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By Dr. Stephanie M. Burchard

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French peacekeeping soldiers patrol the city of Bangui, Central African Republic, Wednesday, September 30, 2015. (Source: AP Photo.)

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A Kenyan soldier stands among piles of locally produced charcoal in the seaside town of Bur Garbo, Somalia. (Source: AP Photo/Ben Curtis, File.)

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In this photo taken Friday, September 11, 2015, former Prime Minister, Amama Mbabazi, left, chats with Forum for Democratic Change, Kizza Besigye, in Naguru, Uganda. (Source: AP Photo.)

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IDA’s Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

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Transitioning to Elections

CAR has been in crisis since a March 2013 coup installed former rebel leader [Michel Djotodia](#) as president. In January of 2014, in the midst of an increase in violence across the country, Djotodia was forced by regional leaders to resign, marking the beginning of the transition back to democratic rule. Catherine Samba-Panza, previously appointed mayor of the capital city, Bangui, was appointed interim president

Since 2013, Djotodia's initial backers, the Séléka, have been engaged in a low-intensity conflict with militia groups known as anti-balaka. While there is a religious component to the schism, with Séléka being mostly Muslim and anti-balaka groups being mostly Christian, the country has [no history of religious conflict](#). CAR does, however, have a long history of coups, dictators, and instability.

Presidential and parliamentary elections are scheduled for December 27, 2015. A referendum on changes to the current constitution is scheduled for two weeks earlier on December 13. These voting opportunities have already been [postponed](#) several times over the past year due to fears that insecurity and violence would accompany the vote.

Danger of Early Elections

The [international community](#) has strongly encouraged CAR to hold elections as soon as possible. [France](#) in particular has been vocal in encouraging elections in 2015 and expressing its desire to [withdraw](#) its troops from CAR. Many [analysts](#) and [nongovernmental organizations](#), on the other hand, have called for elections to be postponed yet again.

The [problems](#) associated with hastily arranged elections are legion, but the largest issue casting a shadow over CAR is the possibility of continuing or even increased conflict after an election. Research by [Brancati and Snyder](#) suggests that elections held too early—before demobilizing and building trusted institutions necessary to administer an election—generally lead to a re-ignition of conflict.

Despite a peace agreement signed in August 2015, the conflict in CAR has not been resolved and the violence has not receded. An international [peacekeeping force](#) of 10,000 troops, as well as French-led mission [Operation Sangaris](#), is currently deployed in CAR. Even more troubling, the [disarmament](#) process is proceeding at a slower-than-expected pace, meaning that rebel groups still have easy access to weaponry.

From an organizational standpoint, several logistical hurdles need to be addressed in post-conflict CAR to ensure that the election is free and fair. A representative voter registration process is absolutely necessary, and the government claims it has conducted one. But with nearly 1 million displaced persons, the majority of whom researchers believe to be [Muslim](#), it is unclear how representative the voter registration exercise could possibly be. It is also not clear that the country has the manpower needed to administer the electoral process. The president of the electoral commission [resigned](#) in early October, expressing doubt that an election could be successfully held in such an abbreviated timeframe.



French peacekeeping soldiers patrol the city of Bangui, Central African Republic, Wednesday, September 30, 2015. (Source: AP Photo.)

Conclusion

On October 31, Interim President Catherine Samba-Panza, appointed to office in January 2014, [assured](#) voters and the international community that elections would be held before the close of 2015. According to her, “There is no alternative for us because we cannot stay indefinitely in a transitional process.” There is truth to this concern. Without an internationally recognized government, CAR struggles to manage its foreign development assistance, and many businesses and governments are wary of doing business under such circumstances. The country also desperately needs solid leadership to unify the country and guide it out of this conflict.

But it is not clear that the country is ready or able to hold elections at this juncture. Rather than fast-tracking elections, or forcing the country to adhere to a strict, time-bound transition process, the international community might instead set specific benchmarks (disarmament, a representative voter registry, enhance electoral commission capacity, etc.) and help the interim government of CAR achieve certain milestones before proceeding with elections.

Elections do not resolve conflict; in fact, by their very nature, elections create competition and often foster political conflict. Political institutions—an electoral commission and the judiciary in particular—will be called upon to ensure that all participants accept the outcome of elections. Elections held without proper safeguards to protect the integrity of the result and without assurances of fair and trusted processes can do more harm than good. As things stand, it does not appear that the voter registration process has accurately captured the entire population. Elections held under such circumstances can cause displaced populations to feel marginalized, creating or reinforcing existing grievances and fueling further conflict. Elections held in an environment with readily available weapons and easily mobilized rebel groups, as is currently the case in CAR, may be a recipe for disaster.

