

**CELEBRITY POLITICS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF UGANDA'S
POLITICAL LANDSCAPE:
A CASE STUDY OF ENTERTAINERS IN UGANDA'S POLITICS**

BY

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DECLARATION

I, Mwayi Kkula Nicholas, hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in this or any other university or institution of higher learning. All sources of information used have been duly acknowledged.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

25-05-2016

APPROVAL

I, Mwayi Kkula Nicholas, hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in this or any other university or institution of higher learning. All sources of information used have been duly acknowledged.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

25-05-2016

DEDICATION

To all Ugandans who find themselves naturally interested In the great political questions of the day.

This is an effort by one of your very own to try and find answers to one of those questions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chiefly, I would like to thank the Almighty God for the gift of life.

I also thank him for the more abundant life which he has given me by the death of his son on a cross.

On top of that, he has given his Holy Spirit, whose enlightenment and continuous fellowship has gendered this dissertation.

I also thank my Family, for their diverse support, the way they checked on my progress also encouraged me to fulfil this work.

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In Relation to this work, I thank him for his timely and comprehensive feedback which has guided me as I wrote this dissertation. I therefore claim responsibility for all errors and omissions that may otherwise be found herein.

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ABSTRACT

The politics of Uganda has experienced a noticeable and impactful change since 2017, marked by the unparalleled rise of entertainers and cultural celebrities into politics via its electoral system. Since the 2017 Kyadondo East parliamentary by-election victory of musician Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu (Bobi Wine) marked the beginning of the phenomenon of celebrity politics, with numerous subsequent happenings leading to the introduction of new actors, modes of communication, and political behaviour into a political system long dominated by professional elites, liberation movement cadres, and military actors. Although the scale and rate of this development is very great, limited systematic scholarly examination of its causes, mechanisms and implications has been achieved.

This paper examines how politics of celebrities can influence the transformation of the Uganda political situation in the period 2017-2026. It is informed by three definite objectives which are to investigate structural and contextual conditions which enable the entry and electoral success of entertainers in Ugandan politics and to evaluate the role of celebrity candidates in voter behaviour and national political opinion and the implications of celebrity politicians in governance quality and accountability processes. The research design is a descriptive and explanatory research design based on critical realist and interpretivist philosophy, which uses secondary data sources, only. The Uganda Elections Data Portal (UEDP), qualitative data analysis of mainstream Ugandan and international media, Afrobarometer country survey data, and parliament materials will make up the primary data sources. The theoretical framework combines Populism Theory created by Laclau (2005) and Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) and Elite Theory in the lineage of Mosca (1939) and Pareto (1935).

The results define political success of the celebrity in Uganda as based on a particular structural arrangement: a dominant-party system that seals off traditional channels of political opposition, a relatively younger population with a strong engagement of the entertainment culture, the fast development of social media as a form of political communication infrastructure, low levels of disillusionment with traditional political elites, and organisational inefficiency of political opposition parties. Data on the UEDP indicate that celebrity parliamentary candidates won with an overall estimated rate of about 38 percent in 2021, compared to a wait of about 22 percent among non-celebrity candidates in

similar constituencies, with observable voter mobilisation in constituencies with contests. Data analysis of media content and Afrobarometer indicates that there is a highly age-differentiated trend in terms of public opinion: 68% of young people who were not yet 30 years old affirmed that they would prefer a politician outside of the traditional political elite, whereas 39 percent of people over 50 did. The analysis of heterogeneous legislative performance of celebrity MPs reveals on governance and accountability that the informal aspect of accountability is reinforced by the amplification provided by the media but yet diminished in attaching to the formal and established mechanisms of parliamentary oversight. Based upon the Pareto notion of elite circulation, the paper finds that celebrity politics in Uganda is much more a type of change in elite composition, as opposed to a major redistribution of political power.

The paper finds the celebrity politics as a structural and sustainable aspect of the Ugandan political terrain that has actual but limited democratising impacts. Guidance is provided to the Electoral Commission, Parliament, political parties and future researchers. The research contributes novel theoretical and empirical insights in the fields of celebrity politics, African electoral politics and the democratic development in Uganda.

Keywords: celebrity politics, Uganda, political landscape, populism, elite theory, voter behaviour, governance, accountability, entertainers, electoral politics

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AFDB African Development Bank

BBC British Broadcasting Corporation

EC Electoral Commission of Uganda

FDC Forum for Democratic Change

LC Local Council

MP Member of Parliament

NRM National Resistance Movement

NUP National Unity Platform

UEDP Uganda Elections Data Portal

UBOS Uganda Bureau of Statistics

UPC Uganda People's Congress

APA American Psychological Association

UN United Nations

ICG International Crisis Group

CHAPTER ONE: CONCEPTUALISATION

1.1 Introduction

This gives the framework on how to study the politics behind celebrities and the way they have transformed the politics in Uganda. It gives the background to the study, a focused problem statement, objectives and research questions of the study, justification and significance of the research, scope of study and a general description of theoretical and conceptual framework on which the analysis will take place. The research paper is guided by a review of how the Uganda political scene has been reshaped by the entry of entertainers into politics since 2017 and how this change of political theatrical has impacted governance structures, voter behaviour and political environment.

1.2 Background to the Study

The nexus between celebrity culture and engagement in formal politics is proved to be a specific attribute of modern democratic regimes all over the world. This has widely been reported by scholars like Street (2004) and Wheeler (2013) among others who say that the merging of entertainment and politics is not just a cultural bread and butter but a paradigm shift of political power seeking, legitimation and exercise. Individuals like Ronald Reagan, Arnold Schwarzenegger, or Volodymyr Zelensky rose to executive political positions, having followed careers in entertainment and media, which attests to the possible value of celebrity status as an efficient political resource (Street, 2004; Marsh et al., 2010).

It is this worldwide trend that has taken especially sharp and consequential form in Uganda, ever since 2017. The turning point in the Ugandan situation was the victory of parliamentary by-election of the so-called Bobi Wine, Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu in the Kyadondo East district in June 2017 (Golooba-Mutebi, 2018). The victory of Kyagulanyi triggered a wave of entertainer involvement in the Ugandan electoral process, yielding a type of political actor whose central argument to occupying a public office is their media presence, fan following and popular culture identities rather than traditional rather than elite qualifications (Cheeseman et al., 2020). Political history in Uganda before this was defined by the rivalry between elite formations: post-independence intellectuals and professionals under presidential rule, military dictators under Idi Amin and others, and the political and intellectual class of the liberation movement that took office under President Yoweri

Museveni in 1986 (Mukholi, 1995; Carbone, 2008). The introduction of celebrity politicians into this field since 2017, therefore, represents a qualitatively new political phenomenon that has the need of being explored by academics systematically. A 2021 report by Godfrey Olukya of the Anadolu Agency recorded some 235 entertainers who took part in the 2021 general elections, 9 of whom were successful in parliamentary seats whilst over 160 succeeded in securing seats in the local government (Olukya, 2021). These numbers suggest a profound and sustained change in the balance of the political elite in Uganda which should be analysed.

Structural factors within the Ugandan political environment contribute to the phenomenon, namely high-levels youth unemployment, disillusionment with traditional political elites, the relative explosion in social-media as a medium of political communication, and youthful demographic with a robust attachment to the entertainment culture (Izama & Wilkerson, 2011; Tapscott, 2021). The role of these conditions in relation to celebrity political participation is crucial to the entire analysis of modern Ugandan politics.

1.3 Problem Statement

Since 2017, an unprecedented increase in the number of entertainers seeking, and gaining political office far more frequently at both national, parliament and local government, levels, has been seen in Uganda. Such surge is analytically important in that it will constitute a break with the traditional patterns of political recruitment and elite reproduction that have traditionally been used to organize the politics of Uganda (Carbone, 2008). However, even with the amount of this development and the rate at which it is occurring, little systematic, empirical academic work exists that investigates the reasons, processes and consequences of this change.

Lack of proper analytical care on this phenomenon poses a number of issues. To begin with, the reasons why celebrity politicians have been successful in electoral politics in the particular political economy in Uganda are yet to be fully theorised. Second, the impacts of celebrity political participation on voter behaviour and political communication standards and the formation of public opinion have not been critically evaluated based on the accessible electoral and media data. Third, the aftermath of celebrity politics in terms of action in governance, responsibility systems, and integrity of the institution is still under a crucial

assessment in Uganda. These gaps are an informative gap in the empirical knowledge of developing political landscape in Uganda.

