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Preventing Change and Protecting the Regime: Crime Preventers, Local Livelihoods, and the 2016 Ugandan Elections

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ABSTRACT

In Uganda's 2016 national election, international and national commentators raised questions about the role that the government's Crime Preventer Programme would play. Many claimed that they would be used "as tools" to rig the elections, intimidate voters, and be manipulated into a voting block for the ruling NRM regime. Based on over 250 interviews and eight months of ethnographic fieldwork between February 2014 and February 2016, this paper presents a study of the Crime Preventer Programme in Gulu District, examining how it developed from a seemingly innocuous community policing programme into a tool to recruit a valuable segment of the population that might otherwise have been a strong supporter of the Opposition. In particular, I ask why the government fostered a program that connected unemployed, marginalized and disenfranchised youth, who theoretically could have used their newfound organization to challenge the state, whether through votes or violence. I examine specific instances when Gulu District's Crime Preventers were mobilized to support overtly political ends, such as altering the voter registration list and blocking movement of Opposition candidates. I use these anecdotes to analyse why youth participated while posing neither a threat to the government, nor inspiring a meaningful backlash from the Opposition. I find that—despite low and unpredictable rewards and high social and psychological cost of supporting a government that many Acholis find reprehensible—the high rate of participation in Crime Preventers and obedience to state authorities can be explained through the militarization of Uganda's neo-patrimonial system and the concomitant securitization of livelihoods.

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Preventing Change and Protecting the Regime: Crime Preventers, Local Livelihoods, and the 2016 Ugandan Elections¹

Introduction

In the months before the 2016 presidential elections in Uganda, tensions were high. The Secretary General of the ruling party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) announced that anyone “disrupting peace” would be shot (Wesonga 2016); in the week before the election alone, the main opposition candidate, Kizza Besigye, was detained five times (Marima 2016); and the NRM ran election ads featuring skulls from their 1986 battle against the Obote regime. The NRM District Registrar stated that the ads were meant to remind the “country that poor choice in the coming election can take the country back to war” (Wandera and Kolyangha 2016). Against this backdrop, the government undertook a massive expansion of its “Crime Preventer Programme”. Uganda’s Crime Preventers are volunteer auxiliary forces that support the police in intelligence gathering and other duties, and go through at times gruelling ad hoc training. By December 2015, police and government spokesmen were claiming that they had recruited somewhere between 1 and 10 million. Nominally intended to curb crime in local communities and help provide security during the election, Crime Preventers were quickly pigeonholed as tools of the ruling regime, “militia” and “crime promoters” who at times used their new positions to extract for personal gain. The Inspector General of Police reportedly announced that Crime Preventers would be armed and should prepare to work with the military in case of an emergency (Enanga 2016). Rumours suggested that five Crime Preventers would stand guard at each polling station to arrest anyone who caused “chaos”.

But in Gulu, Election Day itself was eerily calm. Although it was the middle of dry season, voters awoke to an overcast and stormy sky. At polling stations across Gulu Town, voters huddled under trees or the overhang of nearby buildings, seeking shelter from the rain and waiting up to four hours after the scheduled time for voting to start. At each station, plain-clothed Crime Preventers milled about with voters,² along with one unarmed Special Election Constable—an individual who receives a week-long intensive training on election procedure and is contracted specifically to preside over elections. Some optimistic members of opposition parties suggested the change in weather was an omen for a change in leadership. They were wrong—although contested, the results placed 30-year incumbent, President Yoweri Museveni, in office with 60% of the vote (Kron 2016). Similarly, speculations that Crime Preventers would intimidate voters and manipulate votes did not come to pass.

So why, then, did the Ugandan government recruit and train Crime Preventers? And perhaps more puzzlingly, why did youth take on this unpaid yet demanding commitment? The answers to

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² A report by Citizens Election Observer Network Uganda stated that Crime Preventers were present in 13% of polling stations (The Citizens Elections Observers Network – Uganda 2016), although given the absence of identifiable markers, it may have been more or less.

these questions highlight the neo-patrimonial logic of the NRM's militarized regime,³ and how this logic shapes governance and government. Based on over 250 interviews conducted in Gulu, Pader, Lira, Anaka, and Kampala between February 2014 and February 2016, I argue that due to persistent poverty and unemployment, youth in urban northern Uganda are willing—even eager—to do poorly paid work that supports causes they disagree with if there is hope of future employment. In the 2016 elections, this facilitated large-scale recruitment to the Crime Preventer Programme, thereby helping the ruling regime control (and curry favour with) a potentially dangerous segment of the population: young, unemployed, and marginalized youth. This paper nuances prevailing explanations for the emergence of auxiliary groups and militias (e.g. Raleigh 2016), which focus on the organization of violence to seize control of political institutions. In doing so, these analyses focus on local or national political contestation as a main factor determining the emergence of militias. I argue that this focus underestimates the causal relevance of socio-economic systems and resource distribution. An examination of the Crime Preventer's structure and implementation illustrates that their emergence in advance of Uganda's 2016 national elections was as much a result of a Uganda's militarized neo-patrimonial system as a response to political contestation. This reveals that militias can emerge in contexts of low to moderate electoral competition or any time that a militarized state needs new pathways to efficiently distribute resources.

More specifically, Uganda's Crime Preventers illustrate how state actors (particularly President Museveni himself) build competing institutions particularly in the security sector (police, military, and auxiliary forces) to develop loyalty and distribute a limited amount of goodies. I examine how roles and hierarchies are established within the Crime Preventer Programme (such as rank and file, military discipline, patriotism, and so on), and how deviations from them are punished (corporal punishment, shaming, fines, arrest and detention). Evidence is presented throughout this paper, showing how and why Crime Preventers rarely have leverage to compel state actors to make good on a bargain. Specifically, I focus on how Crime Preventers face the constant possibility of re-categorization (from civilian to state agent and back again), as well as ongoing competition among numerous state security institutions, which produces uncertainty about which rules will apply when and how (Tapscott forthcoming). This tilts the political playing field to further favour those already in power.

Thus, Uganda's Crime Preventer Programme represents a broader balancing act on the part of the regime, in which it distributes just-enough resources to just-enough citizens to produce a just-enough convincing image of opportunity—to produce and maintain hope. In turn, hope fosters a willingness to accept the system and wait for change. This balancing act is made possible by unpredictably framing Crime Preventers as state security forces who are part of a well-organized community policing institution, and at other times, as civilians who are simply volunteering their time. Thus, participation demonstrates a willingness to support the regime, while the state is simultaneously protected from any obligation to set clear expectations, let alone make good on promises. Similarly, the structure of Crime Preventers both facilitated the ruling party's ability to woo them efficiently through rhetoric, training, and material rewards, while concurrently retaining individual agency in key positions such that the delivery of these rewards as well as potential punishments remained unpredictable. Thus, Crime Preventers compete for the few real

³ In Uganda, state, party and government are highly intertwined, and unless stated otherwise, I use them synonymously in this paper, along with the term “ruling regime”, to refer to the NRM government.

or imagined opportunities, thereby limiting the extent to which they attempt to coordinate with each other to further shared interests. Together, these inconsistencies undermined the ability of Crime Preventers to make claims on the state.

This paper proceeds as follows: first, it discusses the origins of the Crime Preventer Programme, highlighting how the Programme was produced with multiple contradictions—simultaneously state and non-state, organized and fragmented. Second, I discuss how the Government of Uganda has securitized livelihoods, including popular narratives about how the government has strategically limited employment options such that working in security sector is seen as the most viable option, particularly for northerners and those who have a low level of education, as well as examples of how the government uses public resources to finance the security sector, including the Crime Preventer Programme. Third, I explore the various benefits, material and non-material, that motivated Crime Preventers to participate in activities about which many expressed significant reservations. Fourth, I examine three case studies that highlight how this allows the state to use Crime Preventers while simultaneously limiting their ability to make claims on the state. Fifth, I explore specific ways in which the state controlled Crime Preventers, including use of punishments, indoctrination and unpredictability, and thus, how the sum of these parts produced a unified voter block in support of the NRM government, helping Museveni retain power through the 2016 elections. Finally, I conclude with an exploration of how individuals and communities contribute to the dynamics described, thereby reinforcing the effectiveness of this governance strategy.

Origins: The Making of a Crime Preventer

Crime Preventers have long been a part of the government's community policing strategy. Bruce Baker (2005) writes about Crime Prevention Panels that started as early as 1993,⁴ which reportedly trained tens of thousands of participants in:

“[T]he nature of community policing and crime prevention; the differences between criminal and civil cases; the importance of preserving evidence at the scene of a crime; the institution of criminal proceedings; the LC judicial structure and the cases that they should and should not handle; summons and warrants; road safety; community service; bomb threats; sexual offences; human rights; constitutional rights; domestic violence; laws as they relate to children; marriage and divorce; and mob justice” (Baker 2005, 30).

