Politicization of COVID-19 in Uganda: a critical reflection on government interventions and citizens' perceptions

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 outbreak in Uganda coincided with the 2021 general elections. Facing strong opposition, Yoweri Museveni was standing at a critical juncture whether he would mark his 35th year as the president. This chapter situates COVID-19 in Museveni's regime. It examines how Museveni and his party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), instrumentalized the pandemic, how citizens perceived the government interventions, and their consequences for Uganda's political future. We argue that, although the instrumentalization of the pandemic might have worked favorably for the ruling party to win the elections, the government interventions revealed the shortcomings of the semi-authoritarian regime—the skewed relationship between the central and local government and incapabilities of local governments—that might challenge Museveni's regime in the future.

Date of Publication: May 25, 2025

Publisher: Springer Nature Link

Book Title: Practical Wisdom and Resilience Overcoming Downside Risk, Hanai, K., Muchetu, R.G., Kinyua, L.K., Mine, Y. (eds)

Book ISBN: Print: 978-981-96-4454-4 and Online: 978-981-96-4455-1

URL: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-4455-1_5

DOI: doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-4455-1_5

Item Type: Book Chapter

Language: English

Keywords: *Government interventions, Local governments, Politicization, Resilience, Risk-perception, Semi-authoritarianism*