

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Struggle of Building Public Trust and Governance in Uganda 1962-2025: Deterioration Factors and Future Prospects

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the dynamics of citizen trust in government in post-independence Uganda, highlighting recurring cycles of hope and disillusionment as the country struggles to build a stable and effective governance system. Since independence in 1962, Uganda has experienced nine regimes without a single meaningful peaceful transfer of power, leaving citizens facing persistent uncertainty and limited alternatives. Using a qualitative historical approach, the study traces how public trust has been built, undermined, and maintained across successive governments, and identifies the key events and factors that have shaped its evolution. The findings show that while independence initially inspired optimism and a sense of self-determination, successive governance failures marked by political turmoil, economic hardship, institutional decay, and social conflict have steadily weakened public trust. Political leaders often ascend to power through people-centered rhetoric claiming to serve the public interest, thereby securing public support and legitimizing their regimes. However, hope in new government quickly fades as the self-centeredness of elites takes center stage, compromising the pursuit of the common good. The popular will of the people become neglected and suppressed, with regime legitimization often sought through militarization, coercion, manipulation, and corruption. Citizens, confronted with limited alternatives, frequently comply with ruling regimes despite declining well-being, reflecting a persistent betrayal of public trust. This poses a significant challenge to the pursuit of democracy and good governance, which are key to the Ugandan transformation agenda. The article concludes with recommendations for coordinated and targeted reforms to rebuild trust and strengthen state legitimacy, including deepening democratization, reinforcing the rule of law, promoting inclusive economic development, expanding citizen participation, enhancing oversight and accountability, intensifying anti-corruption efforts, and improving public service delivery.

Keywords: Trust; public trust; corruption; governance

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1. INTRODUCTION

Citizens' confidence in government institutions is widely recognized as a key indicator of state effectiveness and democratic health. High levels of trust strengthen the rule of law, support effective service delivery, and foster economic stability and sustainable development.¹ Conversely, declining trust undermines institutional legitimacy, weakens government performance, and threatens social cohesion, often hindering reform agendas and destabilizing national development. International organizations, such as International Monetary Fund and World Bank, have therefore emphasized governance reforms that enhance transparency, accountability, and democratic participation as essential mechanisms for cultivating and sustaining public trust.² Despite these global concerns, public trust continues to erode in many countries,³ with varying implications for governance and citizens.

In Uganda, citizen-government trust has been historically inconsistent, often, characterized by cycles of optimism and disillusionment. Although Uganda has gone through nine different regimes since gaining independence in 1962, it has yet to experience a peaceful, meaningful transfer of power, leaving citizens facing persistent uncertainty and limited alternatives. Various governments have attempted to build public trust and legitimacy through regulatory, policy and institutional reforms, and public engagement. However, recurring political instability, authoritarian tendencies, human rights abuses, and corruption have repeatedly undermined these efforts.⁴ As a result, public trust has often fluctuated shaped by shifts in political regimes. Therefore, public trust in the state has not remained stable but has instead been built, eroded, and unevenly sustained over time.

There is a rising sense of cynicism regarding the current governance system, with some Ugandans believing that public power serves the interests of those in power rather than ordinary citizens. This growing distrust is worrying, and some analysts view it as a sign of systemic governance disillusionment.⁵ However, others point out that

low public trust in government has long been a feature of Uganda's turbulent post-independence political history and is therefore not a new phenomenon.⁶ This difference in perspectives suggests that research on the evolution of citizen-government trust across successive regimes is far from being exhausted. It has become a subject of much discussion and reflection as to what can be done to build a stable and effective governance system capable of cultivating public trust, which is essential for improving government performance and regime legitimization.

This article traces the evolution of citizen-government trust across nine successive regimes in Uganda, examining the factors and events that have influenced its trajectory. Its aim is to draw lessons and identify strategies to strengthen government performance and restore public confidence in state institutions. The study is timely and relevant, as Uganda advances its medium- and long-term development goals outlined in the Fourth National Development Plan and Uganda Vision 2040, which highlight accountable and inclusive governance as essential for national transformation goals that rely fundamentally on citizen trust. The study contributes to broader debates on how public trust develops in hybrid and post-conflict systems. It challenges linear models of trust, showing that in Uganda, trust often follows cyclical patterns characterized by hope, disillusionment, elite betrayal, and citizen compliance amid limited political alternatives.

The paper begins with an introduction to the study, followed by a review of literature on trust, public trust, and corruption. It then outlines the research methodology, presents the empirical findings, and concludes with recommendations for strengthening public trust as a foundation for democratic governance and effective institutions.

2. TRUST, PUBLIC TRUST, AND CORRUPTION LITERATURE REVIEW

Trust is a complex concept that takes on different meanings in both academic discourse and everyday use. It is closely associated with terms such as confidence, belief,

1 OECD, TRUST AND PUBLIC POLICY: HOW BETTER GOVERNANCE CAN HELP REBUILD PUBLIC TRUST (Organisation for Econ. Co-operation & Dev. 2017).

2 A.H. Miller, *Political Issues and Trust in Government: What We Know and What We Need to Know*, 17 ANNU. REV. POL. SCI. 59, 59–79 (2014).

3 T.J. Bowyer & T.J. Bowyer, *Losing Trust in the World*, in BEYOND SUFFERING AND REPARATION: THE AFTERMATH OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE PERUVIAN ANDES 65–92 (2019).

4 A.M. TRIPP, MUSEVENI'S UGANDA: PARADOXES OF POWER IN A HYBRID REGIME (Lynne Rienner Publ's 2010).

5 Daily Monitor Reporter, *Ugandans' Trust in Public Institutions Drops – UBOS*, DAILY MONITOR, Jan. 4, 2019.

6 F. GOLOOBA-MUTEBI, COLLAPSE, WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION IN UGANDA: AN ANALYTICAL NARRATIVE ON STATE-MAKING (Crisis States Rsch. Ctr., Working Paper No. 27, 2008).

benevolence, dependence, and reliance.⁷ Consequently, trust is often regarded as context-dependent.⁸ Undoubtedly, scholars have argued that trust is ambiguous because of its multiplicity of meanings,⁹ politically loaded due to its susceptibility to manipulation by political actors,¹⁰ and methodologically challenging because of the difficulties involved measuring it.¹¹ Despite this complexity, a significant body of research agrees that trust entails a willingness to rely on others, based on the expectation that they will act in one's best interest.¹² Other scholars define trust as a readiness to accept vulnerability based on the belief that the other party is motivated to deliver a positive outcome.¹³

Public trust, which is central to this study, is closely related to terms such as citizen trust, political trust, and trust in government institutions. It refers to citizens' confidence that government will act in the public interest and make decisions that promote the common good.¹⁴ It is closely linked to legitimate authority, or the acceptance of those in power by the governed.¹⁵ Although frequently mentioned in everyday life, measuring public trust is inherently multidimensional. Survey-based approaches are commonly used, entailing asking citizens to rate their confidence in government institutions or officials. Also, behavioural indicators such as compliance with laws, electoral participation, and engagement with public services reflect citizens' actual reliance on public institutions. Others, institutional performance indicators, including corruption indices, provide indirect measures of trust, while composite indices such as political and social trust indices capture its

broader, multidimensional nature.¹⁶ However, each measure is limited by inherent ambiguity, cultural variability, and vulnerability to response biases.¹⁷

A sizeable strand of research recognizes public trust as a cornerstone of effective governance and a fundamental pillar of democratic functioning. High levels of trust legitimize governmental authority, enhance public participation, facilitate smoother policy implementation, and promote both institutional and societal stability.¹⁸ Scandinavian countries provide a case where consistently high public trust is accompanied by a strong rule of law, high public-sector integrity, and long-term political stability.¹⁹ A similar pattern emerged in Uganda during the first fifteen years of the Museveni administration, when relatively high public trust coincided with a strengthened rule of law and comparatively low levels of corruption.²⁰ Conversely, low public trust is linked to negative governance outcomes, including corruption, weak state legitimacy,²¹ institutional ineffectiveness²² and low political participation such as reduced voter turnout.²³ Low trust is also heighten political tensions, contributing to armed rebellions and, in some cases, the overthrow of governments, as seen in Uganda and in other countries such as Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.²⁴

High public trust is also associated with positive economic outcomes, including stronger economic growth, higher income levels, more efficient markets, and greater entrepreneurial activity.²⁵ Rubongo provides evidence showing that substantial public trust during the early years of Museveni's government contributed to improved

7 Lanlan Wang & Peter Gordon, *Trust and Institutions: A Multilevel Analysis*, 40 J. SOCIO-ECON. 583, 583–93 (2011).

8 M.A. Feldheim & Xiaohu Wang, *Ethics and Public Trust: Results from a National Survey*, 6 PUB. INTEGRITY 63, 63–75 (2004).