This paper fills these gaps by exploring how celebrity politics whether through the entry and performance of entertainers as a political party between the years 2017 and 2026 has changed the political scene in Uganda. Using secondary data (the Uganda Elections Data Portal (UEDP), media analysis, and available scholarly sources, this study will give a systemic and evidence-based account of the celebrity politics phenomenon in Uganda, its origins, its consequences and how it impacts on democratic development of the country.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1.4.1 Main Objective

To analyse the impact of celebrity politics on the transformation of Uganda's political landscape between 2017 and 2026.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

- i. To examine the structural and contextual factors that facilitated the entry and electoral success of entertainers in Uganda's politics between 2017 and 2026.
- ii. To assess the impact of celebrity candidates on voter behaviour and public political opinion in Uganda.
- iii. To analyse the implications of celebrity politicians for governance quality and accountability mechanisms in Uganda.

1.5 Research Questions

- I. What structural and contextual factors facilitated the entry and success of entertainers in Uganda's politics between 2017 and 2026?
- II. What is the impact of celebrity candidates on voter behaviour and public political opinion in Uganda?
- III. Do celebrity politicians strengthen or weaken governance and accountability mechanisms in Uganda?

1.6 Justification of the Study

Rationality of the study is based on the identified above specific and urgent gaps in its analysis. A noticeable structural change in Uganda occurred in the political arena since 2017, whereas the academic field of Ugandan and African politics in general has yet to generate systematic reflection on the phenomenon of celebrity politics within the scope of Uganda politics. Analytical approaches that give much attention to ethnicity, patronage systems and incumbency benefits have been used to study African electoral politics (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997; Lindberg, 2006) even with the arrival of celebrity politicians the use of these previous analysis formulae cannot adequately explain the analysis.

The research is especially timely following the end of the 2026 general elections in Uganda which were the third election cycle in which celebrity politicians have had mass participation. Such a layer of time allows performing longitudinal analysis of celebrity involvement in politics, which has not been feasible until now. In addition, the growth of digital media and the Uganda Elections Data Portal as an electoral statistics source offers a better evidence base to analyse compared to what the previous researchers had to be satisfied with.

The research also has policy implications. When it is demonstrated that celebrity politics has correlated with undermined governance and accountability it has electoral, policy-disposing effects on electoral regulation, political party development policies and civic education programs. On the other hand, when the celebrity politicians have been discovered to have boosted democratic membership among the previously disengaged youthful groups, this too has had an undeniable contribution to political inclusion strategies. The study thus satisfies the academic and practical needs.

1.7 significance of the study

The results of the study will be useful to various constituencies in the political and academic landscape of Uganda. To policymakers, such as the Electoral Commission of Uganda, the Parliament and respective ministries, the study will be empirical evidence on the political impact of the involvement of celebrities in elections and governance. This can be used to shape policy regarding candidate qualifications and regulating campaign finance, as well as strengthening political parties.

The study provides analytical information on the changing aspects of voter behaviour and political communication in Uganda to political practitioners and party strategists, making them make strategic decisions more often using evidence. To academics and researchers in the field of political science, African studies, and media and communications, the study provides original empirical and theoretical content about a phenomenon that is of global concern but local characteristics that have not so far been well documented. To researchers in the future, the research provides a starting point of analysis and a base of literature that can be enhanced, expanded or disproved through future research.

1.8 Scope of the Study

1.8.1 Geographical Scope

In this research, Uganda has been identified as the geographical area of analysis. The literature on celebrity politics in other countries including Kenya, Senegal and global will be referred to where necessary in respect to theory and for comparison purposes, within the existing literature. Nonetheless, the analysis empirically is limited to the politics of Uganda.

1.8.2 Temporal Scope

The research includes the 2016-2026 general elections that end in January-February 2026. This non-period is the first full circle of the celebrity politics phenomenon in Uganda, including three upcoming electoral periods: 2016, 2021, and 2026. The year 2017 is considered critically analytical as this is the year when the issue of celebrity political involvement as an influential and manifest issue has been consolidated, following the by-election victory of Kyagulanyi and its subsequent media coverage, both nationally and internationally. Where necessary, past scholarship in relation to the theoretical framework and contextual background will also be utilized.

1.8.3 Subject Scope

The study themes include: the structural determinants of celebrity political participation; performance of celebrity politicians in the electoral process based on UEDP data; impact of celebrity politics on voter behaviour and political opinion based on media analysis and survey data; implications of celebrity politics on governance and accountability mechanisms.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

The present research is informed by two theoretical frameworks, namely, the Populism Theory, in particular, the branch of the contemporary authoritarian populism, theorised by Laclau (2005), Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), and modified to the specifics of African political analysis by such theorists as Mamdani (1996) and Gyimah-Boateng (200). These models are discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Populism Theory, in brief, as a guide to orientation, is the analytical resource of how anti-elitists can have their way with existing elite formations through celebrity politicians, and Elite Theory, the alternative resource, is how the existing formations of elite can be replaced or integrated by celebrity politician resources.

The reason to use both of these frameworks simultaneously is empirical complexity of the phenomenon in question. In Uganda, celebrity politicians simultaneously act as populist actors who are putting the established elite rules to the test and as new elite actors who are trying to find a space within established power set-ups. One theoretical school of thought would not be both sufficient and appropriate to describe this duality.

1.10 Conceptual Framework

This study is based on a conceptual framework which assumes three variables which are interrelated. The independent variable is the celebrity politics which is taken as the involvement of persons who have acquired public attention through an entertainment, athletic, or media profession in fields like candidates, elected authorities, or even political activists, in established political procedures. The dependent variable is the change in politics in Uganda, which will be the ability to measure the alteration of electoral results, voter behaviour, quality of governance, accountability measures and political structure. The mediating factor is the public opinion concerning celebrity politicians that are between the factors of celebrity political involvement and the outcome of celebrity political involvement on the political landscape.

The reasoning behind this is as follows: the status of celebrity creates media exposure and recognition among the mass (Street, 2004), which influences the opinion of the masses towards celebrity politicians in a positive (affective identification) and negative (credibility scepticism) way. Such mental image creation on the part of the masses, in turn,

predetermines the electoral success of celebrity candidates and the overall impact of their engagement in political organizations on the system of governance. The framework therefore not only locates the public opinion as an outcome variable but also as a mechanism in which the celebrity politics creates its political impacts.

This theoretical framework is conceptualised in the research by examining UEDP electoral data (to determine the outcomes), media content analysis (to determine the public opinion indicators) and scholarly materials (to determine the effects of governance) as discussed in Chapter Three.

1.11 Summary

The chapter has laid the analytical groundwork of how celebrity politics and how it defines the transformation of Uganda political landscape. Starting with the worldwide situational background of celebrity politics and stepping down to the national context of Uganda post-2017, the chapter has presented the research problem, objectives, and research questions, justified the study, limited the scope of the study, and explained the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that will be used to conduct the analysis. The chapters following them develop in a systematic manner based on these premises: Chapter Two will provide a review of the academic literature related to the issue; Chapter Three will elaborate on the methodology; Chapter Four on the findings and their analysis; and Chapter Five will conclude and make recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the academic literature that is relevant to the study of the politics of celebrity and the way it influences the political environment, especially in the case of Africa and Uganda. The review is themed, with a line of global concept underpinnings, African applications, up to the local Ugandan example. It further expounds on the theoretical backgrounds introduced in Chapter One, the literature on voter behaviour and celebrity politics, studies on governance, accountability and political change in the chapter. Based on gaps identified in the literature, gaps are pointed in each instance to find the original contribution of the current study.

2.2 Conceptualising Celebrity Politics

Celebrity politics as a scholarly field is informed by a fundamental issue of definition. One of the most quoted definitions of the field is given by Street, (2004, p. 437) who defines celebrity politics by incorporating both the political cause or movement that the celebrity is speaking on behalf of, or is purporting to represent as well as the politician who adopts the style and techniques of the celebrity. This dual conceptualisation is analytically significant since it acknowledges the fact that celebrity politics has two flows: celebrity makes a political out of their cultural resources, and politicians develop celebrity images. To this end, the main area of interest in this paper is the former direction: the entertainers and cultural icons that become formal participants in the political processes in Uganda.

In developing this framework, Wheeler (2013) posits that the celebrity politics can be seen as a reaction to the crises of political communication in the modern democracies. Because conventional party loyalties are becoming increasingly weak, and voter disenfranchisement becomes increasingly cynical, celebrities provide a kind of political participation which is emotionally salient and familiar to the culture. Such celebrity politics, however, warns Wheeler (2013), may lead to minimization of policy debate into the personalities of certain issues, which could weaken any deliberative nature of the discourse in a democratic state. One of the main issues which the present study transfers to the situation in Uganda is this tension between political and deliberative impoverishment of inclusion.

Marsh et al. (2010) contribute to the body of literature by creating the division between the so-called celebrity advocates who use their fame to further the cause without running for office, and so-called celebrity politicians who battle election and have official seats. The difference helps analyse the Ugandan case of celebrities like Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, who have travelled the only path from a celebrity supporter, advocate or activist (through music, to speak out against adverse conditions) to celebrity presidential candidate (in 2021). The direction itself and what it tells us about the political opportunity structures in Uganda are one of the questions of analysis that this work answers.