Crime Prevention Panels were not implemented in the north due to the insurgency, and Community Policing was initiated in Gulu a few years after the tentative peace agreement was reached in 2006 (Chairman of Community Policing Forum, 6-Oct-2014).

While the community policing programme described by Baker had no apparent political role, this had changed by 2011, when Crime Preventers were recruited to help provide security for the

⁴ A Ugandan journalist cites the first pass out of Crime Preventers to 1994 (Bagala 2015a).

Presidential elections. In some locations, they received three months of trainings and were provided with uniforms and batons and asked to patrol. One former Crime Preventer explained:

“We also helped a lot with the voting—escorting the votes. We would take the Presiding Officer with the ballot box up to the polling station. We would make sure the votes aren’t stolen, by opening the box before voting started to show everyone it was empty. Then we would make sure people vote only once, by marking their finger with ink when they leave the polling station. Then we would take the ballots up to the sub-county and they would be counted from there” (Former Crime Preventer, Lira, 7-Nov-2014).

Some of those who helped with the elections received a one-time payment of approximately 300,000 shillings (90 USD) for their work and received additional training to become Special Police Constables (police officers on contract). Reportedly, some were able to climb the ranks and become fully incorporated into the Police Force, while others were retrenched, often without notice or explanation.

In January 2014, in response to the rape of a female student at Makerere University, a small group of students called for self-defence training and a greater awareness on campus to prevent such crimes (Bagala 2015a). According to the students, the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Kale Kayihura, “picked interest” and supported their cause, offering trainings at the Police Training School at Kabalye for 700 students (Bagala 2015a).⁵ Kayihura, who fought in Museveni’s bush war since 1982 (Kwiringira 2016) and whom respondents describe as “too close” to the President (see also Kagoro and Biecker 2014, 6), is often credited with initiating the Crime Preventer Programme in its current form.

Over the next year, this group of students became the leadership of the newly-established National Crime Preventers Forum (NCPF), an institution that appeared to be closely associated with the President and the IGP. The Programme’s leadership is young (mostly early 20s), and many come from elite families—some have their own iPads and cars, have travelled internationally, and are university-educated. Rumours suggest that the individuals holding top leadership positions are the children of the IGP.⁶ Moreover, in the months before the election, the leadership of Crime Preventers publically acknowledged their support for the President and the NRM (AFP 2016), explaining that Kayihura is their patron and Museveni has provided for the program (NCPF Leadership, 4-Feb-2016).⁷ Leadership of the NCPF have also been photographed with the President and the IGP; the picture is posted on social media (photo on file with author). When I visited their offices in Wandegaya, Kampala in December 2015, it

⁵ Although the police spokesperson, Fred Enanga, stated in a press release “The public is also invited at any stage to come and witness these programs at the Police Training School to help appreciate its value to all” (Enanga 2014), I did not find this to be the case. When I visited the Training School, I was turned away since I did not have a letter from the Office of the IGP approving my research.

⁶ In my interviews, this rumour was both denied and affirmed by people with first-hand knowledge of the IGP’s family. While lower-level Crime Preventers unanimously believed the rumour, higher-level Crime Preventers denied it, and said it was merely a reflection of the close relationship between the IGP and this “brilliant” young leader.

⁷ Although the respondent, a leader within the NCPF, claimed that Crime Preventers were non-partisan, he also explained, “We are mostly being facilitated by the sitting government. We cannot do work without them,” highlighting the complicated nature of the endeavour.

appeared they were in transition. New laptop computers were stacked on a table in the front room, and photographs of Museveni, inscribed with “The Father of Our Country” adorned the walls.

The NCPF developed an institutional structure resembling the police, with coordinators at the village, parish, sub-county, district, and sub-regional levels—and the number of citizens trained as Crime Preventers surged. The government announced a plan to recruit 30 crime preventers in each of Uganda’s 56,000 villages (Gaffey 2016), and claimed they had recruited 1.5 million in November 2015 (“Over a Million Crime Preventers Passed Out” 2015). However, many argue that these numbers are inflated to intimidate political opposition. Crime Preventers are meant to work with police at the sub-county level and they are often trained by police or former military officers.

The Crime Preventer trainings formalize the affiliation of Crime Preventers and the Police, and thus, a commitment to formal state law as well as the NRM regime. In turn, this weakens the Crime Preventers’ accountability to their communities. They learn that their role is to support the state and protect the peace, for example by disbanding protests. In Uganda, where state, government and party are synonymous, it is very difficult for even the most thoughtful participants to disaggregate which activities might be partisan and which activities serve the public interest.

Moreover, simply being incorporated into an institution affiliated with the police was sufficient to win the rhetorical support of many Crime Preventers, despite the fact that, for most, material rewards were minimal. Respondents explained that Crime Preventers would certainly vote for their benefactor and they would bring their wives, sisters and mothers with them. One member of the NCPF explained that this is because Crime Preventers feel the government is “the only one looking out for them” (NCPF leadership, 4-Feb-2016). Many respondents also commented that the armed forces (police and military) always vote for their “boss,” Museveni, and one even suggested that the military is responsible for voting fraud.⁸

One potential explanation for this loyalty is that military values are emphasized throughout the Programme, including discipline, obedience, and respect for state authorities. One Regional Police Commissioner explained:

“We teach [Crime Preventers] discipline—for example, when I say ‘stand easy,’ you don’t ask ‘why?’; when I say ‘turn right’ you don’t ask, ‘why?’ And we teach them rudimentary military skills, especially parade. You know us security people like parade. And how to greet and pay compliments to authorities. Basically, respect for the forces” (Regional Police Commissioner, 6-Nov-2015).

⁸ For example, one respondent explained to me: “You go the basin and tick. At the station in the presence of people, no—they don’t benefit one party or another. Upstairs where these boxes are taken now, you don’t know what happens. Normally things happen. In the barracks here, all these soldiers, they lie on one side, their boss of course” (Crime Preventer, 25-Nov-2015). Another rumour accused soldiers of transporting faeces from the barracks to the planned location for an opposition candidate’s political rally to disorganize his campaign.

This kind of training develops acceptance of a hierarchy of command, teaching recruits to do as they are told and to ask questions later, if at all. It also cements the relationship between the state and the recruit, as one Crime Preventer explained:

“With the force, once you join, they tell you that the first priority is to keep secrets and be disciplined. With the force, it is command. That is the most important thing. When the government gives you that knowledge, they will never leave you. You cannot leave the army, because they have given you all the government secrets” (Crime Preventer Coordinator, 2-Feb-2016).

On the other hand, because Crime Preventers work on a voluntary basis, commanders cannot be too tough on them, lest they quit. Moreover, although trainings are generally modelled off other police and military trainings, there are no formal instructions for what should be taught or how, leaving agency with each individual trainer to determine his own curriculum. Indeed, trainings at village and sub county levels emphasize marching, but also include other military drills, along with military culture, such as songs, Swahili commands, and saluting, as well as ad hoc lessons in patriotism, law and enforcement and so on. The structure of the NCPF is hierarchical and it is unclear the extent to which the NCPF coordinates with the Uganda Police Force. Crime Preventer coordinators—or “commanders” as they are sometimes called—explained that they frequently receive instructions directly from headquarters, which may not have been shared with local police.

This structure raises an important, albeit puzzling, question: why—and how—has the NRM government developed a system that connects educated elites to disenfranchised masses? Isn’t this a recipe for revolution? In the following sections, I aim to set out a series of explanations for how the NRM regime walks the fine line between mobilizing youth for political ends and limiting their ability to make meaningful claims on the state. To mobilize Crime Preventers in both leadership positions and broader membership, the NRM regime uses promises of access to resources, and threats of humiliation, arrest, fines, and expulsion from the Programme. The regime further uses a series of strategies to maintain the power imbalance between Crime Preventers and state authorities, including injecting unpredictability into a system based on rewards and punishments, along with training in discipline and ideology, and finally, fostering a pervasive sense of surveillance (Tapscott 2015). Moreover, the ruling regime attempts to retain control over Crime Preventers by keeping their young leadership close and placating their ambitions.

