The Relationship between Student Leaders and Political Parties: A Case Study of Makerere University

Taabo Mugume¹ and Thierry M. Luescher²

Abstract

What are the characteristics and implications of the relationship between student leaders and national political parties in African flagship universities? As the most prestigious university of Uganda, Makerere University in Kampala, represents a model case for investigating the involvement of political parties in student politics in Africa. Drawing on propositions adapted from Weinberg and Walker (1969), Schmitter and Streek (1999), and others, this paper uses data generated through in-depth interviews and an online survey to analyse the relationship between political parties and student leaders. It finds that various kinds of resource exchange are key to understanding the relationship whereby variations include the financial and political strength of a political party and student leaders’ ambitions of a future political career. The paper concludes with considering the implications of the relationship in terms of the influence of partisan politics on student representation and the entrenchment of clientelism in multiparty politics in Africa. It further highlights that while in the context of Makerere University, the relationship is more of a negative force to student representation, it argues for institutional innovation around ways of ensuring that the student body can generally experience the positives of the relationship while curbing the negatives.

Keywords: Higher education; student politics; higher education governance; partisanship; political parties

¹ Researcher: Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning, University of the Free State, South Africa
² Senior Researcher/Assistant Director: Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning, University of the Free State, South Africa
**Student politics and political parties**

Some of the earliest attempts at understanding the relationship between student politics and national politics in the wake of the student uprisings of the late 1960s included a focus on political parties. For instance, Weinberg and Walker found that partisan political clubs of students and campus-based student branches of national parties provided systemic linkages between student politics, the higher education system, and the national political system. For instance, they found that “student branches of national political parties compete for student support in the struggle to control university government as well as to influence national politics” (Weinberg & Walker, 1969, p. 81). Similarly, Andersen and Pant (1970, p. 942) showed that there was a close relationship between student politics and party politics in that party leaders influenced decisions on who should represent the party at university level in student elections. Overall the relationship was dynamic, involving a relationship beneficial to both, student leaders and party leaders. From the student leaders’ side they found that “political parties [...] are used by student leaders who need money, present political support, as well as future political contacts to help them in their future political careers” (Andersen & Pant, 1970, p. 943). Thus, during student election campaigns,

“The candidates [i.e., student leaders] themselves were expected to raise a part of the sum [and] the rest was donated by ‘friends’. Often these friends turned out to be local political leaders. Donations were not always in the form of money. Often a jeep would be loaned, or pamphlets would be published” (Andersen and Pant, 1970, p. 943).

Furthermore, Rudolph, Rudolph and Ahmed, (1971, p. 1659) argued that Indian students who hoped to make it to the national political stage in the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s discovered how important it was to get involved in university party politics; this, they argued, also contributed to the high levels of activist recruitment in that country. In a later study, Fendrich and Lovoy (1988, p. 782) found that student leaders in many ways end up involved in political party activities and other activities in a society. Additionally, Hooghe, Stolle and Stouthuysen (2004) emphasise the importance of students as youth in national politics and how that is expressed in the various ways they are sought for recruitment by national political parties.

The nexus of higher education and politics involves many perspectives and dimensions of which the relationship between student leaders and political parties is hardly ever considered. Historically, the scholarly focus has been on non-institutionalised student politics or student activism; only recently has scholarly attention turned to the study of student representation (Luescher-Mamashela, 2015b). Meanwhile, Klemenčič, Luescher and Jowi (in
press) argue that studying student representation is important because “investigations into student power and students’ collective political behaviour contribute to a broader research theme of how human agency – individual and collective – shapes higher education policies, a theme which is still fairly underexplored within the field of higher education studies.” Where, in recent times, attention has been given to institutionalised student representation such as student representative councils (SRCs), student unions and student guilds, very few studies have made reference to the relationship between student leaders in higher education institutions and political parties in Africa (Munene, 2003; Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014; Luescher, Klemenčič & Jowi, in press). In the Ugandan context, scholars such as Byaruhanga (2006), Lutaakome, Tamale and Ssengooba (2005) and Mugume and Katusiimeh (2015) have looked at Makerere University’s (MAK) official student leadership and the structures in place for student representation; in the process they have also provided some insight into on-campus party politics and the influence of national politics on student politics historically in Uganda. The brief overview of existing literature on the topic indicates some aspects to take into account when seeking to understand the dynamic ways in which partisanship relates to student leadership. This includes that a study of this relationship may need to take into account (1) the distinction between ruling and opposition parties; (2) the multi-levelled nature of the higher education polity and policy (student life, university, higher education system, national); (3) the motivations for which the relationship is established and dynamics by which it is maintained; and lastly, (4) the importance of the university context and national political context overall or ‘regime politics’ (Byaruhanga 2006, pp. 52, 106, 112; Hooghe et al, 2004; Weinberg & Walker 1969, p. 82).

Towards a Theoretical Framework

Almost 50 years ago, Weinberg and Walker (1969) suggested a typology intended to explain the relationship between student politics and political systems by considering institutionalised and non-institutionalised student politics. In their discussion they identified political systems and their properties such as the ‘stability’ and ‘legitimacy’ of a government, plus the system linkages between ‘student political behaviour’ and ‘higher education’ at a systems level (pp. 80-82). Political activities that students carry out react to a double relationship, namely, the operational relationship between university management and national government, plus how student politics responds to the general political environment. The two authors further indicated that the most important system linkage in the relationship was the ‘political career’, even though they thought it was not getting enough attention in academic debates on the relationship.
More recently, several scholars who have sought to explain the nature of student representation in various contexts have adapted a framework that was initially designed to study business interest associations. Schmitter and Streek (1999) developed a framework to understand the reasons why independent business investors (i.e. capitalists) in industrialised countries come together to protect and represent their interests through business interest associations. Schmitter and Streek’s framework involves two main perspectives: the logics of membership and influence, which involve four associative actions by which the relationship lives itself out, namely; participation of members in the organisation, representation of members, services to members and control over members. Jungblut and Weber (2012) adapted this framework to study the development of the German student union *freier zusammenschluss von studentInnenschaften* (fzs); Klemenčič (2012) used it in her study of student representation in Europe; and Luescher-Mamashela and Mugume (2014) proposed an adapted version of the framework for studying the effects of student leaders’ partisanship on student representation in African higher education.

