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2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Uganda

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Uganda is a constitutional republic led since 1986 by President Yoweri Museveni of the National Resistance Movement party. During the year voters re-elected Museveni to a sixth five-year term and returned a National Resistance Movement majority to the unicameral parliament. Allegations of arbitrary killings of opposition supporters, disenfranchisement and voter intimidation, harassment of the opposition, closure of social media websites, and lack of transparency and independence in the Electoral Commission marred the elections, which fell short of international standards. The periods before, during, and after the elections were marked by a closing of political space, disappearances of opposition supporters, intimidation of journalists, and reports of widespread use of torture by security agencies.

The national police maintain internal security, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs oversees police. The president detailed army officials to leadership roles within the police force and the executive, including government ministries. The law also allows the military to support police operations to maintain internal security. The Ministry of Defense oversees the army. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were credible reports that members of the security forces committed numerous abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings by government forces, including extrajudicial killings; forced disappearance by the government; torture and cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by government agencies; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; political prisoners or detainees; politically motivated reprisals against individuals in another country; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious abuses in a conflict, including unlawful civilian harm; serious restrictions on free expression and media, including violence, threats of violence, and unjustified arrests or prosecution of journalists, censorship, and the existence of criminal libel laws; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations; serious flaws with citizens' ability to determine their government through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government corruption; serious government restrictions on or harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence, including but not limited to domestic and intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and child, early, and forced marriage; trafficking in persons; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; existence of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults; and existence of the worst forms of child labor.

The government was reluctant to investigate, prosecute, or punish officials who committed human rights abuses or engaged in corruption, whether in the security services or elsewhere in government, and impunity was a problem.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were several reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. The law provides for several agencies to investigate, inquire into, and or prosecute unlawful killings by the security forces. Human rights campaigners, however, claimed these agencies were largely ineffective. The constitution established the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) to investigate any person or group of persons for abuses of any human right (see section 5). The Police Disciplinary Court has the power to hear cases of officers who breach the police disciplinary code of conduct. Military courts have the power to hear cases against officers that break military law, which bars soldiers from targeting or killing nonmilitants.

Opposition activists, local media, and human rights activists reported that security forces killed some individuals the government identified as dissidents and those whom it accused of terrorism. On March 13, local media reported that National Unity Platform (NUP) opposition party member Fabian Luuk died at Kiruddu hospital from injuries he sustained during torture while in detention. NUP leaders alleged that military officers arrested Luuka and three others at a checkpoint in Luweero District, after they discovered the four carrying NUP membership cards, while traveling to Jinja district to work as laborers at a sugarcane plantation. According to NUP leaders, military personnel beat the four individuals, killing two of them, Agodri Azori and Obindu, before abandoning Luuka at Nakawa food market in Kampala. The fourth victim, hailing from Terego County, remained unaccounted for. Local media reported that images of Luuka's body showed "electrocution and burn marks to his arms and legs, severe necrosis of his thigh and legs, along with apparent rotting of tissue." On March 11, the outgoing Speaker of Parliament Rebecca Kadaga stated she had directed parliament's Committee on Human Rights to investigate Luuka's death, but the committee had not released a report by year's end.

Police killed some persons violating COVID-19 curfew regulations. On June 28, local media reported that police arrested Abdrashid Walujjo, one of its officers, after he shot and killed 13-year-old Ester Naula on her way from buying street food after curfew. Police stated Walujjo would be prosecuted for murder, but his trial had not started by year's end.

Hazing was a common practice in detention facilities and sometimes resulted in death. On July 14, local media reported that Joe Okot Otara, an inmate at Anaka Prison in Nwoya District, died while working alongside fellow inmates at a private farm. Police told local media that a postmortem found Otara died of "cardiac arrest, which resulted from a coronary artery occlusion." The postmortem, however, noted that Otara bore bruises "on the left clavicle, chest, abdomen, both knees and legs as well as on the anterior plane of the body." Local media reported that a former fellow inmate said that upon arriving at the farm, four inmate prefects, with encouragement and support from prison wardens, started beating the new inmates working at the farm, including Otara, and left him for dead. According to local media, the former detainee reported that prison wardens surnamed Dratia, Ogwang, and Mazoro ordered hazing for new inmates. The Anaka prison commander, Isaac Aruo, however, denied allegations of torture and said Otara sustained his injuries from a seizure he experienced before death.

b. Disappearance

There were numerous reports of disappearances by government authorities. Local media, opposition political parties, cultural leaders, human rights lawyers, and religious leaders reported that the military – particularly the Chieftaincy for Military Intelligence (CMI) and the Special Forces Command (SFC) – and police used unmarked Toyota Hiace vans, locally known as "drones," to kidnap hundreds of NUP supporters in the periods before, during, and after the January 14 general election, and detained them without charge at unidentified locations. On March 4, the NUP released a list of 423 supporters who had gone missing after abductions by security agencies. Authorities released inconsistent information regarding the number of missing NUP supporters. On February 4, outgoing Minister for Internal Affairs Jeje Odongo stated the government was investigating allegations of the kidnapping of 44 NUP supporters, 31 of whom could not be traced. On March 4, Odongo denied allegations of disappearances by security agencies and declared the agencies had arrested and charged 222 individuals in connection with protests in November 2020. On March 7, President Museveni stated CMI had detained "177 suspects who were either granted bail by court or released," and was still then holding another 65 suspects, while SFC had detained 68 suspects in Kampala, Kyotera, Mpigi, Mukono, and Nakasongola Districts. Museveni added, "The disappearances were a consequence of the essentially treasonable acts of elements of the opposition" and "their foreign backers who wanted to install a quisling regime in Uganda." According to local media reports, security agencies released some of the missing persons, but NUP leaders reported that hundreds of NUP supporters remained missing at year's end. Numerous NUP supporters released by the security agencies told local media that they experienced torture at the hands of security officers, who dumped the NUP supporters by the roadside in swamps, thickets, and forests upon their release.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The constitution and law prohibit such practices. The law stipulates that any person convicted of an act of torture may receive a sentence of 15 years' imprisonment, a monetary fine, or both. The penalty for conviction of aggravated torture is life imprisonment. Nevertheless, there were credible reports security forces tortured and physically abused suspects. Impunity was a problem.

Human rights organizations, opposition politicians, and local media reported that security agencies tortured suspects as well as dissidents to extract self-incriminating confessions and as punishment for their opposition to the government, leading to several deaths. According to media reports, numerous NUP supporters released from detention by the security forces reported that security officers shot them in the legs, beat them with sticks and batons on their joints, and pulled out their toenails using pliers, while simultaneously ordering them to confess to participating in plots to burn fuel stations in Kampala. NUP member and local government official Cyrus Samba Kasato told local

media on March 2 that CMI officers tied him by his hands to suspend him with his feet off the ground and then beat and slapped him for refusing to support the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government.

Local media reported that hazing was a common practice in prisons and sometimes resulted in death.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) activists reported that police officers and medical personnel carried out forced anal examinations on members of the LGBTQI+ community whom they arrested at what was alleged to be a same-sex engagement ceremony (see section 6, Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity).

Local media reported that security forces beat some persons while enforcing regulations to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. On June 6, the president announced renewed restrictions to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, which included an indefinite closure of all schools, a ban on religious gatherings, restrictions on interdistrict public and private transport, and a closure of nonessential business, which he would later expand to include a ban on all nonessential travel and a night-time curfew. The president instructed police and the military to enforce the regulations. Local media reported several incidents in which police and military officers indiscriminately beat persons they found outside after the nighttime curfew with sticks, batons, and gunstocks, maiming some and killing others. On June 28, local media reported that Monica Musenero, the minister in the office of the president in charge of science, technology, and innovation, instructed the resident district commissioner of Butebo District to “spank” and “beat” persons breaching COVID-19 restrictions.

Impunity was a problem, and it was widespread in police, the military, the prisons service, and the executive branch. The security forces did not take adequate measures to investigate and bring to account officers implicated in human rights abuses, especially in incidents involving members of the political opposition. Authorities encouraged and gave political and judicial cover to officials who committed human rights abuses. Security agencies did not take timely or adequate steps to investigate the November 2020 security force killings of unarmed civilians. When a BBC investigation identified two official vehicles whose occupants were responsible for some of the killings, police officers instead summoned the journalists who reported the story for questioning, arguing they incited violence. While addressing a press conference on January 8, the Inspector General of Police, Martin Okoth Ochola, told journalists that police officers would continue beating journalists who insisted on covering violent protests “for their own safety.” The president gave contradictory public messages regarding human rights abuses; although he condemned arbitrary arrests, acts of torture, and cruel and inhuman treatment by the security agencies in a televised speech on August 14, he also commended the security forces for arbitrary arrests and disappearances on March 7. The president also stated that he had led a training session on February 15 with SFC officers in which he taught them to exercise restraint while enforcing crowd control measures, including not shooting at “rioters” except if the rioter threatened a civilian’s life.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Conditions in detention centers remained harsh and, in some cases, life threatening due to gross overcrowding, physical abuse of detainees by security staff and fellow inmates, inadequate food, and understaffing. The government operated unofficial detention facilities where it detained suspects for years without charge.