Van Zoonen (2005) offers a feminist and cultural studies angle, and believes that this interplay between the politics and popular culture is a much deeper-rooted change in citizenship and identity. The citizens have been experiencing politics more and more through the prism of their cultural notions and entertainment needs, which Van Zoonen (2005) calls political fan culture. The concept applies especially in the political framework of youthful, media- onslaught Uganda, where celebrity politicians gain followers who demonstrate some of the elements of fan loyalty, instead of the traditional political loyalty.

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks

2.3.1 Populism Theory

The theory of populism offers the nearest theoretical perspective that can be used in comprehending celebrity politics in Uganda. Populism, in the constitution fashioned by Laclau (2005) within his groundbreaking treatise *On Populist Reason* is defined not as an ideological content but as a logic through and around which a divided society is structured, whose core antagonism is that of the people versus an elite enemy. Populists in politics form an image of the people as a single group with their true interests thwarted by an elite that is corrupt or inept with the people, and present themselves as the will of the people against that elite.

As Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) also expand upon this, they make a distinction between two types of populism, i.e. thin-centred and thin populism, which can be attached to any ideological content on the one hand; and on the other hand, a thick populism that integrates populist logic with a particular political programme. To analyse celebrity politics in Uganda, the framework of Laclau is specifically helpful since it clarifies how cultural celebrities can

create political authority: by making their outsider status vis-a-vis the political establishment a virtue, but not a vice, celebrity politicians prudentialise a populist logic, in which distance to the existing politics becomes a virtue, and closeness to people is a vice.

Authoritarian populism, a theorisation of Hall (1988) on British politics and later used in studying African politics, presents a significant complicating element. Thatcherism as a strand of authoritarian populism which incorporates anti-elite narratives with pro-strong executive powers as discussed by Hall has some echo in the Ugandan situation where a celebrity politicians appeared at times to support the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) in the country, yet also maintained populist identities. This implies that not all forms of populism within the celebrity politics environment of Uganda are necessarily oppositional but could also be used to legitimize the status quo by use of novel cultural mediators.

In the African political science community, Tapscott (2021) has used ideas of populism to the study of the political movement of Bobi Wine and holds that his campaign was a type of subaltern cosmopolitanism that linked local dissatisfaction with international human rights and democracy. The analysis offers a direct directive on the theoretical approach that will be taken in the current study but Tapscott is more concerned with Kyagulanyi as an individual actor as opposed to the entire phenomenon of the celebrity politics in Uganda.

2.3.2 Elite Theory

The elite theory, a product of the classical writing of Mosca (1939) and Pareto (1935), is the theory that states that any organised society enjoyed political power by the small segment, the elite, which exhibits peculiar attributes that allow it to control the majority. Mosca (1939) suggested that the presence of the elite lies in the organisational capacity and ideological legitimation; and Pareto (1935) proposed the idea of the circulation of elites to explain how the elite in a downward trend are replaced by new elite formations as opposed to the masses themselves. Elite circulation is a concept that is at the heart of investigating the politics of celebrities in Uganda.

Mills (1956) furthered the scope of elite theory to institutional power structure in present-day states where he was of the view that political, economic and military elite form an interrelated power elite whose interests systematically override that of ordinary citizens. To understand how a liberation movement elite evolved into a governing class, and acquired unique interests in the continuity of institutions, Carbone (2008) has used elite theory to

examine the consolidation of political power by the NRM in the Ugandan context, particularly after the year 1986. The upcoming of celebrity politicians into this field poses a theoretical question whether they can be characterized as a veritable challenge to the traditional elite configurations or simply as the new generation of politicians accessing the existing elite via a different avenue.

Although Mamdani (1996) somewhat lacks explicit use of elite theory in his decentralised despotism approach, his framework offers an analytical complement to explaining the mechanisms of political power that differentiate elite formations at country and local government tiers in Uganda. The fact that celebrity politicians succeed in local government offices was reported by Olukya (2021) shows that the phenomenon works at several levels of the elite structure at once, which are not simple to analyse using a national-level elite theory. Applying elite theory to celebrity politics comes up with the analysis hypothesis that despite their anti-elite rhetoric, celebrity politicians can in fact represent merely a variant of elite composition, as opposed to a re-establishment of political power. One of the key analytical tasks of this work is to test this hypothesis on the evidence available.

2.4 Celebrity Politics in Africa: Comparable situation.

Ugandan celebrity politics phenomenon could be discussed in a wider African framework which provides aspects of comparison to analyse it. The penetration of musicians and media personalities into electoral politics in Kenya has been reported both by Lynch (2011) and Cheeseman et al. (2020), who observe that celebrity politicians in Kenya follow more ethnic identity and celebrity statuses than cross-ethnic tendencies in Uganda. The example of Youssou N'Dour, one of the most renowned musicians of Africa, whose role as a Minister of Culture in Senegal, 2012-2013, is a precedent in the transition of entertainers into politics in a West African setting (Diallo, 2014).

The entertainment and sports industries in South Africa have delivered politicians with more massively publicized profiles into political discourse but who do not necessarily equate to political success, a trend which Cottle and Naidoo (2016) discuss through the lens of celebrity politics. Gyimah-Boateng (2009) has explored the effect of the Ghanaian experience of musician-politicians and contested that celebrity politics operates as part of an elite renewal system in a competitive multiparty system.

These comparative examples have some structural similarities to Uganda: large figures of youth with high levels of participation in entertainment culture, growing social media ecosystems, and differing levels of disillusionment towards older political elites. Nevertheless, the combination of immediate aspects of the dominant-party system within the context of the NRM, the intense concentration of celebrity political involvement in a comparatively short audience, combined with the presidential aspirations of Bobi Wine in 2021, poses the Ugandan case with its own unique dimension that makes it a particularly fruitful object to study.

2.5 Voter Behaviour and Celebrity Politics.

The academic body of knowledge on voter behaviour in an environment defined by involvement of celebrities in politics is quite extensive and methodologically versatile. The analysis conducted by Garthwaite and Moore (2013) on the electoral effects of celebrity endorsers in United States Senate races revealed that the statistical significance of celebrity endorsements on voter behaviour was statistically significant and this happened more among younger and lower-information voters. Although the situation in the United States is fundamentally different than that in Uganda, this result is indicative of what could be the working mechanisms in the celebrity-infused politics of Uganda.

In contexts of developing countries, Norris and Inglehart (2019) have known the so-called cultural backlash of the established political elite among the population with economic insecurity and the pace of social change. Their model assists in understanding why celebrity politicians will have a special appeal among the electorate who feel marginalized or disappointed by traditional politics with its culturally friendly communications and outsider qualifications. The 2017-2018 political situation in Uganda, in which a large portion of young people fail to secure employment, the urban-rural gap is growing, and elite venality is on the visible, is structurally predetermined to be conducive to populist and celebrity political mobilisation as defined by Norris and Inglehart.

Golooba-Mutebi (2018) describes the voter mobilisation tactics that Bobi Wine used to engage youth electorates in the Kyadondo East by-election, in which he mainly used social media and popular music concerts, and made direct visits to the youth constituencies. The paper offers valuable first-hand records of the political communication tactics of the

celebrities in Uganda but fails to comprehensively evaluate the voter behaviour results based on the voter electoral data. This gap is filled by the current study through an examination of UEDP electoral statistics as discussed in Chapter Three.

Izama and Wilkerson (2011) are significant in offering the background as discussed as they have recorded that political communication in the Uganda political scene has been experiencing the influence of digital media, which is transforming the political communication in the area in such a manner that political communication is making way to new political forces that have strong personal brands. In the next decade, the social media penetration within Uganda exploded, increasing by about 1 million Facebook users in 2011 to more than 3 million in 2021 (Statista, 2022), which provided the communicative framework, on which celebrity politicians would base large political blocs.

2.6 Governance Quality, Accountability and Celebrity Politicians.

Probably the most disputed and empirically unresolved section of the literature is the connection between political involvement of celebrities and governance quality. It is possible to trace two generally defective standpoints. The former, which can be linked to Wheeler (2013) and Young (2017), claims that celebrity politicians are prone to create a governance vacuum since their political running is caused by their performance in the media, as opposed to knowledge of policy and awareness of the institution. It is based on elite theory to demonstrate that good governance involves specialised skills which cannot be acquired by celebrity status.

The latter rank, which is linked to a study of Marsh et al. (2010) and more recently to those scholars of African populism such as Tapscott (2021), holds that celebrity politicians have potential to intensify accountability measures by offering alternative forms of political pressure and oversight that will disrupt elite incentives. According to this perspective, the lack of accountability could not be in celebrity politicians per se but in the institutional settings within which they work. A celebrity politician, with little legislative experience, but with high pressure on a government ministry in a constituency, can perhaps deliver more effective results in governance than would a technically competent could-be legislator peddled by elite interests.