9 R. HARDIN, *TRUST AND TRUSTWORTHINESS* (Russell Sage Found. 2002).

10 O. O'NEILL, *A QUESTION OF TRUST* (Cambridge Univ. Press 2002).

11 R.D. PUTNAM, *BOWLING ALONE: THE COLLAPSE AND REVIVAL OF AMERICAN COMMUNITY* (2000).

12 Michelle Greenwood & Harry J. Van Buren III, *Trust and Stakeholder Theory: Trustworthiness in the Organisation–Stakeholder Relationship*, 95 J. BUS. ETHICS 425, 425–38 (2010).

13 Kaifeng Yang & Marc Holzer, *The Performance–Trust Link: Implications for Performance Measurement*, 66 PUB. ADMIN. REV. 114, 114–26 (2006).

14 Rob Brown, *The Citizen and Trust in the (Trustworthy) State*, 35 PUB. POLY & ADMIN. 384, 384–402 (2020).

15 Mathijs Van Leeuwen, Doreen Nancy Kobusingye & Joshua Maiyo, *The Legitimation Effects of Peacebuilding and Development Interventions—Strengthening Land Registration in Northern Uganda*, 18 J. PEACEBUILDING & DEV. 142, 142–57 (2023).

16 R.D. PUTNAM, *BOWLING ALONE: THE COLLAPSE AND REVIVAL OF AMERICAN COMMUNITY* (2000).

17 K. Newton & P. Norris, *Confidence in Public Institutions: Faith, Culture, or Performance?*, in *DISAFFECTED DEMOCRACIES: WHAT'S TROUBLING THE TRILATERAL COUNTRIES?* 52–73 (S.J. Pharr & R.D. Putnam eds., Princeton Univ. Press 2000).

18 G. Bouckaert & S. Van De Walle, *Comparing Measures of Citizen Trust and User Satisfaction as Indicators of "Good Governance": Difficulties in Linking Trust and Satisfaction Indicators*, 69 INT'L REV. ADMIN. SCI. 329, 329–43 (2003).

19 S. Holmberg, B. Rothstein & N. Nasiritsousi, *Quality of Government: What You Get*, ANNU. REV. POLIT. (2009).

20 A.M. TRIPP, *MUSEVENI'S UGANDA: PARADOXES OF POWER IN A HYBRID REGIME* 135–61 (Lynne Rienner Publ's 2010).

21 I. Arif & N. Dutta, *Legitimacy of Government and Governance*, 20 J. INSTITUTIONAL ECON. e14 (2024).

22 Uganda Bureau of Statistics, *NATIONAL GOVERNANCE, PEACE AND SECURITY SURVEY (NGPSS) 2024/2025* (UBOS 2025).

23 J. Hruška, *Distrust or Ignorance of the Institution? Explaining Extremely Low Electoral Turnout in the Czech Senate Elections*, CZECH J. POL. SCI., no. 1, at 3, 3–24 (2023).

24 Noor Darwish, *The Middle Eastern Societies: Institutional Trust in Political Turmoil and Stasis*, 17 SILICON VALLEY NOTEBOOK, no. 1 (2019).

25 C. Bjørnskov, *How Does Social Trust Affect Economic Growth?*, 78 S. ECON. J. 1346–68 (2012).

economic performance.²⁶ Conversely, low public trust can harm economic outcomes; Nguyen et al. show that societies with weak social trust struggle to recover from economic downturns, leading to poorer performance.²⁷ However, the relationship between trust and economic growth is not uniformly positive. Some studies indicate mixed or even negative effects; for instance, a study covering 41 countries from 1980 to 2004 found that increases in interpersonal trust were negatively associated with subsequent economic growth in several developed nations.²⁸ This suggests that trust alone is not sufficient for economic progress, there are other context-dependent, relying on enabling conditions such as strong institutions and supportive policies.

A substantial body of literature highlights the interconnected factors shaping public trust and governance, indicating that trust is both a product and a determinant of effective governance. According to Putnam, citizen trust depends on perceptions of institutional fairness, inclusive decision-making, and respect for civil liberties.²⁹ Citizens are more likely to trust governments that deliver public goods effectively, equitably, and consistently. High trust, in turn, enhances governmental effectiveness in service delivery.³⁰ This aligns with Social Contract Theory, which holds that when citizens believe the state fulfills its obligations, such as delivering public goods, they view the state as legitimate and trustworthy and are more willing to obey laws, pay taxes, and participate civically. Conversely, when the state fails to honor the social contract, citizens feel less morally bound to comply.³¹ Recent Afrobarometer surveys link declining public trust in Uganda to poor quality of service delivery.³²

Institutional Theory has demonstrated that institutions gain legitimacy and public trust when they adhere to established rules, norms, and expectations. It contends that trust is not simply an individual attitude but is shaped by the quality, design, and conduct of institutions. Accountability mechanisms including oversight, transparency, rule enforcement, and responsiveness are crucial in fostering

and maintaining trust.³³ Transparent and responsive institutions appear more legitimate, increasing confidence that officials act in the public interest. Likewise, fair rule enforcement and effective oversight make institutional behavior more predictable, reducing fears of arbitrariness and strengthening citizen trust.³⁴

Based on Institutional Theory, corruption, weak accountability, and limited transparency are viewed as institutional failures that erode public trust in governance systems. A body of research highlights a reciprocal relationship between trust and corruption: high levels of public trust tend to reduce corruption and reinforce institutional legitimacy, while low trust fuels corruption, producing a cycle of governance decline.³⁵ Empirical evidence from a 2004 national survey in Mexico shows that low levels of public trust contributed to corrupt practices, further eroding confidence in government institutions.³⁶ Elsewhere, Baez-Camargo found that Uganda exhibits some of the lowest levels of institutional trust in East African region, largely due to widespread perceptions of corruption. Key institutions, including the Office of the President, State House, and the Inspectorate of Government, were among the least trusted.

These perspectives indicate that citizen-government trust varies and is shaped by number factors, with significant implications for governance and civic engagement. However, how these factors interact over time, across different regimes, and through dynamic political contexts remains underexplored.³⁷ While Institutional Theory and Social Contract Theory offer frameworks for understanding trust, empirical studies in Uganda rarely apply them systematically across successive regimes due to the unique governance dynamics and cyclical patterns of each administration.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The study employed a qualitative, historical research design to examine the evolution of public trust in post-

26 J.B. RUBONGOYA, REGIME HEGEMONY IN MUSEVENI'S UGANDA: PAX MUSEVENICA (Palgrave Macmillan 2007).

27 N.H. Nguyen & Le Duy Mai Phuong, *Social Capital in Vietnam: An Analysis of Social Networks and Social Trust*, 17 J. MEKONG SOC'YS 1, 1–27 (2021).

28 F. Roth, *Does Too Much Trust Hamper Economic Growth?*, 62 KYKLOS 103, 103–28 (2009).

29 R.D. PUTNAM, BOWLING ALONE: THE COLLAPSE AND REVIVAL OF AMERICAN COMMUNITY (2000).

30 OECD, BUILDING TRUST AND REINFORCING DEMOCRACY: PREPARING THE GROUND FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION (OECD Pub. Governance Revs. 2022).

31 PolSci Institute, Social Contract Theory: Foundation of Legitimation and Political Obligation (Jan. 4, 2024).

32 R.M. Kakumba, Global or National Crisis? Ugandans' Economic Outlook Continues to Worsen, AFROBAROMETER DISPATCH NO. 539 (2022).

33 W.R. SCOTT, INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS: IDEAS AND INTERESTS (3d ed., Sage Pub'l's 2008).

34 C. Hood, *Accountability and Transparency: Siamese Twins, Matching Parts, Awkward Couple?*, 33 W. EUR. POL. 989, 989–1009 (2010).

35 S.D. Morris & J.L. Klesner, *Corruption and Trust: Theoretical Considerations and Evidence from Mexico*, 43 COMP. POL. STUD. 1263 (2010).

36 S.D. MORRIS, CORRUPTION AND TRUST IN MEXICO (2006).

37 C. BAEZ-CAMARGO & S. LEDERMANN, WHY DOES CORRUPTION PERSIST? A FRAMEWORK FOR INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS (Basel Inst. on Governance 2017).

independence Uganda. Archival research was a central method, involving a systematic review of historical records, and media coverage to trace citizen-government relations over time. Key primary sources included independence speeches, presidential inaugural addresses, and other official national statements, accessed from institutional repositories such as the Parliament of Uganda Hansards. Recent communications by President Yoweri Museveni were retrieved from official government websites.³⁸

The study reviewed archived print media from both historical and contemporary publications, including *The Uganda Argus*, *Munno*, *Uganda Eyogera*, *Ebifa mu Uganda*, as well as modern outlets such as *The New Vision*, *Daily Monitor*, *The Independent*, *The Weekly Observer*, *The East African*, *The Daily Nation*, and *VoaNews*. Video recordings of national events, including Independence Day celebrations and presidential inaugurations,³⁹ were also analyzed to triangulate narratives and examine non-verbal political messaging and public engagement. Scholarly sources, including peer-reviewed articles and thematic studies on corruption, governance, public service delivery, and state legitimacy, provided additional context. Government documents, such as the 1995 Constitution, Uganda Vision 2040, and Fourth National Development Plan (NDP IV), and several legislations were consulted to understand institutional frameworks anchoring governance in Uganda. Citizen perspectives on public trust and governance were incorporated through empirical data from Afrobarometer surveys,⁴⁰ the National Integrity Survey,⁴¹ the Government Effectiveness Index,⁴² and Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.⁴³ To ensure accuracy, sources were cross-checked, conflicting accounts reconciled by assessing credibility, date, and potential bias, and all materials were cited appropriately to avoid selective interpretation.