Physical Conditions: Gross overcrowding remained a problem. On November 4, the Minister for Internal Affairs told parliament’s Budget Committee that the prison population was at least 70,000 inmates, which was more than the 22,000-inmate capacity that the prisons service reported in August. Most prisons did not have accommodations for persons with disabilities, and police often detained child and adult suspects together.

Local media reported several deaths in prisons due to prison conditions and abuse by prison staff. On May 25, local media reported that a 62-year-old inmate at Masindi prison, Samuel Rubalire, died alongside 28-year-old prison warden Abel Owori after the two suffocated inside a septic tank. According to local media, prison authorities instructed Rubalire to enter a septic tank and unblock a sewerage channel, where he was overcome by gas. When Owori entered the tank to rescue the inmate, he also suffocated. A police spokesperson told local media that police were investigating the deaths but had released no findings of its investigations by year’s end.

The charity organization Justice Defenders reported in February that former detainees said prisons had inadequate water supply, prison wards were crowded, and prisoners slept sometimes without blankets on the floor and in the corridors by the toilet. Former Kitale prison detainees, especially political prisoners, reported that prisoners slept on the floor on their side since there was not enough room to sleep on their backs. They also reported that prisoners developed frequent bouts of cough, scabies, lice, and diarrhea. Local government authorities in Kalangala District told local media on July 9 that overcrowding had led to an outbreak of COVID-19 infections at Mugoye prison.

Administration: Authorities did not always carry out investigations into credible allegations of mistreatment. Previous detainees told local media that CMI held up to hundreds of detainees in a basement at its headquarters and denied them access to visitors.

Independent Monitoring: Local human rights organizations reported that the prisons service suspended monitoring visits as part of measures to combat COVID-19. The International Committee of the Red Cross visited 14 places of detention in accordance with its standard procedures. Findings from these visits on detainees' treatment and living conditions were submitted to and discussed confidentially with authorities, including CMI, police, and the prisons service.

Improvements: On August 31, the prisons service recruited 364 extra warders, which increased the staffing levels to 10,716. The prison service also reported on August 17 that it made available 13,000 doses of the Astra Zeneca COVID-19 vaccine, in addition to an earlier 2,000 doses, for high-risk inmates.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

Although the law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, security forces often arbitrarily arrested and detained persons, especially opposition leaders, politicians, activists, demonstrators, journalists, LGBTQI+ persons, and members of the general population accused of violating COVID-19 restrictions. The law provides for the right of persons to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court, but this mechanism was seldom employed and rarely successful.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

The law requires that judges or prosecutors issue a warrant before authorities make an arrest unless the arrest occurs during commission of a crime or while in pursuit of a perpetrator. Nevertheless, authorities often arrested suspects without warrants. The law requires authorities to arraign suspects within 48 hours of arrest, but they frequently held suspects longer without charge. Authorities must try suspects arrested for capital offenses within 360 days (120 days if charged with an offense triable by subordinate courts) or release them on bail; however, if prosecutors present the case to the court before the expiration of this period, there is no limit on further pretrial detention. While the law requires authorities to inform detainees immediately of the reasons for detention, at times they did not do so. The law provides for bail at the judge's discretion, but many suspects were unaware of the law or lacked the financial means to cover the bond. Judges generally granted requests for bail. The law provides detainees the right to legal representation and access to a lawyer, but authorities did not always respect this right. The law requires the government to provide an attorney for indigent defendants charged with capital offenses. Most defendants endured significant delays through the judicial process before the courts could conclude their cases. Security forces often held opposition political members and other suspects incommunicado, under house arrest, or both.

Arbitrary Arrest: Arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention, particularly of dissidents, remained problems. Police and military on numerous occasions arrested and harassed opposition politicians, their supporters, and private citizens who engaged in peaceful protests and held public rallies. Police arrested some journalists for covering stories related to abuses in connection with the compilation and announcement of election results, government procurement, and land rights (see section 2). Police also raided an LGBTQI+ shelter and arrested occupants, accusing them of violating COVID-19 regulations on social distancing (see section 6, Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity). On January 18, opposition politician and NUP presidential candidate Robert Kyagulanyi, also known as Bobi Wine, reported that police and military officers had, since election day on January 14, surrounded and blockaded his house, jumped over his fence and pitched tents in his compound, and effectively placed him under house arrest. He said the officers blocked him from leaving his house to access his garden or from receiving visitors, beating a member of parliament who attempted to enter his compound. A police spokesperson denied that security agencies had placed Kyagulanyi under house arrest and said the deployment of security forces around his residence was for Kyagulanyi's own protection. Security officers enforced Kyagulanyi's house arrest until January 25, when a court ordered the security agencies to remove their personnel. On December 13, Kyagulanyi reported that police and military personnel surrounded his home ahead of a planned December 14 campaign stop to support the NUP candidate in Kayunga District elections. Security personnel departed his home on December 15, and the election took place on December 16.

Pretrial Detention: Case backlogs due to an inefficient judiciary, inadequate police investigations, the absence of plea bargaining prior to 2015, insufficient use of bail, the absence of a time limit for the detention of detainees awaiting trial, and COVID-19 countermeasures contributed to frequent prolonged pretrial detentions. On August 31, the prisons service reported that the population of pretrial detainees accounted for 53 percent of the country's then inmate population of 65,147 in the prison system. In June the Supreme Court reduced in-person attendance in court to 10 percent of normal levels. By August this had risen to only 20 percent, slowing pretrial detainees' path through the system.

Detainee's Ability to Challenge Lawfulness of Detention before a Court: Citizens detained without charge have the right to sue the Attorney General's Office for compensation for unlawful detention; however, citizens rarely exercised this right.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, but the government did not always respect this provision. Corruption, understaffing, inefficiency, and executive branch interference with judicial rulings often undermined the courts' independence. Human rights activists and local media reported that on several occasions, security agencies defied court orders to release detainees or arraign persons they detained without charge, and that security agents intimidated judicial officers from making rulings that granted reprieve to political detainees. The activists also reported that due to a lack of judicial independence, the judiciary unnecessarily delayed human rights petitions by denying them hearing dates or prolonging the hearing sessions.

The president appoints Supreme Court justices, Court of Appeal and High Court judges, and members of the Judicial Service Commission (which makes recommendations on appointments to the judiciary) with the approval of parliament.

Due to vacancies on the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, High Court, and the lower courts, the judiciary did not deliver justice in a timely manner. At times the lack of a judicial quorum precluded cases from proceeding.

Judicial corruption was a problem, and local media reported numerous cases where judicial officers in lower courts solicited and accepted bribes from the parties involved.

Trial Procedures

The law provides for the right to a fair and public trial, but the government did not always enforce this right. Although the law provides for a presumption of innocence, authorities did not always respect this right. Defendants have the right to prompt, detailed notification of the charges against them, and are entitled to free assistance of an interpreter. An inadequate system of judicial administration resulted in a serious backlog of cases, undermining suspects' right to a timely trial. Defendants have the right to be present at their trial and to consult with an attorney of their choice. The law requires the government to provide an attorney for indigent defendants charged with capital offenses. Defendants have the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense and appeal. The law allows defendants to confront or question witnesses testifying against them and present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf, but authorities did not always respect this right. Defendants may not be compelled to testify or confess guilt, and they have the right to appeal.

All nonmilitary trials are public. A single judge decides cases in the High Court, while a panel of at least five judges decides cases in the Constitutional and Supreme Courts. The law allows military courts to try civilians who assist members of the military in committing offenses or are found possessing arms, ammunition, or other equipment reserved for the armed forces. Civilians charged in military courts were often denied the right to a public trial, to communicate with an attorney of their choice, and to file an appeal in the civilian court system.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

Authorities detained numerous opposition politicians and activists on politically motivated grounds. Authorities released many without charge but charged others with crimes such as illegal possession of firearms and inciting violence and lodged the complaints in military courts. According to human rights lawyers, the military courts were less independent and allowed authorities to hold the detainees indefinitely. No reliable statistics on the total number of political detainees or prisoners were available. Human rights organizations reported that prison authorities blocked them from visiting political prisoners and detainees as part of measures to stop the spread of COVID-19. The International Committee of the Red Cross reported that authorities granted it access to places of detention. Former political detainees also reported that the UHRC visited them while they were in detention.

