

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### Uganda Monthly Briefing January 2021

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#### Uganda Summary 12 January 2021

***Ugandans vote on 14 January in what is turning out to be the most violent election in the country's history. The three-month campaign for presidential and parliamentary polls has been characterised by mass arrests, torture and imprisonment of opposition supporters. The Media Council of Uganda has revoked all practising journalists' licences and ordered fresh registration in what observers describe as a further attempt to stifle the press. Kenya has moved to resolve a two-year trade war with Uganda by allowing importation of 90,000 metric tonnes of sugar.***

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#### Uganda votes in most violent election in its history

**Ugandans** vote on 14 January in what is turning out to be the most violent election in the country's history.<sup>1</sup> The three-month campaign period, which officially ended on 12 January ahead of the presidential and parliamentary polls, has been characterised by arrests, torture and imprisonment of the opposition supporters.<sup>2</sup> Incumbent president **Yoweri Tibuhaburwa Museveni** (1986-present), who is seeking his sixth term in office, has deployed the military and police to intimidate and arrest opposition supporters around the country.<sup>3</sup>

Armed men in plain clothes have raided homes and businesses, arresting several people and holding them in unknown locations on suspicion of planning to cause insurrection after the election.<sup>4</sup> Independent online local news portal **Nile Post** quotes spokesperson for main presidential challenger **Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu's National Unity Party (NUP)**, **Joel Ssenyonyi**, as saying that several NUP supporters have been arrested at night and their whereabouts are unknown:

*"Continuously, people are being picked at night from their homes in various parts of **Kampala** and beyond, if you think anybody has committed a crime, take him to court."*<sup>5</sup>

The on-going arrests, torture and detention by security forces as well as threats by opposition political party supporters to protest on the streets if the elections are rigged, have created fear among residents in the capital, Kampala, forcing many to leave the city and take refuge in their villages.<sup>6</sup> The **United States Embassy** in Uganda issued a security alert on 8 January urging American citizens living in Uganda to take precaution as demonstrations are likely to remain common and may escalate to violence even after the elections.

*"Clashes at these gatherings and outbreaks of violence have occurred before, during, and after past general elections in Uganda. Police routinely use force, including tear gas, rubber bullets, and live ammunition, to disperse protests. Demonstrations throughout Uganda are likely to remain common and may escalate to violence. U.S. citizens should avoid demonstrations and crowds and take proper precautions against the spread of COVID-19."*<sup>7</sup>

The magnitude of the violence exhibited during the campaigns has attracted international condemnation.<sup>8</sup> **United Kingdom (UK)**-based non-governmental organisation **Amnesty**

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<sup>1</sup> Source DW, 20 Dec 2020

<sup>2</sup> Source UN Human Rights, 8 Jan 2021

<sup>3</sup> Source Uganda analyst

<sup>4</sup> Source Daily Monitor, 29 Dec 2020

<sup>5</sup> Source Nile Post, 25 Nov 2020

<sup>6</sup> Source DW, 30 Dec 2020

<sup>7</sup> Source US Embassy press release, 8 Jan 2021

<sup>8</sup> Source, analyst, Uganda

**International's** regional director for **East and Southern Africa, Deprose Muchena**, says perpetrators of the election violence must be brought to justice:<sup>9</sup>

*"With election day fast approaching, it is imperative that the Ugandan authorities reverse the persistent use of excessive force by the security forces, arbitrary arrests and detention and attacks on journalists. Authorities must ensure that suspected perpetrators are brought to justice and that victims are granted access to justice and effective remedies."*<sup>10</sup>

A group of independent **United Nations (UN)** human rights experts on 5 January also called on Ugandan authorities to end the arrest, detention and judicial harassment of political opponents, civil society leaders and human rights defenders. The concerns come amid an uptick in violence ahead of the presidential election and include reports of the death of Kyagulanyi's bodyguard, along with injuries sustained by three journalists hit by tear gas canisters on 3 January.<sup>11</sup>

*"We are gravely concerned by the election-related violence, the excessive use of force by security personnel, as well as the increasing crackdown on peaceful protesters, political and civil society leaders and human rights defenders."*

The UN experts urged the authorities to drop all charges against those who have been arrested during the election campaign period and to put an immediate end to judicial intimidation of human rights defenders, journalists, civil society leaders, peaceful protesters, political parties and those who express dissent.

