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# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

In 2010 and 2011, sub-Saharan Africa has seen a wave of general elections. This report highlights the political development indicated by the recent round of elections in the African Great Lakes, a region that has long been associated with intense warfare and violence. Despite improvements in security and some socioeconomic achievements, the political evolution in the region since the last round of elections between 2003 and 2006 shows worrying trends. Clear signs of electoral authoritarianism are coupled with new divisions and increasing fragmentation. The report argues that these trends sow the seeds for repeated exclusion and instability and should thus be a serious concern for international actors.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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*Judith Vorrath*

## Political Trends in the African Great Lakes Region

### Summary

- Despite recent elections in Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda and upcoming elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Great Lakes region shows worrying trends toward electoral authoritarianism and political fragmentation, with new divisions that intensify the potential for confrontation.
- A shrinking political space and a tight grip on the state by the ruling elites and their parties are signs of authoritarianism in the region—a cause of concern since armed conflict in all four countries has been strongly linked to a history of exclusion under autocratic regimes.
- New divisions beyond previous alignments in armed conflicts also have occurred and already led to serious confrontations, flight, and at times violence. An increasing political fragmentation has become visible, and splits embroil intraparty conflicts in the political landscape instead of resolving them.
- The two trends—electoral authoritarianism and political fragmentation—are mutually reinforcing within and across the countries of the region and risk jeopardizing economic and social progress in Uganda and Rwanda as well as an emerging vibrant civil society in Burundi and the DRC. In light of the history of conflict and autocratic regimes in the region, these trends have to be a serious concern for local and international actors. The preference for stable leadership, economic performance, and security considerations regardless of political conduct has been a fatal miscalculation before in the Great Lakes region. Rather, acting early and using pressure constructively, the international community should do what it can to support a more open and less fragmented political sphere in the Great Lakes countries.

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Recent international attention to African affairs has focused largely on the uprisings in North Africa, in connection with the larger wave of protests across the Middle East, followed by crucial polls in Southern Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, and Nigeria. The situation in the Great Lakes region—including Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and Uganda<sup>1</sup>—has gotten much less coverage. Yet it is in this region that there is a clear risk of recently observed trends toward electoral authoritarianism and fragmentation halting or even reversing positive political and economic developments. Among such developments, the end of widespread armed conflicts in a part of the world that has long been associated with intense warfare and human suffering is the most remarkable.

Throughout the 1990s, the ongoing civil wars in Burundi, Rwanda, the DRC, and Uganda were mutually reinforcing and strongly linked in a regional conflict formation<sup>2</sup> that at times seemed almost impossible to break up. Since the countries' most recent political transitions, however, there has been no relapse into major warfare in the region, either within or between states. The situation is still fragile, but all four countries, including the DRC, are more peaceful today than they were ten to fifteen years ago. Local violence continues with alarming consequences for the population in eastern DRC, and the regional conflict formation as a whole is not resolved. Several armed groups originating from the other countries in the region still operate in eastern DRC, namely the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) from Uganda, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) from Rwanda, and—as a recent UN report found—again the National Liberation Front (FNL) from Burundi. But despite these threats and challenges, the violence is not nearly as severe as it was in the 1990s and during the Second Congo War. The improvement in security shows in the reduced numbers of displaced people in the Great Lakes. At the peak of the civil wars, there were approximately 2.7 million refugees from the region and more than 4 million internally displaced people. The large majority of these have left the camps, shelters, and other places of refuge, and many have returned home, even though the process is far from complete and (re)integration often difficult.

When warfare and severe violence largely ended, there was great hope for the region's political and economic development. All four countries underwent political transitions that led to a first round of multiparty elections between 2003 and 2006.<sup>3</sup> Tensions among the governments of the region also eased significantly. The Pact on Security, Stability, and Development adopted by the International Conference on the Great Lakes region in 2006 was one indication of this, particularly as it included a common security strategy. Though many parts of that strategy have not progressed since the pact was signed, the countries did cooperate in dismantling armed groups on Congolese territory. The secret agreement between DRC president Joseph Kabila and Rwandan president Paul Kagame in November 2008—followed by action against the FDLR in the Congo and the arrest of National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) leader Laurent Nkunda—as well as the joint operations of Congolese and Ugandan forces against the LRA in 2009 might not have been successful, but they show that hostility between the formerly opposed governments has lessened.