In December 2020 police and military officers arrested at least 96 NUP members while they were traveling with Kyagulanyi to a campaign rally in Kalangala District. Police stated they made the arrests to "restrain" the individuals "from holding massive rallies amidst the increased threats of coronavirus." Kyagulanyi's bodyguard, Edward Ssebuufu, also known as Eddie Mutwe, and his compatriot Ali Bukenya, also known as Nubian Li, later told local media on June 15 that police initially detained some of them at a military barracks and others at a police station in Masaka Town, where police officers poured cold water on the floor and instructed the detainees to sleep in the water. Ssebuufu said that police officers sprayed pepper spray into the cells where NUP suspects, still handcuffed, were held. He added that military officers forced him to strip naked as they mocked his anatomy. On January 4, police arraigned the NUP supporters at Masaka High Court, which granted them bail. The prisons service, however, did not start releasing the suspects until January 6. Prisons

service officers then drove 49 of the suspects to a military court where the military charged them with illegal possession of ammunition in the absence of their lawyers and remanded them to Kitalya Prison. Bukenya told local media on June 15 that Kitalya Prison authorities transferred him to a section holding murder convicts after he told a visiting team from the UHRC that the detainees lived in poor conditions. These included frequent outbreaks of cough, scabies, lice, and diarrhea. He said the detainees missed breakfast whenever occasional power outages occurred. On June 14, the military court released the last of the 49 suspects on bail, but their trial continued at year's end.

Politically Motivated Reprisal against Individuals Located Outside the Country

Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, and Coercion: Local media and opposition activists reported that authorities issued threats to and arbitrarily surveilled the country's dissidents in the diaspora. After false news of President Museveni's death spread on social media in early July, a police spokesperson warned bloggers living abroad that authorities would negotiate with their host countries and Interpol to extradite them to the country for prosecution.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals or organizations may seek civil remedies for human rights abuses through the regular court system or the UHRC, which has judicial powers under the constitution. The law also empowers the courts to grant restitution, rehabilitation, or compensation to victims of human rights abuses as well as to hold public officials involved in human rights abuses personally liable, including contributing to compensation or restitution costs. The UHRC's powers include the authority to order the release of detainees, pay compensation to victims, and pursue other legal and administrative remedies, such as mediation. Civil courts and the UHRC have no ability to hold perpetrators of human rights abuses criminally liable. Bureaucratic delays hampered enforcement of judgments that granted financial compensation to victims. The government rarely complied with judicial decisions related to human rights. On August 9, a court awarded NUP member of parliament Francis Zaake 75 million shillings (\$21,125) as damages in compensation for torture he experienced at the hands of police and CMI officers in 2020, but the government had not paid him by year's end.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The constitution and law prohibit such actions, but there were reports the government failed to respect these prohibitions. There were reports that government authorities entered homes without judicial or other appropriate authorization; accessed, collected, or used private communications or personal data arbitrarily or without appropriate legal authority; implemented regulations and practices that allow for the arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, including the use of technology arbitrarily or unlawfully to surveil or interfere with the privacy of individuals; and used technologies and practices including internet and social media controls, blocking or filtering of websites and social media platforms, sensors, biometric data collection, and data analytics. The law authorizes government security agencies to tap private conversations to combat terrorism-related offenses. The government invoked the law to monitor telephone and internet communications.

g. Conflict-related Abuses

Killings: On August 14, the president reported that the country's soldiers serving in the African Union Mission in Somalia had carried out retaliatory killings against an unspecified number of Somalis after their unit suffered casualties in an ambush. The president declared a military court would charge and prosecute the officers, and on November 13, local media reported the court, while sitting in Mogadishu, had found five soldiers guilty of murder and sentenced two of them to death and three of them to 39 years in prison.

In February the International Criminal Court found former Lord's Resistance Army commander Dominic Ongwen guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the northern part of the country from July 1, 2002, to December 31, 2005. In May the court sentenced Ongwen to 25 years' imprisonment.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

The constitution and law provide for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, but the government often restricted this right.

Freedom of Expression: The government restricted citizens' ability to criticize its actions or to discuss matters of public interest. It also restricted some political symbols. Police and military arrested persons it found wearing camouflage clothing, red berets, and red insignia associated with Kyagulanyi's People Power political movement and the NUP party, which security agencies stated were reserved for use by security forces (see section 1.e.). Military police officers wear red berets, which feature a different logo from those on the berets NUP supporters wear. On March 22, local media reported that CMI officers had on March 12 arrested NUP member James Mubiru in Kasubi

Town for wearing a red beret. The military arraigned Mubiru before a military court on March 22 and charged him with possession of military stores. On August 31, the military court released Mubiru on bail, but his trial continued at year's end.

Freedom of Expression for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media:

The country had an active media environment with numerous privately owned newspapers and television and radio stations. These media outlets regularly covered stories and often provided commentary critical of the government and officials. The police's Media and Political Crimes Unit and the communications regulator, Uganda Communications Commission, however, closely monitored all radio, television, and print media. Journalists, opposition politicians, and human rights activists reported that authorities wielded control over editorial decisions at public broadcasters and at some private media outlets as well.

Violence and Harassment: Security forces subjected journalists and media houses to violence, harassment, and intimidation. On January 8, the inspector general of police warned journalists who insisted on covering violent protests that police officers would beat them "for their safety." On February 17, military police officers beat with sticks and batons at least 20 journalists who gathered at the site of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Kampala to cover Kyagulanyi delivering a petition. Several journalists were hospitalized with injuries to their heads, feet, and ankles, and others lost audio and visual equipment destroyed by military police officers. On February 18, a military court arraigned, prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced seven military police officers who the court declared had assaulted the journalists to varying jail terms of up to 90 days. Some officers received an administrative reprimand.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: The government penalized those who published items counter to its guidelines and directly and indirectly censored media, including by controlling licensing and advertising, instructing editors to suspend critical journalists, and arresting and beating journalists. Government officials and ruling party members owned many of the private rural radio stations and imposed reporting restrictions. Media practitioners said government and security agents occasionally called editors and instructed them not to publish stories that negatively portrayed the government. Journalists, under government pressure, practiced self-censorship. According to local media, police officers in Jinja District on election day January 14 shut down Busoga One FM after the station broadcasted preliminary election results, which authorities stated incited violence and interfered with the electoral process. Police allowed the station to reopen on January 23.

Libel/Slander Laws: Authorities used libel, defamation, and slander laws to suppress criticism of government officials. According to human rights activists, on April 6, police interrogated online journalists Pidson Kareire and Darius Magara after they published a November 2020 report that questioned the competence of a road construction company. Police directed Kareire and Magara to report weekly to the police's Criminal Investigations Directorate. Upon reporting on May 27, police officers detained them, arraigned them in court, and charged them with criminal defamation. The court remanded them to prison until June 17, when it released them on bail. Their trial continued at year's end.

National Security: Authorities cited laws protecting national security to restrict criticism of government policies. On June 24, police officers interrogated Monitor Publications Limited's managing director Tony Glencross and managing editor Tabu Butagira as part of investigations into allegations of publication of false news, criminal libel, and incitement of violence. Police began the investigation following the newspaper's May 31 report describing a BBC investigation that identified two official security vehicles whose occupants shot and killed unarmed civilians during the November 2020 protests. According to local media, police detectives said the publication "promoted sectarianism" and was "prejudicial" to national security.

Internet Freedom

The government restricted and disrupted access to the internet, censored online content, monitored internet communications without appropriate legal authority, pressured internet platforms and technology companies to restrict content, punished internet users who expressed divergent political views, prohibited online anonymity for some individuals, and disrupted communications prior to elections or planned demonstrations.

Human rights activists, journalists, and opposition politicians reported the ruling party's communications arm sponsored fake online accounts to attack opposition politicians and activists on social media. On January 11, local media reported that authorities had banned the social media platform Facebook after the company suspended accounts associated with the Ministry of Information's Government Citizens Interaction Centre. Facebook declared the center had violated the platform's use policy by engaging in "inauthentic behavior" and seeking to manipulate public opinion in favor of the ruling NRM party ahead of the January 14 elections. On January 12, President Museveni stated he banned Facebook for "being arrogant" and added, "If it is to operate in Uganda, it should be used equitably." On January 12, the Uganda Communications Commission wrote to

internet service providers and instructed them to immediately suspend any access and use of any social media platforms, including messaging applications. On January 13, the evening before the elections, the commission directed internet service providers to shut down all internet access, which lasted until January 18. On January 20, local media reported that outgoing Minister of Foreign Affairs Sam Kutesa told a meeting of the diplomatic corps that the internet shutdown had prevented incitement of violence during the elections. On February 10, authorities restored access to social media platforms except Facebook, whose ban continued at year's end.

