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GUNS



EVERYWHERE

The Military and Transition Politics in Uganda

Godber Tumushabe • Andrew Karamagi • Barnet Musasizi • Job Kijja



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The completion of this study, *Guns Everywhere: The Military and Transition Politics in Uganda*, represents a collective journey of resilience, meticulous historical exploration and unwavering commitment to democratic governance. We owe a profound debt of gratitude to the institutional networks, independent scholars and courageous individuals who supported this work despite an increasingly challenging civic and political landscape.

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CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	13
2	DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS: A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW	21
3	UGANDA’S MILITARY FROM THE PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD TO THE MAKING OF THE 1995 CONSTITUTION	27
4	UGANDA’S SECURITY FORCES IN THE POST-1995 CONSTITUTIONAL DISPENSATION	41
5	A MILITARY COUP BY OTHER MEANS: FROM CONSTITUTIONAL TRANSITION TO A MILITARY-ENABLED SUCCESSION	63
6	FROM THE UPDF BACK TO THE NRA	125
7	SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE: THE DAWN OF THE WARRIOR MAD KING SCENARIO	153
8	CONCLUSION	167

Uganda and the military at a glance	7
List of figures	8
List of tables	10
List of boxes	10
Abbreviations	11

UGANDA AND THE MILITARY AT A GLANCE

63 years of independence by December 2025 – and not a single peaceful transfer of power between presidents	4 constitutions since 1962; none has yet subordinated the gun to civilian control	40 years of Museveni’s rule in January 2026 – the rebel commander remains Commander-in-Chief and Chairman of the High Command
10 army representatives reserved seats in Parliament in every election cycle since 1996	8 chiefs of the defence forces since 1995; every surviving one but Muntu went on to Cabinet or command	2,098 pages in the 2021 UPDF Establishment, which codified forces Parliament had declined to legislate
81 clauses in the February 2025 draft of the UPDF (Amendment) Bill, up from 67 in 2024	7 routes by which civilians become subject to military law under the 2025 Bill’s section 117A	0 of the 2025 Bill’s 13 objectives address the army’s subordination to civilian authority

Figures as discussed in this publication, as at December 2025.

LIST OF FIGURES

1	Guns at home: Selected sites where the gun has shaped Uganda's politics, 1960–2025	17
2	Three essential characteristics of a functional democratic state	24
3	Political transitions: A typology	26
4	The military in Uganda from the pre-colonial period to independence in 1962	29
5	Selected milestones in the evolution of Uganda's military, 1962–1995	32
6	No peaceful handover: How Uganda's heads of state have left office since independence	39
7	The security committee pyramid: Membership of the National Security Council and its district and sub-county committees	47
8	Army law step by step: What the NRA Statute, 1991 and the 1995 Constitution removed, changed and added	48
9	"UPDF/NRA": How President Museveni has spoken of the national army since 1995	52
10	From bodyguard to parallel army: Commanders and acting commanders of the Special Forces Command and its predecessors, 1981–2025	56
11	Major legislative milestones in the development of army legislation in Uganda, 1995–2025	60
12	Army law step by step: The 2000 revision and the UPDF Act, 2005	62
13	In his own words: President Museveni on the army, the courts, his opponents and the Constitution, 2012–2025	67
14	The Avenger: The rise of Muhoozi Kainerugaba from LDU recruiter to Chief of Defence Forces	71
15	Birthday politics: Where Muhoozi Kainerugaba's birthday events were held, and what happened, 2022–2025	74
16	The general as diplomat: The Chief of Defence Forces and the diplomatic corps, 2013–2025	77
17	Africa's axis of emerging monarchical military regimes: Where rulers have prepared sons for power through the army, 2001–2025	78
18	From republic to dynasty: Sons, soldiers and succession in Africa, 2001–2025	79
19	Army representatives in Parliament by election cycle, 1994–2021	80
20	From the barracks to the Cabinet: Army commanders and Chiefs of Defence Forces since 1984	81
21	UPDF representatives in Parliament, 1996–2025: Who sat, and what the Hansard records	82
22	What UPDF representatives did in Parliament, by function of a legislator, 1996–2025	83
23	Gunned down: Targeted shootings of Muslim clerics and public officials in Uganda, 2012–2021	87
24	Soldiers in the civil service: Selected retired and serving senior army officers in public institutions	89
25	Operation Wealth Creation: Key milestones, July 2013 – December 2025	92
26	Who runs Operation Wealth Creation: National leadership and regional coordinators, 2013–2025	94
27	Operation Wealth Creation by the numbers: What the operation claims, and what remains	95
28	Evolution of the National Enterprise Corporation (NEC), 1989–2024: Then and now	98
29	The role of NEC and the UPDF in Uganda's development activities	99
30	Informal and semi-formal security formations in Uganda, 1990s–2025, against the electoral calendar	111
31	Guns turned inward: The most extreme acts of violence by the army and police, 2018–2025, and January 2026†	117
32	The army and Uganda's elections, 1996 – December 2025: 37 documented episodes	121
33	Officers in the electoral record, 1996–2025: Who did what, and what followed	122
34	The UPDF command structure under the UPDF Establishment, 2021 (simplified)	128

35	The intelligence architecture of the UPDF: The Chieftaincy of Defence Intelligence and Security (J-2)	130
36	An army down to the sub-county: Structure of the Reserve Force under the UPDF Establishment	132
37	Summary of the changes proposed in the UPDF (Amendment) Bill, 2024	134
38	Basic facts about the UPDF (Amendment) Bill, 2025 (revised draft of February 19, 2025)	136
39	From establishment to statute: What the UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025 did with the structures of the UPDF Establishment, 2021	138
40	Army law step by step: The UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025	139
41	The UPDF Amendment Bill's objectives tested against the constitutional principles of a national army	140
42	The UPDF legal services: Structure and scope of mandate	147
43	A parallel military government in formation: Three arms of government, constitutional and military	150
44	"The thirst for blood": Selected posts by the Chief of Defence Forces on X, 2025	155
45	Projecting power abroad: UPDF deployments in Africa, 1996–2025	159
46	The road ahead: Three phases and three roads to 2031	163
47	Tracking civilian control through five instruments, 1991–2025	168

LIST OF TABLES

1	Defence policy objectives versus UPDF defence objectives	50
2	The NRA of January 26, 1986, written into the UPDF Act, 2005	53
3	Two organs, one membership: The Defence Forces Council and the High Command compared	54
4	Raising an army: How the founding provision of Uganda’s armed forces has changed, 1964–2005	58
5	The UPDF command structure as established under the UPDF Act, 2005 (Cap 330): Organs and functions	61
6	Notable positions in the Uganda Police Force occupied by serving military personnel, 2000–2025	101
7	Political vigilante and mobilisation groups across election cycles, 2001–2025	110
8	What the CDF says: Selected posts by Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba on X, April–May 2025	115
9	Guns turned inward: The incidents, and what followed, 2018–2025, and January 2026†	118
10	Militarisation of Uganda’s electoral processes, 1980–2025	120
11	Composition of the UPDF Joint Services Headquarters	129
12	Role of the Reserve Force	132
13	How the objectives grew: The 2024 Bill, the unpublished 2025 draft and the published 2025 Bill compared	137
14	The warrior mad king scenario at a glance: Ten trends, the evidence up to December 2025, and the signposts to watch	162

LIST OF BOXES

1	The army’s eighteen reasons for the coup of January 25, 1971	33
2	Members of the National Resistance Army Council	36
3	Code of Conduct of the National Resistance Army (NRA): A. Dealing with the public	36
4	Policing by other means: Joint and auxiliary security units, 2002–2016	108
5	Sources and organisation of the Reserve Force	133
6	Clause 30 of the 2025 draft: Insertion of section 117A — “Other persons subject to military law”	146
7	Article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995: Defence of the Constitution	164

ABBREVIATIONS

ADF	Allied Democratic Forces	NGO	Non-governmental organisation
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia	NRA	National Resistance Army
ATMIS	African Union Transition Mission in Somalia	NRAC	National Resistance Army Council
AU	African Union	NRC	National Resistance Council
CA	Constituent Assembly	NRM	National Resistance Movement
CDF	Chief of Defence Forces	NRM-O	National Resistance Movement Organisation
CEDO	Civic Education for Development Organisation	NSC	National Security Council
CIC / C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief	NUP	National Unity Platform
CID	Criminal Investigations Directorate	OWC	Operation Wealth Creation
CMI	Chief of Military Intelligence	PDM	Parish Development Model
CPS	Central Police Station	PGB	Presidential Guard Brigade
DP	Democratic Party	PLU	Patriotic League of Uganda
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo	PPU	Presidential Protection Unit
DRSC	Defence Reserve Support Council	PRA	Popular Resistance Army (1981); People's Redemption Army (2004–2006)
EAC	East African Community	PSU	Public Safety Unit
EACRF	EAC Regional Force	RDC	Resident District Commissioner
ESO	External Security Organisation	RRU	Rapid Response Unit
FARDC	Armed Forces of the DRC	SFC	Special Forces Command
FDC	Forum for Democratic Change	SFG	Special Forces Group
FEDEMO	Federal Democratic Movement	SRB	State Research Bureau
FRONASA	Front for National Salvation	TPDF	Tanzania People's Defence Forces
GLISS	Great Lakes Institute for Strategic Studies	UDRP	Uganda Defence Reform Programme
GSU	General Service Unit	UFF	Uganda Freedom Fighters
HCU	High Command Unit	UFM	Uganda Freedom Movement
IBEA	Imperial British East Africa Company	UHRC	Uganda Human Rights Commission
IDEA	Innovations for Democratic Engagement and Action	UN	United Nations
IGP	Inspector General of Police	UNLA	Uganda National Liberation Army
ISO	Internal Security Organisation	UNLF	Uganda National Liberation Front
JATT	Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force	UNLF-AD	Uganda National Liberation Front – Anti-Dictatorship
KAP	Kalangala Action Plan	UNRF	Uganda National Rescue Front
KAR	King's African Rifles	UPC	Uganda People's Congress
LDU	Local Defence Unit	UPDF	Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army	UPF	Uganda Police Force
MoDVA	Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs	UPM	Uganda Patriotic Movement
MP	Member of Parliament	UYD	Uganda Young Democrats
NAADS	National Agricultural Advisory Services	VCCU	Violent Crime Crack Unit
NEC	National Enterprise Corporation		

INTRODUCTION

It is a bright sunny day in June 2031, at Kololo Ceremonial Grounds. Three years to this day, the incumbent administration had made a major announcement: “Kololo back to the People!” returning the grounds to the citizens as part of the public square. Uganda has gone through a gruelling but largely exciting, peaceful, free and fair election. Former President Yoweri Kaguta Tibuhaburwa Museveni Ssaabalwanyi addresses the ecstatic audience reflecting on the historic significance of the “resistance” that brought Uganda and Ugandans to this epic moment. The Chief Justice of Uganda, in his regalia, is the presiding officer. Outgoing President – H.E. *Entuuha ya Uganda* from the Solidarity Union Party – is handing over the instruments of power to the incoming President-elect – Promise Uganda – of the newly formed Popular Forces for Change Party. It’s a new president. It’s a new political party. The transition from over 70 years of authoritarian rule has finally happened and this ceremony is cementing a new tradition of a peaceful transfer of power from one president to another and from one political party to another. A transition that began 5 years ago, in 2026, has come to fruition.

For a country that has gone through a tumultuous colonial and post-colonial history, the picture of Uganda painted above is the most desirable scenario for the present and the future. Today, there are generations of Ugandans born in the aftermath of independence that still relive the nostalgia of the end of colonial rule. There are those born during Idi Amin’s reign of terror currently reliving the horrors of kidnappings, torture, detentions without trial, and extrajudicial executions that have increasingly become the hallmark of Yoweri Museveni’s 40-year-old regime. Depending on where you live, what you do, what political group you are aligned to, or who you know or don’t know in the incumbent regime, life can simply and instantly turn into a dreadful nightmare.

“ Depending on where you live, what you do, what political group you are aligned to, or who you know or don’t know in the incumbent regime, life can simply and instantly turn into a dreadful nightmare.”

When we published our first political transition scenarios paper in 2021¹, we described three possible transition scenarios for Uganda: the Crested Crane scenario, the Storm in the Teacup scenario, and the Warrior-Mad-King scenario. We presented evidence that the Warrior-Mad-King scenario was the most likely. In this paper, we now show that the Ugandan military remains the single most important factor in the political transition process. The Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF) or elements within it are increasingly being weaponised against citizens and systematically pushing the country towards the warrior-mad-king scenario.

Since 2021, no significant scenarios building work has been undertaken to understand the factors that may shape Uganda's political transition process from the incumbent president to the future. While the authors of the transition scenarios paper referenced above pointed to the outsized influence of the security forces in such a process, very little was known about the security forces and how their influence would shape or be influenced by the alternative scenarios. The purpose of this paper therefore is to deepen our understanding of Uganda's security forces, particularly the army and its allied paramilitary, militia and vigilante groups and how their past and present configuration may impact on the inevitable political transition from the incumbent president to another president.

Taking a historical approach, the paper maps out the evolution of Uganda's military from the pre-colonial period to the present and postulates how such a military could behave in the inevitable political transition process. Our analysis leads to six main conclusions.

First, from the colonial period to the present, Uganda has never had a 'national army'. The colonial army grew out of the Sudanese levies of the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) and became part of the King's African Rifles (KAR), a force raised and commanded by foreigners. At independence it became the Uganda Rifles and, after the 1964 mutiny, the Uganda Army, which Milton Obote and Idi Amin Dada both used to achieve their personal political objectives during the 1960s and the 1970s. Following the "liberation" war against Idi Amin, Oyite Ojok and Yoweri Museveni embarked on recruiting personal armies. Oyite Ojok's army became the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), while Museveni's Front for National Salvation (FRONASA) fighters formed the core of the Popular Resistance Army (PRA), which in 1981 merged with Yusuf Lule's Uganda Freedom Fighters (UFF) to form the National Resistance Army (NRA), the military wing of the National Resistance Movement (NRM). When Oyite Ojok died in a helicopter crash in December 1983, his UNLA crumbled and collapsed under the weight of its internal rivalries and the pressure from the NRA. Museveni's NRA captured power in 1986 and declared itself the national army.

Secondly, in spite of the many attempts to transform the NRA into a national army, including constitutionally baptising it the UPDF, the contemporary UPDF remains the NRA in terms of its loyalty, legal structure, operational structure and general disposition. While the UPDF has evolved into a credible and respected fighting force within the region, the numerous reforms have failed to de-link it from the rebel NRA and its political wing - the NRM. As President Museveni has become increasingly challenged in the political space, his conduct has become more inclined towards summoning the ghost of the NRA of Luwero Triangle² as opposed to the character of a national army envisaged under the 1995 Constitution. All evidence as laid out in

1. Godber Tumushabe and Job Kijja, 2021. Uganda's political transition scenarios to 2026 and beyond: the Crested Crane, the storm in the Teacup, or the Warrior Mad King? GLISS and IDEA, Kampala.

2. Luwero Triangle is a location in central Uganda where Museveni and his National Resistance Army launched the guerrilla campaign against Milton Obote's government between 1981 and 1986 eventually leading to his rise to power.

this paper points to the fact that by every measure, the UPDF remains the NRA and the NRA remains Museveni's army.

Thirdly, the weaponisation of the military against Ugandan citizens that defined the KAR, the Uganda Army and the UNLA is reaching fever pitch levels with the UPDF. Unfortunately, the delivery of violence by the UPDF as an institution or elements within under the camouflage of military uniform has gained currency. Incidences of violence are either perpetrated by the Special Forces Command (SFC), the Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force, the Kiboko Squad or some "errant" elements within the Army. The lines of responsibility and accountability are increasingly being blurred and in the majority of cases, the Uganda Police Force - helpless and confused - is increasingly taking the role of cleaning up the mess.

Fourth, President Museveni established a parallel military government with full executive, legislative and judicial authority. With the adoption of the 2021 UPDF Establishment without civilian or parliamentary oversight, he has laid out an elaborate structure determined by himself as Commander-in-Chief and the army. The Establishment shifts the trajectory of military reforms away from civilian control as envisaged under the 1995 Constitution and the 2004 White Paper on Defence Transformation.³ Deliberately or unconsciously, the reforms published in the UPDF Establishment and now being codified into legislation mixes issues of national defence and security policy, army's subordination to civilian authorities, command and control structures and the general administration of the army.

“By every measure, the UPDF remains the NRA and the NRA remains Museveni's army.

Fifth, the 2021 transition scenarios paper predicted that a Warrior-Mad-King scenario was the most likely scenario for Uganda as the country heads towards the 2026 general elections and beyond. The emerging evidence, epitomised by Museveni's willingness to deploy his army to solve what are inherently political disputes, suggests that we don't need to change our scenario predictions. Effectively, 63 years after Uganda became independent and almost 4 decades under Museveni's NRA, guns are still everywhere. The deployment of armed military officers in parliament to force the passage of the Coffee Bill⁴, the deployment of hooded military officers displaying combat hardware in the March 2025 Kawempe North parliamentary by-election⁵, the abduction and torture of Edward Ssebuwufu aka Eddie Mutwe by the Chief of Defence Forces (CDF)⁶, and the brazen attack by UPDF gunmen on Lubowa Police Post⁷, and weeks later on the Wakiso police division⁸ unleashing generalised violence on police officers and civilians alike, all

³. Republic of Uganda, 2004. White Paper on Defence Transformation, June 2004.

⁴. National Coffee (Amendment) Bill, 2024

⁵. Charles Onyango-Obbo, Kawempe North violence: A glimpse of both past and future, Daily Monitor, March 20, 2025, accessed at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/oped/columnists/charles-onyango-obbo/kawempe-north-violence-a-glimpse-of-both-past-and-future-4970704> on March 22, 2025

⁶. Bobi Wine: Bodyguard Eddie Mutwe 'waterboarded, electrocuted' in custody, The East African, May 8, 2025, accessed at <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/bobi-wine-bodyguard-eddie-mutwe-waterboarded-electrocuted-5033412> on May 10, 2025; <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/05/14/the-deranged-dictators-son-livestreaming-torture-from-his/>

⁷. Soldiers raided Lubowa Police Station on the Kampala-Entebbe highway. See "New details on soldiers' raid on city police station", Daily Monitor, May 2, 2025, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/new-details-on-soldiers-raid-on-city-police-station-5025214>

⁸. Andrew Bagala, "Why soldiers raided Wakiso police station", Daily Monitor, June 4, 2025, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/why-soldiers-raided-wakiso-police-station-5068452>

point to a country “sleep walking” towards a Warrior-Mad-King scenario. The deafening silence from or acquiescence of the President and Commander-in-Chief, and of the leadership of parliament all give the impression of a *de facto* military coup.

Sixth, Uganda has not only stalled on its transition to a stable, and prosperous democracy as envisaged under the 1995 Constitution. It is now a country experiencing systemic democratic reversals. The takeover of key physical, economic, political and technological installations of state by the military is akin to a military *coup d'état* in slow motion. The expropriation of traditionally public spaces such as Kololo Ceremonial Grounds, the Constitutional Square and the National Leadership Institute at Kyankwanzi may pass as legitimate management operations, but has profound implications for Uganda's democratic transition and the place of the military in Uganda's politics. The incumbent ruling elites are uneasy about and opposed to any meaningful governance reforms. The regime has been able to weaken and effectively demobilise political opposition parties and other institutions of citizenship. Having fully engineered a parliamentary majority of cheerleader members of parliament that constitute the ruling National Resistance Movement caucus, and weaponised the military and other security agencies against political dissent, there are hardly any incentives for the ruling elite to negotiate a compromise political consensus. The fear of regime-engineered reforms and the absence of conditions for negotiating a compromise consensus create the level of political uncertainty that makes an ignoble collapse of the regime almost inevitable.