Economically, all four countries remain in the category of low human development according to the Human Development Index of 2010.<sup>4</sup> However, there has been a general upward trend over the past decade, even for Burundi and the DRC; Rwanda and Uganda already had seen positive movement before that, and donors have hailed them frequently for their social and economic progress. In 2007, Rwanda and Burundi joined the East African Community, which launched a common market in 2010.

Even with all the above achievements, however, political developments in recent years have taken a worrying path. None of the countries has consolidated democratic governance; on the contrary, there are clear signs of electoral authoritarianism and political fragmentation. These two trends are cause for concern, because they are mutually reinforcing and push

**Table 1. Recent rounds of Great Lake elections**

Country	Second round of elections	First round of elections after transition
Burundi	June 2010: presidential July 2010: parliamentary	July 2005: parliamentary August 2005: presidential = indirect by Senate and National Assembly
Rwanda	August 2010: presidential (parliamentary already in September 2008)	August 2003: presidential September 2003: legislative
Uganda	February 2011: presidential and parliamentary	February 2006: presidential and parliamentary
Democratic Republic of Congo	Forthcoming, possibly November 2011: presidential and parliamentary	July 2006: parliamentary and presidential, first round October 2006: presidential, second round

the countries back into earlier patterns of authoritarian governance and exclusion, sowing the seeds for future conflict.

## Challenges and Trends in Recent Elections

In Burundi, the DRC, and Rwanda, elections in 2005, 2006, and 2003, respectively, marked the end of a postwar transition based on peace agreements<sup>5</sup>; in Uganda the 2006 elections were the first multiparty elections after Yoweri Museveni's takeover of power in 1986 and the end of so-called no-party democracy with a referendum in 2005. The recent round of general elections in the Great Lakes—in Burundi (2010), Rwanda (2010), and Uganda (2011), as well as forthcoming elections in the DRC (possibly November 2011)—is the second after political transitions were officially concluded (see table 1).

The second round of elections after a transition is particularly important and revealing because it is an initial test for consolidation. A change in power through elections becomes possible for the first time, and competitors' reaction to this concrete option can indicate how open and fair the system really is. In addition, international attention tends to wane in a post-transition period, so that a second round of elections is usually less intensely monitored, testing local ownership of the process.

Therefore, a closer look at trends in the recent Great Lakes elections in Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda, including an analysis of the emerging situation in the DRC, is essential. This report does not presume that the situation is the same in all four countries; rather it outlines two core tendencies challenging the development of democracy that are observable to different degrees across the region. On the one hand, there are continuing or increasing authoritarian tendencies in the ruling governments, and on the other hand, emerging divisions and fragmentation indicate new sources for conflict and political gridlock. Despite the urgent challenges in other areas of the continent, this report strongly calls on international actors to pay close attention and take action before another round of instability plagues the region.

### *Electoral Authoritarianism*

Even as electoral authoritarian regimes in North Africa and the Middle East have unraveled recently due to popular protests, the Great Lakes countries appear to be moving toward this model. Not everywhere in the region are elections merely a façade of multiparty democracy and stripped of any value. But they increasingly serve the purpose of confirming the current leaders in power. In Uganda, Rwanda, and the DRC, there has been no real change in government, respectively, since the last takeover of power by Museveni's National Resistance

Movement (NRM) in 1986, the victory of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in 1994, and Laurent Kabila's overthrow of Mobutu in 1997.<sup>6</sup> Only in Burundi did the current president, Pierre Nkurunziza, initially come to power by the ballot box in 2005.

In all three presidential elections held in 2010 and 2011, the incumbent was confirmed in office. In Burundi, most opposition parties boycotted the presidential and parliamentary elections in June and July 2010 after communal elections led to a clear victory of the ruling National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD). As the sole candidate, President Nkurunziza won 91 percent of votes, and his CNDD-FDD won 81 percent in elections to the National Assembly. In Rwanda, President Kagame won 93 percent of votes in August 2010, while all three other candidates received 5 percent or less. Uganda's election commission announced 68 percent of votes for President Museveni in February 2011, an increase from the last election, held in 2006; his main opponent, Kizza Besigye, followed with 26 percent. Museveni's party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), secured about three-fourths of the seats in the legislature in parliamentary elections taking place the same day.