In April Unwanted Witness Uganda, a digital-rights and free expression group, and Article 19, an international human rights organization focused on freedom of expression and freedom of information, brought a case against the government and service providers for social media blocks during the 2016 election period. The court held that the restrictions were permissible under the constitution, which permits the limitation of constitutionally protected fundamental rights and freedoms.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

The government restricted artistic presentations, including music lyrics and theatrical performances. Academics and human rights activists reported that authorities prevented the appointment of opposition-leaning academics to senior positions at public universities.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The government restricted freedoms of peaceful assembly and association. Government failure to investigate or prosecute attacks on human rights defenders and peaceful protesters led to de facto restrictions on freedom of assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly, but the government did not respect this right. The government used COVID-19 restrictions to block and disperse political opposition gatherings and rallies while allowing similar gatherings of ruling party NRM supporters to continue uninterrupted.

According to local media, on January 26, police officers fired teargas and bullets to disperse a procession organized by the opposition Forum for Democratic Change politician John Bosco Ozuma to celebrate his electoral victory. In contrast, ruling party politicians such as Minister for Security Jim Muhwezi held processions to celebrate their victories without interruption by the security agencies.

On March 15, police officers arrested Kyagulanyi and nine NUP officials as they held a procession in Kampala to demonstrate against the security forces' continued detention without trial of NUP supporters. Kyagulanyi and his colleagues were released without charge the same day.

Freedom of Association

While the constitution and law provide for freedom of association, the government did not respect this right. The government restricted the operations of local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), especially those that work on civil and political rights (see section 5). Government regulations require NGOs to disclose sources of funding and personal information about their employees and impose onerous registration and reporting requirements. They enable the NGO Bureau and its local-level structures to deny registration to any organization focused on topics deemed "undesirable" or "prejudicial" to the "dignity of the people of Uganda." The regulations also provide the NGO Bureau broad powers to inspect NGO offices and records and to suspend their activities without due process. The NGO Bureau imposed registration, permit renewal, and administrative fees that local NGOs declared were exorbitant. Human rights activists reported that NGOs operated in an environment of fear, harassment, and intimidation by security and other officials. They reported that government officials used the laborious registration process to delay issuance or renewal of permits to NGOs, then penalized NGOs for operating without permits. On February 3, local media reported that Minister of Finance Matia Kasaija confirmed that President Museveni had, in a January 2 letter, directed the ministry to suspend the activities of the EU-funded Democratic Governance Facility, which supported operations of many prodemocracy NGOs and some government programs. In the letter, Museveni accused the fund of subverting his government under the guise of improving governance. The fund remained suspended at year's end. On August 20, the NGO Bureau suspended 54 mainly prodemocracy and human rights organizations for allegedly failing to comply with registration requirements. The NGO Bureau reinstated approximately 25 of the suspended organizations in December.

The government also restricted the operations of opposition political parties (see section 3, Elections and Political Participation).

c. Freedom of Religion

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

Not applicable.

f. Protection of Refugees

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern. Most refugees enjoyed unhindered access to asylum, freedom of movement, freedom of residence, right to registration and documentation, and access to justice, education, health care, and employment.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. Individuals fleeing South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (if the Congolese are from eastern DRC) who enter the country through a designated border point have automatic prima facie refugee status (status without determination of individual refugee status). The local Refugee Eligibility Committee, however, determines whether individuals fleeing from Rwanda, Somalia, Burundi, and other countries are eligible for refugee status. The committee was functional, but COVID-19-associated lockdowns, administrative matters, and the continued influx of asylum seekers continued to cause backlogs, although UNHCR and the government were working to address them. Although the country's border had been closed since the onset of COVID-19, the government continued to accept most of the asylum seekers that entered informally.

Refoulement: There was one report of refoulement. UNHCR confirmed reports that the government returned 88 asylum seekers from the DRC to their country of origin and handed them over to DRC authorities in December 2020. The asylum seekers entered the country informally, amid COVID-19 restrictions and border closures, as three separate groups fleeing violence in eastern DRC. Despite assurances from the government that the asylum seekers would be permitted to remain in the country, they were returned to the DRC.

Abuse of Migrants and Refugees: Some refugees continued to report that government officials demanded bribes from refugees to process or issue paperwork, including for refugees to acquire land. On September 13, local media reported on an incident in Nakivale Refugee Settlement where government workers allegedly charged refugees between 500,000 shillings (\$139) and 1,000,000 shillings (\$279) as registration fees for settlement on land belonging to the host community.

Durable Solutions: The government did not accept third-country refugees for resettlement, but it assisted in the safe and voluntary return of refugees to their homes and supported the resettlement of third-country refugees to other countries by providing birth certificates and travel documents. A 2015 constitutional court ruling confirmed that certain long-term refugees have the right to naturalize, and in 2016 the government committed to begin processing naturalization cases for an estimated 15,000 refugees who had resided in the country for approximately 20 years. During the year there were no known cases of a refugee having completed naturalization.

Temporary Protection: The government also provided temporary protection to individuals who were not registered as refugees, with the government designating them "guests of the President," and provided it to approximately 50 persons during the year.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provides citizens the ability to choose their government through free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. The law also allows authorities to carry out elections for local government officials by having voters line up behind their preferred candidate or the candidate's representative, portrait, or symbol. Serious irregularities marred the 2021 presidential and parliamentary elections, including exclusion and intimidation of political opposition members and independent media, significant and widespread voting irregularities, enforced disappearance of opposition political supporters, and violence by security forces.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: During the year the country held its sixth presidential and legislative elections since President Museveni came to power in 1986. The Electoral Commission (EC) announced the president was re-elected with 58.4 percent of the vote, and NUP candidate Robert Kyagulanyi finished second with 35.1 percent. The ruling NRM party captured approximately 63.5 percent of the seats in the 529-member unicameral parliament. There were numerous irregularities in the lead up to, during, and immediate aftermath of the elections. The East African Community Observation Mission reported concerns regarding the EC's inability to register all eligible voters, a "disproportionate use of force in some instances and accusations of biased enforcement against opposition parties and candidates," and "actions taken against opposition parties and candidates when it came to accessing [broadcast journalism]." The group also raised concerns regarding the EC's failure to deliver "timely accreditation and issuance of accreditation documents to domestic observers." Authorities harassed and blocked some domestic independent election observers from observing the electoral process and limited the number of some foreign and diplomatic election observation missions. On January 13, government spokesperson Ofwono Opondo told local media that the government limited the number of accredited observers. Authorities on January 13 also shut down the internet for five days.

On election day, January 14, police officers raided a civil society election data center and arrested 27 NGO staff and volunteers on what a police spokesperson said were suspicions that the staffers had "ulterior motives, which might incite violence in this country." Local media reported on January 27 that police had released all 27 without charge. Local media reported numerous incidents of ballot stuffing and showed several videos of individuals wearing military and police uniforms premarking and stuffing ballots. Police detained Kyagulanyi at his home between January 14 and January 25. Due to election disputes stemming from previous elections, in 2016 the Supreme Court recommended changes to electoral laws to increase fairness, including campaign finance reform and equal access for all candidates to state-owned media. The government had not yet enacted laws to comply with these recommendations.

Political Parties and Political Participation: Opposition parties reported that security agencies interfered with party operations and arbitrarily arrested and detained opposition leaders and intimidated and beat their supporters, ostensibly to prevent incitement to violence (see sections 1.a., 1.c., and 1.d.).