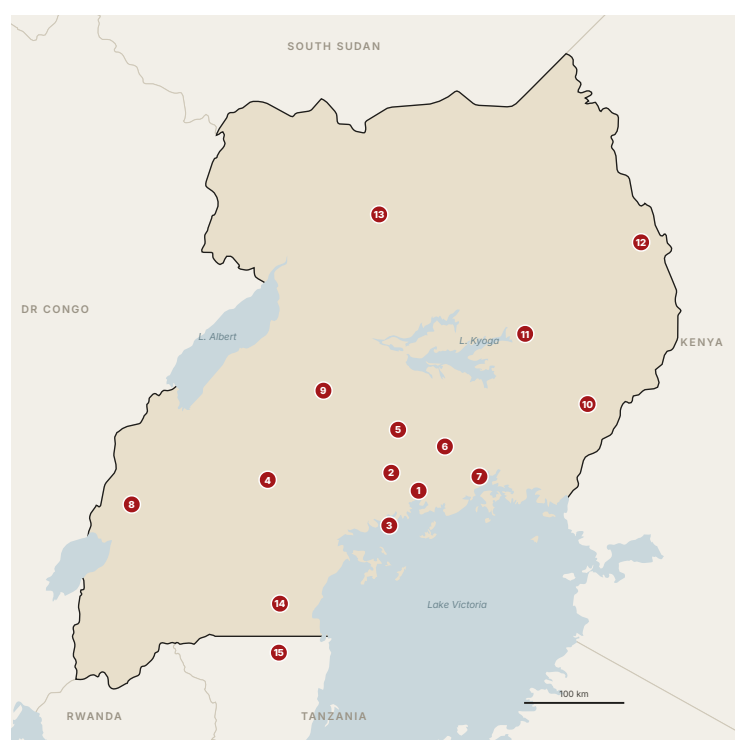
“The takeover of key physical, economic, political and technological installations of state by the military is akin to a military *coup d'état* in slow motion.

Finally, the publication of the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (Amendment) Bill, tabled in Parliament on May 13, 2025, epitomises President Museveni's desire to return Uganda to the ghost of the 1966 attack on the Kabaka's palace. That attack elevated the military over and above any authority, including civilian authority in Uganda. The Bill's codification of the administratively constituted services – the Reserve Forces and the SFC, the concentration of military power in the Joint Command and the High Command and hence the CDF without clear structures for civilian oversight and accountability, and the extension of jurisdiction of military courts to try civilians fundamentally alters the balance of power from “WE THE PEOPLE” to the military. The Bill constitutes an undeclared *coup d'état* against Article 1 of the Constitution which declares that “power belongs to the people.” The Bill was passed by Parliament on May 20, 2025 and signed into law by the President on June 12, 2025 as the UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025,⁹ making the majority NRM members of parliament co-conspirators in the official overthrow of the 1995 Constitution.

⁹ The Bill was tabled in Parliament on May 13, 2025 and passed on May 20, 2025 after a rushed debate and a walk-out by opposition members of parliament who protested its processing that did not allow comprehensive public participation. The President assented to it on June 12, 2025 (the assent was announced on June 16) and it came into force on June 27, 2025 as Act 8 of 2025.

“The fear of regime-engineered reforms and the absence of conditions for negotiating a compromise consensus create the level of political uncertainty that makes an ignoble collapse of the regime almost inevitable.

FIGURE 1 Guns at home: Selected sites where the gun has shaped Uganda’s politics, 1960–2025



- 1 Kampala**
1966 army attack on the Lubiri that forced the Kabaka into exile; November 2020 shootings during protests over Bobi Wine's arrest (at least 54 killed); Kololo grounds; March 2025 Kawempe North by-election violence
- 2 Lubowa and Nansana (Wakiso)**
2025 attacks by gunmen in UPDF uniform on Lubowa police station and Nansana police post
- 3 Entebbe**
1976 Israeli raid; Special Forces Command headquarters
- 4 Kabamba**
6 Feb 1981: NRA attack launches the bush war
- 5 Luweero Triangle**
NRA–UNLA war, 1981–86
- 6 Kayunga**
September 2009: the Kabaka's visit is blocked, sparking riots across Buganda; army deployed, at least 27 killed
- 7 Jinja**
January 1964 army mutiny
- 8 Kasese**
November 2016 attack on the Rwenzururu palace
- 9 Kyankwanzi**
National Leadership Institute
- 10 Bugisu & Bukedi**
January 1960 KAR deployment: 12 killed
- 11 Teso**
Rebellion of 1987–92; Arrow Boys militia raised against the LRA, 2003
- 12 Karamoja**
Four decades of gun violence, cattle rustling and forced disarmament
- 13 Gulu and Acholi**
Twenty years of insurgency, 1986–2006
- 14 Rakai**
Tarehe Sita (Army Day) celebrations, 2025
- 15 Kagera Salient (Tanzania)**
November 1978 invasion, leading to Amin's fall

Source: Compiled by the authors from events discussed in this publication. Boundaries: Natural Earth. Locations approximate.

1.1 Reflections on how the paper was prepared, and its limitations

As already mentioned, the authors set out to answer significant questions that were never answered by the earlier authors of the 2021 Uganda political transition scenarios paper. Talking about the UPDF and its predecessor, the NRA, is a sensitive question in Uganda. The UPDF has been idolised to the point of holding it unblemished for any wrongs. The dominant narratives are that the UPDF is a national army, it brought peace, it does not engage in acts of violence, it is pro-people, it is a peoples' army and so on. Consequently, if you attempt to challenge these narratives, you are either unpatriotic, ungrateful to the men and women who serve in the military, or, worse still, you are parroting foreign narratives or you are a foreign agent.

This study was therefore approached with an open mind, and we set out to collect and collate any data that could explain the evolution, the trends, the patterns and the current posture of the military. We needed to find "reasonable" explanations for the dominant presence of the military in every segment of Ugandan society. Was the escalating military-led violence a mere anecdote or a structural condition that defines the nation's current military posture? Has the command of the military changed since the time of colonialism, when we had a clear mercenary army? How relevant are these changes to the political transition discourse? If the UPDF is a people's army, why has it adopted an aggressive posture, deploying extreme violence against any political activist that crosses its path? These questions were largely informed by the authors' own observations of what was happening in the country throughout the time of writing.

Addressing these questions required taking a historical approach. The historicisation of the research was intended to mitigate potential biases often driven by analysis of standalone events or anecdotes as if they were dominant phenomena. We divided the study into phases to enable possible deductions from each phase. The pre-independence phase helped us understand the way the army evolved during the pre-colonial and the colonial period, and the character of the army that was bequeathed to Uganda at independence. We defined the second phase to cover the period from independence to the promulgation of the Constitution in 1995. After a tumultuous three decades, the promulgation of the 1995 Constitution was supposed to be Uganda's point of departure from a history of violence, abuse of human rights, conflicts and bad politics, to build a country where human dignity and fidelity to the law would be the defining canons of citizenship. Phase 3 of the analysis covers the period from 1995 to the time of publication of this paper. It is informed by questions on how we lived up to the promise of the 1995 Constitution, which sought to subordinate the "Gun" to civilian authority.

The review of the literature took a similar historical approach. We dived deep into the archives to access critical empirical as well as qualitative data and information. Accessing information about the military can be quite challenging. We stood on the shoulders of the intellectual giants who had come before us and wrote about the military and politics in Uganda. The works of leading authors on the colonial and post-independence armies, such as Ali Mazrui (1975),¹⁰ Amii Omara-Otunnu (1987)¹¹ and Timothy Parsons (1999),¹² provided rich material that was foundational to our analysis. For the post-1986 era, Kagoro described the process by which the

¹⁰. Ali A. Mazrui, **Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda: The Making of a Military Ethnocracy** (Beverly Hills and London: Sage, 1975).

¹¹. Amii Omara-Otunnu, **Politics and the Military in Uganda, 1890–1985** (London: Macmillan, in association with St Antony's College, Oxford, 1987).

¹². Timothy H. Parsons, **The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902–1964** (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999).

military penetrated politics and society.¹³ As early as 2021, Tapscott documented how the NRM regime had adopted a system of rule through institutionalised arbitrariness.¹⁴ In *Militarising More to Develop Faster?*, Namwase and others documented the role and influence of the military in different segments of Ugandan society.¹⁵ In *Autocratisation in Contemporary Uganda: Clientelism, Coercion and Social Control*, Khisa (2025) put a spotlight on clientelism, coercion and social control as the regime's main tools of control.¹⁶ Although most of these publications did not directly address militarisation as a military coup in slow motion, they helped give us the most unique points of inquiry and to examine the trends as they evolved. Building on this wealth of literature, we were deeply interested in the grey, sometimes unpublished, literature.

The gaps in the record and information are reflected in the illustration on the command of the SFC. We did not find a complete record of the parliamentary Hansards. For example, we found some 1,902 reports of sittings of Parliament for the period 1996–2025, accessed from Parliament's online archives at parliament.go.ug. There are missing or incomplete records. This limited our analysis of the contributions of army MPs in Parliament. We therefore narrowed our analysis to a sample of 30 sittings that cover each Parliament, the budget sessions and the debates where the army had the most at stake. We needed to make some deductions regarding the contributions of these army representatives in Parliament, or, better still, about the nature of the contributions the country would have missed if these soldiers were not sitting in Parliament as MPs.

We dedicated considerable time and resources to retrieve, document and analyse the historical record of army legislation. There are significant normative questions regarding the establishment, control and subordination of the military to civilian authorities. At each legislative milestone, we sought to understand what changes were introduced in the normative legal framework: what was removed? What was changed? What was added? The overall conclusion from the analysis is that we have come full circle: from a personal colonial and post-colonial army, to an attempt at creating a national army under the 1995 Constitution, and back to a personal army, with the reversals epitomised in the 2021 UPDF Establishment and the UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025.

Finally, we conducted countless unstructured key informant interviews to crosscheck and collate some of the information and data. These included speaking with retired and serving military officers, who helped validate some of our findings and conclusions but also challenged some of our deductions. Most of these resource persons spoke to us on condition of anonymity, to be able to speak candidly on military matters. We are therefore unable to mention individual names here.

This study was impacted by two major limitations. The first and most important was the limited or scattered nature of primary information and data about the military. Consequently, there is considerable reliance on secondary data and sources, which may affect the quality of the analysis. The second major limitation was financial. This work was undertaken under the auspices of the Great Lakes Institute for Strategic Studies and IDEA. During the course of the study, these two think tanks were being harassed by the authorities for exactly the same kind of

¹³ Jude Kagoro, **Militarization in Post-1986 Uganda: Politics, Military and Society Interpretation** (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2015).

¹⁴ Rebecca Tapscott, **Arbitrary States: Social Control and Modern Authoritarianism in Museveni's Uganda** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

¹⁵ Sylvie Namwase, Ronald Naluwairo, Zahara Nampewo and Ole Wæver (eds.), **Militarizing More to Develop Faster? Uganda's Difficult Choices on Governance, Human Rights and the Economy** (2023).

¹⁶ Moses Khisa (ed.), **Autocratization in Contemporary Uganda: Clientelism, Coercion and Social Control** (London: Zed Books/Bloomsbury, 2025).

groundbreaking governance work that they had been undertaking. Besides the limited financial resources to support the research work, the authors were also confronted with making hard choices on how much self-censorship would guide the final publication. We were unable to overcome the funding constraint, and therefore the completion and publication dates kept shifting. We were, however, able to overcome the censorship questions by demanding of ourselves compelling qualitative information and accurate quantitative data, as evidenced throughout the publication.

DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS: A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

Theoretical and empirical studies on democratic transitions are now a dominant feature in political science discourses around the world. While it is possible to stretch the discourse on democracy to the Egyptian and Athenian epochs, the most recent studies can be traced back to the 1980 Woodrow Wilson Centre project “Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy in Latin America and Southern Europe”.¹⁷ Based on a series of conferences convened by the Woodrow Wilson Centre in 1979, 1980 and 1981, O'Donnell and Schmitter published a four volume treatise on Transition from Authoritarian Rule, drawing on experiences of regime transitions in Latin America and Southern Europe. The work by these scholars had been triggered by what is popularly recorded as the “third wave” of democratic changes that unfolded in the wake of the overthrow of the Portuguese fascist dictatorship in 1974.¹⁸

Building on the work of O'Donnell and Schmitter, scholars from across the world invested in exploring the range of conceptual and empirical issues that enhance the understanding of regime transitions. A variety of concepts such as authoritarianism, political liberalisation, democracy, regime transitions and many others have been elucidated in a manner that enhances our contemporary understanding of regime transitions. More importantly, these scholars took a more empirical approach to the study of regime transitions by drawing examples from a wide range of cases from different jurisdictions. While the original studies that became the foundational basis for the theoretical construction that underpins contemporary understanding of transition from authoritarian rule were jurisdiction specific (Latin America and Southern Europe), there are direct parallels between some of the countries covered and Uganda, which is the focus of this paper. These similarities may relate to regime types, the structure of the national economy, the range of actors, the place of the military or the geopolitical context of a country.

In *Democracy's Third Wave*¹⁹, Huntington describes three waves of democratic transitions. He asserts that the first wave of democratic transition began in the 1820s with the expansion of adult suffrage in the United States until around 1926, delivering some 29 democracies around the world. The second wave of democratic transitions was triggered by the end of World War II

¹⁷ O'Donnell, Guillermo A, Schmitter, Philippe C, Whitehead Laurence, Baltimore/London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986

¹⁸ Gerald L. Munck (2011). Democratic Theory after Transitions from Authoritarian Rule. Vol. 9/No.2, PP 333-343

¹⁹ Samuel P. Huntington (1991). Democracy's Third Wave. Journal of Democracy, Vol. 2, No. 2, Spring 1991.

around 1945 and ended around 1962 resulting into about 36 countries that were governed democratically. Huntington published his article in 1991 during the third wave of democratisation which was triggered by the collapse of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and the resulting dissolution of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), events that signalled the end of the Cold War.

Unlike the first and second waves, the third wave of democracy happened more than two decades after most of African states, including Uganda, had attained their ceremonial independence from their colonial powers. Most of these countries were caught up in the wave of democratisation that unfolded following the end of the Cold War, resulting into the collapse of several authoritarian regimes across the continent. By mid-1991, Ethiopia's Mengistu Haile Mariam had fled the country, Somalia's Siad Barre had been deposed, and authoritarian regimes in Congo, Cameroon and Togo had accepted some form of pluralistic reforms. Nicephore Soglo had defeated Mathieu Kerekou in Benin. Mali's Moussa Traore had been overthrown in a military coup after 22 years in power leading to multiparty elections. Close to Africa's Southern-most border, a ceasefire agreement had been signed in Angola ending a twenty-seven-year bloody civil war between the regime of José Eduardo dos Santos and UNITA rebels led by Jonas Savimbi.²⁰

Existing literature on transition from authoritarianism has crystallised on a number of conceptual issues and empirical questions that are at the heart of the effort to understand transitions from authoritarian rule. The first set of questions relate to the need to clarify certain concepts and how they relate to practice. The second set of questions relate to the scale or level of analysis. The third set of questions focus on how potential transitions are impacted upon by a range of factors such as the economy, geopolitics, the character and role of security forces, especially the military, and exogenous factors as may be influenced by a country's geo-political position. The bulk of this scholarly work also sheds light on the complexities associated with authoritarian breakdowns, democratic transitions and the conditions that engender the endurance of democracy.

At its core, the discourse on transition from authoritarian regimes presupposes a transition towards democracy. The dominant assumption is that a transition from authoritarian rule is a shift or transition towards democracy. There is therefore a shift from one set of conditions that are best described as authoritarianism to another set of conditions described as democracy. Understanding political transitions, therefore, starts with understanding the character of authoritarian regimes and the desired outcome, which is a functional and stable democratic state. In between these two conditions, there are multiple conditions that many scholars describe as hybrid regimes.

Globally, authoritarian regimes have unique characteristics. They are largely characterised by highly concentrated and centralised governmental power maintained through systematic political repression and the exclusion of potential opponents by brute force, coercion and an elaborate patronage system. At their peak, such as in Hosni Mubarak's Egypt, Augusto Pinochet's Chile, Obiang Nguema's Equatorial Guinea, Paul Biya's Cameroon, Museveni's Uganda and many others, power is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a coterie of people, who act on behalf of the authoritarian ruler. The extent and nature of concentration of power has been variously described by different authors as bureaucratic authoritarianism, authoritarian corporatism, or pre-totalitarianism, among others. At their core, authoritarian rulers and regimes undermine or

²⁰. Al J Venter 2021: Battle for Angola: the End of Cold War in Africa. Helion & Company.

totally reject fair play in politics, invest in actions that deny legitimacy to real or perceived opponents, curtail the civil liberties of opponents, use political violence as a tool for monopolising power, and rely upon ‘divide and rule’ tactics as a tool for governance.

2.1 Political liberalisation

Political liberalisation generally involves the re-establishment of political rights and some degree of citizen control over political processes. The political transition theory discourse suggests that political liberalisation can take place under authoritarian regimes. Depending on the obtaining political conditions and the range and incentives of actors, such political liberalisation can be a precursor to democratisation, although in some cases the transition can result into a reverse to more intense forms of authoritarianism. O'Donnell and Schmitter define liberalisation as “the process of making effective certain rights that protect both individuals and social groups from arbitrary or illegal acts committed by the State or third parties”.²¹

“The political transition theory discourse suggests that political liberalisation can take place under authoritarian regimes.

In practice, authoritarian regimes can embark on efforts to liberalise politics as a response to intense demands for democratisation. Authoritarian rulers may accept demands for liberalisation, mainly to release pressure arising from demands for reform. However, in the absence of effective transition, such liberalisation is unlikely to lead to much needed changes to the structure of power and authority where the authoritarian ruler becomes accountable to the citizens or appropriate institutions of state.

2.2 Democratisation

Democratisation refers to the processes whereby the rules and procedures of citizenship are either applied to political institutions previously governed by other principles (e.g. coercive control, social tradition, expert judgement, or administrative practice), or expanded to include persons not previously enjoying such rights and obligations (e.g. non taxpayers, illiterates, women, youth, ethnic minorities, foreign residents), or extended to cover issues and institutions not previously subject to citizen participation (e.g. state agencies, military establishments, partisan organisations, interest associations, productive enterprises, educational institutions, etc.).²²

According to O'Donnell and Schmitter, citizenship is the fundamental guiding principle of democracy. Citizenship “involves both the right to be treated by fellow human beings as equal with respect to the making of collective choices and the obligation of those implementing such

²¹ Guillermo A. O'Donnell & Philippe C. Schmitter (1986). *Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore. Pp6

²² Uk Heo and Sung Deuk Hahm, *Political Culture and Democratic Consolidation in South Korea*, Asian Survey University of California Press, September 2014

choices to be equally accountable and accessible to all members of the polity.”²³ The principle of citizenship imposes obligations on the ruled to respect the legitimacy of choices made by deliberation among equals, and rights on rulers to act with authority (and to apply coercion where necessary) to promote the effectiveness of such choices, and to protect the polity from threats to its persistence.