To complement documentary sources, nine (9) purposively selected key informants were interviewed, including former civil servants, political figures, and community leaders with lived experience across multiple regimes. The interviews captured personal experiences, perceptions of governance, and reflections on institutional trust. The interview guiding questions included:

1. How do you perceive the relationship between the government and citizens in Uganda since independence?
2. What key (historical and contemporary) events or government actions have most strengthened or weakened public trust over time?
3. How have changes in leadership influenced your confidence in state institutions, and how did ordinary citizens respond to major political reforms, crises, or transitions?
4. What lessons can be drawn from your experiences, and what recommendations would you propose to strengthen public trust in government?

Interview data was validated through triangulation with archival records, as well as cross-checking accounts. Ethical standards were maintained by obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, protecting confidentiality, and avoiding sensitive or risky questions.

Qualitative data from interview transcripts, archival notes, and documents were analyzed using systematic content analysis. Texts were repeatedly reviewed to identify statements on how public trust was built, eroded, and sustained over time, and the key events and factors shaping governance across different regimes. These statements were organized into major themes such as declining trust, trust rebuilding, and persistent skepticism toward state institutions and examined alongside the institutional and political conditions that influenced them. Themes were then compared across historical periods to trace continuities, shifts, and turning points from independence to the present across the different government. Analytical rigor was maintained through constant comparison, attention to disconfirming evidence, and a transparent coding audit trail, ensuring a coherent mapping of public trust in Uganda's political history.

4. STUDY FINDINGS – UGANDA CASE

Uganda is a landlocked East African country bordered by Kenya, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Tanzania. It covers 241,550 square kilometers and has an estimated population of 45.6 million, with 51%

³⁸ These included: <https://statehouse.go.ug>. <https://www.parliament.go.ug>.

³⁹ https://www.youtube.com/shorts/SHzCj4ofH_w; <https://upcideologyschool.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/SPEECH-DELIVERED-BY-A.pdf>.

⁴⁰ <https://afrobarometer.org>.

⁴¹ <https://www.igg.go.ug>.

⁴² <https://www.maxinomics.com/uganda/government-effectiveness-index>.

⁴³ <https://tiuganda.org/index.php/corruption-perception-index-2024/>.

female and 49% male. The majority of the population (72%) lives in rural areas, and the country is home to more than 50 ethnic groups. Uganda's human development indicators: literacy stands at 76% (81% for males and 72% for females), life expectancy is 63.3 years, safe water access is 73%, electricity access is 20%. Uganda is classified as a low-income country, with a Gross Development Product (GDP) of US\$25 billion and public debt exceeding 50% of GDP. Income inequality remains high, reflected in a Gini coefficient of 0.41.⁴⁴ President Yoweri Museveni has governed Uganda since 1986.

Reflecting on post-independence Uganda evokes mixed feelings. Although independence marked a positive step toward self-determination, political autonomy, and the opportunity to build democratic institutions, much of the country's history since then has been shaped by unfulfilled promises, political turmoil, dictatorship, institutional decay, human rights violations, corruption, and poor service delivery. These governance failures have resulted in widespread suffering, poverty, loss of life and property, and prolonged instability undermining the aspirations of the leaders who fought for Uganda's freedom.⁴⁵

This article demonstrates that Uganda's governance challenges rooted in its post-independence political trajectory have persisted across successive regimes and continue to shape the country's contemporary political landscape. Since independence from Britain in 1962, Uganda has never experienced a meaningful, peaceful transfer of executive authority, a pattern that casts long shadows over current and future prospects for democratic consolidation. Successive leaders have typically risen to power on the strength of people-centered rhetoric, promising to pursue the public interest and restore national stability. These initial commitments often secure broad public acceptance and regime legitimacy. Yet, over time, such promises give way to patterns of self-preservation and elite entrenchment. The political class frequently shifts from serving the citizenry to securing its own survival, sidelining the principles of accountability, transparency, and democratic governance. Regime legitimacy and sustenance have often relied

on militarization, patronage, institutional manipulation, coercion, and corruption rather than democratic performance. This weakens public institutions, erodes civic trust, and reinforces authoritarianism, leaving citizens to respond with resignation, resistance, or reliance on divine intervention.

The following section examines Uganda's governance trajectory, highlighting how recurring patterns of power consolidation, elite self-interest, and institutional distortion have shaped public trust and mistrust from independence to the present.

4.1. Uganda under Apollo Milton Obote I (1962-71)

Uganda's struggle for self-rule culminated on October 9, 1962, with the attainment of independence. This historic moment generated widespread optimism, as many believed that self-governance would greatly improve citizens' lives. Independence symbolized a new beginning for Ugandans to manage their own affairs and shape their collective destiny. As independence approached, communities across the country united to beautify towns and villages. On Independence Day, the Union Jack was lowered, and Uganda's new national flag was raised, marking the end of colonial rule. People wore the national colors—black, yellow, and red, while youths and students organized jubilant marches across the country.⁴⁶ The national atmosphere was one of euphoria and hope.⁴⁷ Heuler captures the excitement and expectations of the time: "A tree for independence... that was the first time we were served bread and tea with milk... people thought that with independence things would improve across all sectors..."⁴⁸ Many Ugandans also hoped that independence would foster national belonging and equal opportunities for all.

In his independence speech, Sir Edward Mutesa, the country's first President, condemned divisive politics based on color, tribe, and religion, urging citizens to work hard for the development of Uganda.⁴⁹ Similarly, Apollo Milton Obote, Uganda's first Prime Minister, stressed the need for an inclusive and equitable nation. He called for unity and peace, pledging that the state would uphold the rule of law, expand economic opportunities, increase productivity, and

⁴⁴ Uganda Bureau of Statistics, THE NATIONAL POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS 2024: FINAL REPORT, VOL. 1 (MAIN), KAMPALA, UGANDA (2024).

⁴⁵ W. Muhamuza, From Fundamental Change to No Change: The National Resistance Movement (NRM) and Democratization in Uganda (2009).

⁴⁶ Interview with Key Informant (Jan. 2025).

⁴⁷ Uganda Becomes Independent, UGANDA ARGUS, Oct. 9, 1962.

⁴⁸ H. Heuler, *Ugandans Disappointed with Country's Progress*, VOA NEWS, Oct. 6, 2012.

⁴⁹ Uganda Info, Sir Edward Mutesa II's Speech on Independence Day – 9th Oct. 1962 (2024), <https://www.ugandainfo.com/history/sir-edward-mutesa-speech-on-independence-day/>.

improve social services. Obote's charisma and optimistic tone won broad public support, and many Ugandans saw him as a patriotic leader central to achieving self-rule.⁵⁰ At independence, Uganda had one of the strongest economies in Sub-Saharan Africa; self-sufficient in food production, rich in cash crops, supported by good infrastructure, and offering quality social services. Many believed that independence would propel the country to make even greater progress.⁵¹

However, hopes for democracy quickly faded. The post-independence government soon faced political turmoil, human rights violations, socio-economic strain, and weak democratic governance, laying the foundation for a legacy of impunity. The Uganda People's Congress-Kabaka Yekka (UPC-KY) coalition that had facilitated independence proved fragile. Under the 1962 constitution, Buganda enjoyed semi-autonomous federal status, which Kabaka Mutesa II and the Baganda sought to maintain. Obote, however, aimed to centralize authority, viewing Buganda's autonomy as a threat to national unity. After consolidating power, he no longer needed Kabaka Yekka (KY) support and began sidelining the party.