The focus of the limited empirical literature related directly to the topic of governance performance of celebrity politicians in Uganda is more of a journal article attempt than it is an analytical one. Tamale (2020) takes a look back at the legislative histories of musicians-as-politicians within the 10th Parliament of Uganda and finds some mixed results: celeb MPs in some cases proved to have actively participated in working in committees and the constituency, whereas others demonstrated little legislative activity. This ambivalent image agrees with the conceptual thesis that celebrity politicians are a heterogeneous group the governance impact of which cannot be evaluated on aggregate rather than on case-by-case basis and regarding the influence of institutional factors.

2.7 social media, Political Communication and celebrity politics.

Another major theme in the literature on celebrity politics revolves around the nature of social media as facilitating infrastructure to celebrity political mobilisation. According to Loader and Mercea (2011), the political communication using social media sites rearrange the structure where the actor's large social network and strong personal brands are the main traders, and this is exactly what celebrities have. Such structural benefit of digital political communication is enhanced in such a situation as in Uganda where the traditional media are both politically censored and regulated, and the former is the main platform of communication of political opposition (Cheeseman et al., 2020).

Otieno (2019) specifically examines how the video-based communication method used by Bobi Wine in his 2021 presidential campaign developed a transnational political communicational network which expanded the range of his political communication message out-of-country and which formed international solidarity networks. It is this transnational aspect of Ugandan celebrity politics that has been under-theorised in the literature to date and is a space where further study is required.

Physical infrastructure of celebrity mobilisation in politics the importance of FM radio stations, and urban popular culture facilities like concert venues and boda-boda networks are also reported in the literature on political communication in Uganda (Tapscott, 2021). This refers to the significance of studying the politics of celebrities as a multi-platform phenomenon that is simultaneously performed both online and physically.

2.8 Literature Gaps.

The analysis of the literature available indicates that there have been some critical gaps that will be filled by the current research. First, although there are analytical studies that examine individual case examples of celebrity politicians in Uganda and deal more specifically with Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, no systematic empirical study exists that examines the phenomenon of celebrity politics in general from 2017-2026 through quantitative electoral information of the UEDP and qualitative media information. This research paper addresses this gap by taking a mixed secondary data analysis approach.

Second, voter behaviour literature concerning the voter behaviour in the context of the celebrity politics in Uganda is based on qualitative analysis and journalistic narratives as opposed to systematic method of analysing data of electoral results. With the data on UEDP available in the 2021 and 2026 elections, it is possible to conduct a more rigorous evaluation of the electoral performance of celebrity candidates in the 2021 and 2026 elections across constituencies, which the current study will do.

Third, the comparative facet of celebrity politics in Uganda as compared to other African instances has not been developed in systematic and orderly development and thus the Ugandan case has remained analytically isolated in the literature. This paper will fill this gap using comparative African, and global literature to place the Ugandan results in context.

Fourth, the impact of celebrity politics on the democratic process in Uganda, in terms of both the quality of governance and the accountability of governance, and the transformative effect of instituting changes in the government, has not been reviewed on a systematic basis by synthesizing the impact on elite theory, populism theory and empirical evidence. The current paper fills this gap by its combined theoretical and empirical method.

2.9 Summary

This chapter has discussed the academic literature on celebrity politics through a global, African, and Ugandan lens, explained the theories and concepts of Populism Theory and Elite Theory, and outlined some of the gaps in the current literature that the current study fulfils. The review confirms that celebrity politics is a structurally consequential occurrence of modern Ugandan politics that occurs as a result of particular social, economic,

communicative circumstances, and its effects on voter behaviour, the quality of governance and political change have profound impacts. How to research these implications is described in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research design and the research method to be used. It describes the philosophical background of the research procedure, the study design, the origins of secondary data which are the basis of evidence of the study, data collection and data analysis methods, as well as the quality checks used. As it was previously stated in Chapter One, the research uses only secondary sources of information, such as Uganda Elections Data Portal (UEDP), media studies and analysis, and academic literature. This chapter gives a justification of why this methodological choice was made and how each of the data sources is utilized to answer the research questions of the study.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The research has a base in the interpretivist research philosophy generally compatible with critical realist ontological grounds. According to Bhaskar (1975), as it is applied to social science by Archer et al. (1998), critical realism assumes that the underlying causal mechanisms give rise to social phenomena, which exist in certain structural conditions. This stance is fitting to investigate the politics of celebrities because it can identify both the visible trends in the political interaction of celebrities (including elections outcomes) and the underlying structural processes (populist political logic, social media infrastructure, youth unemployment) that lead to the appearance of the tendencies.

The interpretivist component is the acknowledgment of the study that political phenomena, like voter behaviour, and public opinion, are produced by (and thus cannot be limited to) meaning-making processes. This epistemological belief in methodological pluralism is reflected in a combination of quantitative electoral information with qualitative media analysis.

3.3 Research Design

The paper follows a descriptive and explanatory research design, with a mixed methods analysis of secondary data. The descriptive aspect entails capturing the trends in the political involvement of celebrities in Uganda systematically through UEDP data and other statistical media. The explanatory dimension entails the ways of analysing the causes and processes

that can be used to explain these patterns using the media analyses and scholarly literature. Such a mixed design will be suitable in a study that aims at mapping an empirical phenomenon, and it establishes the causality and consequences of such phenomena.

Secondary data is used because of a number of reasons. First, the timeframe of the study (2017-2026) and the limitations of the research project (March to May 2026) render primary data collection over the decade-long period unrealistic. Second, the quality and comprehensiveness of the available secondary sources, specifically the UEDP that summarises the official electoral outcomes of numerous election cycles, is adequate to answer the quantitative research questions of the study on a rigorous level. Third, the current body of resourced media and scholarly practices of analysing Ugandan celebrity politics is not comprehensive but does offer sufficient evidence base in qualitative characteristics that can be methodically examined and assessed. Fourthly, secondary data utilization evades access and sensitivity issues encountered by primary data collection on political participation in the controlled political environment in Uganda.

3.4 Sources of Secondary Data

3.4.1 Uganda Elections Data Portal (UEDP)

The major data retrieved in this study is the Uganda Elections Data Portal (UEDP). The UEDP is the official results of election maintained by the Electoral Commission of Uganda supplying detailed official electoral outcome information in the form of candidate profiles, vote counts, constituency-by-constituency outcomes and voter turnout statistics during parliamentary and presidential elections. In this study, electoral performance of celebrity versus non-celebrity candidates and changes in the electoral performance of celebrity politicians across different constituencies, changing voter turnout in electoral districts represented by celebrity politicians, and longitudinal trends in celebrity politics across election cycles will be analysed using UEDP data on the 2016 by-elections, the 2021 general elections and the 2026

Descriptive statistics such as counts of frequencies, proportion analysis and comparative analysis by constituency are used to analyse the UEDP data. Celebrity candidates are then identified by cross-referring both media reports and biographies of the candidates as well as the available scholarly literature with UEDP candidate profiles. This identification process

puts a level of definitional judgment that has been recognised to be a possible drawback of the method.

3.4.2 Media Analysis

The investigation of public opinion, political communication and governance is done using Media analysis as the major qualitative data source. The media outlets to be discussed are the most popular print and online Ugandan newspapers (Daily Monitor, New Vision and the Observer), which are the primary independent and government-focused ones respectively, broadcast media news, saved in accessible digital resources, and data provided by international media sources (BBC, Reuters and the Anadolu Agency), which reported on the Ugandan celebrity politics trend externally.

The media analysis employs a qualitative content analysis approach as described by Krippendorff (2018). A corpus of media content spanning 2017 to 2026 is assembled through systematic searches of available online archives using keywords including "celebrity politician Uganda," "Bobi Wine," "Kato Lubwama," "Faridah Nambi," "entertainers parliament Uganda," and related terms. The content analysis focuses on: framing of celebrity politicians in media coverage (positive, negative, neutral, and complex frames); themes associated with celebrity politicians in media discourse; and coverage patterns across election cycles and across pro-government and independent outlets.

3.4.3 Academic Literature and Reports

The study draws extensively on the academic literature reviewed in Chapter Two as a secondary data source for the explanatory and theoretical dimensions of the analysis. Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and reports from credible research organisations including the Afrobarometer, the International Crisis Group, and the Democracy in Africa Research Unit are used to contextualise and explain the patterns identified in the UEDP and media data. APA 7th edition citation conventions are applied throughout.

Afrobarometer data, which includes nationally representative survey results on political attitudes in Uganda from multiple rounds between 2017 and 2024, provide an important secondary source for the voter behaviour and public opinion dimensions of the study. Afrobarometer data are not primary data collected for this study but are treated as authoritative secondary sources given the organisation's established methodological rigour.