FIGURE 2 Three essential characteristics of a functional democratic state



Source: United Nations Development Cooperation Framework.

2.3 Political transitions

The main assumption underlying political transition theory is that any country in which there is a shift away from authoritarianism is a country undergoing transition to democracy. O'Donnell and Schmitter define transition as the interval between one political regime²⁴ and another.²⁵ The political transition discourse attempts to answer fundamental questions such as the triggers or origins of political transitions, the modalities in which the transitions manifest themselves, the range of actors in the political transition process as well as the outcomes of such transition processes.

Existing literature and practice suggest that there are generally three modes of transition from authoritarian rule: reform, compromise, and overthrow.

Transition by way of reform is most likely when the old regime is taking the lead in managing the transition process. This is often possible mainly because the authoritarian regime invested in demobilising and destroying opposition political actors and all other forms of alternative power centres. Under these conditions, the ruling political elite feel safe and comfortable to trigger and manage the transition process often by way of political liberalisation, where they allow citizens to exercise a range of civil and political liberties, short of competitive electoral politics. In a transition process by way of reform, the key actors within the old regime end up still retaining

²³. Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 7–8.

²⁴. The same authors define 'regime' to mean "the ensemble of patterns, explicit or not, that determines the forms and channels of access to principal government positions, the characteristics of the actors, who are admitted and excluded from such access, and the resources or strategies they can use to gain access ...".

²⁵. Guillermo O'Donnell & Philippe C. Schmitter (1986). *Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore. Pp5

political power and are able to influence the range of choices that can be made in the newly established “democracy”.

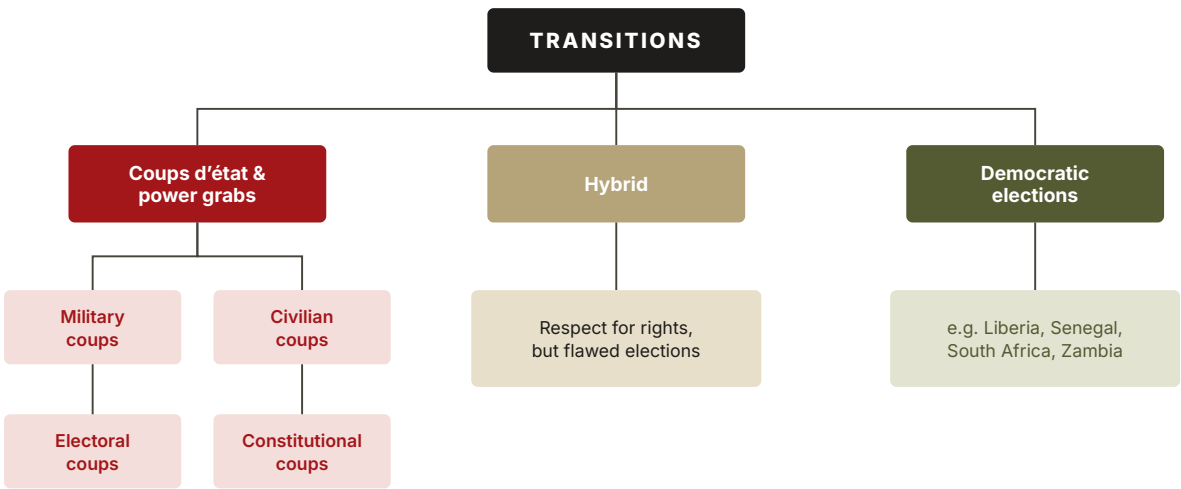
Political transition from authoritarian rule by way of compromise arises from a special condition affecting both the old regime and any existing political opposition and citizens’ pro-democracy activist groups. This situation arises where the authoritarian regime has not succeeded in fully demobilising institutions of citizenship which remain resilient as alternative centres of power. The resultant balance of power, or the fear of a potential balance of terror, acts as incentive for the political elite that hold the monopoly of power within the authoritarian regime to manage a negotiated transition with appropriate safeguards and guarantees.

The overthrow of an authoritarian regime happens when political opposition groups and citizens’ collective organisations have grown strong to a point where they can engineer the overthrow of the regime. This may be achieved through citizens’ popular uprising, a military coup, or a combination of the two. Unlike the other two transition modalities, the overthrow of a regime often creates the widest discretion for citizens to direct the course of democratisation. The downside of overthrowing an authoritarian regime though is that years of authoritarianism weaken institutions of state and citizenship and often leaves that country exposed to potential extreme violence and total breakdown of state. Such has been the fate of countries like Libya, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sudan.

Whatever the mode of the political transition, there is consensus about the general characteristics of most transitions. Across the board, there is agreement about the uncertainty of outcomes of any transition process and fears about potential reversals to authoritarianism. The complexity of political transitions is manifest in the range of complex issues that post-authoritarian governments have to confront: removing the armed forces from politics; establishing procedures for dealing with past human rights abuses; organising mechanisms of political participation, including the convening of “founding elections,” to channel long pent-up demands; and creating a consensus as to the rules regarding how political power is held and exercised.²⁶

²⁶ Larry Diamond, *Is the Third Wave of Democratisation Over? An Empirical Assessment*, Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, 1997, accessed at https://kellogg.nd.edu/sites/default/files/old_files/documents/236.pdf on March 20, 2025

FIGURE 3 Political transitions: A typology



Source: Authors' compilation.

Finally, one of the fundamental challenges in political transitions is how transition to democracy can be attained without a country degenerating into extreme violence or triggering dramatic discontinuity.

UGANDA'S MILITARY FROM THE PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD TO THE MAKING OF THE 1995 CONSTITUTION

The Ugandan military is the most consequential of the segments of the security forces that has an enduring influence on the nation's governance since the founding of the country more than one-and-a-half centuries ago. To understand the extent of this influence and Uganda's political transition trajectory, the analysis in this chapter is divided into three phases: the colonial phase (1894-1962); the post independence period (1962 to the promulgation of a new constitution in 1995); and the post 1995 constitution stretching from 1995 to the present.

3.1 The military during the colonial period

Prior to the establishment of Uganda as a British protectorate in 1894, Uganda was a collection of independent kingdoms and chiefdoms. The most consequential of these kingdoms were Bunyoro Kingdom, Ankole Kingdom, Toro Kingdom and Buganda Kingdom, all of which were located in the geographical space historically known as the interlacustrine region. By 1894, these kingdoms had established standing armies that became the instruments of their imperial ambitions and territorial expansion. In particular, Bunyoro²⁷ and Buganda²⁸ had established considerable armies that fought against each other during this period.²⁹

However, the major process of forming what became a Ugandan military took place over the colonial period (1894-1962). At the very inception of British rule in Uganda in the early 1890s, the Imperial British East Africa (IBEA) Company established a 300-men strong force called the Zanzibar Levy comprising Sudanese soldiers whose mandate was to help the Company manage its Ugandan affairs. Over the years, this force was reorganised and transformed into different formations owing to a range of circumstances such as World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945), containment of the growing popular domestic unrest, and support for military

²⁷. Oyindamola Depo Oyedokun, The Rise and Fall of the Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom, AfricaRebirth, August 30, 2023, accessed at <https://www.africarebirth.com/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-bunyoro-kitara-kingdom/> on March 20, 2025

²⁸. The Kingdom of Buganda, Africa Defence Forum, May 29, 2023, accessed at <https://adf-magazine.com/2023/05/the-kingdom-of-buganda/> on March 20, 2025

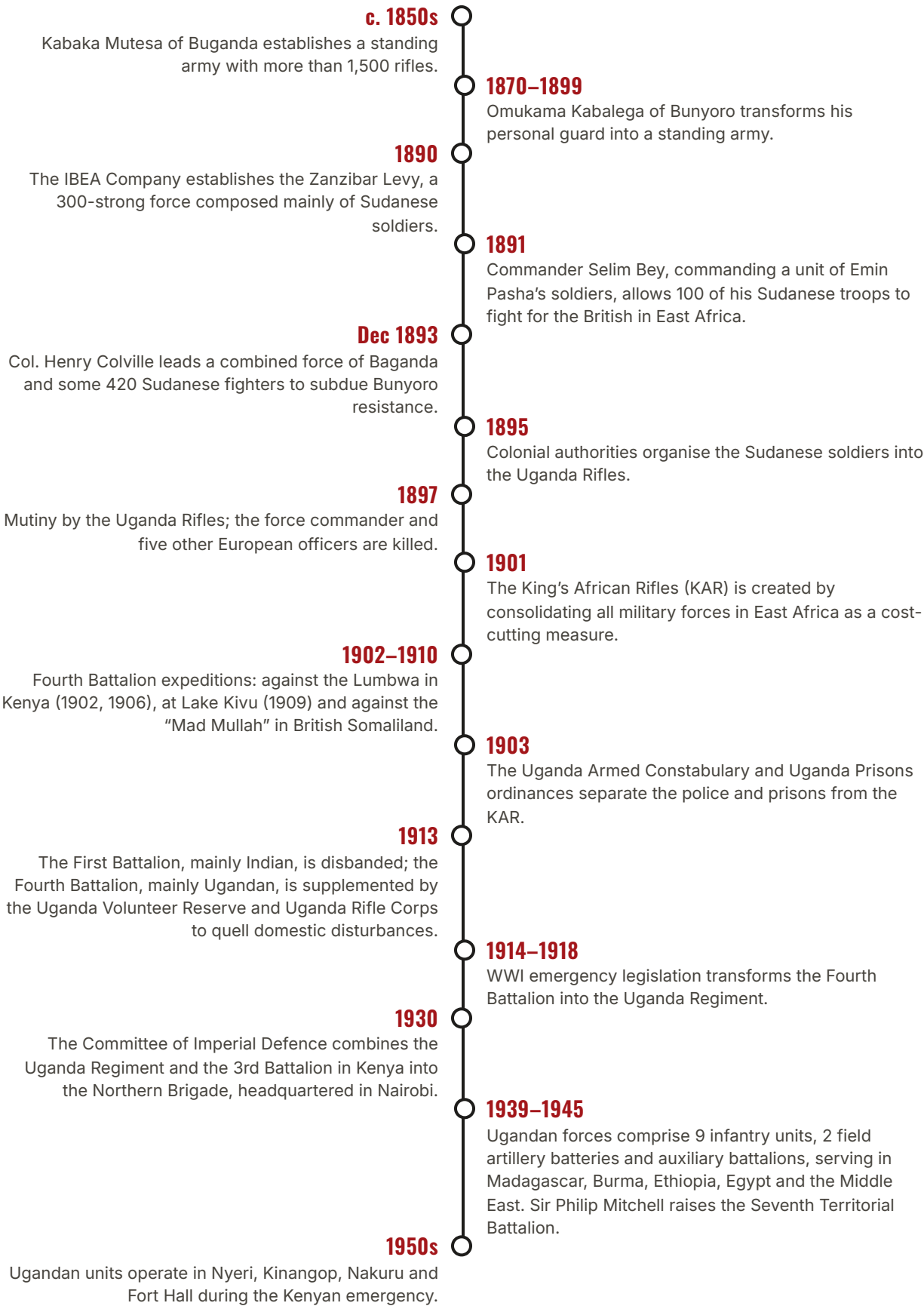
²⁹. Kabalega attacks British army base, sparks war with colonialists, Daily Monitor, June 30, 2019, accessed at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/kabalega-attacks-british-army-base-sparks-war-with-colonialists-1834510> on March 20, 2025

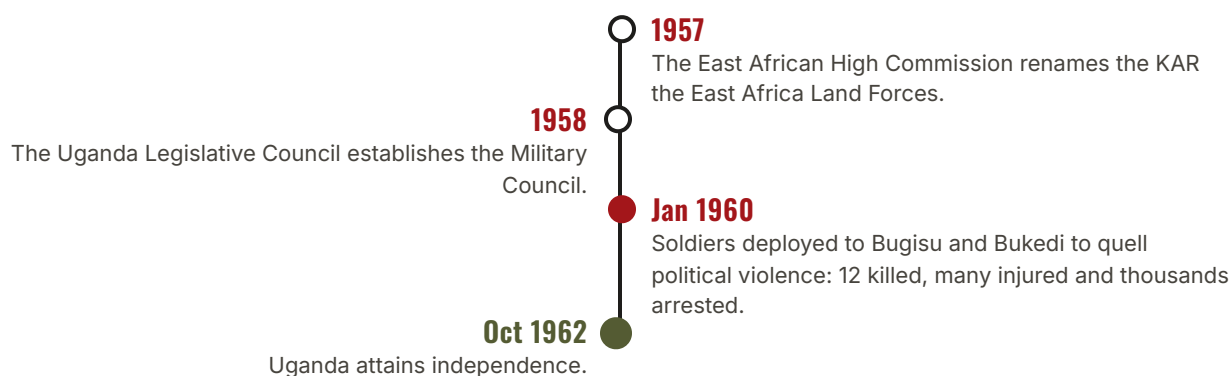
expeditions for the colonial authorities in the region.^{30,31} **Figure 4** shows the metamorphosis of the colonial army from its inception until Uganda gained independence in 1962.

30. <https://www.kingsafricanriflesassociation.co.uk/the-history-of-the-kar/>; https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/The_King%27s_African_Rifles

31. Amii Omara-Otunnu, *Politics and the Military in Uganda, 1890–1985* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, in association with St Antony's College, Oxford, 1987); H. Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles: A Study in the Military History of East and Central Africa, 1890–1945* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1956).

FIGURE 4 The military in Uganda from the pre-colonial period to independence in 1962





Source: Authors' compilation from King's African Rifles Association; Daily Monitor archives.

In 1957, the East African High Commission which had been established in 1948 to administer the British territories of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania changed the name of the force from King's African Rifles (KAR) to East Africa Land Forces. As most of these territories continued to agitate for independence, these colonial troops were deployed to suppress growing anti-colonial protests. For example, in 1960, KAR soldiers were deployed in Bugisu and Bukedi districts to quell ensuing political violence, resulting in the killing of 12 people, injuring many others and the arrest of more than 1,000 others.³² Indeed, the character of Uganda's future military is often considered to be derived from these early manifestations of violence against civilians.

3.2 Uganda's military from 1962 to the promulgation of the 1995 Constitution

At independence in 1962, Uganda's military changed from KAR to Uganda Rifles. On January 22, 1964, a section of the military based in Jinja mutinied, demanding a pay rise and the Ugandanisation of the officer corps. Prime Minister Obote sent the Minister of Internal Affairs, Felix Onama, to Jinja; the mutineers detained and beat him, and he agreed to their demands for pay and promotion.³³ The mutiny was contained by some 450 British soldiers from Scots Guards and Staffordshire Regiment.

The major post independence legal reforms covering the armed forces seems to have been undertaken in 1963. The Visiting Forces Act³⁴ came into force on January 1, 1964. According to its long title, the Act was enacted "to enable service courts and authorities of sending states to which visiting forces³⁵ belong to exercise jurisdiction and other powers over members of such forces and for other purposes connected therewith." It is instructive to note that, among other things, the Visiting Forces Act provided that "...the civil courts shall have the primary right to exercise jurisdiction in respect of any act or omission constituting an offence against any law in force in Uganda alleged to have been committed by a member of a visiting force."³⁶

In March 1964, the Armed Forces (Amendment) Act³⁷ was adopted, amending the Uganda Military Forces Ordinance of 1958.³⁸ Among other things, the Act provided that the appointment

³². Dozens killed in 1960 Bukedi riots as locals oppose unfair taxes, Daily Monitor, April 5, 2020, accessed at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/dozen-killed-in-1960-bukedi-riots-as-locals-oppose-unfair-taxes-1884004> on March 20, 2025

³³. Daily Monitor, "The 1964 army mutiny", August 13, 2012, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/the-1964-army-mutiny-1523172>; M. J. Macoun, *Wrong Place, Right Time: Policing the End of Empire* (1996), p. 74.

³⁴. Cap 308. See Cap 331 of the Revised Edition of the Laws of Uganda, 2023. Vol. XIII

³⁵. "Sending State" is defined as the State to which a visiting force belongs. According to the Act, "visiting force" means anybody, contingent, detachment or member, including a dependent of a member, of the army, navy or air force of any State which, with the consent of the President, is lawfully present in Uganda or on board any aircraft of Uganda.

³⁶. Visiting Forces Act, Cap 331. S.3.

³⁷. No. 5 of 1964

³⁸. No. 34 of 1958

of the members of a court martial would be subject to the approval by the Military Council.³⁹ During the same year, the Armed Forces Act⁴⁰ was enacted, repealing the Uganda Military Forces Ordinance, 1958. Section 1 of the Act provided that “there shall be raised and maintained in accordance with the provisions of this Act and of Regulations made thereunder an Army, and an Air Force to be known as the Army of Uganda and the Air Force of Uganda, not exceeding such strength as may from time to time be determined by Parliament.”⁴¹

The defining moment for Uganda's military came 4 years after independence in 1966. On May 24, 1966, the military under Prime Minister Apollo Milton Obote deposed President Sir Edward Mutesa. The attack on the Lubiri (the Kabaka's palace at Mengo), the climax of what became known as the 1966 crisis, signalled the first time a post-independent politician used the military to settle domestic political scores.⁴² On February 13, 1965, Congolese aircraft bombed West Nile villages of Paidha and Goli. A combination of these incidents and the resulting regime instability triggered Milton Obote to change the architecture of the military in many ways. Idi Amin Dada and Shaban Opolot were appointed army commander and army chief of staff, respectively. Army strength was increased to 4,500 personnel. Army headquarters were moved from Jinja to Kampala. The General Service Unit (GSU) was established, while Israel started offering training of the army and the GSU.

In July 1967, a military police force was created under the command of Idi Amin Dada. **Figure 5** shows some selected timelines in the evolution of Uganda's military for the period from 1962 to the promulgation of the 1995 Constitution. The formation of these auxiliary military outfits has since then remained a permanent feature of Uganda's military and often these outfits redefine civil military relations.

