



REPORT ON CIVIL LIBERTIES VIOLATIONS IN UGANDA

July to September 2025

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We further acknowledge the vital support and partnership of key civil society organizations to which cases were referred for redress and assistance.

Finally, we extend our gratitude to the journalists, digital platforms, and community-based information networks whose reporting and updates contributed significantly to the documentation of these events. Their coverage has played a crucial role in raising awareness and fostering public discourse on human rights concerns in Uganda.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Between July and September 2025, Uganda witnessed a troubling escalation in civil liberties violations, marked by targeted crackdowns on dissent, arbitrary detentions, and systemic suppression of civic freedoms. This report emerges from a frontline monitoring initiative led by Justice Access Point (JAP), aimed at documenting these infringements with evidentiary precision and ethical resolve. Grounded in constitutional guarantees and international human rights norms, the findings illuminate not only the scale of abuse but also the resilience of communities resisting civic erasure.

Through a multi-pronged framework combining field observation, rapid response, and triangulated data validation, this report offers a sobering account of the state of personal liberty, freedom of expression, assembly, and association across Uganda. It also surfaces the structural barriers—disappearances, restricted access, and retaliatory threats—that continue to obstruct justice and accountability. In doing so, it calls for urgent redress, institutional reform, and solidarity with those whose voices remain silenced.

Objectives

This report seeks to achieve the following core objectives:

 Record Violations Jul-Sep 2025	01	Document Violations of Civil Liberties —Systematically record incidents of repression, arbitrary detention, and suppression of fundamental freedoms across Uganda between July and September 2025.
 Analyze Patterns	02	Analyze Patterns and Drivers of Abuse —Identify recurring trends, geographic hotspots, and institutional actors implicated in the erosion of freedom of expression, assembly, association, and personal liberty.
 Amplify Voices	03	Amplify Affected Voices and Community Resilience —Center testimonies of victims, civic actors, and community leaders to foreground lived experiences and grassroots resistance to civic erasure.
 Inform Reform	04	Inform Policy and Legal Reform —Provide evidence-based insights to guide legislative, judicial, and administrative reforms aimed at safeguarding civil liberties and strengthening accountability mechanisms.
 Power Advocacy	05	Support Advocacy and Strategic Engagement —Equip civil society, media, and international partners with credible data and analysis to advance coordinated advocacy, protective interventions, and solidarity actions.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This report employs a multi-pronged framework to document and analyze civil liberties violations across Uganda. The approach integrates systematic field observation, targeted documentation, and rapid intervention to ensure evidentiary rigor and timely support for affected individuals.

2.1 Monitoring Framework

Between July and September 2025, a dedicated team of monitors tracked violations in four key domains:



Monitors operated across multiple districts using structured observation tools and standardized incident reporting templates to ensure consistent and comparable data. Their work was guided by constitutional benchmarks and international human rights standards.

2.2 Rapid Response Mechanism

Justice Access Point (JAP) deployed a Rapid Response Team (RRT) to address urgent violations. The RRT conducted real-time verification, facilitated legal referrals, and provided community-based support—particularly in cases of arbitrary detention, suppression of peaceful protest, and threats to civic actors. This mechanism enabled swift documentation and harm mitigation while reinforcing accountability pathways.

2.3 Data Collection and Validation

Primary Data: Field reports, witness testimonies, and interviews with victims and community leaders.

Secondary Data: Legal documents, media coverage, and prior human rights assessments.

Triangulation was used to validate findings and minimize bias. Media-reported incidents were systematically tracked and documented.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

All engagements adhered to principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and trauma-sensitive inquiry. Monitors and RRT members received training in ethical documentation and risk mitigation, especially in politically volatile contexts.

2.5 Limitations

Restricted access to detention sites, fear of retaliation, and selective media coverage posed challenges to comprehensive documentation. Additional constraints included difficulty locating victims, particularly in cases of enforced disappearance. Despite these limitations, the combined efforts of the monitoring team and RRT yielded a robust evidentiary base for this report. Personal Liberty

3.0 MEDIA-TRACED VIOLATION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES IN UGANDA: ANNOTATED VIGNETTES

This section lays bare a troubling pattern of state actions aimed at stifling political dissent and curtailing fundamental freedoms in Uganda. Through a series of vivid case studies, it reveals how opposition supporters, candidates, and activists face harassment, violence, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation—often under the guise of maintaining public order or enforcing electoral laws. These incidents are more than isolated events; they form a mosaic of systemic repression that chips away at constitutional guarantees and international human rights obligations. Each vignette exposes the erosion of political pluralism and the shrinking of civic space, highlighting a worrisome shift towards securitizing political participation and normalizing heavy-handed tactics against peaceful assembly and expression. The stories here demand close scrutiny—not just as legal violations, but as signals of a democracy under strain.

Vignette No. 1: Assault on NUP Supporters at Party Headquarters

Date: September 4, 2025

Location: Makerere–Kavule, Kampala

Victims: NUP supporters

Summary: Military and police personnel violently stormed the National Unity Platform (NUP) headquarters in Makerere–Kavule, dispersing supporters gathered at the premises¹. Authorities claimed the assembly was unlawful, yet media footage and eyewitness accounts suggest a coordinated assault targeting political expression. NUP officials condemned the incident as “State-sponsored intimidation.”

Legal Analysis: The assault violates Article 29(1)(d) of the Constitution of Uganda, which guarantees the right to freedom of assembly and association. The use of force against peaceful supporters contravenes Article 24, which prohibits cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and Article 23(1), which protects against arbitrary detention. The absence of prior warning or judicial oversight further undermines procedural safeguards.

Under the ICCPR, the incident breaches Article 21 (right to peaceful assembly), Article 9 (protection from arbitrary arrest), and Article 7 (freedom from inhuman treatment). The deployment of military personnel in a civilian political context raises concerns under the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, which require necessity, proportionality, and accountability.