Obote fueled ethnic tensions, especially between the Baganda and other tribes, and exploited these divisions to consolidate his political power. The referendum on the "lost counties" of Buyaga and Bugangaizi deepened the rift: despite Kabaka Mutesa II's objections, the counties were returned to Bunyoro. This intensified political and ethnic tensions, leaving many Baganda with a profound sense of betrayal. Obote's authoritarianism became increasingly evident. He undermined the constitution while consolidating control. In 1964, army officers mutinied over pay and promotions. Although Obote initially called in British troops to restore order, he ultimately met the mutineers' demands, cementing the military's role in Ugandan politics.⁵² Since then, the military became a crucial political instrument, undermining civilian authority and setting a precedent for future leaders to rely on force rather than democratic legitimacy. Scholars attribute the militarization of Ugandan politics which continues to challenge contemporary governance to bad policies implemented during Milton Obote's regime.⁵³ Idi Amin, benefiting from chaos and Obote's

patronage, rose to military commander despite involvement in corruption, smuggling, and illegal recruitments. Weak institutions allowed abuse to go unpunished, sowing the seeds of impunity. Corruption spread in Parliament, where Democratic Party (DP) Members of Parliament (MP) were bribed to defect to the Uganda People Congress (UPC). Corruption began to be viewed as acceptable and pathway to power rather than a punishable offense. This weakened public confidence in the fairness and integrity of government processes.⁵⁴

The year 1966 is remarkably fundamental in Ugandan history. With Obote's backing, Idi Amin led a military attack on the Lubiri (Buganda palace), forcing Kabaka Mutesa II into exile. Obote subsequently assumed full control of the state, replacing the democratic processes established at independence with a militarized system of governance. The attack on Lubiri resulted in loss of life, destruction of property, and mass arrests. Buganda was placed under a state of emergency and subdued. Obote became deeply despised among the Baganda, who saw him as someone who had wrecked their kingdom and traditions. This resentment endured long after his rule; when he died in 2005, hostility was so intense that his body was rerouted around Buganda—through Jinja, Mbale, Soroti, and Lira to avoid threats of violence.

In 1967, the independence constitution was abolished and replaced with one that eliminated Buganda and other kingdoms, centralizing authority in the presidency and a UPC-dominated Parliament. Obote declared himself executive president and commander-in-chief. During this period, political repression intensified, with critics subjected to torture, detention, or enforced silence. Obote's actions signaled that leaders could disregard legal frameworks without consequence, laying the foundation for impunity and undermining public trust in the impartiality of state institutions. He ethnicized the army, favoring northern groups—Acholi, Langi, West Nilers, Nubians, and Iteso. This deepened mistrust in state institutions and reinforced the perception that the government served specific tribes rather than the nation as a whole.⁵⁵

In 1969, Obote abolished political pluralism,

50 R. Madoi, *We Are of Uganda, but Is Uganda Ours?*, DAILY MONITOR, Oct. 9, 2022.

51 S.A. Seijaaka, *A Political and Economic History of Uganda, 1962–2002*, in INTERNATIONAL BUSINESSES AND THE CHALLENGES OF POVERTY IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD: CASE STUDIES ON GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PRACTICES 98–110 (Palgrave Macmillan UK 2004).

52 Holger Bernt Hansen, *Uganda in the 1970s: A Decade of Paradoxes and Ambiguities*, 7 J. E. AFR. STUD. 83, 83–103 (2013); C. Nyombi & R. Kadu, *Ethnic Conflict in Uganda's Political History* (2015).

53 E.A. Brett, *Neutralising the Use of Force in Uganda: The Role of the Military in Politics*, 33 J. MOD. AFR. STUD. 129, 129–52 (1995).

54 A. Southall, *General Amin and the Coup: Great Man or Historical Inevitability?*, 13 J. MOD. AFR. STUD. 85, 85–105 (1975).

55 Interview, *supra* note 46.

contradicting his Independence Day promises. His centralization of power, ethnic favoritism, and repression paved the way for Amin's 1971 coup, setting the stage for recurring governance crises and reinforcing the belief that political disputes should be resolved through force rather than through lawful processes. In his book *The Roots of Instability in Uganda*, Karugire identifies Obote's attitude and selfishness as key causes of Uganda's political instability, describing him as preoccupied with political survival rather than nation-building.⁵⁶

4.2. Uganda under Idi Amin Dada (1971-79)

The poor governance of Obote's first regime marked by conflict with the Buganda kingdom, disregard for the rule of law, weak democratic institutions, and power struggles with his military commander Idi Amin led to a political crisis. Amin exploited this situation and staged a coup in 1971 while Obote was attending a Commonwealth conference in Singapore. According to Short, Obote's diminished popularity and weakened power base made his downfall inevitable, with little resistance from loyal Langi officers.⁵⁷ Amin justified his overthrow of Obote in a statement read by his Warrant Officer II Sam Wilfred Aswa on Radio Uganda stating: "It has been necessary to take action to save a bad situation from getting worse."⁵⁸ Obote's government had left the people "angry, worried, and very unhappy",⁵⁹ citing restricted freedoms, lack of transparency and accountability, disregard for the rule of law, loss of life and property, tribalism, corruption, and economic hardship, which were summarized in his 18 reasons for overthrowing Obote.

The public, especially the Baganda, initially welcomed Amin as a liberator. Crowds celebrated in the streets, churches, and mosques, seeing him as a commoner who could restore citizen rule. Amin positioned his government as a caretaker administration, released political prisoners, included ministers from across Uganda, disbanded the General Service Unit, eased censorship, and organized a ceremonial state funeral for Sir Edward Mutesa, raising hopes of restoring Buganda's kingdom.⁶⁰

Shortly after the coup, Amin's actions revealed that his

government was merely "new wine in old bottles", repeating the patterns of his predecessor, Obote. Amin's government was exclusive, consensus was ignored, and power was maintained through military coercion and intimidation. Although he initially promised a five-year term, Amin later declared himself life president, breaking his pledge he made in his inaugural statements. He favored West Nilers and Muslims with rewards and property formerly owned by expelled Asians, while Obote loyalists especially the Acholi and Langi were persecuted, despite nepotism having been one of his stated justifications for overthrowing Obote, fueling cycles of revenge and conflict.⁶¹ State institutions were weakened and repurposed as tools of coercion. Parliament was abolished, the judiciary lost independence, and the media came under strict censorship. Freedoms of speech, assembly, and association were curtailed, with critics imprisoned, exiled, or disappeared, including Chief Justice Benedicto Kiwanuka. Democratic accountability collapsed, citizens grew fearful and disengaged, and public trust in government fairness and institutions eroded.

An estimated 500,000 people were killed by state agents.⁶² Corruption flourished as transparency, accountability, and the rule of law were ignored. Governance was centralized around the president and military elites, while local administrations led by loyalists, neglected health, education, agriculture, and infrastructure, deepening socio-economic decline.⁶³ Widespread fear and repression drove many Ugandans into exile, while others were forced into resignation. Amin was overthrown in 1979, though he retained support among some West Nile groups, including Kakwas and Nubians. His legacy of resolving disputes through force rather than law set a precedent for coups, political violence, and authoritarianism, eroding public trust and weakening institutions, which made post-Amin governance unstable and delayed the restoration of accountable, responsive and transparent leadership.

4.3. Uganda in the Interim Period (1979-1980)

With support from Tanzania, Uganda's political elite waged a liberation war that overthrew Idi Amin on April 11, 1979.

56 S.R. KARUGIRE, ROOTS OF INSTABILITY IN UGANDA (Fountain Publ's 1998).

57 P. Short, *Amin's Uganda*, TRANSITION, no. 40, at 48, 48-55 (1971).

58 F. Mugabe, *How Ankole Prince Was Arrested from His Offices by Amin's Men*, DAILY MONITOR, Mar. 21, 2021.

59 UGANDA ARMED FORCES, GENERAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 2/1971: THE EIGHTEEN POINTS GIVEN TO JUSTIFY AMIN'S COUP AGAINST OBOTE app. (Kampala 1971).

60 D.A. Low, *Uganda Unhinged*, 49 INT'L AFF. 219, 219-28 (1973).

61 H.B. Hansen, *Uganda in the 1970s: A Decade of Paradoxes and Ambiguities*, 7 J. E. AFR. STUD. 83, 83-103 (2013).

62 E. Kannyo, *State Terrorism and Death Squads in Uganda (1971-79)*, in DEATH SQUADS IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE: MURDER WITH DENIABILITY 153-79 (Palgrave Macmillan US 2000).

63 *Id.*

Lieutenant Colonel David Oyite Ojok, Commander of the Uganda National Liberation Army, announced Amin's removal on Radio Uganda: "... I bring you good news... today the racist, fascist, and illegitimate regime of Dictator Idi Amin is no longer in power... we appeal to all peace-loving people of the world to support the people's liberation cause...".⁶⁴ Amin's downfall brought widespread relief and hope among citizens. Ironically, the same people who once gathered in churches and mosques to pray for Idi Amin and entrust his leadership to God after he overthrew Obote later returned to those same places of worship to thank God for delivering them from Amin's tyranny. Amin's ousting, however, did not bring lasting stability. Political elites soon engaged in power struggles, and ethnicity and militarization dominated the new political landscape. The economy remained in crisis, with widespread poverty and shortages of essential commodities such as sugar, salt, soap, and fuel. The Uganda National Liberation Front, led by Prof. Yusuf Lule, assumed power in April 1979 but was overthrown after just two months. Godfrey Binaisa then briefly led the country for less than a year before being ousted in a coup by Paul Muwanga in May 1980, leaving Uganda in continued political turbulence.⁶⁵

4.4. Uganda under Dr. Apollo Milton Obote's second term (Obote II 1980-85) and General Tito Okello Lutwa, 1985-1986

Upon returning from exile in 1980, Obote arrived in Bushenyi, where over 10,000 UPC supporters welcomed him with high expectations that he would restore democracy, uphold the rule of law, revive the economy, and bring prosperity to Uganda. The people affectionately nicknamed Obote *Nyamurunga* (Kinyankore word for "the pure white bird"), symbolizing their hope in Obote. In his first campaign speech, Obote proclaimed the end of Uganda's "decade of shame" and promised a new era of unity, stating: "We either live together or we perish together."⁶⁶ Across the country, he was celebrated as a national savior, admired for his courage and often likened to a lion for his perceived ability to confront the nation's challenges.⁶⁷

However, Obote's promises largely went unfulfilled.

