP, regardless of their geographic location. The placement of sparse plus symbols and more prominent lightning bolts in the physical realm, the subject again reiterated how latent support existed for the movement in rural villages and towns, but the challenge lay in actually mobilizing those populations into active supporters.

Most of the subjects avoided the bordering process, instead opting for smaller individual visual representations of ongoing struggles or characteristics of the movement that when taken together painted a picture of the current state of the NUP. Some subjects also required additional encouragement or probing questions; asking things such as "where would you place the core of the movement" or "where are the threats to the movement coming from" spurred additional detail and conversation as participants engaged with the map. Figure 6.5 offers another example of how participants identified key "flashpoints" that produced a composite image of the NUP. In drawing a series of "mountain peaks" at the top of the map, this subject described the inspiration and direction that the movement took from its leaders, such as Bobi

Wine and other NUP members of parliament. Interestingly, the relation with the diaspora and social media environment was drawn as moving towards the center of the movement, as opposed to the outward flow illustrated by the subjects in Figure 6.4 and Figure 6.3. This was articulated as the flow not just of financial support from diaspora communities but also the solidarity and moral support, which inspired members of the NUP to continue their efforts within Uganda. The role of traditional elites such as religious or tribal leaders was also illustrated, as the subject indicated with arrows emanating from the top-left corner towards the center of the map, without either a positive or negative symbol. This facilitated a discussion of the “sideline” position taken by these elites in the struggle between the NRM and the NUP, and the frustration felt by NUP supporters that these institutions wouldn’t step up and use their influence to apply pressure to the regime. This was in contrast to the supportive influences (indicated by green positive symbols) or negative forces (indicated by the



red minus symbols).