On January 5, local media reported that FM radio stations in the Teso subregion had denied access to at least five opposition presidential candidates during the election campaign. On January 18, local media and the NUP reported that police and military officers sealed off the party's secretariat, which according to the party prevented any staffers from accessing it, thereby disorganizing the party's preparations for a legal challenge to the election results. According to local media, a police spokesperson said, "It's not a siege but simply a security operation to neutralize threats that were detected." On the same day, police officers enforced a blockade at Kyagulanyi's home, preventing his lawyers from entering so he could not record a statement in preparation for his presidential election petition. Local media reported on February 16 that security officers had vacated the NUP secretariat's premises. Opposition political parties reported that security officers and executives at government-controlled media blocked opposition politicians from accessing media houses.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No law limits the participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. The law mandates affirmative action seats in parliament and in local government councils be reserved for women, youth, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities, and the government implemented the law effectively. On June 8, President Museveni appointed the country's first female prime minister, Robinah Nabbanja. Cultural factors, high costs, and sexual harassment, however, limited women's ability to run for political office. Female activists reported the official fees required to secure a nomination to run for elected office were prohibitively high and prevented most women from running for election. Activists reported violence and harassment committed by members of the security agencies discouraged women from turning up to cast their ballots, so many preferred to stay in the safety of their homes. Activists reported that the number of women legislators holding open seats dwindled because of the affirmative action policy, which reserved a legislative position for women in each district. They reported that internal political party processes locked women out of contesting for open seats, limiting them to affirmative action seats. Activists also reported that media coverage mocked and trivialized women candidates as well as perpetuated the inequality and subordination of women.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties of up to 12 years' imprisonment and confiscation of the convicted persons' property for official corruption. Nevertheless, transparency civil society organizations stated the government did not implement the law effectively, and there were numerous reports of government corruption during the year. Officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity, and many corruption cases remained pending for years.

Corruption: On September 1, parliament resolved that the auditor general carry out a forensic audit into four trillion shillings (\$1.1 billion) of government expenditure to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 since the financial year 2019-20, after members of parliament and the auditor general found numerous cases of “unauthorized diversion of funds, irregular use of direct procurements, procurements without signed contracts, late delivery of goods, and payment before receiving goods.” A parliament select committee found that the Ministry of Health’s accounting for funds spent in the financial year 2019-20 was questionable because the ministry’s records showed its expenditure exceeded the amount it received by 7 percent. On March 11, the auditor general reported that an audit into financial year 2019-20 expenditure showed that 25 government agencies spent 144 billion shillings (\$40.2 million) without adhering to procurement rules. The report added that 284 million shillings (\$79,200) in other government expenditure remained unaccounted for, that the Office of the Prime Minister lacked sufficient evidence to prove it delivered 56 billion shillings (\$15.6 million) worth of COVID-19 relief items, and that at least 18 percent of relief items distributed by the Office of the Prime Minister failed quality checks. The auditor general had not released details of the forensic audit by year’s end.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups operated with government restrictions. The president continued repeatedly to accuse civil society of accepting funding from foreign donors interested in destabilizing the country and directed the blockage of funding and suspension of activities for some prodemocracy and human rights organizations. Human rights activists reported that the government took measures to “decrease foreign participation and bleed civil society organizations” by lengthening the registration approval process and increasing the annual visa fees for expatriate workers to 10 times their previous amount. Human rights activists reported that local government authorities declined to respond to repeated requests for approval of license-renewal documents from the NGOs Chapter Four, Citizens Coalition for Electoral Democracy Uganda, and Western Ankole Civil Society Forum.

Environment and land rights conservationists reported that police harassed and arrested human rights defenders working to protect the environment and communities’ access to land. On January 31, conservationist William Amanzuru reported that police had summoned him for questioning and charged him with robbery after his community confiscated 11 million shillings worth (\$3,070) of charcoal. On May 24, police dropped their charges against Amanzuru.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The UHRC is the constitutionally mandated institution with quasi-judicial powers authorized to investigate allegations of human rights abuses, direct the release of detainees, and award compensation to abuse victims. The president appoints its board, consisting of a chairperson and five commissioners.

The UHRC pursues suspected human rights abusers, including in the military and police forces. It visits and inspects places of detention and holds private conferences with detainees on their conditions in custody. It investigates reports of human rights abuses, reports to parliament its annual findings, and recommends measures to improve the executive’s respect of human rights. The executive did not always implement UHRC recommendations. On July 16, the president appointed a chairperson and four commissioners to the UHRC whose absence since the death of the previous chairperson in 2019 had prevented the UHRC from presenting its human rights findings to parliament. Nevertheless, the UHRC made public statements prior to and after the appointment of these commissioners, raising concerns regarding human rights abuses such as extra judicial killings of suspects by police officers, excessive use of force while implementing COVID-19 restrictions, and harassment of journalists.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape of women, which is punishable by life imprisonment or death. The law does not address spousal rape. The law defines rape as “unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or a girl without her consent.” Men accused of raping men are tried under a section of the law that prohibits “carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature.” The law also criminalizes domestic violence and provides up to two years’ imprisonment for conviction.

Rape remained a common problem throughout the country, and the government did not effectively enforce the law. Local media reported numerous incidents of rape, often involving kidnapping and killings of women, but authorities were often unable to investigate and hold perpetrators accountable. Local media often reported that perpetrators of rape included persons in authority, such as religious leaders, local government officials, police and military officers, health-care workers,

and academic staff. According to local media and human rights activists, many rape survivors lacked faith in government institutions to bring their abusers to justice and declined to report the crime, while others remained silent to avoid stigmatization. Human rights activists and local media reported that, even when women reported cases of rape to police, officers blamed the women for causing the rape by dressing indecently, took bribes from the alleged perpetrators to stop the investigation and to pressure the survivors into withdrawing the cases, or simply dismissed the accusations and refused to record them. According to human rights activists, police personnel lacked the required skills for collection, preservation, and management of forensic evidence in sexual violence cases. Human rights activists also reported that some police stations lacked female officers on the staff, which discouraged rape survivors from reporting their cases. On March 16, local media reported that police in Moroto District arrested one of its officers, Moses Steven Ebu, on allegations of rape. According to local media, the survivor sought refuge at Camp Swahili Police Post after she was unable to find public transport home before curfew. Ebu allegedly raped her at the police post. On March 18, local media reported that police had arraigned Ebu in court and charged him with rape. The trial continued at year's end.

Human rights activists also noted that government restrictions on movement to combat COVID-19 made it difficult for survivors to report rape or access postexposure prophylaxis after rape. Local government officials, academics, and journalists reported that gender-based violence was common and worsened during restrictions to combat COVID-19. Human rights activists reported that the restrictions increased poverty for many households, which raised tensions and conflict in domestic settings, particularly violence against women. The activists also reported that during the June to July COVID-19 lockdown, some survivor support centers closed and rendered many survivors unable to access help. On September 1, local media reported that military officer Samuel Ojara shot and killed himself after he had shot and killed a 20-year-old woman identified as Sharon Okello in what the police stated was an attempted rape.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): The law prohibits FGM/C and establishes a maximum penalty of 10 years' imprisonment for convicted perpetrators, or life imprisonment if the victim dies; however, the government did not effectively enforce the law. According to the 2016 Demographics and Health Survey, 0.3 percent of the female population younger than age 50 had undergone FGM/C. Local media and government officials, however, reported that the practice was common among some communities along the eastern border with Kenya. Government officials reported that some parents and cultural leaders in the Karamoja subregion used the school closures due to COVID-19 to force teenage girls to undergo FGM/C, which led many girls to flee into neighboring Kenya. Local government leaders also reported that some cultural leaders in Amudat District traveled to Kenya on the pretext of celebrating the end-of-year December-January holiday season and subjected girls to FGM/C. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported that COVID-19 lockdowns exacerbated FGM/C incidents by enabling practitioners to carry out the practice in hiding. UNFPA also reported that the government had committed \$55,000 to interventions against FGM/C in the Sebei subregion. The resident district commissioner in Amudat District announced on February 25 that the government had recruited a network of informers in communities throughout the district who would strengthen surveillance and enforcement efforts against FGM/C. UNICEF reported that it was working with 20 young men married to women who did not undergo FGM/C as social ambassadors to convince communities that FGM/C was unnecessary.

Other Harmful Traditional Practices: According to local media and human rights activists, violence against widows was prevalent. The activists reported that widows in remote areas complained that their deceased husband's families forced them to marry their brothers-in-law to compensate for the bride price paid to their families. The law does not explicitly provide widows with the opportunity to consent before marrying their brothers-in-law. Local media also reported that many widows in remote areas experienced sexual violence at the hands of their deceased husband's family and lost their rights to property (see section 6, Discrimination).

Sexual Harassment: The law criminalizes sexual harassment and provides for penalties of up to 14 years' imprisonment, but authorities did not effectively enforce the law. Sexual harassment was a widespread problem in homes, schools, universities, workplaces, public transport, public spaces, media, and in the music and entertainment industry. Local media reported numerous incidents of senior executives, public servants in the legislature and judiciary, and music producers who demanded sexual favors from female subordinates in exchange for job retention, promotion, and nomination for official trips. On May 7, parliament called for the prosecution of philanthropist Bryan Kirumira, also known as Bryan White, after parliament's Committee on Human Rights found that he sexually harassed women he employed in his charity, the Bryan White Foundation. The committee found that the military and police provided Kirumira with protection, which intimidated survivors and deterred them from seeking justice. The public prosecutor had not brought any charges against Kirumira by year's end.

