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# Uganda: Current Issues and U.S. Relations

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## Uganda: Current Issues and U.S. Relations

Uganda, led by one of the world's longest-serving heads of state, President Yoweri Museveni, has one of the youngest, most rapidly growing, and fastest urbanizing populations in the world. The country has never had a democratic transition of power. Uganda's early post-independence decades were plagued by coups, dictatorships, and mass atrocities. Under Museveni, who seized power in 1986, Uganda has been comparatively stable, but increasingly authoritarian. Observers have questioned the credibility of elections under Museveni, which have been marred by state violence and repression. Uganda's next elections are scheduled for January 2026, when President Museveni, age 80, appears set to run for a seventh term. Some experts warn that the country, which is engaged in controversial military deployments in neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan, faces a growing risk of instability at home.

U.S. officials have routinely characterized Uganda as an important security partner in Africa, notably for its counterterrorism efforts in Somalia. Successive U.S. presidential administrations and some Members of Congress have praised the country for hosting one of the world's largest refugee populations and for its efforts to counter HIV/AIDS, while raising rising concerns with corruption, the illicit trade of gold from conflict-affected neighboring countries, and human rights abuses, notably torture, arbitrary detention, and forced disappearances. Threats to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons in Uganda drew increased global attention in 2023 when the government enacted its Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA), which, among other provisions, introduced the death penalty for some same-sex acts; the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress considered legislation, H.Res. 1324, in response. The Biden Administration terminated Uganda's eligibility for U.S. trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in late 2023, citing human rights concerns, including, but not limited to, the AHA.

The State Department, in its 2024 Investment Climate Statement on Uganda, cautioned that while Uganda offers numerous opportunities for investors, "persistent corruption, democratic backsliding, and a closing of civic space, continued human rights violations, and potential for instability ahead of the 2026 elections should be considered." Museveni has rebuffed governance and human rights critiques and pursued his government's long-standing relations with U.S. rivals, including China, Russia, and Iran, as U.S. ties have cooled. Uganda, a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, joined the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) bloc as a partner nation in early 2025.

The United States has long been Uganda's largest aid donor, despite tensions in the relationship, with a majority of U.S. assistance focused on global health programs. Recent changes to U.S. foreign assistance by the Trump Administration, which have spurred debate in Congress and legal action, have implications for Uganda and U.S. engagement. The State Department has not published details on which U.S.-funded programs in Uganda have been terminated, but press reports, court filings, and accounts from implementers highlight some reported impacts of the U.S. funding disruption in the country.

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## Overview

Uganda, led by one of the world's longest-serving heads of state, President Yoweri Museveni, has been viewed by successive U.S. Administrations as an important counterterrorism and global health partner in Africa.<sup>1</sup> The country has been a leading troop contributor to the African Union (AU) stabilization mission in Somalia, where it has supported efforts to counter Al Shabaab—Al Qaeda's largest and wealthiest affiliate—for almost two decades. The Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF) is also deployed in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where it conducts operations against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a group of Ugandan origin aligned with the Islamic State, and other local armed groups.<sup>2</sup> UPDF forays in neighboring countries have been controversial, and Uganda (**Figure 1**) has been implicated in the illicit trade of gold and other natural resources during its operations in DRC and South Sudan. Uganda hosts one of the world's largest refugee populations: over 1.8 million people, most of them from South Sudan and DRC.

Uganda has never had a democratic transition of power. It has one of the world's youngest and fastest growing populations, and the vast majority of Ugandans have known only one leader. Under President Museveni, who was described by U.S. officials in the 1990s as one of a "visionary" new generation of African leaders, the country's political system has grown increasingly authoritarian, despite regular elections.<sup>3</sup> Corruption, high unemployment, rising crime, human rights abuses, land disputes, ethnic favoritism, and uneven development have fueled popular discontent. Freedom House ranks Uganda "Not Free" in its annual *Freedom in the World* index, and observers warn of growing risks to the country's stability.<sup>4</sup>

U.S. engagement in Uganda over the past quarter century has focused broadly on advancing regional stability and countering terrorism, responding to global health threats and humanitarian crises, and promoting democracy and development. Over the past decade, U.S. officials and some Members of Congress raised growing concern with human rights violations, closing political space, and corruption.<sup>5</sup> Ugandan security forces have been implicated in serious abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and the arbitrary arrest and enforced disappearance of hundreds of government critics and opposition supporters.<sup>6</sup> Alongside these issues, the Biden Administration condemned Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act, adopted in 2023, as "one of the most extreme anti-LGBTQ+ laws in the world."<sup>7</sup> Citing human rights concerns, the Biden Administration terminated Uganda's eligibility for trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in late 2023 and issued an advisory warning U.S. businesses and investors of financial and reputational risks related to "endemic corruption and the lack of respect for human rights in

<sup>1</sup> State Department, "U.S. Relations with Uganda," available at <http://www.state.gov/countries-areas/uganda/>.

<sup>2</sup> The United States first sanctioned the ADF in 2014 and designated the group, aka ISIS-DRC, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 2021. For more on the group, see CRS In Focus IF12206, *The Allied Democratic Forces, an Islamic State Affiliate in the Democratic Republic of Congo*.

<sup>3</sup> Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs, "Democracy in Africa: The New Generation of African Leaders," hearing, March 12, 1998; Freedom House, *Freedom in the World* index, updated annually.

<sup>4</sup> Michelle Gavin, "Uganda's uncertain future," Africa in Transition Blog, October 18, 2022; Maria Burnett and Michael Mutyaba, "Stability, security, and Uganda's ever elusive leadership transition," Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 2022; U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, *An Uncertain Future: Preventing Mass Atrocities in Uganda*, October 2024.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Mission to the United Nations, Remarks by Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield in Kampala, August 4, 2022; State Department, *Integrated Country Strategy – Uganda*, May 12, 2022; Senator Cory Booker, Booker, Risch Press State Department on Reevaluation of U.S.-Uganda Relationship, March 4, 2021; S.Res. 807; and H.Res. 1324.

<sup>6</sup> State Department, "Uganda," *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights*, April 23, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> White House, Press Briefing, March 22, 2023.

Uganda.”<sup>8</sup> Museveni has rebuffed governance and human rights critiques, accused Western countries of trying to “impose” homosexuality on other countries, and cultivated closer relations with Russia and the People’s Republic of China (PRC; China).<sup>9</sup>

The Trump Administration has yet to articulate its policy toward Uganda, but its changes to U.S. foreign assistance have had a substantial impact on U.S. engagement in the country in early 2025. Uganda has been among the top African recipients of U.S. foreign aid for more than a decade, receiving over half a billion dollars a year in U.S. support. The United States has been Uganda’s largest aid donor, with a majority of U.S. funding focused on global health efforts. Communicable diseases, notably malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), and respiratory and diarrheal diseases, are among the leading causes of death in Uganda, which has faced multiple Ebola and Marburg outbreaks, and strengthening the country’s health system has been a long-standing U.S. objective. Uganda is facing its eighth Ebola outbreak since 2000, and reports suggest that U.S. support for the response has been affected by the Administration’s aid freeze and subsequent contract terminations, as have U.S.-funded HIV, TB, and malaria programs.<sup>10</sup> The latest U.S. Integrated Country Strategy for Uganda (released in 2022) asserted that hundreds of thousands of Ugandans could die without U.S. health assistance and disease threats could endanger the United States. The strategy, which highlighted Uganda’s untapped reserves of base metals and rare earth minerals, noted that health programs were the “the most popular element of the bilateral relationship.”<sup>11</sup>

## Background and Political Situation

Uganda has a turbulent history—after gaining independence from British rule in 1962, its first president, Edward Mutesa II, king of the Buganda kingdom (from which Uganda’s name derives), was violently ousted in 1966 by prime minister Milton Obote, who was in turn overthrown by his military chief, Idi Amin, in a 1971 coup. Amin’s rule was brutal and repressive, and human rights groups estimate that 100,000-500,000 people were killed under his reign before he was ousted by Tanzanian troops and Ugandan insurgents in 1979.<sup>12</sup> A period of political instability and civil war followed, and Obote returned to power for several years before he was ousted in another coup.

President Museveni, who seized power in 1986 after waging a rebellion following his loss in the 1980 elections, has led Uganda for almost four decades. “The problem of Africa in general and Uganda in particular is not the people but leaders who want to stay in power,” he said in his 1986 inaugural address.<sup>13</sup> Now 80, Museveni appears set to run for a seventh term in January 2026.