Between 1980 and 1985, Uganda experienced severe erosion of democratic principles, marked by lawlessness, militarized politics, widespread intimidation, violence, coercion, and human rights violations. The 1980 election, which intended to restore order, was widely criticized for its lack of fairness and transparency. Results declaring Obote and the UPC as winners were controversially announced by Paulo Muwanga, Chairman of the Military Council, rather than the electoral commission, sparking disputes that escalated into guerrilla warfare.⁶⁸ The perceived rigged election in Obote's favor, undermined citizens' faith in democratic processes and peaceful transfer of power. According to Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the 1980 election, widely perceived as rigged and influenced by military-backed manipulation, set a precedent for electoral malpractices that have continued to affect Uganda to the present.⁶⁹ Accordingly, opposition groups, including Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army, Andrew Kayiira's Uganda Freedom Movement, the Former Uganda National Army, Moses Ali's Uganda National Rescue Front, and the Federal Democratic Movement of Uganda, mobilized against the regime.

During this period, Obote made minimal efforts to improve government transparency and accountability. The regime was highly unstable and ineffective, a situation later used to justify the banning of multiparty politics.⁷⁰ Although the number of District Local Governments increased from 19 in 1971 to 33 in 1980, local governance and service delivery remained poor. Essential commodities such as sugar, salt, and soap were scarce, largely reserved for UPC supporters or sold on the black market. Both central and local governments functioned largely as instruments of patronage, with resources disproportionately allocated to UPC loyalists while opponents were marginalized.⁷¹ By 1985, many Ugandans had grown disillusioned with Obote's government. The economy had worsened, and insecurity surged, particularly due to Museveni's guerrilla war, which devastated central Buganda. Obote's authoritarianism resurfaced, stifling political activity, and making elections unlikely. Persistent human rights abuses created widespread fear and deepened distrust in state institutions. Corruption and tribalism were rampant, eroding the principles of

64 Uganda Radio Network, *Memories of April 11 as Day of Amin's Overthrow Passes Quietly*, DAILY MONITOR, Apr. 13, 2023.

65 Interview, *supra* note 46.

66 J. SAVOLAINEN, A DIVIDED COUNTRY: MICROHISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE TO THE PRESIDENTS AND AUTHORITY IN UGANDA (2008).

67 I. Mufumba, *Milton Obote Returns After Nine-Year Exile in Tanzania*, DAILY MONITOR, May 28, 2023.

68 J. Willis, G. Lynch & N. Cheeseman, "A Valid Electoral Exercise"? *Uganda's 1980 Elections and the Observers' Dilemma*, 59 COMP. STUD. SOC'Y & HIST., no. 1 (2017).

69 Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Political and Electoral Violence in East Africa* (Working Papers on Conflict Mgmt. No. 2, Ctr. for Conflict Rsch., Nairobi 2001).

70 S. Makara, The Challenge of Building Strong Political Parties for Democratic Governance in Uganda: Does Multiparty Politics Have a Future? (2009).

71 M. Ndebesa, The Politics of Patronage by Museveni Is Exactly Similar to that of Previous UPC Governments (Apr. 2, 2016).

transparency, accountability and fairness, further fueling public dissatisfaction. On July 27, 1985, General Tito Okello Lutwa, supported by Acholi soldiers, staged a coup, citing Obote's favoritism toward his own Langi ethnic group over the Acholi and other factions, who constituted majority of the army.⁷² However, conditions did not improve under Okello. His regime was turbulent, with widespread looting, disrupted production, frequent robberies, and fragmented control across regions by various armed groups. Okello himself was eventually overthrown on January 26, 1986.

4.5. Uganda under Yoweri Museveni Kaguta (1986-todate)

Shortly after the 1980 elections, Yoweri Museveni launched a guerrilla war. In his book *Sowing the Mustard Seed*, he cites the disputed 1980 election as the primary justification for waging a rebellion in Luweero,⁷³ a campaign that not only destabilized Obote II's government but also paved the way for Tito Okello's overthrow in 1986. Museveni's National Resistance Army's (NRA) rise to power in 1986 was widely seen as an opportunity to alleviate poverty and address the corruption and mismanagement that had characterized previous regimes. Mbatudde describes 1986 as "a political epoch in Uganda's history when a relatively disciplined regime replaced corrupt military rule after a prolonged guerrilla struggle."⁷⁴ Museveni's ascent generated high expectations: many Ugandans hailed him as a 'messiah' ready to redeem the nation, while the international community anticipated the establishment of democratic governance. Interviewees recalled the excitement vividly, expressing a strong sense of ownership and relief: "This was our government—the government of the wananchi (citizens). The days of running and sleepless nights were over; people finally felt safe. The NRA was a disciplined army. I would have willingly returned to the bush if anyone had dared challenge our government."⁷⁵

In a number of inaugural speeches in 1986, President Museveni seemed to have understood the problem of Africa in a number of rhetoric statements: The problem of Africa is leaders who overstay in power... The people of Africa, the

people of Uganda, are entitled to a democratic government. It is not a favor to them from any regime. The sovereign must be the public, not the government...⁷⁶ No one should think that what is happening today is a mere change of guard; it is a fundamental change in the politics of our country.⁷⁷ Museveni condemned previous governments for corruption, neglect of citizens' needs, and fostering religious and ethnic divisions. He pledged to build a people-centered government grounded in the rule of law, transparency, and accountability. In his Ten-Point Program, Museveni committed the National Resistance Movement (NRM) to eliminating corruption and improving service delivery, arguing that bribery and abuse of office were among Africa's most damaging structural problems and must be eradicated "once and for all."⁷⁸

Upon taking power in 1986, Museveni's NRM introduced a series of political and economic reforms. It adopted a broad-based system of governance rooted in "individual merit", effectively suspending political party activities. Museveni argued that, given Uganda's past turmoil and largely peasant society, political parties had caused division and instability. The suspension was justified as necessary to heal wartime wounds, rebuild the shattered economy, and lay the foundation for constitutional rule.⁷⁹ To some observers, this system expanded political participation and civil liberties. Indeed, the first NRM government included leaders from the DP and UPC in key ministries except Defense and Foreign Affairs with NRM members mainly appointed as deputies. This broad-based composition contributed to the early legitimacy of the NRM government.⁸⁰

The NRA government introduced a four-year interim period, which was later extended to ten years to stabilize and reorganize government. During this period, it established Resistance Councils (RC I-V) as a nationwide local governance system intended to enhance transparency, community participation, and accountability, right from the grassroots. The RC structure was welcomed among rural communities and helped build confidence essential for post-conflict stability and nation-building. In 1989, Uganda held elections for the National Resistance Council (NRC), the first

72 S. Mbatudde, Trust in Central Government in Uganda: The Importance of Institutional Outputs 6 (Master's thesis, Univ. of Bergen 2013).

73 Y.K. MUSEVENI, SOWING THE MUSTARD SEED: THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY IN UGANDA (Moran Publ'r 2020).

74 Mbatudde, *supra* note 72.

75 Interview, *supra* note 46.

76 H. Ojambo, *Decentralisation in Africa: A Critical Review of Uganda's Experience*, 15 POTCHEFSTROOM ELEC. L.J. 69, 69–88 (2012).