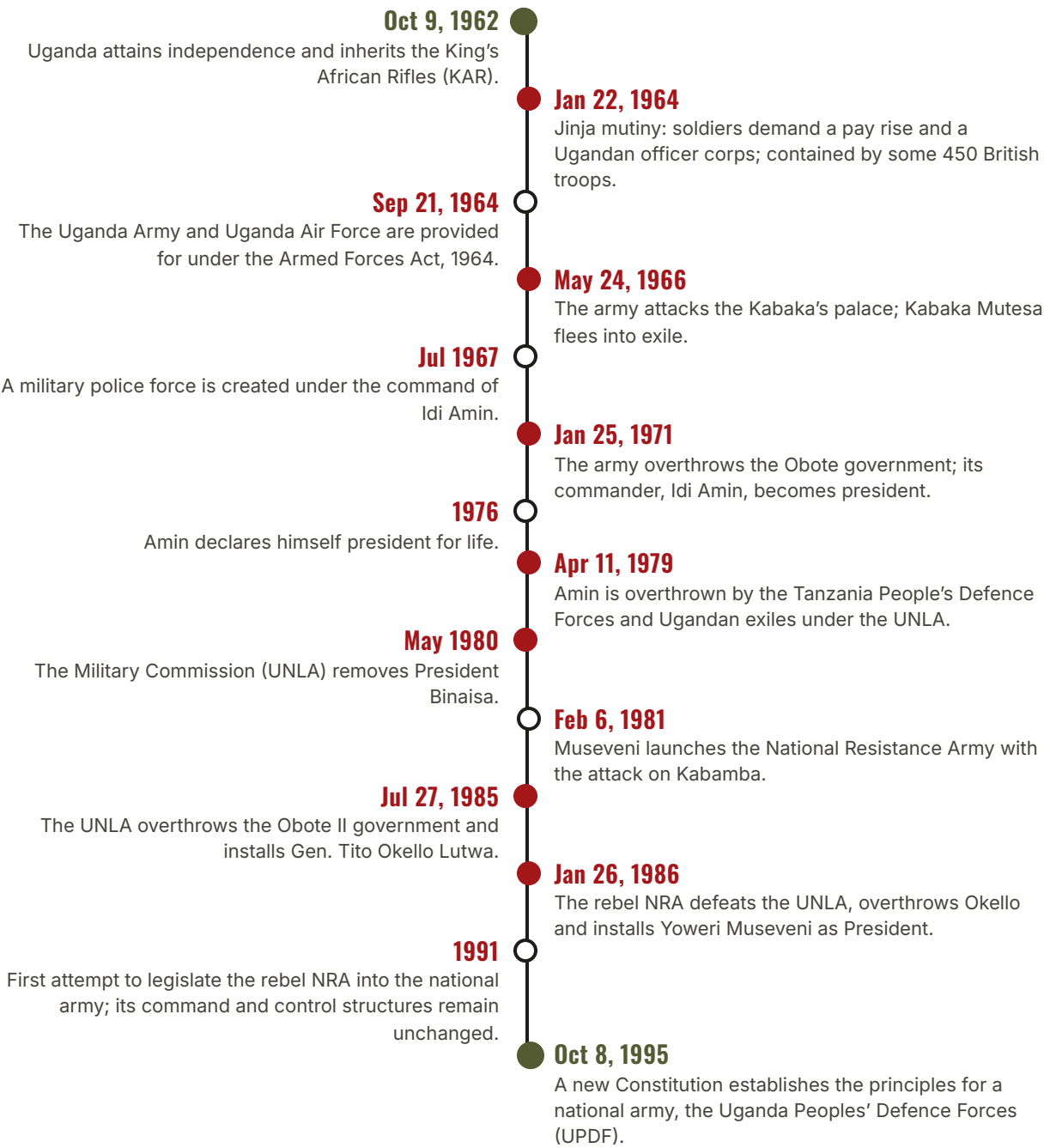
³⁹. The Act came into force on March 23, 1964.

⁴⁰. No. 25 of 1964

⁴¹. The Act was assented to on September 7, 1964, and came into force on September 21, 1964.

⁴². George Kanyeihamba, Kanyeihamba's Commentaries on Law, Politics and Governance, LawAfrica, page 12

FIGURE 5 Selected milestones in the evolution of Uganda’s military, 1962–1995



Source: Authors' compilation.

Milton Obote's government was overthrown by the military on January 25, 1971.⁴³ For the next 8 years (1971-1979), the military dominated all spheres of political, economic and administrative life of the country. The soldiers justified the takeover in eighteen reasons, drafted and read on the day by Warrant Officer II Sam Aswa of the Records Office at Mbuya Barracks (Box 1).⁴⁴ Many of the grievances listed, among them detention without trial, the absence of elections, a second

⁴³. See Statement by the Uganda Army, The Uganda Gazette, Vol. LXIV, No. 5, February 5, 1971.

⁴⁴. Daily Monitor, "How the 1971 overthrow of President Obote was hatched", February 20, 2016, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/how-the-1971-overthrow-of-president-obote-was-hatched-1641098>; Amin's 18 reasons for the coup, in National Movements and the New States in Africa, https://kawa.ac.ug/Africannationalismebook/amins_18_reasons_for_the_coup.html

army outside the regular forces and the division of the army along ethnic lines, would return in the decades that followed. The executive and legislative arms of the government were fused into a powerful military presidency. The military reigned and unleashed terror on the population. Amin established the State Research Bureau (SRB) and the Public Safety Unit (PSU) which became unmatched in terms of notoriety for abuse of human rights. Amin went ahead to militarise many aspects of governmental operations. He established an advisory council comprised mainly of military commanders. Military tribunals were elevated and placed above the civil judicial system, while army officers were appointed in strategic leadership positions traditionally reserved for civilian bureaucratic leaders in government and statutory agencies.⁴⁵

BOX 1 The army's eighteen reasons for the coup of January 25, 1971

As announced on behalf of the army led by Maj. Gen. Idi Amin Dada, the reasons accused the Obote government of:

- i) Detaining people for long periods without trial, among them former ministers and members of the opposition.
- ii) Keeping an indefinite state of emergency, in force since the 1966 crisis, which allowed arrest without trial.
- iii) Denying people the freedom to express their views on political and social problems.
- iv) Failing to stop frequent loss of life and property through robbery and violence.
- v) Proposing a national service that would take people away from their homes.
- vi) Tolerating widespread corruption by ministers and senior civil servants.
- vii) Holding no elections for eight years.
- viii) Pursuing economic policies, including nationalisation, that left many people poor, unemployed and short of basic goods.
- ix) Imposing high taxes that burdened ordinary people.
- x) Allowing the prices of essential goods to rise while prices paid to farmers for crops such as coffee and cotton fell.
- xi) Isolating Uganda from its East African partners.
- xii) Creating a wealthy class of leaders who grew richer while preaching socialism.
- xiii) Failing to convene the Defence Council since 1969, so that the needs of the armed forces went unaddressed.
- xiv) Building a second army, the General Service Unit under Akena Adoko, recruited largely from Obote's home area.
- xv) Using a 1967 development master plan for Lango to place people from one area in key national positions.
- xvi) Dividing the armed forces by placing the President's kinsmen in key posts.
- xvii) Downgrading the army, which had supported the government since 1962, by turning the Cabinet Office into another army.
- xviii) Bringing the country to bloodshed, which only unity could end.

Source: Summarised by the authors from the text read on January 25, 1971 by Warrant Officer II Sam Aswa, as reproduced in Daily Monitor (February 20, 2016) and National Movements and the New States in Africa (kawa.ac.ug). The order follows the latter. Wording is paraphrased, not verbatim.

The full control over the executive, legislative and judicial authority of State did not shield Amin's regime from instability. As early as 1972, a group of exiles from Tanzania attacked the

⁴⁵. Similar manoeuvres are playing out today under incumbent president Yoweri Museveni.

regime although they were repulsed.⁴⁶ In July 1976, Idi Amin allowed a hijacked Air France flight from Tel Aviv, Israel, to land at Entebbe Airport, culminating into a raid by Israeli commandos who took over the airport and rescued all but one of the hostages.⁴⁷ In October 1978, Amin's soldiers at Malire Mechanised Regiment and several other military units mutinied after Vice President Gen. Mustafa Idris was involved in a suspicious car accident. On account of some of the soldiers running into Tanzania, Amin invaded and annexed the Kagera Salient on November 1, 1978. Tanzanian President Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere ordered the Tanzania People's Defence Forces (TPDF) to reclaim the territory and invade Uganda, which culminated in the overthrow of Amin on April 11, 1979.

Another important timeline in the development of Uganda's military that is fundamental to its character is the immediate post-Amin period. Idi Amin was overthrown by a combined force of the Tanzania Peoples' Defence Forces (TPDF) and Ugandan exiles organised under the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) and its political wing – the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF). Between April 1979 and December 1980, Uganda had three successive governments led by Prof. Yusuf Kironde Lule (April-June 1979), Godfrey Lukongwa Binaisa (June 1979 – May 10, 1980) and the Military Commission under the Chairmanship of Paul Muwanga (May 10, 1980 – December 1980).⁴⁸

UGANDA TIMES

Vol. I No. 55 Kampala, Tuesday, June 19, 1979 Shs. 2/-

Full Cabinet list out

THE Government has released a full list of 34 Ministers and 30 Deputy Ministers set out in the table below in accordance with the Regions from which they come.

CABINET MINISTERS:			
REGION	MINISTERS	DEPUTY MINISTERS	MINISTERS
BUGANDA Population 3.5 m	1. Hon. K. Husbwa (Minister of Animal Resources) 2. Hon. Dr. Kayunga (Minister of Internal Affairs) 3. Hon. R. Semugwa (Minister of Commerce) 4. Hon. S. Sebageruka (Minister of Finance) 5. Hon. Prof. J. Dunga (Minister of Agriculture) 6. Hon. P. Muwanga (Minister of Labour) 7. Hon. Dr. A. Bwala (Minister of Health)	1. Hon. A. Kijane (Minister of Reg. Co-operation) 2. Hon. M. M. Igabi (Minister of Local Administrations) 3. Hon. Prof. A. Wandera (Minister of Education) 4. Hon. D. Nabudere (Minister of Culture and Comm. Dev.) 5. Hon. Augustine Osuban (Minister of Works and Housing) 6. Hon. Prof. Yoweri Museveni (Minister of Co-operatives and Marketing)	1. Hon. A. Kijane (Minister of Reg. Co-operation) 2. Hon. M. M. Igabi (Minister of Local Administrations) 3. Hon. Prof. A. Wandera (Minister of Education) 4. Hon. D. Nabudere (Minister of Culture and Comm. Dev.) 5. Hon. Augustine Osuban (Minister of Works and Housing) 6. Hon. Prof. Yoweri Museveni (Minister of Co-operatives and Marketing)

2 days before Parliament impeached him, Prof. Yusuf Kironde Lule reshuffled cabinet and named new ministers including Augustine Osuban & Moses Omuor who never sat in their offices. Many years later they became traditional rulers of their communities...

"Full Cabinet list out": The Uganda Times of June 19, 1979 announces the Binaisa government, with Yoweri Museveni as Minister of Defence. Two years later he would be in the bush leading the NRA. Source: Uganda Times, June 19, 1979.

⁴⁶. When Amin annexed the Kagera Salient onto Uganda, The New Vision, October 17, 2019, accessed at https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1508815/amin-annexed-kagera-salient-uganda#google_vignette on March 20, 2025

⁴⁷. Left Behind: How Israeli hostage Dora Bloch met her tragic death, Daily Monitor, July 19, 2020, accessed at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/left-behind-how-israeli-hostage-dora-bloch-met-her-tragic-death-1901872> on March 20, 2025

⁴⁸. The six members of the Military Commission were Paulo Muwanga, Yoweri Museveni, Tito Okello Lutwa, David Oyite Ojok, William Omari, and Zed Maruru.

One of the major developments during this period that has had profound impact on the character of the Ugandan military is that key figures within the UNLA, in particular David Oyite Ojok and Yoweri Kaguta Museveni started recruiting and building personal militias to bolster their influence in the evolving political landscape. Various accounts suggest that Museveni's estimated 80⁴⁹ soldiers grew to 8,000 soldiers while Oyite Ojok's 600 soldiers grew to 24,000 men strong.

Following the general elections in 1980, the UNLA remained the national army until the Obote government was overthrown in July 1985. However, Yoweri Museveni launched a guerrilla war in February 1981 with the Popular Resistance Army, which became the National Resistance Army (NRA) after its merger with the Uganda Freedom Fighters in June 1981, and fought until he captured power in 1986. Other armed groups also fought the Obote II government, among them the Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM), the Federal Democratic Movement (FEDEMO), the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF) and the UNLF-Anti-Dictatorship (UNLF-AD). Over the period 1981-1986, the fight between the government UNLA and the rebel NRA defined the character of the military vis-à-vis civilians. The UNLA is variously described as a highly undisciplined force that committed innumerable human rights violations, especially in the Luwero Triangle where the NRA was most active.⁵⁰ A combination of pressure from the NRA rebels, the breakdown in the command and control structure of the UNLA following the death of the then army chief of staff Maj. Gen. David Oyite Ojok in a helicopter crash on December 2, 1983,^{51,52} and the rivalry between Acholi and Langi army officers resulted in the overthrow of the Obote II government on July 27, 1985.

Following the overthrow of the Obote II government and the short-lived military junta led by Gen. Tito Okello Lutwa (July 1985 – January 1986), the UNLA was dissolved.⁵³ The Armed Forces Act of 1964 was repealed. The rebel NRA was proclaimed as Uganda's national army. Section 10 of Legal Notice No.1 of 1986 enshrined the Army Council of the rebel NRA into the new governmental structure as the National Resistance Army Council. Implicit in the declaration is the fact that the newly created National Resistance Council (NRC) was subordinated to the National Resistance Army Council (NRAC) by requiring that the NRC "shall seek the views of the National Resistance Army Council on all matters that the National Resistance Council considers important."⁵⁴ This subordination of the newly established legislative body is further evidenced in section 10(iii) of Legal Notice No. 1 which provides that the NRAC "may" forward its views to the NRC but adopts a mandatory requirement for the NRC to take the views of the NRAC into account when making a decision on such matters.

⁴⁹. In *Sowing the Mustard Seed* (1997), Museveni suggests that he crossed from Tanzania into Uganda with a force of 200 fighters. See Yoweri Museveni (1997). *Sowing the Mustard Seed: The Struggle for Freedom and Democracy in Uganda*. 2007 Reprint.

⁵⁰. Haggai Matsiko, *The forgotten original 27*, *The Independent*, January 31, 2013, accessed at <https://www.independent.co.ug/the-forgotten-original-nra-27/> on March 20, 2025

⁵¹. Died on December 2, 1983

⁵². Aviation Safety Network, occurrence 121964, Bell 412, December 2, 1983, <https://aviation-safety.net/wikibase/121964>; Daily Monitor, "Questions linger 40 years after Oyite Ojok's demise", 2023.

⁵³. Legal Notice No. 1, 1986

⁵⁴. Section 10(ii)

BOX 2 Members of the National Resistance Army Council

- i) Members of the High Command;
- ii) Directors of Departments;
- iii) Senior Army Officers at the date of this Proclamation; and
- iv) Battalion Commanding Officers of the National Resistance Army.

Source: Legal Notice No. 1 of 1986, Section 10.

Operationally, the NRA dubbed itself a “people’s army.” In most of the country, with the exception of Northern and Eastern Uganda, the NRA maintained utmost discipline and established unprecedented excellent relationships with citizens. In these areas where there was no conflict, NRA personnel conducted themselves with utmost civility and honour. The composition of the National Resistance Army Council is shown in **Box 2**. As shown in **Box 3**, NRA soldiers were required to adhere to a strict code of conduct defining how they were to relate to the public and amongst themselves.

BOX 3 Code of Conduct of the National Resistance Army (NRA): A. Dealing with the public

- i) Never abuse, insult, shout at, or beat any member of the public.
- ii) Never take anything in the form of money or property from any member of the public – not even somebody’s sweet bananas or mere sugar cane – without paying for the same.
- iii) Pay promptly for anything you take, and in cash.
- iv) Never kill any member of the public or any captured prisoner, as the guns should only be reserved for armed enemies or opponents.
- v) Return anything you borrow from any member of the public.
- vi) Offer help to members of the public when you find them engaged in productive work, if you have time.
- vii) Offer medical treatment to members of the public who may be in the territory of your unit.
- viii) Never develop an illegitimate relationship with any woman because there are no women as such waiting for passing soldiers, yet many women are wives, or daughters of somebody somewhere. Any illegitimate relationship is bound to harm our good relations with the public.
- ix) There should be no consumption of alcohol until the end of the war. Drunken soldiers are bound to misuse the guns which are given to them for defence of the people.

Source: Schedule to Legal Notice No. 1 of 1986 (February 14, 1986).

As early as 1991, the NRM government further sought to regularise all existing armed forces at the time as a national army by enacting the National Resistance Army Statute.⁵⁵ The purpose of this legislation as set out in its long title was “to provide for the establishment and regulation of the army, which shall be *a people’s force* (emphasis ours), and for other matters connected therewith.” Section 105 provides thus:

“105. The Armed Forces of Uganda in existence immediately before the date of the commencement of this Statute shall be deemed, on and after that date, to be included in the National Resistance Army raised and maintained under this Statute.”

⁵⁵. National Resistance Army Statute, 1991. The Statute was assented to by President Museveni on August 8, 1992.

Effectively, the National Resistance Council codified the rebel NRA by “deeming” it to be the national army. The National Resistance Army Statute 1991 provided for 3 key structures for the governance of the military.

First, the Statute provided that the President is the Commander-in-Chief of the army. This is consistent with Article 24 and Article 78 of the Constitution. The Commander-in-Chief has exclusive power to appoint the Army Commander, the Deputy Army Commander, the Army Chief of Staff, and “such other officers of the Army under such title as he may deem fit to be head of any force in the Army who shall be responsible for the command, control and administration of that force and shall be responsible to the Army Commander.”⁵⁶ The law did not make any provisions for qualifications of persons to be appointed in such command positions or any civilian oversight over the appointments.

Second, the National Resistance Army Council (NRAC) was re-established under Section 9 of the Statute and its membership expanded to include: commanders of different Forces and, division and brigade commanders of the Army. The Statute prescribed the function of the NRAC as follows:

“S.9(4). Subject to the general direction of the President, the National Resistance Army Council shall be responsible for professional advice on military defence policy generally.”

The NRAC is also mandated under S.9(3) to “advise the President on all matters connected with the control and administration of the Army”.

Thirdly, the Statute further codified the High Command and for the first time provided for its composition.⁵⁷ Besides the categories of members of the High Command by virtue of the respective offices, the most conspicuous category were the “original members of the High Command as at the 26th day of January, 1986.”⁵⁸ These “original members” were never disclosed, whether by Legal Notice No.1 of 1986 or by the Statute. More than a decade later, the issue of who constituted this category of members of the High Command became one of the most controversial issues during the enactment of the Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces Act, 2005.⁵⁹ To date, the “original members of the High Command” remains a permanent fixture of the Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (UPDF) governance architecture.

The NRA Statute laid down a comprehensive set of offenses that may be committed by persons “subject to military law”. Section 75 vested the High Command or any other authority authorised by the High Command, with the mandate to convene a military court. The Statute established a hierarchy of military tribunals including Unit Disciplinary Committees, Field Court Martial, Division Court Martial with unlimited jurisdiction, and a General Court Martial with both original and appellate jurisdiction.⁶⁰ The heads of most of these military tribunals were to be appointed by the High Command and therefore by operation of law by the President and Commander-in-Chief.

⁵⁶. NRA Statute, s.8(a), (b), (c) and (d).

⁵⁷. NRA Statute, s.10

⁵⁸. NRA Statute, s.10(c)

⁵⁹. Supreme Court: Civil courts powerless to hear appeals from Court Martial, The Independent, December 12, 2024, accessed at <https://www.independent.co.ug/supreme-court-civil-courts-are-powerless-to-hear-appeals-from-court-martial/> on March 20, 2025

⁶⁰. Sections 76-79 NRA Statute

Prior to the enactment of the Statute, the exclusive power over appointment of the command of the army and all its organs was vested in the person of President Museveni as the rebel leader of NRA and later as President in accordance with Legal Notice No.1 of 1986. By the time of the enactment of the Statute, Museveni had already established a *fait accompli* situation regarding the structure, organs and command of the army. Effectively, even if the National Resistance Council had the wisdom to structure a national army, they had limited room for manoeuvre because of the irreversible state that had been established hitherto. To date, the Uganda legislature has not figured out how to deal with Museveni's mischief of transforming his army and only seeking legislative endorsement of any such changes *ex post facto*⁶¹.