Inspired by the Schmitter and Streek framework, Luescher-Mamashela and Mugume (2014) propose four associative actions to understand the relationship between student leaders and political parties, which they name respectively: participation of student leaders in the party; representation of student leaders by the party; exchange of goods and services; and control over student leaders by the party. A key variable between the different associative actions is the nature of the resource exchange relationship between student leaders and parties, the significance of which was already crucially pointed out by Andersen and Pant (1970).

The study will rely on the indicators which emerge from the various studies such as those noted above for purposes of analysing the generated data. Weinberg and Walker’s (1969) typology focuses on the systematic linkage being the recruitment function the relationship plays either by actually availing or promising career opportunities. The associative actions proposed in the study by Luescher-Mamashela and Mugume (2014) indicate: participation of student leaders in the party which may imply political parties availing actual roles for student leaders within the political party through which student leaders can be involved in the internal decision making process; representation of student leaders by the party may refer to the political party taking on the role of representing the interests of the student leader; exchange of goods and services may refer to the process whereby student leaders offer certain services to the political party and in reply the political party rewards them with goods and services; and control over student leaders by the party may refer to when student leaders take orders from party leaders, thus losing their independence on decision making. Also findings from other studies such as Byaruhanga (2006), will be considered in terms of confirming findings from other studies but also informing on new findings from the analysis.
The following discussion considers the methods used to generate the necessary data for the study and then articulating on student politics at Makerere University.

**Methodology**

In this paper we investigate the relationship between student leaders and political parties at the case of Makerere University (MAK) in Uganda. In particular, we focus on: (1) the reasons for student leaders and political parties establishing a relationship; (2) the arrangements required to establish and maintain the relationship between student leaders and political parties, and; (3) the effects of the relationship on shaping student leaders' ability to represent students. Empirical research to this end was conducted at Makerere University, Kampala, which is the premier national research University of Uganda and the highest ranked African university outside of South Africa (Bothwell, 2015). The research used a mixed methods approach (Creswell, 1999, 2003), whereby qualitative data was generated by means of in-depth interviews with student leaders and the dean of students of the university, and with representatives of national political parties. The latter included national party leaders with the youth and student portfolio from the four most important national political parties of Uganda, namely: the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM); the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), which is the largest opposition party; the Democratic Party (DP) and the Uganda Peoples’ Congress (UPC) are the two oldest political parties in the country. A total of fifteen interviewees were purposefully selected for their direct involvement in, and in-depth knowledge of, the relationship between student leaders and political parties. In addition to interviews, an online survey was carried out in 2013/14 to gather the perceptions of a large sample of undergraduate students and student leaders about the relationship between student leaders and political parties. The survey produced a total of 941 responses of undergraduate students, of which 109 were student leaders. The survey was considered a ‘pilot’ and part of a larger investigation by HERANA into the relationship between higher education and democracy and therefore did not produce a fully representative sample (for details on the methodology of the survey at Makerere University see Luescher-Mamashela, 2015a, pp. 26-32). The following section contextualises the application of the framework to studying student representation at Makerere University.
Student Politics and Representation at Makerere University

Makerere University (MAK) became an independent, degree-granting institution of higher learning in 1963 following the breakup of the erstwhile East Africa University of which the university had been a part since its founding (Sicherman, 2005, p. 57). Being the premier national university of Uganda, the effects of national politics on Makerere University have always been felt strongly, particularly during the early history of the country and institution, and almost led to the destruction of the university during Idi Amin’s rule (1971-1979) (Sicherman, 2005). A complete rejuvenation of Makerere University began in the late 1980s through the 1990s with the aspiration “to become one of East Africa’s pre-eminent intellectual and capacity-building resource, as it was in the 1960s” (World Bank, 2000, p. 54). By 2000, Makerere University was a model for the revitalisation of higher education in Africa, and by 2015 Makerere was ranked third place in the Times Higher Education university rankings of African universities (Bothwell, 2015; World Bank, 2000). Against this, Makerere students have historically been criticized for having been less involved in politics and particularly in the struggle for their country’s independence than students elsewhere on the continent. However, Byaruhanga (2006) has shown a close relationship between student leadership and national government, including an ongoing historical relationship between Makerere’s student leadership and the major national political parties in Uganda which must not be underestimated. Other literature on student politics in Uganda also shows close interaction between national politics and student politics with respect to both, student issues and matters of national significance. Indeed, the relationship between Makerere’s student leadership and national government is strikingly close. According to Byaruhanga (2006), the resolution of most student strikes involves State House i.e., the Office of the President. Most student boycotts end up in a call or a visit by the Ugandan President to the university and the President making certain promises before the protest will come to an end. In this respect, it has also been argued that the ruling political party was more inclined to make decisions favouring students’ demands when the incumbent guild president of the Makerere student guild was aligned to the national ruling party than an opposition party. Byaruhanga has therefore argued that national government’s response to the demands of students at Makerere has been influenced by student leaders’ partisanship (Byaruhanga, 2006).