### **Media council orders fresh accreditation of journalists**

The **Media Council of Uganda (MCU)**, the body charged with the regulation of the media in Uganda, on 10 December revoked all practising licences from journalists and ordered fresh registration in what observers say is an attempt to further stifle the press.<sup>12</sup> The MCU gave all practising journalists a seven-day ultimatum starting on 10 December to register or risk being denied access to cover the 2021 elections and other public functions.<sup>13</sup>

The move drew condemnation from local and international civil society and rights groups due to the timing of the directive issued only a month before polling day.<sup>14</sup> The **International Press Institute (IPI)**, a global network of editors, media executives and leading journalists for press freedom, criticised the order, which also targeted foreign journalists by stipulating new conditions, including a requirement to obtain a letter from the **Interpol** office of their respective countries and give details of their employers.<sup>15</sup> The IPI said the government is stifling independent, critical coverage of the election campaign, which will deprive Ugandans of the opportunity to make an informed choice in the upcoming election:

*"The new regulation not just undermines press freedom it also violates all democratic norms. The government should immediately withdraw the new rules and allow journalists to cover the campaign and the elections."*<sup>16</sup>

Journalists in Uganda similarly expressed fear that the new directive would prevent critical coverage of the campaign as well as the general elections.<sup>17</sup> The **Foreign Correspondents Association of Uganda (FCAU)** issued a statement on 11 December describing the media council's action as "*an attempt at intimidation which has no place in a democratic society run by the rule of law*":

<sup>9</sup> Amnesty International, 14 Dec 2020

<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International, 14 Dec 2020

<sup>11</sup> UN, 8 Jan 2021

<sup>12</sup> The Independent Magazine, 10 Dec 2020

<sup>13</sup> The Independent Magazine, 10 Dec 2020

<sup>14</sup> Source, Uganda analyst

<sup>15</sup> The International Press Institute, 11 Dec 2020

<sup>16</sup> The International Press Institute, 11 Dec 2020

<sup>17</sup> The International Press Institute, 11 Dec 2020

*“This move comes as journalists from major international outlets are being barred from entering the country and some already here are being forcibly removed by plain clothes state security officers, despite complying with all accreditation and immigration requirements as advised by the Ugandan government.”<sup>18</sup>*

**Canada-based CBC News** reported on 30 November that Ugandan authorities had deported three Canadian journalists who had come to Uganda to cover the elections. CBC News claimed the three journalists – **Margret Evans, Lily Martin** and **Jean-Francois Bisson** – had met all the requirements for foreign journalists reporting in Uganda.<sup>19</sup>

Three organisations – the **Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda**, the **East African Media Institute** and the **Centre for Public Interest Law** – filed an application in the **Constitutional Court** on 5 January seeking a temporary injunction restraining the Media Council of Uganda from enforcing its guidelines of accrediting journalists to cover the 2021 elections.<sup>20</sup> As of 11 January, hundreds of local and foreign journalists were still waiting for accreditation.

### **Uganda and Kenya resolve trade war**

**Kenya** has moved to resolve a two-year trade war with Uganda by allowing importation of 90,000 metric tonnes of sugar.<sup>21</sup> The announcement is good news for Ugandan farmers as well as the government, which saw its trade deficit increase by \$1.2 trillion from \$2.4 trillion in 2017/2018 to \$3.7 trillion in the 2018/2019 financial year.<sup>22</sup> Kenya had in 2020 intensified its crackdown on Ugandan products by blocking importation of goods such as poultry, sugar and milk in a move, coupled with the closure of the border with **Rwanda**, that has affected the livelihoods of more than 100,000 farmers in Uganda.<sup>23</sup>