The lack of change in power is not direct proof of façade elections; though outcomes of over 90 percent for an officeholder seem very unlikely in a competitive, free system, the results could be due to high voter satisfaction and the presidents' popularity. However, there are other, very direct indications of a trend toward electoral authoritarianism. In all four countries, the ruling leaders and their parties restrained political freedoms and used state resources to stay in power. This follows a more general pattern in the behavior of hybrid regimes in Africa, shifting away from influencing election outcomes on voting day itself toward actions by the ruling party before the election, such as intimidating and excluding the opposition.<sup>7</sup> In the Great Lakes, this trend has been most visible in Rwanda. Since the last presidential elections in 2003, the ruling RPF has exerted a high level of control over the political sphere. The opposition as well as civil society and the independent media are subject to frequent harassment. An International Crisis Group assessment that the constitution adopted in 2003 would leave practically no room for gradual liberalization later proved to be regrettably right.<sup>8</sup>

The Rwandan parliamentary elections in 2008 confirmed that the political space was so tightly controlled that there was no real opposition to the RPF. But the 2010 elections were accompanied by yet another wave of harassment and intimidation, including the suspension of two independent newspapers, the exclusion of three new opposition parties from the elections, and the arrest of opposition members as well as a U.S. lawyer who was trying to legally defend an arrested opposition politician in the run-up to the elections. The killings of a journalist working for a newspaper closed by the Rwandan authorities and of the vice president of an opposition party that was not allowed to register for the elections raised accusations of government involvement, though this could not be fully substantiated. As tensions increased, there were also grenade attacks ahead of and directly after the elections.

Similarly, though to a lesser degree than in Rwanda, in Uganda the government limited the space for opposition parties, civil society, and the media.<sup>9</sup> In 2009, four radio stations were closed several months after violent clashes in Kampala, and several newspaper journalists were charged with sedition on dubious grounds. The same year also saw disputes over Museveni's renewal of the election commission, the breakup of protests, and the arrests of several opposition members by the police. Similar incidents of the police crushing opposition demonstrations also took place in 2010. The Ugandan state institutions are under the control of the ruling party, which used state resources in its election campaign.<sup>10</sup> Civil society groups face legal restrictions as they have to renew their official registration regularly, leaving room for the control of their activities and limiting political activism. Though vio-

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lence in 2010 was not widespread, the month of the elections saw attacks, harassment, and intimidation by the authorities. On election day, a journalist was shot by troops who fired at an opposition politician, and there were reports of violence, particularly in the eastern part of the country, where seventy people were injured, according to the Red Cross.

In Burundi the political space is somewhat more open. There is a lively civil society and media landscape, and opposition parties engaged in the public debate ahead of the latest elections.<sup>11</sup> But in recent elections, restrictions and abuses have taken a form that is all too familiar from other countries of the region. During the campaign between May and the end of July 2010, there was a huge wave of arrests of opposition party members, particularly after attacks against some CNDD-FDD offices during the presidential campaign. By then, the opposition had already quit the electoral process and formed an alliance in response to the communal election results, though there had been no evidence of massive fraud.<sup>12</sup> With tension mounting between the CNDD-FDD and most opposition parties, a significant number of opposition politicians went into hiding or exile, including the heads of several parties. With the boycott, the opposition certainly had its share of responsibility in this crisis. But the group leaving the country comprised very different personalities who all felt threatened in the light of increasing authoritarian tendencies. In response to the election boycott, the government practically banned all meetings or activities of opposition parties. Another indication of the shrinking space for open discourse was the expulsion of the Human Rights Watch (HRW) representative for Burundi ahead of the elections after publication of a critical report; within the same month, Rwanda also expelled its HRW representative.

More important, repressive practices by the Burundian government had occurred before the immediate run-up to the elections. Already in 2006, after the CNDD-FDD takeover, the government had made a dubious coup allegation, followed by the arrest of several opposition politicians, including former president Domitien Ndayizeye. The period in between the two rounds of elections also saw the frequent arrest and harassment of journalists and members of civil society, most notably in the second half of 2008. Opposition parties could not operate freely, particularly at the local level. The ruling party used its militant youth wing as an instrument of intimidation. Other parties created similar groups in response, leading to a militarization of Burundian politics. The ruling party dominates state institutions down to the communal level, and functions assigned almost exclusively to CNDD-FDD members brought about clear organizational and financial advantages in the election campaign.

