



המכון ליחסי אפריקה ישראל
Israel Africa Relations Institute

Uganda: A Look to the Future

By Dr. Irit Back

Head of African Studies, Tel Aviv University

© The Israel Africa Relations Institute

May 2024

Tel. +972-9-9554990 | info@israel-africa.org.il | www.israel-africa.org.il
linkedin.com/Israel-Africa Relations Institute | twitter.com/IsraelAfricaOrg

Executive Summary:

Uganda stands at a pivotal juncture after almost four decades under President Yoweri Museveni's leadership. During his tenure, the country experienced economic growth and liberalization, sustained by the discovery of oil near Lake Albert and abundant natural resources, rendering it increasingly appealing to foreign investment.

However, despite these promising prospects, potential investors in Uganda confront significant political and reputational hazards. Museveni's authoritarian governance and crackdown on opposition voices, coupled with contentious legislation targeting the LGBTQ community and uncertainties surrounding political succession, cast doubts on the country's stability for investors.

This paper provides an in-depth examination of Uganda's current political and economic landscape, offering potential investors a thorough understanding of both the promising investment opportunities and the attendant political risks. Additionally, it assesses sectors historically engaged by Israeli firms and identifies potential areas of collaboration and development to foster stronger bilateral ties between Uganda and Israel.

Uganda – Key Indicators:

Population: 47,249,585

Government Type: Presidential Republic

Size: 241.6 thousand sq. KM

Total GDP: \$34.8 billion Per Year

GDP Per Capita: \$735 Per Year, \$2,038 (PPP)

Annual GDP Growth: 4.2%¹



¹ The World Bank, available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/uganda>.

Historical Background:

Uganda, a landlocked country with a population of approximately forty-seven million people, is situated on the northern shore of Lake Victoria, Africa's largest lake and the source of the White Nile River. Originally comprising the Kingdom of Buganda, in 1893, the British East Africa Company relinquished its administrative authority to the British crown, establishing the British Protectorate of Uganda. During the colonial era, British governance in Uganda relied primarily on an oligarchy of tribal chiefs appointed by British colonial officials. Many of these chiefs received their education in British missionary schools and embraced Christianity, predominantly Protestantism. It was through this system of indirect rule that the British maintained political and economic dominance. Moreover, the colonial period laid the groundwork for Uganda's current economic trajectory.²

Historically, most of the inhabitants of present-day Uganda engaged in small-scale subsistence agriculture. During the colonial period, the British encouraged the introduction of cotton production, followed by coffee cultivation. Additionally, in the 1950s, the British introduced agricultural cooperatives to assist Ugandan farmers in transitioning from subsistence agriculture to export-oriented cash crops.

In 1962, Uganda gained its independence from Britain and chose to remain within the British Commonwealth. Led by Prime Minister Milton Obote, leader of the Ugandan People's Congress (UPC), Uganda's first years of independence were dominated by the political conflict between the central government led by Obote and the largest regional kingdom, Buganda. Buganda's leader, Kabaka (King) Mutesa II, held the position of President. By 1966, tensions escalated, and Prime Minister Obote, in conjunction with the Army, forced Mutesa II into exile in the United Kingdom. Obote consolidated power behind the military and in 1967 declared himself president, transforming Uganda into a Republic and dissolving all tribal kingdoms.

² R. L. Metts, (1992). The Political Economy of Uganda, 1890-1979: A Case Study of Colonialism and Underdevelopment. *Journal of Developing Areas*, 26(2), 288-290.

With the growing influence of the Army, Obote faced a military coup in 1971 led by General Idi Amin. Amin's rise to power was initially supported by Western nations, including the United States, United Kingdom, and Israel. They viewed Amin as a potential pro-Western strongman who could shift Uganda away from its ostensibly non-aligned stance under Obote. However, Amin abruptly changed his foreign policy in 1972. Instead of aligning with the West, he embraced the Soviet Union and radical Arab states, including Libya. Amin openly supported the Palestinian nationalist movement, even aiding Palestinian hijackers. This controversial shift in alliances ultimately led to the famous Entebbe rescue operation by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in July of 1976.

Amin's rule also had a significant impact on Uganda's economic trajectory following his expulsion of the Ugandan Asian community, which dominated the mercantile and professional classes.³ The nearly 80,000 expellees had their property and businesses confiscated, resulting in significant economic contraction. Between 1972 and 1975, Uganda experienced a 5% decline in GDP. The Asian community owned 90% of Uganda's businesses and was responsible for 90% of the total tax revenue base.⁴

Amin ruled Uganda with an iron fist, leading to significant repression and the deaths of over 300,000 civilians. His regime was marked by brutality and human rights abuses. Amin was finally ousted from power following the invasion of Tanzanian forces in conjunction with Ugandan exiles in 1979. After Amin's flight to exile in Saudi Arabia, Uganda faced political instability for the next six years. Milton Obote regained the Presidency in 1980, following an election tainted with claims of

³ For the history of Indian community in Uganda, see: A. Michel, (2015). *Indian Africa: Minorities of Indian-Pakistani Origin in Eastern Africa* (M. Adam, Ed.). Nairobi: Africae.