In spite of the new legislation, the structure and character of the NRA as a rebel force that captured the state and constituted itself into government remained the same. Notwithstanding its strict code of conduct, in most parts of Northern and Eastern Uganda where insurgency reigned for over two decades, and Karamoja region with its long tradition of cattle rustling, the character of the NRA was never distinguishable from the character of its predecessor armies such as the Uganda Rifles under Obote I government, the Uganda Army under Idi Amin, or the UNLA under Obote II regime (1981-1985).

Indeed, there are quite striking similarities between the NRA with some of the previous armies. For example, the patron of the KAR was the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEACo.) which ran the Uganda Protectorate on behalf of Britain. For most of the 1970s, the Uganda Army was exclusively Amin's army that paid loyalty to him and was unrestrained in its abuse of the rights of Ugandan citizens. The ownership of what came to be called UNLA is vividly described by Yoweri Museveni in *Sowing the Mustard Seed* where he observes that by the time of the Moshi Conference, he had mobilised a force of some 9,000 fighters compared to Obote's 600 and Paul Muwanga's 1500.⁶² It is these fighting groups, loyal to their respective 'warlords' that were bundled together and referred to as the UNLA.

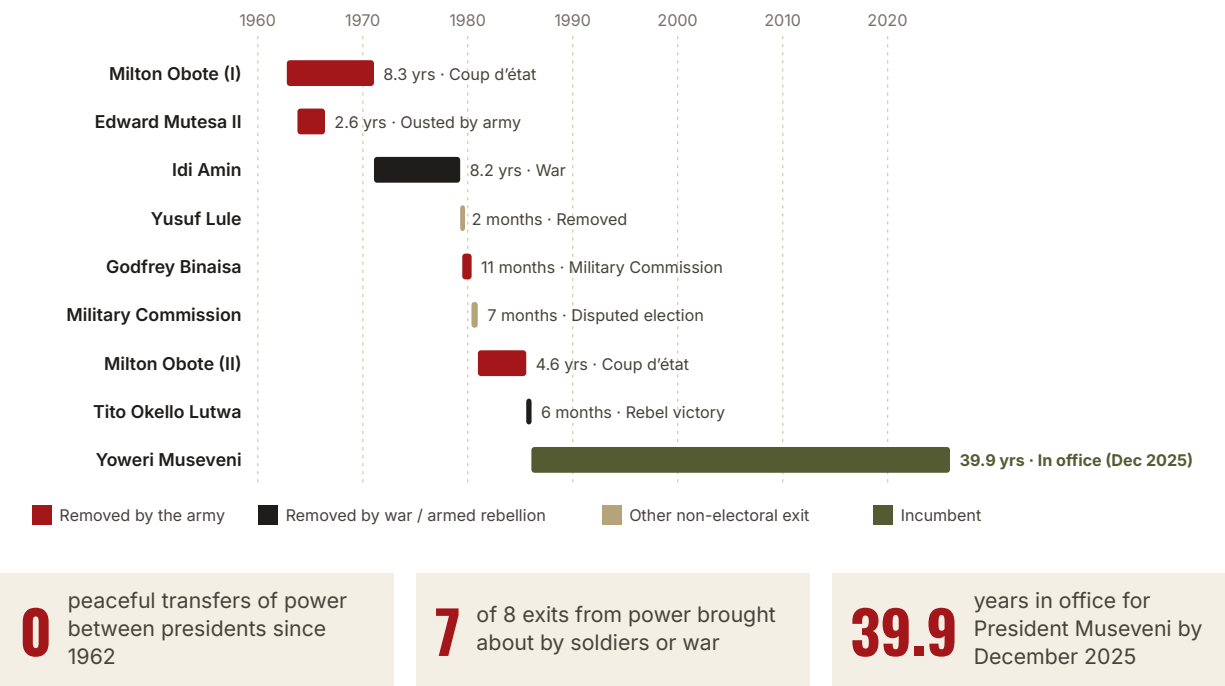
In the same way, the NRA was a group of fighters mobilised, recruited and trained by Museveni and patronised by his political wing - the National Resistance Movement (NRM). The NRM introduced some form of electoral democracy, but at all times, the power and authority of the State and government rested with the military or President Museveni who owned and controlled the NRA as President, Commander-in-Chief, the Chairman of the National Resistance Army Council and the Chairman of the High Command. It is tenable to argue that between 1986 until the promulgation of the 1995 constitution, Uganda was effectively under military rule by the NRA - not much different from what was experienced under Uganda Army during the 1970s. The fundamental question that belies the Ugandan military question today and the role it may play in the unfolding political transition process in the country is whether the NRA has in real terms transformed from a personal guerrilla outfit founded and led by Yoweri Museveni into a Ugandan national army subordinate to civilian authority.

⁶¹. This mischief is played out again under the UPDF amendment bill where Reserve forces and Special Forces Command (SFC) are established and Parliament asked to endorse them

⁶². Yoweri Museveni (1997). *Sowing the Mustard Seed: The Struggle for Freedom and Democracy in Uganda*. 2007 Reprint, Page 106.

“The fundamental question that belies the Ugandan military question today and the role it may play in the unfolding political transition process in the country is whether the NRA has in real terms transformed from a personal guerrilla outfit founded and led by Yoweri Museveni into a Ugandan national army subordinate to civilian authority.

FIGURE 6 No peaceful handover: How Uganda’s heads of state have left office since independence



Source: Authors' compilation. Mutesa II served as ceremonial president while Obote was executive prime minister. Durations are approximate.

UGANDA'S SECURITY FORCES IN THE POST-1995 CONSTITUTIONAL DISPENSATION

The third and most critical phase of the evolution of the Ugandan military covers the period from the promulgation of the 1995 Constitution to the present. As already alluded to, the NRA that captured power in 1986 was no different from the previous armies that had captured the state and established control over Uganda and Ugandans. Formerly, the NRA largely claimed and sought to portray itself as a “people’s” army. In most areas of the country that were not under insurgency, it adhered to its strict code of discipline and developed respect among the civilian population.

However, there is mounting evidence to suggest that the NRA was never much different from the armies before it. This was a fighting rebel group constituted, raised, trained and commanded by its rebel leader, Museveni. Over the 5 years’ rebellion, the recruitment into the group was not conducted following any national laws. Like the KAR that had been built on a foundation of Sudanese mercenaries, or Amin’s Uganda Army dominated by Nubians within its command, the NRA had Rwandans occupying high level command positions, including in its top most ranks.⁶³ In this respect, each of Uganda’s successive armies has had a ‘foreign’ core whose loyalty ran to its commander rather than to the country. The Rwandan elements within the NRA and affiliated security agencies later invaded Rwanda on October 1, 1990, stoking the flames that culminated in the one-hundred-day genocide against the Tutsi in 1994, following the death of the then President Juvenal Habyarimana in a plane crash.⁶⁴

It is therefore presumptuous to suggest that mere narratives such as “popular resistance” or a “peoples’ army” could all of sudden transform a rebel group into a national army. It may be said that from 1985 to 1996, when elections were held under a new constitution, Uganda was for all intents and purposes under military rule, first by the UNLA under Tito Okello and thereafter by the NRA under Yoweri Museveni. The fundamental question today is whether the NRA has undergone an authentic transformation to change its character from a rebel outfit to a national army. To answer this central question, it is important to look at the legal, political and operational changes and posture of the military in the post-1995 dispensation.

⁶³. These include the Late Fred Gisa Rwigyema and current Rwandan President Paul Kagame.

⁶⁴. The Rwanda Crisis from Uganda to Zaire, the Path to a Genocide, Howard Adelman and Astri Suhrke, 1999.

“It is therefore presumptuous to suggest that mere narratives such as “popular resistance” or a “peoples’ army” could all of sudden transform a rebel group into a national army.

4.1 From NRA to NRA 2.0: The failure to transition the NRA into a national army

Following more than 3 decades of military or quasi military rule, characterised by widespread human rights abuses by the military, the Uganda constitution making process (1988-1995) provided the first opportunity for Ugandans to define the character of a national army and to restore civil-military relations. The role of the military was one of the key questions that the Uganda Constitutional Commission had to address through public consultations. The people’s views about the military are captured in Chapter 14 of the report of the Commission.⁶⁵ According to the report, the general consensus of Ugandans was that “Uganda should have a national, professional, disciplined and patriotic army composed of citizens whose main role should be to defend national independence and territorial integrity and guarantee peace and stability for the people. It should serve national, and never partisan, interest.”

It is important to recognise from the onset that the national army envisaged through the constitution making process consultations was completely different from the NRA. As already alluded to, the NRA had been produced by a clearly defined history. First, it was created by “self-spirited individuals” led by Yoweri Museveni to resist what they considered bad leadership. The recruitment into the NRA never followed any nationally agreed criteria and was mainly undertaken through some form of scouting by a network of recruiting agents across the country. By its very nature, the NRA paid its primary loyalty to Yoweri Museveni, its rebel leader. Importantly, like the armies before it, the NRA had a considerable membership of foreigners, mainly of Rwandan origin. The constitution-making consultation process provided the opportunity to consider how to move away from these historical flaws that characterised Uganda’s previous armies.

Based on its wide public consultations, the Uganda Constitutional Commission articulated the core functions of the armed forces as:

- i. To defend national independence;
- ii. To preserve the country’s sovereignty and integrity;
- iii. To guarantee peace and security for citizens;
- iv. To lend cooperation in emergency situations or public disaster;
- v. To engage themselves in programmes for the development of Uganda;
- vi. To relate harmoniously to civilian population;
- vii. To be committed to the Constitution and promote fundamental human rights and the national objectives.

⁶⁵. Uganda Constitutional Commission Statute, Statute No. 5, 1988

The Commission observed that in discharging this mandate, the army should be obedient to directions from the civilian and democratically elected government. While the Commission recommended the establishment of a “Uganda Armed Forces”,⁶⁶ the Constituent Assembly that debated and promulgated the new constitution changed the name to Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (UPDF).⁶⁷ In a subsequent undated interview, the late Brig. Noble Mayombo⁶⁸ explained that (i) “Uganda” reflected the name of the country, (ii) “Peoples’ Defence” meant the shift from the NRA’s mission of resisting bad leadership to UPDF’s core mission to protect people, including against anti-people governments and (iii) “forces” meant that the country could establish different segments of the UPDF such as infantry, marines, etc.⁶⁹ He thus captured the intended break with the past.

The 1995 Constitution sought to establish a new era in civil-military relations – “the proper subordination of a competent and professional military to the ends of policy as determined by civilian authority”⁷⁰ - in Uganda by providing a set of principles upon which a new normative framework for the governance of the military could be founded. As already discussed in the preceding sections, the Ugandan military had already emerged as the root cause of Uganda’s political instability. From KAR to UNLA and the NRA, these were personal fighting armies that fell short of the criteria of being characterised as a national army. On the one hand, they needed to adopt constitutional principles for the establishment of a military strong enough to defend the country’s territorial integrity and sovereignty. On the other hand, there was need to establish a military that would conduct its affairs so as not to destroy the society and country it is supposed to protect.

At its core, a normative framework that builds a strong foundation for the subordination of the military to the civil authorities of a country has two important dimensions.

First, strategic level decision making, including on matters of war and peace, is placed in the realm of the state’s civil authorities, rather than exclusively with the professional military leadership. A governance system that allows the civil authorities of a country to retain control over military or state security represents a true manifestation of the power of citizenry and profound respect for democratic values. Such a system that gives power to the civil authorities of government to determine what the military can do or not do and how much it can spend, protects a nation’s democratic process from abuse. Civilian control of the military therefore implies that all decisions regarding a country’s defence – the organisation, recruitment, training, deployment and the use of the armed forces, the setting of military priorities and financing are taken by the civilian leadership.

⁶⁶. Pages 359-383 of the Uganda Constitutional Commission Report, Citizen Rights in Africa Initiative, accessed at http://citizenshiprightsafrika.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Uganda-Constitution-Commission-1995-report_missingchaps7-14_and24-1.pdf on March 20, 2025

⁶⁷. Articles 208 and 209 of the 1995 Constitution, respectively.

⁶⁸. Brig. Noble Mayombo (1965–2007) was a senior officer of the NRA and the UPDF. He served as one of the army’s representatives in Parliament and in the Constituent Assembly, headed military intelligence and, from October 2005, was Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Defence and chairman of the board of the New Vision Group. He died on May 1, 2007 in Nairobi, aged 42. New Vision, “What killed Mayombo?”, <https://newvision.co.ug/news/1215155/killed-mayombo>.

⁶⁹. <https://youtu.be/nkMsLrthsZU> (accessed on February 18, 2025). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkMsLrthsZU>

⁷⁰. Samuel Huntington (1957). *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press.

“Civilian control of the military therefore implies that all decisions regarding a country’s defence – the organisation, recruitment, training, deployment and the use of the armed forces, the setting of military priorities and financing are taken by the civilian leadership.

Second, the military itself must be professional and politically neutral, internalising civilian supremacy as part of its institutional culture. Military professionalism is commonly grounded in several overriding principles: the subordination of the military to democratic civilian authority, allegiance to the state and a commitment to political neutrality, and an ethical institutional culture.

There is substantial literature that has evolved on the subject of civil-military relations mostly since the publication by Samuel Huntington’s “The Soldier and the State” in 1957.⁷¹ A review of this literature suggests that civilian control mechanisms can be considered in two categories: those that affect the ability of the military to subvert control and those that affect the disposition of the military to be subordinate. The first category generally rests on setting normative rules through appropriate constitutional and other statutory safeguards against military interference. The second category focuses on the military’s *disposition* to intervene by building what is generally referred to in the literature as a “cult of obedience” or “professionalism”. Huntington argued that the best guarantor of military subordination to political supremacy is a truly professional military (objective civil control). He opined that the alternative – *subjective civilian control* -maximises civilian power by both civilianising and politicising the military, by making it politically dependent and denying it a distinct professionalism that is clearly different from that of other organisations in society.

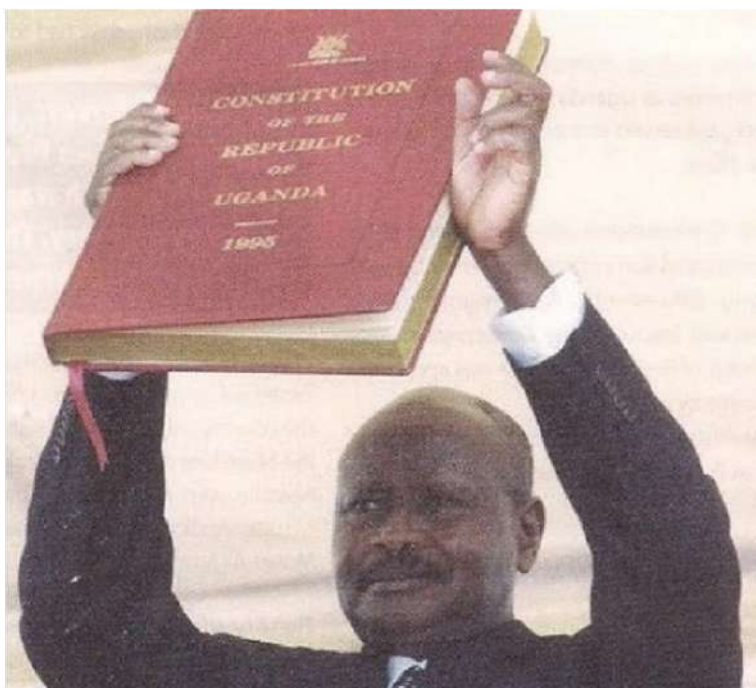
4.2 The normative framework for the Ugandan military

4.2.1 The constitutional foundations of the military

Based on the consultations, findings and recommendations of the Uganda Constitutional Commission, the framers of the 1995 Constitution provided the normative rules to govern the military under Chapter 12 covering defence and national security. Article 208(1) provides that “there shall be armed forces to be known as the Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces.” The Constitution prescribes that “the Uganda People’s Defence Forces shall be non-partisan, national in character, patriotic, professional, disciplined, productive and subordinate to the civilian authority as established under this Constitution. Article 209 prescribes the set of functions to be discharged by the army. Finally, Article 210 vests parliament with the mandate to make laws regulating the Uganda People’s Defence Forces regarding its command and control, force recruitment and organization, terms and conditions of service, as well as deployments outside Uganda. The Constitution, within the same Chapter, establishes and provides for the functions of

⁷¹ Ibid., 44

the Uganda Police Force,⁷² Uganda Prisons Service,⁷³ a National Security Council”⁷⁴ and vests parliament with the mandate to establish intelligence services.⁷⁵



President Museveni holds up the 1995 Constitution, which baptised the NRA the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces but left its command and character intact.

It is important to note that the 1995 Constitution was supposed to be the point of departure in the agenda for the transformation of Uganda's security forces into a national institution. In particular, the Constitution laid down the normative boundaries to guide the potential transition and transformation of the rebel NRA into a national army – the UPDF. However, the Constitution did not change the underlying superstructure of the NRA which had hitherto proclaimed itself a “national army.” Upon the promulgation of the constitution, its rebel leader - Yoweri Museveni – temporarily abandoned the military uniform to contest for elections. He was declared winner, sworn in as president and once again became the Commander-in-Chief following the 1996 general elections. The army command did not change either. The then army commander of the NRA, Maj. Gen. Gregory Mugisha Muntu, continued in his command position until 1998 when he was relieved of the position; he later retired from the army. The presence of the military in the legislative organ of the state was maintained through a special representation provision that guarantees representation of the army in parliament.⁷⁶

The 1995 Constitution did not have any immediate profound impact on the National Resistance Army (NRA). By implication of the transition clauses,⁷⁷ the NRA was baptised the UPDF. However, its character, command and control structures remained the same.

⁷². Article 211

⁷³. Article 215

⁷⁴. Article 219

⁷⁵. Article 218

⁷⁶. Article 78(c)

⁷⁷. Chapter 19

“The 1995 Constitution did not have any immediate profound impact on the NRA. By implication of the transition clauses, the NRA was baptised the UPDF. However, its character, command and control structures remained the same.

An important anecdote in the development of the normative legal framework governing the army is the enactment of *The Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (Application to Civilians) Regulations*⁷⁸ which sought to extend the application of the then National Resistance Army Statute, 1992 to certain categories of civilians.⁷⁹ In spite of a newly adopted constitution that sought to reshape the civil-military relations in the country, this instrument demonstrated that the military mindset that pervaded all of NRA leadership thinking remained dominant and unchanged.

Substantively, the first notable attempt to regulate the UPDF within the framework of the 1995 Constitution appears to have been in 1999 when the then defence state minister Steven Kavuma⁸⁰ presented to parliament a bill regarding the deployment of Ugandan troops abroad. The Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (Deployment of Troops Outside Uganda) Bill, 1999, sought to create authority for the deployment of the UPDF for purposes of peacekeeping, peace enforcement or any other purpose”, such as rescue missions and disaster management. The Bill was later abandoned as legislators demanded that a more substantive legislation be introduced to implement the provisions of the 1995 Constitution.

4.2.2 Establishment of the National Security Council

In 2000, five years after the promulgation of the Constitution, the National Security Council Act⁸¹ was enacted. During the same year, all the Laws of Uganda were revised leading to the publication of the revised edition of 2000. The functions of the Council were expanded to include: coordinate and advise on policy matters relating to intelligence; review national security needs and goals; brief the cabinet regularly on matters relating to national security; receive and act on reports from the joint intelligence committee; and carry out any other functions as parliament may assign to the Council.⁸² In addition to the establishment of the National Security Council, the Act provided for the establishment of district and sub-county security committees which today account for the overbearing influence of security and intelligence personnel in public life.