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Observers Say Corruption Is Out of Control

On June 29, 2015, Kenya’s Auditor General released a report on the financial statements of the Kenyan government for the 2013–2014 fiscal year. According to the [report](#), only 3.8 percent of government revenue had been fairly recorded. Of the 101 financial statements available to the Auditor General, only 26 percent received unqualified opinions. Coming just a day following [President Obama’s speech](#) in Addis Ababa, in which he challenged African leaders with the statement: “Nothing will unlock Africa’s economic potential more than ending the cancer of corruption,” the audit report was widely discussed in Kenya.

Since the release of the Auditor General’s report, corruption has remained a major focus of political debate in Kenya. In early August, John Githongo, an internationally respected whistleblower and activist, warned that corruption was sliding out of control. Githongo [called](#) the government led by President Uruhu Kenyatta “the most rapacious administration that we have ever had.” In early November, yet another corruption scandal rocked the country when it was revealed that the [Ministry of Devolution and Planning](#) had been grossly overspending and mismanaging government funds. For example, pens normally priced at 10 cents were being purchased for as much as \$85 each.

After Denial, the Government Responds

The initial government response to the Auditor General’s report was to shrug it off. Finance Minister Henry Rotich was [reported](#) as saying that his ministry “has since established that there were no resources lost.” Only on November 13, a day following the release of the diplomatic statement noted above, did President Kenyatta take action. After a meeting with business executives, Kenyatta [stated](#), “We agreed we are going to work and come up with a framework of dealing with real corruption as well as perceived corruption.” He promised that a group composed of government and private sector representatives would present a report within a week on dealing with corruption. In a [statement](#) announcing this move, Kenyatta’s press spokesman lauded the roles of Kenya’s “vibrant democracy” and “free press” in bringing allegations of corruption to light. He also called upon Kenya’s international partners, including the United States and the European Union, to work harder to ensure that the proceeds of corruption used to buy property abroad are returned to Kenya.

Meanwhile, Somalia-Based Smuggling Continues

An article in the [July 10, 2014](#) edition of *Africa Watch* reported on the extensive documentation provided by a United Nations Security Council monitoring group on the involvement of the Kenya Defense Force (KDF) in violations of the ban on trafficking in charcoal produced in Somalia. In effect, the KDF was a participant in a trading network that provided the terrorist group al-Shabaab with its largest source of income.

The [most recent report](#) of the same UN group, released on October 9, provided an update on that situation. The report indicated that although the illegal trade in charcoal continues, al-Shabaab’s share of the income has diminished. This is apparently largely because al-Shabaab no longer controls any major ports used for exporting. In response, the terrorist group



A Kenyan soldier stands among piles of locally produced charcoal in the seaside town of Bur Garbo, Somalia. (Source: AP Photo/Ben Curtis, File.)

has sought to obstruct the trade and thereby deny profits to its opponents, which include the KDF and the Ras Kamboni militia. The cumulative effect, according to the monitoring group, has been a reduction in the charcoal trade and a fall in revenues.

Just as the export trade in smuggled charcoal has diminished, illicit trade in sugar from Somalia to Kenya is thriving. The UN monitoring group reported that sugar is imported to Somalia through the port of Kismayo, which is controlled by the KDF, and transported by truck across several border points. Al-Shabaab is reported to levy a toll of around \$1,000 on each truckload. This revenue is a major source of income for the terrorist group.

The UN monitoring group provided few details on the sugar smuggling network and avoided directly identifying the KDF or Kenyan government officials as part of the network. Those connections are, however, made in detail in “Black and White: Kenya’s Criminal Racket in Somalia,” a [report](#) released on November 11 by Journalists for Justice. The title refers to the complementary trades in charcoal, exported from Somalia, and sugar, which is imported. The same vessels may carry both cargos. According to the report, the KDF, al-Shabaab, and the Ras Kamboni militia are all heavily involved in the sugar trade. The report estimates that 150,000 tons of illicit sugar enter Kenya via the Somali port of Kismayo each year. This trade amounts to about 230 trucks with 14 tons leaving Kismayo for Kenya each week. Based on these estimates, the sugar trade may yield an income of \$12.2 million annually to al-Shabaab and a similar amount to members of the KDF and its Somali allies. Meanwhile, according to Journalists for Justice, the illegal charcoal trade continues to flourish.

Kenyan Government Rejects Accusations, but Somali Parliament Wants Kenyans Out

The Kenyan government was quick to denounce the report of Journalists for Justice. A [government spokesman](#) called the report “absolute garbage” and “intellectual dishonesty masquerading as research” that undermine Kenya’s effort to stabilize Somalia. A [KDF spokesman](#) also rejected the report, saying, “It is not correct and it is not factual.”