⁴ "50 Years on From the Arrival of the Ugandan Asians," 18 August 2022, *The Economist*, <https://www.economist.com/britain/2022/08/18/50-years-on-from-the-arrival-of-the-ugandan-asians>

fraud and irregularities. The contested election results led to a protracted civil conflict known as the Bush War.⁵

In 1985, a military coup led by General Tito Okello ousted Obote, but his rule was short-lived. Rebel leader Yoweri Museveni's insurgency, known as the National Resistance Movement (NRM), captured Kampala, the capital. Museveni swiftly began to consolidate power, securing international development funds from institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank to reconstruct Uganda's economy. However, his administration also restricted the activity of political parties through the "movement system". Despite these efforts, Museveni faced considerable opposition from different armed factions, primarily in the north of the country, including the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

Uganda's Politics Today: The Persecution of the LGBTQ Community

Uganda remains a presidential republic, with President Museveni still in power since 1986. Although elections have taken place since 1996, international observers have not declared them to be free and fair. Additionally, Museveni, now 75 years old, has made several amendments to the Ugandan constitution.

In 2005, Museveni allowed a constitutional referendum that approved the inclusion of political parties. However, in parallel, he loosened term limitations, enabling himself to continue his rule. The second significant change occurred in 2018, when he abolished the presidential age limit of 75, allowing him to run for an unprecedented sixth term in 2021.⁶

While initially coming to power as a revolutionary seeking to build a stable Uganda and uphold democratic norms, Museveni's anti-democratic behavior has created tensions with the West due to internal repression and alleged fraud and

⁵ B. Baker. (2004). Popular Justice and Policing from Bush War to Democracy: Uganda 1981–2004. *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 32(4), 333–348. 1

⁶ "Scrapping Presidential Age Limits Sets Uganda on a Course of Instability," 27 August 2018, *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/scrapping-presidential-age-limits-sets-uganda-on-course-of-instability/>.

irregularities. Following the 2016 national elections, the opposition led by Kizza Besigye, an army officer and Museveni's former personal physician, claimed large-scale intimidation during the vote and protested the official results. Besigye was placed under house arrest, which was later withdrawn after international pressure.⁷

The 2021 elections were the most competitive since Museveni's rise to power. The opposition unified behind reggae singer Robert Kyagulanyi, better known by his stage name Bobi Wine, who achieved significant fame for singing against corruption and joblessness through his party, the National Unity Platform (NUP).

The election results declared Museveni as the victor with over 58% of the votes. However, Wine and the opposition refused to accept the results, citing large-scale irregularities and accusations of voter fraud. Following the vote, Wine was put under house arrest, and government forces eventually withdrew after 11 days of significant criticism.⁸

The lead-up to the election was marked by severe restrictions imposed by the government, including the shutdown of social media. Additionally, violence erupted when Wine's arrest during campaigning sparked protests, resulting in the deaths of at least 28 people and nearly 600 arrests.⁹ While Wine initially sought to challenge the election result in court, he later decided to bring the case "back to the court of

⁷ Josh Kron, "Uganda Opposition Candidate Kizza Besigye Taken From Home," 22 February 2016, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/23/world/africa/uganda-opposition-leader-taken-from-home-kizza-besigye.html>; Lewis Sanders, "Police to Withdraw from Opposition Residence" 1 April 2016, *Deutsche Welle*, <https://www.dw.com/en/uganda-police-chief-orders-withdrawal-from-opposition-leader-kizza-besigyees-residence/a-19159678>.

⁸ Eoin McSweeney, "Uganda Security Forces Withdraw from Bobi Wine's Home Ending 11 Days of House Arrest," 26 January 2021, *CNN*, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/01/26/africa/bobi-wine-free-house-arrest-intl/index.html>.

⁹ Abdi Latif Dahir, "Uganda Releases Opposition Leader After Clashes Kill at Least 28," 20 November 2020, *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/20/world/africa/Uganda-Bobi-Wine-protests.html>; "Uganda Elections 2021: Social Media Blocked Ahead of Poll," 12 January 2021, *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55640405>.

the people”.¹⁰ In response, Museveni accused the opposition of being aided by “foreign agents” and “homosexuals”, insinuating an attempt to start an insurrection.

The brutal crackdown before and after the elections has forced the opposition underground and led to evidence of torture and crimes against humanity. A lawsuit has been submitted to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague.¹¹

The Ugandan opposition’s profile has risen internationally due to the documented abuse at the hands of Museveni’s government, as well as the release of the Oscar-nominated documentary titled “Bobi Wine: The People’s President”.¹²

The Ugandan Government’s response in the aftermath of the 2021 election has brought about a more authoritarian turn and greater international isolation. This situation has raised questions about succession before the 2026 presidential election. Following the contested election, Museveni took the controversial step of closing the UN human rights office. The UN’s committee against torture had previously raised concerns about excessive use of force, arbitrary detention, and violence. They called for an investigation of senior officials.¹³

Parallel to the political crackdown, Museveni has also acted against the LGBTQ community, bringing with it significant international condemnation that could have an impact on Uganda’s economy. Museveni had introduced legislation targeting the LGBTQ community in the past, first with a 2009 law that broadened a British colonial-era law criminalizing homosexuality to include the death penalty.¹⁴

¹⁰ Rodney Muhumuza, “Uganda’s Wine Withdraws Court Challenge to Election Results,” 22 February 2021, *The Associated Press*, <https://apnews.com/general-news-88085eefd624de960d32fc7f36f2472d>.