There are several political party chapters at Makerere University which are geared towards recruiting student members and supporting student leaders. They include branches of the National Resistance Movement (NRM), the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), the Uganda People’s Congress (UPC) as well as the Uganda Young Democrats (UYD) which is a youth branch of the Democratic Party (DP). Many of the members of the student government of Makerere, i.e. the Makerere Student Guild, are affiliated with one of these
party chapters. According to the student leaders interviewed for this study, opposition parties are more popular among students, while the ruling party NRM has been struggling to gain strong student support throughout its more than 25 years of rule. Thus, the guild presidency at MAK, it has been reported in the interviews, has been mainly UYD and FDC. (Interviews with guild leaders, October 23, 2013).

Structures of Student Representation

Figure 1 provides a basic organogram of the structures of student representation at Makerere University (MAK). It shows at the centre the Guild Representative Council (GRC), which forms the university’s student parliament and from which the guild president draws her/his cabinet. The GRC is elected from different constituencies, especially the halls of residences, colleges and schools of the university. It further lists the university committees in which student representatives formally represent students (also see Mugume & Katusiimeh, 2015).

Figure 1: Organogram of student representation at Makerere University

The guild cabinet refers to the main students’ representative body at Makerere University which represents the interests of students within the institution and nationally. All student leadership structures are formally headed by the guild president who is directly elected by students in an annual student election and who appoints the guild cabinet from members of
the GRC. Every student contributes approximately 10 US Dollars (20,000 Ugandan shilling) to the guild budget (Byaruhanga, 2006, p. 25; Interview with guild leaders & dean of students, 23/10/2013; Makerere University Guild Constitution, 2011). As noted above, the GRC is constituted by student representatives from the halls of residence and from the constituent colleges of the university, in which representation is then extended to the different schools within colleges (Byaruhanga, 2006, p. 26; Lutaakome et al., 2005). According to the guild leaders and the dean of students (Interviewed, October 23, 2013), the guild cabinet has 28 members (referred to as ‘ministers’) and there are 96 GRC representatives. There are numerous other, mostly non-partisan, student organisations at Makerere University, such as the Makerere University Private Students Association (MUPSA), founded in 1997 by so-called ‘private’ or fee-paying students to advocate for their interests (Interview with MUPSA leader, April 16, 2014). There are games unions, academic associations, district or county associations, ethnic associations and secondary school associations (Byaruhanga, 2006, p. 26-28; Interviewed guild leaders & dean of students, October 23, 2013). There are also a number of charity organisations at the institution, such as the Rotaract Club of Makerere University (MAK Rotaract Club, 2014).

Figure 1 also shows that students are represented in various institutional committees of the two main bodies which run the institution, i.e., council and senate, as well as in the various committees of these bodies. Council committees where students are represented at Makerere University include: finance planning and academics committee, students welfare and disciplinary committee, quality assurance committee (joint committee), estates and works committee. Senate Committees include: admissions board, research committee, quality assurance committee, appeals committee (ad hoc), and anti-sexual harassment committee. The committees mainly have one or two student representatives; as part of representation gender equity is seriously considered, so where two representatives are required one of the student representatives is required to be female. The same applies to the disabled (Interview with dean of students & guild leaders, October 23, 2013; also see Mugume & Katusiimeh, 2015).

*Student Guild Electoral Process*

The main student election at Makerere University is the annual election of the guild president. The electoral process is determined in the *Makerere University Guild Constitution (2011)* which provides for the guild elections to be overseen by an electoral commission made up of students and guided or led by a staff member. Candidates for the guild presidency customarily go through highly public party primaries in their respective political party chapters on campus up to the point where one party member is elected to stand as the
party’s flag bearer in the upcoming guild president elections; other contenders for the position may stand as independent candidates (Alina, 2014). After about three weeks of campaigning, student elections are eventually held campus wide and all registered students at Makerere University are free to vote. The winner of the guild presidency will then appoint members from the GRC to form the guild cabinet.

With regard to the GRC, the guild leaders interviewed (October 23, 2013) confirmed that there are various constituencies through which a student can contest. They include that a student can contest to represent her or his hall of residence, college or school; a student can also be elected through the games union. Campaigns and elections into all these different student leadership positions, takes place at the same time.

The electoral process and structure of the student government have been designed to resemble the national process and structures, whereby the presidential candidate first contests party primaries (or can stand as independent) after which a nation-wide direct election follows. The president-elect then appoints members of parliament to form a cabinet. Parliament itself is composed of members from demarcated constituencies, some of which are geographical constituencies determined by population size, while others represent structures such as the police, the army and many more (Electoral Commission of Uganda, 2013). It may be argued that the corresponding design provides for student leaders to learn how things operate at national level. The basic structure of student government outlined in Figure 1 thus provides for the main structures of student leadership at MAK.

**Student Leadership and Political Parties at Makerere University**

The survey conducted with undergraduate students at Makerere University suggests that a large proportion of both, student leaders (SL) and students who are not in leadership positions (SNL) have partisan affiliations and many are actively involved in the activities of their respective political party chapters on campus. Figure 2 shows that about 3 in 5 student leaders are party members (“official leaders” 11%, “active member” 31%, “inactive member” 18%) and 2 in 5 of those students who are not holding any leadership positions (“official leaders” 2%, “active members” 22%, “inactive member” 17%). It is especially noteworthy that 1 in 10 student leaders (11%) report being official leaders in their respective party.

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3 In 2013/2014 academic year, Makerere University had an enrolment of 33,782 registered undergraduate students (Luescher-Mamashela, 2015a, p. 30).
Figure 2: Student involvement in political party chapters on campus

Key: SL = student leader; SNL = student not in leadership
N for SL=109, Missing=8; N for SNL=832, Missing=79

Overall the impression from the survey is that a large proportion of students at Makerere hold party membership, and that student leaders tend to be even more likely and more intensively involved with political parties than ordinary students. Partisanship is overall surprisingly widespread on campus among students. Figure 2 shows the extent and level of student involvement in party chapters on campus.

Why do student leaders establish a relationship with political parties?