Museveni’s National Resistance Movement (NRM), formed from his rebel group, dominates the parliament, in which the UPDF, a key constituency of his, holds seats. The body amended the constitution to remove presidential term limits in 2005 and the age limit for the presidency in 2017, allowing Museveni to run again. The age limit debate spurred protests and a heavy police crackdown. Opinion polls have suggested most Ugandans support age and term limits.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> State Department, Uganda Business Advisory, October 23, 2023.

<sup>9</sup> “‘We don’t need lectures from anyone,’ Museveni tells foreign critics,” *The Monitor* (Kampala), January 13, 2021; “UN rights chief calls Uganda anti-gay bill ‘deeply troubling,’” Associated Press (AP), March 22, 2023.

<sup>10</sup> See e.g., “As Ebola spreads in Uganda, Trump aid freeze hinders effort to contain it, U.S. officials fear,” *New York Times*, March 6, 2025; UNAIDS, “Impact of US funding cuts on HIV programmes in Uganda,” March 19, 2025.

<sup>11</sup> State Department, *Integrated Country Strategy – Uganda*, May 12, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Hostile to Democracy: The Movement System and Political Repression in Uganda*, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Yoweri Museveni, *What is Africa’s Problem?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Afrobarometer, “Uganda: Country democracy scorecard,” July 17, 2024 and “Most Ugandans favour presidential age limits, Afrobarometer survey shows,” March 3, 2021.

Museveni won 58% of the vote in the 2021 elections, per official results, amid an internet blackout, intimidation and violence by security forces, and allegations of fraud.<sup>15</sup> Opposition candidate Robert Kyagulanyi, a musician better known as Bobi Wine who was elected to parliament in 2017, came in second, with 34%. The 2021 result was Museveni's lowest official margin of victory since taking power. The State Department called the process "fundamentally flawed" and voiced concern over the shooting of protesters, the arrest of opposition presidential candidates, and violence against journalists, human rights activists, and opposition supporters during the election period.<sup>16</sup> Wine's National Unity Platform (NUP) party won the largest number of opposition seats (17%) in the National Assembly. The NRM retained its parliamentary majority, but the vice president and over a dozen ministers lost their seats.

Bobi Wine, whose campaign was chronicled in an Oscar-nominated documentary produced by National Geographic, brought new energy to Uganda's political opposition.<sup>17</sup> Unlike veteran opposition leader Kizza Besigye, 68, who served alongside Museveni in the guerilla war before running against him in four elections, Wine, now 43, is part of the post-war generation. His "People Power" movement aims to harness mounting frustration among a youthful electorate. With almost 80% of Uganda's population under the age of 30, Wine has sought to challenge the NRM's claim to legitimacy based on a liberation struggle that ended before most Ugandans were born. Elected in 2017 to represent an urban constituency in Kampala, Wine has also sought to engage the urban poor, in one of the fastest urbanizing countries in the world.<sup>18</sup>

Wine was a vocal opponent of lifting the presidential age limit, and he made international headlines in 2018 when security forces detained and severely beat him while he was campaigning for a parliamentary colleague.<sup>19</sup> An elite security unit shot and killed his driver, and Wine and five other MPs were arrested, along with over 30 opposition supporters, accused of inciting violence against a presidential motorcade, and charged with treason. Wine, who was reportedly tortured in detention, received medical treatment in the United States after being released on bail. The incident spurred protests and a severe crackdown by security forces. The government brought additional charges against Wine in 2019, accusing him of intent to "alarm, annoy, or ridicule" the president; he was arrested again in 2020 and charged with "acts likely to spread" COVID-19 during his presidential campaign.<sup>20</sup> His 2018 treason charge remains pending.

In late 2024, Ugandan security officials forcibly returned Museveni's longtime rival Kizza Besigye from Kenya and presented him in a Uganda military court, where he was charged with treason and plotting to overthrow the government. Besigye denies the charges, which carry the death penalty. Uganda's Supreme Court stopped his trial in January, ruling that civilians cannot be tried in military tribunals and ordered the cases of Besigye and others transferred to civilian courts. Besigye's abduction followed the July 2024 abduction of 36 members of his party, the Forum for Democratic Change, from Kenya to Uganda, where they stand charged with terrorism.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g., Freedom House, "Uganda," *Freedom in the World 2022* and the State Department's human rights report.

<sup>16</sup> State Department Bureau of African Affairs (@AsstSecStateAF), Twitter post, January 15, 2021; and "The West's patience with Uganda's strongman wanes after a bloody election," *New York Times*, January 30, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Mutyaba, "Bobi Wine: Why the Ugandan regime is so rattled by the popular musician," *African Arguments*, August 20, 2018; Anna Reuss, "This is why Bobi Wine constitutes an unprecedented threat to Museveni," *Democracy in Africa*, December 2020; National Geographic, *Bobi Wine: The People's President*, initial release 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Liam Taylor, "The new politics of an urbanizing Uganda," *Foreign Policy*, April 9, 2023.

<sup>19</sup> "'They're going to imprison some of us. And yes, they will kill some of us.'" *New York Times*, October 12, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> BBC, "Bobi Wine charged with 'annoying' Uganda's Museveni, August 6, 2019; "Treason case against Bobi Wine goes unheard for four years," *The Monitor* (Kampala), February 26, 2023.



Figure I. Map of Uganda



**Comparative size:** slightly smaller than Oregon  
**Population:** 49 million, 3.18% growth  
**Official languages:** English and Swahili  
**Religions:** Protestant 45%, Catholic 39%, Muslim 14%  
**Life expectancy:** 69.7 years  
**Median age:** 16.2 years | 2<sup>nd</sup> youngest  
**Fertility rate:** 5.17 children born/woman | 7<sup>th</sup> highest  
**Population under 14 years of age:** 47%  
**HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate:** 5.1% (2023)

**Adult literacy:** 79% (male 84%, female 74.3%) (2021)  
**GDP:** \$55.6 billion, 5.9% growth, \$ 1,187 per capita  
**Health expenditure:** 4.7% of GDP (2021)  
**External debt:** \$11.4 billion (2023)  
**Electricity access:** 47% (2022)  
**Major exports | partners:** gold, coffee, fish, refined petroleum, tobacco | India 21%, UAE 16%, Hong Kong 10%, South Sudan 8%, Kenya 6% (2023)  
**Major imports | partners:** refined petroleum, gold, plastics, packaged medicine, palm oil | China 19%, UAE 12%, Tanzania 11%, India 10%, Kenya 7% (2023)

**Sources:** CRS graphic. Data from CIA World Factbook, UNAIDS, and IMF; 2024 estimates unless noted.

## Human Rights Concerns

The State Department's most recent human rights report documented serious restrictions of political rights, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and torture by state agencies in Uganda.<sup>21</sup> Security forces "often" arbitrarily arrest and detain people, particularly opposition supporters, activists, demonstrators, journalists, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons, per the report. Human rights groups estimate over 1,000 people were detained around the 2021 elections, and abductions of opposition supporters reportedly continue.<sup>22</sup> The arrest of Besigye and others in his party, reported NUP abductions, and violence during a March 2025 by-election against journalists underscore concerns about the climate for the 2026 polls.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> State Department, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*.

<sup>22</sup> HRW, "Uganda: Hundreds 'Disappeared,' Tortured," March 22, 2022 and "No justice for victims of forced disappearances in Uganda," December 8, 2022; "'Drones' the vans that take people away," BBC, February 13, 2023; Parliament Watch, "Among demands clarity from gov't on NUP kidnappings, February 23, 2025.

<sup>23</sup> See e.g., USHMM Simon-Skjodt Center, *An Uncertain Future: Preventing Mass Atrocities in Uganda*; Committee to Protect Journalists, "Troubling crackdown on Ugandan journalists ahead of 2025 elections," March 27, 2025.

Civil society in Uganda has faced increasing pressure and intimidation. Ugandan authorities suspended 54 civil society groups after the 2021 elections, accusing them of foreign-sponsored interference in Uganda's politics. The government forced the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to close its office in Uganda in 2023.

Torture in Uganda is a critical issue, according to human rights reports. Human Rights Watch, among others, has reported on the unlawful detention and torture of hundreds of people since at least 2018.<sup>24</sup> The State Department report described impunity for torture as "rampant." A group of Ugandan activists, opposition leaders, and government critics filed testimonies in 2023 with the International Criminal Court (ICC), accusing senior Ugandan officials, including Museveni and his son, UPDF chief General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, of torture, killings, and other crimes against humanity, citing abuses around the 2021 elections and other incidents. Among those who filed submissions with the ICC is satirist Kakwenza Rukirabashaija, who was detained and reportedly tortured after criticizing members of the first family, including Kainerugaba, in 2021.<sup>25</sup>

The Biden Administration sanctioned several Ugandan security officials for their role in torture and repression, including the head of military intelligence in 2021 and the head of Uganda's prisons service in 2023. In 2024, the Biden Administration imposed visa bans on Uganda's deputy military chief for his role in extrajudicial killings and on several Ugandan Police Force officials for torture and related abuses.<sup>26</sup> The first Trump Administration sanctioned a former head of the Ugandan Police Force for serious human rights abuses and corruption in 2019.