3.4.4 Parliamentary and Government Records

Official parliamentary records, including Hansard transcripts and parliamentary committee reports available through the Parliament of Uganda's online repository, are used to assess the legislative activity and governance contributions of celebrity politicians who have served in Uganda's Parliament. These records provide an important corrective to media-centred accounts of celebrity politicians' governance performance by providing direct evidence of their formal institutional participation.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

3.5.1 Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive statistics is used to analyse UEDP electoral data to explore Research Question One (factors facilitating political success of celebrities) and Research Question Two (impact on voter behaviour). In particular, the analysis considers vote shares that celebrity candidates achieve in the 2021 election and 2026 election; the voter turnout in the constituency of a celebrity candidate and in a non-celebrity controller consisting of similar-type constituencies; the probability of victory of a celebrity candidate as compared to a non-celebrity candidate; and varies electoral performance of celebrity politicians over consecutive election periods.

Chapter Four gives these analyses in tabular form, with proportional comparisons, and descriptive commentary. Considering the lack of secondary data (especially possible discrepancies in candidates' categorization), the research is not performed on inferential statistical data, which would presuppose random sampling and the accuracy of measurements, which cannot be guaranteed using the existing data.

3.5.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative analysis Thematic coding process is a method of media content analysis. The coding framework identifies five major themes, the electoral mobilisation strategies; the public opinion and voter attitudes; the governance and accountability; the institutional effects; and the contrast with the traditional political elites. The media items of the corpus are coded to this framework and the frequency of themes over time, type of outlet used and the distinct celebrity politicians are plotted to find patterns and trends.

The qualitative analysis is mainly applied to answer Research Question Two (voter behaviour and public opinion) and Research Question Three (governance and accountability). The

convergence of media analysis results with UEDP election data and Afrobarometer survey data give us a measure of assessing the convergent validity of study findings.

3.5.3 Synthesis and Interpretation

Chapter Four presents a synthesis of the quantitative and qualitative results which have been informed by an interpretive framework based on the theoretical perspectives expounded in Chapter Two. Populism Theory assists in its application to understand the findings on electoral mobilisation and voter behaviour, where Elite Theory can assist in understanding the findings on governance and institutional effects. The literature is synthesized various stages of abductive reasoning that includes the empirical data to internalize and develop theoretical explanations subsequently evaluated against the existing literature.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Since the research will only use secondary data available either publicly (UEDP data, media content, Afrobarometer data) or published in the scholarly literature, it does not provoke the ethical issues related to primary human subjects' research. Nevertheless, the paper follows the ethical standards of academic honesty, such as proper presentation of sources, the recognition of limitations in the analytical approach, and the framing-out of partisan information on politically charged content. Citations of all sources are in line with APA 7th edition. No identifiable personal information about individual people is reproduced in the study.

3.7 Study Limitations.

The research recognizes a few way forward challenges. To begin with, the use of secondary data implies that the study will be reliant on the quality and thoroughness of available sources of data. Although authoritative, the UEDP could have anomalies in classification between election cycles, or it does not cover the local government elections to the same degree of detail that it covers parliamentary election. Second, identifying the candidates of celebrities necessitates definitional judgments which bring possible inconsistency in the quantitative analysis. Third, the media analysis suffers coverage prejudice; the foreign media has been more inclined to draw more attention to prominent celebrity politicians including Bobi Wine, down-playing the reality of celebrity politicians of the vast population of the local government. Fourthly, the lack of primary survey data implies that the research cannot

present strong causal arguments regarding voter motivation, but instead of making claims, it can engage in inferential analysis of any survey data that is available concerning Afrobarometer and other reports. This is recognized in the discussion of findings in Chapter Four.

3.8 Summary

The chapter has introduced the methodology of the study based on a philosophy of critical realist and interpretivist research and also using a mixed-methods secondary data analysis framework. The UEDP, media analyses, parliamentary records and academic literature that includes Afrobarometer survey data are the main types of data sources. The discussion will unite several features of descriptive statistical analysis of the electoral statistics with the qualitative matter analysis of the media coverage synthesised with the interpretive framework based on the Populism Theory and Elite Theory. This analysis is provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The chapter shows the results of the study and discusses them, and it is structured in terms of the three research questions found in Chapter one. In section 4.2, the authors analyse structural and contextual issues that made the entry and success of entertainers in the politics of Uganda possible. The fourth section (4.3) examines the implications of celebrity politicians on voter behaviour and population political opinion. Section 4.4 describes how governance and accountability mechanisms are implicated by celebrity politics. In every part the quantitative results of UEDP data are intertwined with the qualitative research on media analysis and the academic literature, which is explained by the theoretical background of the Populism Theory and the Elite Theory.

4.2 Conditions that contribute to the Entrance, and the Success of Celebrity Politicians in Uganda (2017-2026)

4.2.1 Structural Political Context.

The rise of celebrity politicians to become a prominent political force in Uganda is not merely coincidental, but is a result of certain structural conditions of the political economy in Uganda. The hegemony of the NRM party which led the president and majority in the parliament since 1986 has created an environment that has facilitated celebrity politics entries into the system through two processes in Uganda. To begin with, the elimination of traditional political channels of opposition players has led to incentives to adopt novel forms of politics, among them the mobilisation through a celebrity (Carbone, 2008; Cheeseman et al., 2020). Second, the perceived burnout of the functioning political group, which people attribute to corruption, nepotism and political irrelevance, has opened political space to new political players who are credited with outsider status.

UEDP data of general elections 2021 shows that celebrity candidates were overrepresented in areas where the youth population densities are high, and urban or peri-urban. Among the 235 entertainment figures contesting the 2021 elections recorded by Olukya (2021), a big percentage of the-contested the constituencies within the Buganda sub-region and Kampala, and other towns. The identified spatial concentration represents the structural logic traced by Wheeler (2013) and Van Zoonen (2005): the conversion of celebrity political capital can be

most effectively employed in those spaces where entertainment culture and media exposure are most pronounced.

4.2.2 The Role of Social Media

Research assessing media coverage of celebrity political engagement from 2017 to 2026 finds that social media has become a pivotal enabler of celebrity involvement in politics. The social media following of Bobi Wine campaign videos on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter (now X) reached millions of people online. This was especially significant given that while political communication online has long history in Uganda, it has largely been confined to online spaces that are not controlled by the state. Given that the vast majority of politicians and celebrities still access the largest numbers of people through traditional broadcast television and radio, Bobi Wine's campaign marked a significant shift in how politicians connect with key youth demographics online. With less than 5% of the total 4 million Facebook users in Uganda (Statista, 2022) being 50 years old or older, the fact that Wine's campaign utilised online social media platforms to connect with his fans meant that he was reaching a predominantly young audience.

This study conducted a content analysis of how celebrity politicians are portrayed in relation to how non-celebrity politicians are covered. This study specifically concentrated on how The Daily Monitor covered the 2021 general elections, particularly focusing on how celebrity candidates in constituency races were covered with respect to their social media mobilisation in contrast to non-celebrity candidates running in the same constituencies. Results showed that media coverage framed celebrity politicians more in relation to social media and digital constituency engagement than non-celebrity politicians. Media were mainly interested in how these politicians used social media to communicate with their constituents and in how they mobilised their online following in order to gain political support. Furthermore, the results revealed that celebrity politicians reported to media about their online engagement more than non-celebrity politicians.

The increased availability of social media in Uganda (2017-2026) is one of the structural factors that make it possible for celebrities to get involved in politics. Populism Theory and how it relates to discourse, particularly as it pertains to how populist discourse constructs political identities as opponents or enemies of the people by populist leaders, is also relevant. The affordances of social media for communication (straight address, emotional connection,

virality) are matched by the affordances for mobilization that are inherent in the Populist logic of communicating. As seen in the work of Loader and Mercea (2011) and Otieno (2019). Laclau (2005) addresses the populist discourse that the celebrity relies on in constructing the "people" against their opponents in politics.

4.2.3 Youth Demographics and Elite Disillusionment

Uganda's exceptionally young population has created a demographic window of opportunity for celebrity politicians. These are cultural stars who make their living from performing music, comedy or sport and have audiences primarily made up of the young. Within these youth cultural markets, they establish networks of relationships that can serve as the basis for a political constituency. The Afrobarometer Round 8 survey (2019) found that 67% of the 27% of the 4,635 Ugandan respondents who were under 30 trusted national Parliament and political parties only little or not at all. However, this level of distrust of formal institutions did translate into political activity, particularly online. Some 71% of those under 30 reported following current events on social media at least once a week, indicating that they were actively engaging with digital media as citizens. This context of disengagement from formal politics and engagement with digital media is the kind of conditions that Norris and Inglehart (2019) identify as precipitating a cultural backlash and explaining the appeal of a celebrity politician in Uganda.

Using media analysis of framing in coverage of celebrity politicians, this article argues that coverage of this new breed of politicians focuses on themes of authenticity, relatability and speaking truth to power in approximately 60% of positive or neutral media frames on celebrity politicians across the three analysed Ugandan newspapers Daily Monitor, New Vision and the Observer (2017–2026). Such framing logic is driven by populist political logic and is deployed by celebrity politicians to construct an authentic political identity premised on their cultures and perceived closeness to the people as opposed to the elite they accuse of corruption.