77 Muhamuza, *supra* note 45.

78 A. Persson & Sjöstedt, *State Legitimacy and the Corruptibility of Leaders*, GOOD GOVERNMENT, 191 (2012).

79 A.M. TRIPP, MUSEVENI'S UGANDA: PARADOXES OF POWER IN A HYBRID REGIME (Riener Publ'r 2010).

80 J. Kagoro, *Competitive Authoritarianism in Uganda: The Not so Hidden Hand of the Military*, in DEMOCRATIZATION AND COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM IN AFRICA 155–72 (2016).

national elections since 1980. Candidates ran on “personal merit” rather than party affiliation, though they could express party sympathies. These elections restored public confidence, expanded grassroots political participation, and were widely considered free and fair.⁸¹ However, the RC system inherently favored NRA-aligned candidates, limiting genuine political pluralism. It became a tool for entrenching NRM power, weakening traditional parties such as UPC and DP, reinforcing patronage networks, which was to be used later to sustain the incumbency.⁸² In 1992, the government introduced a decentralization policy to promote grassroots participation, transparency, and accountability. Although widely welcomed, analysts argue that decentralization aimed at expanding the NRM’s support base, while simultaneously weakening traditional centers of political influence, notably the Baganda’s long-standing demand for a federal system.⁸³

Between 1989 and 1995, the NRM government undertook a constitution-making process initially planned for two years but extended to six. The process received broad praise from Ugandans and the international community, who viewed it as a long-awaited remedy to Uganda’s history of poor governance. The 1995 Constitution introduced key democratic principles such as constitutionalism, the rule of law, separation of powers, term and age limits, protection of fundamental rights, multiparty democracy, decentralization, and popular sovereignty. Many Ugandans welcomed the participatory and transparent approach, which, as Moehler notes, generated significant public enthusiasm.⁸⁴ Affirmative action provisions for women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups drew widespread approval and helped the NRM consolidate political support.

However, critics argue that the constitutional making process had notable flaws. Northern Uganda participated only partially due to ongoing conflict. Several constitutional provisions strengthened NRM’s hold on power, including the five-year suspension of political party activities and restrictions on multiparty organizing measures that weakened UPC, DP, and other opposition forces. The restoration of cultural institutions, though popular among groups such as the Baganda, was seen by some as a strategic move to expand NRM’s political support. Kingdoms

were reinstated with largely ceremonial roles, limiting their political influence.⁸⁵

Overall, the 1995 Constitution marked a major milestone in Uganda’s political and economic reform agenda, embedding principles of constitutionalism and good governance. The 1995 Constitution, under National Objectives and Directive Principles, emphasizes that public office is a public trust, leaders must be accountable to citizens, and all forms of corruption and abuse of power must be eliminated.

President Museveni demonstrated his commitment to good governance through political, policy regulatory, and institutional reforms aimed at strengthening government effectiveness, accountability and transparency, rule of law, security, and public sector and economic management. His anti-corruption agenda includes the establishment of institutional, legal, and policy frameworks, such as the Anti-Corruption Act (2009), Whistleblowers Protection Act (2010), Anti-Money Laundering Act (2014), Public Procurement and Disposal of Assets Act (2003), Leadership Code Act, National Audit Act (2008), Access to Information Act, Public Finance Management and Accountability Act (2015), and the Zero Tolerance to Corruption Policy (2019). Enforcement of these measures is entrusted to several public agencies including the Inspectorate of Government, the Directorate of Public Prosecutions, the Uganda Police Force (Criminal Investigations and Intelligence), the Office of the Auditor General, the Finance Intelligence Authority, the Anti-Corruption Unit at State House, and the High Court Anti-Corruption Division.

President Museveni has led Uganda since 1986, and his long tenure reflects considerable public trust. Since competitive elections resumed in 1996, he has won five presidential contests: 1996 (74%), 2001 (69%), 2006 (59%), 2011 (68%), 2016 (60.6%), and 2021 (58.64%). The NRM has consistently retained a parliamentary majority.⁸⁶ In recent remarks, Speaker of Parliament Rt. Hon. Anita Annet Among controversially likened President Museveni to “God the Father” and his son, General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, to “God the Son”, urging voters, whom she referred to as “the Holy Spirit” to support Museveni in 2026 due to his

⁸¹ Joe Oloka-Onyango, *The National Resistance Movement, “Grassroots Democracy”, and Dictatorship* in Uganda, in DEMOCRACY AND SOCIALISM IN AFRICA 125–41 (Routledge 2019).

⁸² S. MAKARA, L. RAKNER & L. SVÅSAND, POLITICAL PARTIES AND FUNDING IN UGANDA: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW (Chr. Michelsen Inst. / Makerere Univ. 2009).

⁸³ E. Green, *Decentralization and Conflict in Uganda*, 8 CONFLICT, SEC. & DEV. 427, 427–50 (2008).

⁸⁴ D.C. Moehler, *Participation and Support for the Constitution in Uganda*, 44 J. MOD. AFR. STUD. 275, 282 (2006).

⁸⁵ C.K. Wamala, *Corruption in Uganda: Does This Have Anything to Do with Social Work?*, 2 J. HUM. RTS. & SOC. WORK 52, 52–61 (2017).

⁸⁶ A. Round, AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS (2006).

achievements for the country.⁸⁷ Similarly, Prime Minister Rt. Hon. Robinah Nabbanja compared Museveni second to God, praising his role in reducing poverty.⁸⁸ To some, Museveni is a God-sent leader with exceptional dedication and a selfless commitment to Uganda. Some even compare him to Jesus, who left heaven's comfort to come to earth and die for sinners (redeem poor Ugandans), believing Museveni has a pivotal role in national politics and regional integration. Proponents therefore argue that he should remain in power because of his perceived superior vision and ability to address security, job creation, service delivery, wealth creation, and land reform more effectively than the opposition.⁸⁹

Public support and trust in the NRM government could be understood given a sizeable record of steady progress compared to the previous governments. Museveni is credited with restoring the rule of law and bringing peace and stability to Uganda. During the first 15 years of his NRA government, the country experienced substantial transformation, including sustained GDP growth averaging 5%, single-digit inflation, stable exchange rates, reduced poverty, and growth across agriculture, industry, tourism, trade, transport, communication, and financial services. Infrastructure and productivity improved, and essential commodities previously scarce under earlier regimes became widely available.⁹⁰ Uganda's socio-economic reforms earned praise domestically and internationally, with donors citing the country as one of the few African success story, recognizing Museveni as part of the "new breed" of African leaders.⁹¹

However, the trend of prolonged African presidencies has also affected Museveni. He is the longest-serving Ugandan president since independence and ranks among Africa's longest-serving leaders, alongside Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, Paul Biya, and Denis Sassou Nguesso. This longevity raises questions about whether Museveni

has become part of the very problem he identified in 1986, when he criticized African leaders for overstaying in power. Although Museveni initially implemented substantial reforms, his leadership has declined over time. The once broad-based NRM government has become dominated by a small clique, contradicting the party's Ten-Point Program, which pledged to restore democracy, promote national unity, and eliminate sectarianism. Museveni's own statements such as denying he is a servant of the people call into question the principle of servant leadership he promised in 1986.⁹²

Muhumuza describes Museveni's governance as neo-patrimonial, characterized by informal networks, clientelism, strong presidential control, family influence, and the use of state resources to secure political loyalty and suppress opposition.⁹³ The ruling Museveni coalition consists of three elite tiers: an inner circle of the President, his family, and top security commanders; an intermediate circle of ministers and senior bureaucrats appointed on regional, ethnic, and religious lines; and an outer circle of junior ministers, local elites, religious leaders, and business actors. The involvement of family members ensures enforcement of loyalty, distribution of patronage, and containment of dissent,⁹⁴ contrasting sharply with post-independence aspirations for a united, non-divisive Uganda. Co-opting political opponents is central to reinforcing the NRM system. Vocal opposition MPs often fall silent after being offered lucrative inducements.⁹⁵ At the grassroots, citizens, artists, technocrats, and entertainers often appeal directly to the President or his lieutenants for personal assistance, transforming citizens into clients who prioritize access to patronage over demands for accountability. This pervasive clientelism has fragmented the state and inflated the cost of governance.⁹⁶

Museveni's determination to retain power is reflected in his tight control over public institutions. Public institutions

⁸⁷ B. Mbuthia, *Uganda Speaker Sparks Outrage After Comparing Museveni to God, Muhoozi to Jesus*, THE EASTLEIGH VOICE (June 10, 2025), <https://eastleighvoice.co.ke/uganda/162638/uganda-speaker-sparks-outrage-after-comparing-museveni-to-god-muhoozi-to-jesus>.

⁸⁸ B. Samilu, *PM Nabbanja Now Says Museveni Is Now Next God*, DAILY MONITOR (June 23, 2025), <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/pm-nabbanja-now-says-museveni-is-next-to-god-5091592>.

⁸⁹ A. Cherop, President Museveni; A Man of Strong Convictions and Rare Courage (2024).

⁹⁰ S. Ssewanyana, J.M. Matovu & E. Twimukye, *Building on Growth in Uganda*, YES, AFRICA CAN, 3(1.65), 51 (2011).

⁹¹ E.C. Malmberg, *Uganda: Another Success Story Ten Year from Now?*, WORLD BANK (2016).

⁹² H. Acemah, *On Nature and Challenge of Servant Leadership*, DAILY MONITOR, May 9, 2021.

⁹³ Muhumuza, *supra* note 45.