Threats to LGBT persons in Uganda have drawn international attention. A law adopted in 2014 made same-sex relations (already illegal in Uganda) punishable by life in prison before it was struck down in court. The parliament passed legislation in 2023 that went further, not only making "the offense of homosexuality" punishable by life in prison, but creating a new offense of "aggravated homosexuality" punishable by death, and making the "promotion of homosexuality" punishable by up to 20 years in prison. The Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA) criminalized failing to report someone suspected of participating in same-sex acts to police as well as renting property to LGBT persons. In the law's first year, an estimated 600 people were subjected to human rights violations and abuse based on their actual or imputed sexual orientation, per the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who urged its repeal.<sup>27</sup> U.S. and UN officials raised alarm that the AHA would lead to reduced access to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment services; reports indicate that fear has since discouraged some LGBT Ugandans from seeking health services.<sup>28</sup>

In response to the AHA, which the Biden Administration described as "part of an ongoing trend of democratic erosion in Uganda," the U.S. government issued visa restrictions and travel and business advisories, and redirected aid that had been provided through Uganda's government,

<sup>24</sup> HRW, "*I Only Need Justice*": *Unlawful Detention and Abuse in Unauthorized Places of Detention*, March 22, 2022; Liam Taylor, "How one writer's story ignited a debate about torture in Uganda," *Al Jazeera*, February 11, 2022.

<sup>25</sup> "How one writer's story ignited a debate about torture in Uganda," *Al Jazeera*, February 11, 2022.

<sup>26</sup> On sanctions, see Treasury Department, *Treasury Targets Repression and the Undermining of Democracy*, December 7, 2021; Treasury Designates Perpetrators of Human Rights Abuse and Commemorates the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, December 8, 2023; and Treasury Sanctions Former Ugandan Inspector General of Police for Role in Serious Human Rights Abuse and Corruption, September 13, 2019. On visa bans, see State Department, *Designation of Ugandan Public Officials*, May 30, 2024 and *Designation of Uganda Police Force Officials Due to Involvement in Gross Violations of Human Rights*, October 2, 2024.

<sup>27</sup> OHCHR, "Uganda: Türk dismayed at ruling upholding discriminatory anti-gay law," April 3, 2024.

<sup>28</sup> State Department, *Joint Statement by the Leaders of the Global Fund, UNAIDS and PEPFAR on Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act 2023*, May 29, 2023; Kat Lay, "Threats, accusations, and assault: the dangers of running an LGBTQ+ health clinic in Uganda," *The Guardian*, May 1, 2024.



including HIV/AIDS and other health assistance, to nongovernmental implementing partners.<sup>29</sup> The Biden Administration revoked Uganda's AGOA eligibility on the basis of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights by the Ugandan government, setting the AHA's repeal as one of the human rights-related requirements for reinstating eligibility.<sup>30</sup> In 2024, Uganda's Constitutional Court overturned sections of the law restricting health care access and criminalizing renting property to LGBT persons but otherwise upheld the AHA.

### Muhoozi Kainerugaba and Succession Speculation

As Museveni approaches 40 years in power, there is growing speculation about when and how a political transition in the country may ultimately transpire. His eldest son, Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba, 50, has signaled interest in succeeding his father as president. In 2023, he asserted that he was "tired of waiting," and in 2024 briefly declared his candidacy before withdrawing his bid.<sup>31</sup> He has since expressed support for his father's reelection in 2026.

Kainerugaba has spurred controversy with provocative social media posts that have raised his public profile.<sup>32</sup> He routinely threatens violence against his father's political rivals, most notably Bobi Wine, whom he threatened in 2025 to behead, as well as Kizza Besigye, whom he threatened to hang.<sup>33</sup> He has repeatedly expressed admiration for Russian president Vladimir Putin and support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. After Kainerugaba boasted in 2022, while head of Uganda's army, that he could capture Kenya's capital in two weeks, Museveni issued a rare public apology to the country and rebuked his son, removing him from his position.<sup>34</sup> In early 2024, however, Museveni elevated his son to lead Uganda's military. Kainerugaba threatened to expel U.S. ambassador William Popp months later, accusing him of disrespecting Museveni and undermining Uganda's constitution; he later changed his tone and expressed "maximum respect" for the ambassador.<sup>35</sup> Kainerugaba has posted threats related to Uganda's military operations in DRC and South Sudan that could further inflame tensions there.

While Kainerugaba regularly praises his father on social media, he has criticized the NRM, asserting that the party does not represent Ugandans. His ambition has reportedly divided Uganda's ruling elite and its officer corps, and some experts warn that his ascension could spur a crisis.<sup>36</sup> Kainerugaba is not the only member of the first family rumored to have presidential aspirations—his brother-in-law Odrek Rwabwogo, among others, is a potential rival.

## The Economy: Oil, Gold, and Corruption Concerns

President Museveni has outlined a vision of transforming Uganda, with an economy long dominated by rain-fed agriculture, into an upper-middle-income country by 2040.<sup>37</sup> His government has focused heavily on infrastructure investments, which have improved road networks and increased power generation, but also fueled debt. Uganda owes most of its debt to traditional multilateral lenders, but China's debt share is rising. The International Monetary Fund assesses that Uganda has a moderate risk of debt distress and limited space to absorb shocks.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>29</sup> White House, The United States Response to Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act and Persistent Human Rights Abuses, December 11, 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Statement from U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai on the AGOA Eligibility Review, October 31, 2023.

<sup>31</sup> Al Jazeera, "Son of long-serving Museveni to run for Uganda presidency in 2026," March 16, 2023; "Museveni's son, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, drops 2026 presidential bid," The East African, September 21, 2024.

<sup>32</sup> For more, see Liam Taylor, "'Muhoozi talk' and the future of Uganda," Democracy in Africa, December 9, 2022; "A dictator and his entitled son are holding Uganda captive," *The Economist*, March 23, 2023.

<sup>33</sup> Muhoozi Kainerugaba (@mkainerugaba), X posts, January 5, 2025 and January 17, 2025.

<sup>34</sup> President Yoweri Museveni, Statement on Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba's Tweets about Kenya, October 5, 2022.

<sup>35</sup> "Uganda's military threatens US ambassador with expulsion," VOA, October 4, 2024; Muhoozi Kainerugaba (@mkainerugaba), X post, February 13, 2025. See also Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) Chairman Jim Risch (@SenateForeign), X Post, October 4, 2024.

<sup>36</sup> Liam Taylor, "Uganda's brewing succession crisis is fracturing its ruling regime," *Foreign Policy*, August 30, 2023.

<sup>37</sup> National Planning Authority, "Vision 2040," available at <https://www.npa.go.ug/vision2040/>.

<sup>38</sup> IMF, *Uganda: Staff Report for the 2024 Article IV Consultation—Debt Sustainability Analysis*, August 16, 2024.

