



## Uganda

U.S. officials have viewed Uganda as a key security partner in East Africa for over a decade. It has played a lead role in high-profile counterterrorism and stability operations in the region, most notably in Somalia. Uganda is major recipient of U.S. foreign aid and one of the top recipients of U.S. security assistance in Africa. The United States provides logistics, training, equipment, and advisory support to the Ugandan military for its regional operations. Reports of torture and unlawful killings by security forces complicate the bilateral relationship, however, as do growing concerns about Uganda’s political trajectory. The country has never had a democratic transition of power.

### Politics

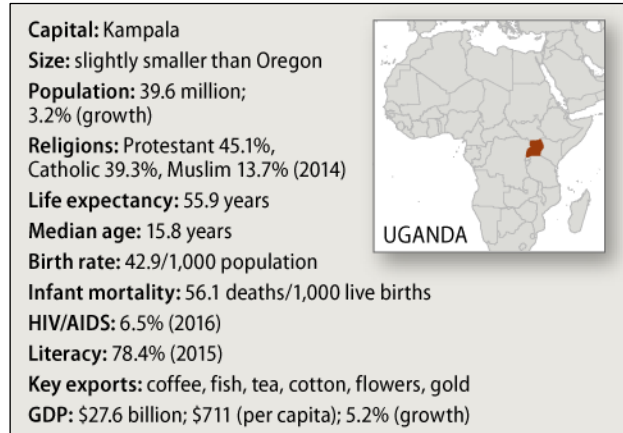
President Yoweri Museveni, who seized power in a rebellion over three decades ago, is one of the world’s longest-serving heads of state. Though he was once dubbed part of a “new generation of African leaders,” his government’s reputation has been undermined by reported corruption, repression, and other abuses of power. High unemployment, rising crime, communal tensions, and land disputes have fueled popular discontent, as have poor service delivery and uneven development among Uganda’s regions. The opposition has long been divided, but Museveni, in his 70s, faces a new challenge from a younger generation of critics who seek to harness mounting frustration among a youthful electorate to push for change.

President Museveni was reelected to a fifth term in 2016, in a vote marred by allegations of voter intimidation, harassment of the opposition, and the misuse of state funds. His main challengers were two former government officials: former Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi and opposition leader Kizza Besigye. Both have repeatedly been arrested by police; Besigye was detained on election day and kept under house arrest during the post-election period, preventing him from filing a legal challenge. The State Department suggested that the electoral irregularities and conduct reported were “deeply inconsistent with international standards” for a democratic process, contending that “the Ugandan people deserved better.”

The ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM), which was formed from the rebel movement Museveni led in the 1980s, dominates the parliament. The military, which is constitutionally granted seats in parliament and is widely viewed as a key constituency for Museveni.

Uganda’s parliament abolished presidential term limits in 2005. The constitution has barred candidates above age 75 from vying for the presidency, but in late 2017, parliament voted to remove the age limit after contentious debate, paving the way for Museveni to potentially stand for a sixth term in 2021. The age limit debate spurred protests and a security force crackdown; a 2017 survey suggested most Ugandans support presidential age and term limits.

**Figure 1. Uganda Key Facts**



**Source:** Data from CIA World Factbook, IMF (2018).

Musician Bobi Wine (Robert Kyagulanyi), who was elected to parliament as an independent in 2017, has by many accounts become the new, youthful face of the opposition. His protest songs have raised government ire (his concerts were banned in 2017), and he has drawn large crowds with his slogan of “people power.” He was a vocal opponent of lifting the presidential age limit. In August 2018 he and others were detained and reportedly tortured, sparking public outrage and protests, during which security forces assaulted several journalists. The government has accused Kyagulanyi and several fellow parliamentarians of inciting violence against Museveni’s motorcade; 34 people, including Kyagulanyi, face treason charges.

### Human Rights Concerns

The State Department’s most recent human rights report on Uganda documents restrictions on political freedoms and incidents of torture, excessive force, and unlawful killings by security forces, and notes that officers implicated in abuses often enjoy impunity. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reports that there has been no investigation into the deaths of over 150 people, including children, during security operations in Kasese, in western Uganda, in 2016. HRW asserts that as of mid-2018 there have been no convictions of security personnel for incidents of torture, despite more than 1,000 allegations of torture from 2012 to 2016 alone.

Activists raise concerns with several laws, including the Public Order Management Act, which gives police broad authority to block public meetings and detain opposition candidates and supporters. Another law adopted in 2015 tightened the regulation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), prohibiting activity “contrary to the dignity of the people of Uganda.” The government monitors social media and has arrested critics, citing the Antiterrorism Act and other laws. In 2018, the government imposed a social media tax on users (it blocked social media during the 2016 polls).

Threats to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights have drawn international attention, particularly around Uganda's 2014 adoption of the Anti-Homosexuality Act. That law, which made same-sex relations punishable by life in prison, was later struck down in court. According to the State Department's human rights report, LGBT persons continue to face "discrimination, legal restrictions, societal harassment, violence, and intimidation."