¹ <https://x.com/DailyMonitor/status/1963580158406734309> captioned: “WATCH: Military and police personnel jointly assaulted NUP supporters at the party headquarters in Makerere-Kavule this afternoon.”

Contextual Analysis: This incident exemplifies the securitization of opposition spaces and the erosion of political pluralism in Uganda. The targeting of party headquarters—a symbolic and operational center—suggests an effort to delegitimize and destabilize organized dissent. The framing of political gatherings as unlawful assemblies reflects a broader strategy of civic space contraction, particularly in the lead-up to the 2026 elections.

Vignette No. 2: Police Warning to Jinja NUP Candidate

Date: August 25, 2025

Location: Jinja

Victim: Julius Kaira, NUP candidate

Summary: Police issued a public warning to Julius Kaira following an “unauthorized march” involving his supporters². Authorities threatened future arrests and emphasized strict compliance with electoral laws. The warning was widely interpreted as a form of political intimidation.

Legal Analysis: The warning and threat of arrest infringe upon Article 29(1)(a) and (d) of the Ugandan Constitution, which protects freedom of expression and assembly. The warning, though framed as law enforcement, may intimidate candidates and supporters from freely organizing rallies or political meetings. Past practices suggest selective enforcement of such warnings, disproportionately affecting opposition candidates. Electoral campaigns are a key avenue for candidates to share ideas and critique government policies. Threats of arrest may have a chilling effect, stifling political discourse.

The presumption of illegality without judicial determination violates Article 28(1), which guarantees due process and the presumption of innocence. Pre-emptive threats of arrest without clear specification of unlawful conduct suggest a risk of arbitrary arrest and detention. The targeting of a candidate’s mobilization efforts also undermines Article 61(1)(e), which mandates electoral fairness.

By framing participation through the lens of potential criminal liability, the police risk undermining citizens’ ability to freely engage in democratic processes. This undermines the right to Political Participation under Article 38 of the Ugandan constitution.

Under the ICCPR, the incident breaches Article 19 (freedom of expression), Article 21 (peaceful assembly), Article 25 (political participation), and Article 14(2) (presumption of innocence). The public shaming and legal threats constitute indirect restrictions on civic engagement and electoral competition.

Contextual Analysis: Uganda has a history of police warnings and crackdowns during election periods, often justified under maintaining “public order.” Such warnings have previously been used as a tool for shrinking civic space and suppressing opposition activities. Jinja is a politically active

² <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/follow-electoral-guidelines-or-face-arrest-police-warns-5167356>

district, making it a frequent site of heightened police vigilance. This vignette reflects the use of administrative warnings as tools of preemptive suppression. The framing of political mobilization as “*unauthorized*” without clear legal thresholds enables discretionary enforcement and fosters a climate of fear. Such tactics risk deterring legitimate political participation and eroding public trust in electoral institutions.

Vignette No. 3: Arrest of Kampala Traders During Tax Protest

Date: August 20, 2025

Location: Kampala

Victims: 17 Kampala traders

Summary: Seventeen traders were arrested during a protest against high taxation and the implementation of the Electronic Fiscal Receipting and Invoicing Solution (EFRIS)³. Police deployed tear gas and charged the traders with “common nuisance,” a broadly defined offense. Bail was granted to most of the accused, though procedural irregularities were noted.

Legal Analysis: Traders engaging in peaceful protest and strikes are exercising their fundamental rights. The arrest and charging of the traders raise serious concerns under Article 29(1)(a) and (d) of the Ugandan Constitution, which protect the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. The use of tear gas and force against nonviolent demonstrators contravenes the principle of proportionality and necessity in law enforcement.

The charge of “*common nuisance*,” as applied in this context, appears overly vague and may violate the principle of legality enshrined in Article 28(12) of the Constitution, which requires that offenses be clearly defined by law.

Procedural irregularities during arrest, bail hearings, including lack of interpretation services and inconsistencies in surety testimonies, undermine the right to a fair hearing under Article 28(1).

Internationally, the actions contravene Article 21 of the ICCPR, which protects the right to peaceful assembly, and Article 19, which guarantees freedom of expression. The arbitrary nature of the arrests and the use of vague charges also breach Article 9 of the ICCPR.

Contextual Analysis: The traders exercised legitimate grievances through collective action—an expression of their economic and civil rights. Detaining individuals for mobilizing or advocating strikes may raise concerns around suppression of dissent. Detaining individuals for leveraging protest qualifies as arbitrary as due process was not properly followed, especially given the mass arrests in a short period. Reports indicate the arrests occurred swiftly, and in some cases, individuals were charged and arraigned shortly afterward. Transparency and adherence to due process are essential.

³ https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/17-kampala-traders-charged-with-common-nuisance-after-tax-protests-5161244?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Vignette No. 4: Violent Arrest and Persecution of Habib Buwembo

Date: September 5, 2025

Location: Busunju and Mityana

Victims: Habib Buwembo, NUP Mobilisation Head, and supporters

Summary: While conducting political mobilization activities in Mityana, Mr. Habib Buwembo and several supporters were violently arrested by police⁴. Their stated offense was encouraging citizens to vote for the NUP party president. The arrests were carried out without prior warning, and detainees were later granted bail.

Legal Analysis: Arresting and violently handling opposition leaders for peaceful political mobilization constitutes a direct infringement on civil liberties guaranteed under Uganda’s Constitution and international human rights law. The arrest of Mr. Buwembo and his colleagues violates Article 29(1)(a) and (d) of the Constitution of Uganda, which protect freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. The absence of lawful grounds for arrest and the targeting of political speech constitutes an abuse of police authority and breach Article 23(1), which guarantees liberty and protection from arbitrary detention.

Under the ICCPR, the incident contravenes Article 19, which protects the right to hold and express opinions without interference, and Article 21, which guarantees peaceful assembly. The targeting of political mobilization efforts further undermines Article 25, which affirms the right to participate in public affairs.