Uganda's economic outlook is tied to its nascent energy sector: the IMF predicts its economy will grow over 7% in 2025 and possibly over 12% in 2026, depending on when oil production begins. With an estimated 1.4 billion barrels of recoverable oil reserves, the country expects to ultimately produce 230,000 barrels per day, roughly on par with Gabon. France's TotalEnergies and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) have licenses to develop the reserves; drilling at fields around Lake Albert began in 2023. A U.S. company, McDermott, is part of an international consortium developing fields for Total. Construction of the 895-mile East African Crude Oil Pipeline, which would carry the oil to a Tanzanian port for export, has been plagued by delays and financing challenges. The \$4 billion pipeline, which has drawn environmental, climate, and forced displacement concerns, is part of a broader \$10 billion project to develop Uganda's oil.<sup>39</sup>

**Gold.** Uganda has largely untapped reserves of base metals, cobalt, coltan, and rare earth minerals, and in 2022, officials announced the discovery of large gold deposits.<sup>40</sup> Uganda licensed a Chinese firm to produce and refine the gold; production is reportedly set to commence in 2025.<sup>41</sup> The \$200 million project represents the country's first major large-scale production of gold, which was previously limited to artisanal and small-scale miners. Uganda has nevertheless been a significant gold exporter for years: gold surpassed coffee as its biggest foreign currency earner in 2018, with the value of annual gold exports rising from \$10 million a decade prior to over \$500 million that year. Uganda's gold exports more than doubled in 2019, to over \$1.2 billion, and surged in 2023 to \$2.3 billion as new processors came online.<sup>42</sup>

Only a fraction of Uganda's gold exports are mined in Uganda—the country is widely reported to be a hub for gold smuggled from other countries in the region.<sup>43</sup> In 2022, the U.S. Treasury Department reported that over 90% of DRC's gold “is smuggled to regional states, including Uganda and Rwanda” and sanctioned the Africa Gold Refinery (AGR; then Uganda's only gold refinery), its Belgian owner, and a network of companies involved in the illicit movement of gold valued at hundreds of millions of dollars from DRC.<sup>44</sup> AGR had previously drawn controversy in 2019, when it reportedly processed over \$300 million in gold brought from Venezuela on a Russian charter aircraft—an apparent effort to circumvent U.S. sanctions on Venezuela's central bank and gold industry.<sup>45</sup> Reports also suggest that gold mined in South Sudan and Sudan has been smuggled into Uganda for processing and export.<sup>46</sup> In 2024, the State Department issued a Statement of Concern on the illicit trade of certain minerals, including gold and tantalum, from DRC through Uganda and Rwanda, which “in many cases” helped finance DRC armed groups.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>39</sup> “How one controversial pipeline reveals the state of the global fight over oil,” *Washington Post*, March 11, 2025; “Inside a \$10 billion bet on the world's longest heated oil pipeline,” *Barron's*, May 3, 2024; and “Economic lifeline or climate peril? East African pipeline is a new flashpoint,” *National Geographic*, September 7, 2022.

<sup>40</sup> “Uganda says exploration results show it has 31 million tonnes of gold ore,” Reuters, June 8, 2022.

<sup>41</sup> “Wagagai's first gold bars to be produced by December,” *Natural Resources*, September 10, 2024; “Busia RDC calls for probe into gold firm mistreatment allegations,” *New Vision*, February 24, 2025.

<sup>42</sup> “Uganda gold exports jump more than 10-fold in 2023, says central bank,” Reuters, March 19, 2024.

<sup>43</sup> Swissaid, *On the Trail of African Gold: Quantifying Production and Trade to Combat Illicit Flows*, May 2024; Uganda EITI Report for Fiscal Year 2021/2022, October 2024; Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI), “Gold rush: How illicit gold from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo flows through Uganda,” April 2021; “How Can Uganda Export So Much More Gold Than It Mines?” *The Economist*, May 23, 2019; “Gold worth billions smuggled out of Africa,” Reuters, April 24, 2019.

<sup>44</sup> Treasury Department, Treasury Sanctions Alain Goetz and Network Involved in Illicit Gold Trade, March 17, 2022.

<sup>45</sup> “How 7.4 Tons of Venezuela's Gold Landed in Africa—and Vanished,” *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ), June 18, 2019.

<sup>46</sup> See e.g., GI, *Tarnished Hope: Crime and Corruption in South Sudan's Gold Sector*, May 31, 2023; Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, “Corruption in South Sudan's gold sector is bleeding its miners dry,” June 1, 2023.

<sup>47</sup> State Department, Statement of Concern Related to Certain Minerals Supply Chains from Rwanda and Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo Contributing to the Ingoing Conflict, July 9, 2024.

**Corruption Allegations.** Corruption and patronage are reportedly entrenched and seen by some observers as worsening.<sup>48</sup> The State Department’s annual human rights report has routinely noted “numerous” reports of government corruption and asserted that “officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.”<sup>49</sup> Uganda’s Inspector General has reported that much of Uganda’s revenue is lost to corruption, estimating the annual cost of corruption at \$2.4 billion (roughly a quarter of the nation’s budget) and assessing that 85% of government jobs at the district level are secured through bribery.<sup>50</sup> Some of Uganda’s corruption scandals have drawn international attention and legal action, including the reported bribery of then-foreign minister Sam Kutesa by a Hong Kong politician on behalf of a PRC-based energy company in 2016.<sup>51</sup>

Embezzlement scandals involving the diversion of donor funds have led to several suspensions of donor assistance. Some donors froze aid in 2018 in response to a scandal involving inflated refugee rolls and diverted food aid, which implicated both Ugandan officials and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR); the United States, as UNHCR’s largest donor, demanded accountability from Uganda and UNHCR.<sup>52</sup> Several Ugandan civil servants were later prosecuted, but no higher-level officials, despite reports implicating individuals in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). OPM staff have reportedly been involved in subsequent scandals, including related to COVID-19 aid and refugee resettlement.<sup>53</sup> In 2023, UN agencies reported another case of inflated refugee figures, again involving OPM staff, resulting in prosecutions.<sup>54</sup> Some observers allege that Uganda’s role as Africa’s largest refugee host and permissive refugee policy have constrained the ability of UNHCR and others in the international community to push for greater accountability.<sup>55</sup>

As noted above, the Biden Administration issued a business advisory in late 2023 warning U.S. businesses and investors of risks resulting from endemic corruption and violence against human rights activists, media members, political opponents, LGBT persons, and other groups. The advisory cited risks “associated with interference in and intimidation of the judiciary, use of influence in the courts to resolve political disputes, and co-opted security forces,” as well as rent-seeking from officials and intrusive government security and surveillance.<sup>56</sup> In 2024, the State Department imposed visa restrictions on four current and former Ugandan officials, including Speaker of parliament Anita Among, for their reported involvement in significant corruption.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Freedom House, “Uganda: Country Profile,” *Freedom in the World 2025*; Afrobarometer, “Ugandans dissatisfied with government efforts against corruption, but fear retaliation if they speak out,” February 5, 2025.

<sup>49</sup> Freedom House, “Uganda: Country Profile” and State Department, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights*.

<sup>50</sup> “Corruption remains major challenge after Museveni’s 39-year -residency – IGG,” *The Monitor*, January 27, 2025; “85% of Uganda’s civil servants hired through bribery, says IGG Kaya,” *The Monitor*, March 4, 2025.

<sup>51</sup> Patrick Ho was prosecuted in the United States for a bribery scheme in which Kutesa accepted funds, some an ostensible campaign donation to Museveni. Justice Department, “Patrick Ho, Former Head of Organization Backed by Chinese Energy Conglomerate, Convicted of International Bribery, Money Laundering Offenses,” December 5, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> U.S. Embassy in Uganda, Statement from the U.S. Mission on Uganda Refugee Response, December 11, 2018; “Key Donors Freeze Uganda Refugee Aid After UN Mismanagement Scandal,” *The New Humanitarian*, February 28, 2019; and “Germany joins UK, Japan in suspending refugee funding in Uganda,” *The Observer*, August 6, 2019.

<sup>53</sup> “Uganda detains top officials for alleged coronavirus aid fraud,” *Reuters*, April 9, 2020; “Refugees pay huge bribes to relocate,” *The Observer*, March 30, 2022.

<sup>54</sup> “Uganda’s refugee programme hit by fresh fraud concerns,” *The New Humanitarian*, April 21, 2023.

<sup>55</sup> “Who paid the price for Uganda’s refugee fraud scandal?” *The New Humanitarian*, December 7, 2022.

<sup>56</sup> State Department, “Uganda Business Advisory,” October 23, 2023 and *2024 Investment Climate Statement*.

<sup>57</sup> State Department, Designation of Ugandan Public Officials, May 30, 2024.

## Regional Issues

Uganda has complicated relationships with some of its neighbors. It has intervened militarily in DRC and South Sudan, and its forces have been accused of human rights abuses and trafficking natural resources, including gold, timber, and ivory, from those countries.<sup>58</sup> Museveni has supported several insurgencies in the region, including those that brought the ruling regimes in Rwanda and South Sudan to power.<sup>59</sup> Uganda's relationship with Rwanda is particularly complex; the countries appear to be competing for influence in eastern DRC, where both have economic, security, and political interests.<sup>60</sup> UN sanctions monitors for DRC have implicated both Rwanda and Uganda in providing support and training to the M23 rebel group in DRC, which is currently engaged in a territorial offensive that experts warn could spark another regional war.<sup>61</sup> In 2024, UN sanctions monitors for Sudan named Uganda as one of the countries through which weapons for the insurgent Rapid Support Forces in Sudan have reportedly been transferred from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which is the primary destination for Uganda's gold exports.<sup>62</sup>

**DRC.** Uganda was one of several countries involved in wars in DRC between 1996 and 2003.<sup>63</sup> The International Court of Justice ordered Uganda to pay \$325 million in reparations to the DRC in 2022, finding it responsible for violating DRC's borders, the deaths of up to 15,000 people, displacement, rape, child soldier recruitment, and the looting of natural resources. The UPDF deployed into DRC again in the late 2000s, with Congolese permission, in pursuit of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a brutal armed group of Ugandan origin. The United States provided security assistance in support of Ugandan-led regional counter-LRA operations (2008-2017).