⁷⁸. Statutory Instrument No. 8, 1996

⁷⁹. See National Resistance Army Statute No. xxx of 1991, s.104(1)(j); Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces Act, Cap 307, 2000; Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces Act, 2005, Part V, S.119(1)(c), (d), (e), (f), (g), and (h).

⁸⁰. Mr. Steven Kavuma was later appointed deputy Chief Justice on March 5, 2015, a position he held until retirement in September 2017, upon attaining the mandatory retirement age of 70.

⁸¹. National Security Council Act, No. 12 of 2000. The Act came into force on June 23, 2000. The Act is reproduced in the 2000 edition of the revised laws of Uganda as Cap 301.

⁸². Section 2 of the National Security Council Act, 2000,

FIGURE 7 The security committee pyramid: Membership of the National Security Council and its district and sub-county committees

Source: National Security Council Act, 2000 (Cap 301), sections 2–6. Classification by the authors.

Between 2000 and 2005 when the first major post-1995 constitution legislation on the military was enacted, there were a series of reform initiatives that provided opportunity for the transformation of the NRA into a national army as envisaged under the Constitution. First, during the 2001 presidential elections campaigns, President Museveni had pledged the professionalisation of the army as one of his major campaign promises for what was supposed to be his last term of office under the 1995 Constitution.

In 2001, the Uganda Defence Reform Programme (UDRP) was launched. Around the same time, a defence review process was launched.⁸³ In 2002, the National Resistance Army (Amendment) Bill, 2002⁸⁴ was published. The Bill was presented in Parliament for its first reading in August 2002 by then defence minister John Patrick Amama Mbabazi. While the Bill was largely a reproduction of the NRA Statute, it is instructive to note that it sought to vest the powers of determining the strength of the UPDF in the President.⁸⁵ The 1991 NRA Statute had vested this power into the National Resistance Army Council and the National Resistance Council sitting in a closed session.⁸⁶ By implication, the new legislation proposed to shift this power from an oversight organ of state and vest it in an individual authority. Before the Bill was considered for enactment, it was withdrawn upon pressure from the Members of Parliament who demanded a comprehensive UPDF legislation consistent with the framework established under the 1995 Constitution.

⁸³. For a detailed overview of the Defence Review process, see The Uganda Defence Review: Learning from experience. Kings College London and Makerere University, 2007.

⁸⁴. Bill No. 17 of 2002 published on August 2, 2008.

⁸⁵. A look at the highs and lows of Amama, October 5, 2014, Daily Monitor, accessed at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/a-look-at-the-highs-and-lows-of-amama-1586878> on March 20, 2025

⁸⁶. NRA Statute, 1992. Section 1

Figure 8 sets out what the NRA Statute and the 1995 Constitution each removed, changed and added, and what each step meant for the subordination of the military to civilian authority.

FIGURE 8 Army law step by step: What the NRA Statute, 1991 and the 1995 Constitution removed, changed and added

● Moves power towards the army or the Commander-in-Chief ● Moves power towards Parliament, the courts or the Constitution

1991

National Resistance Army Statute

Enacted by the NRC; in force 24 April 1992

CODIFIES A REBEL ARMY

– REMOVED

- Armed Forces Act, 1964 (Cap. 295) repealed: the “Army of Uganda” and “Air Force of Uganda” end
- Earlier armed forces as separate bodies: all absorbed into the NRA

~ CHANGED

- All armed forces existing before the Statute “deemed” part of the NRA (s.105)
- Army strength set by the NRA Council **and the NRC sitting in closed session** (s.1)
- Army described as “a people’s Force”, “properly guided, disciplined and politicised”

+ ADDED

- President as C-in-C appoints the whole command; no qualifications or vetting (s.8)
- NRA Council and High Command, both chaired by the President; High Command includes the “**original members as at 26 January 1986**”, never named (ss.9–10)
- Civilians subject to military law: aiding a soldier, or possessing arms “ordinarily being the monopoly of the Army” (s.14)
- “Subversion” offence: “cheap popularity”, “liberalism”, “intrigue” (s.16)
- Courts martial appointed by the High Command for one year, each with a political commissar; prosecutor “may be an intelligence officer”

Implication for civilian control. Turns the NRA’s bush-war order into law. Command, military justice and the army’s own policy council all run to one person, the President and rebel commander; civilians can be tried by soldiers. The only civilian check is the legislature’s share in setting troop strength.

1995

Constitution of the Republic of Uganda

Promulgated 8 October 1995

STRENGTHENS ON PAPER

– REMOVED

- Legal Notice No. 1 order superseded: the legislature no longer subordinate to the Army Council
- The name “National Resistance Army”

~ CHANGED

- NRA becomes the **Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces** (Art. 208(1))
- President remains C-in-C (Art. 98)
- Existing law, including the NRA Statute, continues in force (Art. 274): no transformation plan

+ ADDED

- UPDF to be “non-partisan, national in character, patriotic, professional, disciplined, productive and **subordinate to the civilian authority**” (Art. 208(2))
- No person may raise an armed force except under the Constitution (Art. 208(4))
- Parliament to make laws on organs and structures, recruitment, terms of service and deployment abroad (Art. 210)
- Independent courts (Arts. 126, 128); intelligence services by Act of Parliament (Art. 218); National Security Council (Art. 219)
- Ten army representatives in Parliament (Art. 78(1)(c))

Implication for civilian control. The strongest statement of civilian supremacy in Uganda’s law. But it left the NRA’s commander, command and statute in place and gave the army seats in Parliament, so subordination depended on Parliament later giving Article 208 content.

Source: NRA Statute, 1991; Constitution of Uganda, 1995; UPDF Act, Cap. 307 (revised edition 2000); UPDF Act, 2005 (Act 7 of 2005); UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025 (Act 8 of 2025). Assessment by the authors.

4.3 The road to the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces Act, 2005

In 2003, the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces Bill was published and introduced in parliament.⁸⁷ According to its long title, the Bill's objective was "to make provision for the regulation of the Uganda People's Defence Forces pursuant to Article 210 of the Constitution"⁸⁸ The Bill provided a unique opportunity to achieve the transformation of the NRA rebel force into the UPDF as envisaged under Article 208 of the Constitution. According to the Bill's memorandum, it sought to make provisions for (i) command and control structures of the UPDF, (ii) recruitment, appointments and promotions, (iii) terms and conditions of service, and (iv) deployment of troops outside Uganda.

As the processing of the 2003 Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces Bill was still held up in Parliament, Government published a White Paper on Defence Transformation.⁸⁹ The White Paper was presented as the Government's blue print for the transformation of Uganda's defence and security sector and the professionalisation of the UPDF. The White Paper paid particular attention to the principle of civil military relations and particularly, the underlying principle that the defence forces should be subject to the authority of the country's civil and political leaders. Among other things, the Paper noted that "just as the military should not use their official positions to get involved in partisan politics, the civil political elite should not interfere in military operational matters and the military chain of command."

However, absent in the White Paper was the conscious articulation of the institutional mechanisms for strengthening civilian oversight over the military as envisaged under the Constitution. The White Paper makes passing and general references about civil-military relations without articulating the actual institutions of authority, responsibility and accountability.

It is also curious that the White Paper tended to suggest that Uganda's defence policy objectives were different from the defence objectives of the military (**Table 1**).

⁸⁷ The Bill was introduced for the first reading on December 4, 2003. See Parliament of Uganda, Hansards. December 2003.

⁸⁸ Uganda People's Defence Forces Bill, No. 22 of 2003.

⁸⁹ Republic of Uganda, 2004. White Paper on Defence Transformation. June 2004, Kampala.

TABLE 1 Defence policy objectives versus UPDF defence objectives

Defence policy objectives	UPDF defence objectives
a. Building adequate and credible defence capacity to address both internal and external security threats. b. Creating a productive and self-sustaining force. c. Ensuring adherence to and furtherance of our international obligations. d. Ensuring continuation and strengthening of the legacy of a people’s army that has respect for the rights of the people. e. Creating military alliances to enhance regional security and stability. f. Maintaining national cohesion. g. Promoting cooperation with East African countries, recognising regional integration through the EAC and AU as key to the defence of Uganda. h. Supporting regional and continental integration through the African Union (AU).	a. Ensuring the defence of the country and the Constitution of Uganda that encapsulates peoples’ sovereignty through popular will. b. Assisting with peacetime security. c. Contributing to regional stability. d. Provision of support to the civil authorities. e. Conducting defence diplomacy. f. Support to international obligations.

Source: National Defence Policy, 2004, pp. 28–29.

The apparent tensions between the civilian defence establishment and a UPDF that hitherto remains an autonomous special purpose vehicle of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) remains an enduring faultline that will define the trajectory of Uganda’s political transition process.

4.4 The Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces Act and the ghost of the NRA

A holistic overview of the parliamentary debates and the resulting Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces Act 2005 shows that the Act failed to address the fundamental flaws inherent in the conception, organisation and command structure of the NRA. This is best exemplified by the debate on 3 particular elements of the Bill that proved to be quite controversial over the course of the debate (September 2004 – December 2005). These are:

- (i) inclusion of members of the original NRA high command in the organs of the UPDF;

(ii) the place of the Presidential Guard Brigade as a distinct Service; and

(iii) establishment of a standing Reserve Force.

4.4.1 The ghost of the NRA refuses to leave

The efforts by members of parliament to de-link the UPDF from the NRA were aggressively resisted by the founders of the NRA who saw the legislation not from the spirit of the 1995 Constitution but from their fights against “bad leadership” throughout the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s. The claim of ownership of the NRA is best summarised by Severino Kahinda Otafire who, in defence of legislating the members of the NRA High Command into the new law opined thus:

“With due respect to Hon. Omara Atubo, our country is about 43 years since independence. We had armies that have been responsible full time in government, for changing political dispensation. This is the only Army that for close to 20 years has sustained rule of law, not changed political dispensation,

created a history of a stable and service-oriented Army. We are therefore saying, that the founder leaders of this Army and unfortunately for you, seven are remaining. When you talk of historical members of the High Command, we are only seven: Gen. Yoweri Museveni, Brig. Kategaya, Col Kahinda Otafiire, Lt Gen. Tinyefuza, Lt Gen. Salim Saleh, Lt Gen. Elly Tumwine, and Brig. Matayo Kyaligonza. So, we are only saying that these fellows who brought this Army, led it for five years through the bush, have upheld it for the last – by the time this Parliament changes it will have been 25 years of dedicated service to this Army. We are only saying, give them a chance to nurture this history, to guide these young men and women and ensure that as we leave or we are being knocked out by biology, we leave this country with a tradition of defending the Constitution, of respecting politicians. That is why we come here; we would like to see a situation where –(Interruption)”⁹⁰

In the final Act, Severino Kahinda Otafiire was only included in the schedule of senior army officers but not as one of the members of the High Command.⁹¹

The President's own language has kept the identification alive. Thirty years after the Constitution created the UPDF, he and the army's institutions continue to present it as the NRA of 1981, in speeches, ritual and political education (**Figure 9**).

⁹⁰. Hansard of the Parliament of Uganda

⁹¹. In 2008, for UPDF/Ministry of Defence Spokesperson Paddy Ankunda wrote that “the NRA can be described as a mutation of the Front for National Salvation (FRONASA) formed by Museveni and others to fight the Amin dictatorship. See The New Vision at <https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1197362/updf-tribal-army> (accessed on March 3, 2025).

FIGURE 9 “UPDF/NRA”: How President Museveni has spoken of the national army since 1995



2025 •

4 October 2025 · Kabamba · commissioning of officer cadets REPORTED

Recalled the NRA's origins and its "evolution into the UPDF", crediting bush-war strategy and tactics.
One army, one story, from 1981 to the present.
UPDF website, 4 October 2025

What the record shows. Outright naming of the UPDF as the NRA is rare in the searchable record: one verbatim instance, in 2024. The identification is carried instead by continuity language ("the original NRA", "we the freedom fighters"), by ritual (an army birthday dated to 1981) and by the army's own political schooling in "NRA ideology". The pattern intensifies after 2021, alongside the rise of Muhoozi Kainerugaba as CDF.

Source: As cited for each entry; compiled by the authors from State House, UPDF and Ministry of Defence releases, the President's X account, Daily Monitor, The Observer, Nile Post, UG Diplomat and IRIN. "Verbatim" means the words are quoted in the source; "reported" means the source paraphrases.

TABLE 2 The NRA of January 26, 1986, written into the UPDF Act, 2005

MEMBERS OF THE HIGH COMMAND AS AT 26 JANUARY 1986 (Third Schedule)	SENIOR OFFICERS AS AT 26 JANUARY 1986 (Second Schedule)
i. (Rtd) Gen. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni	i. Maj. Gen. Mugisha Muntu x. Lt. Col. Fred Mwesigye
ii. Lt. Gen. Elly Tumwine (RIP)	ii. Maj. Gen. Joram Mugume xi. Lt. Col. Andrew Lutaaya
iii. Lt. Gen. Salim Saleh Akandwanaho	iii. Maj. Gen. Ivan Koreta xii. Lt. Col. Gyagyenda
iv. Lt. Gen. David Tinyefuza	iv. Brig. Jim K. Muhwezi Kibirango
v. Hon. Brig. Eriya Kategaya (RIP)	v. Brig. Steven Kashaka xiii. Lt. Col. Ahmed Kashilingi
vi. Brig. (Rtd) Matayo Kyaligonza	vi. Col. Kahinda Otafiire (RIP)
	vii. Col. Pecos Kutesa xiv. Lt. Col. Samson Mande
	viii. Col. Julius Kihanda (RIP)
	ix. Col. Peter Kerimu xv. Lt. Col. Amin Izaruk

Source: Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces Act, No. 7 of 2005, Second and Third Schedules.

4.4.2 Fusion of the Defence Forces Council and the High Command

One of the fundamental flaws of the UPDF Act 2005 was its failure to de-link the two primary governance institutions of the military from each other. Ordinarily, the Defence Forces Council should be the civilian organ that is mandated to determine and shape national defence policy and strategy while providing oversight over the military command and administration. On the other hand, the High Command should be the military organ that is mandated to propose military policy, military structure, administration of the army and execution of war and other military missions. However, the fusion of these two organs and the “overburdening” of the Defence Forces Council with the members of the High Command remains the enduring legacy of the NRA. While it is difficult to know how these two organs operate distinctively because of the opaque nature of their operations, there is no doubt that there is no substantive distinction in their statutory mandates.

TABLE 3 Two organs, one membership: The Defence Forces Council and the High Command compared

	UPDF Council (Defence Forces Council)	High Command
Establishment	There shall be established for the purpose of this Act a Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces Council (s.13(1)).	There is established under this Act the High Command of the Defence Forces (s.14(1)).
Membership	a. Members of the High Command b. Persons who were senior army officers on 26 January 1986 c. All Directors of Services established under the Act d. Commanding officers of brigades and battalions and officers commanding equivalent units	a. The President b. The Minister c. Members of the High Command on 26 January 1986 d. The Chief of Defence Forces e. The Deputy Chief of Defence Forces f. All Service Commanders g. The Chief of Staff h. All service chiefs of staff i. All Chiefs of the Services j. Commanders of formations higher than a division k. All Division Commanders and the Commandant of General Headquarters l. Commanders of the military wings of the liberation organisations and other commanders and experts co-opted by the President*
Chair	The President; in his absence the Minister, or such other person as the President may appoint.	The President.
Functions	a. Advise the President on all matters connected with control and administration of the Defence Forces b. Be responsible for giving professional advice on military defence policy generally	a. Advise the President in emergency situations and on matters relating to national security or deployment of the Defence Forces b. Advise the President when Uganda is at war c. Perform such duties as may be conferred upon it by law d. Perform such other functions as the President may direct
Meetings	Regular; not less than three times in each calendar year (s.15).	Regular; not less than three times in each calendar year (s.15).

Source: Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces Act, No. 7 of 2005; Laws of Uganda, Revised Edition 2023, Cap 330. *The liberation organisations are NRM, UNRF, UFM, FUNA, SUM, FEDEMO, FRONASA and UNLF/Anti-Dictatorship (Rwenzori Front).

4.4.3 The Presidential Guard Brigade and the Reserve Force

From the time of the NRA's rebellion in the Luwero Triangle, a special security team was dedicated to protecting Yoweri Museveni, the NRA rebel commander. Available accounts suggest that during the period 1981-1986, the team was known as the High Command Unit (HCU). Upon capturing power in 1986, the Unit was renamed the Presidential Protection Unit (PPU). By the time of the debate on the 2003 UPDF Bill, the PPU had been renamed the Presidential Guard Brigade (PGB). The PGB had become a very controversial unit in terms of its command and composition,⁹² and had gained notoriety with its overt participation in the 2001 election violence, when members of the Presidential Protection Unit opened fire on opposition

⁹² The PGB was perceived to be commanded by mainly Bahima and Ugandans of Rwandan origin, the two ethnic groups are directly affiliated to Mr. Museveni.

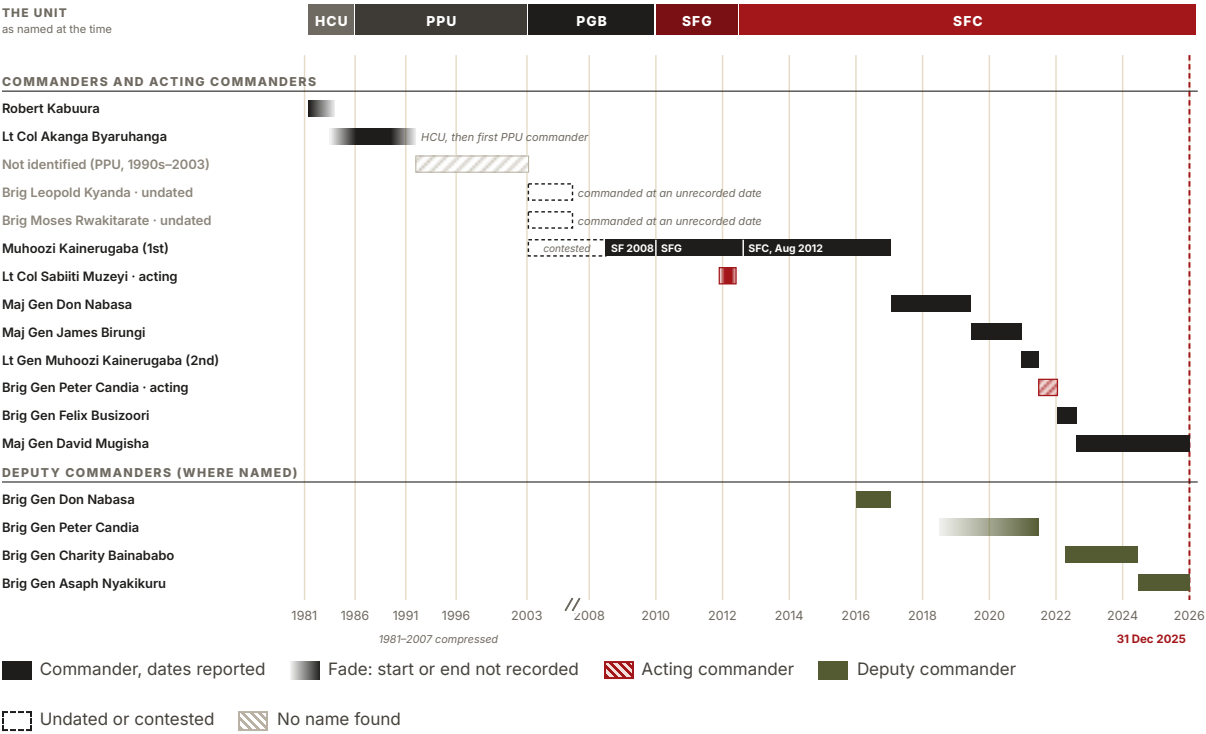
demonstrators in Rukungiri on March 3, 2001.⁹³ Inasmuch as the Brigade was not part of the Bill, it had been brought up in the committee report to parliament.