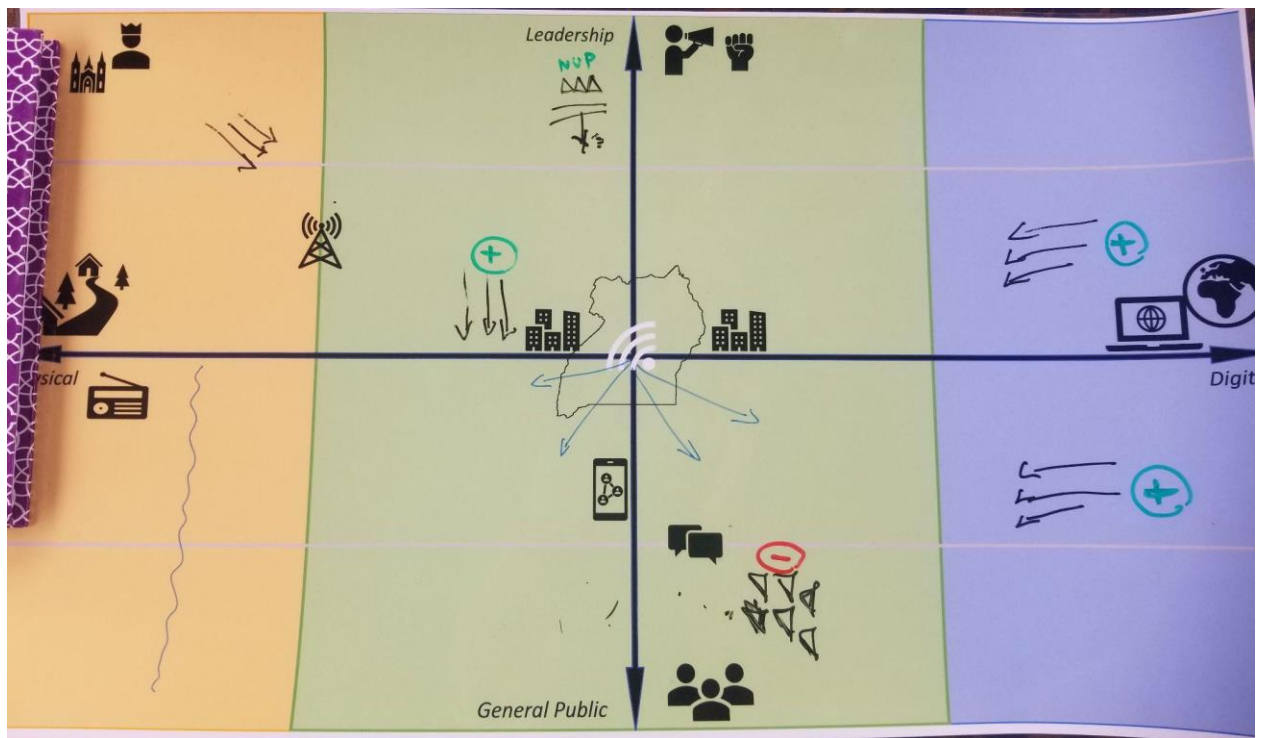


Figure 6.5. Digital Resistance Map, NUP supporter

Again, the “frontline” was articulated on the left side of the map, as the subject described the challenges of other NUP operatives to open field offices in different parts of the country. However, this subject did challenge some of the organization of the map, describing how many rural Ugandans still have access to mobile phones (see Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2019) and how she frequently communicates political developments to her family members living in such regions.

By the final subject, the prompt for the mapping exercise had been refined to a point where direction was provided but not overbearing, allowing for the subject to

comfortably draw on the map and describe their thought process without questioning the use of symbols or whether their work was acceptable. Instruction was given to consider geographic metaphors like hill tops for the “strongpoints” of the NUP, as well as drawing the borders that have been established or are still in contention with the regime. The relational symbols between the movement and other institutions or groups was also described, with attention paid to whether the relationship was uni or bidirectional. Figure 6.6 shows this final instance of the mapping exercise.

