



Africa Counts

The continent's autocrats must recognise that time is running out for despotism

Here is your quiz starter for ten. Who, 25 years ago, wrote in his book, *What is Africa's Problem?*: "The problem of Africa in general, and Uganda in particular, is not the people but leaders who want to overstay in power"? It was Yoweri Museveni. Yet in the process of making himself comfortable in the job of President of Uganda for the past quarter of a century, Mr Museveni has long since decided — much as Leona Helmsley did with regard to paying taxes — that respecting the constitutional laws of elections is for the little people.

The one-time rebel commander who seized power at the head of a guerrilla army in 1986 promised, ten years ago, to retire from politics. But he later thought better of his rash pledge and amended the Constitution to allow himself to run for a third term in 2006. Yesterday he was sworn in for a fourth term, as an opposition spearheaded by Kizza Besigye, who was once Mr Museveni's personal doctor, challenged the authenticity of a poll that gave the President 68.3 per cent of the vote.

It is not just that Mr Museveni has clung to power long after democracy and decency dictated that he should pass on the baton, but that he has

increasingly resorted to brutish methods to do so. Mr Besigye has been accused of treason and rape. Opposition leaders were sprayed with pink paint this week to stop them holding a rally. To curb riots, Mr Museveni wants to introduce a law to deny bail for six months to those arrested while protesting. Human Rights Watch says that government forces have shot and killed nine people during crackdowns on protests sparked by recent sharp rises in food and fuel prices. Mr Museveni has metamorphosed from the man once hailed by Bill Clinton as a template for African leadership into an autocrat who has come to regard power no longer as a privilege but as an entitlement.

Like other leaders in the region, he believes that the undoubted good that he did for his country in his early years in office after the savagery of Idi Amin and Milton Obote has given him both the right to treat Uganda as if it were a rotten borough, and also inoculated the country from the risk of infection from the Arab Spring. In Rwanda, Paul Kagame, the President re-elected last year in an election scarred by censorship, murder and a barely plausible opposition, also shows signs of a

man who has grown too used to power to want to surrender it. Many think he is now doing more harm than good. Allegations of fraud blighted the re-election in Tanzania of the President, Jakaya Kikwete. In Ivory Coast, the former President Laurent Gbagbo had to have his suitcases packed for him when he refused to pack them himself and leave after his election defeat. In Sudan Omar al-Bashir has been in power for 22 years; in Cameroon, Paul Biya for 29.

Mr Museveni, in particular, feels that the outside world will not be too fussy about how he behaves in his own backyard as long as Uganda continues to serve as a relatively stable player in the region, protecting the Somali Government and building stability in Sudan. He must be disabused of this dream. Britain, troubled by the future of Ugandan democracy, has already cut some of its aid to Kampala. The West can do more. It must show leaders in sub-Saharan Africa who continue to steal power in doctored ballots that oppression and totalitarianism will not be tolerated; that their populations must once more be allowed to see elections as a word, not a sentence.