

Country Brief

Uganda

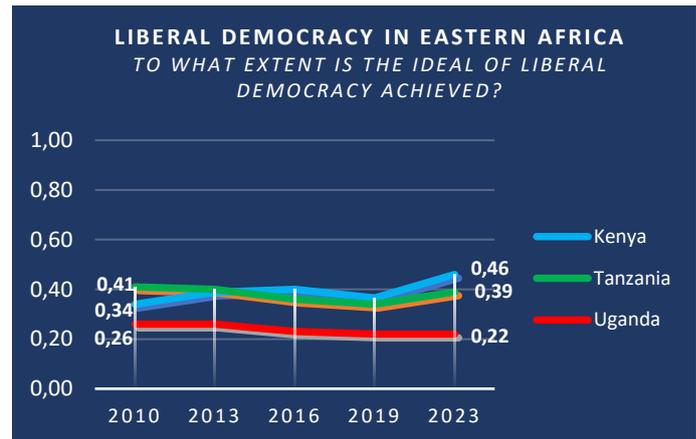
Electoral autocracy



COUNTRY INDICATORS

Population: 47.124 million (WB)
Urban population: 26% (WB)
Urban population growth (annual): 5.3% (WB)
Access to water: 56% (WHO-UNICEF)
Access to electricity: 42.1% (WB)
Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000 births): 43 (WB)
GDP (current US\$): 40.435 billion (WB)
GDP per capita, PPP (current Int\$): 2,398 (WB)
Global Freedom Status: Not Free, Score 34 (FH)
Human Development Index: Low (0.525), Rank 166/191 (UNDP)
Local Government Association: [Uganda Local Governments' Association \(ULGA\)](#); Urban Authorities Association of Uganda (UAAU)

Figure 1



Source: V-Dem Institute (2024)

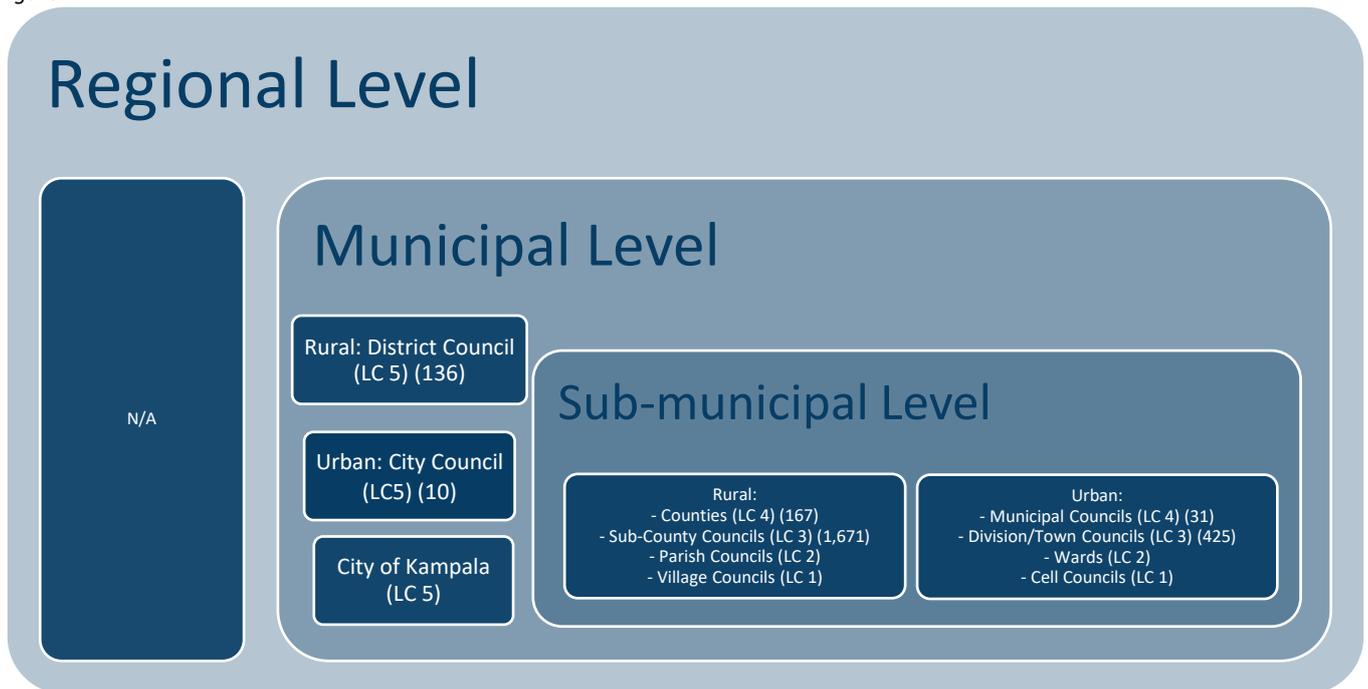
Clarification: The liberal principle of democracy emphasizes the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against the tyranny of the state and the tyranny of the majority. The liberal model takes a 'negative' view of political power insofar as it judges the quality of democracy by the limits placed on government. This is achieved by constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances that, together, limit the exercise of executive power. To make this a measure of liberal democracy, the index also takes the level of electoral democracy into account.