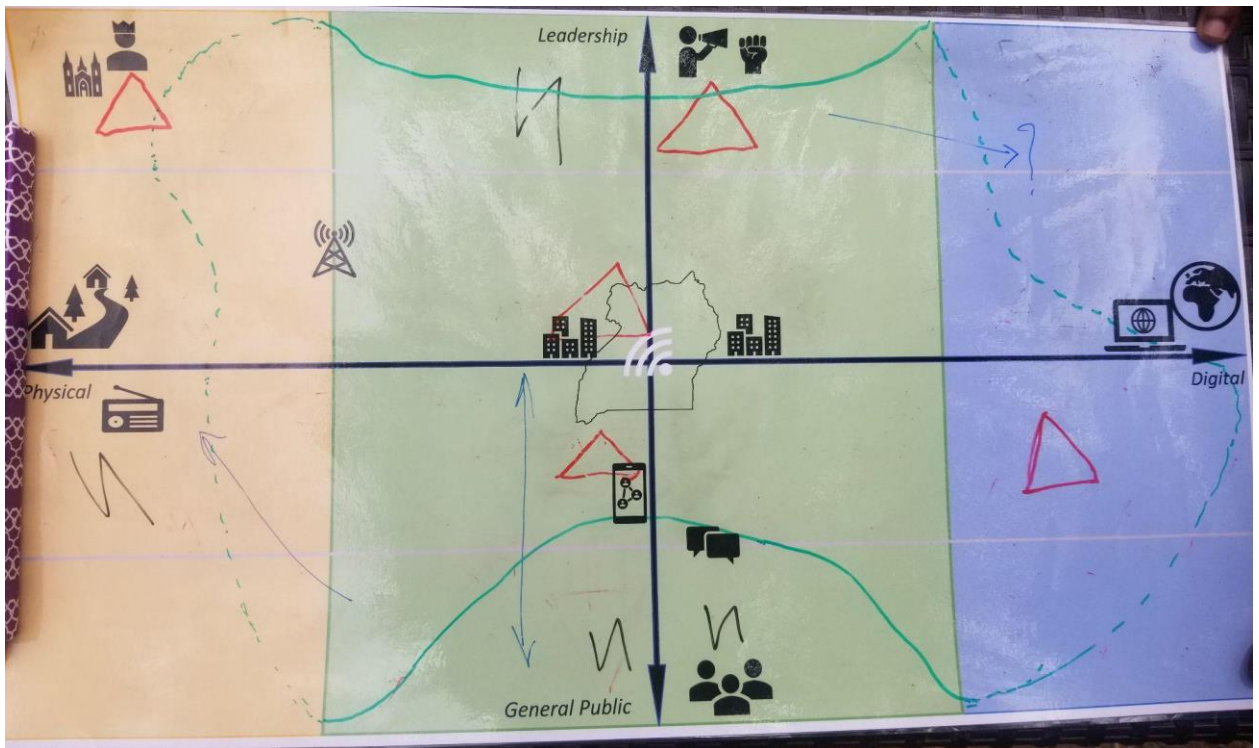


Figure 6.6. Digital Resistance Map, NUP supporter

Drawing the borders of the movement first, the subject described the “confirmed” borders as the center of the map, the numbers of digitally-connected Ugandans like

himself who, in his view, were the NUP's lifeblood. The dip towards the top-center was described in a similar manner as previous subjects, concerning the political maneuvering of Ugandan elites outside of the movement and attempts by NUP leadership to form coalitions; with the continued non-alignment of Ugandan elites, this subject considered them to be outside the borders of the movement, despite the positive influence of NUP leaders like Bobi Wine. Digitally, the subject shared the common themes of diaspora support, but also drew a tentative border in the upper-right, indicated by the dotted concave line. This was described as the at-times difficult attempts to gain recognition and support from foreign elites like Western governments or other influencers. This echoed similar sentiments from one of the senior NUP leaders interviewed, who commented on the need for Starlink support from Elon Musk a la Ukraine. To the left, the subject shared similar visualizations in drawing a dotted "frontline" where the NUP was continuing its efforts to expand. Notably, though, the border extended further towards the traditional elites (seen in the top left) as the subject described the networking efforts that NUP leaders had made to establish connections with Ugandan religious organizations that might one day come out in support of the movement. These efforts were also publicly broadcasted, as social media frequently documents the attendance of NUP leaders at religious ceremonies with both Christian and Muslim organizations, such as the recent appearance of Mathias Mpuuga, ranking NUP member of parliament, at a fundraising event for a church in Masaka (Musaasizi, 2022).

Taking these subjects' visualizations together, I propose a composite image of the NUP and People Power Movement's expansion across digital and physical spaces both within and outside of Uganda, seen in Figure 6.7. Much in line with the narratives described through interviews and mapping, the "heartland" of the movement remains the center, consisting of the NUP's professional cadre and faithful supporters with internet access. The charisma and media savvy of Bobi Wine, a point raised by several subjects, advances the borders towards the top center-right, and is noted as a "strongpoint" of the movement that offers continued inspiration and media attention; Wine's recent foreign tour promoting a biographical documentary serves as the most recent (and largely successful) attempt to focus global attention and support behind the NUP (Roxborough, 2022). Building on the maps and comments of most subjects, the relationship between the NUP and "external digital" spaces stands out as a relatively stable "frontier." The flow of information and images from Uganda to the diaspora and western audience, and the flow of remittances, media attention, and political support back brings to mind images of a reliably used highway system, transporting people and goods between destinations. However, due to the challenges to free internet access imposed by the regime and the immaterial nature of certain digital spaces (see Unipan, 2021), this "region" of the map might be visualized with tentative borders that continue to evolve.