Whatever the accuracy of the report, it has put further strain on the relationship between Somalia and Kenya. That relationship has been under stress since the start of Kenya’s incursion into Somalia in October 2011, when Kenya supported the effort of the Ras Kamboni militia to establish itself as the de facto government in Jubaland, the portion of Somalia bordering Kenya. More recently, Kenyan plans to put in place a series of barriers and fences along the border with Somalia have strained ties. On November 14, the Somali parliament, reacting to the report by Journalists for Justice, reportedly [voted](#) overwhelmingly to demand that Kenya withdraw its forces from Somalia. This resolution is likely to have only symbolic effect since the KDF is present in the country as part of an African Union force that is authorized by the UN Security Council, but it is indicative of the poor state of relations.

Conclusion

The move by President Kenyatta to establish a committee to recommend courses of action to curb corruption may be a step in the right direction, but it is only a small one. With multiple, credible allegations of misconduct on the part of Kenyan officials and military personnel on the public record, it would seem important for the Kenyan government either to convincingly refute the charges or to take steps to ensure that misconduct ceases and that the guilty are called to justice. Absent such action, the confidence of the Kenyan public in their government, which has been a key partner of the United States in the fight against terrorism, seems likely to continue to decline.

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Campaign Season Begins Amid Police Suppression

Campaign season officially started in November, and Human Rights Watch has called on the Ugandan authorities to stop obstructing peaceful gatherings of candidates running against the sitting [president](#). Among the seven challengers officially nominated on November 4 are Dr. Kizza [Besigye](#), the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) nominee, and Faith Maureen Kyalya [Walube](#), the only female in the race and the former presidential advisor on poverty alleviation. Besigye has already lost three contested elections to Museveni. Amama [Mbabazi](#), a former prime minister and longtime ally of Museveni, is on the ballot as an independent candidate. Mbabazi was fired from his position within Museveni's government in 2014 for fear of his increased influence among members of the National Resistance Movement (NRM), particularly [younger](#) members, who feel Museveni has been in power for too long. Museveni came to power in a coup in [1986](#) and has won several contentious elections over his nearly three decades in office.

Rigged Elections and the Citizens' Coalition for Electoral Democracy (CCEDU)

The [prevailing](#) sentiment in the country is that there is little chance of a power change. In a [poll](#) conducted by Research World International, 61 percent of voters do not believe Museveni would peacefully hand over power if he is defeated in the election (19 percent think he can peacefully hand over power, 14 percent do not know, 6 percent are undecided, and 1 percent had no comment), and 32 percent do not believe elections will be free and fair. In the same poll, 94 percent of those questioned said they intend to vote. According to some analysts, however, [turnout](#) is expected to be even lower than it was in 2011, given the sense of inevitability that Museveni will win.

Museveni is using the levers of power available to him to ensure his reelection. In September, police in the towns of Soroti and Jinja used [teargas](#) to disperse a peaceful gathering of Mbabazi supporters. [Human Rights Watch](#) has called for this practice to be stopped, saying that people should be allowed to gather and hear information about each of the candidates. According to the police, large rallies were [illegal](#) at the time because the EC had not formally nominated Mbabazi. As recently as October, Besigye was placed under house arrest to prevent him from [leading](#) planned rallies. Police [brutality](#) may further undermine the election process through intimidation and fear. Finally, vote buying and bribery remain tactics actively used by candidates in Ugandan elections. The result could be elections that are neither free nor fair, with low levels of voter turnout.

At least one organization is taking steps to encourage higher voter turnout. Created in 2009, the [CCEDU](#) is a coalition of over 600 NGOs and 8,000 individuals working toward electoral democracy in Uganda. The CCEDU works to increase voter turnout and promote citizen participation in the electoral process, and it [encourages](#) citizens to demand free and fair elections from the government. It fights against apathy among citizens who believe their vote will not matter in the ultimate outcome. Like other grassroots campaigns, [CCEDU](#) urges voters not to succumb to bribery and to instead choose the elected officials they feel would best represent their country. CCEDU has been very active in the run-up to the 2016 elections.



In this photo taken Friday, September 11, 2015, former Prime Minister, Amama Mbabazi, left, chats with Forum for Democratic Change, Kizza Besigye, in Naguru, Uganda. (Source: AP Photo.)

Conclusion

Under Uganda's first-past-the-post system of elections, it is likely Museveni will succeed at winning another term in February. The presence of two strong opposition candidates could work in Museveni's favor by splitting the vote. This, coupled with reported bribery and strong-arm tactics of the police, suggest that Museveni will emerge as the victor once again. But the electoral climate could look very different in Uganda in 2021, whether or not Museveni is again a candidate. Some see the [departure](#) of Mbabazi and his supporters from the NRM as a culture shift and a harbinger of further change. The key question may be whether the opposition in 2021 will be able to unite around a single, strong candidate. Success in that regard could make for a more competitive election.

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