All three countries with recent elections have seen an increase in or a manifestation of authoritarian practices. All incumbents relied on state resources in their campaigns. Though violence linked to elections was not widespread, the security situations in Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda all worsened, and according to *CrisisWatch*,<sup>13</sup> there have been no overall improvements since then. These patterns are reproduced in the largest and still most fragile country of the region, the DRC.

After a DRC election process in 2006 that international actors largely saw as hopeful and positive, an authoritarian trend has gripped the country. Political power is strongly centralized around the president's office, and President Joseph Kabila's enactment of a new constitution in January 2011 further reinforced the lack of checks and balances. Many members of the opposition in parliament boycotted the adoption of amendments that abolish the second round of presidential elections and give the president the power to dissolve provincial assemblies and recall governors. The changes also undermine the independence of the judiciary by placing the prosecutor's office under direct ministerial control. Furthermore, the law for a new electoral commission in 2011 gives four representatives of political parties to the presidential majority and three to the opposition, which can hardly constitute an independent body.

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As in the other countries of the region, political freedom in the DRC is restricted; repression and payments are regular means of dealing with contenders. Cases such as the murder of human rights campaigner Floribert Chebeya Bahizire in June 2010 have rightly fueled national and international concerns, as expressed by a U.S. State Department press release.<sup>14</sup> All these developments are evidence of increasingly authoritarian measures by a president who initially seemed to deviate from previous patterns of governance in the country. The decision making in the increasingly small circle of members of a parallel cabinet around Kabila, accompanied by the exploitation of the state's resources and high levels of corruption, have raised questions about a resemblance to the Mobutu period.<sup>15</sup> There is hardly any doubt among observers that Kabila's efforts to be reelected will succeed, whether elections take place in November 2011 or with some delay in 2012.

Authoritarian measures thus have become a somewhat common ground for governments in the Great Lakes region. The degree, context, and concrete appearance of the phenomenon vary, and the political opposition has not always been capable and responsible. But overall, governance trends in the four countries are worrisome. The DRC and Burundi began the period after conflict with peace agreements and a more inclusive transition compared with events in Uganda and Rwanda, which built on the military victories of today's ruling movements. But the results have become similar: a shrinking political space and a strong grip on the state by the ruling elite.

### ***New Divisions and Political Fragmentation***

Electoral authoritarianism has severely obstructed the consolidation of democracy in the region. A second troublesome development, which became apparent in the first round of elections between 2003 and 2006 but attracted much less attention, is the occurrence of new kinds of division and a general fragmentation of the political landscape. Beyond the already mentioned political violence, with killings and grenade attacks around the recent round of elections, there are new lines of tension in all four countries that are not simply a remake of earlier divisions in armed conflict.<sup>16</sup> In Rwanda and Burundi, intraethnic tensions have run high since the transition out of conflict. In Rwanda, this is linked to the exile of large numbers of Rwandans and the strong bases of the RPF among them. After the return of the mostly Tutsi refugees and the RPF takeover in 1994, large numbers of Hutu left the country, but also, in a second wave, many of the so-called genocide survivors. This group largely comprised Tutsi who had remained inside Rwanda during its darkest period and often felt like second-class citizens after the RPF took control of the state apparatus. This division became prominent inside the Tutsi elite, even within the RPF and the army. It also led to unexpected coalitions of Hutu groups and genocide survivors and a general radicalization of the opposition in exile. Divisions also became apparent among the different earlier exile components of the RPF. Mostly, the English-speaking "Ugandans" are seen as building the core of today's RPF leadership, while cadres who returned from French-speaking host countries such as Burundi feel sidelined.<sup>17</sup>

In a similar manner, divisions among the different Hutu groups that emerged in the course of the civil war are still relevant in Burundian politics. The CNDD as the main Hutu rebel movement in the conflict was essentially a splinter group from the largest Hutu party at the time and later on decomposed into several factions, of which two remain politically relevant today. In negotiations and the following transition after 2001, it became apparent that conflicts among the different Hutu actors were often rooted in tensions between political and military components and divisions due to exile, since important parts of the rebel leadership as well as some political leaders were based abroad.<sup>18</sup> The militarization among the ruling CNDD-FDD and other Hutu parties in the run-up to the 2010 elections indicates that these divisions remain important.