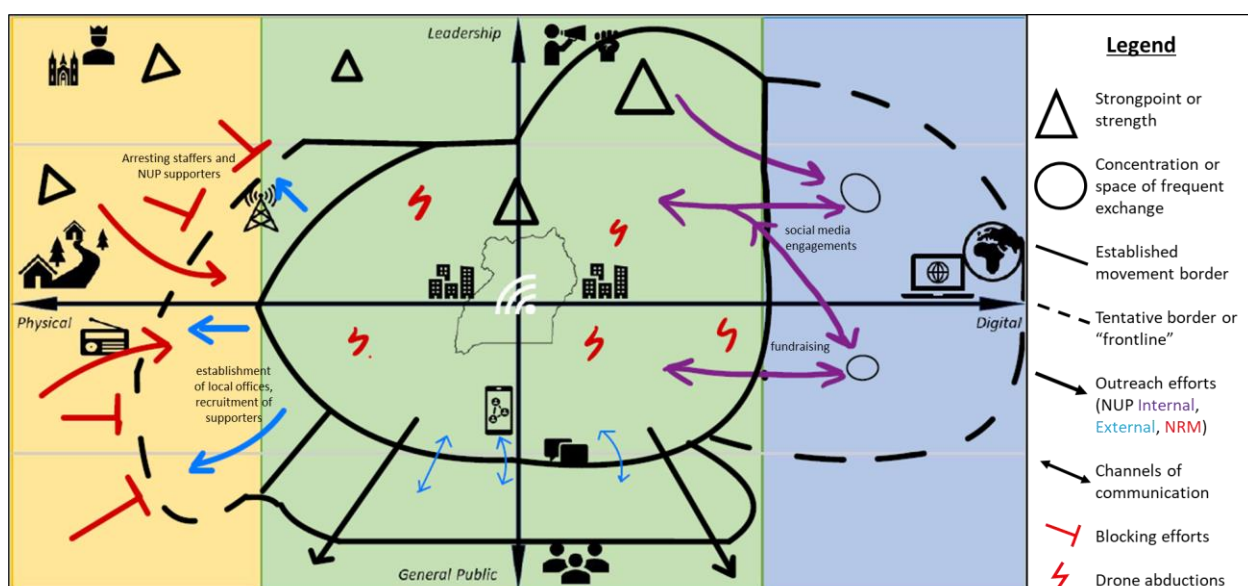


Figure 6.7. Proposed composite map of NUP

The ongoing challenges of the NUP to expand its offices and supporters into rural Uganda might be represented as the contentious “frontline” between the opposition and the ruling regime, where attempts to physically reach villages are rebuffed by security forces and party mobilizers are arrested. These threats to the movement may also be visualized as within the heartland; frequent arrests of NUP supporters and members by unmarked police vans (referred to locally as “drones”) was described by interview subjects as a constant worry (VICE News, 2021). The arbitrary nature of when and where these arrests take place can be represented by the random placement of drone icons. Finally, the visualizations and descriptions by subjects of the constant work done to compete for supporters brings to mind a borderland somewhere in between the “frontline” already described and the more solidly supportive digital frontier.

## 6.4 IMPLICATIONS

From this exercise, several insights can be drawn about both the state of digital resistance in Uganda as well as the implications of this framework as a research method in future work. With regards to the NUP, these exercises in participatory mapping tell a fuller story of the popular struggle that has evolved since Bobi Wine's pivot to politics in 2017. Unsurprisingly, a common theme from the subjects was the centering of the cadre and supporters as the backbone of the movement, a category most would have fallen under. The ways that the NUP's relationship with external digital spaces was visualized also aids in describing the various types of digital spaces that have been appropriated in the wake of digital repression by the Museveni regime. Rather than a simple, unidirectional flow, the mapping exercises instead described multiple directions of support coming from both the members of the movement inside Uganda as well as foreign audiences. The struggle of the NUP to establish its physical presence in rural parts of the country is also better understood through the visual representations articulated by subjects. Subjects often used military-style language, comparing it to a frontline or describing outreach efforts as incursions into enemy territory. These visual and verbal characterizations thus speak to the mindset of many NUP members who see their movement not as a political campaign but as a political struggle.

As a research method, the digital resistance map offers a novel contribution to both participatory mapping and the existing literature on digital spaces. As discussed in the

literature review, participatory mapping predominantly is used in activist research working with indigenous populations or other subaltern groups that have historically been excluded from political processes. These applications of the method therefore are centered on physical spaces, giving a cartographic voice to those groups and affording them the ability to define their physically-grounded communities. However, as it applies to digital spaces, the technique has not yet been applied. Using frameworks such as the digital resistance map may then allow for similar activist research to understand how underprivileged groups are affected by the growing “digital divide” (van Dijk, 2006) or increases in digital repression (Tufekci, 2017; 223-260). As a final consideration, participatory frameworks such as the digital resistance map also offer potential utility for the resistance movements themselves. Following the mapping exercise, subjects were asked about their initial thoughts and impressions on the activity and whether they found it useful; the vast majority indicated they did and several asked for digital copies to be sent in order to use for future planning efforts. The shortcomings encountered through the initial iterations of the exercise, though, highlight the continuing challenge of refining and exploring the importance of both research tool design and implementation.