The evidence in Figure 2 corresponds with the findings of earlier studies that political parties focus on student leaders, especially guild election candidates, and that there is a correlation between student leadership and the leadership of the party chapters at MAK. It is argued here that even though political parties target guild presidency candidates, generally other student leadership candidates cannot just ignore party support given the resources some candidates receive during student election campaigns. It is only 'wise' for any student leadership candidate to try and associate him or herself with a particular political party. It is further emphasized that even though independent candidates can stand for the guild presidency, it is always the candidates associated with political parties who win (Interviews with guild leaders, October 23, 2013 & 24, 2013). When a so-called independent candidate wins, such a candidate will have turned independent only because of conflicts within his or her party chapter on campus. This situation may occur when a candidate believes that the party primaries of her or his particular chapter had not been free and fair, and thus he or she lost being the party flag-bearer to another candidate due to some foul-play. In other words,

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4 Provided that the MAK student survey was a pilot and did not produce a fully representative sample, the statistical significance of this correlation has not been tested but is proposed here as hypothesis for future studies of this nature.
not just any individual who runs as independent without any party connections can win (Interviews with guild leaders, October 23, 2013 & 24, 2013).

Therefore, the pressure to affiliate to a political party starts early: an aspirant student leader who wants to ensure a measure of success in student elections, especially in the elections for the guild presidency, will associate with a political party. Guild leaders confirmed in interviews a range of ways in which political parties support their candidates in student elections. Firstly, the party provides campaigners and supporters on campus to start a candidate’s campaign. They are mainly its staunchest members and in most cases they will work for the candidate during the campaign playing various roles. In addition, a candidate is able to access the political party’s logistics, finances and campaign expertise, which are extremely important when deciding on a campaign strategy. Especially campaigns for the guild presidency receive a lot of party support; this is less so for GRC campaigns, given that the positive impact for the party – in particular the prestige for having a party member as incumbent – is very little. Moreover, at the level of GRC (student parliament) elections, the students in general tend to be more concerned about the personal qualities of the candidate, rather than her or his party affiliation. Meanwhile, the Makerere guild presidency is national news. Both, student leaders and leaders of political parties that were interviewed for this study confirmed that Ugandan political parties recognize the importance of the youth in the country, and given that Makerere University is the most prestigious university in the country, the youth generally aspire to it and seek to associate themselves with it and hence the popularity of its guild president in Uganda (Interviews with guild leaders A & B, October 23, 2013; FDC leader A, October 22, 2013). A candidate for the guild presidency needs to have a strong team of supporters on her/his side who work for the party candidate and create a positively inspiring popular image in the candidate’s camp (Interview with guild leader B, October 23, 2013).

How do political parties reflect student leaders’ interests?
Political parties have established a variety of ways in which they address through their structures and support student leaders’ concerns. At Makerere University, 3 in 4 of the surveyed student leaders (67%) indicate that their party has established a youth wing which provides a structure to relay students’ concerns into other party structures and particularly the party’s top structures. Just over 3 in 5 student leaders (62%) acknowledged the presence of a special student desk in the party established specifically to handle student leaders’ issues in the party. Finally almost half of the sampled student leaders (49%) claim that they were not ordinary party members but they were actually holding leadership positions within their respective parties (compare Figure 3 below).
The efficacy of various structural provisions to accommodate and represent student leaders’ interest within the political parties is evident in the large proportion of student leaders (3 in 4; 67%) who argue that student issues are included in their respective political party’s policy framework, party manifesto and/or policies. The analysis therefore indicates a high level of representation of student leaders in internal party structures and inclusion of students’ concerns in party policy documents.

![Figure 3: Does your political party represent student leaders’ concerns?](image)

**Figure 3: Does your political party represent student leaders’ concerns?**

*N=109, Missing=47 (N=Student leaders only)*

Political party affiliation may benefit student leaders also insofar as a party may be able to influence and pressure on university management or national government to respond to student leaders’ interests. One student leader argued that the ruling NRM may be able to use its influence on institutional management, while this would appear more difficult for an opposition party to achieve. However, the same student leader argued that no party enjoys full control over the institution; whatever form of influence a party may have would be more indirect and may actually be exerted via student leadership (Interview with guild leader B, October 23, 2013).

**What is the contribution of the relationship towards enhancing democratic practice?**

A general correspondence of the experiences and interests of student leaders and students in general is most important in the representation of the student voice. Several questions show that there is generally a close correspondence of the views of student leaders and students not in leadership evident in various questions of that nature (e.g. compare Figure 4 below). When questioned about this, student leader C (Interviewed, October 24, 2013) recalled several recent incidents where student leaders took up student concerns because they were also affected by them e.g. with regards to student complaints about delays in publishing examination marks, and matters related to on-campus residences. Provided that
guild cabinet members are accommodated in on-campus student halls, the student leader argued that they share similar problems like other students in the residences, such as water shortages, delayed building renovations, etc., and as a result resolving a problem for all resident students, could also be dealing with their own.

As far as student leaders' partisanship is concerned, Figure 4 shows that ordinary students see value in the relationship of student leaders with political parties. A sizeable majority of 3 in 4 agree or even strongly agree that “the relationship between student leaders and political parties affords student leaders an opportunity to be trained in democratic politics” (76% of students). Training in democratic politics may help student leaders to actually represent the students better.

When being questioned about this, the dean of students mentioned that student leaders also get training from the university directly to fulfil their mandates; however, student leaders reported that this happens only in the first two weeks of being in office. Conversely, political parties offer continuous training and support throughout their term of office, and in addition to mentorship and training, student leaders could also access national political networks which they could even use after studying (Interview with guild leaders & dean of students, October 23, 2013). Indeed, aspirations of getting involved in off-campus, national politics has been cited among the key reasons why student leaders seek to establish a relationship with political parties. Evidence from interviews shows that many student leaders at Makerere expect that associating with a political party will serve their future career ambitions in politics or government. That there is a substance to these aspirations has been trend observed already by Byaruhanga (2006) who found that student leaders especially of Makerere University have historically ended up as powerful politicians or in powerful bureaucratic
positions in the country (even though there are more than 20 new universities in Uganda). The expected rewards a student leader may get from this kind of relationship cannot easily be ignored; hence student leaders ensure they establish the relationship and participate in maintaining it (Interviews with guild leaders A & B, October 23, 2013). This is discussed further with reference to Table 4 (below).