In 2021, Uganda deployed several thousand troops into eastern DRC for joint operations with DRC forces against the ADF, aka the Islamic State-DRC. Those operations are ongoing, although UN sanctions monitors and some regional analysts have questioned their effectiveness and Uganda's motives.<sup>64</sup> Uganda began another DRC deployment in early 2023, sending troops to

<sup>58</sup> Kristof Titeca, "Understanding the illegal ivory trade and traders: evidence from Uganda," *International Affairs*, September 1, 2018; International Court of Justice, "Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (DRC v. Uganda)," <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/116>; Musinguzi Blanshe, "'Big men', an ugly history, and the ruthless Congo Basin timber smuggling business," *Africa Report*, April 4, 2024.

<sup>59</sup> Uganda and Tanzania fought a war in the late 1970s, and Museveni launched his rebellion from there. Rwanda's current president, Paul Kagame, grew up as a refugee in Uganda. He joined Museveni's uprising in the 1980s and later served as Uganda's military intelligence chief after Museveni took power, before helping to launch a rebellion against Rwanda's government from Uganda in 1990. Uganda and Rwanda together helped overthrow the government of DRC (then Zaire) in 1997, then backed different DRC rebel groups between 1998 and 2003; their armies fought each other in DRC in 1999-2000. Starting in the late 1980s, Museveni also provided support to the southern Sudanese insurgency led by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM, now South Sudan's ruling party) against Khartoum.

<sup>60</sup> On Uganda's interests in DRC, see Kristof Titeca, "Uganda's chess game in Eastern DRC: With or Without M23?" Egmont Institute, June 2024 and "Uganda and the DRC conflict: the interests driving Kampala's involvement," *The Conversation*, August 20, 2024. For more, see Musinguzi Blanshe, "Can Museveni and Kagame's renewed bromance inspire regional peace?" *Al Jazeera*, April 27, 2022.

<sup>61</sup> "A tinderbox conflict in Congo is ready to explode," Reuters, March 5, 2025; UN, *Midterm Report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, S/2024/969, December 27, 2024. Much of M23's current leadership was based in Uganda between 2013, when the group was nominally defeated in DRC, and 2021, when it reemerged.

<sup>62</sup> UN, Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Sudan, S/2024/65, January 15, 2024. On transfers through Uganda see also "A U.S. ally promised to send aid to Sudan. It sent weapons instead," *Wall Street Journal*, August 10, 2023 and, on reported gold transfers, "The gold rush at the heart of a civil war," *New York Times*, February 7, 2025. See also "Uganda and UAE ramp up economic deals," *Arabian Gulf Business Insight*, March 29, 2024.

<sup>63</sup> HRW, *Uganda in Eastern DRC: Fueling Political and Ethnic Strife*, March 2001.

<sup>64</sup> The UN Group of Experts on DRC has reported on the expansion of the ADF's operations and tactical capabilities despite Ugandan-DRC operations (see UN docs S/2024/969 and S/2022/967). See also Congo Research Group and Ebuteli, "Uganda's Operation Shujaa in the DRC: Fighting the ADF or securing economic interests?" June 2022.



join a Kenyan-led East African Community (EAC) intervention force to stabilize areas affected by the Rwanda-backed M23. While the EAC force deployed in response to a DRC government request, Uganda's participation spurred some Congolese suspicion, given allegations of Ugandan support to M23, whom Gen. Kainerugaba has repeatedly referred to as "our brothers."<sup>65</sup>

The EAC force withdrew in late 2023, but thousands of Ugandan forces remained in DRC for counter-ADF operations. In February 2025, as the M23 expanded northward from its strongholds in DRC's North Kivu province, Uganda deployed more troops into Ituri province (north of M23-held areas) and subsequently announced that its forces had taken control of the capital of the ADF-affected province and another town reportedly threatened by local militia.<sup>66</sup> Some observers posit that Uganda is using its deployments to guarantee continued strategic and economic access in the face of Rwandan expansionism.<sup>67</sup> In March 2025, Kainerugaba threatened to help the M23 march on Kisangani, one of DRC's largest cities.<sup>68</sup> Ugandan and Rwandan forces fought over the strategic city 25 years ago, causing immense damage, killing hundreds, and displacing thousands.

**South Sudan.** Uganda hosts over a million refugees from South Sudan's civil war. The UPDF deployed when that war began in late 2013, purportedly to ensure state stability and protect key infrastructure at the request of South Sudan's government. The UPDF guarded the airport, a lifeline for the diplomatic community; Uganda also transferred arms to the government and reportedly conducted airstrikes against the opposition.<sup>69</sup> Uganda later withdrew its troops and facilitated the 2018 peace deal. In 2024, UN sanctions monitors documented "significant military activity" by the UPDF, an apparent violation of the UN arms embargo on South Sudan.<sup>70</sup> In early 2025, amid fears of a return to full-scale civil war in the country, Uganda deployed additional forces and has conducted airstrikes that by some accounts have killed civilians.<sup>71</sup> Kainerugaba publicly acknowledged UPDF airstrikes and declared he was "tired of killing Nuer" (South Sudan's second largest ethnic group, which comprised the core of the opposition in the civil war), asserting that if the opposition did not surrender, "not even a rat will survive in Nuer country."<sup>72</sup>

**Somalia.** Uganda has been a key troop contributor to the AU mission in Somalia (now known as AUSSOM) since the AU force (then known as AMISOM) first deployed in 2007. In retaliation, Al Shabaab conducted its first attack outside Somalia in Kampala in 2010, killing 79 people, including one American. U.S. officials have called Ugandan forces the AU mission's "most effective" contingent, but the UPDF has also been implicated in serious abuses against civilians in Somalia.<sup>73</sup> The UN Security Council authorized the AU force's new mandate in late 2024, and

<sup>65</sup> See e.g., UN doc. S/2022/967; "Congo turns heat on Uganda over M23 rebels, *The Monitor*, November 3, 2022; International Crisis Group (ICG), "Easing the Turmoil in the Eastern DR Congo and Great Lakes," May 25, 2022; and Muhoozi Kainerugaba (@mkainerugaba), Twitter posts, March 31, 2023 and November 6 and 20, 2022.

<sup>66</sup> "Uganda: the quiet power in the eastern DRC conflict," RFI, March 23, 2025.

<sup>67</sup> Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "The DRC conflict enters a dangerous new phase," February 26, 2025. See also Muhoozi Kainerugaba (@mkainerugaba), X post, February 28, 2025: "Well now the UPDF is going to capture the entire DRC border with Uganda. From Lubero north! That is our sphere of influence."

<sup>68</sup> Muhoozi Kainerugaba (@mkainerugaba), X posts, March 23, 2025.

<sup>69</sup> Conflict Armament Research (CAR), *Weapons Supplies into South Sudan's Civil War*, November 15, 2018.

<sup>70</sup> UN, *Interim report on the Panel of Experts on South Sudan*, November 29, 2024.

<sup>71</sup> ICG, "South Sudan on the Precipice of Renewed Full-blown War," March 7, 2025; "Nasir rocked by renewed aerial bombardments, Radio Tamazuj, March 19, 2025; UNMISS, "UNMISS calls for immediate cessation of hostilities and restoration of calm in South Sudan," March 26, 2025.

<sup>72</sup> Andrew Bagala, "South Sudan's VP Machar says Uganda is violating arms embargo," *The Monitor*, March 25, 2025; Muhoozi Kainerugaba (@mkainerugaba), X posts, March 23 and 24, 2025. For more on the current situation, see Joshua Craze, "What is happening in South Sudan," *African Arguments*, March 27, 2025.

<sup>73</sup> State Department, *Uganda - Integrated Country Strategy*; Mohamed Gabode, "African Union peacekeepers in Somalia accused of widespread abuse," *The New Humanitarian*, March 12, 2025.

while some details of the mission, including its funding, remain unclear, Uganda is expected to be its largest troop contributor, with 4,500 soldiers. Uganda has received support from the United States, European donors, and the United Arab Emirates, among others, for its deployment.