Contextual Analysis: The violent arrest and degrading treatment in court underscore the misuse of state security apparatus for partisan political purposes, an abuse of police authority. The arrest demonstrates a pattern of repression against NUP leaders and supporters, designed to silence dissent and undermine fair competition ahead of the 2026 elections. This incident reflects a pattern of targeted repression against opposition mobilizers, particularly in peri-urban and rural constituencies. The criminalization of political speech and voter engagement activities signals a shrinking civic space and a securitized approach to electoral participation. The use of force against peaceful mobilization undermines democratic pluralism and deters grassroots political organizing.

4 NUP Arrests: Why Now? Phoenix Browser, <https://x.com/TashaNatas28450>

Vignette No. 5: Arrest of Youth Climate Activists⁵

Date: July 30, 2025

Location: Kampala

Victims: 10 youth climate change activists

Summary: Ten youth activists were violently arrested while staging a peaceful demonstration in Kampala against the financing of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) project. Tear gas was deployed, and demonstrators were detained without prior warning.

Legal Analysis: The arrests violate Article 29(1)(a) and (d) of the Constitution of Uganda, which protects freedom of expression and assembly. The use of force against peaceful demonstrators contravenes Article 24, which prohibits cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and Article 23(1), which protects against arbitrary detention.

Internationally, Uganda is in breach of its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)—specifically, Article 19 (freedom of expression), Article 21 (peaceful assembly), and Article 9 (protection from arbitrary arrest). The deployment of tear gas against nonviolent youth activists further contravenes the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, which require necessity, proportionality, and restraint in policing assemblies.

Contextual Analysis: This case highlights the increasing vulnerability of environmental defenders in Uganda. The securitization of climate activism and the framing of peaceful protest as a public nuisance reflect a broader intolerance toward dissenting voices in extractive sector governance. The arrests risk chilling youth-led civic engagement and undermining Uganda’s commitments to participatory environmental stewardship. The unlawful arrests of youth activists opposing the EACOP project represent a serious violation of constitutional guarantees and Uganda’s international human rights obligations. Beyond the immediate harm to those detained, such repression creates a chilling effect on civic participation, particularly among youth and environmental defenders. To uphold democratic principles and sustainable development, Uganda must shift from criminalizing dissent to fostering an enabling environment where citizens can freely and safely advocate for environmental justice.

5 <https://margheritanews.ug/2025/08/over-10-youth-activists-arrested-in-kampala-for-protesting-eacop-funding-by-stanbic-bank/>

Vignette No. 6: Abduction and Sentencing of Elson Tumwine⁶

Date: August 4, 2025

Location: Kampala City

Victim: Elson Tumwine, university student

Summary: Mr. Elson Tumwine was abducted by security operatives for posting a TikTok video critical of President Museveni. He was held incommunicado for several days and later sentenced to two months in prison.

Legal Analysis: The abduction, prolonged incommunicado detention, and subsequent sentencing of Mr. Tumwine represent multiple, serious breaches of both domestic constitutional guarantees and Uganda's binding international human rights obligations. Article 23(1) of the Constitution of Uganda guarantees personal liberty and protection from arbitrary arrest and detention. The forcible abduction and detention of Mr. Tumwine without lawful process falls squarely within the constitutional ban on arbitrary deprivation of liberty. Article 23(4) requires that a person deprived of liberty be produced before a court "without undue delay" (and in practice within the 48-hour rule used in domestic procedure). Mr. Tumwine's incommunicado detention and failure to be promptly brought before a judicial authority amount to a direct breach of this safeguard. Sentencing for online expression infringes Article 29(1)(a), which protects freedom of speech and expression. Criminal sanctions that target peaceful online expression are impermissible under the Constitution unless they satisfy a strict test of legality, necessity and proportionality — requirements not met where dissenting opinions are punished.

Under the ICCPR, the incident breaches Article 19 (freedom of expression), Article 9 (protection from arbitrary detention), and Article 14 (right to a fair trial). The criminalization of digital dissent raises serious concerns about Uganda's compliance with international standards on freedom of opinion and access to justice.

Contextual Analysis: This case exemplifies the growing surveillance and penalization of youth digital expression. The use of abduction tactics and expedited sentencing for online content reflects a broader strategy of deterrence targeting politically critical voices. The incident underscores the need for digital rights protections and judicial safeguards against politically motivated prosecutions.

Ultimately, the criminalization of digital dissent in this case signals a broader closing of civic space, particularly for youth activists who increasingly rely on digital platforms to engage in democratic discourse. Strengthening digital rights and reinforcing judicial independence are therefore essential to ensuring that online spaces remain viable platforms for civic participation and accountability.

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c74dzxxrn7o>

Vignette No. 7: Detention of PFF Party Supporters⁷

Date: August 12, 2025

Location: Ntungamo Town

Victims: Supporters of the People's Front for Freedom (PFF) party

Summary: During the launch of the People's Front for Freedom (PFF) party in Ntungamo, police detained several supporters, citing unlawful assembly. The arrests were reportedly triggered by the wearing of party-branded t-shirts and participation in a public march.

Legal Analysis: The detention of PFF supporters violates Article 29(1)(d) of the Ugandan Constitution, which guarantees freedom of association and assembly. The criminalization of symbolic political expression, such as wearing party attire, lacks legal basis and contravenes Article 23(1), which protects against arbitrary arrest.

Under the ICCPR, the incident breaches Article 21 (peaceful assembly), Article 22 (freedom of association), and Article 19 (freedom of expression). The arrests also raise concerns under Article 25, which protects the right to participate in public affairs without discrimination.

Contextual Analysis: This case reflects the systemic constraints placed on emerging political formations in Uganda. The policing of party launches and symbolic expression suggests a restrictive environment for political pluralism. The incident underscores the need for legal reforms to safeguard the rights of new political actors and ensure equitable access to civic space.