## **7. Conclusion**

### **7.1 INTERSECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

Over the course of the preceding work, two distinct images emerge that together illustrate the relevance of Uganda's political future. One image is that of Uganda's digital and human landscape, the environment that led to the growth of the People Power Movement and eventually the National Unity Platform. The other image is of the NUP itself; caught between a political party and a social movement, operating across digital and physical spaces, the NUP is not easily captured by most political taxonomies, instead demonstrating organizational fluidity as it seeks to achieve its goal of a fully democratic Uganda. Through this mixed-methods approach, several intersecting themes are illuminated, with applications to numerous disciplines and subdisciplines within geography.

One of the primary themes is, as noted, the fluidity across physical and digital spaces that the NUP and People Power Movement exude, much as they shift between political party and social movement. Articulated through interviews and illustrated through the participatory mapping exercises, the shifting forms and functions of the NUP's wings and sub organizations highlight how contemporary social movements are innovating new ways to coordinate action and create space for democratic expression, in the face of both physical and digital repression by authoritarian regimes. Movements such as the NUP therefore offer fertile ground for political and digital geographers to



study how digital and physical landscapes are entangled as a result of regimes of surveillance and repression.

Through quantitative analysis of country-wide data (see Chapter 3) and qualitative analysis of surveys and interview responses, this research also illuminates the challenges of digitally mediated movements to reach “the last mile” in achieving desired political outcomes. Namely, despite the NUP’s success in organizing and communication efforts across multiple media platforms and wide availability of cell phones and digital media across Uganda, frameworks of repression and surveillance built during British colonialism and intensified by the Museveni regime disrupt efforts to turn political support from passive to active and achieve victories in elections at any scale, such as the 2021 presidential elections or the bye-election in Kayunga (see Chapter 4). Again, this barrier was literally illustrated by interviewees in the participatory mapping exercise and described as the current “front line” between the opposition and the regime. Further research by political geographers or other disciplines on the mobilization of digital support into physical collective action in these contexts would further knowledge both in the academy and for practitioners like the NUP.

Finally, the case of Bobi Wine and the NUP serves as additional evidence of the trend of translocalism and international solidarity between social movements with pro-democracy aims (see Davis, 2017). Through the use of physical mobilities, such as Wine’s recent trip to Kyiv to show solidarity with the Ukrainian people, and digital media, like an appearance on a virtual panel with Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guido, Wine and the NUP represent one of several contemporary organizations

contending for material and political support and aiming to create a global coalition of like-minded movements struggling against authoritarianism by varied means. This latter appearance, however, triggered a massive backlash from Ugandan and African commentators accusing Wine of “auditioning for the imperial puppet job” (Freeman and Pierre, 2021). Though Wine deleted tweets referencing the dialogue with Guido, the critical response speaks to the complexity of translocalism that movements must contend with. While translocalism affords movements benefits like global awareness, solidarity, and tactic sharing (Davis, 2017), these associations can also be mobilized by the state into accusations of foreign influence or control that undercut movement legitimacy (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2021). This theme also attends to the existing debate between scholars of resistance on varied organizational structures; far from a leaderless social movement prone to what Bennett and Segerberg (2013) term “connective action,” the People Power Movement and NUP’s hierarchy instead represents a digitally-mediated form of collective action. And while the formalization of the People Power Movement into the NUP has been accomplished largely through the efforts of subordinate leaders and party cadre, the initial explosion of grassroots support cannot be extricated from the individual appeal and popularity of Robert Kyagulanyi. His role as a cultural and political leader, positioning himself as Museveni’s antipode, will continue to be a salient point of analysis for Ugandan politics and resistance moving into the future.