In Uganda, strong tensions have developed between the government and the Baganda, the largest ethnic group in the country and one that remains strongly attached to its history as a kingdom and its current monarch, who is recognized as a cultural leader. In a riot in September 2009 linked to the issue of land reform, several people were killed and hundreds arrested. In the first half of 2010 there was another step of escalation when the royal tombs of the Baganda kings burned down under obscure circumstances and security forces killed several people in the protests that followed. Even with a history of strained relations between the old Buganda kingdom and central authorities, this development signifies a new mode of confrontation. Museveni had to reach out to the Baganda in his election campaign, but central contentious issues are unresolved, such as land ownership and the installation of a federal system giving the group a greater say. Thus, there is potential for further conflict.

In addition to its ongoing security problems in its east, the DRC has faced new local revolts in Equateur and Bas-Congo. Security forces have moved in to crush both challenges to central authority, which in Bas-Congo alone led to several hundred people killed in 2007 and 2008. There, the banned Bundu dia Kongo movement seeks greater autonomy for the western Bas-Congo province. Conflicts in both places remain unresolved, and tensions continue making these areas two potential arenas of future conflict beyond eastern Congo, where a new alliance between CNDP and FDLR factions in North Kivu has added another concern to the already fragile security situation. The 2006 elections also saw an east-west split in voting patterns: most of Kabila's support was from the eastern provinces, while his opponent, Jean-Pierre Bemba, was most popular in the west. Serious tensions along these lines are, however, less likely at present, as Bemba is detained and on trial before the International Criminal Court and his party has subsequently been weakened by leadership struggles.

The newly emerging conflicts in the countries of the Great Lakes are part of a larger process of political fragmentation since the first round of elections, an expression of more deeply rooted disputes between as well as within parties, which external actors have all too often ignored or underestimated, as they are seen as almost random, short-term struggles. But these tensions have been quite persistent and have left visible marks in the countries' political landscapes. In addition to the fragmentation based on the divisions outlined above—particularly the intraethnic divisions in Burundi and Rwanda—the recent rifts in the ruling parties also share a common origin. Factionalism in former rebel movements, which all four ruling parties essentially are, is common, even after a political transition. An armed group often does not completely transform itself into a political party; frequently, internal processes remain rather undemocratic, and military cadres can maintain a strong influence on the decision-making process. The results are often harsh responses to internal criticism as the core party leadership tightens its hold on power, much as governments led by those parties secure control of the state. Party leaders often also have difficulty balancing different internal groups' demands, such as those of former fighters and the rather intellectual cadres.

The CNDD-FDD in Burundi has seen several waves of internal tension. In April 2007 the head of the party was dismissed and arrested, followed by the defection and expulsion of twenty-two deputies from the CNDD-FDD. More recently, there have been controversies around allegations of corruption and silencing practices inside the party. Similarly, conflicts among the core group of English-speaking RPF cadres have become apparent in Rwanda. A general who was part of the inner circle before a fallout with Kagame defected.<sup>19</sup> The arrest of two senior officers and a military reshuffle in 2010 can also be seen as an indication of rifts in the RPF leadership. In Uganda, the party of Museveni's main rival, who originally had been a close ally in the guerrilla war, profited from rifts in the NRM after Museveni decided to run for a third term. This left other NRM leaders in the waiting line disgruntled. Several of those politicians, attracted by the opposition Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), also

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were from the same region of Uganda as Museveni. In the DRC, Vital Kamerhe, a close ally of Kabila, resigned from his People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy (PPRD) in December 2010 to create his own party and run for president. The initial dispute with President Kabila was over allowing Rwandan forces to be deployed to eastern Congo, but Kamerhe justified his resignation by claiming disillusionment with the turn the political party and the administration had taken. These signs of factionalism in the ruling parties are accompanied by obscure decision making in small circles around the presidents, often involving military officers. Thus, fragmentation accompanies authoritarian practices, and the two seem to be mutually reinforcing.