⁷ Daily Monitor <https://www-monitor-co-ug.webpkgcache.com/doc/-/s/www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/police-arrest-pff-supporters-over-illegal-assembly-in-ntungamo-5153078>

Vignette No. 8: Teargassing of PFF Supporters⁸

Date: August 28, 2025

Location: Busimbi, Mityana District

Victims: Supporters of the People’s Front for Freedom (PFF) party

Summary: Police blocked a peaceful procession to inaugurate the PFF party offices, citing a lack of prior clearance. The District Police Commander ordered the road closed and deployed tear gas to disperse supporters.

Legal Analysis: The disruption violates Article 29(1)(d) of the Ugandan Constitution, which guarantees freedom of assembly. The use of tear gas against nonviolent demonstrators contravenes Article 24, which prohibits cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. The requirement for police clearance, absent a legal threshold, undermines the presumption of lawful assembly.

Under the ICCPR, the incident breaches Article 21 (peaceful assembly) and Article 19 (freedom of expression). The deployment of force violates the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms, which require necessity and proportionality in crowd control.

Contextual Analysis: This incident illustrates the discretionary policing of opposition gatherings and the securitization of party-building activities. The framing of peaceful inaugurations as security threats reflects a broader intolerance toward political pluralism. Such tactics risk deterring civic participation and entrenching fear among emerging political formations.

Table 1: Typology of Media-Reported Civil Liberties Violations

Typology Category	Description	Indicative Examples	Legal Implications
Suppression of Peaceful Assembly	Disruption or criminalization of lawful protests, vigils, or community gatherings.	Dispersal of youth-led protests; arrests during civic commemorations.	Violates Article 29(1)(d) of the Ugandan Constitution and Article 21 of the ICCPR.
Censorship and Intimidation of Expression	Targeting of journalists, bloggers, or individuals for speech deemed critical of state actors.	Shutdown of radio stations; threats against investigative reporters.	Breaches Article 29(1)(a) of the Constitution and Article 19 of the ICCPR.
Arbitrary Arrest and Detention	Detention without due process, often targeting activists, opposition figures, or community leaders.	Nighttime raids; prolonged detention without charge.	Contravenes Article 23 of the Constitution and Article 9 of the ICCPR.
Enforced Disappearances	Cases where individuals were abducted or went missing under suspicious or politically motivated circumstances.	Victims last seen in custody; families denied access or information.	Violates the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; may constitute crimes against humanity.
Retaliation Against Civic Organizers	Harassment or violence directed at those mobilizing communities or coordinating advocacy.	Surveillance of NGO offices; physical assault of conveners.	Undermines freedom of association (Article 29(1)(e)) and may breach protections under the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

⁸ Daily monitor <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/police-fire-tear-gas-to-block-pff-supporters-in-mityana-5171270>

Typology Category	Description	Indicative Examples	Legal Implications
Digital Surveillance and Cyber Harassment	Use of digital tools to monitor, intimidate, or discredit civic actors online.	Hacking of activist accounts; smear campaigns on social media.	Raises concerns under the Data Protection and Privacy Act (2019) and international norms on digital rights.
Restriction of Association and Movement	Legal or extralegal measures limiting the ability to organize, travel, or convene.	Banning of civic meetings; denial of travel permits to organizers.	Violates Article 29(1) (e) and Article 12 of the ICCPR.

Table 1 presents a typological analysis of these media-reported violations, highlighting patterns of repression, civic resistance, and institutional impunity. By cataloging these events, the report not only affirms the role of media as a witness to civic harm but also underscores the urgency of protecting journalistic freedom and digital rights in Uganda’s evolving civic landscape.

4.0 RAPID RESPONSE TEAM (RRT) AND REFERRAL MECHANISMS

The Rapid Response Team (RRT) plays a critical role in ensuring swift and effective referrals to relevant institutions for redress and support in cases involving violations of civil liberties. Documented cases are systematically referred to the following key entities:

- **Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC):** Handles complaints concerning unlawful arrests, torture, and enforced disappearances.
- **African Centre for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (ACTV):** Offers medical and psychosocial support to victims of police brutality and torture.
- **Professional Standards Unit (PSU):** Investigates police misconduct, including physical abuse and unlawful detentions.
- **Human Rights Centre (HRC):** Provides legal assistance and advocacy for individuals affected by violations of civic rights.

Table 2: Documented Cases and Referral Summary

Case No.	Victim	Incident & Location	Referral(s)
1	JAP-25-RRT-001	Arbitrary arrest and detention without cause at Nabisalu Police Station, Makindye, 8:00 PM	UHRC, PSU, ACTV
2	JAP-25-RRT-002	Arrest during peaceful protest/strike on taxes, Kampala	UHRC, HRC
3	JAP-25-RRT-003	Arbitrary arrest, beaten by police while monitoring youth elections, Kisenyi, Kampala	UHRC, PSU, ACTV
4	JAP-25-RRT-004	Unlawful arrest, beaten by police and NRM supporters, lost teeth, Kasato Zone	UHRC, ACTV
5	JAP-25-RRT-005	Arbitrary arrest and detention without cause at Nabisalu Police Station, Makindye, 8:00 PM	UHRC, PSU
6	JAP-25-RRT-006	Unlawful arrest during anti-corruption protest at Parliamentary Avenue	UHRC, HRC

5.0 FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN UGANDA: AN EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF DIGITAL AND MEDIA CONSTRAINTS (2024–2025)

Freedom of expression constitutes a fundamental pillar of democratic governance, facilitating citizen participation, governmental accountability, and the pluralistic exchange of ideas. However, empirical evidence derived from a focused survey conducted in Uganda during 2024–2025 reveals a complex environment wherein this right is increasingly circumscribed. This chapter offers a rigorous analysis of the prevailing conditions affecting freedom of expression, as delineated through digital rights, media freedom, and institutional safeguards. The findings elucidate the nuanced mechanisms by which expressive freedoms are constrained, not through overt suppression, but via systemic and often covert controls that engender pervasive self-censorship and attenuate civic agency.