**Maintaining the Relationship between Student Leaders and Political Parties**

In considering the ways in which the relationship between student leaders and political parties is maintained, we have focused on the two main actors involved, i.e. the student leaders themselves and the (representatives of) political parties. In keeping with the theoretical framework borrowed from Luescher-Mamashela and Mugume (2014), a key focus are relations of (material and symbolic) resource exchange. Party chapters have been discussed above as the branches of the national political parties on campus. The committees of student leaders which run these structures are supposed to comply with the requirements of their main party and represent the interests of the party on campus. However, since student leaders are a very small constituency within a political party, they may not yield the required influence to drive party policy towards the interests of students at the institution. In the process, student leaders may find that certain party policies are hard to reconcile with students’ interests and to represent student interests through the chapters.

In maintaining the relationship between student leaders and political parties, party branches on the Makerere campus appear primarily as a means to that end only. As noted in relation to Figure 3 above, through the party’s youth wing, political parties are able to aggregate student concerns and include them in the party’s manifestos and policy frameworks. Some student leaders may also hold actual leadership positions in their respective mother party’s structures. What emerges is a coordinated system of party structures linking in various ways Makerere University student leaders into the mother body; in keeping with Weinberg and Walker’s finding (1969) that student branches provide systemic linkages between student politics, higher education and national politics. The party chapters on campus thus act as the organisational vehicle or infrastructure for the associative actions suggested by Luescher-Mamashela and Mugume (2014, pp. 510-511; as adapted from Schmitter & Streeck, 1999). The conditions for the chapters to play this role and variations in different kinds of associative actions are discussed further in detail below.

*Resource Exchange*

Ability to facilitate the exchange of key symbolic and material resources is the key characteristic of effective student chapters of political parties on the Makerere campus.
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Resource exchange is a characteristic found in all associative actions, albeit in different directions and to different degrees. Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 below show what kinds of resources are provided and how, at different stages of a students’ ‘life-cycle’ as student leader.

Table 1: What support for your election campaign do you get from a political party?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The various goods and services provided to SL during campaigns</th>
<th>Actual number of SL who agree to having received these goods &amp; services</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Posters</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash for campaigning</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in campaigning</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rallies</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing a manifesto</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-shirts</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=109. This was a multiple response question, respondents could select as many options as they liked. Therefore each choice response is to a total of 100%.

Table 1 shows the type of resource that most student leaders sampled in the survey have received from their party chapter during their election campaign. Almost 1 in 3 student leaders (28%) received posters; about 1 in 5 received cash for campaigning and/or campaign training; 1 in 6 had rallies organised for them as part of their campaign and about 1 in 10 received support in writing their manifest and/or T-shirts as part of the party’s campaign support. Considering the above it shows that the various percentages just about add up to 100; thus if each student leader was only given one type of support, every leader would have received some kind. This is most unlikely, however; rather it is clear that a few student leaders in the sample receive a whole variety of goods and services. As mentioned above, political parties focus on guild leadership campaigns and on the guild presidency candidates in particular. Meanwhile those who answered the question for Table 1 also include college and school representatives, GRC members, and guild cabinet members, and it has been shown previously that about 40% of student leaders are not affiliated to any political party, which also resonates with the evidence from the interviews (Interview with UPC leader B, October 17, 2013; Interview with FDC leader A, October 22, 2013; Interview with guild leader A & B, October 23, 2013).

Looking at Table 1 in that context, it shows a serious interest and investment by political parties in a select few student leaders, typically the candidates for the guild presidency, at Makerere University. A UPC leader noted that the focus on the guild presidency was due to a shortage of party funds, arguing that even though the party always intends to support and
encourage these young leaders, it is always strained for resources because, in the case of his party, the party had not been in power since 1985 (Interview with UPC leader A, October 17, 2013).

After student leaders have been elected into office, the relationship continues to be maintained involving (student expectations of) a variety of resources from parties. Table 2 shows that 2 in 5 of the sampled student leaders (41%) expect ongoing leadership training and workshops; about 1 in 6 expect political support from the party in terms of using its influence either with university management or national government; there are also continued expectations for tangible support: just over 1 in 7 hope to land an internship through their party-connection, and a small number of about 1 in 20 expect cash support and/or scholarship funds for tuition or residence (compare Table 2).

Table 2: What support do you expect from a relationship with a political party when elected in student leadership office?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The various goods and services that could be provided to SL after elections</th>
<th>Actual number of SL who agree to the option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership training &amp; workshops</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The party can put pressure on university management</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The party can put pressure to change national policies</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash support during studies</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition or residence funding/scholarship</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=109. This was a multiple response question, respondents could select as many options as they liked. Therefore each choice response is to a total of 100%.

Thus, student leaders’ expectation of receiving goods and services from their respective political party does not stop after the campaigning. However, political parties are clearly expected to reduce the flow of cash and other material goods and turn more to political support and services after elections. The party’s actual provision of services to incumbents is not only meant to contribute to the development of the young leaders but also to coach them to perform well in office so as to send a favourable message about the party’s brand (Interview with FDC leader A, October 22, 2013). Again, the Table also shows that only a few student leaders expect to be provided with such resources, possibly for reasons as those discussed in relation to Table 2.
Many student leaders do not expect the relationship with their political party inaugurated while studying at Makerere University to end after graduating. Indeed, over 1 in 3 student leaders expect their affiliation to a party to pay off in terms of career opportunities (34%); and between about 1 in 5 and 1 in 4 student leaders expect to get a job in local or national government (18%); a leadership position in the party (23%), and/or to be selected to stand on a party platform in a constituency as candidate (26%).