Uganda’s deputy secretary to the treasury, **Patrick Ocailap**, says the Kenyan government has agreed with immediate effect to allow the entry of 20,000 metric tonnes of Ugandan sugar while the rest will be cleared following a verification process.<sup>24</sup> The announcement followed a meeting on 18 December between a Ugandan delegation led by Ocailap and a Kenyan team led by principal secretary of the ministry of trade, ambassador **Johnson Weru**. Uganda-based **Independent Magazine** quoted Ocailap as saying that the meeting agreed that Kenya will allow duty free sugar from Uganda of up to 90,000 metric tonnes per year on condition of submission of proof that the sugar is wholly obtained from Ugandan factories.

*“It was also agreed that the Kenyan government would immediately post trade facilitation officers within Uganda to gather information, monitor and confirm that Uganda exports into Kenya are wholly obtained from Ugandan factories. Uganda’s government was also officially tasked to notify Kenya of its decision to abolish bonded warehousing of sugar and provide verifiable evidence which would help in reducing smuggling and re-packaging of non-East Africa originated sugar.”<sup>25</sup>*

The two countries resolved that Kenya’s agriculture ministry, through its **Agriculture and Food Authority**, would fully audit the register of permit holders with a view to establishing fully authorised import/trade permits and weed out inappropriate ones by the end of December.<sup>26</sup>

Kenya banned importation of Ugandan sugar in a 22 July directive, arguing that sugar is imported into Uganda from outside the East African region and later re-bagged for export as though it originated

<sup>18</sup> The International Press Institute, 11 Dec 2020

<sup>19</sup> The Independent Magazine, 11 Dec 2020

<sup>20</sup> Human Rights Network for Journalists, 5 Jan 2021

<sup>21</sup> Xinhua, 27 Dec 2020

<sup>22</sup> Trade Mark East Africa Report

<sup>23</sup> Daily Monitor, December 8 2020

<sup>24</sup> The Independent Magazine, 25 Dec 2020

<sup>25</sup> The Independent Magazine, 25 Dec 2020

<sup>26</sup> The Independent Magazine, 25 Dec 2020

from Uganda.<sup>27</sup> Tanzania had also in 2019 banned Ugandan sugar traders from its market, claiming that they were importing cheap sugar from Kenya and **Brazil**, before repackaging and exporting it to Tanzania.<sup>28</sup> Tanzania reached an understanding with Uganda in April by allowing importation of 20,000 metric tonnes of Ugandan sugar.<sup>29</sup> **Uganda Sugar Manufacturers Association (USMA)** chairman **Jim Kabeho** noted in July that Uganda's sugar sector was "in crisis", grappling with stockpiles of about 150,000 tonnes of sugar.<sup>30</sup>

## Planner

14 Jan 2021 (**Uganda**) Presidential elections

## Chronology

11 Jan 2021 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Daily Monitor*. **United States**-based social media platform **Facebook** closes several accounts belonging to Ugandan government officials it accuses of seeking to manipulate public debate ahead of 14 January elections;

10 Jan 2021 **Washington (USA)** *Daily Monitor*. The **United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR)** raises a red flag over rising human rights violation cases in Uganda ahead of presidential and parliamentary elections slated for 14 January;

9 Jan 2021 **Berlin (Germany)** *DW*. Ugandan opposition leader **Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu** (also known as **Bobi Wine**) calls on the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** to investigate Uganda's president and senior officials for alleged human rights abuses;

8 Jan 2021 **Washington (US)** *UN*. **UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR)** urges **Ugandan** authorities to ensure 14 January elections are free and peaceful, noting the arrest of opposition candidates and their supporters is among several "worrying" developments ahead of the vote;

7 Jan 2021 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Aljazeera*. Police confront popular opposition presidential candidate **Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu** (also known as **Bobi Wine**) during an online news conference;

5 Jan 2021 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Nile Post*. Catholic bishops in Uganda under their umbrella body, the **Uganda Episcopal Conference (UEC)**, warn police against inviting the army into the management of elections;