## U.S.-Uganda Relations

Successive U.S. presidential administrations have described Uganda as a partner in promoting stability in the region, praised its contribution to countering Al Shabaab in Somalia, lauded its efforts to fight HIV/AIDS, and welcomed its role as a refugee host, while expressing occasional concern about political repression, human rights abuses, and corruption.

Relations became increasingly strained over the past decade amid democratic backsliding in Uganda and its government's deepening relations with China and Russia (see below). Museveni has routinely spoken of "Western neo-imperialism" and a need to prevent "aggression against Africa," but some observers see his engagement with U.S. rivals as intended to shield his government from Western criticism.<sup>74</sup> The first Trump Administration sanctioned a former Ugandan security official under Executive Order 13818 ("Global Magnitsky") for torture and four Ugandans, including two judges, for a corrupt adoption scheme. Uganda's 2021 elections and subsequent developments increased tensions in the U.S.-Uganda relationship. U.S. diplomats in Uganda were reportedly targeted in late 2021 with surveillance equipment acquired by the Ugandan government from an Israeli company, NSO Group, that the U.S. Commerce Department designated for export controls.<sup>75</sup> The Biden Administration subsequently designated, as noted above, two Ugandan security officials for Global Magnitsky sanctions and issued travel bans on others. Relations further deteriorated with the 2023 enactment of Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act, which contributed to the Biden Administration's decisions to issue a business advisory and terminate the country's eligibility for U.S. trade benefits, among other actions.

Members of Congress from both parties have raised concern over political repression in Uganda.<sup>76</sup> Abuses around the 2021 elections led some to call for a review of non-humanitarian aid to ensure that it not abet corruption or human rights abuses.<sup>77</sup> The Anti-Homosexuality Act also drew criticism from some Members and prompted the introduction in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress of H.Res. 1324, which sought to condemn Uganda's "undemocratic human rights regression."<sup>78</sup>

**U.S. Trade.** Uganda's primary exports to the United States are coffee, cocoa, base metals, and fish. Bilateral goods trade totaled \$239 million in 2024, and while Uganda lost AGOA eligibility in 2024, U.S. imports rose 14.6% from 2023, totaling \$132 million in 2024.<sup>79</sup> Per President Trump's April 2025 tariffs announcement, U.S. imports from Uganda face a new 10% tariff.

<sup>74</sup> Africa renews push for favorable UN Security Council reforms," AP, January 20, 2022; Joseph Siegle, "Why Russia is on a charm offensive in Africa," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, July 26, 2022.

<sup>75</sup> Liam Taylor, "'Beacon of impunity': US eyes Uganda ties as abuses continue," *Al Jazeera*, March 4, 2021; Commerce Department, Commerce Adds NSO Group and Other Foreign Companies to Entity List for Malicious Cyber Activities, November 3, 2021; "The secret Uganda deal that has brought NSO to the brink of collapse," *Financial Times*, December 21, 2021.

<sup>76</sup> See e.g., SFRC Chairman Jim Risch (@SenateForeign), X Posts, January 5, 2022, February 7, 2022, and November 20, 2024; SFRC, Ranking Member Menendez Statement for the Record on Safeguarding Democracy in Uganda, December 31, 2020; and SFRC, "Risch, McCaul: Museveni, Ugandan Military Must Respect Polls," January 13, 2021.

<sup>77</sup> See e.g., Letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken by Senators Booker and Risch, March 4, 2021.

<sup>78</sup> For criticism, see Senator Ted Cruz, who called the AHA "grotesque & an abomination" in a May 29, 2023 Twitter post and SFRC, Chairman Cardin Statement in Support of LGBTQI+ Communities in Uganda," December 21, 2023.

<sup>79</sup> Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, "Uganda," available at [ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa/east-africa/uganda](https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/africa/east-africa/uganda).



### Uganda's Relations with U.S. Rivals

**China.**<sup>80</sup> China is a leading source of foreign direct investment in Uganda; its loan commitments there reportedly total over \$4.2 billion. Among other projects, China ExIm Bank financed the \$200 million expansion of Entebbe International Airport and the recently completed \$1.7 billion Karuma Hydropower Station, Uganda's largest power-generating installation. Financing from the China ExIm Bank comprises the second largest share of Uganda's external public debt. After the World Bank suspended new lending in 2023 in relation to the AHA, Uganda turned to China for a \$150 million loan for internet infrastructure. The extent of China's involvement in Uganda's economy has spurred U.S. concerns, as has China's support for Uganda's expanding digital surveillance capacity. China's Huawei has provided surveillance equipment for Kampala, including cameras with facial-recognition technology, and has been named in Ugandan efforts to intercept the communications of government critics. Museveni, a vocal critic of donor conditionality, has praised China's "non-interference" foreign policy approach.

**Russia.**<sup>81</sup> Uganda-Russia relations have deepened over the past decade. President Museveni lauded Russia during a 2022 visit by Russia's foreign minister, and the NRM signed a cooperation agreement with Russia's ruling party. After Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia reportedly offered to expedite the delivery of attack helicopters in exchange for Ugandan state television airing Russian state-funded news several hours a day. As part of the deal, reports suggest Russia offered Uganda the services of a propaganda network known as the Africa Back Office (linked to Wagner Group founder Yevgeny Prigozhin) to counter criticism of Uganda's government. Uganda has abstained on UN General Assembly resolutions that have criticized Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Museveni and Gen. Kainerugaba attended Russia's 2023 Africa summit, where they reportedly discussed Uganda becoming a regional hub for the maintenance of Russian-origin military equipment, including fighter jets and helicopters, and for small arms production. Kainerugaba visited Moscow in 2024 and then hosted a Russian defense delegation, after which the Ugandan army announced that Russia had donated \$100 million, a notably rare, and sizable, financial pledge on Russia's part. In early 2024, the United States sanctioned a Uganda-based Moldovan businessman, Valerii Copeichin, and his company, Pro Heli, for their role in supporting Russia's defense sector. Pro Heli provides maintenance for Uganda's fleet of Russian-origin helicopters.

Russia, like China, has supported Uganda's efforts to expand its surveillance capabilities. In 2023, Uganda hired a Russian firm to establish and operate a new surveillance system for tracking vehicles through new mandatory electronic registration plates, prompting an outcry from human rights and privacy advocates. Ugandan elections officials visited Russia in early 2024 to study how the latter uses information technology to manage elections.

**Iran.**<sup>82</sup> Iranian presidents Ebrahim Raisi, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and Hashemi Rafsanjani each visited Uganda while in office, and Museveni has visited Iran several times. In 2023, Uganda was one of three countries to host the first visit by an Iranian leader, then-president Raisi, to Africa in over a decade, and Museveni cited Iran's "anti-imperialism position" as the basis for their cooperation. Uganda hosted an Iranian delegation in early 2025 aimed at further strengthening relations, with discussions on "political cooperation, trade and investment, education, health, and technological exchange."

**North Korea.**<sup>83</sup> Museveni maintained Uganda's longstanding military ties with North Korea until at least 2017, when, under pressure related to UN sanctions, Uganda said it cut military relations (other ties continued). North Korea closed its embassy in Uganda in 2023 as part of a broader downsizing of its diplomatic presence in Africa.

<sup>80</sup> Sources for this section include Boston University Global Development Policy Center's Chinese Loans to Africa Database; IMF, *Uganda: 2024 Article IV Consultation - Staff Report*, September 2024; "Huawei Technicians Helped African Governments Spy on Political Opponents," *WSJ*, August 15, 2019; Privacy International, "Huawei infiltration in Uganda," June 25, 2020; "Museveni lauds China's non-interference policy," *The Monitor*, September 14, 2020; and "Uganda leader says China-style diplomacy 'better than the West's,'" *Nikkei*, March 17, 2022.

<sup>81</sup> Sources for this section include "Russia – Uganda: Why Museveni is gravitating toward Putin," *The Africa Report*, June 17, 2022; "Uganda's Museveni extols Africa-Russia ties during Lavrov visit," *Al Jazeera*, July 26, 2022; "Russia's influence campaign in Africa targets a U.S. ally," *Wall Street Journal*, December 15, 2022; "In Uganda, spy-aiding number plates are Russia's latest footprint," *The Africa Report*, July 4, 2024; "Russia gifts Ugandan army \$100 million as Muhoozi courts Putin," *Africa Report*, August 29, 2024; Human Rights Watch, *Uganda: Rights concerns over license plate tracking*, November 14, 2023.