⁹³. Amnesty International, "Uganda: Only a climate of accountability will create lasting respect for human rights", AI Index AFR 59/006/2001, March 16, 2001, which reports that members of the Presidential Protection Unit opened fire on demonstrators in Rukungiri on March 3, 2001, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/afr590062001en.pdf>.

FIGURE 10 From bodyguard to parallel army: Commanders and acting commanders of the Special Forces Command and its predecessors, 1981–2025

Five names in four decades: the High Command Unit (1981), Presidential Protection Unit (1986), Presidential Guard Brigade (2003), Special Forces Group (2010) and Special Forces Command (2012). Between January 2017 and December 2025 the command changed hands six times, four of them in 2020–2022.

SUCCESSION, 1981 – DECEMBER 2025



REGISTER OF COMMANDERS

	UNIT	OFFICER, RANK, ROLE	FROM	TO	HOW THE TENURE ENDED	GRADE	SOURCES
1	HCU	Robert Kabuura Commander · Commander	May 1981	Bush war (date not recorded)	Died during the bush war	B	MODVA SFC brief history; GlobalSecurity; Daily Monitor, 13 Aug 2022
2	HCU → PPU	Akanga Byaruhanga Lt Col (as PPU commander) · Commander	During the bush war	Not recorded (1990s?)	Not recorded; deceased	B	MODVA SFC brief history; GlobalSecurity; Eagle Online, 26 Aug 2015
3	PPU	Not identified — · Commander(s)	1990s	2003	—	Gap	No public source names PPU commanders between Byaruhanga and the 2003 brigade
4	PGB	Muhoozi Kainerugaba Capt / Maj · Commander (contested)	21 Feb 2003	Not recorded	—	C	Wikipedia, Presidential Guard Brigade (commander at the 2003 expansion). Contradicted by Daily Monitor, 25 Jun 2021: in 2003 he commanded a motorised infantry battalion within the PGB
5	PGB	Leopold Kyanda Brig (later Maj Gen) · Commander	Not recorded (2003–2008?)	Not recorded	Later CMI, attaché in Washington, Chief of Staff Land Forces (2013)	C	Eagle Online, 26 Aug 2015; Daily Monitor, 25 Jun 2021; Wikipedia, L. Kyanda
6	PGB	Moses Rwakitarate Brig (later Lt Gen) · Commander	Not recorded	Not recorded	Later Air Force Commander	C	Eagle Online, 26 Aug 2015
7	PGB / SFG	Sabiiti Muzeyi Lt Col · Deputy; acting commander	Not recorded	Not recorded	Commanded the unit while Muhoozi was on a course in South Africa (probably early 2012); Deputy IGP, Mar 2018	C	Daily Monitor, 6 Mar 2018; Wikipedia, S. Muzeyi
8	Special Forces →						

	SFG → SFC	Muhoozi Kainerugaba Lt Col → Brig Gen → Maj Gen · Commander	Jul 2008	Jan 2017	Commander of Special Forces 2008; first SFG commander 2010; SFC commander Aug 2012; became Senior Presidential Adviser for Special Operations	A	Daily Monitor, 25 Jun 2021; ChimpReports; Wikipedia, M. Kainerugaba
9	SFC	Don Nabasa Col / Brig (deputy 2016) · Commander	Jan 2017	Jun 2019	Left for training in China	A	New Vision, 20 Jan 2017; KFM, 12 Jun 2019; Daily Monitor, 13 Aug 2022
10	SFC	James Birungi Maj Gen · Commander	Jun 2019	Dec 2020	Redeployed to monitor the South Sudan peace process	A	New Vision; Daily Monitor, 13 Aug 2022; Wikipedia
11	SFC	Muhoozi Kainerugaba Lt Gen · Commander (2nd term)	16 Dec 2020	24 Jun 2021	Appointed Commander Land Forces	A	New Vision; Daily Monitor, 25 Jun 2021
12	SFC	Peter Candia (Chandia) ACTING Brig Gen · Acting commander	24 Jun 2021	Jan 2022	Sent to the National Defence College, Jinja	A	Daily Monitor, 25 Jun 2021 and Aug 2022
13	SFC	Felix Busizoori Brig Gen · Commander	Jan 2022	9 Aug 2022	Moved to Deputy Commander, 3 Division (seen as a demotion); shortest-serving	A	Daily Monitor, 5 and 13 Aug 2022; UPDF, 9–10 Aug 2022
14	SFC	David Mugisha Brig Gen → Maj Gen · Commander	9 Aug 2022	Serving (Dec 2025)	—	A	UPDF, 9 Aug 2022

DEPUTY COMMANDERS NAMED IN PUBLIC SOURCES

	UNIT	OFFICER, RANK, ROLE	FROM	TO	HOW THE TENURE ENDED	GRADE	SOURCES
15	PGB	Sabiiti Muzeyi Lt Col · Deputy commander	Not recorded	Not recorded		C	Daily Monitor, 6 Mar 2018
16	SFC	Don Nabasa Col / Brig · Deputy commander	2016	Jan 2017	Promoted to commander	B	Wikipedia, D. Nabasa
17	SFC	Peter Candia (Chandia) Brig Gen · Deputy commander	Not recorded	24 Jun 2021	Made acting commander	B	Daily Monitor, 25 Jun 2021
18	SFC	Charity Bainababo Brig Gen · Deputy commander	Apr 2022	Jun 2024	To the National Defence College	A	Eagle Online, 13 Apr 2022; UPDF and Pulse Uganda, Jun 2024
19	SFC	Asaph Mweteise Nyakikuru Brig Gen · Deputy commander	Jun 2024	Serving (Dec 2025)	—	A	Pulse Uganda, 17 Jun 2024; Eagle Online, 20 Jun 2024

What the record shows.

- Muhoozi Kainerugaba has had by far the longest tenure: about eight and a half years (2008–2017), and a second spell in 2020–21.
- Between December 2020 and August 2022 the force had four commanders in twenty months, one of them acting and one removed after seven months.
- Two of the deputies named since 2016, Nabasa and Candia, later led the force; Candia first as acting commander.

Note for the reader.

- No public source names the PPU commanders between Akanga Byaruhanga and 2003, or gives dates for Kyanda's and Rwakitarate's PGB commands. UPDF posting orders or the SFC Establishment would close this gap.
- Sources disagree on 2003: one has Muhoozi commanding the new brigade, the Daily Monitor has him commanding a battalion within it.
- Wikipedia lists "Lt Gen Sam Kavuma" among SFC commanders without a source; his biography does not mention the post, so he is left out.
- Maj Dick Bugingo (2000) and Lt Col Ndahura (2001) are named as PPU officers, not as unit commanders.

Source: Grades: A, dated in an official release or in two or more press reports; B, a single report or a cited secondary source; C, undated, contested or unsourced. Ministry of Defence and Veteran Affairs, SFC brief history; GlobalSecurity.org, "Special Forces

history post-1986”; UPDF releases (9–10 Aug 2022; Jun 2024); Daily Monitor (6 Mar 2018; 25 Jun 2021; 5 and 13 Aug 2022); New Vision (20 Jan 2017; Dec 2020); KFM (12 Jun 2019); Eagle Online (26 Aug 2015; 13 Apr 2022; 20 Jun 2024); Pulse Uganda (17 Jun 2024); ChimpReports; Wikipedia entries for the officers named. Bar ends are approximate to the month.

Then Minister for Defence John Patrick Amama Mbabazi sought to allay the fears of the members suggesting that the PGB was just a specialised department within the UPDF dedicated to the protection of the President. In addition to the PGB, the Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces Bill of 2003 sought to create a standing reserve force with standing command and control structures. Amid sustained disapproval from members of parliament, some of the provisions establishing such a force were removed from the final legislation.

However, as is standard practice with Museveni’s regime, the objections to the institutionalisation of the PGB and the Reserve Force did not deter him from implementing his agenda, contrary to the law. The plan to establish a reserve force was pursued administratively with an elaborate vertical structure under the ministry for veterans affairs. In practice, the veterans groups operate as an extension of Museveni’s campaign structure during elections and are known to be responsible for some of the extreme violence during elections.⁹⁴

In the years subsequent to the enactment of the Bill, the fears of the members of parliament were confirmed as the Brigade continued to expand in terms of size, specialisations, influence and command that is distinct from the official command of the UPDF. Its notoriety also continued to grow as it increasingly got involved and entangled in national electoral politics.⁹⁵

TABLE 4 Raising an army: How the founding provision of Uganda’s armed forces has changed, 1964–2005

1964 Armed Forces Act, No. 25 of 1964 FORCE RAISED An Army and an Air Force “to be known as the Army of Uganda and the Air Force of Uganda” STRENGTH DETERMINED BY Parliament	1991 National Resistance Army Statute, 1991 FORCE RAISED An Army “to be known as the National Resistance Army” STRENGTH DETERMINED BY NRA Council and the National Resistance Council, sitting in closed session	1995 Constitution of Uganda, 1995 (Art. 208) FORCE RAISED Armed forces “to be known as the Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces”; non-partisan, national in character, patriotic, professional, disciplined, productive and subordinate to the civilian authority STRENGTH DETERMINED BY Parliament (Art. 210)	2000 UPDF Act, Cap 307 (Revised Laws, 2000) FORCE RAISED An army “to be known as the Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces” STRENGTH DETERMINED BY UPDF Council and Parliament, sitting in closed session	2005 UPDF Act, No. 7 of 2005, s.3 FORCE RAISED Restates Article 208 principles; members to be citizens of Uganda “of good character” STRENGTH DETERMINED BY Not specified
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Source: The Armed Forces Act, 1964; NRA Statute, 1991; Constitution of Uganda, 1995; UPDF Act, Cap 307 (2000); UPDF Act, 2005.

The Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces Act, 2005, was therefore the first substantive legislation through which the foundational constitutional principles for a national army as elucidated in the 1995 Constitution could have been operationalised. The fundamental test for a national army had been set out in Section 3 of the Act. The Force envisaged under Articles 208(2) and (3) of the

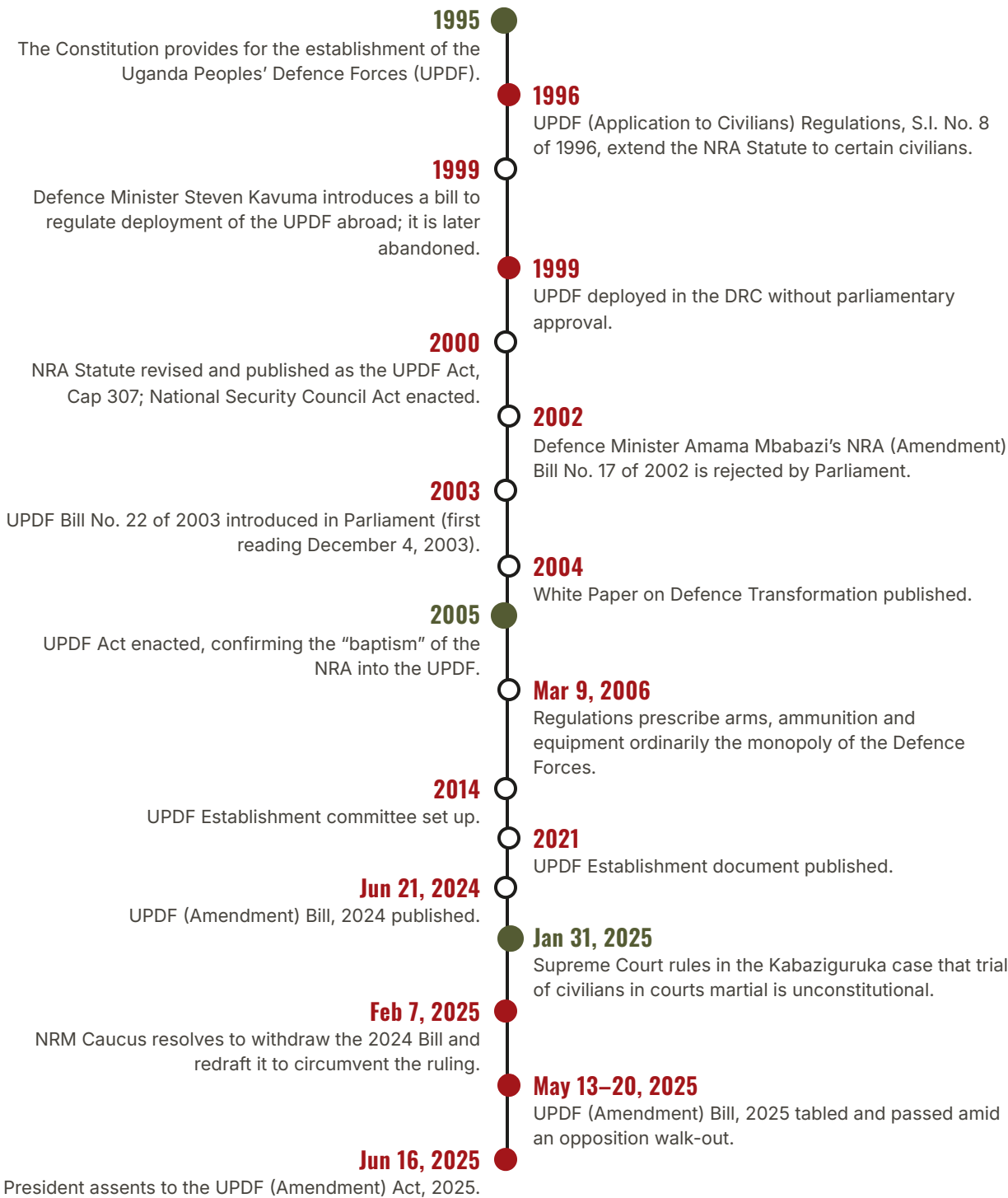
94. Here are NRA’s top 100 fighters, Daily Monitor, accessed at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/special-reports/here-are-nra-s-top-100-fighters-1565000> on March 20, 2025

95. Rtd. Col. Dr. Kizza Besigye v Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and the Electoral Commission, Presidential Election Petition No. 1 of 2001, Supreme Court of Uganda.

Constitution is supposed to be established by parliament, it should be non-partisan, national in character, patriotic, professional, disciplined, productive and subordinate to civilian authority. Eligibility for membership of the UPDF is being a Ugandan citizen of good character.⁹⁶ However, the legislators made no attempt whatsoever to give content to these foundational principles. It is therefore no surprise that since the promulgation of the Constitution close to 30 years ago, the non-partisan, national and patriotic character of the UPDF has remained elusive and a matter of intense debate and political rhetoric.

⁹⁶. Uganda People's Defence Forces Act, 2005. S.3(1)(a) and (b).

FIGURE 11 Major legislative milestones in the development of army legislation in Uganda, 1995–2025



Source: Authors' compilation; Parliament of Uganda.

TABLE 5 The UPDF command structure as established under the UPDF Act, 2005 (Cap 330): Organs and functions

Provision	Organ	Functions
s.7	Commander-in-Chief	—
s.13	Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces Council	Advise the President on all matters connected with the control and administration of the Defence Forces; give professional advice on military defence policy generally; perform such duties as may be conferred upon it by law.
s.14	High Command	Advise the President in emergency situations and on all matters relating to national security or deployment; advise the President when Uganda is at war; perform duties conferred by law and other functions as the President may direct.
s.17	Command and Staff Meetings	Formulate policy for consideration and approval by the High Command and the Defence Forces Council; other functions as the CDF may direct.
s.18	Implementation Committee	—
s.19	Commission Board	Advise the President on appointment of persons to commissions and on promotion of officers; select officers for courses; recommend officers for promotion examinations; receive officers' grievances on promotion; monitor retirement and determine termination of service.
s.20	Unit Promotions Board	—
s.22	Policy and Administration Committees	—
s.24	Committees	The President may, in consultation with the Defence Forces Council, create committees for the proper administration of the Defence Forces.
s.25	Board of Inquiry	Investigation or reporting on any matter.
s.26	Defence Forces Fund	Receive funds from fines under the Act, gifts, donations, proceeds of sale of farm produce and funds generated by projects managed by or on behalf of the Defence Forces.

Source: Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces Act, 2005 (Cap 330). Article 98(1) of the Constitution makes the President Commander-in-Chief.

The 2000 revision of the laws and the UPDF Act, 2005 continued that story (**Figure 12**). Parliament gained control over new services and peacekeeping deployments, but lost its share in setting the strength of the army, and the founders of 1986 were written into the Act by name.

FIGURE 12 Army law step by step: The 2000 revision and the UPDF Act, 2005

● Moves power towards the army or the Commander-in-Chief ● Moves power towards Parliament, the courts or the Constitution

2000

UPDF Act, Cap. 307 (Laws of Uganda revision)

The 1991 Statute as revised to 31 December 2000

COSMETIC

– REMOVED References to the NRA, the NRA Council and the National Resistance Council	~ CHANGED - NRA → UPDF; NRA Council → UPDF Council; NRC → Parliament - Strength set by the UPDF Council and Parliament in closed session (s.2) - C-in-C now under Art. 98(1) of the Constitution (s.9)	+ ADDED - Nothing of substance - Kept: 1986 “original members”, subversion offence, civilians under military law, High-Command-appointed courts
---	--	--

Implication for civilian control. A change of names, not of character. Five years after the Constitution, the rebel-era statute governed the constitutional army unchanged, and Article 210 still awaited a law.

Same year: the National Security Council Act creates district and sub-county security committees.

2005

UPDF Act, 2005 (Act 7 of 2005)

In force 2 September 2005

MIXED

– REMOVED - UPDF Act, Cap. 307 repealed Parliament’s role in setting army strength: now “the President in the Defence Council” (s.3(3)) “Subversion” as an offence (moved to the Code of Conduct, with compulsory political education)	~ CHANGED - Army Commander → Chief of Defence Forces (s.8) 1986 founders now named: six in the High Command (3rd Schedule), fifteen senior officers in the Defence Forces Council (2nd Schedule) - Defence Forces Council still built on High Command members; Council and Command fused (ss.14–15) - Court Martial Appeal Court chair must be qualified as a High Court judge (s.199)	+ ADDED - Art. 208(2) principles written into the Act (s.3(1)) - Services: land, air and “any other service prescribed by Parliament” (s.3(2)) - Peacekeeping abroad needs Parliament’s approval (s.39) - Officers must resign or retire before seeking political office (s.99) - Reserve forces drawn from auxiliaries and “state security organisations” (s.6); aid to the civil power with police powers (ss.42–43) - Civilians still subject to military law (s.119(1)(g)–(h))
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Implication for civilian control. Parliament gained control over new services and peacekeeping, and the constitutional principles became law. But it lost its say over troop strength, the founders were entrenched by name, military courts stayed in the High Command’s hands and civilians stayed under military law.

Same year: presidential term limits removed from the Constitution.