Abdi Latif Dahir, “Ugandan President and His Son Are Accused of Crimes Against Humanity,” 11 July 2023, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/11/world/africa/uganda-president-crimes-against-humanity.html>.

¹² Susan Orlean, “From House Arrest to the Oscars Circuit,” 21 February 2024, *The New Yorker*, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-los-angeles/from-house-arrest-to-the-oscars-circuit>.

¹³ Samuel Okiror, “Uganda Condemned for ‘Shameful’ Decision to Close UN Human Rights Office,” 8 February 2023, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/08/uganda-condemned-decision-close-un-human-rights-office-museveni>.

¹⁴ Kizito, K. (2017). Bequeathed Legacies: Colonialism and State led Homophobia in Uganda. *Surveillance & Society*, 15(3/4), 567–572.

International outrage postponed the passage of the bill in the Ugandan Parliament until December 2013, and forced its amendment, removing the death sentence and instead, lowering the penalty to life in prison. The law was eventually challenged in the court system and overturned, with President Museveni deciding not to challenge the ruling following the negative international publicity.¹⁵

Following the election, Museveni re-introduced an updated version of what became known as the 'Anti-Gay' Law, which passed the Ugandan Parliament in March 2023. The law, one of the world's harshest and most draconian, goes beyond previous pieces of legislation, instituting the death penalty for anyone convicted of what has been defined as 'aggravated homosexuality'. The New York Times described this term as 'homosexual acts committed by anyone infected with H.I.V. or involving children, disabled people, or anyone drugged against their will'.¹⁶ This, in addition to life imprisonment for anyone who engages in gay sex, and a decade in prison for anyone who attempts to engage in same-sex relations, is liable. The law has been met with significant criticism from both the United States and the European Union, and the UN human rights chief, Volker Türk, called the law 'probably among the worst of its kind in the world'.¹⁷ The Ugandan leadership has framed their law as a defense of sovereign rights and African traditionalism against the pressure of Western imperialists. Yet the legislation poses significant risks to Uganda's standing in the world and potential investment from its American and European partners. In August 2023, The World Bank notified the Ugandan government that it would withhold funding following the anti-gay law, arguing that the law did not meet the bank's environmental and social standards. The United States also reacted

¹⁵ Nicholas Bariyo, "Uganda's Attorney General Won't Appeal Ruling on Antigay Law," 13 August 2014, *The Wall Street Journal*, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ugandas-attorney-general-wont-appeal-anti-gay-law-ruling-1407946971>.

¹⁶ Abdi Latif Dahir, "Uganda Passes Strict Anti-Gay Bill That Imposes Death Penalty for Some," 22 March 2023, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/22/world/africa/uganda-lgtbq-anti-gay-law.html>.

¹⁷ "Uganda: Türk Urges President Not to Sign Shocking Anti-homosexuality bill," 22 March 2023, *The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/03/uganda-turk-urges-president-not-sign-shocking-anti-homosexuality-bill>.

harshly to the measure, imposing visa restrictions on Ugandan officials, while also removing Uganda from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) program at the beginning of this year. AGOA provides eligible sub-Saharan African countries with duty-free access to the US for more than 1,800 products¹⁸. These measures pose a significant political and reputational risk for those who seek to do business in Uganda, as Museveni has taken a more authoritarian line.

Political Succession Possibilities

Following the 2021 elections, a power struggle has emerged within the Ugandan regime between President Museveni and his son, General Muhoozi Kainerugaba. The 49-year-old Kainerugaba, Museveni's eldest son, has grown impatient with the lack of generational change within the leadership ranks. Museveni has promoted his son within the army, forgiving his temper tantrums and Twitter rants. One of these rants saw him joking about invading Kenya, which led to his dismissal by his father as the commander of Uganda's land forces. Kainerugaba has also taken to criticizing his father, labeling those who supported Museveni's re-election bid as 'gangsters, criminals, and disasters'. Additionally, he has created his own "MK Movement", building an independent bloc of public support.¹⁹ Kainerugaba's outbursts may signal that younger officials within the regime are growing restless due to the retention of power and influence by the older generation of leadership. This situation could potentially open a fissure within the government. As a result, the growing power and influence of Kainerugaba, along with the active political opposition, including Bobi Wine, raises significant questions about Uganda's political future as it approaches the 2026 elections, during which President Museveni will be 81 years old. In March of 2024, Kainerugaba was appointed, following a cabinet

¹⁸ Gloria Aradi, "US to Remove Uganda and Three Other African Countries from Agoa Trade Deal," 31 October 2023, *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-67236251>.

¹⁹ "A Dictator and his Entitled Son are Holding Uganda Captive," 23 May 2023, *The Economist*, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2023/03/23/a-dictator-and-his-entitled-son-are-holding-uganda-captive>.

reshuffle, as the Ugandan military's chief of staff, capping his meteoric rise as his father's heir apparent, and signaling a potential leadership transition. In addition to Kainerugaba's appointment, two of his closest advisors were appointed cabinet ministers in the reshuffle, pointing to significant changes within the regime's upper-level leadership as they transition to a younger cadre of leaders with a view to the 2026 elections²⁰.