1. Digital Rights: The Politicization of Access

The survey data substantiate that the digital domain in Uganda is characterized by severe restrictions that transcend mere technological deficits to encompass political interference. With an average domain score of 5.0 on a 7-point scale, digital rights emerge as the most restricted sphere among those examined. All respondents acknowledged problematic conditions, with no individual reporting unfettered access to digital platforms or immunity from online suppression.

This digital divide is thus not simply a matter of infrastructure but a politically charged stratification that limits equitable participation. The underrepresentation of marginalized groups in the sample—constituting only 14%—further reflects their broader exclusion from digital spaces. Consequently, the digital environment operates as a filtered and surveilled arena, reinforcing existing socio-political hierarchies and undermining the democratic potential of digital communication.

2. Media Freedom: Operational Constraints and Censorship

Contrary to a scenario of outright media shutdown, the Ugandan media landscape operates under a regime of sustained interference and censorship. The survey reveals that 97% of respondents reported interference with journalistic activities, 93% identified censorship of media content, and 90% noted inadequate protection for sources. These statistics depict a media environment under considerable duress, where journalistic autonomy is compromised.

The average score of 4.8 in the media freedom domain reflects the constrained conditions under which media practitioners must operate. Media actors are compelled to navigate an environment characterized by avoidance, self-regulation, and adaptation rather than candid and critical reporting. Such constraints significantly diminish the media’s capacity to function as an effective mechanism of public oversight and accountability.

3. Institutional Safeguards: Symbolism Versus Functionality

The institutional frameworks intended to uphold freedom of expression exhibit pronounced fragility. With an average score of 4.6, the domain of institutional safeguards indicates systemic

deficiencies. Only 14% of respondents considered existing legal protections adequate, and a mere 21% reported access to effective remedies for violations. Furthermore, only 17% affirmed the existence of rigorous oversight mechanisms.

This disparity between formal constitutional guarantees and the lived realities of citizens highlights the hollowing out of institutional accountability. Such symbolic protections fail to provide meaningful recourse for victims of expression-related violations, thereby eroding public confidence in the rule of law and diminishing the practical enforcement of fundamental rights.

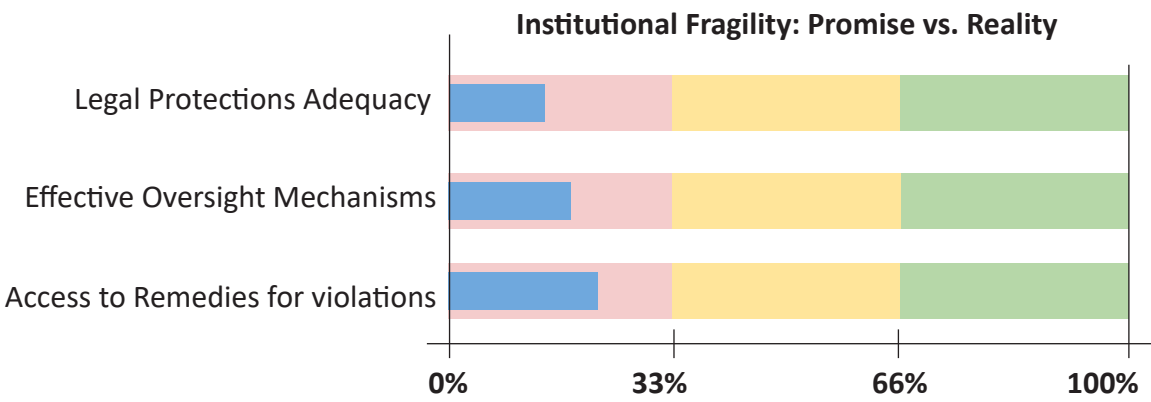


Chart Key: Promise Vs Reality

Symbol/Color	Meaning
<div>Blue Bar</div>	Actual adequacy level reported by respondents (e.g., 14%, 17%, 21%)
<div>Black Marker Line</div>	Ideal benchmark (100%) — full institutional functionality
<div>Red Zone (0–33%)</div>	Symbolic: Institutions exist but lack meaningful enforcement
<div>Yellow Zone (34–66%)</div>	Functional: Partial effectiveness, uneven access, or implementation
<div>Green Zone (67–100%)</div>	Robust: Strong, reliable institutional safeguards

4. The Self-Censorship Paradox: Fear as a Predominant Form of Expression Control

A particularly salient and paradoxical dimension of Uganda’s expressive environment emerges in the phenomenon of self-censorship. The survey data reveal a striking contradiction: while a substantial majority of respondents (86%) report no direct disruption or punitive action against their specific expressions, a similarly overwhelming proportion harbor significant fears—65% fear retaliation, and 59% feel unsafe engaging in public critique.

This divergence constitutes the self-censorship paradox: freedom of expression is not primarily curtailed through overt censorship or direct repression, but rather through anticipatory silence induced by fear and insecurity. Citizens internalize the potential consequences of dissent, leading them to preemptively silence themselves even in the absence of immediate threats or sanctions.

This form of psychological control represents a sophisticated mechanism of governance, whereby the perception of risk supplants direct coercion. The paradoxical effect is a pervasive climate of silence and restraint that subtly but effectively restricts public discourse. Such anticipatory self-censorship not only inhibits individual expression but also weakens collective democratic engagement by narrowing the range of permissible opinions and critiques.

Understanding this paradox is critical, for it underscores that legislative reforms and institutional safeguards, while necessary, may not suffice if they fail to address the underlying climate of fear. Efforts to restore freedom of expression in Uganda must therefore encompass not only structural protections but also initiatives aimed at rebuilding public trust and alleviating the psychological barriers that sustain anticipatory silence.