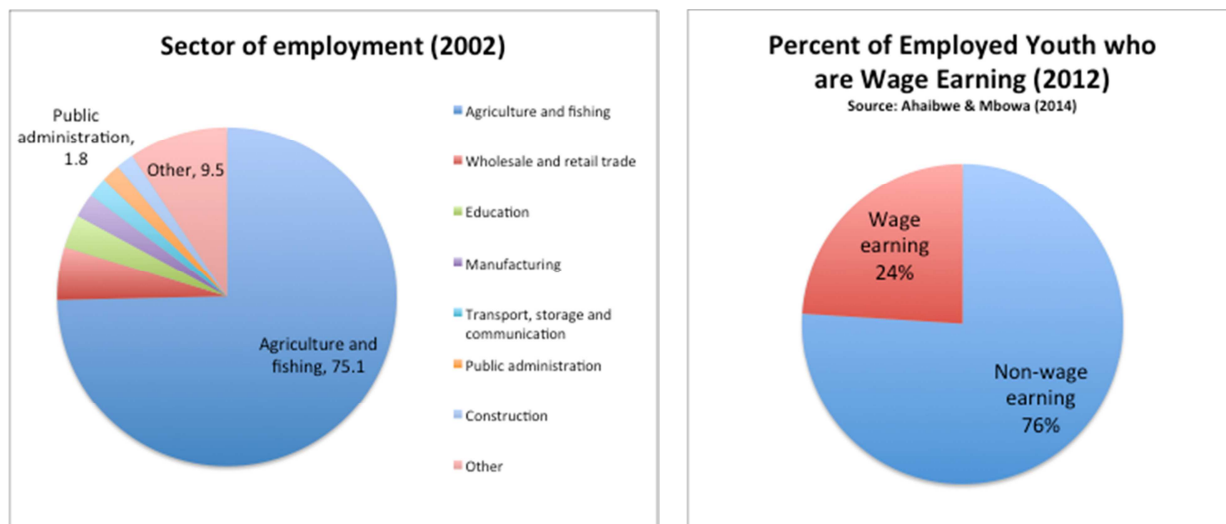
Uganda’s Securitized Livelihoods

A Convergence of Narrative and Reality: Security Work as the Only Work

Underemployment and low salaries are defining characteristics of the Ugandan workforce. Approximately 18% of Ugandans are not in education, employment, or training; 53% work in agriculture, while 23% are in services and 6% are in the industrial sector (Ahaibwe and Mbowe

2014).⁹ A mere 24% of employed youth receive wages for their work (Ahaibwe and Mbowa 2014). Thus, salaried jobs with the government are highly coveted, whether in civil service or security services.

Figures 1 & 2: Employment statistics in Uganda



Data from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2006) show that in 2002, 1.8% of jobs country wide were in public administration. Although civil service was a major employer in the 1980s, reforms that began in 1992 significantly reduced the sector (Ahaibwe and Mbowa 2014). In its place, the government has “promoted a culture of ‘self-employment’ through microfinance”, supporting a variety of loan schemes for youth, starting with the Youth Entrepreneurial Scheme (YES) in the 1990s, to today’s Youth Livelihood Fund (YLF) (Ahaibwe and Mbowa 2014). These programs, popularly viewed as vehicles for neopatrimonial and party-based payoffs, have been wildly unsuccessful at recouping loans as well as at reducing unemployment (Ahaibwe and Mbowa 2014).

In this environment, employment in state security services is one of the more viable options, particularly for those with a low level of education. Although employment in the police and military are not represented in the above graphs, statistics place the Uganda Police Force at 43,668 officers (Kagoro and Biecker 2014), while the military and reserve forces are estimated around 50,000 each (Pike 2015). Together, police, military, and auxiliary forces constitute approximately 5.4% of all wage-paying jobs in the country.¹⁰ More impressively, together, police and military constitute approximately 9% of formal sector jobs.¹¹ Moreover, the Uganda Police

⁹ Author figures derived from (Ahaibwe and Mbowa 2014).

¹⁰ I arrived at this number with a back of the envelope calculation. According to the CIA World Factbook, Uganda’s labor force was estimated at 18,580,000 in 2015. Ahaibwe & Mbowa (2014) state that approximately 18% of the population is not in the workforce—thus, I estimate that the workforce is 15,235,600. Of this, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2012) estimates that only 17.3%—or 2,102,900—are in wage paying jobs. Thus, the 43,668 jobs in the Police Force constitute approximately 1.6% of all wage paying jobs in the country, while the military constitutes another 1.9%, as do the reserve forces.

¹¹ I arrived at this number with back of the envelope calculations. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2012) calculates that 6.5% of the working population—or 990,314 people—are in formal employment. Thus, a police force of 43,668

Force is one of the faster growing sectors in the country, having tripled in size since 2005 (Kagoro and Biecker 2014).

For most of those who are working and receiving pay in the informal sector in Gulu Town, salaries are abysmal. A survey I conducted with 41 members of youth security groups found that they make on average 45,400 shillings (13.50 USD) per week, and work at a variety of odd jobs, many of them seasonal, including brick laying, construction work, and subsistence farming. The subset of youth security group members who were also Crime Preventers made on average slightly less, at 43,400 shillings (13 USD) per week. The lowest paid police officer makes approximately twice this, at about 350,000 shillings per month (103 USD). Thus, while a relatively low percentage of Ugandans work in the security sector, it is one of the few viable employment opportunities in a country that reportedly has one of the highest unemployment rates in Africa (Mwesigwa 2014) and the second youngest population in the world (Brinkhoff 2015).

The security sector may be even more alluring for Acholis, a population that has long been stereotyped as having a biological proclivity for making war, and whom other authors describe as the subjects of a politically and socially constructed “military ethnocracy” (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999; Mazrui 1975). From colonial times, the north was intentionally underdeveloped to retain a reserve of unskilled labour that could be easily mobilized into the armed services (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999) and would be of a different ethnic group to southerners in designated production zones (Carbone 2008, 41).¹² Bøås (2004) further elaborates this rank-and-file “meta-narrative” of the Acholi, in particular highlighting how it contributed to divisions between Acholis and other ethnic groups in Uganda.

Particularly in the north, where nearly 95% of the population was displaced during the conflict, and many lived in camps, the community lived in proximity to soldiers—soldiers who were better paid and cared for by the state than civilians (Dolan 2009). Unlike civilian men, who became increasingly idle in the camps (Lehrer 2009), soldiers were employed and active. Additionally, throughout the conflict and particularly in camps for internally displaced people, soldiers humiliated civilian men in front of women and children, seducing their wives and reporting them as rebels if they protested (Onyango 2012, 5, 14, 18). This reinforced a division between civilians and soldiers, and made being a soldier a desirable job.

Thus, given the rarity of paid work and the nature of Acholi meta narratives, it is not surprising that in Gulu District, there is a strong sense among youth that one of the few viable job options is to join the police or the military. One Crime Preventer reflected this notion when I asked him if joining the army might have downsides: “If you fear to join the army it will be hard to get a job. You should be with a strong heart and go join the army” (Crime Preventer, 18-Nov-2015). This

constitutes 4.4% of those jobs, while the military at 50,000 constitutes 5%, for a total of 9.4% of all formal sector jobs. I did not include auxiliary forces in this calculation, as these forces receive monthly stipends rather than salary, and it is at times irregular or revoked without explanation.

¹² A host of other explanations are used to further justify this narrative of a martial north, which include that northerners are lazy and unfit for bureaucratic jobs (Bøås 2004, 287), that the British believed they were strong because of their diet of “hardy millet” (Museveni 1997), and perhaps more convincingly, that northerners made up a plurality the armed forces through the Obote regime (Bøås 2004, 287).

narrative dominates in Gulu District, where elites argue that the same logic remains in place today. For example, a locally elected politician in Gulu explained:

“Every president of Uganda is not sure of himself. He needs a shield. The shield of the government is these youths. Museveni says, “We want to recruit 5000 soldiers.” He can run and get forces from these youth who are idle, yet they have papers [educational qualifications]...When you tell them there will be a recruitment [to the forces], these are the ones who will run. There [are] no other job[s] for youth” (Locally elected politician, 5-Feb-2016).

Many of the Crime Preventers I spoke with explained that their primary reason for joining the Programme was to find employment. They unanimously stated that if they were offered a paid alternative, they would accept it and leave Crime Preventers.

An additional twist to this narrative suggests that keeping job opportunities few and far between makes it easier for the government to control the population. Doom and Vlassenroot (1999) note an “asymmetric relationship between economic underdevelopment and dominance in the military sector” which they call “the key to the political kingdom” (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999, 8). A director of a prominent human rights organization explained that poverty favours the monetization of loyalty: “Control of resources is just in the hands of the government. Once you have a very poor population, if you give them 1000 shillings, they thank you for months. [Now, we] can’t even tell them what their rights are unless [we give them] money” (Director of human rights organization, 10-Feb-2016).