Uganda's Economy

Uganda possesses significant economic potential, but it has faced challenges due to political upheaval and corruption. After gaining independence, Uganda was one of East Africa's most developed nations. However, the expulsion of the Asian community and political instability during and after Idi Amin's regime severely hindered its ability to build a competitive economy. Despite these obstacles, Uganda has made considerable progress under President Museveni in liberalizing the economy and fostering a nascent private sector.²¹

With approximately three-quarters of its population residing in rural areas, agriculture and agricultural products remain Uganda's primary sources of foreign income. Notably, coffee production has been the most profitable foreign currency earner for the country. Uganda is Africa's second-largest coffee producer, trailing only Ethiopia, and coffee exports account for about a fifth of Uganda's total exports. The surge in coffee prices during the early to mid-1990s created opportunities for significant capital inflows, leading to structural reforms and increased investment in the Ugandan economy. President Museveni actively encouraged Ugandan Asians to return after their expulsion, and they have once again become a vital entrepreneurial class in the country.

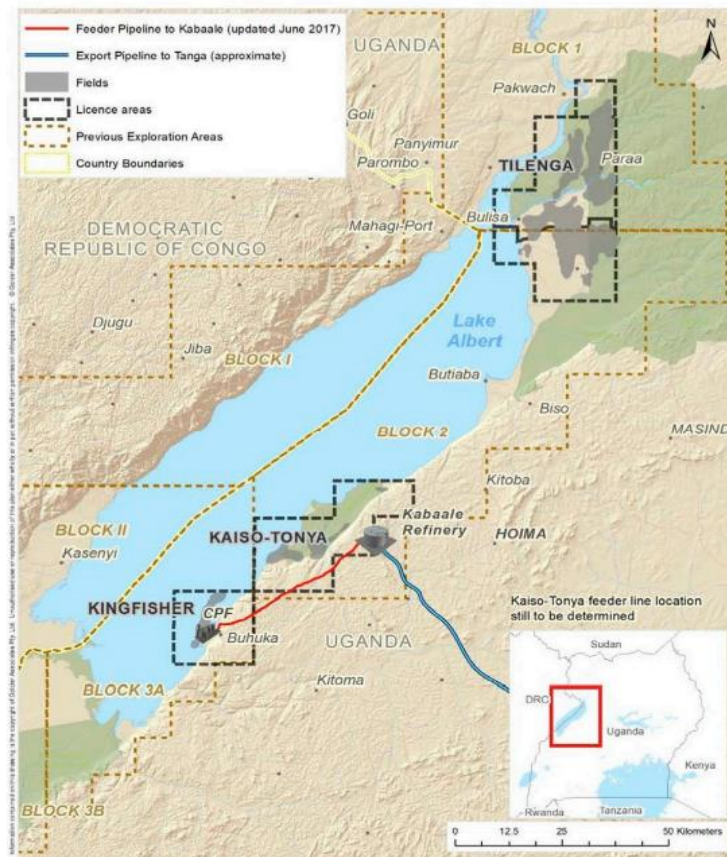
²⁰ Danai Nesta Kupemba, "Muhoozi Kainerugaba: Ugandan President Promotes His Son to Military Chief," 22 March 2024, BBC News, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68635411>; "Uganda's President Museveni promotes son to army chief," 22 March 2024, Al-Jazeera, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/22/ugandas-president-museveni-promotes-son-to-army-chief>

²¹ Alan Whitworth and Tim Williamson (2010), "Overview of Ugandan Economic Reform Since 1986," in *Uganda's Economic Reforms: Insider Accounts*, ed. Florence Kuteesa, Emmanuel Tumusiime-Mutebile, Alan Whitworth, and Tim Williamson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1-31.

Throughout his tenure, Museveni has sought to encourage foreign investment in Uganda and help develop its private sector. Aided by a competent central banker, the Oxford-educated Emmanuel Tumusiime-Mutebile, Uganda in the 1990s succeeded in significantly growing its economy, using the proceeds of its coffee boom. Uganda's economy has been one of the world's fastest growing, with the World Bank estimating its GDP growth at 5.3% during FY23, compared to 4.7% the year before. This occurred on the back of monetary tightening by the Bank of Uganda, which has lowered inflation from its October 2022 peak at 10.7%, falling below its 5% target in June 2023. Uganda's economic growth is expected to accelerate as the central bank eases monetary policy, together with an expected rebound in tourism and export-oriented agricultural products.

The most significant economic development is Uganda's transition into an oil producer, which is expected in 2025. The discovery of significant oil reserves abutting Lake Albert in the country's northwest is being developed by the French supermajor Total Energies and the Chinese oil conglomerate China National Offshore Oil Cooperation (CNOOC), and it is expected to power economic growth in the coming decade.²²

²² Elias Biryabarema, "TotalEnergies, CNOOC Make Final Decision on \$10 bln Uganda, Tanzania Oil Project" *Reuters*, 1 February 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/businessenergy/uganda-agree-deal-with-total-cnooc-major-oil-project-2022-02-01/>.