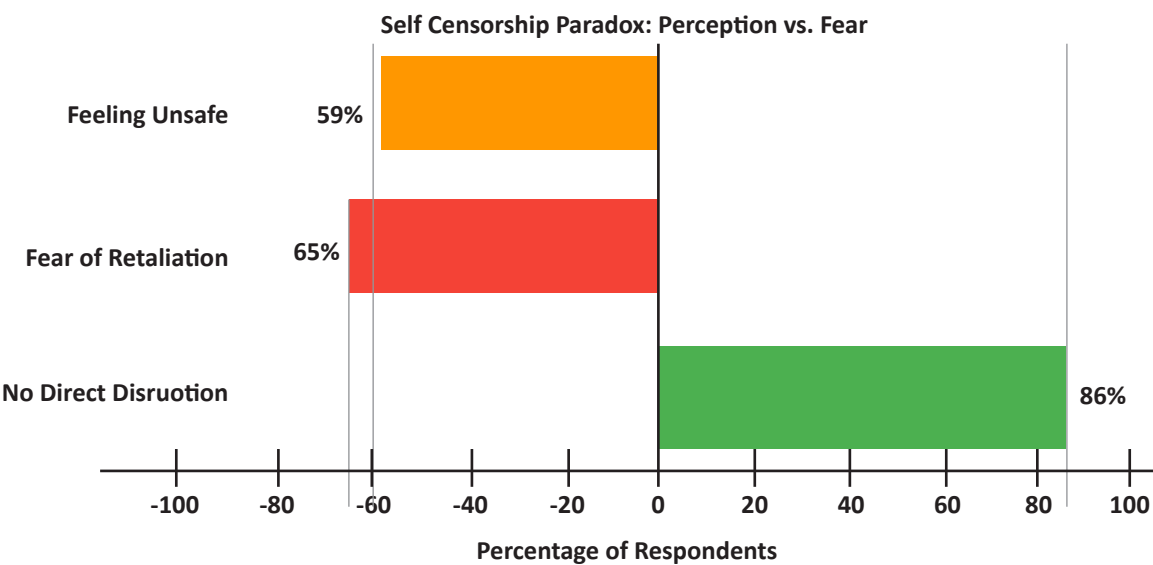


Chart Key: Self-Censorship Paradox

Symbol/Color	Indicator	Direction	Description
<div>Green</div>	No Direct Disruption	Positive	Most respondents weren't directly blocked (86%)
<div>Red</div>	Fear of Retaliation (65%)	Negative	Fear alone suppresses expression
<div>Orange</div>	Feeling Unsafe (59%)	Negative	Psychological unease inhibits free expression

5. Demographic Variations in Perceptions of Expressive Freedom

The survey data further illuminate demographic differentials in perceptions of expressive constraints. Gender differences are marginal, with females reporting slightly higher perceived limitations (4.3) than males (4.1), potentially indicative of heightened vulnerability or risk awareness among women. Age-related disparities are more pronounced; adults averaged 4.5, with a substantial proportion (22%) registering extreme constraint scores, compared to younger

adults who averaged 4.0 and exhibited fewer extreme responses (10%). This suggests that older cohorts possess a more acute awareness of historical and ongoing risks.

Geographical analysis reveals minimal divergence between rural (4.1) and urban (4.2) respondents, challenging assumptions that urban environments necessarily confer greater expressive freedom. Instead, these findings suggest that systemic constraints permeate across spatial divides, manifesting as widespread and entrenched limitations.

6. Methodological Considerations

While the survey’s sample size is modest and exhibits demographic imbalances—most notably a predominance of male (76%) and young adult (69%) respondents—the data’s high completion rate and low variance confer a degree of robustness. The presence of strongly polarized responses (18% at scale endpoints) further attests to the intensity of participant convictions. Nevertheless, future research efforts should strive for greater inclusivity, particularly to amplify marginalized voices and refine the understanding of expressive constraints within diverse socio-political contexts.

7. Conclusion: Imperatives for Reform and the Restoration of Expressive Agency

In sum, the empirical evidence portrays a Ugandan civic space under considerable strain, where freedom of expression is circumscribed through indirect but effective means. The digital and media realms, while operational, are subjected to layered restrictions that undermine their democratic functions. Institutional safeguards remain insufficiently robust to protect rights or provide redress, exacerbating the precariousness of expressive freedoms.

Addressing these challenges necessitates comprehensive reforms targeting digital governance frameworks, media protections, and institutional accountability mechanisms. Equally critical is the cultivation of an environment that mitigates fear and fosters psychological safety, enabling citizens to exercise their expressive rights without apprehension. Only through such multifaceted interventions can Uganda’s freedom of expression evolve from a fragile ideal into a substantive reality accessible to all.

6.0 KEY FINDINGS

This section distills the most salient patterns, trends, and structural dynamics emerging from the documented civil liberties violations across Uganda between July and September 2025. Drawing from triangulated field reports, media-traced incidents, and rapid response interventions, the findings reveal a systematic erosion of constitutionally protected freedoms—particularly the rights to expression, assembly, association, and personal liberty.

Rather than isolated infractions, the documented cases reflect a coordinated pattern of state-sanctioned repression, often justified under the guise of public order, electoral compliance, or national security. The findings underscore the disproportionate targeting of opposition actors, youth activists, and civic mobilizers, alongside the securitization of political participation and the criminalization of dissent.

By synthesizing legal analysis, contextual insights, and empirical documentation, this section offers a consolidated overview of the civic space landscape in Uganda. It is intended to inform advocacy, guide institutional reform, and support solidarity efforts aimed at restoring democratic norms and safeguarding fundamental rights.