This is the most obvious explanation for why youth join the Crime Preventer program. They are hoping to be incorporated into the security sector, whether through the police or the military. This is a reasonable goal for a few reasons. First, there is precedence: in the 2011 election cycle, the government also recruited Crime Preventers (although on a much smaller scale), and trained them to be Special Election Constables. From there, a subset were incorporated into the Uganda Police Force, and allowed to climb the ranks. Second, authorities regularly hinted that incorporation was possible, or even inevitable. One officer in Kampala’s Central Police Station explained to me, although being a Crime Preventer does not get you a job, “...those with qualifications have the upper hand to join the police or military. Your CV is improved if you volunteer...we already know you. Even in the UN that is what they do—take volunteers and that helps them get jobs” (Police Officer, Kampala, 5-Nov-2015). Other local leaders asserted that all Crime Preventers would be incorporated into the police, military, or other auxiliary forces.

Supporting the Troops: Uganda’s Militarized Neo-Patrimonial Structure

“There is a huge unemployed population here [in Uganda]. Crime Preventers was to keep the youth busy so they don’t cause problems during the election. They were being reorganized into savings and loan groups as a strategy to deal with young people, and get them closer to [the President]” (Member of President’s campaign team, 18-Feb-2016)

Channelling state resources to and through the military has been an explicit strategy of the government under the NRM since Museveni took power (Owana 2014). In 1989, Uganda's Parliament approved the National Enterprises Corporation (NEC)—a “parastatal body set up by the Ministry of Defence principally to organise defence personnel for productive functions” (Owana 2014). The NEC prioritizes recruitment of soldiers, and in its early days, engaged in activities as wide ranging as pharmaceuticals, textiles, and baking, and won various contracts with the government including to fence and clean the airport, to fumigate government offices and to construct “unipots” for the Ministry of Finance (Owana 2014). Andrew Mwenda noted the NEC was a vehicle for private profiteering in the early 2000s (Mwenda 2014). Today, the NRM government continues to channel employment opportunities to the military through the NEC (Katongana 2016).

As another example, in June 2014, the President disbanded the program structures of the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), deploying the military in its place under his brother, General Salim Saleh, in an initiative referred to as “Operation Wealth Creation” (Atibuni 2015). Museveni argued that NAADS had been corrupt under civilian management,¹³ and further, that military oversight would provide support for veterans (Musisi 2014). The first phase of NAADS, from 2001 to 2010, had an estimated budget of 108 million USD, while the second phase, which started in 2010 and is ongoing, had an estimated budget of 450 million USD at the beginning of the project cycle (Nassaka 2014). In January 2016, during a campaign stump speech, the President stated that funding for the NAADS sector would be increased from 203 billion shillings annually (62 million USD) to 1 trillion shillings (297 million USD) (Mugerwa 2016). The use of the military in agricultural services is often questioned, in particular because most soldiers do not have technical background in agriculture. Thus, this seems to be a transparent strategy to channel public resources to the military.

The same logic of repurposing public resources to reward service is used to bolster the Crime Preventer Programme. A member of the NCPF explained to me that the Programme has recently finalized Memorandums of Understanding with Operation Wealth Creation, NAADS, and the Youth Livelihood Programme to “give priority to Crime Preventers.” One member of NCPF explained to me:

“When there is any government project targeting a section of people, we bring them to the Crime Preventers to take them up [so they can improve their lives]. Like NAADS is the best known. We bring them in to give information to these people. The whole idea is to link them up and to help them. There is also microfinance. And health—these people must be healthy. At the end of the training they all go for HIV screening—it is not mandatory, but they have the

¹³ An external evaluation by Brookings suggests that although Museveni's assessment may be accurate, it does not tell the whole story. In practice, it appears that NAADS was used more as a vehicle for “well-to-do farmers” to gain access to credit, rather than to increase yields—thus, it is hardly surprising that it failed on the metrics that Museveni used to condemn it. “Regarding access to credit, the results clearly indicate that a significantly higher share of households participating in NAADS had access to credit compared with non-NAADS households. The notable increase—albeit starting from a low percentage—in the share of NAADS participants accessing credit may be due to the fact that farmers participating in NAADS are encouraged and supported to form and operate SACCOs at the subcounty level, then linked to microfinance institutions and commercial banks for access to credit products either as individuals or in groups” (Okoboi, Kuteesa, and Barungi 2013, 16).

option. We help them access services” (NCPF leadership, 6-Nov-2015).

Another Crime Preventer also working at the NCPF in Kampala explained:

“We are developing partners at the ministries, the prime minister’s office, KCCA [Kampala Central City Authority]... We are all in touch, and all agree to help provide for Crime Preventers. We are all in partnership. They give us projects, and we run them and then benefit. [*Can you give me an example?*] The Ministry of Health had an immunization campaign. The Crime Preventers will monitor the program. The Ministry will facilitate transport, airtime and with any extra funds they can give a simple allowance” (NCPF leadership, 5-Nov-2015).

Recently, another leader within the NCPF announced on Facebook that he acquired a factory that will employ “thousands” of Crime Preventers in the production of “cakes, b[e]ans, rice, maize flo[u]r, bread, animal feeds, poultry...to feed the entire country” (Kamugisha 2016). Thus, one strategy for attracting youths to Crime Preventers is giving them priority access to state resources and public programming.

Another economic perk for Crime Preventers is access to Savings and Credit Co-Operatives (SACCO).¹⁴ Both the Police Force and the military have SACCOs: The Police Force’s SACCO, called Exodus, has a membership of 21,000 and is valued at 7 billion shillings (2.7 million USD) (Nakabugo 2014), while the military’s SACCO, *Wazalendo*¹⁵, has a membership of 72,800 and was valued at 67.4 billion shillings (19.2 million USD) (Wazalendo SACCO 2014). In the months before the 2016 election, the Crime Preventers began *Mwangaza*¹⁶ SACCO, which reported 5,672 members in October 2015, with thousands more reportedly joining in November 2015 through February 2016. Participants contribute 17,000 shillings (5 USD) to join, and some Crime Preventers believed they would be able to take out loans with an interest rate as low as 2 per cent (Crime Preventers, 11-Feb-16).¹⁷

There is limited information on how Mwangaza SACCO will function, and misinformation breeds expectations that all participants will all have access to free loans. One Crime Preventer, coordinating at the sub-county, explained to me: “We have...Mwangaza SACCO, where crime preventers can get loans and start business...We don’t know what SACCO or mwangaza really means. We have been hearing those questions from there. The lecturers tell us that when you have saved money they will give you some small money based on what you have saved” (Crime Preventer Coordinator, 18-Nov-2015). Moreover, in the 2011 election, NRM politicians gave large donations to SACCOs across the country, perhaps further raising hopes of Crime Preventers that their SACCO would give them access to large loans (Titeca 2014).

¹⁴ Titeca describes how in the 2011 Ugandan elections, the NRM regime used SACCOs as a political strategy to distribute resources and gain support. See: (Titeca 2014)

¹⁵ *Wazalendo* is the Swahili word for “patriots”.

¹⁶ *Mwangaza* is a Swahili word meaning “solution” or “ray of light”.

¹⁷ This may be a flat interest rate per month. For example, Exodus offered a flat monthly interest rate of 1% (12% per annum) (Mabonga, n.d.).

Leaders of the Crime Preventers further justify the Crime Preventer Programme with rhetoric of income generation and empowerment, describing the program as a way to instil economic skills in participants through in-person trainings, capacity building and so on. One member of the NCPF leadership explained that he thinks of youth as “enslaved” because they are poor and disempowered:

“Youth are slaves, being over utilized because [they] cannot make [their] own income and be independent. So we bring them financial activities. I want to put Crime Preventers to the next level. We want to bring the whole country in [to the Crime Preventer Programme and income generation]. Thirty-five million should be crime preventers. We mobilize people into a visible cause” (NCPF Leadership, 10-Feb-2016).

Of course, from the perspective of Crime Preventers, there is a quid pro quo for the economic empowerment that the Crime Preventer Programme offers.

“All I want is the loan they promise to give us, that’s why I keep hanging on. If I can invest into a good business, I start pulling out [of Crime Preventers] after returning all the loan. I have been doing graphic designs. I want to open a music studio with my younger brother’s son...Then a gym of course. I had [some of these things], but...they gave it to the soldiers. They wanted some money from me before they would give it back, so they gave it to the soldiers. There are very many things I can do for a living, it’s just [lack of] capital [that limits me]” (Crime Preventer, 4-Feb-2016).

Placing these quotes in juxtaposition emphasizes that the Crime Preventer Programme leverages the very economic marginalization its leaders condemn. Thus, the perception that the only jobs available are in the security sector combined with funnelling state funding to the Crime Preventer Programme, as has been done in other election cycles and for other organizations, incentivizes youth to join the Programme.

For those in the leadership of Crime Preventers, similar dynamics are at play. Some leadership explained that they want to continue working with Crime Preventers going forward, while others readily share their political ambitions, reasoning that leadership within the NCPF provides excellent exposure to the masses, along with opportunities for networking with elites. While older politicians are frustrated with Museveni’s refusal to leave power, leadership of the NCPF is young enough that they are almost guaranteed to see transition within their lifetimes—unlike their predecessors, they have the flexibility to bide their time and wait for the right moment to enter politics.