Map of Uganda showing the location of the projects. Source: Ogwang & Vanclay ²³

While there is potential for continued and sustained economic growth, significant structural and institutional problems remain. Over the last decade and a half, Uganda has witnessed a substantial expansion in its economy. However, when considering real GDP per capita growth—the most accurate measure for comprehensive economic growth—it has only increased at an average rate of around 1.0% per year since 2011. This modest growth is a consequence of Uganda’s booming birth rate, which has led to a population increase of approximately 3% per annum.²⁴

²³ Ogwang T, Vanclay F. Social Impacts of Land Acquisition for Oil and Gas Development in Uganda. *Land*. 2019; 8(7):109. <https://doi.org/10.3390/land8070109>.

²⁴ For the full data set see: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.GROW?locations=UG>.

Additionally, environmental factors, including drought, have become a cause for concern, particularly with more acute repercussions related to climate change impacting Uganda's economy. The development of Uganda's oil reserves, while potentially adding significant revenue to the state's coffers, also carries significant environmental risk. These oil reserves are located near Murchison Falls National Park, one of the world's most famous game reserves and home to large populations of elephants, giraffes, lions, and leopards. The proximity of oil extraction to this delicate ecosystem could pose significant damage to local habitats. Furthermore, there is the challenge of transporting the oil to market.²⁵ Being a landlocked country, Uganda faces a difficult proposition in getting its oil to market. Currently, a pipeline is under construction, with the aim of transporting the oil from Uganda, across Tanzania, to the port of Tanga on the Indian Ocean. From there, it will finally be exported to global markets. According to the Financial Times, Uganda's oil reserves are expected to contribute a boost in revenue of over 1.2 billion dollars to its GDP, serving as a significant source of income for this low-income country.²⁶ In addition, Uganda has engaged in discussions with the UAE regarding Emirati investment in a planned 4-billion-dollar refinery to process some of its crude oil. This move comes after negotiations with an American consortium fell through. Kampala aims to boost domestic employment and support local development through these initiatives.²⁷

Uganda has also made significant efforts to develop its mining sector, another area with high growth potential. According to the Ugandan Ministry of Energy and Resources, the country holds significant reserves of gold, cobalt, copper, iron ore, rare earth metals, vermiculite, and phosphates. To extract these significant reserves, the government is setting up a national mining company that will aim to take equity stakes of up to 15% in all medium and large-scale mining operations within the

²⁵ Leslie Hook, "The Oil Giants Drilling Among the Giraffes in Uganda" 12 April 2022, *The Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/e1670042-11bd-4c68-9bde-a599d94bd8c0>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Biryabarema Elias, "Uganda in Talks with UAE Investment Firm Over Planned Oil Refinery," 23 January 2024, *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/uganda-talks-with-uae-investment-firm-over-planned-oil-refinery-2024-01-23/>.

country. Under the terms of the new law, mining licenses will be awarded based on a competitive tender price, rather than the Ministry's previous 'first come, first serve' criteria.

Security Threats and Potential Risks in Uganda

Today, Uganda still faces significant political and security risks that should be carefully considered by any potential investor. Historically, the country has grappled with guerrilla insurgencies, with the most notorious being Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which primarily operated in the northern regions. Although the scale of these insurgencies has diminished compared to previous decades, credit goes to the Ugandan military's efforts in pacifying the threat and international cooperation and aid, including support from the United States.

Presently, there exists a significant insurgency led by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an affiliate of the Islamic State. The ADF operates in the border region between western Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This group has been responsible for recent attacks, including a suicide bombing in Kampala near the police headquarters and the parliament building in November 2021. Additionally, in June 2023, an attack occurred at a school in the western border town of Kasese, resulting in the tragic loss of 41 lives, mostly students.

Anticipating the future, Uganda’s political terrain gives rise to apprehensions. While President Museveni has provided considerable stability, enabling Uganda’s economy to grow significantly, his recent legislative program targeting the LGBTQ community has sparked questions and created headaches for the government, especially in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic. Reports indicate that the anti-gay law is negatively impacting the economy, particularly the tourism sector. Whether this law will be overturned in the courts or remain in effect remains



*Uganda’s vulnerable western border region.
Source: Institute For Security Studies (ISS)*

uncertain. Nevertheless, it could potentially give investors pause before committing their capital to Uganda.²⁸

Uganda as a Regional Power: Prospects and Challenges

Uganda is a member of several regional organizations in East Africa, most prominently the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC). As one of Africa's elder statesmen and one of the most prominent regional powers within IGAD, President Museveni has frequently served as a mediator in regional conflicts. Notably, he played a crucial role during the Civil Wars in Sudan and South Sudan, and more recently, in the conflict between the Ethiopian government and its restive northern region, Tigray.²⁹ However, Ugandan mediation efforts have sometimes been perceived as an attempt to manipulate and influence its neighboring countries' internal affairs for its own benefit.³⁰

In addition to mediation, Uganda has actively participated in regional peacekeeping missions. In 2007, Uganda became the first African country to deploy troops as part of the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), and it remains the largest contingent within this mission. Uganda's involvement in AMISOM has garnered significant benefits, with Washington recognizing Uganda as a key ally in the war against terror in East Africa. Consequently, Uganda has received substantial American support, including funds for training its army and over one hundred and seventy million dollars in annual military aid. Ugandan Armed Forces, both in AMISOM and elsewhere, are actively engaged in combating terrorism in the Horn of Africa, particularly against Somalia's terrorist movement, Al-Shabaab, and in the battle against piracy in the Red Sea. While this participation has enhanced Uganda's

²⁸ David Segal, "An Anti-L.G.B.T. "An Anti-L.G.B.T.Q. Law in Uganda Is Hurting the Economy," 19 December 2023, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/19/business/uganda-lgbtq-law-economy.html>.