Taken together, this study deepens work by political geographers and other social scientists on contemporary resistance networks and social movements. Recent research by political geographers like Jentzch and Masullo (2022) have explored the role of local

factors in determining whether campaigns pursue violence or nonviolent means of resistance. While cross-case work furthers political geography's breadth of understanding resistance strategies and the decision to employ violence, this study's trans-scalar approach on a single case study of resistance provides a greater depth, illuminating physical and digital spatial patterns from a national to individual scale. Additionally, continuing human geography's tradition of interdisciplinary contribution, such work serves as an example of novel research on Bobi Wine and the NUP from a geographical lens; in the field of social movement studies and conflict research, this research deepens understandings of emerging movements that resist reductive characterizations as resistances, social movements, or political factions. This work thusly presents new contributions to continuing research on Ugandan contentious politics, expanding on work done by scholars like Khisa, Wilkins, and others on the "Bobi Wine Factor" and the ramifications for post-Museveni Uganda.

## **7.2 FUTURE INTERVENTIONS**

Taking this research further offers several potential avenues to continue to illuminate the entanglements between physical and digital spaces of resistance in Uganda. Conceptually, expanding the breadth of the research as well as the depth of existing work would better serve both the field of human geography as well as the subjects in the interest of activist research practices. To begin, conducting additional surveys in

Kayunga to measure changes in attitudes would aid in the understanding of how UPDF and NRM repression tactics affect political attitudes over time, and whether the short term gains for the regime (through intimidated voters) create long term gains for the opposition (through increased resentment towards the government). Curtice and Behlendorf (2021), using data on protests and violence against civilians in Kampala, demonstrate the “backfire effect” in Uganda; replicating similar studies in Kayunga or other sites of election rigging would further paint the picture of Uganda’s political terrain. One shortfall in this research that might be addressed in future work is the demographic and geographic distribution of interview subjects. Due to logistical constraints, all interviews were conducted in Kampala; with additional time and funding, in-country research could be conducted near the “frontline” of the NUP’s outreach efforts. Interviews with mobilization cadre and newly swayed supporters would also make this research more robust in its description of a movement and party in transition.

With regards to future research on participatory mapping and Ugandan opposition groups, incorporating crisis mapping tools like Ushahidi (Gutierrez, 2018) offers significant potential to both researchers and the NUP. With “drone” abductions of NUP supporters growing in rate as of February 2023 (Wandera, 2022), current reporting is limited to social media postings of the individuals taken. To date, there exists no comprehensive database of abducted persons or where abductions are taking place. Using platforms such as Ushahidi would therefore aid in the production and circulation of maps showing the geospatial distribution of abductions by Ugandan security forces. Much akin to the “geographies of terror” described by Oslender (2008), these tools would illuminate

the repertoire of violence (Gutierrez-Sanin and Wood, 2017) deployed by the Museveni regime. As of writing, the use of Ushahidi for this purpose has been proposed to NUP leaders but has not yet been demonstrated or adopted.

### **7.3 POTENTIAL SCENARIOS**

Of course, the future of the NUP is far from certain, and several potential scenarios exist for the future of the party and for Uganda. While this work refrains from any predictions of how events will unfold, some discussion is worth considering for contextualizing this research for the near future.

Museveni's Final Re-election, MK Project Successful: Perhaps the more cynical or “safe” scenario is that of yet another successful reelection campaign by Yoweri Museveni. With the next presidential election in 2026 and numerous parliamentary by-elections such as that in Kayunga being manipulated for the NRM, numerous Ugandan political commentators have observed that a Museveni victory in 2026 seems all but certain. Given Museveni's monopoly of power since 1986, the likelihood of accepting defeat in his final election to Bobi Wine or another opposition candidate could be viewed as unlikely. Beyond 2026, a familial transition of power also concerns activists and opposition members.