Motivating the “Foot Soldiers”: Material and Non-Material Incentives

By organizing Crime Preventers into a system, training them in discipline, and establishing their accountability to the police and the state rather than their communities, the NRM regime established an identifiable voter block, to which they could give small rewards and expect

significant returns. Crime Preventers obtained both material and immaterial benefits for their participation. Some saw these benefits as blatant corruption and an attempt to buy votes, while others narrated it as payment for work well done, or an investment in the future productivity of Crime Preventers.

One such reward included motorcycles, purchased for Crime Preventer Coordinators at the District and Sub-County levels. Reportedly, the police gave 2 million USD to the NCPF from the Community Affairs budget to procure the motorcycles. At a market rate of approximately \$1000 USD, this would mean around 2000 motorcycles were purchased. Unsurprisingly, many Crime Preventers used the motorcycles for motorcycle taxi business (Kolyangha 2016). A Kampala-based police officer said that this was okay, as long as the bike was not damaged to the extent that it could not be used for official business. In Gulu District, Crime Preventers received neither log-books for the bikes, which determine ownership, nor helmets, which are legally required for motorcycle riders. Crime Preventer Coordinators at the village level were promised manual bicycles. These are significant in a context where even the police are often without motorized means of transport (Bagala 2015b). Moreover, as illustrated, the bikes can be used for other livelihoods, providing alternative sources of revenue even while Crime Preventers remain formally unpaid.

Another benefit is of course the short-term employment that many Crime Preventers gained through being SPCs. Others had the opportunity to work as polling agents and polling assistants. One plan—that seemingly did not work—attempted to recruit Crime Preventers systematically to work as polling assistants. According to the Handbook for Polling Officials, polling assistants assist the Presiding Officer in performing their duties, help verify voter identity, facilitate voting, and assist with vote counting (Electoral Commission 2016, 7–8). According to some respondents, sub-county coordinators were asked to recruit five Crime Preventers for each polling station in their area. The Crime Preventers were told they would be paid for their work. They were then required to fill out a “Bio Data” form for the National Crime Preventers Forum, which requested a photograph, identifying information including name, national ID number, contact, and next of kin, and finally, a section titled “political background.” Most respondents, whether Crime Preventers or not, agreed that this phrasing “political background” would require one to explain political party affiliation. Many who filled the form believed that the “correct” answer was the NRM. With the exception of one such form I saw filled, all respondents reported their political background as “National Resistance Movement”. One Crime Preventer who was distributing the forms described this process as performative:

NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTERS FORUM
BIO DATA

PERSONAL PROFILE

NAME.....	SEX.....
CITIZENSHIP.....	DISTRICT.....
SUB COUNTY.....	PARISH.....
VILLAGE/ZONE.....	DATE OF BIRTH.....
EDUCATION LEVEL.....	MARITAL STATUS.....
CONTACT.....	NATIONAL ID NO.....
OCCUPATION.....	E-mail address.....
NEXT OF KIN.....	CONTACT.....

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

.....

.....

.....

“They must [fill the form correctly] if they want the job...Their hearts stay with them. I’m not forcing them to change their mind to vote someone. They are

supposed to vote anyone they choose. [If they want to put] “FDC” I say, ‘that one will not be accepted, that one is a failure of interview. If you are rich, stay there [in FDC]. We need ones who are poor to fill this form, so they fill this form correctly.’ You get something afterward” (Crime Preventer, 9-Feb-2016).

Other Crime Preventers denied the existence of this form, or suggested it was not asking for party affiliation. When I posed the question to two Crime Preventer coordinators who I interviewed together, they looked at each other uncomfortably, laughed, and then one proceeded to explain to me that this section was meant to list any previous political positions one had held. Others, including politicians, journalists, and one political operative for the NRM simply did not believe that such a form could exist, saying that the government would never be so careless as to document party favouritism. A member of the President’s campaign team explained:

“I would not be surprised if declaring loyalty is part of the system; I would be surprised to see it on paper. [To do that would] drive a deep wedge, dividing people. They never documented it in any other countries [...]. When Mbabazi said, ‘I have my people in the system,’ those were scaring words. It made the President wonder, ‘which people?’” (Member of President’s Campaign Team, 18-Feb-2016)

In any case, the Crime Preventers who applied in Gulu Municipality were not offered the position. The hiring seems to have taken place through the Electoral Commission, as the rules dictate. Although it is unclear what the overall intention was, it seems likely that this was another attempt to channel state resources, this time from the Electoral Commission, to Crime Preventers.

Small material rewards are also a part of being a Crime Preventer. Many received T-shirts either specifically for Crime Preventers or for the NRM party. Crime Preventers also receive small payments, at times from the Crime Preventer system for completing duties, as in the task to check the voter registration list, at other times from complainants who give 2,000 to 3,000 shillings (.40 - .60 USD) to show appreciation.

Perhaps a greater inducement than small material incentives, are the immaterial incentives, which include gaining both political power and self-worth. Many who participate in Crime Preventers do so hoping to “get into the system” and gain access to not just resources, but also political power. In a context where arrest is common and standards for evidence are low to non-existent, having connections with the police is valuable. During one of my interviews, a respondent’s phone rang, and he explained it was a friend whose brother had been arrested. He went on to lament that although his friends no longer wanted to socialize with him because of his work as a Crime Preventer, they were always calling him when they had problems with the police. A lot of work appears to go into this, where the police encourage Crime Preventers to see themselves as distinct from the community, using their position as locals to be more effective spies.

Other youth opt to participate in Crime Preventers because it bolsters their sense of self-worth, allowing them to engage in what they view as productive activities, to build social networks, and

to gain recognition in the community. Many Crime Preventers expressed enthusiasm for the daily activity that the Crime Preventer training offered, reporting that the training helped keep them active, busy, and healthy. Some elaborated that unlike football, a popular pastime with Ugandan youth, marching is a useful skill. Others expressed that almost any activity was preferable to being idle—a quality that is both highly stigmatized by the community and can be grounds for arrest. In observing trainings, it was apparent that participants relished the camaraderie, teasing each other when misinterpretation of Swahili commands led to near collisions, and glowing with pride when drills were completed successfully. One group held weekly social events, watching music videos of local artists, drinking, and chatting. Others explained to me that one of the major benefits of being in Crime Preventers was traveling around the country and meeting youth from all different regions. Participants seem to view this both as a professional networking tool, but also as an enjoyable activity. To some extent, the unreliable and poor treatment that Crime Preventers experience—for example, being bussed to Kampala for rallies without reliable provision of food or return transport—seems to bolster their commitment to each other and develop solidarity.¹⁸

Maximizing Loyalty and Limiting Accountability: How the Government Enforces a One-Sided Bargain

The following three cases illustrate how Crime Preventers exist in a vague space between the state and the community. This allows state actors to leverage divergent expectations, as well as the vulnerable position of youth to use them for overtly political ends while avoiding responsibility for the actions and welfare of Crime Preventers. These include using Crime Preventers to make bigger crowds at rallies, to police the elections and to manipulate the voter registration list.

Case Study 1: Karuma Bridge Demonstration

A number of authors have noted that Crime Preventers were used to swell crowds at NRM rallies. In Gulu, Crime Preventers were discouraged from attending opposition rallies, although at times they did so as undercover intelligence. More often, Crime Preventers were encouraged to attend NRM rallies wearing civilian clothes, with a mandate to provide intelligence or security. To other bystanders, these Crime Preventers would appear to be participants in the rally. One Crime Preventer explained, “Differentiating Crime Preventers from civilians is difficult, because they are all in yellow. If you’re not wearing yellow you will not even get tea.” Of course, it’s not necessarily possible to distinguish “rally goers” from “Crime Preventers,” as both categories are civilians attending the rally. However, in the case of Crime Preventers, it appears they often attended such rallies out of a sense of responsibility or duty to serve, as commanded by the police.

¹⁸ For more on how hazing and other unpleasant experiences can develop solidarity and assimilate soldiers, see: (Dornbusch 1955, 318–319).

One rally that received particular attention was held on July 10, 2015. An Opposition Member of Parliament, Odongo Otto, organized 400 youth to march 10 kilometres to block presidential hopeful, Amama Mbabazi, from crossing the Nile into the northern region. At that time, Mbabazi was still attempting to run as a member of the NRM party. The demonstration was organized to protest actions Mbabazi had taken when he served as Prime Minister, specifically accusations that he had stolen 12.7 million USD meant to help reconstruct the north after the conflict through the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) (*Al Jazeera* 2012). The day after the demonstration, Crime Preventers from Gulu raised a complaint: they had been “tricked” into joining the rally.