Table 3: What support do you expect from a relationship with a political party once you have graduated?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The various goods and services that could be provided to SL after graduating</th>
<th>Actual number of SL who agree to the option</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career opportunities</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection to stand on party platform in a constituency</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership position within the party</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job in local or national government</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=109. This was a multiple response question, respondents could select as many options as they liked. Therefore each choice response is to a total of 100%.

There are clearly high expectations of professional and/or political career opportunities through the political party. This finding resonates with the literature on student politics at Makerere University (Byaruhanga, 2006). These expectations also involve certain constraints on student leaders; student leaders must nurture their political connections in the party, and must avoid being seen as ‘compromised leaders’; they must thus follow party rules and protocol. For example, we were told that the guild president 2013-2014, who was an affiliate of FDC, i.e. an opposition party, avoided having formal meetings with leaders from other parties and even declined to meet the President of Uganda on occasion, who is from the NRM. One way in which student leaders solidify and maintain their connections with their party is by getting involved in the political party structures in their respective home areas (Interview with guild leaders A & B, October 23, 2013).

So far we have shown that most resource exchange directly benefits the student leaders. It can be argued that students who are not in leadership positions also benefit somewhat indirectly from these exchanges. For example, when political parties offer leadership training...
to their respective student leaders, this may help them to represent the student voice more effectively.

Table 4: What does your political party expect from you as a party member and student leader?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The various options a SL could choose to do for the party</th>
<th>Actual number of SL who choose the option</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in political party activities</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting new members</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a disciplined member of the party</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering time and effort</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publically defending the party’s position</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including party branding in your campaign</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including party position and ideology in your manifesto</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=109. This was a multiple response question, respondents could select as many options as they liked. Therefore each choice response is to a total of 100%.

Table 4 expresses the expected obligations of student leaders towards their party as regards resource exchange (from the view of student leaders). It shows that about 1 in 3 student leaders indicated that they were expected to participate in political party activities (37%), recruit new members (33%), be disciplined party members (28%) and also volunteer their time and effort to party activities (28%). Furthermore, almost 1 in 4 expected to publically defend the party’s position (23%), and almost 1 in 5 student leaders think that their party expects them to include the party’s branding in their campaign (19%) and include party positions and ideology in their manifesto (18%).

It is noteworthy that overall more student leaders indicate what they should give back to their party than the goods and services they receive from their party (compare Table 4 with Tables 1, 2, and 3). Moreover, while political parties give or are expected to give both goods and services to student leaders, student leaders mostly promise services and loyalty to their party, including using party logos etc. (Interviews with student leader A, October 23, 2013 & UPC leader B, October 17, 2013).

An (expectation of) exchange of resources is evidently important in the process of maintaining the relationship between student leaders and political parties. In our interview with the dean of students, he resented the party influence on student leaders arguing that the relationship had "commercialized" student leadership at MAK. The dean indicated that as a result of the ‘commercialization’, the substance of the debates among student leaders on
campus was influenced a great deal by national politics and party politics (Interview with the dean of students, 23 October, 2013). Moreover, provided that the ruling party has more resources at its disposal than an opposition party, the university campus at times becomes a playground for contestation between the different parties, whereby the ruling party frequently tries to persuade opposition party student leaders to join it with the promise of providing certain resources. One may argue that the more student leaders become pinballs in the game between different parties, the more they may forget about representing students’ interests and focus on their personal interest, thus maintaining the relationship but compromising representation of the students who are not in leadership.

Finally, the recruitment of new members is clearly one of the main expectations that political parties have on student leaders. Table 4 shows that 1 in 3 student leaders mention it as a party expectation (33%). To a party, recruiting members from among the student body of Makerere is one of the important ways of renewing itself given that these upcoming elites in the country are getting skills that may enable them to run the party. This point has been made earlier by scholars such as Hooghe et al (2004), Rochford (2012) and Weinberg and Walker (1969). It was mentioned in several interviews that the student election campaigning period on campus is for the parties the major period for recruiting new members (FDC leader A, October 22, 2013; Guild leaders A & B, October 23, 2013; UPC leaders A & B, October 17, 2013).

**Impact of student leader’s partisanship on their ability to represent students**

The discussion of the resource-exchange relationship between student leaders and political parties above has so far suggested that it may effect student representation in contradictory ways. It may positively influence student leaders’ ability to represent students due to the political support and training student leaders receive; and it may also negatively affect their ability to represent students’ interests authentically as student leaders may have to ‘tow the party line’ and may come to be engaged too deeply in party business at the expense of their student leadership mandate.

**Perceptions of student leaders’ ability to represent students and reasons**

Earlier we have shown that about 3 in 4 students in general (76%) agree that student leaders’ relationship with political parties has as a positive dimension that it affords student leaders the opportunity to learn more about democratic politics (compare Figure 4 above). Does the relationship have negative impacts on student leaders’ ability to represent the student voice?
Figure 5 (below) shows that indeed, a majority of students and student leaders agree that partisanship impacts negatively on student representation. In particular, almost 3 in 4 students who are not in leadership agree at least somewhat that there is a negative impact (72%); strikingly, an even greater proportion of student leaders also consider it has a negative impact (76%).