One of the most frequently raised concerns amongst NUP members interviewed was the concern over “MK Project,” the moniker given to the political campaign of

President Museveni's son and heir apparent, Muhoozi Kainerugaba. At 48 years old, the prospect of another "president for life" generated concerns for opposition members over yet another multi-decade period of authoritarian rule. Kainerugaba's online presence has also stirred concerns; a frequent user of Twitter, Muhoozi has been the subject of numerous digitally-born scandals, such as threads extolling the virtues of African women, offering one hundred Ugandan cows for the hand of newly-elected Italian Prime Minister Georgia Meloni, and most notably his threat to invade and capture the Kenyan capital of Nairobi (Daily Monitor, 2022; Aine, 2022). Following the diplomatic row caused by the incident, President Museveni moved Muhoozi from his position as commander of Uganda's special forces to a subordinated position within the Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF). Muhoozi's Twitter activity has also offered some idea of what a successful MK Project might look like. Offering support to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, dismissing accusations of human rights abuses, and claims to be the next chapter of "musevenism" all feature heavily on Kainerugaba's timeline (Kainerugaba, 2023; The Independent, 2022). Unsurprisingly, the NUP and other opposition parties fear that the weight of the NRM regime will be thrown behind Muhoozi in future elections. With the same political architecture in place that has maintained Museveni's rule since 1986, the concerns loom large that Muhoozi will easily inherit the presidency in 2030, the next presidential election after 2026 which Museveni has indicated he will again contest for.

NUP Victory in 2026: Alternatively, given the continued groundwork by NUP leaders and activists to establish the party in the "upcountry," the new collaboration with

the FDC to present a more unified front, and the increased media attention to the “Ghetto President” story of Bobi Wine, the possibility of a NUP electoral victory in 2026 does exist. Achieving such an outcome would require far more intense coordination and campaign efforts, however, if the NUP is to overcome the NRM’s ballot-stuffing, vote-rigging, and intimidation efforts that have been widely observed in previous elections. As a result, a victorious Bobi Wine presidential campaign would therefore indicate successes not just in mobilizing rural voters but also in making inroads with Ugandan police and security forces, the entities most regularly deployed to prevent free and fair elections from taking place along with Resident District Commissioners (RDCs) . It stands to reason then that were Wine to gain the tacit support of UPDF leaders in his next presidential campaign through assurances of a continued place in Ugandan society, the likelihood of a military coup might be less than if the NUP were to gain control through nonviolent direct action, such as Sudan’s 2019 revolution that has since backslid into authoritarian control by military junta (Jeffrey, 2022). Alternatively, in the face of a reactionary coup, the NUP’s groundwork in civil society organization and resistance tactics could be mobilized to prevent a consolidation of power, similar to the mass acts of disobedience in Burkina Faso in the wake of a 2015 coup (Zunes, 2017; 44-49). A major consideration, though, would be whether Museveni would respect the election results if the tallies did indicate an NRM defeat. Museveni’s own speeches dismiss the prospect of defeat at the ballot box, speaking to a sense of confidence in the ability of local NRM representatives like RDCs and UPDF intimidation tactics. Still, the momentum gained

from the first electoral victory of an opposition candidate could generate enough popular support to constrain Museveni's options to remain in power.

Commitment to Civil Resistance: During several interviews, subjects in leadership positions made reference to broadening the list of tactics being deployed by the NUP in its campaign to remove Museveni from power. As discussed in the preceding chapters, the debate over an electoral strategy or one of civil resistance continues to be contested within leadership circles; some contend that continuing to run NUP candidates despite NRM election rigging further legitimizes the party while simultaneously delegitimizing the regime, while others argue it is a waste of party resources. Other opposition leaders like Kizza Besigye, for example, have made multiple speeches calling for more direct action to remove Museveni from the presidency (Daily Monitor, 2020).

Were the NUP (along with its political allies) commit to a more confrontational strategy of civil resistance, a successful uprising would be far from certain. Harkening back to the preceding discussion of tactical innovations and diversity in resistance movements (Chenoweth, 2019), the NUP's tactics remain limited in reach, focusing more on mobilizing existing supporters through marches or rallies than forms of collective action aimed to force concessions from the regime. These other forms include economic strikes aimed to paralyze the Ugandan economy, or the defections of NRM or societal elites essential to the continuing operation of the state. If the NUP is unable to broaden its repertoire of resistance participants, the Museveni regime would likely be able to withstand the storm of civil unrest.