According to respondents, a few police officers instructed Crime Preventers to meet at various police posts in Gulu Town so they could depart for a three-month training at the Police Training School at Kabalye, which they did without question. Instead, they were bussed to the rally point, where they were given T-shirts with a red “x” through Mbabazi’s initials (JPAM) and read, “Why buy a Benz of 600 million with PRDP money?”

Image 1 & 2: Front and back of T-shirt distributed to Crime Preventers and others who attended the rally.



They were then instructed to march with the other protesters. The demonstration was well-documented by local and national media, although there was no confrontation as Mbabazi delayed his consultations, seemingly for a different reason altogether (Etukuri and Semakula 2015). Some of the Crime Preventers, disgruntled at having been misinformed on the purpose of their travel; coerced to march in the heat without water or food; for some, abandoned with no means of transport to return to Gulu Town; and finally, angry about the lack of payment, brought complaints to the District and Regional Police Commissioners, who responded that they were similarly misinformed.

Because Crime Preventers are informal and their mandate is loose and undefined, politicians are able to mobilize them for overtly political activities and then claim the Crime Preventers were acting of their own volition. In turn, the Crime Preventers are willing to obey orders even when there is significant evidence to suggest that they are being manipulated. For example, the Crime Preventers I interviewed mentioned that they were first put on a lorry, which was in such bad shape they doubted it would make the trip to Kabalye. Then, when they were given the T-shirts, they dutifully donned them, without asking questions, despite having no idea what “JPAM” stood for. Similarly, they continued to follow orders to descend from the bus, join the rally, and march to Karuma Bridge. They only questioned these orders after the fact, when it became clear

that they were getting a bad deal, no remuneration would be offered, and the police were denying giving any orders at all.

A variety of evidence suggests that the police who informed the Crime Preventers about the sham training must have known that they would really be taken to demonstrate. One retired police officer reflected that someone within the police must have given permission: “Because you can’t come from nowhere and pick someone who I’m looking after, and take [him] away” (Retired Police Officer, 16-Oct-2015). Others speculate that the police offered up Crime Preventers to please NRM party leadership, whether directly commanded or not, because “That is how you get promoted—do something to please the President” (Locally elected politician, 21-Sept-15). One Crime Preventer who facilitates trainings explained that he suspected Crime Preventers were not going for training, and refused to go:

“I refused to go to Karuma—the CID [Criminal Investigations Director] came to talk to me, and said to me “let me take these people, and then I’ll provide transport for you to come back.” The police knew that if I did not go the others also would not. [In this way] I was forced to go to Karuma” (Crime Preventer Trainer, 29-Sept-15).

One district level politician further asserted that there is evidence that the NRM paid the organizing MP, Otto, to stir up resentment against Mbabazi in northern Uganda (personal interview, 19-Feb-2016). He posited that this why Otto—an opposition politician—was willing to meddle in internal NRM party politics, despite facing discipline from his own party for doing so (*The Insider* 2015).

The Crime Preventers continued to seek redress: they threatened to march up to Gulu’s Central Police Station in protest, but were told if they did, they would be tear-gassed. Instead, the disgruntled Crime Preventers went to journalists from the major newspapers, who ran a number of articles with headlines such as “We Were Tricked to Join Anti-Mbabazi Demo - Crime Preventers” (Otto 2015), and “Gulu Crime Preventers hoodwinked into joining anti-Mbabazi demos” (Ocungi 2015), as well as Human Rights Focus, who advised they go to the Department of Labour to complain about unpaid work. Reflecting on this, another Crime Preventer said: “But they are not government employees, so they were left hanging.”

The police, who had previously been unresponsive, contacted the complainants and threatened them with jail time for going to the press. When asked why Crime Preventers are not allowed to talk to the press, the Public Relations Officer for the sub-region explained that it was for their own protection, saying “if you report on your friend who has committed a crime, what will stop him from doing something bad on you? So it’s like you’re an intelligence officer and you need to be protected.” Seven months later, in February 2016, one Crime Preventer opted not to participate in training to be a Special Election Constable because he feared retribution for speaking to the press about the Karuma Bridge demonstration. Although the above-mentioned newspaper articles discuss 40 disgruntled Crime Preventers, my interviews suggest that in fact, Crime Preventers were bussed from various districts in northern Uganda, including Pader and Nwoya. Others may not have complained because they were satisfied with the amount they were paid (reportedly 5,000 shillings, or 1.50 USD), or perhaps they realized the potentially high costs

of making their situation public.

Crime Preventers were used for rallies on other occasions to control crowds or to fill them out. For example, the day of the President's nomination, buses full of youth dressed in yellow whooping and yelling filled the streets in Kampala. One Crime Preventer explained to me:

“We went to Kololo for the president's nomination. We went as supporters, and we all put yellow. The DPC said the president wants to talk to the crime preventers. I thought, “the president needs to tell us something important.” They provided transport from and to. [We were told] those who went will get 500,000 shillings each. Then we were told to stand for the rally and listen to the speech. He was for nomination. They told us, ‘you should be happy, you will be paid for it. Sing, dance and wave—your 500,000 [shillings] is coming’.”

This strategy, although blatant, still produces the appearance of massive support. Because there is no clarity on who is there to get paid, and who supports the candidate—and indeed, sometimes there is no substantive difference—the ploy appears to be effective at making a candidate look popular. An employee in the Political Commissariat in Kampala was following the events on social media, and explained the significance of these events from his perspective, as well as the constraints he faces when discussing such issues:

“We've been saying that crime preventers are not political—they don't choose them by their party. Now, if they are picked and brought to Kampala, does that mean the party in power is trying to use the opportunity? I also have the same questions you do—but I cannot answer. Whoever comes to power will be my boss. Some play politics, others do not” (Employee at Police National Headquarters, Kampala, 5-Nov-2015).

Case Study 2: Special Election Constable & Elections

One of the few publically stated rationales for recruiting Crime Preventers, aside from combatting crime in a general sense, was to help police the 2016 Presidential elections. Indeed, a few weeks before the elections, 36,000 Crime Preventers were recruited to be Special Election Constables (Kato 2016). Although metrics for selection are unclear, respondents believe they were recommended by the sub-county coordinators and selected based on the loyalty and commitment they showed over the previous months. Reportedly, in Gulu District, nearly one-fifth of recruits were dropped after initial selection without explanation—this appears to have occurred in other districts as well. According to police officials in Masaka District in the Central Region, this was because some failed interviews, were physically weak or did not have the minimum educational requirements (Ssenkabirwa and Kisekka 2016). In Gulu, one Crime Preventer speculated others did not make it through security checks, which were conducted in Kampala after the recruits submitted their fingerprints. Another guessed it was because of the government's limited resources.

Those who were selected participated in a one-week training in Gulu Town. A significant part of the training appears to have been dedicated to further instilling discipline in new recruits. One recent recruit explained to me some of the tactics used to train recruits in discipline and authority:

Say you are sitting with a colleague after hours. An instructor comes and looks at you. “Get up, come. Go back. Come. I told you to come. Go back and sit. Come!” He’s seeing how you are responding. It will be put in your notes; you’re someone who can follow command, which is needed in the force.

“There’s a lot of lies in training. They call them ‘sweet nothings.’ They even brought a very big fat cow. They say, today, it’s for you guys. They took it behind the kitchen and hid the cow. Guys were happy...Guys started washing their dishes, looking for pepper... When it came to lunch time, the whistle was blown, and everyone started fighting to get into line. They dish beans and *posho* [a staple food]. So when you come and you get you are expected to say ‘thank you.’ When you don’t say ‘thank you’ [that’s indiscipline]. In the force, you are not supposed to initiate anyone to support you... There’s no riot in the force. [If there is a problem] go alone and say, ‘please, this was not good.’ So you can also be handled alone” (Newly recruited Special Election Constable, 13-Feb-2016).

Additionally, recruits were instructed their duties, prohibited activities on Election Day, the institutional organization of the Police Force, including the role of SPCs, as well as a very long list of “uniform rules”. The duties of the Special Election Constables included:

- (1) Know we are the SPCs, not election constables;
- (2) Support the police in patrol during night and day;
- (3) Manage violence and enforce the law;
- (4) Be ready to do duties of emergency in case of a bad situation arising;
- (5) We should be ready to work with the army security agency, including prisons, army and intelligence agents.
- (6) Discipline: we should not put on party shirts, or flash any [party] slogan. Anyone who does that will be charged with the Police Act.¹⁹ That person will be sent to prison.