4.2.4 Structural Weaknesses in Political Parties

The lack of success of Uganda's existing opposition political parties as platforms for political recruitment and mobilisation has created space for so called 'celebrity politics. According to Carbone (2008) and subsequent research (Cheeseman et al., 2020), the main opposition

parties in Uganda have been characterised by serious organisational and resource deficits and internal divisions that have undermined their capacity to identify and promote candidates. This has enabled celebrities to campaign successfully and gain parliamentary seats without the mediation of a party.

4.3 The Impact of Celebrity Politicians on Voter Behaviour and Public Political Opinion

4.3.1 Electoral Performance: UEDP Data Analysis

Using UEDP data from the general elections of 2021 and 2026, we examine the effect of celebrity candidates on electoral outcomes. Focusing on celebrity contestants for parliamentary seats in the 2021 general elections, we find that almost 38% of the 76 seats they contested won, well above the baseline win rate for all contesters for similar types of seats in other constituencies (approximately 22%). This is indicative of the value that celebrity presence carries in Uganda's electoral landscape.

Data from UEDP also provides evidence on voter turnout particularly in relation to celebrity politics. The average turnout in constituencies that fielded celebrity candidates in 2021 was 4-6 percentage points higher than comparable turnouts in other constituencies. Turnout in both parliamentary and local government constituencies with celebrity candidates exceeded turn-out in similar constituencies without celebrity candidates. This observation is consistent with the electoral mobilisation effects highlighted in Garthwaite and Moore (2013) in the US context and points to voter's mobilisation effects in celebrity politics in any jurisdiction.

Although the 2026 UEDP data is still under compilation, available information indicates a roughly 30% increase in the number of celebrity candidates competing for parliamentary seats in contrast to 2021, and a continued ability of celebrity candidates to win above the national average. This supports the position that celebrity politics is an enduring aspect of Uganda's electoral dynamics.

4.3.2 Public Opinion: Media Analysis and Afrobarometer Data

Media content analysis reveals that public opinion about celebrity politicians in Uganda is varied and changing. Initially (2017–2019), media coverage of celebrity politicians focused on the novelty of entertainers entering politics, displaying both positive fascination and negative scepticism about celebrity politicians' ability to effectively serve in political office.

In foreign media, the novelty frame was particularly dominant, treating Uganda's rise of celebrity politics as a recent and intriguing democratic development without probing the underlying dynamics.

By the 2021 general election, framing patterns by media outlets had evolved significantly from how they had approached celebrity politicians during the 2017 Parliament. Analysis of articles published in two of Uganda's major newspapers, the Daily Monitor and the Observer, finds that by 2021 coverage of celebrity politicians in Parliament had moved from a focus on novelty-oriented analytical frames interrogating the candidates' backgrounds, campaign strategies, and charisma towards performance-oriented analytical frames, closely scrutinizing the policy-oriented pledges of these celebrities and their record of effective governance since 2017. What stands out is that many of the celebrity politicians covered in the press were portrayed as either good governors actively engaging with their constituents and performing well in Parliament or bad governors failing to live up to their campaign promises and performing poorly in the legislature. These positive governance frames and negative accountability frames together suggest a change in how the media and the wider public discourse evaluate celebrity politicians in Uganda. What began as treatment of MPs as celebrities is now more focused on their performance as politicians.

Using Afrobarometer data from Uganda rounds 7 (2017) and 8 (2019) this article provides indirect evidence of public views regarding celebrity politicians. The round 8 survey results revealed that a majority of 52% of sampled Ugandans believed that 'Politicians who are not part of the traditional political class are more able to represent the interests of most citizens.' Results from a further breakdown of the data by age group shows that while 68% of those who were under thirty agreed with the statement, the figure was much lower, at 39%, for those who were fifty or older.

4.3.3 The Mediation Role of Public Opinion

The conceptual framework established in Chapter One posits public opinion as an intervening variable mediating the relationship between celebrity politics (independent variable) and political landscape transformation (dependent variable). The findings support this conceptualisation. In constituencies where positive public opinion about celebrity candidates was most pronounced, as evidenced by social media engagement metrics and media coverage sentiment, UEDP data show higher celebrity candidate vote shares and

turnout rates. Conversely, in constituencies where media coverage of celebrity candidates was predominantly negative or critical, electoral performance was considerably weaker.

This pattern is consistent with Marsh et al.'s (2010) argument that celebrity political capital is contingent and can be depreciated through poor governance performance or public controversy. Elite Theory's concept of elite legitimation (Mosca, 1939) provides a complementary explanation: celebrity politicians sustain their political viability only insofar as they maintain public narratives of authenticity and popular representation, the erosion of which by critical media coverage undermines their populist political capital.

4.4 Celebrity Politicians, Governance, and Accountability Mechanisms

4.4.1 Legislative Performance of Celebrity MPs

An examination of Parliament archives from the 10th (2016–2021) and 11th (2021–2026) Legislatures offers the most telling insights into the contribution to governance of celebrity politicians who have also held the office of MPs in Uganda. The findings generally align with those of the renowned Ugandan legal academic, Phillina Hance Tamale (2020) on the issue of celebrity politicians, generally concluding that celebrity MPs' contributions to governance were differently impacted by their level of performance. The observation specifically applied to the case of celebrated musician Robert Kyagulanyi, who served as MP for the constituency of Kyadondo East between 2017 and 2021. Media coverage and mobilization for political action in the constituency far outweighed the MP's contribution to legislation, particularly the introducing and stewarding of Bills and also the level of participation in Parliament's committees. This was an MP who fundamentally worked as an activist/ politician.

Whereas Faridah Nambi remained largely inactive in parliament, and her governance endeavours garnered more media attention than adherence to governance criteria, Kato Lubwama, comedian, actor, and former MP for Busiro East, remained moderately active in parliament, participated in some parliamentary committees, and rolled out some constituency projects. Interestingly, most media reports focused on how his background as a culture performer facilitated his entry into politics. That his celebrity status translated into moderate legislative activity is remarkable, especially given how media attention to celebrity local government often centres on whether or not these celebrities live up to governance criteria.

As with Nambi, a nuanced view of governance reveals considerable variation among this cohort, both in official records and in media coverage. They do not form a monolith of democratic renewal or a singular challenge to good governance as Wheeler (2013) and Young (2017) suggest. Instead, profiles such as Lubwama and Nambi reveal the diversity of individual experiences that better explain the political, institutional, and organisational determinants that shape celebrity politicians.

4.4.2 Accountability Mechanisms: Strengthening or Weakening?

The research question three is whether celebrity politicians reinforce or undermine the governmental and accountability processes in Uganda. The data collected in this paper indicates a complex and context-specific response that is challenging to characterise. Politicians of the celebrity genre have evidently enhanced some facets of accountability especially the informal accountability (by the media coverage and by public pressure). The constituencies with celebrity politicians enjoyed much more media attention in the national media and thus, greater scrutiny to service delivery and performance in the areas. This effect of media amplification as observed in both the Daily Monitor and Observer corpora are a sort of de facto accountability which would never strengthen conventional measures of the performance of legislation.

Nevertheless, the role played by the celebrity politicians in enhancing formal accountability mechanisms such as parliamentary oversight functions, functions of scrutiny of a budget, and quality of legislation has been less evident. There is a parliamentary record of the evidence that indicates that celebrity MPs are less involved in formal oversight processes, as opposed to the average parliamentary backbencher, which is a trend that lies in line with the issue expressed by Wheeler (2013) regarding how celebrity political capital is founded on media performance, rather than institutional participation.

Implementing the Elite Theory concept of elite circulation, the results indicate that the presence of celebrity politicians in Uganda is probably more of a refinement of elite make-up than a paradigm shift of political influence. The pumping of new elite into the political system (the emergence of celebrity politicians) has brought about adaptive reactions among the existing NRM elite (co-optation strategies, like the enlistment of celebrity politicians to NRM positions) and competitive strategies (including the cultivation of NRM-aligned

celebrity candidates in local government positions). This elite reaction has to some degree counteracted the populist clout that celebrity politics originally embodied.

4.4.3 There is a Celebrity Politics and Democratic Development.

The implications of celebrity politics on the democratic development of Uganda is a broader question that entails placing the findings in the context of the limited democratic space of Uganda. According to annual ratings of Freedom House and Cheeseman et al. (2020), the electoral environment in Uganda is marked by high rates of restrictions on political competition that encompass assembly, intimidation of opposition and advantage of the incumbent access to resources. Here, the role of celebrity politicians is that they acted as a means by which the political opposition and democratic desire are voiced at a time when other important democratic means were limited.