![Figure 5. The relationship between student leaders and political parties negatively impacts on student leaders’ ability to represent students](image)

For SL=109, Missing=3 & N for SNL=832, Missing=71

Different reasons are given by the different actors for these negative perceptions. As mentioned above, the dean of students of Makerere University argues that student leaders end up paying more attention to national political problems linked to their respective political parties than campus issues. Additionally he argues against the ‘commercialisation’ of student politics by political parties (Interview with dean of students, October 23, 2013). Student leaders interviewed also argue that aspirations for future political career call for compromises in the respective student leader’s political party, compromises which may not be in the interest of the students she/he is meant to represent (guild leaders B & C, October 23, 2013 & 24, 2013).

Yet, the negative perceptions presented in Figure 5 are seemingly at odds with other evidence presented both in the survey and in interviews. For instance, Figure 6 shows that there are reasonably high levels of trust between students and student leaders. Considering student leaders’ perceptions about themselves, it emerges that 2 in 3 student leaders would argue that they generally trust each other (“I trust them a lot” 23%, “I trust them somewhat” 44%). More importantly, the same proportion of 2 in 3 students not in leadership also trust the student leaders as noted at 65% (“I trust them a lot” 20%, “I trust them somewhat” 45%). This reflects positively on the student leaders.
Figure 6. How much do you trust student leaders at Makerere University?

\[ N \text{ for SL}=109 & \text{ Missing}=2; N \text{ for SNL}=832 & \text{ Missing}=64 \]

Thus, it would appear that in terms of the students' perceptions of trust the relationship between student leaders and political parties has little impact. In seeking to understand the survey responses, guild leader B (Interviewed, October 23, 2013) argued that the reported negative implications of student leaders' partisan relations were in most cases exaggerated. The student argued that in order to be a student leader at Makerere University, the student leader must be popular among students. As soon as a student leader turns against student interests, she or he will lose popularity and so will the political party that supports him or her. The interviewee's claim was that both student leaders and the political party will always seek to safeguard the interests of students for their own popularity's sake. In addition, a party leader argued that:

“... Party leaders are not aiming for party interests but rather student interests and guild student [leaders] are Ugandans like any other Ugandan. So if the interests of the FDC party are bad, Adeke [i.e. the current guild president] would not be guild president. Therefore... those who do think she does represent students' interests are part of what we stand for” (Interview with FDC leader A, October 22, 2013).

The argument presented above by both the student leader and the FDC party leader attempts to present a (perhaps somewhat forced) convergence of interests. Conversely, other interviewees noted that currently student leadership at Makerere University was indeed highly 'commercialized' and as a result the focus of the student leaders does turn to the resources they get; representing student interests at that point thus comes second. However they also argued that since even the student leaders themselves are students within the institution, the interests of the student leaders and students in general overlap and in the process either by student leaders directly promoting their personal interest, or not, the
student interest may be served. (Interview with FDC leader B, October 22, 2013; Interview with MUPSA leader, April 16, 2014).

However, student leaders do get compromised and may fail to represent the interests of students authentically. A guild cabinet member noted that even though the administration was often conveniently being blamed, there were problems among student leaders in the way they carried out their responsibilities: “We do a lot of politicking …, all the talking but very little action” (Interview with guild leader D, October 24, 2013).

Moreover, there is a problem about the way student leaders relate to resources, often pushing for their personal interests rather than represent students. The same guild minister argued,

“… the money that is allocated to the guild, if you ask to try and understand how much of that money is surely there to benefit students, it’s actually very little and some of those activities that are planned sometimes never happen. At the end of the day you find that the money is spent on GRCs allowances, maybe the president’s allowances etc. …” (Interview with guild leader D, October 24, 2013).

Another student leader argued that when considering student leaders’ effectiveness of representing the students’ voice one needed to understand the fact that student leaders are also students, hence on top of representing students and other political activity, they have to attend lectures, do assignments. In extension of this, two student leaders noted during interviews that sometimes felt intimidated by academics during meetings with academic staff, while they had a constituency to represent (Interviews with student leaders A & B, October 23, 2013). While these various points together highlight hindrances other than those related to the partisan relations of student leaders with political parties, there are others that explicitly point towards the issue.

In what ways then may a particular political party affiliation directly impact on student leaders’ role and effectiveness in serving students? The comments made by one student leader in this regard are revealing:

“We have had programmes, programmes which in my opinion were non-partisan. [However,] the guild president found it hard to be part of [the programmes] yet they were benefitting students. But because these are believed to be NRM programs, the guild president has somehow decided to scrap or dodge them because she thinks, what will the party [i.e. FDC] think of her?… We have also had instances where we could have had a chance to meet the president of the country and put our case. The [national] President is
the Visitor of Makerere University when he comes here, but when we request the guild president to meet him, you find she is a little reluctant to buy into that. She believes that when the FDC leadership finds out that she has met with the President who is NRM, they will think she has been compromised” (Interview with guild leader D, October 24, 2013).

This shows the sway political parties have over student leaders to the extent that programmes that could help students are discontinued as they are perceived to be of the one or other party. This same point was confirmed by another student leader who argued that the guild leadership had been invited to participate in government programmes that could be beneficial to students, “but because they are organised by the NRM, the invitations never reach all the guild leaders, they get stuck on some one’s desk you know. Such things have happened, so that is how much the parties have affected us here” (Interview with guild leader C, October 24, 2013). Similarly, meetings with high level officials are avoided so as to be perceived to be party loyal. Hence, a guild cabinet minister argued that:

“The system we have here grooms us for the future, but it does not benefit the students we lead at this point. We are looking more ahead [towards national politics] rather than to work and solve students’ problems here….“ (Interview with guild leader C, October 24, 2013).

Thus, while there is certainly a vast array of constraints to effective student representation, there are matters of direct impact arising from the relationship between student leaders and political parties at Makerere University, and particularly student leaders’ political and professional career ambitions upon completion of their studies. Thus, student leaders will avoid those issues which they think can antagonize their relationship with the party and seek to please the party in a constant balance act between being seen to represent student interests and a loyal student cadre of their party. It is in this respect then that party politics may be seen to be compromising student representation and therefore to negatively impact on the ability of student leaders to actually represent students. Conversely, it may be seen to teach student leaders political lessons for life with respect to the conflicts of interests they will encounter and need to manage as they may enter ‘big politics’.