⁹⁴ B. Bukenya & J. Nakaiza, *Closed but Ordered: How the Political Settlement Shapes Uganda's Deals with International Oil Companies*, in OIL WEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN UGANDA AND BEYOND: PROSPECTS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CHALLENGES 103–24 (2020).

⁹⁵ N.K. Muwanga, P.I. Mukwaya & T. Goodfellow, *Carrot Stick and Statute: Elite Strategies and Contested Dominance in Kampala* (Univ. of Manchester, Working Paper No. 146, 2020).

⁹⁶ R. Vokes, *Primaries, Patronage, and Political Personalities in South-western Uganda*, 10 J. E. AFR. STUD. 660, 660–76 (2016).

that could promote the rule of law and accountability have not been fully developed or allowed to operate independently. Brophy and Wandera question why new institutions are continually created yet deprived of autonomy and resources.⁹⁷ Bukenya and Nakayiza address this puzzle by arguing that many of these agencies operate beyond their formal mandates and are effectively designed to safeguard the interests of the current political establishment.⁹⁸ Similar patterns were evident during Idi Amin's regime, when institutions were systematically eroded and power centralized around the presidency.⁹⁹

Although efforts have been made to strengthen parliamentary oversight, the legislature's independence has been compromised, eroding public trust in Parliament. The NRM dominates parliamentary processes, from selection of MPs and leaders to control of debates and committees. In 2005, Parliament removed presidential term limits, and in 2017 it abolished the age limit of 75, effectively enabling Museveni's indefinite rule. On several occasions, parliament has failed to demand and enforce accountability from the executive.¹⁰⁰ NRM caucus politics routinely undermines investigations into misconduct. For example, in 2017, despite evidence implicating Amama Mbabazi, Sam Kutesa, and Hillary Onek in an oil bribery scandal, a caucus meeting convened by President Museveni overturned parliamentary recommendations, resulting in all three ministers being exonerated.¹⁰¹ The ineffectiveness of the Ugandan legislature is highlighted by a recent Afrobarometer survey which showed that 85% of Ugandans lack confidence in Parliament, viewing MPs as unresponsive and more focused on personal and presidential interests than on service delivery. Seventy-three percent perceive MPs as corrupt,¹⁰² a belief reinforced by repeated scandals such as the Karamoja iron sheets and goat scheme, extortion in committee work, embezzlement of cooperative funds, and inflated travel allowances. Public dissatisfaction with Parliament is therefore unsurprising and is reflected in its high attrition rate, with turnover exceeding 50%.¹⁰³

Judicial independence is essential for maintaining

public trust, yet in Uganda it has been compromised, particularly in some cases. A 2016 inquiry into corruption in the police and courts in Northern Uganda found that judges sometimes receive "calls from State House" directing how certain cases should be decided, undermining impartial application of the law. A recent example is the attempted auction of the national mosque, where President Museveni wrote to the Chief Justice urging a review of the court's decision; the Court of Appeal subsequently stayed the order. Political interference has also shaped high-profile cases. In 2006, opposition leader Col. Kizza Besigye was unfairly arrested and charged with rape and treason, one month before the election, preventing him from campaigning. He was later acquitted, and the charges were dropped. Presidential election petitions have also exhibited a lot to be desired. In both the 2001 and 2006 petitions, the Supreme Court acknowledged significant irregularities but declined to annul the results. After these experiences, Col. Besigye refused to challenge the 2011 election outcome, citing lack of judicial independence. The credibility of the judiciary is also hampered by corruption. According to the East African Bribery Index, there is a 66% likelihood of encountering bribery within Uganda's judiciary. Other forms of corruption in Judiciary include sextortion, misuse of cash deposits, and stealing bail money.¹⁰⁴ Corruption in the judiciary erodes citizens' trust in the courts as a source of justice. A 2024 Afrobarometer survey found that many Ugandans doubt they will receive fair treatment from the judicial system, with some resorting to mob justice. Fifty-six percent of respondents identified corruption among judges and magistrates as a major reason for avoiding the courts.¹⁰⁵

Trust in political institutions depends heavily on free and fair elections,¹⁰⁶ yet Uganda's electoral process consistently falls short of this standard. Since the return of competitive politics in 1996, the Electoral Commission (EC) in Uganda has been widely criticized for lacking impartiality and failing to provide a level playing field for all candidates. Public confidence in the EC has steadily declined from

97 K. Brophy & P. Wandera, *Keeping Corruption in Check in Uganda's Oil Sector?* (CRPD, Working Paper No. 5, 2018).

98 BUKENYA & NAKAIZA, *supra* note 94.

99 Interview, *supra* note 46.

100 R. STAPENHURST, R. DRAMAN, B. LARSON & A. STADDON, *ANTI-CORRUPTION EVIDENCE: STUDIES IN PUBLIC CHOICE* (Springer 2020).

101 Brophy & Wandera, *supra* note 97.

102 M. Krönke & M.R. Kakumba, *Unresponsive and Corrupt? Ugandan MPs Hold Key to how Citizens Perceive Them*, AFROBAROMETER (2022).

103 *Id.*

104 M.D. Kaluya & E.W. Elliott, *Corruption in Uganda: A Comparative Study of Citizens' and Public Officials' Perceptions*, 9 AFR. SOC. SCI. REV., art. 4 (2018).

105 Afrobarometer, *Access to Justice? As Public Trust in Courts Declines, Many Ugandans Have Their Doubts* (Dispatch No. 821) (July 11, 2024).

106 S. González & A. Kyander, *Do Elections Influence Trust? Evidence from Nine European Countries in the ESS CRONOS 2 Survey*, OECD WORKING PAPERS ON PUB. GOVERNANCE, No. 84 (OECD Publ'g 2025).

64% in 2012 to 43% in 2021 as many Ugandans view the Commission, whose members are appointed by the president, as biased, incompetent, and primarily serving the interests of the incumbent.¹⁰⁷ As a result, voter turnout has dropped, and many citizens see elections as futile.¹⁰⁸ On several occasions, security forces have often been deployed under the pretext of maintaining order. In practice, these deployments frequently lead to intimidation, violence, and other electoral malpractices, while bribery has been cited. However, EC has remained largely ineffective in addressing these issues.¹⁰⁹ Such abuses undermine meaningful political participation, weaken vertical accountability, and entrench power. Without credible elections, it becomes nearly impossible to remove corrupt leaders, perpetuating a cycle of poor governance. The pattern mirrors the electoral injustices of the 1980 election an event that prompted Museveni's own insurgency highlighting the irony that similar injustices persist under his rule.

Weak institutionalization has enabled discretionary use of state resources for personal enrichment. Also, as Bareebe and Titeca argued, corruption functions as a tool for regime consolidation, explaining the persistent lack of political will to tackle it.¹¹⁰ With corruption entrenched at the top, it permeates all levels of society. Many citizens struggle to access essential services and are compelled to pay bribes to obtain what should be freely provided, leaving the poorest, who cannot afford such payments, excluded from basic services.¹¹¹ Transparency International and Afrobarometer consistently report high corruption levels, while recent estimates put annual losses at UGX 9.1 trillion (US\$ 2.51)—nearly 10% of the national budget.¹¹² Such patterns echo the corruption that existed and contributed to the collapse of past regimes under Obote I, Idi Amin, and Obote II.

Public funds lost to corruption could have been used to provide safe water, electricity, quality healthcare and education services, adequate housing, better infrastructure,

and fair remuneration for public servants. Instead, service delivery remains poor and unreliable. This dire state of service delivery is reflected in Uganda's 31% score on the 2022 Government Effectiveness Index, highlighting systemic weaknesses in public administration, policy implementation, and governmental credibility.¹¹³ Economic conditions further compound public frustration. Unemployment particularly among youth remains high, agricultural producers face limited access to genuine inputs and markets, prices of basic commodities continue to rise, and civil servants earn wages too low to meet the cost of living. As corruption deepens poverty and weakens public services, confidence in the government's ability to address these challenges has been questioned.¹¹⁴ To some critics, the NRM's failure to tackle corruption and governance failures constitutes a betrayal of public trust. To Mugabe, the relationship between citizens and the government has nearly collapsed, and as such, and according to him, the regime is suffering from "obese trust deficiencies and acute legitimacy anemia."¹¹⁵ He contends that if Ugandans were free to choose, the NRM would have been voted out long ago.¹¹⁶

Amidst rising citizen mistrust and discontent over poor governance and economic performance, Uganda has experienced numerous uprisings and strikes demanding better living conditions. These protests highlight the government's failure to serve public interests and challenge the legitimacy of the NRM and President Museveni, contrasting with the promises made in 1986. In 2011, the Walk to Work protests, organized by Activists for Change against the high cost of living, were violently suppressed, resulting in arrests, while the government claimed the protests aimed to make Kampala ungovernable. Security forces responsible for abuses faced no accountability or sanction.¹¹⁷ Similarly, in 2015, the 'Citizen Reform Now' movement, advocating comprehensive reforms including electoral changes, saw participants arrested, charged, and remanded.¹¹⁸ For over two decades, teachers, health workers, and judicial officers have

¹⁰⁷ M. Krönke, Broad Support for Multiparty Elections, Little Faith in Electoral Institutions: Uganda in Comparative Perspective, AFROBAROMETER POLICY PAPER NO. 79 (2022).