Decentralisation

Uganda is a unitary state. Uganda embarked on an ambitious decentralisation programme in the early 1990s after emerging from a series of dictatorial regimes and civil wars. In order to achieve greater empowerment and a more responsive public sector, Uganda's 1995 Constitution provided for an extensive system of local government. As a result, the Ugandan Constitution is one of few African constitutions that make detailed provisions for the role and responsibilities of local governments (UCLG, 2020, p.39). However, despite a constitutional framework defining a strong, devolved local government system, there is a considerable gap between the *de jure* status of local governments in Uganda and the *de facto* degree to which local councils are able to control local affairs (SNG-WOFI Uganda, 2019).

Uganda's local government structure is fragmented vertically with five levels of Local Councils (LCs) below the national level (see Figure 2). At the top of the structure, are the District Councils (and the City of Kampala), which are then divided depending based on whether it is a rural or urban setting. In urban settings, there are City, Municipal, Division/Town, Ward and Cell Councils. In rural areas, there are District, Counties (which are administrative units without a council), Sub-County, Parish and Village Councils.

Figure 2



Source: SNG-WOFI Uganda (2019) & MOLG (2019)

District Councils & City Councils¹

The District Council is the planning authority in rural settings and is made up of an executive committee composed of chairperson, vice-chairperson, and secretaries nominated from amongst the councillors. The City Council is the urban equivalent of the district, with an executive committee composed of a mayor, deputy mayor, and secretaries. The City of Kampala has a special status, managed under Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), with an elected council headed by a Lord mayor (SNG-WOFI Uganda, 2022).

Both the District chairperson and the City mayor (council executives) are directly elected for a five-year term. (CLGF, 2019). The executive committees are responsible for monitoring and implementation of council programmes. Since the early days of the NRM government there has been a trend for creating new Districts by splitting the existing ones into ever smaller units. Uganda has moved from 33 original districts in 1986 to 45 in 1997 to 80 in 2006 and eventually to 135 as of 2021 (SNG-WOFI Uganda, 2022).

County/Sub-County Councils & Municipal/Division Councils

The Sub-County (rural) and Division or Town Councils (urban) are legislative bodies with very similar structures and functions as the District and City Councils. They are elected bodies that are responsible for service delivery and local economic development within their areas (CLGF, 2019). The Sub-County/Division Councils consists of elected councillors, representing the Parish/Wards, as well as government officials involved in health, development, and education.

Above them, the County (rural) and Municipality (urban) are administrative units that help coordinate and monitor implementation. These Councils are made up by the executive committee members of the Sub-County/Division, which then elect an executive committee from among themselves. County committees have

¹ The Government of Uganda aims to create 15 Cities to forward the urbanisation agenda laid out in The Uganda Vision 2040 and the third National Development Plan. As of July 2020, 10 cities became operational: Arua, Mbarara, Gulu, Jinja, Fort Portal, Mbale, Masaka, Lira, Soroti, and Hoima. An additional 5 cities are to become operational by July 2026 (SNG-WOFI Uganda, 2022).

more limited powers than Municipal committees. Each County is also represented in national parliament by an elected MP.

Parish/Village Councils & Ward/Cell Councils

The Village Council (rural) and Cell Council (urban) are the units that are closest to the communities, and all citizens over the age of 18 are members. A Village usually consists of 50-70 households that is home to 250-1000 people. They are run by a local council and governed by a chairperson and an executive committee. Above them, the Parish and Ward Councils, composed of committees with chairperson/vice-chairperson and secretaries, are mainly responsible for monitoring service delivery within their territories (CLGF, 2019).