Reproductive Rights: There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

Human rights activists reported that although persons with disabilities had the right to access reproductive services, the absence of health workers with the ability to communicate with blind and deaf patients meant that many persons with disabilities did not receive all the information they needed regarding reproductive health services. LGBTQI+ activists reported that members of the community were able to provide informed consent before receiving reproductive health treatment. LGBTQI+ activists also reported that police officers carried out forced anal examinations against some members of the LGBTQI+ community (see section 1.c. and section 6, Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity). (See the Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) subsection for additional information.)

Local media and human rights activists reported that cultural practices in some remote areas impeded access to sexual and reproductive health services. On May 21, local media reported that some women in Amudat District complained that their husbands prevented them from accessing reproductive health services because they wanted to have as many children as possible. Human rights activists reported the COVID-19 lockdown led to closure of some reproductive health service providers and prevented many women from accessing reproductive health services. The activists also reported that women in remote areas where there were few health-care providers found it difficult to access reproductive health information. LGBTQI+ activists reported that some public health officials declined to provide health services, including reproductive health services, to LGBTQI+ persons.

Human rights activists reported that some police Family and Child Protection units often ran out of postexposure prophylaxis for rape survivors and many public health-care facilities lacked emergency contraception medication.

Maternal mortality was 375 deaths per 100,000 live births, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) and local civil society organizations. Media attributed the high rate to a lack of access to skilled medical care for pregnant women, a preference for traditional birth attendants over skilled medical workers, and unsafe abortions. Human rights activists reported that travel restrictions to combat COVID-19 prevented many women, especially in remote areas, from accessing neonatal and prenatal health care. According to the WHO, adolescent birth rates were high, at 111.4 per 1,000 girls for the period 2011 to 2020. According to human rights activists and the WHO, statutory rape, child sexual exploitation, a high rate of school dropouts that led to and was also caused by teenage pregnancies, limited knowledge of contraception among teenagers, and school closures due to COVID-19 countermeasures were among the causes.

There were social and cultural barriers related to menstruation and access to menstruation hygiene that impacted girls' ability to participate equally in society including many limits on girls' access to education. Local media reported many girls lacked access to menstrual hygiene materials, including sanitary towels. This caused many to suffer stigmatization and bullying, which led many to drop out of school. Local media and child rights activists reported that girls who became pregnant while in school almost always dropped out of school. According to child rights activists, public and private schools dismissed and declined to readmit girls who became pregnant while in school. On March 26, local media reported that the government had adopted a new policy directing that all girls who become pregnant while in school would undergo mandatory maternity leave at three months of the pregnancy and would return to school six months after delivery. The new policy also directed that a boy responsible for the pregnancy would simultaneously drop out of school until the girl returned. The government also advised that girls change school after giving birth to avoid stigmatization (see section 6, Children).

Discrimination: The law provides women the same legal status and rights as men, but the government did not enforce the law effectively. Human rights activists reported numerous cases of discrimination against women, including in divorce, employment, education, and owning or managing businesses and property. Many customary laws discriminate against women in adoption, marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Under customary laws in many areas, widowed women cannot own or inherit property or retain custody of their children. Traditional divorce law in many areas requires women to meet stricter evidentiary standards than men to prove adultery. In some ethnic groups, men can "inherit" the widows of their deceased brothers. The law does not recognize cohabiting relationships, and women involved in such relationships had no judicial recourse to protect their rights.

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The law prohibits discrimination and violence on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, origin, social or economic standing, political opinion, and disability, but the government did not enforce the law effectively. Opposition politicians and local media reported that security officers and vigilantes associated with the second deputy prime minister, General Moses Ali from the Madi ethnic community, continued harassing and evicting members of the Acholi community from disputed land in Apaa Village in the northern part of the country so he could establish a private game reserve. On August 11, local media reported that the military had arrested 48 individuals accused of attacking

Acholi residents in Apaa with bows and arrows and machetes and burning Acholi homes, before releasing 31 and handing 17 over to police. On August 13, President Museveni announced that he had set up a commission of inquiry to investigate the land dispute, but the commission had not shared its findings by year's end.

Indigenous Peoples

Some indigenous minorities continued to accuse the government of marginalization that excluded them from participating in decisions affecting their livelihood. Civil society organizations reported the government continued in its refusal to compensate the Batwa people, whom it displaced from lands it designated as forest reserves. On August 20, the Constitutional Court ruled that the government had "disadvantaged and marginalized" the Batwa community by evicting them from their native land without compensation. The Constitutional Court ordered a lower court to determine the Batwa community's due compensation and ordered the government to recognize that the Batwa had a lawful claim to the land and to compensate them within 12 months. On September 11, local media reported that the government had appealed the Constitutional Court's ruling to the Supreme Court, which had yet to hear the appeal by year's end.

Children

Birth Registration: The law accords citizenship to children born inside or outside the country if at least one parent or grandparent is a citizen at the time of birth. Abandoned children younger than age 18 with no known parents are considered citizens, as are children younger than 18 adopted by citizens.

The law requires citizens to register a birth within three months. Lack of birth registration generally did not result in denial of public services, although some primary schools, especially those in urban centers, required birth certificates for enrollment. Enrollment in public secondary schools, universities, and other tertiary institutions required birth certificates.

Education: The law provides for compulsory education through the completion of primary school by age 13, and the government provided tuition-free education in select public primary and secondary schools (ages six to 18 years). Parents, however, were required to provide lunch and schooling materials for their children, and many parents could not afford such expenses. Local media and civil society organizations reported that child, early, and forced marriages and teenage pregnancy led to a higher rate of school dropouts for girls than for boys (see section 6, Women). Local media, private school proprietors, opposition politicians, and activists reported that government efforts to provide virtual learning to children during a school closure as part of measures to fight COVID-19, including providing lessons on broadcast media and printing classwork in the newspapers, denied children from poor backgrounds the opportunity to learn as their families could not afford radios or printed materials. Opposition politicians and child rights activists also reported that some schools switched to online classes during the closure, which denied learning opportunities to children whose parents could not afford internet connections.

Child Abuse: The law prohibits numerous forms of child abuse and provides monetary fines, five years' imprisonment, or both for persons convicted of abusing children's rights. Victims' parents, however, often opted to settle cases out of court for a cash or in-kind payment. Corporal punishment in schools is illegal. The law also provides for protection of children from hazardous employment and harmful traditional practices, including child marriage and FGM/C. Despite the law, a pattern of child abuse existed in sexual assault, physical abuse, ritual killings, early marriage, FGM/C, child trafficking, infanticide, and child labor, among other abuses. Traditional healers (witch doctors) kidnapped and killed children to use their organs for ancestral worship. Child rights activists reported cases in which wealthy entrepreneurs and politicians paid traditional healers to sacrifice children to ensure their continued wealth and then bribed police officers to stop the investigations. Child rights activists reported that COVID-19-related school closures led to an increase in child abuse incidents in homes and communities, especially through the increased use of beatings as a disciplinary measure, child neglect, and child sexual exploitation. The government operated a tollfree helpline to which it encouraged survivors and witnesses of child abuse to call and report.

The Lord's Resistance Army, an armed group of Ugandan origin operating in the DRC, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic, continued to hold children against their will.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: The legal minimum age for marriage is 18, but authorities generally did not enforce this law. Child marriages were prevalent and became even more so during school closures introduced as a measure to address COVID-19. According to UNICEF in 2017, 40 percent of girls were married before age 18 and 10 percent were married before age 15. According to local media reports, local government officials blamed families and some community leaders for concealing child marriage cases, which they supported as a cultural practice. Numerous government officials in the central and local governments regularly joined efforts led by child rights activists and cultural leaders to speak out and sensitize communities against child marriages. District probation

officers at local governments also supported efforts led by child rights activists to rescue children from forced marriages and keep them in shelters before their gradual reintegration into communities.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits commercial sexual exploitation, the sale and procurement of sexual services, and practices related to child pornography. It sets the minimum age for consensual sex at 18 years. The law defines “statutory rape” as any sexual contact outside marriage with a child younger than 18, regardless of consent or age of the perpetrator. The government did not enforce the law effectively, however, and the problem was pervasive. Child rights activists reported that as many teenage students turned to online lessons after school closures, cases of online sexual exploitation increased. Local media and child rights activists also reported that despite bans on bars operating, some bar owners continued to operate clandestinely and exploited children in sex trafficking.