4 Jan 2021 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Daily Monitor*. The health ministry announces that Uganda will access the **AstraZeneca Covid-19** vaccine based on available evidence and recommendations of the **Scientific Advisory Committee**;

3 Jan 2021 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Nile Post*. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) charged with helping urban refugees caution refugees against involving themselves in current partisan political campaigns to avoid harassment by the different political party groups;

2 Jan 2021 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Daily Monitor*. **National Unity Platform** presidential candidate **Robert Kyagulanyi** alias **Bobi Wine** launches **U Vote**, an app he says will help platform members to tally their votes during the 14 January presidential election;

1 Jan 2021 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Daily Monitor*. President **Yoweri Museveni** says he is still investigating circumstances under which security personnel shot and killed former national boxing champion **Isaac Ssenyange** alias **Zebra Mando**;

30 Dec 2020 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Daily Monitor*. Kampala Police have started investigating circumstances under which former national boxing team captain **Zebra Ssenyange** alias **Mando** was gunned down at around 1am on 30 December;

<sup>27</sup> Xinhua, 27 Dec 2020

<sup>28</sup> The East African, 27 Dec 2020

<sup>29</sup> CGTN, 27 Dec 2020

<sup>30</sup> Daily Monitor, 23 Jul 2020

29 Dec 2020 **Kampala (Uganda)** *BBC*. **United Nations** human rights experts have called on Uganda to drop charges against activists and opposition supporters arrested ahead of January's presidential election;

28 Dec 2020 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Daily Monitor*. **National Unity Platform (NUP)** presidential candidate **Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu** alias **Bobi Wine** suspends his campaign schedule in **Lwengo** and **Bukomansimbi** following the shooting of a journalist on his campaign trail;

27 Dec 2020 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Aljazeera*. A bodyguard for opposition leader **Bobi Wine** is killed and two journalists injured amid violent confrontations between security forces and Bobi Wine supporters;

26 Dec 2020 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Daily Monitor*. **Electoral Commission** suspends all campaigning for 14 January presidential polls in the capital and 10 highly-populated districts, citing **coronavirus** risks;

24 Dec 2020 **Kampala (Uganda)** *The Guardian*. Police charge prominent human rights lawyer **Nicholas Opiyo** with money laundering and Kampala magistrates remand him in custody until 28 December;

23 Dec 2020 **Kampala (Uganda)** *The Independent*. The government toughens conditions for foreign journalists who intend to cover the 14 January general elections, including a requirement for temporary working permits and a special pass;

22 Dec 2020 **Nairobi (Kenya)** *HRW*. Non-governmental organisation **Human Rights Watch** claims that thousands of voters in **Apa** village may be unable to vote in **Uganda's** 14 January elections if authorities do not take urgent steps to update the voters' register;

21 Dec 2020 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Daily Monitor*. Police say **Justine Namambo**, whom security personnel shot and injured in Mukono District during political protests that erupted on 18 November after the arrest of opposition **National Unity Platform** presidential candidate **Bobi Wine**, will be taken to **India** for further treatment;

20 Dec 2020 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Daily Monitor*. **Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF)** soldiers arrest 13 **Sudanese** in **Kitgum District** after they crossed into Uganda territory, allegedly "*with intent to cause havoc*";

19 Dec 2020 **Kampala (Uganda)** *The Independent*. Independent presidential candidate General **Henry Tumukunde** vows to bring an end to the 35-year rule of President **Yoweri Museveni**;

17 Dec 2020 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Daily Monitor*. President **Yoweri Museveni's** assistant private secretary, **Carolyn Kembabazi**, is remanded to **Luzira Prison** after police charged her with giving false information to an **Electoral Commission** human resource officer;

16 Dec 2020 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Xinhua*. The education ministry extends schools' opening date for finalists and learners in candidate classes until 18 January due to the scheduled general elections;

15 Dec 2020 **Kampala (Uganda)** *Africa news*. **Uganda Communications Commission (UCC)** requests United States-based technology company **Google** to shut down at least 14 channels for allegedly mobilising riots;

### About Africa Risk Consulting:

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