Bobi Wine Assassinated: Having already faced violent attacks and attempts on his life by pro-regime forces, the risk to Wine's health and well being remains a real threat. The most serious threat came in 2018 when gunmen attacked Wine's motorcade, killing his driver Yasiin Kawuma (Wandera, 2021). Despite the shield of international media attention that Wine's story has earned him, he remains vulnerable while in Uganda; tight regulations on firearms in Uganda prevents the NUP from maintaining armed security, and bureaucratic slow rolling by the NRM has disrupted efforts by the NUP to register and use armored vehicles for Wine's movement through the country (Kampala Dispatch, 2021). Still, Wine's strongest defense remains his place on the world stage and the spotlight that has been cast on his treatment by the Museveni regime. That being said, the willingness of the Museveni regime (and, arguably, greater willingness of a potential Muhoozi regime) to deploy violence against its opponents creates the sense that the targeting killing of Bobi Wine is a potential scenario. Were such events to unfold, the death of the country's most popular opposition leader would very likely serve as a catalyst for nationwide protests and social unrest. The NUP's subordinate leaders like MPs Mathias Mpuuga and Joel Ssenyonyi, party secretary general David Lewis Rubongoya, or Wine's wife Barbie Kyagulyanyi would likely step into the spotlight and assume leadership of the NUP; this however poses another potential risk to the party, as interviewees declined to elaborate on the party's succession plan. Thus, while the death of Bobi Wine would likely trigger massive amounts of popular support and give the NUP momentum, it is unclear if the party's leaders would be able to quickly take advantage of such a groundswell in order to force the removal of Museveni from power. Kizza Besigye

and the FDC, alternatively, could also return to the position of social leader of the Ugandan opposition, especially in the wake of increasing collaboration between the NUP and FDC.

Collapse of Regional Stability: At the conclusion of one interview with a student NUP leader, the subject offered his personal view of how the political future of Uganda will unfold. The subject described the plot of *The Dark Tower* series by Stephen King, in which the titular tower was threatened with destruction, which would unleash a wave of otherworldly beasts into the world and cause widespread violence and chaos. The subject likened the tower to the continued rule of Museveni, expressing his fears that even a President Bobi Wine would be confronted with a breakdown in societal order as the NRM party machinery dissolved and splinter factions sought regional control. While this account relies on metaphor to convey a sense of fear, the subject nonetheless highlights the potential for a breakdown in Uganda's relative stability. As has been seen in neighboring states like Sudan, democratic transitions from authoritarian rule are especially vulnerable to military coups; with the UPDF focused as much on regime stability as on recent expeditionary operations, it stands to reason that senior military leaders could step in to assert control over the country. Alternatively, the lack of Museveni's direction could represent an opportunity for regional factions or entities like the tribal kingdoms to assert their local monopoly of control. Such concerns were voiced anecdotally by non interview subjects, several of whom voiced support for the NRM precisely for this security concern. Were such a breakdown to occur, much violence would likely occur within the Central Region; as the site of both the dominant tribal

kingdom (Buganda) and the state government, the Central Region could very well see intense crackdowns by the UPDF seeking to monopolize control over both the Baganda people and pockets of NUP support. Secondly, a breakdown in internal Ugandan stability would likely lead to the UPDF withdrawing from its expeditionary security commitments in Somalia and the DRC border, creating opportunities for militant organizations like Al-Shabaab and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) to reconstitute and stage expanded operations.

#### **7.4 CLOSING THOUGHTS**

Whether any of these scenarios are born out, this research has demonstrated that the People Power Movement and National Unity Platform represent a new chapter in Uganda's political history. The mobilization of millions behind a message of democratic reform and the charismatic leadership of Bobi Wine, mediated through a complex digital landscape, offers insights for numerous disciplines, to include the interdisciplinary field of resistance scholars. As it relates to the struggle between authoritarianism and liberal democracy presented in this work's introduction, the continued adaptiveness and fluidity of form and function will likely be vital not only to the NUP's future but to the future of other nonviolent movements seeking similar objectives.

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