The opposition is by no means spared from fragmentation. In the DRC, for example, the alliance led by Bemba's party in 2006 has largely fallen apart, with many members of parliament now frequently voting with Kabila's coalition. Opposition politicians who have already announced their candidacy for the presidential race display little willingness to step back in favor of creating a unified opposition to President Kabila. This will almost certainly give Kabila a majority in the first—and, after the amendment, only—round of presidential elections. Several opposition parties, such as that founded by Kamerhe, are the result of factionalism within the ruling party. But factionalism within opposition parties is not uncommon either, as in the case of the main opposition party in Burundi in 2008, when a group of members of parliament left their faction and founded a new party. The ruling party can spur or fuel such rifts to weaken the opposition.

One general problem with fragmentation is that the differences causing it are not of an ideological nature; rather, the party landscape embodies the rifts of past political conflicts based on intraethnic, regional, and other divisions. Furthermore, fragmentation limits the opposition's influence, making a change in power through elections even more unlikely, despite the antagonism that the authoritarian tendencies of the Great Lakes governments have created. Under current conditions, the opposition also has difficulties building wider local bases in the population, leading to miscalculations about their parties' influence and the unpopularity of the incumbent.

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## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Why should international actors worry about electoral authoritarianism and political fragmentation in the Great Lakes region? Surely, a shrinking political space and human rights abuses are themselves causes for concern. But there are also wider implications. First, regimes between democracy and autocracy have been found to be especially conflict-prone. It would be dangerous if the countries of the region got stuck in this hybrid state. But increasing authoritarianism can hardly be the answer to this problem, since armed conflict in all four countries has been linked strongly to a history of exclusion under different autocratic regimes. Even if countries such as Uganda and Rwanda have demonstrated important economic and social progress, and Burundi and the DRC have vibrant civil societies, the future depends on further political development.

Western governments should not merely list democracy and governance as top priorities of their cooperation with Africa but act on it before a serious deterioration sets in. A support for strong institutions, not for strongmen, as President Barack Obama said in his 2009 Accra speech, must finally materialize in the Great Lakes. Otherwise, political exclusion, as seen in recent election processes, risks a serious backlash. A push by international actors for dialogue and inclusion—not in government, but in the political space more generally—is essential. Elections open a window for outside support, but also monitoring and pressure. Western donors should focus not merely on a free and fair vote but also on the freedom of expression and the use of state resources in the run-up to elections.

Second, new political divisions in all four countries, ranging beyond previous alignments in armed conflicts, have become the basis for serious confrontations, flight, and at times violence. The process of political fragmentation has led to a narrowed power base of ruling elites and a weakened opposition, making a change in power more unlikely. Furthermore, intraparty conflicts have become embroiled in the political landscape by split-offs and expulsions. Without serious attempts at dialogue and conflict resolution, these divisions could potentially create far-reaching security threats in the future. Outside actors need to properly assess and address the sources of emerging conflicts in the Great Lakes region, encompassing not only security challenges stemming from the initial armed conflict but also more recent divisions. Fragmentation could be restricted by support for the transformation of armed movements, political dialogue, and training programs by international NGOs, but also by donors' demands for the opening up of decision-making processes.

Third, the two trends of authoritarianism and political fragmentation are mutually reinforcing within and across the Great Lakes countries, as the shrinking political space has created and fueled newly emerging tensions, within as well as among parties. Governments are likely to answer challenges to their authority with yet another round of tightening control. The trends are also accompanied by strengthening relations of the heads of states, reflected in the presence of Kagame and Museveni at the DRC's fiftieth independence anniversary celebrations in June 2010; more than once in the past, strong regional links have reinforced ongoing negative developments.

All the observations together indicate that the consolidation of democracy remains a vague hope for the countries of the Great Lakes. Substantial improvement depends on local governments and political elites, who bear large parts of the responsibility for the current situation. But international actors can make sure not to repeat the mistakes of the past. The preference for stable leadership, sound economic performance, and security considerations, without accounting for political conduct, has been a fatal miscalculation before in the Great Lakes region. Neither the popularity of the Rwandan and Ugandan governments with donors and Western leaders nor the operation of Ugandan and Burundian troops in Somalia on behalf of Western security interests can belie the worrying political trends.