<sup>82</sup> Sources for this section include Eric Lob, "Raisi goes to Africa in search of allies for Iran," July 26, 2023; Official website for Yoweri K. Museveni, "Uganda, Iran to Strengthen Cooperation," [yowerikmuseveni.com/uganda-iran-strengthen-cooperation](http://yowerikmuseveni.com/uganda-iran-strengthen-cooperation); Uganda Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Bilateral political consultations between the Republic of Uganda and the Islamic Republic of Iran," February 5, 2025.

<sup>83</sup> Sources for this section include Joe Parkinson, "Tracking the Commandos, North Korea's Secret Export," *WSJ*, December 9, 2018; Maxwell Bone, "Uganda: North Korea's African Ally," *The Diplomat*, October 30, 2019.

## U.S. Assistance

The United States allocated bilateral aid for Uganda totaling over \$535 million in FY2023 and over \$470 million in FY2024.<sup>84</sup> The Biden Administration requested almost \$532 million for FY2025, of which 88% was intended for health programs. These figures do not reflect all U.S. aid to the country, some of which is provided through regional and global programs. Beyond bilateral assistance, U.S. humanitarian aid allocations for Uganda, which totaled over \$75 million in FY2023 and \$90 million in FY2024, have supported refugees in the country and food-insecure Ugandans in the drought-prone northeast.<sup>85</sup> In addition to routine bilateral assistance for professional military education, the UPDF has received U.S. training, equipment, logistics, and advisory support since 2007 for its deployment in Somalia. Bilateral aid figures do not reflect that funding, which has been provided through State Department budget lines for Somalia, regional and global security initiatives, and Department of Defense (DOD) funding. Prior to Uganda's flawed 2021 elections, it was a top African recipient of DOD's global train-and-equip program (now 10 U.S.C. §333), cumulatively receiving well over \$300 million in military support between FY2011 and FY2021.

Foreign aid cuts by the Trump Administration, which have prompted congressional debate and legal challenges, have implications for Uganda and U.S. engagement.<sup>86</sup> Health assistance has dominated the U.S. aid portfolio in Uganda for over two decades. Per the State Department, "U.S. assistance has contributed to Uganda's reduction in maternal and child health deaths, improved life expectancy, and helped Uganda move toward HIV epidemic control."<sup>87</sup> In his March 4, 2025 address to a joint session of Congress, President Trump mentioned U.S. funding "for social and behavior change in Uganda" among a list of "appalling waste" identified by his Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE); House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Brian Mast has cited U.S. assistance to support LGBT individuals in Uganda as an example of the Biden Administration "imposing their far-left-ideology onto other nations."<sup>88</sup>

Some implementers of U.S.-funded health programs in Uganda have reported that the suspension of U.S. funding in late January 2025 has constrained their ability to maintain programs, despite public directives from the Secretary of State to continue life-saving activities, and reports suggest some programs have since been terminated.<sup>89</sup> The Trump Administration has not published data

<sup>84</sup> FY2025 State Department Congressional Budget Justification; State Department, "U.S. Relations with Uganda," January 22, 2025. For more on foreign assistance obligations to Uganda, see [foreignassistance.gov/cd/uganda/](https://foreignassistance.gov/cd/uganda/).

<sup>85</sup> USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, Uganda Assistance Overview, December 2024.

<sup>86</sup> Executive Order 14169 of January 20, 2025, "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid," *Federal Register* 8619, January 30, 2025; Secretary of State Marco Rubio (@marcorubio), X Post, March 10, 2025. See also Pete Marocco, "Reclaiming Our Sovereignty: 'AID' and the American People," RealClear Politics, March 19, 2025; House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, "America Last: How Foreign Aid Undermined U.S. Interests Around the World," hearing, February 26, 2025; and "Brief of 202 Members of Congress as Amici Curiae in Support of Plaintiffs Motion for Summary Judgement," *AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES v. TRUMP*, 1:25-cv-00352, (D.D.C. Mar 31, 2025) ECF No. 68.

<sup>87</sup> State Department, "U.S. Relations with Uganda," January 22, 2025.

<sup>88</sup> White House, Remarks by President Trump in Joint Address to Congress, March 4, 2025; House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC), Chairman Mast Delivers Opening Remarks at HFAC Hearing on the USAID Betrayal, February 13, 2025.

<sup>89</sup> "Documents reveal scope of Trump's foreign aid cuts," Politico, March 26, 2025; Sara Jerving, "Ousted USAID health lead says US fumbled Uganda's Ebola response," *Devox*, March 26, 2025; HFAC Democrats, Statement of Nicholas Z. Enrich, "Shadow Hearing – Thrown into Chaos: The Dismantling of USAID and its Real-Life Consequences," March 25, 2025; Andrew Green, "PEPFAR cuts hit Uganda's most vulnerable," *Foreign Policy*, March 14, 2025; Center for Global Development, "The USAID cuts: little sign of mercy for 'lifesaving' health (continued...)"

on how much assistance previously obligated for Uganda has been affected by the terminations, but the Uganda AIDS Commission assesses that up to 29,000 local health workers could lose their jobs as a result.<sup>90</sup> World Health Organization (WHO) officials indicated in early February 2025 that they may have to cut a quarter of their emergency response budget due to the U.S. withdrawal from the WHO, with near-term implications for emergency programs in Uganda to contain Ebola and other infectious diseases.<sup>91</sup> The reported termination of U.S. funding for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, which purchases vaccines for children in low-income countries, may also have major ramifications for Uganda, which has been a leading Gavi beneficiary.<sup>92</sup>

The Trump Administration's aid cuts and decision to shut down the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) are occurring as some other major donors are also reducing their foreign aid funding.<sup>93</sup> Some observers warn that China and Russia may seek to exploit the situation to increase their influence.<sup>94</sup> In Uganda, China's ambassador has sought to contrast his country's aid and economic cooperation with the U.S. cuts, asserting in March 2025 that "China believes that big countries should honor their commitment and fulfil their due responsibilities" and announcing new food assistance for the food insecure northeast.<sup>95</sup> Russia has made Uganda a focal point for its health diplomacy in Africa, and in late February its embassy publicized the deployment of a team of Russian specialists to support Uganda's Ebola response.<sup>96</sup> In 2024, Russia, which has accused the U.S. military of using laboratories in Africa to develop biological weapons, held its first Russian-African International Conference on Combating Biological Threats in Uganda.<sup>97</sup>

The State Department has not published details on which U.S.-funded programs in Uganda have been retained or terminated, but press reports, court filings, and accounts from implementers highlight some reported impacts of the U.S. funding disruption in Uganda. Several focal areas for U.S. assistance are briefly addressed below.

**HIV/AIDS and TB.** Uganda, which has an estimated 1.5 million people living with HIV and a 5.1% adult prevalence rate, has been a leading recipient of assistance under the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) for over two decades.<sup>98</sup> The U.S. Embassy in Uganda

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programs," March 14, 2025; and "The Trump Administration said these aid programs saved lives. It canceled them anyway," Pro Publica, March 1, 2025.

<sup>90</sup> "US aid cuts could wipe out 20,000 health jobs," *The Monitor*, March 13, 2025.

<sup>91</sup> Health Policy Watch, "Crucial WHO health emergency response faces budget cut of 25%," February 6, 2025.

<sup>92</sup> Stephanie Nolan, "U.S. to end vaccine funds for poor countries," *New York Times*, March 26, 2025.

<sup>93</sup> CRS In Focus IF10261, *U.S. Agency for International Development: An Overview*; "Europe is cutting development spending, and it's not because of Trump," Devex, March 25, 2025; "EU aid to least developed countries is trending way down," Devex, November 4, 2024; "'Utterly devastating': Global health groups left reeling as European countries slash foreign aid," Euronews, March 7, 2025.

<sup>94</sup> "Trump's global funding cuts leave a void in Africa for rivals to exploit," *Washington Post*, March 24, 2025; "Trump's USAID cuts help China and Russia, former officials argue in court," *Newsweek*, March 17, 2025; Chatham House, "First USAID closes, then UK cuts aid: what a Western retreat from foreign aid could mean," March 5, 2025.

<sup>95</sup> "China reaffirms support to Uganda as US cuts aid," *The Monitor*, March 21, 2025; "China donates rice to northeastern Uganda to alleviate food shortage," Xinhua, March 27, 2025.

<sup>96</sup> "Russia's growing footprint on the African health landscape," Think Global Health, September 4, 2024; "Uganda seeks deeper health sector ties with Russia," *New Vision* (Kampala), December 27, 2024; and Russian Embassy in Uganda (@RusEmbUganda, X post, March 3, 2025).