Infanticide or Infanticide of Children with Disabilities: Local media reported that intersex children were at high risk of infanticide and that some parents of children with disabilities abandoned them in the bush or threw them in pit latrines to die. Local media also reported numerous incidents of killings of children for use in ancestral worship. The law criminalizes infanticide or infanticide of children with disabilities, but authorities sporadically enforced the law.

Displaced Children: Local civil society organizations and media reported that poverty and famine drove families in the remote northeast Karamoja region to send many children to Kampala to find work and beg on the streets. Civil society organizations reported that traffickers often manipulated families in Karamoja to sell their children to traffickers for 50,000 shillings (\$13.90) with promises the children would obtain a good education or a profitable job. Instead, traffickers forced the children to beg on the streets of Kampala or other major cities and gave them almost none of what they earned. Kampala City authorities worked with civil society organizations to return Karamojong street children to their families, but often the families soon returned the children to the streets because families partly depended on the children’s collections to maintain their households. Local media and child rights activists also reported increased numbers of children living on the streets in other towns, such as Mbale, Lira, and Gulu, where a lack of rehabilitation facilities frustrated local government efforts to remove the children from the streets.

Institutionalized Children: Police announced on November 22 that they had shut down several children’s shelters where they rescued more than 90 children whom ISIS-DRC supporters were attempting to radicalize.

International Child Abductions: The country is not a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State’s *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

Anti-Semitism

The Jewish population had approximately 2,000 members centered in Mbale District, in the eastern part of the country. There were no reports of anti-Semitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Organ Harvesting

Police, local media, and activists reported that organized criminal groups carried out organ harvesting. Police reported that some workers who signed up with labor recruitment companies to work in the Middle East and Gulf State countries had their organs, especially kidneys and liver, harvested.

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities could not access education and health services on an equal basis with others. According to disability rights activists, persons with disabilities lacked equitable access to public buildings and transportation. They reported that many public schools, hospitals, and courts of law, among other public buildings, lacked ramps to enable access for persons with disabilities. The law provides for access on an equal basis to education, employment, health services, information, communications, buildings, transportation, and the judicial system for persons with disabilities, but the government did not effectively enforce the law. After criticism from persons with disabilities, the government’s information office, Uganda Media Centre, during the year employed a sign language interpreter whenever public officers used the office to make official communications.

Local media reported that some local government officials harassed persons with disabilities. On September 8, local media reported that local government officials at Rukungiri District evicted persons with disabilities from their land to build an industrial park and relocated them to a plot of land with hilly terrain, which they found difficult to access. The Rukungiri district chief administrative officer dismissed the claims and instead accused some persons with disabilities of trying to steal the contested land.

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental disabilities. Local media and activists for persons with disabilities reported that persons with disabilities experienced social prejudice and discrimination in social service delivery and in access to public spaces. Disability rights activists reported government requirements for every person to wear a face mask as part of its public health regulations to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 discriminated against deaf persons, who needed sign language – often accompanied by mouthing words – to communicate.

Local media reported that some local government officials in Masaka City demanded kickbacks from persons with disabilities in order to include them as beneficiaries of a livelihood fund. According to local media, in 2020 the government created a fund to provide five million shillings (\$1,410) in seed capital grants to groups of persons with disabilities, but some government officials demanded as much as 70 percent of the total in kickbacks. The Masaka resident city commissioner instructed police to investigate the allegations, but police had not released their findings by year's end.

According to the latest Ministry of Education statistics, 2 percent of elementary school students were children with disabilities while the rate in secondary schools was 0.6 percent. Local media reported some parents of children with disabilities hid them from the public out of shame, while some physically restrained their children by tethering them to tree trunks.

Local civil society organizations reported the government neither ran any support programming for persons with albinism nor tried to establish the number of those with albinism or their concerns. Local media also reported that persons with albinism complained that some government officials left out persons with albinism when selecting beneficiaries to receive farming inputs, such as seedlings and animals, as part of official agricultural subsidy programs.

While the law gives persons with disabilities the right to elect members of their community as local government and legislative representatives, some candidates reported that late delivery of voting materials as well as missing voter registers on polling day led to delays, which frustrated community members and discouraged them from voting.

HIV and AIDS Social Stigma

Although the law prohibits discrimination against persons with HIV and AIDS, discrimination and stigma were common and inhibited these persons from obtaining treatment and support. Local civil society organizations reported the stigma resulted from limited public knowledge regarding the methods of HIV transmission as well as “the belief that living with HIV is shameful.” Civil society organizations reported that stigma pushed persons with HIV to exclude themselves from social services and employment opportunities, including care programs. Local media and civil society organizations reported numerous incidents of parents who abandoned children with HIV and of persons, particularly men, who abandoned spouses with HIV. Police, the prisons service, and the military regularly refused to recruit persons with HIV and AIDS, claiming their bodies would be too weak for the rigorous training and subsequent deployment. According to local media, most employers declined to employ persons with HIV as domestic workers.

In cooperation with the government, international and local NGOs sponsored public awareness campaigns to eliminate the stigma of HIV and AIDS. Government and HIV and AIDS counselors encouraged the population to test for and share information concerning HIV and AIDS with their partners and family. Persons with HIV and AIDS formed support groups to promote awareness in their communities.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

LGBTQI+ persons faced discrimination, legal restrictions, harassment, violence, and intimidation. Authorities incited, perpetrated, and tolerated violence against LGBTQI+ individuals and blocked some meetings organized by LGBTQI+ persons and activists. On May 31, police officers raided the Happy Family Youth Uganda LGBTQI+ shelter in Wakiso District outside Kampala and arrested 44 individuals – 36 men and 8 women – celebrating what was alleged to be a gay engagement ceremony. Amateur video footage recorded at the scene showed a plainclothes police officer verbally abusing and mocking the detainees. Police announced that it would charge the individuals with “a negligent act likely to spread an infectious disease” for disobeying COVID-19 restrictions. On June 1, however, a police doctor subjected some of the detainees to forced anal examinations. On June 7, a court released the detainees on bail, and the court dismissed the case in November.

Consensual same-sex sexual conduct is criminalized according to a colonial-era law that criminalizes “carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature” and provides for a penalty of up to life imprisonment. Attempts to “commit unnatural offences,” as laid out in the law, are punishable with seven years’ imprisonment. The government occasionally enforced the law.

Local media and LGBTQI+ organizations reported that some hospitals and religious institutions offered and subjected LGBTQI+ persons to conversion therapy. Local media also reported that intersex children were at a high risk of infanticide.

Although the law does not restrict freedoms of expression or peaceful assembly for those speaking out in support of the human rights of LGBTQI+ persons, the government severely restricted such rights.

The law does not prohibit discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons in housing, employment, nationality laws, or access to government services.

Local civil society organizations reported that public and private health-care services turned away LGBTQI+ persons who sought medication and some health-care providers led community members to beat LGBTQI+ persons who sought health care. Local civil society organizations reported that some LGBTQI+ persons needed to pay bribes to public health-care providers before they received treatment.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

Mob violence was prevalent. Communities often resorted to mob violence due to a lack of confidence in police and the judiciary to deliver justice. They attacked and killed persons suspected of robbery, homicide, rape, theft, ritual sacrifice, and witchcraft, among other crimes. Mobs often beat, lynched, burned, and otherwise brutalized their victims. On August 30, local media reported that a mob in Fort Portal Town killed a man by cutting off his head after they found him with a stolen chicken. Police stated they would investigate the killing but did not reveal any findings by year’s end.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides for workers, except members of the armed forces, to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The Ministry of Gender, Labor, and Social Development (Ministry of Labor) must register unions before they may engage in collective bargaining.

The law allows unions to conduct activities without interference, prohibits antiunion discrimination by employers, and provides for reinstatement of workers dismissed for union activity. The law also empowers the minister of labor and labor officers to refer disputes to the Industrial Court if initial mediation and arbitration attempts fail. The law, however, gives government labor officers power to declare industrial actions illegal if a given officer has taken steps to resolve the labor dispute in question through conciliation. In July new legislation came into force, strengthening the powers of the Industrial Court to the level of the High Court and introducing measures including increasing the numbers of judges in the court and reducing the number of judges required to make a quorum. The NGO Platform for Labor Action (PLA) reported that the law was already being implemented with positive results, and cases were moving through the Industrial Court faster than before.