## The Economy and Corruption Concerns

Stronger economic growth will be critical for Uganda's ability to manage its rapidly growing population, 70% of which is under 25. Unemployment is a key problem, as is a growing demand for education and health services. Uganda has one of the lowest electrification rates in Africa, only 22% of the population has access to electricity.

President Museveni's ambitious development strategy, which aims to make Uganda a middle-income country by 2020 and an upper-middle-income country by 2040, is unlikely to meet its first target. GDP growth, forecast at under 6% until 2020, is far below the government's double-digit goal. Uganda seeks to develop its energy, agriculture, and tourism sectors by improving infrastructure, developing human capital, and strengthening competitiveness. It also seeks to reform its regulatory environment: Uganda ranks 122<sup>nd</sup> in the World Bank's *Ease of Doing Business* Index. Rising public debt, which has nearly tripled since 2015 to more than 60% of GDP, may threaten growth. Chinese financing comprises a growing share of Uganda's debt.

Uganda's economic outlook is tied to its nascent energy sector. Proven crude oil reserves are estimated at 2.5 billion barrels, with 500 billion cubic feet of natural gas reserves. The government suggests that crude oil production, which the World Bank forecasts could bring up to \$2 billion in annual revenues, will begin in 2020, but others suggest it may be later. New roads are under construction, with Chinese financing, and land-locked Uganda seeks to fast-track plans for a pipeline to export oil via Tanzania. A General Electric subsidiary is part of an international consortium working on plans for a \$4 billion refinery.

Critics contend that state corruption and patronage are entrenched, and that the government has failed to hold senior officials accountable. Some also argue that donor aid, which comprises a large share of the government's budget, has been used as a source of patronage. Embezzlement scandals involving the alleged diversion of donor funds from post-conflict reconstruction and health programs led some donors to withhold budget support temporarily in previous years. The government, under pressure, adopted a legal framework to improve public-sector governance and created an anti-corruption court. New allegations surfaced in 2018, regarding fraud and misuse of donor funds intended for refugee assistance.

## Uganda's Regional Role

Uganda is a key troop contributor to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which has a U.N. Security Council mandate to counter the Al Qaeda-affiliated insurgent group Al Shabaab. In retaliation, Al Shabaab conducted its first terrorist attack outside Somalia in 2010, killing 79 people, including one American, in bombings in Kampala. Until 2017, Uganda also led regional efforts to

pursue the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a small, violent group of Ugandan origin that has terrorized civilians across Central Africa. U.S. advisors withdrew from the LRA mission in 2017 and Uganda subsequently pulled its troops, declaring that the LRA no longer posed a security threat. Separately, since 2017, Uganda claims to have conducted minor military operations in the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo against a small, nominally Islamist Ugandan rebel group, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).

Uganda has won international praise for its open-door policy for refugees from conflicts in neighboring countries, although its role as a refugee host has not been without controversy (amid reports of fraud noted above). South Sudan's civil war has spurred an influx of over a million refugees into Uganda. Uganda deployed troops to South Sudan when the conflict began in 2013 at the request of its government, to protect key infrastructure and state stability. It later withdrew the troops, and played a reportedly influential role in pushing South Sudan's president to sign a peace accord in 2015. That deal collapsed less than a year later, and Uganda is now trying to mediate a new agreement in partnership with Sudan, which was until recently a rival. Uganda is not generally viewed as an unbiased actor in the South Sudan conflict, having been, for example, implicated in facilitating arms transfers to the government.

## U.S. Assistance

U.S. foreign aid to Uganda has focused primarily on health programs, but also supports agriculture, education, governance, and conflict mitigation initiatives. Bilateral aid rose from \$330 million in FY2007 to over \$500 million in FY2016, before falling to \$415 million in FY2017. The Trump Administration has requested \$460 million in FY2019, with over 90% for health programs. The FY2019 request does not include food aid, which is allocated during the year (it composed \$24 million of the FY2017 total).

Bilateral aid figures do not include much of the substantial U.S. security assistance Uganda receives to support its participation in regional stability operations. Uganda has been the largest recipient of U.S. support for AMISOM, which has totaled roughly \$2 billion in State Department and Department of Defense (DOD) support to all troop contributing countries. That total includes DOD "train and equip" funding, of which Uganda has been among the largest recipients in Africa. Since FY2011, DOD has notified Congress of over \$280 million in military equipment and training for Uganda; over \$60 million provided jointly to Uganda and Burundi in AMISOM support; and significant funding for the 2011-2017 counter-LRA effort. Uganda also receives counterterrorism aid through the State Department's Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism (PREACT) and Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) programs. The United States provided \$33 million in support to Uganda via the African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership (APRRP).

Uganda is among several African countries that maintain ties with North Korea; it claims to have cut military ties in 2017, under pressure to comply with U.N. sanctions.

**Lauren Ploch Blanchard**, Specialist in African Affairs

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