The evidence presented above shows the positive contribution the relationship may have on student representation such as: wide spread party membership on campus, which may highlight interest in party politics (compare Figure 2); teaching student leaders about democratic politics while, the student community gets to experience multiparty politics at a more-microcosm level (eg., campaigns, voting process) and the party primaries on campus may introduce the student community to internal party democratic politics. While it also
highlights the negative effects of the relationship such as: the ‘commercialization’ of the political process which then forces student leaders to engage in a rigorous such for resources from various stakeholders in a process where political parties have the highest stake and thus the most willing actors to invest the needed resources which then come with strings attached; the convergence of an exchange of resources between political parties and student leaders during campaigns but also after campaigns in addition to the future aspirations of student leaders most especially political careers, which as noted in the evidence above (compare Tables 1, 2, 3, 4) creates a high level of compromising on the side of student leaders to stay in the party’s ‘good-books’. The analysis of the relationship at Makerere University points to a relationship that distracts student leaders in the process of trying to represent the interests of their constituency or the student body rather than contributing to actual enhancing of their ability to represent these interests in the process.

Consequently, the evidence generally informs that suggesting a perfect relationship would be unrealistic given the dynamism and levels of actor dependence noted on each side of the relationship. Therefore given detail of the study in discussing the positives and the negatives of the relationship, it is only advisable that an institution of higher learning investigates how best its student body can enjoy the positives of the relation while curbing the negatives. The study highlights a need for institutions to study the various ways of improving the methods through which their students can gain from the relationship given the institutional context. While on the other hand investing in the various measures which reduce the negative effects of the relationship, to attempt to strike a relationship where the student body in general gains more than what is scarified in exchange.

**Conclusion**

This paper has presented the data of a pilot survey and interviews with student leaders, party leaders and university management on the relationship between student leaders and political parties at Makerere University, Uganda. It confirms that the historical relationship between student leaders and political parties in Uganda continues till today (Byaruhanga, 2006); and that the historical fact of the transition from student leadership into national political office remains an aspiration to current student leaders at Makerere University. Party chapters are powerful student organisations at Makerere University; they are able to recruit a large number of students as members, and they have various resources at hand to support affiliated student leaders to gain office – particularly the highest office of guild president. The study shows that partisan affiliation has become so important at Makerere that a student leader cannot win the guild presidency without being aligned to a particular political party; the campaignin resources that political parties are able to avail to student leaders during
campaigns are too manifold. In addition, most student leaders have future political ambitions and as a result they seek affiliation with political parties.

While it has also been noted that the ability of student leaders to represent students was somehow influenced by whether the party they were affiliated to was in power or not. The ruling party can offer more opportunities in the process, and because it has access to more resources it is also able to use them to control or influence decisions made by student leaders.

Therefore in relation to the questions outlined earlier to guide this paper: first, the reasons for the relationship include; the political party wanting to recruit new members among the student community, while on the other hand student leaders want to access the privileges that come with such membership which include funding during student leadership campaigns, career opportunities after graduation and further benefits for their future careers. Secondly the relationship is maintained through party chapters on campus, through which resources are exchanged between student leaders and political parties. This includes availing goods and services to student leaders during campaigns, availing more services after the elections and offering former student leaders mainly career opportunities by the political party directly and indirectly. Political parties on the other hand expect student leaders to recruit new members, volunteer for party work. Through this exchange, both main actors are rewarded hence it becomes logical to maintain it.

Therefore the study shows that the relationship benefits student leaders and political parties directly, while the student community may benefit indirectly from the relationship e.g., as their interests may be advocated for also by political parties on behalf of their student leaders. Students in general may also gain when student leaders learn leadership skills through the training and mentoring offered by the political parties. Conversely, the fact that most student leaders have future political ambitions they then prefer to defend the party and focus more on protecting their relationship with the party than actually representing students’ interests. This has been shown in the case of student leaders avoiding promoting projects on campus which are funded by political parties they are not affiliated to since it could appear that the student leader is ‘compromised’. Therefore the main negative effect of the relationship especially for student leaders with future political ambitions is that in the process student leaders are inducted into a patron-client relationship with the political party thus constantly rewarding the student leader as the student leader submits to party control. The relationship distracts student leaders in the process of representing students’ interests rather than enhancing their ability to represent such interests.
The study shows that while the relationship has its positive and negative effects on student representation, it is an important relationship in various contexts such as; introducing this youthful community to democratic practices thus citizenship development, leadership development, opening-up the institutional space to the national political context etc. Therefore the study highlights a need for institutional innovation in terms of amplifying the positives students in general can gain from the relationship while creating acceptable and realist mechanisms of curbing the most negative effects of the relationship to the student community.

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References


**Interviews**

Dean of students (Interviewed, October 23, 2013)

Guild leader A (Interviewed, October 23, 2013)

Guild leader B (Interviewed, October 23, 2013)

Guild leader C (Interviewed, October 24, 2013)

Guild leader D (Interviewed, October 24, 2013)

Former Guild leader (Interviewed, October 22, 2013)

MUPSA leader (Interviewed, April 16, 2014)

MAK Rotaract Club leader (Interviewed, April 16, 2014)

UYD [DP] leader (Interviewed, April 15, 2014)

FDC leader A (Interviewed, October 22, 2013)

FDC leader B (Interviewed, October 22, 2013)

NRM leader A (Interviewed, October 22, 2013)

NRM leader B (Interviewed, October 22, 2013)

UPC leader A (Interviewed, October 17, 2013)

UPC leader B (Interviewed, October 17, 2013)