When international attention focuses on sub-Saharan Africa only in situations of acute crises—as in Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Côte d'Ivoire—it sends a fatal message to local actors. To counter the worrying trends outlined in this report, the international community should act early and use pressure constructively. The DRC elections, foreseen for November 2011, are the next crucial entry point for external support, cooperation, and pressure for real improvement. The country, the largest in the region, has been and remains the focal point of a regional conflict formation, and there is leverage, as the international presence is still far-reaching.

The international actors in the DRC should press for a more inclusive and fair process in the run-up to the presidential and parliamentary elections. Under current conditions, the usefulness of elections is entirely called into question, as they risk reinforcing existing patterns. In the time remaining, pressure from Western and African actors, such as the African Union, is essential for an independent electoral commission and improvements in the institutional framework more generally. But apart from short-term measures linked to elections, a more consistent medium- to long-term engagement in the DRC and the region is necessary.

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## Notes

1. Tanzania is also part of the Great Lakes region but differs from the other four countries in several important respects; among others, it did not go through a civil war followed by political transition. Thus its political evolution is not a subject of this report.
2. This concept has been defined and outlined for the African Great Lakes region; see Barnett R. Rubin, Andrea Armstrong, and Gloria R. Ntegeye, eds., "Regional Conflict Formation in the Great Lakes Region of Africa: Structure, Dynamics and Challenges for Policy," paper for the Center on International Cooperation, New York University, and the African Peace Forum, Safari Park Hotel, Nairobi, November 11–13, 2001.
3. For details see following section.
4. See the 2010 rankings in the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index (HDI), available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/> (accessed May 23, 2011).
5. In the Rwandan case, the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) officially based the transition process on the Arusha agreement from 1993 after its military victory in 1994.
6. He was succeeded by his son Joseph Kabila after his assassination in 2001 without any official selection process.
7. See Denis M. Tull and Andreas Mehler, "The Hidden Costs of Power-Sharing: Reproducing Insurgent Violence in Africa," *African Affairs* 104 (2005): 383. This does not mean that vote rigging and fraud have not occurred at all. But the main focus in the following is on the more severe shrinking of the political space.
8. International Crisis Group, "Rwanda at the End of the Transition: A Necessary Political Liberalization," Africa Report no. 53, Brussels, November 2002.
9. While Rwanda is categorized as not free in the Freedom House Index, Uganda is partly free.
10. For example, in 2011 the chairman of the parliament's public account committee stated that most of a \$260 million supplementary budget had been allocated to bodies connected to the Museveni campaign; see Ioannis Gatsiounis, "Vote-Buying Charges Taint Uganda Election," *The Washington Times*, February 18, 2011.
11. Burundi also was the only country among the three with an independent electoral commission, though the ruling party first tried to impose nominations for the commission in its favor and only agreed to a more balanced setup after protests from the opposition and intense external pressure.
12. The national and international observer missions both undermined the credibility of the communal elections and evaluated the influence of irregularities on the overall result as not significant. In the case of the Rwandan and Ugandan elections, there were more critical voices, for example, from the United States, European Union, and Commonwealth, on the uneven political playing field and authoritarian moves by the governments ahead of elections, though the mostly calm atmosphere of the voting was lauded as well.
13. Monthly bulletin by the International Crisis Group, available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/crisiswatch.aspx> (accessed May 23, 2011).
14. Philip J. Crowley, "Death of Floribert Chebeya Bahizire," press statement, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC, June 4, 2010, available at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2010/06/142678.htm> (accessed May 11, 2011).
15. See, for example, François Soudan, "RDC: Joseph Kabila, Mobutu Light?," *Jeune Afrique*, February 2011.
16. Despite or because of the official condemnation and unity campaigns in Rwanda and Uganda, ethnic and regional affiliations are still very relevant. In recent elections in Rwanda, where a debate on Hutu and Tutsi grievances has been taboo, a reemergence of ethnic sentiments has been noted. By contrast, in Burundi, where the peace negotiations sparked an open discourse on ethnic issues and past conflicts, the importance of ethnic divisions has diminished significantly.
17. There has been a corresponding shift in language policy. After English became the third official language in Rwanda in 1994, it replaced French as the language of instruction in schools in 2008.
18. The previously relevant regional divide—south versus center-north—also played a role.
19. He sought asylum in South Africa, where he was shot in the run-up to the 2010 Rwandan elections but survived.

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