²⁹ Irit Back (2020), *From Sudan to South Sudan* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Irit Back (Forthcoming), *The Role of Regional Multi-Actor Mediators: The Case of IGAD in the Ethiopia-Tigray Conflict*, *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*.

³⁰ Mareike Schomerus (2012), 'They Forget What They Came for': Uganda's Army in Sudan." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 6, no. 1: 124-153.

regional leadership credentials and strengthened its relations with key allies, there are claims that these benefits have also been utilized by President Museveni to tighten his authoritarian regime's grip on Uganda.³¹

Uganda is also part of the Great Lakes region, and its relations with its neighbor the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are complicated and unstable. Between 1998-2003 Uganda received considerable international criticism following its intervention in the internal conflicts of the Eastern region of the DRC, particularly its involvement in illegal exploitation of natural resources there.³² More recently, Ugandan troops have participated in the short-lived peacekeeping mission of the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) in the Eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).³³

Yet, shortly after the deployment of the mission, the DRC government decided not to extend the mandate of the mission. It is reasonable to assume that the previous experience of Ugandan presence contributed to distrust from the DRC, which led to the decision to terminate the EACRF presence there.

Opportunities for Israel-Ugandan Collaboration

Uganda offers significant opportunities for Israel and Israeli firms. Before Idi Amin severed ties with Israel, Israeli companies, most notably Solel Boneh, played a crucial role in constructing and upgrading Uganda's infrastructure. Additionally, IDF officials assisted in training the Ugandan Army.

In the agricultural sector, Israel has historically shared its expertise with Uganda, and this collaboration remains a promising avenue. Given that much of Uganda's economic activity revolves around coffee exports and other crops like cotton and tobacco, Israel's agricultural know-how could be highly beneficial.

³¹ P. D. Williams (2018). Joining AMISOM: why six African states contributed troops to the African Union Mission in Somalia. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 12(1), 172-192.

³² UN. Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of Congo. UN doc. S/2002/1146, October 16, 2002.

³³ EACRF was established by the EAC in November 2002, and Ugandan troops were deployed there together with forces from Burundi, Kenya, and South Sudan.

Specifically, Israel's expertise in water preservation and advanced agricultural technologies could help maximize crop yields. Over the past decade, Israel has actively advised the Ugandan government on irrigation techniques to enhance agricultural production. Notably, this assistance has been particularly impactful in Uganda's northern Karamoja region—the country's sole semi-arid area—which has faced the brunt of climate change with severe droughts and malnutrition.

Israel has also made significant contributions to safeguarding local fish species in Lake Victoria. The introduction of the invasive Nile perch threatened the livelihoods of local fishermen. Researchers from Hebrew University stepped in, creating artificial fishponds to raise carp and thereby preserving the local fish population while providing food for the community. Programs and investments like these can further strengthen Israel's influence in Uganda and offer essential avenues for investment and cooperation.

In the realm of security and defense, Israel has already signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Uganda in September of 2022³⁴. This agreement opens up significant avenues for cooperation in the fields of security and defense. Israel can offer substantial support in several key areas, such as military training, updating Uganda's antiquated military equipment, and Advising Against Guerrilla Activity and ADF Insurgency.

Uganda's energy infrastructure, including its hydroelectric and solar potential, remains largely underdeveloped. However, it presents a valuable opportunity for Israeli firms, especially in the solar sector, to establish partnerships. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), nearly all of Uganda's electricity is generated from renewable sources, yet substantial hydropower and solar resources remain untapped. Investment and development in these sectors could yield significant benefits. Leveraging Israel's expertise in solar energy, Uganda could enhance its

³⁴ Hamza Kyeyune, "Israel-Uganda Sign Defense Cooperation Agreement Amid Criticism," 20 September 2022, *Anadolu Agency*, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/israel-uganda-sign-defense-cooperation-agreement-amid-criticism/2689941>.

energy production and distribution. Ultimately, this collaboration would contribute to providing greater access to electricity for the Ugandan population.

Additionally, there is significant common ground for potential cooperation in relation to Uganda's growing ICT sector and collaboration on capacity building in the cyber space. For an elaborate overview of Uganda's cybersecurity capacity, implications and recommendations, please refer to *Appendix 1*.

Conclusion

Uganda currently finds itself at a critical juncture, balancing substantial growth prospects with notable reputational and political hazards. As climate change takes its toll and numerous development initiatives unfold, Israel and Israeli enterprises have much to gain from sustained involvement and investment in Uganda.

However, the potential for political instability and pervasive corruption must be carefully considered alongside the anticipated investment benefits. Despite these risks, ongoing Israeli investment in Uganda offers a pathway for extending Israel's influence.