The uniform rules focused on how Special Police Constables should present themselves now that they are officially part of the Force, and no longer mere Crime Preventers (see Tapscott forthcoming, for more details on uniform rules). In the training, Special Police Constables are told that they must not be partisan; however, the overarching theme of the training is that SPCs should become a part of the system and follow commands unquestioningly. A few days before the election, I asked one recent recruit what he would do if he saw any violations on polling day, and he explained:

¹⁹ The Police Act specifies that any “member of a security organisation placed under the command of the inspector general for the performance of police duties” is subject to the police disciplinary code of conduct (“The Police Act” 1994, pt. VI, Section 44).

“I don’t want to be part of the [NRM] system. As a polling constable, there are certain limits—my hands are tied. If anything happens, I have to note it down. So when you [the victim of injustice] go to your candidate to make a complaint and they call me, then I can give the information in court. Or, if I cannot go to court [because of my own security] I can give the report. With the government having a larger arm, people want to be on the safe side. I’ll take note. I’m not going to court to be on the safe side” (Special Police Constable, 19-Feb-2016).

Thus, he argued that he could help improve the system through participation, although he feared that making public statements in court about voter intimidation, fraud or other irregularities might put him at risk. He also explained that although SPCs are clearly instructed to keep partisan attitudes to themselves, “At the end of the day, all the big people will come [to the training]. What they do is say you have to vote wisely if you don’t want to go back to the bush or back to the IDP camps. Of course, what they mean is to vote for Museveni. It influences a lot of guys, but not all” (SPC, 19-Feb-16). Such partisanship has been noted by other researchers, including a recent Human Rights Watch report that noted a Crime Preventer training manual that stated “Every good thing you are seeing around is as a result of good NRM governance” (Human Rights Watch 2016).

On Election Day, SPCs were hardly distinguishable from long-serving police officers. In one case, an officer’s pink furry boots tipped me off; outside the tallying station, a colleague whispered in my ear that the officers with white lapels were actually Crime Preventers. The degree to which they blended in, however, reflects a comment made to me by a female employee at a human rights NGO: “When the [Special Police Constables] came back from six months of training they were uniformed and you could not tell who was who...When circumstances call for it, they just change the uniforms around...Unless someone tells me who is behind the uniform, we can’t know” (Human rights NGO, 29-Sept-15).

The Crime Preventers who worked as SPCs were told they would be paid 11,000 shillings (3.20 USD) each day for 14 days of work, starting with the Presidential elections on February 18, 2016. Reportedly, the police asked some Crime Preventers to return their uniforms before paying them, which resulted in riots, quelled only when the police, “explained to them the police procedures and they understood our position and their response to our order is now good” (Bagala 2016).

Case Study 3: Suspicious Activities

Crime Preventers were also used in less visible ways, which are more difficult to interpret. For example, in December 2015, Crime Preventers were deployed across the country to check the voter registration list. This deployment reported in newspaper articles, covering Mbabazi’s call for an investigation (NTV 2015; Musinguzi 2015; Mugume 2015; Segawa 2015; Sserunjogi 2015). A number of Crime Preventers and civilians explained to me that Crime Preventer coordinators for each village were given the voter registration list and asked to verify it door-to-door, checking off individuals who were correctly registered, marking “D” for any deceased

individuals and “DR” for any who had moved. Some did so; others feared that if they checked the lists openly, community members would be suspicious of their motivations and beat them.

Crime Preventers had conflicting interpretations of this activity. Some argued it was intended to bias the election in favour of the NRM. One Crime Preventer explained to me that they were supposed to eliminate known members of the Opposition. Others suggested that checking the list was an attempt to intimidate the population; still others that the NRM would use the information to vote for the deceased. Another Crime Preventer pointed out that this was a difficult position to inhabit: “Should I do anything stupid with [the voter registration list], it will backfire on me. [The community members] know me from my childhood. It’s very risky to do anything.”

Others insisted that the exercise was intended to make the list more accurate, or prevent the Opposition from rigging. A police officer in Gulu Central Police Station gave a possible explanation:

“The voter registrar of the Electoral Commission is the EC’s responsibility. Each presidential candidate is given the voter registration to cross check if it’s ok. He can use any method. The Crime Preventers are members of the community. They can use them to check. It’s his personal decision to see if they are there or dead. Some presidential candidate [might have] decided to use them to check because they are many. So they used them to check if they [the voters] are existing or dead. This helps you know the number of people who are registered. The ones who are alive, you can know the number, and then you can know if the number of votes given is more or less. When they add the votes up, it should be slightly less than the overall list. This helps them to know there was no rigging” (Police Officer, 13-Feb-2016).

Another explanation suggested that the Opposition was planning to rig votes by manipulating an inflated voter registry. Still others said they did not know or flatly denied that it had happened at all, despite the above-mentioned reports in media, by community members, and by Crime Preventers at varying levels. Some respondents became worried or angry when I asked them about this, telling me to be careful what kind of questions I asked.

Reportedly, each village coordinator was paid 5,000 shillings (about 1.50 USD) to verify the list, while the sub-county coordinator was paid 150,000 shillings (about 45 USD). One sub-county coordinator explained to me that although the village coordinators were supposed to do the work, he held responsibility for completing the task:

“I leave it with village coordinator. If it becomes difficult for them, I fill it. Me as a commander, I have to do the work to make sure the form is full. If they say, go and plant for me the maize, I cannot say, “I’m tired.” I have to finish the work. I have to go and see that those must finish. For them they know [which community members are alive, dead, Opposition, etc.]. If they don’t know, you have to ask someone who knows, so that he helps you to mark those people. But secretly. When people know [what we are doing], that is another problem again. That is why they are talking on us every day” (Crime Preventer Coordinator, 3-Feb-2016).

A member of Crime Preventer leadership told me that the list had been checked on two occasions—the first time, in late October the exercise resulted in a suggested 100,000 changes to the list. He elaborated: “We gave the first round to the police. They were not convinced. We needed to do another verification.” So in mid-December, they went to check the lists again, this time against photographs of the voters. The second round resulted in a recommended 40,000

modifications. These were reportedly handed up the command hierarchy of Crime Preventers, from village coordinators all the way to the National Crime Preventer Forum.

Despite the hundreds of individuals involved in checking the list across the country, the overall goal of the exercise remains unclear. A leader within the National Crime Preventers Forum said he did not know what happened with the lists, but implied that they made their way all the way to the Office of the President. “I don’t know what [the President] did with it [the updated voter registration list]. I don’t know where they took them. We came back to do our work.” Respondents, including politicians both in and out of power, journalists, and Crime Preventers generally seemed unconcerned about this activity; upon further questioning, it appeared that they were confident the entire system was rigged, and thus, found little value—and lots of risk—in investigating what they saw as the minutiae of how.

These three cases illustrate how Crime Preventers were used for political ends throughout their recruitment, training, and deployment. Moreover, the cases highlight the conflation of party and state in Uganda, and thus, how youth, who understood their activities as following legitimate orders from the police, engaged in political activities.

Solidifying Support: Punishment, Indoctrination, and Unpredictability

Despite the many and varied rewards offered to Crime Preventers, it is important to note that there is limited predictability, and an opaque system of granting benefits. Rather, recruits must show that their loyalty is unwavering by sticking with the Programme despite numerous disappointments, broken promises, and wasted time.²⁰ Even then, only some participants get rewarded with promotions, payments, or praise. Punishments, also, are unpredictably distributed. Consider, for example, those Crime Preventers that were dropped from SPC training after the week-long training commenced. Another Crime Preventer explained to me that he applied to join the military during a routine recruitment, only to learn that they would only consider applicants who had graduated from Senior 4 (equivalent of Ordinary Level) in 2013 or 2014, while he had graduated in 2012. He guessed that this had to do with the age group they wanted to recruit, but was unable to get clearer information. This process both culls the group to include only those who are patient and committed, while conditioning them to have high hopes and low expectations. This, in turn, maintains a level of competition among recruits, which helps balance the camaraderie developed in training such that recruits’ strongest commitments are to the state, not to each other. Thus, Crime Preventers remain fragmented, protecting the state from an organized interest group that could potentially make meaningful claims for representation or remuneration.

²⁰ For example, respondents told me that on numerous occasions they were asked to mobilize to travel to Kololo. Crime Preventers travelled from various districts to the Central Police Station in Gulu Town, hoping they would be taken for training. Upon arrival, they were told to leave and return at a later time, then asked to wait for hours on end with no food, water or shelter. On one occasion, limited transportation meant that many who came were sent home with nothing. Those who remained were bussed to rallies in Kampala.

Moreover, many promises made to Crime Preventers were based on the future success of the regime. For example, police promised Crime Preventers that they would get their reward after “the big man” won re-election. Even payment for the SPCs would occur after the election results were announced—in the case of an opposition candidate winning the election, it is unlikely that they would receive payment for that work. Moreover, their decision to get involved with Crime Preventers at all is based on a wager that the NRM government and its militarized neo-patrimonial system will remain the enduring scaffolding of the Ugandan state, and so they should do their best to get incorporated into it, and hopefully reap some of the rewards.