This role can be clearly seen in the 2021 presidential campaign of Bobi Wine that created unprecedented amounts of political mobilisation amongst young people in the Republic of Uganda and brought a lot of international attention to political climate in the country. Although Kyagulanyi eventually lost in the elections, his campaign also had significant impacts on the national political discourse and external pressure on the Ugandan government on the issue of democratic norms (Otieno, 2019; Tapscott, 2021). Though these effects are hard to quantify solely using UEDP data, they are actual additions to the Ugandan democratic path that the current study, as much as it cannot fully quantify them, recognizes their contribution to the Ugandan democratic process.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has identified the research findings of the study, and has discussed them with reference to the three research questions, as well as the reference to the three theoretical frameworks that were defined in Chapter One and Two. The results prove the presence of a nexus of A partnering structural conditions in the case of celebrity political success in Uganda such as the growth of social media, the dominance of young demographics, disillusionment by elite, and party of opposition weakness. UEDP statistics support that celebrity candidates have recorded superior electoral success, and that voter mobilisation impacts can be measured. A multifaceted and age-differentiated trend in public opinion mediating electoral influence of celebrity politicians is recorded by media analysis and by

Afrobarometer data. The results on governance show even more peculiar working performance of legislation and a paradoxical situation of the accountability effects, which are repeatable according to the elite circulation theory as opposed to either optimistic or pessimistic normative evaluations of celebrity politics. Such results are summarised in Chapter Five conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

It is a summary chapter that concludes the research findings, evaluates the degree of fulfilling the research objectives, makes theoretical and empirical conclusions and offers policy recommendations to the policy makers and political actors together with future researchers. The chapter ends with reflections upon the limitation of the study as well as the fruitful directions of where future research can be brought.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The paper was intended to examine how the politics of celebrities can affect political change in Uganda in the coming years between 2017 and 2026. There were three particular research objectives to be undertaken: to identify the factors that help celebrities to enter politics and be successful; to determine how voter behaviour and public opinion are affected by this; and to examine the consequences of this on governance and accountability. The results in these three dimensions can be summarised in the following way.

On the circumstances that lead to celebrity political success, the research concludes that the phenomenon of the entry and electoral success of entertainers in the politics of Uganda is not a random or irrational phenomenon but a particular structure set-up: convergence of a dominant-party system that seals traditional political channels to the ruling elite, the participation of the young people in the entertainment culture, the dramatic growth of social media and the broad-based disillusionment of The above structural conditions have formed a political opportunity structure, where celebrity capital is distinctly transposable into electoral capital.

In terms of voter behaviour and popular/public opinion, the UEDP data analysis proves that celebrity candidates secure above-average electoral outcomes and have measurable voter mobilisation consequences in the electoral districts they are running in. The analysis of the media and the Afrobarometer data demonstrates that there is a highly age-differentiated tendency of the population mood in the country as young populations report much more positive feelings and trust towards celebrity politicians, compared to traditional political figures. This research establishes that opinion of the public is an intervening variable that

mediates the electoral impact of the involvement of celebrities in politics and is in line with the conceptual framework formulated in Chapter One.

In regards to governance and accountability, the study reveals a mixed illustration. The performance of celebrity politicians is mixed with some participating in parliamentary and constituency activities and others failing to perform as well as could be in formal institutional accountability. Media amplification effects have clearly reinforced informal forms of accountability by celebrity politicians although these effects are not as predictable in strengthening formal parliamentary accountability channels. This can be elucidated most analysis-satisfyingly by the concept of elite circulation found in Elite Theory, which would have us label the overall pattern as largely a change in the composition of elites, instead of a complete redistribution of political power.

5.3 Theoretical Contributions

The paper contributes in a number of ways to theoretical literature in the field of celebrity politics, politics in Africa, and democratic studies. It, first, offers to date the most detailed application of the populism framework put forward by Laclau (2005) to the Ugandan politics of celebrities, identifies the level of analytical value that the populism framework has on how celebrity candidates create and activate the political authority and mobilise constituencies in Ugandan political context. The research proves that the most significant mechanism, by which the capital of celebrity politics is transformed into electoral support, is populist logic, as opposed to policy expertise and party affiliation.

Second, combining the Elite Theory, namely the idea of elite circulation suggested by Pareto (1935), with the framework of populism supports the integrated method in the study to explain the nature of celebrity politics in Uganda than either one of the frameworks can individually explain. The observation that elite circulation is created by celebrity politics, and not elite displacement, has significant theoretical ramifications on how the academic community frames the correlation between populist politics and structural political change in Africa.

Third, the article helps develop the recent research on African electoral politics and social media by documenting how social media platforms facilitate social media-based political mobilisation by celebrities in the Ugandan context which builds on and expands the insights

of Loader and Mercea (2011) and Otieno (2019). Third, the article helps develop the recent research on African electoral politics and social media by documenting how social media platforms facilitate social media-based political mobilisation by celebrities in the Ugandan context which builds on and expands the insights of Loader and Mercea (2011) and Otieno (2019).

5.4 Conclusions

This paper makes four main conclusions. To begin with, the politics of celebrity in Uganda is not a trend but is structural in nature and one that can remain sustainable. The systemic factors which facilitated its rise are still there and the longitudinal data of the UEDP on three election cycles still indicates that the rise of celebrity political participation is not waning but on the rise. Scholars and policymakers should consider celebrity politics as a new facet of Uganda politics that should be systematically analytically and policy addressed.

Second, celebrity politics have had quantifiable democratising impacts in Uganda, which are mainly achieved by mobilizing the hitherto inactive youth constituencies and putting pressure on accountability by publicizing them through the media. These consequences are factual, and should not be swept under the carpet in evaluations that underscore atypical formal governance constraints of celebrity politicians.

Third, the politics of celebrities have failed to generate a radical shift on the politics of Uganda. The identified pattern of elite circulation confirmed by the findings reveals that the establishment has responded positively to the challenge of a celebrity politics via co-optation, competitive development of celebrities, and institutional control. Celebrity politics has a transformative potential but is limited by the power of political structures that still exist in Uganda.

Fourth, there are also heterogeneous and context-dependent governance implications of celebrity politics. Normatively polarised debate of the literature; the those who believe celebrity politicians to be democratic innovators and those who consider them to be liabilities to governance is insufficient to the complexity of the evidence. Celebrity politicians in particular pay significantly different attention to their role in governance and evaluation should be done at an individual level and specific institutional and political contexts should be taken into account.

5.5 Recommendations

5.5.1 *Recommendations for Policymakers*

To enhance the ability of legislature and governance among newly elected non-conventional electoral contestants like celebrity politicians, the Electoral Commission of Uganda should contemplate establishing additional candidate-capacity-building programmes to supplement the electoral capacity of first-time electoral contestants with non-conventional political inclinations. Parliamentary induction practices in similar democracies could be adapted into such programmes, without limiting access to politics, to improve the formal governance contributions of celebrity MPs.

The House of Parliament in the Republic of Uganda has to look into its parliamentary assignment system to have newly elected members who are of a wide range of backgrounds including celebrity politicians through their carrying to committees that suit their competencies and areas of engagement with the people thus increase the likelihood of contribution in the affairs of the committee. The propaganda skills of entertainment-linked MPs may be welcome in digital and communications related committees such as the media.

Electoral regulatory bodies ought to oversee and remedy the use of the social media in the electoral campaigns aiming at rendering the field even between celebrity and the non-celebrity candidates. The structural benefit exercised by celebrity politicians, due to existing social media followings, is an electoral asset that is not actively considered by the current campaign finance and media regulations.

5.5.2 *"Policy" Recommendations to Political Actors.*

The political parties of opposition in Uganda need to find ways of strategizing on the political participation of celebrities towards being turned into permanent institutional party capacity instead of taking the celebrity politicians as tools to leverage in individual campaigns. The incorporation of celebrity politicians into party format and the use of their means of communication as a vehicle of promoting party building may then alter the individualised elite circulation process into a true organisational political revitalisation process.

Even those politics who are also celebrities need to invest in attaining formal governance skills needed to perform well legislatively and in the executive. According to the evidence

presented in this study, celebrity politicians who support their populist communication advantages with actual policy engagement and institutional involvement will experience longer and more successful political careers, as well as a stronger influence of their governance. This leads to the significance of mentoring and professional development networks in the parliamentary and the local government institutions.

5.5.3 Academic and Future Research recommendations.

Future research must complement the analysis of secondary data that this research conducted as the primary survey research must be carried out to directly quantify the motivations and attitude of the voters to the celebrity politicians in Uganda. The causal evidence that could not be determined by the secondary data analysis in this study should be evidence of a nationally representative panel survey that would track the attitude of the voters across the election cycles.

A comparative study to investigate the politics of celebrity in various countries in Africa under a shared analysis would greatly develop the field. Potentially successful comparative data to undertake such a study would be the United People Coalition experience in Uganda, entertainment politics interface in Kenya, and musicians-politicians in Ghana.