- **Political Repression:** Opposition parties and their supporters face orchestrated crackdowns, including violent protest dispersals, abductions, and politically motivated prosecutions, severely limiting political engagement. Security agencies, primarily the Uganda Police Force (UPF) and the Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence (CMI), were identified as principal perpetrators. Courts, while occasionally granting relief, often failed to provide consistent redress due to executive influence and prolonged trial delays
- **Targeting Environmental Defenders:** State force is also deployed to suppress environmental rights defenders and anti-fossil fuel activists opposing national infrastructure projects, subjecting them to arbitrary arrest and disappearance.
- **Erosion of Civic Freedoms:** Freedoms of expression, assembly, and association are systematically curtailed through overt violence, threats, legal harassment, and administrative barriers, creating a repressive environment. Peaceful assemblies were blocked through the denial of police notifications and violent dispersals using tear gas and live ammunition.
- **Digital Surveillance and Repression:** Freedoms are further curtailed by the criminalization of online speech critical of the government and the implementation of invasive surveillance technologies, raising severe concerns about privacy rights and digital expression.
- **Institutional Weaknesses:** Legal protections and accountability mechanisms are inadequate, with key institutions either complicit or ineffective, fostering a culture of impunity.

- **Judicial Defiance:** The executive and legislative branches have actively sought to reinstate and broaden the jurisdiction of military courts to try civilians, directly defying landmark Supreme Court rulings and undermining the constitutional separation of powers.
- **Psychological Impact:** Fear of retaliation has led to widespread self-censorship among civic actors, further contracting democratic space beyond visible acts of repression. Victims of abduction and torture face long-term trauma, with inadequate access to medical, psychosocial, or legal support.
- **Role of Media:** Despite significant constraints, media outlets and civic monitoring groups play a critical role in documenting abuses and amplifying victims’ voices, though media freedom faces ongoing threats. Independent media and civic monitoring groups continued to document violations and amplify victims’ voices despite intimidation, shutdowns, and threats of license revocation. Social media platforms played a critical role in mobilization and information-sharing, but users face digital surveillance and prosecutions under the Computer Misuse Act.
- **Electoral Context:** Violations disproportionately targeted opposition political mobilization ahead of the 2026 elections, raising concerns about a non-level playing field. Security forces demonstrated bias in restricting opposition events while facilitating ruling party activities.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The documented violations of civil liberties between July and September 2025 reveal a deeply entrenched pattern of repression, institutional impunity, and civic space contraction in Uganda. In response, this section outlines targeted recommendations aimed at reversing these trends, strengthening accountability, and safeguarding fundamental rights.

Grounded in constitutional guarantees and international human rights obligations, the recommendations are directed toward key stakeholders including government institutions, law enforcement agencies, civil society actors, media platforms, and international partners. They are designed to catalyze legal reform, enhance protective mechanisms, and foster an enabling environment for democratic participation.

Each recommendation reflects the urgency of coordinated action to restore public trust, uphold the rule of law, and ensure that civic actors especially youth, opposition leaders, and environmental defenders can operate free from intimidation, arbitrary detention, and violence. The goal is not only to address immediate harms but to build resilient systems that protect civil liberties in the lead-up to the 2026 elections and beyond.

To address these systemic challenges and safeguard civil liberties, the following actionable measures are proposed:

1. Strengthen Legal Frameworks and Accountability

- Reform ambiguous laws enabling arbitrary arrests and vague charges to ensure compliance with Uganda’s Constitution and international human rights standards.
- Bolster the independence and capacity of oversight institutions, such as the Uganda Human Rights Commission and the Professional Standards Unit, to investigate abuses and enforce sanctions.

2. Protect Civic Space

- Cease the use of military and excessive force against peaceful assemblies and political activities, ensuring compliance with constitutional protections.
- Guarantee unrestricted rights to peaceful protest and political mobilization, removing administrative obstacles and ending intimidation tactics.
- Protect Digital Rights: Cease the use of vague laws (e.g., “common nuisance”) to prosecute online critics and halt the implementation of invasive real-time surveillance systems without robust legal and privacy safeguards.

3. Support Victims and Civic Actors

- Enhance access to medical, psychosocial, and legal support for victims of rights violations through partnerships with organizations like the African Centre for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (ACTV) and the Human Rights Centre (HRC).
- Implement protective measures to shield activists, journalists, and opposition members from retaliation and enforced disappearances.

4. Promote Media Freedom and Public Engagement

- Protect independent media and digital platforms as essential tools for documenting abuses and fostering informed public discourse.
- Support capacity-building programs for journalists and civic monitors to promote ethical, trauma-sensitive reporting practices.

5. Ensure Transparent Electoral Processes

- Enforce electoral laws that uphold political pluralism and enable equitable participation for all candidates without discrimination or obstruction.
- Monitor security forces to ensure impartiality and accountability during electoral periods.

6. Engage International Partners

- Collaborate with international human rights organizations to monitor violations and provide technical assistance for reforms.
- Leverage regional and global advocacy to promote adherence to democratic norms and civil liberties in Uganda.

8.0 CONCLUSION

This report highlights the critical need for immediate reforms to reverse the erosion of civic freedoms in Uganda. Without decisive action, the country risks further democratic regression and the alienation of its citizens from meaningful political participation. Sustained commitment to legal reform, institutional accountability, and support for civic actors is essential to fostering a democratic and inclusive society.