Support for the NRM within Crime Preventers (and other auxiliary forces) is further bolstered through direct efforts at indoctrination. One LCI Chairman, born in the 1950s and a long-time supporter of the NRM, explained to me his views on party indoctrination through *chaka-mchaka*, a military training course designed for civilians.

“In the cadre course, they teach what they call patriotism. They have a lecture given by experienced politicians. They start way back with the history of Uganda, before colonization. They talk of the good and the bad things that the government does and then you are given the freedom to discuss...Then you try to compare the past and the present...It’s like a debate. The government in power will always praise itself more. They explain that before [the NRM was] there, things were like this or that, but now, we have UPE [Universal Primary Education], USE [Universal Secondary Education], better security, roads, and so on. During the lectures, they are also very tricky. The lecturer will tell you the good things. Then there will be another one to tell the bad things. That’s when you’ll hear a lot of questions. Then you will know who to focus on and how to convince them. That’s how you can learn how to really support the party. I think that the Crime Preventers are also getting these lessons” (LCI Chairman, 9-Feb-2016).

Patriotism and nationalism are common elements in training. Cecilie Lanken Verma (2012) discusses these in her research on *chaka-mchaka*, explaining that “political education” or “ideology” is a key part of the training, in which recruits were urged to become “transformation agents” of Uganda. As such, they should participate “active[ly] in economic and productive development and...act[...] as the instigators and promoters of government programs in their communities” (Lanken Verma 2012, 104). In my interviews, people discussed patriotism as defending and serving the country out of love rather than a desire for personal gain, although many also understand the patriotism as a necessary prerequisite for personal gain. The LCI explained, “The training on patriotism is a way of giving recruits the wisdom of the good of the government and how to convince people that the government in power is the best.” Moreover, he and other respondents were convinced that on the whole, the indoctrination works: it convinces recruits that the government is responsible for the good developments they see in society. At the time of research, there was no formal training for Crime Preventers at a village or sub-county level, and so decisions on training content appeared to be relatively ad hoc and individualized. However, sessions for “patriotism” and “nationalism” are regularly included in the trainings conducted at the Police Training School at Kabalye, where many recruits are taken for more advanced training.

Moreover, as youth participate in the Crime Preventer Programme, they are asked to engage in activities that distance them from the community and demonstrate their allegiance to the state without decreasing their dependence on the community. For example, there appears to be a heavy emphasis on using Crime Preventers to arrest gamblers. Gambling is an illegal, but popular, pastime. One Crime Preventer lamented that he no longer feels safe in his community because of the work he is doing for the police.

“Even my friends, they didn’t like me because they say for us we are capturing people, gamblers. Whether I am doing it or not, they say I am the commander, I am instructing them [the Crime Preventers] to go and do the work. I am not happy every day. The work which I’ve entered in is not good at all. My life is not safe...I have transferred [moved] from the place where I used to sit always because when I go there they are just saying ‘ah, this one is not a good guy’” (Crime Preventer Coordinator, 3-Feb-2016).

In spite of these experiences, many Crime Preventers decided to stick with the programme, reasoning that they had already started down this path, and that the community would understand that the work was with the hope of making money, something to which everyone is sympathetic. Somewhat paradoxically, leaders of the Programme motivate youth to participate by telling them they should be patriotic and work for no payment, but Crime Preventers themselves justify their activities to the community as a way of seeking employment.

Another factor that keeps Crime Preventers obedient is fear. Notably, most of my respondents preferred to refer to the President as “mzee” or “big man” rather than by his name. One Crime Preventer explained to me, “Nowadays [with the elections coming up] there must be intelligence everywhere. If they hear you calling ‘President Who, President Who’ [shakes head]—you can call him ‘mzee’ or ‘that man’—it means the current one. And you can call the other candidates by name” (Crime Preventer, 7-Feb-2016). Another Crime Preventer told me that even among his colleagues—who are defined primarily by their responsibility to give information to the authorities—there are spies who are supposed to report on any misbehaviour of Crime Preventers. Those who don’t follow commands face retribution or replacement, as one commander explained to me:

“If you say you don’t like [the command]—immediately, I have to replace you. Because an order is an order. But not by force. Not even putting that person in too much pressure. Saying, ‘You just go out.’ I have replaced them but not reported them” (Crime Preventer Coordinator, 3-Feb-2016)

Moreover, Crime Preventers are used to being ignored. Many community members and elites—lawyers, NGO workers, and politicians—describe them as uneducated, ex-rebels and contemporary criminals—youth who have no option but to be used as tools of the ruling regime. At best, this elicits sympathy, but more frequently, dismissal. This is effective for the government: when the community rejects Crime Preventers as allies of the government, it makes the division a reality.

This, in turn, produces the Crime Preventers as a group both distinct from their community and from the state. The IGP and the ruling regime reinforced this narrative, suggesting in rallies and public speeches that Crime Preventers would be armed and should be prepared to fight with the government if the peace was disturbed (*The Insider* 2016). At the same time, as mentioned in the introduction, leaders within the NRM party stated publically that anyone causing chaos during the elections would be shot (Wesonga 2016). Although the IGP denied stating that Crime Preventers would be armed, one Crime Preventer told me he was expecting to receive a gun in the days before the election; another told me that he had a gun on his person, clarifying that it was obtained legally. Rumours of armed Crime Preventers making arrests in Gulu and other districts were in constant circulation. In response to such rumours, citizens assumed that Crime Preventers would be instrumental in enforcing the President's electoral success, whether with veiled or overt violence.

Conclusion

The Crime Preventer Programme was opportunistic on the part of the ruling regime, repurposing an existing community policing program to extend the party's patronage system and earn the support of tens of thousands of unemployed and desperate youth. In this way, the ruling regime used a combination of promises and threats to keep recruits in a precarious situation, in which they ally with the regime and not with each other. Additionally, the Crime Preventer Programme, like much of the rest of the Ugandan government, is neo-patrimonial, premised on personal relationships intertwined with formally state institutions such that it is constantly unpredictable whether state authorities will act in their personal or formal capacity. Importantly, the decision—whether personal or formal—is backed by a threat of significant violence. The resultant unpredictability undermines the ability of citizens to act strategically, or to hold state actors to account. This is all made possible by the militarization of the neo-patrimonial system in Uganda, whereby diverse military and security institutions both provide the threat of violence to uphold and enforce unpredictable decisions, and are the primary channels for the distribution of resources. In turn, this attracts underemployed youth to the security sector, where they can be indoctrinated with military discipline and lessons on patriotism for the NRM state.

Perhaps surprisingly, individuals and their communities contribute to this environment in which citizens' claims are fragmented. This fragmentation inhibits collective political action outside of the NRM, thereby preventing citizens from making effective claims on state authorities. From the vantage point of an individual citizen, they must accept any possible work that comes their way—their families are in need of food, shelter, education, and the like—and as young men, it is their designated social role to be providers (Dolan 2011). To complain about the terms of work is risky, and young men feel they cannot afford to take this individual risk for potential group gain. Moreover, few other safety nets exist. One Crime Preventer Coordinator explained his conundrum:

“The Opposition doesn't care about us. We need the money of the government because we are the jobless people. [The government] say[s] they care about us, but [I think] what we're doing is not good. But we went [to be Crime Preventers] because of the money.”

[*What do you think about that?*] “Their point is not bad. But when you support [the government], there is nothing we shall gain from them. Their word is always very sweet like that. But there is nothing to gain. You have to pray to God to help you... but not these politicians. They’re all the same. Whether they send them there, they will talk like they will give you something. But when they go for Parliament, you will see them after 5 years...” (Crime Preventer, 18-Nov-2015)

The community also intensifies these dynamics, viewing Crime Preventers as unemployed, uneducated, former-rebels, who are using the title and access that comes with being a “crime preventer” to become “crime promoters”. In this way, they write off Crime Preventers and become increasingly uninformed about their activities over time. Moreover, because the community sees Crime Preventers as an NRM programme, those who are in the Opposition—which, historically, was the vast majority of the north—remain uninterested in the Programme, in some ways abandoning those who have signed up. In a culture that highly values the giving and receiving of advice from friends and family, this ignorance of activities is divisive, and serves to distance Crime Preventers from their communities and strengthen their allegiance to the state.

Thus, in two years, the NRM regime transformed Crime Preventers from an apparently innocuous community policing intervention to an effective tool to recruit a valuable segment of the population—underemployed, marginalized youth, who might otherwise be strong supporters of the Opposition—to become a part of the state security services. This allowed for the efficient and effective extension of existing systems of resource distribution within Uganda’s militarized neo-patrimonial state. This, in turn, solidified support for the NRM, and helped Museveni win his fifth term in office.

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