<sup>97</sup> "Briefing: Pro-Russian media amplify claims of US biological weapons in Africa," BBC Monitoring, December 25, 2024; "Russia's latest target in Africa: U.S. funded anti-malaria programs," *New York Times*, October 14, 2024; "Russia ready to collaborate with Africa against new pandemics – Putin," RT, April 17, 2024; and "Russian intelligence is pushing false claims of U.S. biological testing in Africa, U.S. says," February 8, 2024.

<sup>98</sup> Authorization for PEPFAR (P.L. 108-25) lapsed in late March 2025, and while congressional appropriations provide for funding through the end of September 2025, the program's future is uncertain with the expiry of its authorization.

has reported that PEPFAR has prevented over 600,000 HIV-related deaths and 500,000 HIV infections, including the potential infection of over 230,000 babies, in Uganda.<sup>99</sup> PEPFAR has funded anti-retroviral therapy (ART) for nearly 1.4 million HIV-positive Ugandans annually. U.S. funding accounts for 55% of Uganda's total HIV/AIDS response (which is 80% foreign donor-funded), per UNAIDS, which reported in March 2025 that all facilities providing ART in the country were operating at reduced capacity, and some had stopped services, due to the disruption of U.S. funding.<sup>100</sup> UNAIDS has also reported that the funding disruption has affected HIV testing services and reduced adherence to protocols to prevent mother-to-child transmission. The funding disruption has reportedly affected TB prevention, diagnosis, and treatment in Uganda, where U.S. assistance has supported TB preventative therapy for nearly 100,000 people.<sup>101</sup> The head of UNAIDS, who is Ugandan (and who is married to imprisoned opposition politician Kizza Besigye), has warned that HIV/AIDS could surge in the coming years if the U.S. cuts persist.<sup>102</sup>

**Malaria.** Malaria is the leading cause of mortality and morbidity in Uganda, which has the world's highest malaria incidence rate and has been a focus country for the U.S. President's Malaria Initiative (PMI). U.S. assistance has reportedly annually protected over three million Ugandans through mosquito abatement programs, according to the U.S. Embassy, which reported that as of 2024 mortality in children under five had decreased by 41% since PMI activities started in Uganda in 2005.<sup>103</sup> Press reports suggest malaria prevention and treatment programs in Uganda have been affected by the disruption of U.S. funding, with spraying ahead of the rainy season suspended in February and some contracts terminated.<sup>104</sup>

**Ebola Response.** The United States has long played a leading role in helping Uganda respond to infectious disease outbreaks, including Ebola. Uganda's current Ebola outbreak began in January 2025 and involves the "Sudan" strain of the virus, for which there are no U.S. Food and Drug Administration-approved vaccines or treatments. Cases have been confirmed in the densely inhabited capital city, Kampala, home to an estimated two million people, and at multiple health facilities—raising the risk of large-scale transmission. U.S. officials reportedly assessed that Uganda lacked sufficient laboratory supplies, diagnostic equipment, and protective gear for the response.<sup>105</sup> In late February 2025, U.S. presidential advisor Elon Musk acknowledged that Administration officials had "accidentally cancelled" emergency response support for the outbreak, but asserted that it was restored immediately, with "no interruption."<sup>106</sup> USAID global health officials, however, have stated that while a waiver was granted for support to the Ebola response, as of late March 2025 no funds had been disbursed, and USAID staffing cuts and directives regarding engagement with WHO further hampered U.S. coordination.<sup>107</sup> USAID

<sup>99</sup> U.S. Mission in Uganda, *Report to the Ugandan People* 2023.

<sup>100</sup> UNAIDS, "Impacts of US funding cuts on HIV programmes in Uganda," March 19, 2025. See also Parliament of the Republic of Uganda, "Gov't addressing funding gaps following US aid cuts – PM" March 6, 2025.

<sup>101</sup> Stop TB Partnership, Report on the Impact of US Government Funding Halt on TB Responses in High TB Burden Countries, March 3, 2025; Aria Bendix, "World Health Organization warns of possible tuberculosis surge because of USAID cuts," NBC News, March 9, 2025; Stephanie Nolan, "Tuberculosis resurgent as Trump funding cut disrupts treatment globally," *New York Times*, March 11, 2025.

<sup>102</sup> UN, "UN agency warns of 'surge' in AIDS deaths without US funding," March 24, 2025.

<sup>103</sup> U.S. Mission in Uganda, *Report to the Ugandan People* 2023.

<sup>104</sup> "No disease is deadlier in Africa than malaria. Trump's US aid cuts weaken the fight against it." AP, March 9, 2025.

<sup>105</sup> "As Ebola spreads in Uganda, Trump aid freeze hinders effort to contain it, U.S. officials fear," *New York Times*, March 6, 2025; Jerving, "Ousted USAID health lead says US fumbled Uganda's Ebola response," March 26, 2025;

<sup>106</sup> "Musk says DOGE 'restored' Ebola prevention effort. Officials say that's not true." *Washington Post*, February 27, 2025.

<sup>107</sup> HFAC Democrats, Statement of Nicholas Z. Enrich, "Shadow Hearing – Thrown into Chaos: The Dismantling of USAID and its Real-Life Consequences," March 25, 2025.

officials have reported that, as a result, implementers lacked funding to screen for Ebola at Uganda's main international airport—near Kampala—or move personal protective equipment from Kenya to Uganda to protect health workers. The U.S. Embassy appeared to counter these reports in mid-April 2025, asserting that the United States had provided technical support to Uganda “since the first day of the outbreak” and had provided “robust” contributions for the response totaling over \$ 6 million, including the donation of antibody treatments to help manage any new cases.<sup>108</sup> Trump Administration directives have reportedly restricted coordination between the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which has an office in Uganda, and the WHO, although according to the CDC, its staff have been cleared to speak “one-on-one” with WHO counterparts related to Ebola in Uganda.<sup>109</sup>

**Refugees.** The U.S. aid suspension has affected humanitarian programs in Uganda, including assistance for Africa's largest refugee population, according to UN agencies.<sup>110</sup> Refugee programs in the region were already facing funding shortfalls due to rising global displacement and competing demands for donor funds, and Uganda faces the prospect of a surge of new refugees in 2025 as security conditions deteriorate in DRC and South Sudan.<sup>111</sup> UNHCR has reported that as of late February 2025 donors had contributed roughly 11% of the \$361 million needed for the year to support refugees in Uganda. The United States has routinely provided over half of all refugee aid in the country.

**Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance.** Trump Administration cuts to U.S. assistance programs supporting civil society, human rights, and democracy have implications for Uganda, in the context of shrinking civic space, corruption, and the forthcoming 2026 elections. Ugandan civil society groups slated to conduct voter education and programs to mitigate electoral violence report that their activities have been affected by the disruption of U.S. funding, as well as by European aid cuts.<sup>112</sup> Groups in Uganda supporting shelters to protect LGBT persons from homelessness and violence have also reportedly lost funding.<sup>113</sup> As of late March 2025, programs to combat torture, support transitional justice, and monitor and counter disinformation in Uganda have reportedly been terminated. One of the largest anti-corruption programs in the country was also among the USAID agreements reportedly terminated, according to court filings.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>108</sup> U.S. Embassy in Uganda, “United States continues to boost Uganda's Ebola response with advanced treatments to save lives and prevent spread,” April 14, 2025.

<sup>109</sup> White House, Withdrawing the United States from the World Health Organization, January 20, 2025; “CDC memo orders public health officials to stop working with WHO immediately, AP, January 27, 2025; “As Trump shuts down USAID missions, officials warn Ebola outbreak in Uganda will spread,” CBS News, February 5, 2025.

<sup>110</sup> “Without USAID support, refugees in Uganda lose food, job training,” *Global Press Journal*, February 7, 2025; UNHCR, Uganda: Funding Update 2025, March 6, 2025; “U.S. aid freeze ‘decimates’ life-saving work globally, survey finds,” Reuters, February 19, 2025; World Food Program, “World Relief strongly urges Trump Administration to reverse terminations of refugee resettlement and humanitarian aid,” February 27, 2025.

<sup>111</sup> “Uganda struggles to feed more than 1.7 million refugees as international support dwindles,” AP, October 31, 2024;

<sup>112</sup> “Voter civic education in limbo as NGOs exit over USAID funding suspension,” *Monitor*, March 12, 2025.

<sup>113</sup> Abdi Latif Dahir, “Where being gay is punishable by death, aid cuts are ‘heartbreaking’,” *New York Times*, March 4, 2025.

<sup>114</sup> AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES v. TRUMP, 1:25-cv-00352, (D.D.C. Mar 17, 2025) ECF No. 66.



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