The government did not effectively enforce the law. Civil society organizations stated the Ministry of Labor did not allocate sufficient funds to hire, train, and equip labor officers to enforce labor laws effectively. Employers who violated a worker’s right to form and join a trade union or bargain collectively faced penalties that were not commensurate with similar abuses. Administrative and judicial procedures were subject to lengthy delays and appeals. The National Organization of Trade Unions (NOTU) reported that there were several instances of violent confrontations in companies where employers laid off staff without severance benefits.

The government and employers generally did not respect the constitutionally guaranteed rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. Antiunion discrimination occurred, and labor activists accused several private companies of deterring employees from joining unions. NOTU reported that some companies that had previously allowed unionization used the economic conditions of COVID-19 to deny collective bargaining. In May medical interns under their umbrella body Federation for Uganda Medical Interns went on strike regarding low allowances, refusing to work for a week before the government agreed to review their request for increased allowances. During the strike, the Ministry of Health told interns to either continue with their internships as they waited for increased allowances or leave the program altogether.

NOTU and the PLA continued to report employers laying off workers during the COVID-19 lockdown period. The PLA reported that most cases it was handling during the year involved unpaid wages after termination of employment, while individuals also struggled to travel to the PLA to report their cases due to transport restrictions and the curfew.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children, but does not prohibit prison labor. The law states that prison labor constitutes forced labor only if a worker is “hired out to, or placed at the disposal of, a private individual, company, or association.” The government did not effectively enforce the law. Human rights activists reported that it lacked the means to inspect places of concern through a limited number of labor inspectors and inadequate financing for their operations. Those convicted of using forced labor are subject to minor penalties that were not commensurate with those for similar abuses.

Local civil society organizations and media reported that many citizens working overseas, particularly in the Gulf States, became victims of forced labor. Civil society organizations reported that traffickers and legitimate recruitment companies continued to send mainly female jobseekers to Persian Gulf countries where many employers treated workers as indentured servants, withheld pay and travel documents, and subjected them to other harsh conditions indicative of forced labor. With borders and the international airport reopened from October 2020 after a five-month closure, media and local NGOs reported large numbers of young citizens – especially women – traveling to Gulf states for work.

Also see the Department of State’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

Although the law purports to prohibit the worst forms of child labor, it allows children as young as 12 years of age to do some types of hazardous work under adult supervision. Children are required to attend school until age 13. This standard makes children ages 13 to 15 vulnerable to child labor because they are not required to attend school but are not legally permitted to do most types of work. The law bans the employment of children between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. and provides for occupational safety and health restrictions for children. The government did not effectively enforce the law, particularly in the informal sector where most children worked. Penalties were small and not commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as kidnapping. The government prosecuted 33 cases of child labor during the year. Most employers did not keep required registries of child workers or comply with the requirement for regular medical exams of child workers. Laws against child labor were not enforced in the informal sector, where most children worked.

The Uganda Bureau of Statistics reported in April that child labor rates increased due to widespread job loss, restrictions on movement during lockdowns, and the majority of 15 million school-going children being out of school since the March 2020 closure of schools. The government child helpline, media, and NGOs continued to report cases of child trafficking, including for labor and child sexual exploitation (see section 6, Children).

Research by Human Rights Watch and the country’s Initiative for Social and Economic Rights found that during the pandemic children were injured by debris and sharp objects as they performed hazardous work in stone quarries and sugarcane fields, with many responding that they worked so they could help their families buy food following a loss of income.

Local civil society organizations reported that children worked in fishing, gold and sand mining, cattle herding, grasshopper collecting, truck loading, street vending, begging, scrap collecting, street hawking, stone quarrying, brick making, road construction and repair, car washing, domestic services, service work (restaurants, bars, shops), cross-border smuggling, and commercial farming (including the production of cocoa, coffee, corn, tea, tobacco, rice, sugarcane, vanilla, and rice). Local civil society organizations and media reported poverty led children to drop out of school to work on commercial farms, while some parents took their children along to work in artisanal mines to supplement family incomes. These organizations also reported that some children who had started working during the lockdown did not return to school when schools briefly reopened. Local civil society organizations reported that orphaned children sought work due to the absence of parental authority.

Local NGOs reported that children who worked as artisanal gold miners were exposed to mercury, and many were unaware of the medium- to long-term effects of the exposure. They believed they were compelled to continue working due to poverty and a lack of employment alternatives. Children also suffered injuries in poorly dug mine shafts that often collapsed.

Also see the Department of Labor’s *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, religion, political opinion, national origin or citizenship, social origin, refugee or stateless status, disability, age, language, and HIV or communicable disease status, but it does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

The government did not effectively enforce the law. Penalties were not commensurate with those for similar abuses and were seldom applied. LGBTQI+ persons faced social and legal discrimination in hiring and employment. Women's salaries lagged those of men, and women faced discrimination in employment and hiring, and broad economic discrimination (see section 6, Women). Persons with disabilities faced discrimination in hiring and access to the workplace.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The law technically provides for a national minimum wage much lower than the government's official poverty income level. This minimum wage standard was never implemented, and the level had not changed since 1984. In 2019 parliament passed a law that created mechanisms for determining and reviewing the minimum wage per sector, but parliament reported in 2019 that the president had declined to sign the bill, arguing that the existing law was sufficient.

The maximum legal workweek is 48 hours, and the maximum workday is 10 hours. The law provides that the workweek may be extended to 56 hours per week, including overtime, with the employee's consent. An employee may work more than 10 hours in a single day if the average number of hours over a period of three weeks does not exceed 10 hours per day or 56 hours per week. For employees who work beyond 48 hours in a single week, the law requires employers to pay a minimum of 1.5 times the employee's normal hourly rate for the overtime hours, and twice the employee's normal hourly rate for work on public holidays. For every four months of continuous employment, an employee is entitled to seven days of paid annual leave.

The Ministry of Labor and local government labor offices are responsible for enforcement of wage and hour laws. Inspection was insufficient to enforce compliance. In addition to inspectors, the country has labor officers who have the mandate to conduct inspections of worksites, focusing on standards of employment and workers' rights more broadly. Labor officers have the authority to make unannounced inspections, initiate sanctions, instigate prosecutions of repeat offenders through the Industrial Court, and close worksites. With 135 labor officers covering more than 130 districts, the number of labor officers combined with the 21 labor inspectors was insufficient for the size of the country's workforce, which included more than 15 million workers. Labor officers often depended on complainants and local civil society organizations to pay for their travel to inspection sites. This travel was impacted by COVID-19 lockdown travel restrictions. The PLA reported that many of the labor officers were dual-hatted as social workers and did labor-related work only when a complainant reported an abuse.

Authorities did not effectively enforce labor laws on wages and hours, and penalties were not commensurate with those for similar abuses. The legal minimum wage was never implemented, and civil society organizations reported that most domestic employees worked all year without leave. Wage arrears were common in both the public and private sectors. The PLA reported that abuses of standard wages and overtime pay were common in the manufacturing, education, private security, and transport sectors.

Occupational Safety and Health: The law establishes appropriate occupational safety and health standards and regulations for all workers. The law authorizes labor inspectors under the Ministry of Labor's Department of Occupational Safety and Health to access and examine any workplace unannounced, issue fines, and mediate some labor disputes. While the law allows workers to remove themselves from situations that endanger their health or safety without jeopardizing their employment, legal protection for such workers was ineffective. According to the PLA and NOTU, most workers were unaware of their employers' responsibility to ensure a safe working environment, and many did not challenge unsafe working conditions, due to fear of losing their jobs. In June, during a peak in reported COVID-19 cases in which health workers were particularly at risk, staff in one health facility participated in a week-long strike until hospital administrators supplied them with personal protective equipment.

Inspections for occupational safety and health were conducted by the same inspectors under the same authorities as wage and hours. Authorities did not effectively enforce labor laws on occupational safety and health, and penalties were not commensurate with those for similar abuses. Workers in the mining, construction, and textile sectors faced hazardous and exploitive working conditions. The PLA reported that abuses of safety and health standards were common in the manufacturing, education, private security, and transport sectors.

Informal Sector: According to 2017 government statistics, which were the most recent available, the informal sector employed up to 85 percent of the labor force primarily in agriculture, domestic work, construction, and transport. Labor officials reported that labor laws did not protect workers in the informal economy, including many domestic and agricultural workers. Live-in domestic workers were at increased risk of poor working conditions, forced to work longer hours without compensation in homes during lockdown periods, often not provided with medical care, and subject to reduced wages. The president declined to sign amendments to the employment law passed in April that would expand protections for domestic workers and other informal-sector workers and require employers to establish measures to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace.

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Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and
Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien
T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583
F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
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F.A.Q.
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