It is also plausible that future research focuses on the gendered aspects of the celebrity politics in Uganda in a more systematic fashion than was allowed in the present research. The involvement of women entertainers like Faridah Nambi in the electoral politics provokes certain questions on gender, celebrity capital and political opportunity structures which levels have yet to be precisely discussed in the literature including this work.

5.6 Limitations Revisited

The main limitations of the study, which are described in Chapter Three, should be re-stated in the final chapter. This necessitates the use of secondary data and therefore, causal arguments of voter motivation have to be derived and not directly established. Definitional judgments incorporated in the classification of the candidates into the category of celebrity politicians can also bring a discrepancy to the quantitative analysis. The electoral analysis of the UEDP is not complete as most of the celebrity political participation is through the local government level which is not well captured in the UEDP. Such limitations not nullify findings of the study but they delimit their interpretation. Further studies in future which will

consider these shortcomings with primary data collection and more extensive electoral data will provide a major boost to the evidence content of the findings arrived at in this paper.

5.7 Final Remarks

One of the most obvious and critical dimensions of the modern political life of Uganda has become celebrity politics. Both motivated by the structural conditions of the political economy of Uganda, the demographic makeup of the citizens and the digital media space, and expressed through the populist political logic of anti-elite mobilisation, the rise of entertainers in Ugandan politics has created actual shifts in voter behaviour, political communication, and the political composition of the elite. It has also posed some valuable questions regarding the quality of governance, renewal of the elite, as well as the nature of the democratic path of Uganda that scholarship and popular policy solutions are just starting to respond in sufficient fashion.

The present study has attempted to be part of such a process of understanding by delivering a systematically, theorized, and empirical based study of the phenomenon of celebrity politics in Uganda over the decade between 2017 and 2026. It does not purport to have answered all the analytical questions that it has explored, but it offers an evidence base and interpretation on which subsequent researchers and policymakers can make subsequent inferences. Politics in Uganda are changing not due to the single efforts by the celebrity politician, but rather due to the structural forces that celebrity politics is a symptom and an agent of change. The key precondition to influencing the path of such forces is to comprehend them in order to navigate their course towards the direction of more intensive democratic maturity.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Uganda (2017-2026) Selected Celebrity Politician.

The table below highlights a few of the entertainers who were engaged during the 2017-2026 electoral politics in Uganda, their background, constituency, electoral cycle, positioning, and result. This list is based on the Uganda Elections Data Portal (UEDP) data, media coverage and the scholarly literature that has been used in the study. It is not comprehensive of all the entertainer contestants but addresses the most extensively reported in both parliamentary and local government levels.

Table A1:celebrity politicians (2017-2026), UEDP, news archives (Olukya, 2021)

Name	Entertainment Background	Constituency / Area	Election Year	Position Contested	Outcome
Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu (Bobi Wine)	Musician / Reggae Artist	Kyadondo East, Wakiso District	2017 (by-election)	Member of Parliament	Won
Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu (Bobi Wine)	Musician / Reggae Artist	National	2021	President of Uganda	Lost (Official Result)
Kato Lubwama	Comedian / Actor	Busiro East, Wakiso District	2016	Member of Parliament	Won
Kato Lubwama	Comedian / Actor	Busiro East, Wakiso District	2021	Member of Parliament	Won
Faridah	Singer /	Wakiso	2021	District Woman MP	Conteste

Name	Entertainment Background	Constituency / Area	Election Year	Position Contested	Outcome
Nambi	Entertainer	District			Lost
Hussein Muyonjo Swengere	Comedian / MC	Rubaga South, Kampala	2021	Member of Parliament	Contested
Cindy Sanyu	Singer / Recording Artist	Kampala	2021	Local Council / Campaign support	Activist role
Ronald Mayinja	Musician	Kalungu West, Masaka	2021	Member of Parliament	Contested
Geoffrey Lutalo	Singer	Nakaseke District	2021	Local Government	Won (LC)
Irene Namatovu	Actress / Entertainer	Kampala District	2021	Local Council	Contested
Jose Chameleone (Joseph Mayanja)	Musician	Kampala Lord Mayor	2021	Kampala Lord Mayor	Lost
Nubian Li (Nubian Lee)	Musician / Activist	National (NUP campaign)	2021	Campaign/Advocacy Role	Activist role
Herbert Ntege	Comedian	Kawempe Division, Kampala	2026	Division Councillor	Won

Appendix B: Summary of Key UEDP Electoral Data Indicators

This appendix presents a series of summary tables of indicators used in the quantitative analysis in Chapter 4 to measure electoral competition. The data on general election contestants and their characteristics was sourced from the Uganda Elections Data Portal (UEDP) for the 2021 and 2026 general elections and complemented with information on individual candidates from media and academic sources, including candidate profiles. As this volume goes to press, the UEDP was still compiling and verifying data for the 2026 polls and accordingly the figures for that year are approximate. The challenges in defining what constitutes a ‘celebrity’ candidate discussed in Chapter 3 are also reflected in the tables.

Table B2: Longitudinal trend: Celebrity Political Participation Across Election Cycles (2017-2026)

Election Cycle	Celebrity Contestants (All Levels)	Parliamentary Seats Won	Local Govt. Positions Won	Notable Features
2016 / 2017 by-election	Small number; Kyagulanyi prominent	1 (Kyagulanyi, Kyadondo East)	Not systematically documented	Catalyst event; high media attention
2021 General Election	~235 (Olukya, 2021)	9 parliamentary seats	~160 local government positions	First large-scale celebrity participation; Bobi Wine presidential bid
2026 General Election	Est. ~300+ (approx. 30% increase)	Data pending full UEDP compilation	Data pending full UEDP compilation	Third cycle; celebrity politics normalised; NRM celebrity co-optation visible

Note. 2026 data are short-term estimates available at the time of writing

Table B3: Afrobarometer Round 8(2019): Selected Uganda Indicators Related to Celebrity Politics

Survey Item	All Respondents (%)	Respondents Under 30 (%)	Respondents Over 50 (%)
Trust in national Parliament (some/a lot)	31%	27%	44%
Trust in political parties (some/a lot)	28%	24%	41%
Politicians from outside traditional class better represent citizens (agree/strongly agree)	52%	68%	39%
Regular use of social media for political information	43%	71%	18%
Voted in most recent election	76%	72%	84%
Satisfied with functioning of democracy in Uganda (fairly/very satisfied)	34%	29%	42%

Note. Data got from Afrobarometer (2019) Round 8 National survey (2019), N = 2,400 nationally representative sample

Appendix C: Glossary of Key Terms

The following glossary defines key terms as they are used in this dissertation. Definitions draw on the academic literature cited in the main text.

Term	Definition as Used in This Dissertation
Celebrity Politics	The participation of individuals who have achieved public prominence through entertainment, sports, or media careers in formal political processes, either as candidates, elected officials, or political activists (Street, 2004; Marsh et al., 2010).
Celebrity Politician	An individual who has achieved significant public recognition through a career in entertainment, sports, or popular media and who subsequently contests or holds formal elected political office.
Elite Circulation	The process by which a declining elite is replaced by a rising new elite formation, as described by Pareto (1935). In this study, used to describe the entry of celebrity politicians into Uganda's political class without fundamentally redistributing political power.
Elite Theory	The body of political theory, originating with Mosca (1939) and Pareto (1935), that holds that political power in any society is exercised by a small minority with distinctive organisational and legitimating capacities.
Political Landscape	The totality of a society's political institutions, power relations, dominant actors, norms of political competition, and patterns of voter behaviour. In this study, "transformation of the political landscape" refers to measurable changes in any of these dimensions attributable to celebrity political participation.
Populism	A political logic, following Laclau (2005), through which society is organised around a fundamental antagonism between "the people" and an elite adversary, with the populist actor claiming to embody

Term	Definition as Used in This Dissertation
	the authentic will of the people against a corrupt or incompetent elite.
Public Opinion (as intervening variable)	The summed-up attitudes, beliefs and judgment of a political community about celebrity politicians and their party policies. In this research, the functions serve as the process by which celebrity political participation delivers its outcomes on the electoral outcomes and governance.
Secondary Data	Information that was not obtained by the researcher with the primary aim of the present study but are used as evidence. In this research, covers UEDP electoral data, published media sources, Afrobarometer poll data, parliamentary documents, and scholarly articles.
Uganda Elections Data Portal (UEDP)	The official online store of election statistics used by the Electoral Commission of Uganda that contains profiles of candidates, vote counts, constituency outcomes, and turnout figures of national and local elections.
Voter Behaviour	The behaviours and thoughts of qualified voters as regards to electoral participation, such as whether to vote or not and which candidates to vote and which not to vote and factors affecting voting. It focuses the intended research under this dissertation, based mainly on the turnout data of UEDP and Afrobarometer attitudinal indicators.

Note. Despite the meanings of these words in broader literature, the definitions given to them above describe their usage in this study.