Appendix 1

Uganda's Cybersecurity Capacity, Challenges & Recommendations

I. Overview of Uganda's Cybersecurity Capacity – National Plans and Strategies:

Over the years, the Government of Uganda has created an enabling environment to facilitate the growth of the information and communication technologies (ICT) sector. Uganda has invested in a national fiber-optic backbone to promote social and economic development by providing cost-effective, reliable, and high-speed connectivity to businesses and citizens. In the last ten years, Uganda's ICT sector has experienced exponential growth, largely due to favorable policies and legal conditions that have led to increased investment, expansion of ICT infrastructure, innovation, and the development of new ICT products and services.

The potential for completely transforming the economy and the associated social impact is best demonstrated by the widespread expansion and adoption of mobile money services in Uganda. According to Bank of Uganda statistics, mobile money transactions facilitated via telecommunication company platforms more than doubled in value, increasing from \$9 billion in 2015 to \$26 billion in 2020.

The recent *National Development Plan III (2024–2030)* outlines the country's medium-term strategic direction, development priorities, and implementation strategies in alignment with *Uganda Vision 2040*. Among the 18 core programs of this strategy, digital transformation—leveraging ICT services for social and economic development—holds a prominent place. Simultaneously, peace, security, and defense are essential prerequisites for sustainable socio-economic transformation, democracy, and national unity.

While the growth in ICT infrastructure, Internet usage, and online access has created new opportunities for Uganda, the increasing use of e-services necessitates robust cybersecurity protection. Safeguarding against cyber fraud and maintaining trust in these services is crucial. Moreover, information security contributes to

broader national security goals by protecting critical sectors and information infrastructure.

The Cybersecurity Strategy 2022

Cybersecurity in cyberspace is especially vital for realizing Uganda's strategic visions. The Cybersecurity Strategy 2022 outlines development paths, policy recommendations, and technical guidelines to achieve Uganda's Vision 2040, aiming to transform the country into a competitive upper middle-income nation. Uganda has taken significant steps to establish and implement the necessary policy, legal, and regulatory frameworks to harness the growing digital economy while ensuring the safety and security of its critical national infrastructure and citizens. This approach fosters a trustworthy and confident digital environment.

The Cybersecurity Strategy 2022 serves as a strategic planning tool that reflects Uganda's vision for achieving the objectives of modern economies. This strategy contributes to existing policies aimed at implementing Uganda's socio-economic development from a cybersecurity perspective. It aspires to support the creation of a digital environment that citizens and businesses can trust.

The National Cybersecurity Strategy 2022–2026

The National Cybersecurity Strategy 2022–2026 represents a pivotal step in safeguarding the nation's digital infrastructure and promoting the safe and secure use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Over the past decade, Uganda's ICT sector has experienced exponential growth, driven by favorable policies and investments in ICT infrastructure.

This growth has led to significant advancements in economic development and social impact, exemplified by the widespread adoption of mobile money services. However, alongside these advancements, there is an increased risk of cyber threats and cybercrime. The growing reliance on e-services necessitates robust cybersecurity measures to protect against cyber fraud and maintain trust in digital transactions.

Moreover, ensuring cybersecurity is not only about safeguarding economic interests but also about protecting national security by securing critical sectors and information infrastructure.

The vision outlined in the strategy underscores Uganda's aspiration to become a Digitally Empowered Society and a Knowledge Economy. This vision is supported by a mission to create a cybersafe and protected Uganda, ensuring a secure and resilient cyberspace that fosters ICT adoption and innovation for socio-economic stability and development. To achieve this vision, the strategy sets forth several goals, including the incorporation of ICTs into every aspect of daily life, the establishment of a national cybersecurity system, and the reduction of cybercrime. It emphasizes the importance of collaboration between the government, companies, and the community to adhere to cybersecurity guidelines and policies. The strategy document is structured into four main chapters:

1. *Vision, Mission, and Goals*: Outlines the overarching vision, mission, and specific objectives.
2. *Contextualization and National Capacity*: Provides context by analyzing the current situation and assessing national capacity.
3. *Alignment with Strategic Perspectives*: Ensures alignment with other strategic frameworks, including Uganda Vision 2040, Digital Uganda Vision, and the 4th Industrial Revolution Strategy.
4. *Digital Transformation of the Economy*: Details the steps needed for digital transformation.

Additionally, the strategy provides regulatory guidance and outlines the roles of key regulatory authorities, such as the *National Information Technology Authority - Uganda (NITA-U)* and the *Uganda National Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-UG)*. Furthermore, it recognizes that digital transformation is essential for driving economic growth and competitiveness. Simultaneously, it underscores the critical role of cybersecurity in safeguarding national interests and sovereignty in cyberspace. In terms of regulatory authority, the strategy highlights the

establishment of NITA-U as the regulatory body responsible for overseeing the implementation and enforcement of the *Data Protection and Privacy Act (DPPA)*. Additionally, CERT-UG plays a crucial role in ensuring the protection of critical information infrastructures and providing security advisories to mitigate cybersecurity incidents.