9.0 SUMMARY OF MEDIA-TRACED VIOLATIONS OF CIVIL LIBERTIES IN UGANDA. BETWEEN JULY 1ST TO SEPTEMBER 30TH 2025

Region	Date	Event	Type of civic liberty violated	Description	Level of violence	Source of information
Jinja South West Consituency, Mpumude Estate Primary	27 th July	Dr. Namwoza thanks giving ceremony	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Freedom of associationFreedom of assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Dr. Namwazo is an NUP candidate, police claim that NUP would use the forum to do politics	Police blocked the people from attending the event, several NUP supporters arrested	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Daily Monitor https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/jinja-police-block-thanksgiving-event-over-fears-of-nup-politicking-5133768
Kampala	30 th July	Protests against EACOP Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Freedom of expressionFreedom of assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">10 youth climate change activists arrested while holding peaceful demonstrations	Violent arrests and throwing of tear gas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Margheritanews.ug https://margheritanews.ug/2025/08/over-10-youth-activists-arrested-in-kampala-for-protesting-eacop-funding-by-stanbic-bank/
Kampala City	4 th August	Anti Museveni Tiktok Video	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Freedom of expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Elson Tumwine a university student abducted by security agencies and later sentenced to 2 months in jail by Entebbe court	Violent abduction, held incommunicado for several days without family knowing his where abouts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">BBC news https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c74dzxxrn7o
Ntungamo town	12 th August	Launching of People’s Front for Freedom (PFF) party	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Freedom of associationFreedom of assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Police detained supporters of PFF party accusing them of marching in Ntungano town while wearing party t-shirts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Arrest and detention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Daily Monitor https://www-monitor-co-ug.webpkgcache.com/doc/-/s/www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/police-arrest-pff-supporters-over-illegal-assembly-in-ntungamo-5153078
Kampala	19 th August	Traders protest against high taxation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Freedom of expressionFreedom of Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Several traders in Kampala have been arrested. Police terming their protest unlawfulTraders insisted they had notified the police about their peaceful demonstration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Police teargas, several traders violently arrested	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Nile post news https://nilepost.co.ug/index.php/business/281583/photos-no-room-for-bargain-as-police-crush-kampala-traders-protest

Region	Date	Event	Type of civic liberty violated	Description	Level of violence	Source of information
Jinja City	25 th August	Peaceful procession by Julius Kaira NUP candidate for jinja city councillor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Freedom of Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Police blocked and detained his supporters for alleged violation of electoral laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Violent arrests	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Daily monitor https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/follow-electoral-guidelines-or-face-arrest-police-warns-5167356
Nyamitanga Mbarara City	27 th August	Abduction of Sam Mugumya for aid to Dr. Kiza Besigye	Freedom of Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Abducted by alleged soldiers in army uniform & plain clothe operatives, though the UPDF has refuted the claims	Bundled into drone van by soldiers i.e enforced disappearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Daily Monitor https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/opposition-activist-sam-mugumya-reported-abducted-in-mbarara-5170156
Mityana District, Busimbi	28 th August 2025	Peaceful Procession to open People’s Front for Freedom (PFF) party offices	Freedom of Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mitiyana District Police Commander Mr. Steve Ojok stopped the procession saying the gathering lacked police clearancePFF Party official condemned the police stating they had notified the police about the event	Police blocked the road and teargassed the PFF supporters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Daily monitor https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/police-fire-tear-gas-to-block-pff-supporters-in-mityana-5171270
Kampala Makerere NUP Headquarter	4 th September	Gathering at NUP party offices	Freedom of Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Police and military engaged NUP party supporters in violent confrontation to disperse them on alleged illegal gathering	Police and military physically assaulted party officials and supporters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Daily Monitor X/Twitter post https://x.com/DailyMonitor/status/1963580158406734309
Kampala Town	4 th September	Nomination of NUP Candidate for Mayor Position	Freedom of Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Alien Skin a singer turned politician blocked and interrupted celebration of Hon. Ronald Balimwezo as NUP nominee candidate for Mayor position	Violent confrontations and stone throwing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">ChimpReports https://chimpreports.com/uganda-police-arrest-5-nup-members-after-opposition-clashes-involving-alien-skin/
Kampala Kabuusu	5 th September	Peaceful procession by Lord Mayor Erias Lukwago to Electoral Commission office in Ntinda to be nominated	Freedom of Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Police blocked Mayor Lukwago and his supporters at Kabuusu junction	Physical confrontation with supporters	https://x.com/DailyMonitor/status/1963874104185942047

Region	Date	Event	Type of civic liberty violated	Description	Level of violence	Source of information
Wakiso District Electoral Commission Offices	5 th September 2025	Local government candidate registration exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Freedom of AssociationFreedom of assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Confrontation erupted as a group of PFF supporters—escorting their candidates to register—faced off with police, who accused them of violating electoral regulations	Chaotic scenes as police attempted to confiscate banners, flags, and megaphones, leading to scuffles with supporters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Nilepost news https://nilepost.co.ug/news/285552/police-clash-with-pff-supporters-during-candidate-registration-in-wakiso
Mbale city	5 th September	NUP nomination for mayor aspirants	Freedom of assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Police fired teargas to disperse supporters of the opposition National Unity Platform (NUP) who had gathered	Teargas and excessive use of force	Video
Busunju, Mityana.	5 th September	Arrest and detention of (NUP) Mobilisation Head, Habib Buwembo	Freedom of association and political participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Violently arrested by regime police while mobilizing supporters in Busunju, Mityana	Violent arrests and detention for several days	NUP posts Phoenix Browser, https://x.com/TashaNatas28450 ,
Kampala , Kawempe	6 th September	Abduction of Bobi Giant for alleged Unlawful Military Drills during the Celebration of 43 rd Birthday of Robert kyagulanyi in February 2025.	Freedom of association	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Perpetrators are described as armed men in a drone vehicle (a type often associated with reported enforced disappearances in Uganda	Violent abduction and held incommunicado	NUP post and daily monitor https://x.com/DailyMonitor/status/1963874104185942047
Kampala, Kawempe Chief Magistrate Court Kampla	8 th September	Abduction of NUP Deputy Spokesperson Alex Waiswa	Freedom of association and Right to Liberty and Security of Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Immediately after attending court proceedings, he was seized by unidentified operatives and forcefully taken away in what amounts to an abduction.	Arbitrary Arrest and Abduction	https://x.com/Humanrights256/status/1964990541247979814
Kampala	10 th September	Re-arrest of Nubian Li a local musician	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Freedom of expressionFreedom of Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Its alleged Nubian li a close ally of NUP party composes songs of criticizing government	Violent rearresting by police	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Stella Nyanzi Instagram Posts https://www.instagram.com/p/DOY8MMvDcNz/

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11.0 APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF MEDIA-TRACED VIOLATION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES IN UGANDA.

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