Local Autonomy

Mandates

The Local Government Act of 1997 specifies the roles and responsibilities of local governments, separately for rural and urban local councils. Local Governments are required to provide a broad range of services ranging from education to water provision and urban services. Furthermore, numerous functions and services have to be devolved onward by district councils to lower local government councils (i.e. the Sub-County level in rural areas). In practice, the district level performs the bulk of service delivery responsibility over local services. This is partly due to the depth of fiscal decentralization where lower local government functions are very inadequately funded (SNG-WOFI Uganda, 2022). However, central ministries often continue to be extensively involved in different aspects of local service delivery.

Table 1

Main Sectors	Local Government Responsibilities
1.General public services	Civil status registry; Statistical office; Public buildings and facilities
2.Public order and safety	Fire protection; Civil protection; Criminal justice
3.Economic affairs/transport	Agriculture, forests and fisheries; Local economic development and promotion; Tourism; District and community access roads; Public transport and public vehicle parking
4.Environmental protection	Sanitation; Refuse collection and disposal; Cemeteries and crematoria; Slaughterhouses; Environmental protection; Consumer protection; Public parks, gardens and recreation grounds
5.Housing and community amenities	Town planning; Regional planning; Public lighting; Water supply (joint)
6.Health	Primary care (discretionary); Hospitals (discretionary); Health protection (discretionary)
7.Recreation, culture & religion	Theatres and concerts; Museums and libraries; Parks and open spaces; Sports and leisure facilities
8.Education	Pre-school (kindergarten and nursery); Primary and secondary education; Vocational and technical
9.Social protection	Family welfare services; Welfare homes; Social security

Source: SNG-WOFI Uganda (2022)

Local Government Finances

The primary sources of revenue are transfers from national government; however local governments are mandated to raise revenue locally, including property taxes, licences and user fees (CLGF, 2019). A majority of the local revenue (particularly in districts) is generated from fees and fines, taking on average nearly half of the total local revenues. The different tiers of local government share collected revenue between themselves

according to prescribed formulas: In rural areas, Districts claim 35% of local revenue and Sub-County Councils claim 65%; In urban areas, Cities and Municipal Councils claim 50% while their Divisions receive 50% (SNG-WOFI Uganda, 2022).

The share of public sector resources being transferred to local councils has stagnated at around 15%, and reduced to 13,7% in the 2021/2022 fiscal year. It is noteworthy that around 96% of local government revenue come from grants and substitutes from central government. Out of the central government transfers, 10% were unconditional and discretionary grants. The limited fiscal space has a negative impact on local government autonomy (SNG-WOFI Uganda, 2022). Governments formulate their own budgets.

Local Democracy

State of Elections

The last election for district/city, municipality/division, and sub-country/town councils was held in 2021. Local government elections are held every five years, and the next election is set for 2026.

Uganda is an authoritarian country where the ruling party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), and President Yoweri Museveni has been in power since 1986. There have been calls for term limits, but in 2017 the Constitution was amended to remove the president's age limit. In January 2021, Museveni secured another 5-year term with 58,6% of the vote against opposition candidate Bobi Wine at 34,8% (EC, 2021). The election was neither free nor fair. V-Dem's Clean Elections Index (see Appendix 2) and Liberal Democracy Index (see Figure 1) ranks Uganda very low with few signs of democratic development for the past decade. In the local elections for District Mayors, NRM won 93 out of 146 seats (64%) (EC, 2021).

Since 2005, the tendency in Uganda seems to be one of re-centralisation of powers and authority, as central government has become more assertive over local affairs, while the administrative powers and financial resources of local governments have been gradually eroded (SNG-WOFI Uganda, 2022). Local councils have, for example, lost the right to appoint their own chief administrative officers. The ability for local governments to plan and manage their own affairs is limited. The Ugandan Electoral Commission asserts that "there remains several challenges in achieving desired high participation", as there is fatigue to vote in the Local Government Council Elections (EC, 2021, p.13).

Electoral Outcomes

Table 3

Electoral Outcomes	2006	2011	2016	2021	2026
Registered voters	10,78 million	13,95 million	15,28 million	18,10 million	
Voter turnout	69,2% (Presidential election)	59,3% (Presidential election)	67,6% (Presidential election)	59,4% (Presidential election)	
Female Councillors	N/A	N/A	48,3% (12626 of 26115)	N/A	
Female Mayors	N/A	N/A	1% (16 of 1530)	N/A	

Source: MLG Factsheet 2017 (CLGF, 2018); Electoral Commission (EC, 2021).