Overall, the National Cybersecurity Strategy 2022–2026 of Uganda reflects a comprehensive approach to cybersecurity, aligning with national development goals and strategic frameworks to create a safe and trusted digital ecosystem that fosters innovation, economic growth, and prosperity.

II. Regulatory Environment

The regulatory environment in Uganda pertaining to cybersecurity is structured around several key legislative acts and regulatory bodies:

- *Computer Misuse Act, 2011*: This act serves as a foundational piece of legislation aimed at ensuring the safety and security of electronic transactions and information systems. It criminalizes unauthorized access, abuse, or misuse of computers and information systems, thereby providing a legal framework for combating cybercrime.
- *Data Protection and Privacy Act, 2019 (DPPA)*: The DPPA is a comprehensive legislation regulating the collection, processing, holding, and usage of personal data within Uganda. It imposes obligations on data collectors, processors, and controllers regarding data security and outlines measures to be taken in case of breaches. The establishment of the National Information Technology Authority - Uganda (NITA-U) as the regulatory body under the DPPA underscores the government's commitment to ensuring data protection.
- *Data Protection and Privacy Regulations, 2021*: These regulations complement the DPPA by providing detailed guidelines and procedures for

compliance with data protection requirements, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of data protection measures.

- *Uganda Communications (Computer Emergency Response Team) Regulations, 2019*: These regulations establish the Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT), housed within the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC). CERT-UG plays a vital role in protecting critical communications infrastructure, managing cybersecurity incidents, and providing security advisories to stakeholders.
- *Electronic Signatures Act, 2011*: Sections 11 and 13 of this act stipulate security requirements for electronic signatures, contributing to the overall cybersecurity framework by ensuring the integrity and authenticity of electronic transactions.

In terms of regulatory oversight and enforcement, NITA-U and CERT-UG play pivotal roles. NITA-U, as the regulatory authority under the DPPA, is tasked with overseeing compliance with data protection regulations, investigating complaints, and raising public awareness about data privacy issues. On the other hand, CERT-UG focuses on safeguarding critical information infrastructures, providing security advisories, and responding to cybersecurity incidents.

III. Implications and recommendations:

Despite the existence of legislative frameworks and regulatory bodies, Uganda faces several challenges in the realm of cybersecurity that need to be addressed:

1. *Limited Cybersecurity Awareness*: There is a need to enhance cybersecurity awareness among individuals, organizations, and government entities to foster a culture of cybersecurity and promote proactive risk management practices.
2. *Cyber Threat Landscape*: The evolving nature of cyber threats poses significant challenges to Uganda's cybersecurity posture. Threat actors,

including cybercriminals, state-sponsored actors, and hacktivists, constantly exploit vulnerabilities in information systems, necessitating robust cybersecurity measures.

3. *Capacity Building*: There is a need to strengthen cybersecurity capabilities through capacity building initiatives, including training programs, skill development, and knowledge transfer, to effectively combat cyber threats and address skill shortages in the cybersecurity workforce.
4. *Resource Constraints*: Limited financial resources and infrastructure constraints pose challenges to implementing comprehensive cybersecurity measures across government agencies and critical infrastructure sectors.
5. Regulatory Compliance: Ensuring compliance with cybersecurity regulations and standards remains a challenge for organizations, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), due to resource constraints and lack of awareness about regulatory requirements.

To address these challenges and enhance Uganda's cybersecurity resilience, a strategic approach is required:

1. *Capacity Development*: Invest in capacity building initiatives to enhance cybersecurity skills, expertise, and technical capabilities across government, academia, and industry sectors.
2. *Public-Private Collaboration*: Foster collaboration between government, industry stakeholders, and civil society to promote information sharing, best practices, and collaborative cybersecurity initiatives.
3. *Risk Management*: Implement risk-based approaches to cybersecurity that prioritize the identification, assessment, and mitigation of cyber risks to critical infrastructure and sensitive data.
4. *Awareness and Education*: Launch cybersecurity awareness campaigns targeting individuals, businesses, and government entities to promote cybersecurity best practices, threat awareness, and incident response readiness.

5. *Regulatory Compliance*: Strengthen enforcement mechanisms and provide support to ensure compliance with cybersecurity regulations, standards, and guidelines, particularly among SMEs and critical infrastructure operators.

By adopting a comprehensive cybersecurity strategy that addresses these key areas, Uganda can enhance its cybersecurity resilience, protect critical infrastructure, and foster trust and confidence in its digital economy and information systems.

Overall, the National Cybersecurity Strategy 2022 - 2026 shows a roadmap for Uganda to navigate the complex cybersecurity landscape, mitigate emerging threats, and build a secure and resilient cyberspace that supports its socio-economic development goals and aspirations.

Resources:

<https://aag-it.com/the-latest-cyber-crime-statistics/>

<https://www.ucc.co.ug/cybersecurity-reports/>

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/octopus/-/ugan-1>

<https://www.dataguidance.com/opinion/uganda-cybersecurity>

<https://isoc.ug/index.php/cyber-security/>

<https://ega.ee/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Ugandan-national-cybersecurity-strategy.pdf>

<https://www.comparitech.com/blog/vpn-privacy/cybersecurity-by-country/>

<https://www.upf.go.ug/cyber-barometer/>

<https://gcsc.ox.ac.uk/files/ugandacmmpdf>