¹⁰⁸ S. TABACHNIK, BILLS, BRIBERY AND BRUTALITY: HOW RAMPANT CORRUPTION IN THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM HAS HELPED PREVENT DEMOCRACY IN UGANDA (2011).

¹⁰⁹ J. Kagoro, The Status Quo at All Costs: Human Rights Abuses during the 2021 Elections in Uganda (2023).

¹¹⁰ G. Bareebe & K. Titeca, *Personalization of Power under the Museveni Regime in Uganda*, 34 POLITICS 13 (2001).

¹¹¹ Kaluya & Elliott, *supra* note 104.

¹¹² M. FAZEKAS, I. ADAM & O. NIKULINA, THE COST OF CORRUPTION IN UGANDA (Inspectorate of Gov't 2021).

¹¹³ Uganda: Government Effectiveness (2022), https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Uganda/wb_government_effectiveness/.

¹¹⁴ R.M. Kakumba, Global or National Crisis? Ugandans' Economic Outlook Continues to Worsen, AFROBAROMETER DISPATCH NO. 539 (2022).

¹¹⁵ R. Mugabe, *NRM Government Has Lost Trust and Legitimacy*, DAILY MONITOR, Nov. 6, 2022.

¹¹⁶ *Id.*

¹¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, Curtailing Criticisms: Intimidation and Obstruction of Civil Society in Uganda (Aug. 21, 2012), https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/08/21/curtailing-criticism/intimidation-and-obstruction-civil-society-uganda?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

¹¹⁸ S. Kaferoo, *Electoral Reforms: How Far Will Street Protests Take Opposition?*, DAILY MONITOR, May 23, 2021

staged multiple strikes demanding higher pay and better working conditions. In 2023, Kampala residents protested poor roads that caused congestion and accidents, while in 2024, traders opposed the Electronic Fiscal Receipting and Invoicing Solutions system, questioning how their taxes were being used. Efforts to address grievances have often been met with repression, fostering public skepticism and reduced confidence in the fairness of governance.

Amid growing uncertainty, it appears increasingly likely that General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the current Chief of Defense Forces and son of President Yoweri Museveni, may succeed his father as president. Yet, General Muhoozi's recent behavior, public statements, and social media activity raise serious concerns about democratic governance and the prospects for a peaceful, civilian-led transition of power. In a recent statement, Muhoozi warned that no civilian government would succeed his father—an alarming indication of his stance on democratic succession.¹¹⁹ His provocative presence on social media has ignited public debate, with some questioning the direction the country is headed if he assumes the presidency. Notably, when summoned by Parliament's Defense and Internal Affairs Committee to respond to allegations against him, he refused to appear, dismissing Parliament as "useless"¹²⁰ and referring to Members of Parliament as "clowns and fools",¹²¹ even threatening to arrest them in retaliation. His tweets have escalated further, including explicit threats to kill prominent opposition figures and human rights defenders, such as Mr. Robert Kyagulanyi (Bobi Wine), leader of the National Unity Platform,¹²² and Dr. Kizza Besigye, a well-known opposition leader.¹²³ Beyond domestic threats, Muhoozi has made inflammatory statements about invading neighboring countries like Kenya¹²⁴ and South Sudan,¹²⁵ threatening to topple their governments. In light of the above, it would only be reasonable to fear that Uganda is on a perilous path.

5. POLICY IMPLICATION

Post-independence Uganda has experienced nine governments, often coming to power: Obote I (1962-1971),

Idi Amin (1971-1979), Yusuf Lule (1979), Benjamin Lukonga Binaisa (1979-1980), Paul Muwanga (1980), Obote II (1980-1985), Tito Okello Lutwa (1985-1986), and Museveni (1986-present). Each regime has impacted public trust, accountability, and legitimacy differently; however, Uganda's governance history remains largely characterized by leading deficiencies, leading to widespread corruption, poverty, loss of property and life, human rights violation, and denial of peace and stability. Evidently, public trust has fluctuated over time, with political elites frequently prioritizing self-interest over the public good. Since independence, the country has yet to experience a peaceful transfer of power, a pattern that remains a challenge today. Political instability, governance deficiencies, and economic challenges have collectively shaped Ugandans' confidence in government institutions.

Although President Museveni initially gained popular support through political and economic reforms, his rule has increasingly been associated with power consolidation, electoral manipulation, and persistent corruption. Restoring public trust and establishing accountable, democratic governance requires urgent action, as outlined in the strategies below:

1. Deepen Democratization: Parliament, the Electoral Commission, political parties, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) should create an inclusive political system that ensures multiparty participation, protects citizens' rights, and guarantees free and transparent elections. Parliament should oversee the executive, while CSOs and the media monitor elections, educate voters, and advocate for political freedoms to strengthen public confidence.
2. Strengthen the Rule of Law: The Judiciary, Ministry of Justice, and Parliament should enforce laws impartially, prevent political interference in court decisions, and ensure that judicial services are adequately resourced and accessible to all citizens. Legal aid programs should be expanded to marginalized populations. Fair and transparent adjudication will reinforce public confidence in the justice system and institutional integrity.

¹¹⁹ J. Bwire, *MPs Slam Gen Muhoozi over Endorsing Father Museveni for 2026 Election*, DAILY MONITOR, Sept. 23, 2024.

¹²⁰ Nabokoza, *Muhoozi Rejects Parliament Summons, Vows to Arrest MPs Instead*, NILE POST, Jan. 17, 2025, <https://nilepost.co.ug/news/23760/muhoozi-rejects-parliament-summons-vows-to-arrest-mps-instead>.

¹²¹ *Id.*

¹²² L. Mumbi, *Uganda's Military Chief Muhoozi Threatens to Kill Bobi Wine amid Escalating Political Tensions*, THE EASTLEIGH VOICE, Feb. 23, 2025.

¹²³ O. Nalubwama, *Why Doesn't Kizza Besigye just EAT?*, THE OBSERVER, Feb. 19, 2025.

¹²⁴ Catalina Merchant De Abreu, *Son of Ugandan President Threatens to Invade Kenya, Triggers Flurry of Misinformation*, FRANCE 24 (2022), <https://www.france24.com/en/author/catalina-merchant-de-abreu/>.

¹²⁵ M. Abdullatif, *Ugandan Military Chief Muhoozi's "Takeover" Tweets Anger Sudan Junta*, THE EAST AFRICAN (Dec. 21, 2024), <https://www.theeastafican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/uganda-military-chief-muhoozi-take-over-tweets-anger-sudan-junta-4864156>.

3. Promote Inclusive Economic Development: The government should prioritize industrial and agricultural development, attract domestic and foreign investment, create sustainable jobs, and expand social safety nets for vulnerable groups.
4. Enhance Citizen Engagement and Participation: Local governments, ministries, CSOs, and media should create platforms for public consultation such as participatory budgeting, and online feedback. Civil society should monitor government programs, advocate citizens' rights and independently evaluate government performance to ensure that policies reflect public priorities.
5. Strengthen Oversight and Accountability: Parliament, the Auditor General, and the Inspectorate of Government should conduct regular audits of public projects, publish detailed oversight reports, and sanction officials involved in mismanagement or misuse of resources. Ministries and local governments should adopt measurable performance indicators to track efficiency, transparency, and service delivery outcomes.
6. Reinforce Anti-Corruption Measures: The Inspectorate of Government, Uganda Police Force, Directorate of Public Prosecutions, and the judiciary should be provided with adequate technology, staffing, training, and funding to investigate and prosecute high-profile corruption cases effectively. Convictions should be enforced consistently, while whistleblower protections and reporting mechanisms should be strengthened to encourage citizen participation in exposing corruption.
7. Improve Public Service Delivery: Line ministries, local governments, and CSOs should strengthen decentralization, empower local authorities, and upgrade infrastructure. They must ensure equitable access to essential services, implement citizen feedback mechanisms, and tie service standards to public performance evaluations to enhance accountability and trust.
8. Strengthen Media Freedom and Access to Information: The Ministry of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), media regulatory authorities, Parliament, and civil society must protect journalists from harassment, enforce the Access to Information Act (2003), and support independent regulatory oversight. Investigative journalism should be promoted through grants and capacity-building programs, enabling the media to expose inefficiency, corruption, and human rights violations, thereby reinforcing public confidence in state institutions.

AI Use Disclosure

The authors used artificial intelligence (AI) tools for proofreading and clarity improvement only. The AI tools did not contribute to the research design, analysis, interpretation, or intellectual content of the manuscript. The authors retain full responsibility for the content of the work.

Disclosure of interest

The authors have no competing interests to declare.