Women's representation

With 45,7% of elected seats held by women in 2016, Uganda was ranked 8th globally in a recent assessment on women's political representation in local government (UN Women, 2021). It is, however, notable that while a significant proportion of councillors are women, the proportion of female mayors elected is only 1%. The Ministry of Local Government also reports that as of July 2018, women comprise 12% of all Chief Administrative Officers (CAO), 3% of all Town Clerks, and 20% of all Deputy CAOs (MOLG, 2019). The Local Government Act, Article 180 (2)(b), provides for a minimum of 30% of council seats to be reserved for women (EC, 2021, p.28).

Table 4 – Elected persons (IEBC, 2022, p.76)

Elective Position (<i>Seats</i>)	2011		2016		2021	
	Men	Women (%)	Men	Women (%)	Men	Women (%)
President Elections (1)	1	0	1	0	1	0
Parliamentary Elections: Directly Elected (353 in 2021) ²	230	8 (3,4%)	274	16 (5,5%)	335	18 (5%)
Parliamentary Elections: District/City Women Representatives (146)					N/A	146
Parliamentary Elections: Older Persons/ PWDs/ UPDF/ Workers/ Youth Representatives (30)					17	13 (43%)
Parliament Total (529)					352	177 (33%)

Source: EC, 2021, p.71

Table 5 – (EC, 2021, p.10)

Number of Elective Positions for General Elections	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
Total	711,611	768,445	948,834	1,299,348	1,658,260

² EC, 2021, p.12: 1996: 7 women; 2001: 8 women; 2006: 11 women; 2011: 8 women; 2016: 16 women; 2021: 18 women.

Parliament Representation Total	295	319	375	427	529
Members of Parliament Representing Constituencies	214	215	238	290	353
District/City Women Representatives in Parliament	56	79	112	112	146
Local Government Level Total	12,950	17,592	24,122	28,520	45,435
Districts/City				3,156	5,039
Municipalities/City Divisions				1,224	2,331
Sub-County/ Towns / Municipal Divisions				24,140	38,065

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About ICLD

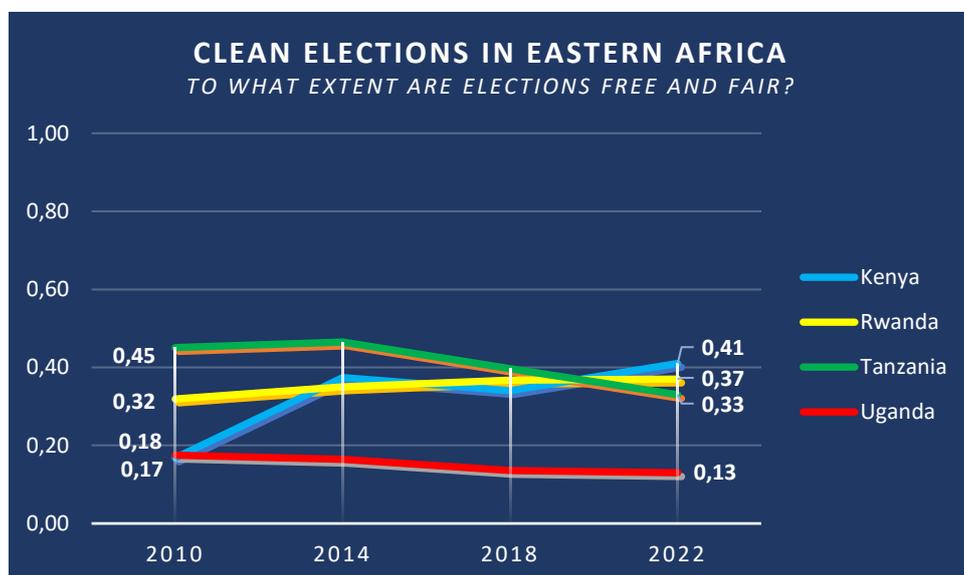
The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is part of the Swedish development cooperation. The mandate of the organisation is to contribute to poverty alleviation by strengthening local governments. This Country Brief is part of a publication series that investigates the state of decentralisation and local democracy in countries where ICLD programmes operate.

This Country Brief covers events up to October 2023.

Appendix 1: Clean Elections Index

Research Question: To what extent are elections free and fair? (Low to High; 0-1)

Clarification: Free and fair connotes and absence of registration fraud, systematic irregularities, government intimidation of the opposition, vote buying, and election violence



Source: V-Dem Institute (2022)

Appendix 2: Corruption Perceptions Index

Clarification: CPI measures how corrupt each country's public sector is perceived to be, according to experts and businesspeople.