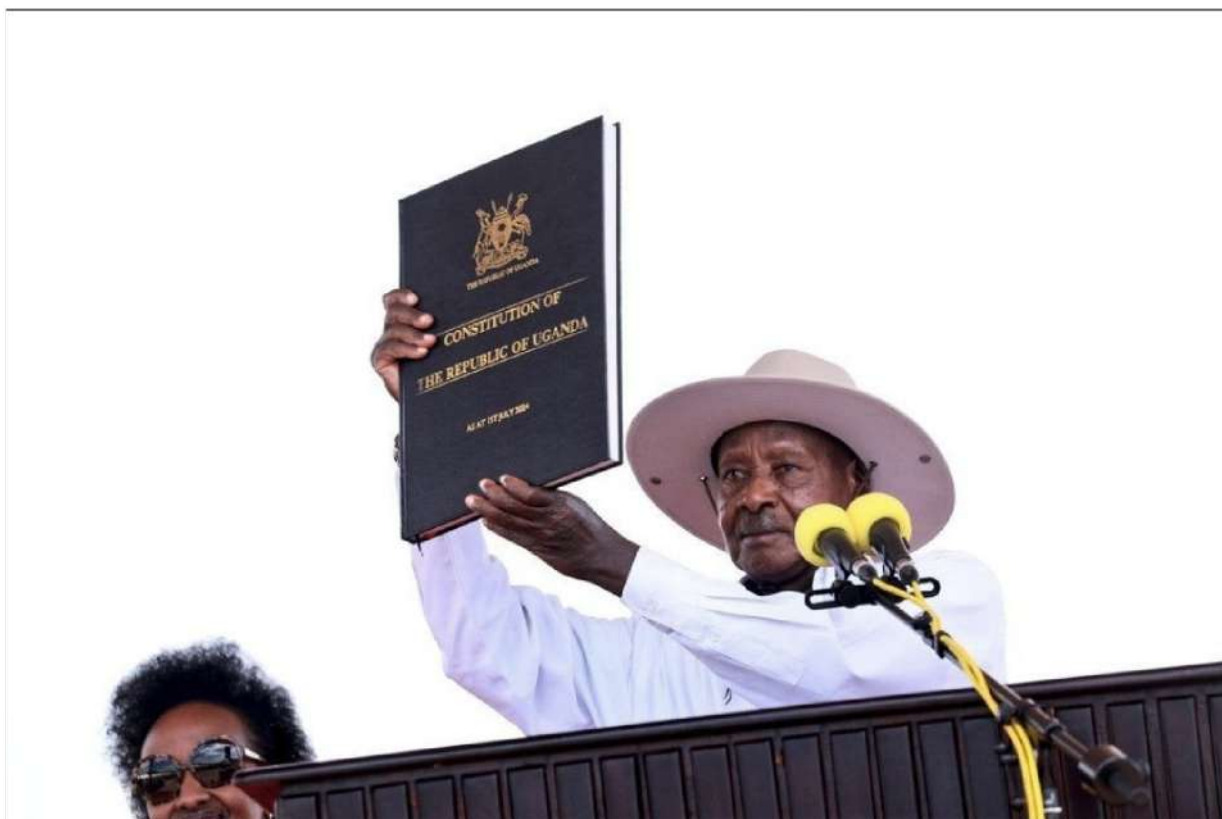
Source: NRA Statute, 1991; Constitution of Uganda, 1995; UPDF Act, Cap. 307 (revised edition 2000); UPDF Act, 2005 (Act 7 of 2005); UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025 (Act 8 of 2025). Assessment by the authors.

4.4.4 A national army mostly in name

The UPDF Act, 2005 should have been the moment at which the UPDF was established as the national army envisaged under the 1995 Constitution: non-partisan, national in character, professional and subordinate to civilian authority. Instead, the legislative process entrenched the NRA. The Act wrote the High Command as it stood on January 26, 1986 into law, fused it with the Defence Forces Council, and left the Presidential Guard Brigade and the Reserve Force to be built outside the existing normative legal framework. The Hansards of the debate show that the founders of the NRA did not see the army as a national institution answerable to Parliament and the people, but as their own institution, one that needed to be protected from everybody else. In the words of Kahinda Otafire, the seven surviving historical members of the High Command needed “a chance to nurture this history”. For Museveni, as founder and leader of the NRA rebels and the army’s only Commander-in-Chief since 1981, this posture has not changed. The next chapter shows how the army that its founders would not let go of in 2005 has since been carried into politics, the economy, faith, policing and the succession itself.

A MILITARY COUP BY OTHER MEANS: FROM CONSTITUTIONAL TRANSITION TO A MILITARY-ENABLED SUCCESSION

The promulgation of a new Constitution in 1995 was hailed as “a new beginning” for Uganda. Consistent with President Museveni’s “fundamental change” speech at the precincts of Parliament on January 26, 1986, the pillars of a new governance architecture were beginning to fall in place. The Constitution in Article 1(1) declared that “All power belongs to the people who shall exercise their sovereignty in accordance with this Constitution.” Article 1(2) emphasised this citizen sovereignty stating that “... all authority in the state emanates from the people of Uganda” “All authority” is an expansive phrase that means executive, legislative, judicial and administrative authority to be exercised by any person. Article 2(1) declares the supremacy of the Constitution over all authorities and persons throughout Uganda. In the same spirit, the primary responsibility to defend the Constitution, including resisting “any person or group of persons seeking to overthrow the established constitutional order” is vested in the citizen. The Constitution guarantees protection or immunity from prosecution for any person or group of persons who resists the suspension, overthrow, abrogation or amendment of the Constitution.



President Museveni raises a copy of the Constitution at his swearing-in. Article 1 declares that “all power belongs to the people”.

The 1995 Constitutional order enshrined a set of mechanisms for political transition mainly through credible, free and fair elections.⁹⁷ Besides, the Constitution also contained major safeguards designed to avoid a scenario where there is a re-emergence of a life president.⁹⁸ The restrictions on the number of presidential terms⁹⁹ that a person could hold the office of president and the imposition of an upper limit on the age of persons seeking to contest for president¹⁰⁰ were all designed as potential safeguards against a potential life presidency.

Finally, the 1995 Constitution sought to break the cycle of personal armies by establishing a ‘Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces’ by authority of parliament, setting the foundational principles that defined the character of Uganda’s armed forces. This represented a deliberate effort to break away from the armies of the past that operated like private mercenary or militia armies which paid loyalty to their leaders. With the 1995 Constitution therefore, the rebel outfit called National Resistance Army (NRA) that had mounted a “popular” struggle against the Obote II government (1981-1986) would be transformed into a national army defined by the criteria set out in Article 208 of the constitution. In the words of Brigadier Noble Mayombo, the transformation meant that the army would abandon the philosophy of resisting bad leaders and transform into one whose most important mission was the defence of the people.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Article 59, Clauses 1-4, of the 1995 Constitution

⁹⁸ The third president of Uganda Gen. Idi Amin Dada had declared himself “life president” of Uganda until he was forcefully removed from power by a combined force of Tanzania Peoples’ Defence Forces (TPDF) and Ugandan exiles.

⁹⁹ Article 105

¹⁰⁰ Article 102

¹⁰¹ Mayombo’s account of the name and mission of the UPDF is from the same interview cited above: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkMsLrthsZU> (accessed on February 18, 2025).

“In the words of Brigadier Noble Mayombo, the transformation meant that the army would abandon the philosophy of resisting bad leaders and transform into one whose most important mission was the defence of the people.

In principle, a “peoples’ defence force” that is “national in character, patriotic, professional, disciplined, productive and subordinate to the civilian authority” is one that is capable of defending a nation’s territorial boundaries, protect citizens against abuse of power and violation of fundamental human rights and freedoms, and protecting the sovereignty of the citizens that they exercise through credible, fair and free elections. With an aging president Yoweri Museveni and his increasingly belligerent and antagonistic son and Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) Muhoozi Kainerugaba, we assess the current posture of the Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (UPDF) and what this posture portends for the political transition discourse in the country.

The central argument in this section of the paper is that Uganda is undergoing a covert military takeover or a *coup d’état* in slow motion through militarisation of public and citizens institutions. Across the board, there is evidence of the growing influence and involvement of the army in all aspects of the Ugandan society beyond the traditional and constitutional mandate of national defence. Today, UPDF’s presence extends to public administration, economic sectors, conservation, social programmes and the UPDF (Amendment) Bill 2025 extends it to the judicial system.

“Uganda is undergoing a covert military takeover — a coup d’état in slow motion.

5.1 In his own words: The Commander-in-Chief on the army, the courts and the Constitution

Long before the son, there was the father. Thirty years after the Constitution created the UPDF, President Museveni still speaks of the army as the NRA and as his own, and his words show both what he believes the army is and how he believes it can be used. Over more than a decade, speaking as Commander-in-Chief, he has described the army as loyal to him personally, the courts as an obstacle, his opponents as enemies to be crushed and the Constitution as something to be amended whenever a court applies it (Figure 13). For him, the NRA has remained the NRA, and it has remained his army. In May 2012, replying to a newspaper report on the UPDF in Somalia, he wrote that “soldiers are loyal to the President because he is elected” and that “there is only one ‘wife’ UPDF”.¹⁰² In January 2017, at the Liberation Day celebrations in Masindi, he

¹⁰². Daily Monitor, “Only patriots, revolutionaries can build an army like UPDF”, May 7, 2012, reporting the President’s statement of May 6, 2012.

told the country: “I am not a servant of anybody. I am a freedom fighter, that is what I do.”¹⁰³

The courts have repeatedly been told where they stand. Addressing the annual Judges’ Conference in January 2014, he complained that bail had been granted to people charged with treason and warned the judges: “You are provoking the people and me... You are judges but you are Ugandans first.”¹⁰⁴ At the launch of the New Law Year in February 2022, he returned to the same complaint, calling bail “a provocation”.¹⁰⁵ When the Supreme Court ruled in January 2025 that civilians cannot be tried by courts martial, he replied that “the country is not governed by the Judges”, that “we cannot and will not abandon this useful instrument for stability”, and that the Attorney General should “propose the amendments to the constitution”. Parliament did so within four months.¹⁰⁶ In July 2025, he declared: “I will no longer tolerate judicial officers releasing criminals.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³. Africanews, “‘I’m not anybody’s servant, I’m just a freedom fighter’ – Ugandan President”, January 27, 2017.

¹⁰⁴. Daily Monitor, “Museveni to judges: Don’t provoke me”, January 27, 2014.

¹⁰⁵. Daily Monitor, “I named him Muhoozi which means vengeance, such that when someone wrongs me he avenges – Museveni” (audio), February 4, 2022; Watchdog Uganda, February 4, 2022.

¹⁰⁶. State House Uganda, “H.E. the President’s statement on the Supreme Court decision against military court martial”, February 1, 2025; JURIST, “Uganda President defies supreme court ruling declaring military trials of civilians unconstitutional”, February 2, 2025.

¹⁰⁷. allAfrica, “Uganda: Judiciary Independence Defended Amid Museveni’s Bail Remarks”, July 25, 2025, reporting the President’s remarks at Makerere University Business School on July 19, 2025.

FIGURE 13 In his own words: President Museveni on the army, the courts, his opponents and the Constitution, 2012–2025

Seventeen statements by the Commander-in-Chief, 2012–2025: an army loyal to him, courts that provoke him, opponents to be crushed and a Constitution to be amended.

THE COURTS AS AN OBSTACLE

Jan 2014 Annual Judges' Conference, Entebbe	"You are provoking the people and me." "You are judges but you are Ugandans first."
4 Feb 2022 Launch of the New Law Year, High Court, Kampala	"I've been quarreling about this issue of bail. It's a provocation."
1 Feb 2025 Statement on the Supreme Court's ruling against military trials of civilians	"The country is not governed by the Judges." "We cannot and will not abandon this useful instrument for stability."
19 Jul 2025 Makerere University Business School	"I will no longer tolerate judicial officers releasing criminals."

THE CONSTITUTION AS NEGOTIABLE

8 Jan 2016 Campaign rally, Ntungamo	"How can I go out of a banana plantation I have planted that has started bearing fruits?"
1 Feb 2025 Same statement on the Supreme Court's ruling	"Let, therefore, the Attorney-General propose the amendments to the constitution."

CITIZENS TO BE CRUSHED

Mar 2012 Naguru Police Barracks, after a policeman died in clashes with civilians	"We are going to crush them all."
Jan 2015 Rally in Rukiga County, Kabale	"The Opposition are like wolves lurking around to tear Uganda apart."
Apr 2016 St Emmanuel Cathedral, Kinyasano, Rukungiri	"Don't attempt playing in my garden. I can kill you." "Time for elections is over."
21 Jul 2020 National address, six months before the elections	"You can plan whatever you plan, we shall crush you."
Nov 2020 National address in military fatigues, after 54 people were killed	Quoting Romans 1:32 on the opposition: "those who practice such things are deserving of death".

THE ARMY AS HIS OWN

6 May 2012 Statement replying to a Daily Monitor report on the UPDF	"Soldiers are loyal to the President because he is elected." "There is only one 'wife' UPDF."
26 Jan 2017 NRM/A Liberation Day, Masindi	"I am not a servant of anybody. I am a freedom fighter, that is what I do."

Reading the record. These are the President's own words, spoken as Commander-in-Chief. Read together, they treat the army as personally loyal to him, the courts as an obstacle to be overcome, opponents as enemies to be crushed, and the Constitution as something to be amended when a court applies it.

Source: Daily Monitor (May 7, 2012; March 22, 2012; January 27, 2014; January 17, 2015; January 9, 2016; April 3, 2016); Africanews (January 27, 2017); Daily Monitor and Watchdog Uganda (February 4, 2022); State House Uganda, President's statement on the Supreme Court decision (February 1, 2025); allAfrica (July 2025); The Irish Times (July 23, 2020); VOA (November 2020). Quotations are verbatim as reported; dates in short form where the source gives only the month.

His opponents, and citizens who protest, have been warned in the language of war. After a policeman died in clashes with civilians in Kampala in March 2012, he said: "We are going to crush them all."¹⁰⁸ In January 2015 he described the opposition as "wolves lurking around to tear Uganda apart" and vowed, "I will not allow them."¹⁰⁹ Weeks after the 2016 election, he told a congregation in Rukungiri that protesters should not "attempt playing in my garden. I can kill you", adding that "time for elections is over".¹¹⁰ Six months before the 2021 elections, he warned: "You can plan whatever you plan, we shall crush you."¹¹¹ After 54 people were killed in November 2020, he addressed the nation in military fatigues and quoted Scripture against the opposition:

¹⁰⁸. Daily Monitor, "Museveni says he will crush lawless civilians", March 22, 2012.

¹⁰⁹. Daily Monitor, "I cannot leave power to wolves, says Museveni", January 17, 2015.

¹¹⁰. Daily Monitor, "Museveni vows to crush protesters", April 3, 2016.

¹¹¹. The Irish Times, "Ugandan president will 'crush' protesters ahead of election", July 23, 2020.

“those who practice such things are deserving of death”.¹¹² Campaigning in January 2016, he explained why he would not step down: “How can I go out of a banana plantation I have planted that has started bearing fruits?”¹¹³

Taken together, these statements are not slips of the tongue. They express a consistent view of power in which the army belongs to its founder, the courts serve at his tolerance, citizens who oppose him are a security threat and the Constitution yields when it stands in the way. It is this view, held by the Commander-in-Chief, that his son has inherited and now voices from the command of the army.

5.2 The Avenger Successor: The rise of a tweeting general from LDU to CDF

Evidence shows that President Museveni as the original owner of NRA remains the substantive owner of the UPDF in both normative and operational terms. From a purely normative perspective, the embedding of the NRA High Command as it existed on January 26, 1986, in the Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces Act 2005 cemented the ownership of the Ugandan military by Museveni who has been the Army’s Chairman of the High Command for the last 44 years. The rebel NRA “captured the state of Uganda” in 1986 and presided over it until 1996. The symbolic transition to civilian rule through universal adult suffrage was a still birth as the NRA bargained and justified its representation in parliament and Museveni as its founder remained the President and Commander-in-Chief.¹¹⁴

Symbolically, President Museveni represents the incomplete transition of the story of UPDF from its predecessor rebel outfit – the NRA. He is its only C-i-C since its inception in 1981¹¹⁵. His symbolic retirement from the Army on April 6, 2004 was presented as a watershed moment where the military ruler ostensibly abandoned his military fatigues and the Kalashnikov to become a civilian president. However, this was a short-lived triumphant constitutional moment as he realised that he had to fall back to “his army” to secure the presidency during the hotly contested 2001 and all the elections that followed.

As President, Commander-in-Chief and one of the top-most four-star generals of the army, President Museveni has presided over the recruitment and passing out of almost all infantry trainees of the UPDF since its creation 30 years ago. Like with the NRA, he has presided over almost every commissioning or retirement ceremony of senior army officers with limited exceptions where such ceremonies are presided over by his younger brother Caleb Akandwanaho. For him, the UPDF is still the NRA with a “historical mission” rooted in his FRONASA movement. Indeed, as his long stay in power has eroded his popularity, he has coiled back from the people into his NRA power base, donning army fatigues at many public and diplomatic functions,¹¹⁶ carrying a Kalashnikov (*Rwitalabagomi*, “the one that kills rebels”)¹¹⁷ as he

¹¹². VOA, “Uganda President Quotes Bible in Ominous Message to Opposition”, November 2020.

¹¹³. Daily Monitor, “I can’t leave power now – Museveni”, January 9, 2016.

¹¹⁴. See Article 78(c) of the Constitution and Page 381 of the Uganda Constitutional Commission Report, Citizen Rights in Africa Initiative, accessed at http://citizenshiprightsfrance.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Uganda-Constitution-Commission-1995-report_missingchaps7-14_and24-1.pdf on March 20, 2025

¹¹⁵. To emphasise ownership of the army, Mr. Museveni often pushes back its origins to the 1960s and more specially to the 1970s when he operated another rebel outfit called FRONASA.

¹¹⁶. Bury me in military uniform, says Museveni, Daily Monitor, January 24, 2021, accessed at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/bury-me-in-military-uniform-says-museveni-1493308> on March 20, 2025

¹¹⁷. Why Museveni and his *Rwitalabagomi* are inseparable, Nation, March 6, 2010, accessed at <https://nation.africa/kenya/life-and-style/lifestyle/why-museveni-and-his-rwitalabagomi-are-inseparable--626084> on March 20, 2025

responds to emergencies¹¹⁸ or making regular references to “the original NRA” at official state functions.¹¹⁹

The UPDF does not celebrate the day of its birth which is October 8, 1995, when the Constitution that established it was promulgated. Rather, the official “army day” is February 6, the day in 1981 when Museveni’s Popular Resistance Army, which became the NRA a few months later, attacked Kabamba military garrison and embarked on its 5 years rebellion.¹²⁰



Rwatabagomi: President Museveni, carrying his rifle, at the scene of the 2010 Bududa landslide.

For the last 3 decades, President Museveni has engaged in a choreographed process to handover his army to his son, Muhoozi Kainerugaba. As far back as 1997, reports emerged of a young Muhoozi Kainerugaba engaging in the recruitment of university students into the UPDF.¹²¹ In an August 1997 interview, Museveni defended Muhoozi Kainerugaba’s recruitment transgressions as being restricted to Local Defence Units (LDUs) activities and had nothing to do with the military. However, Muhoozi Kainerugaba’s cohort of “LDU” recruits was later to join the army sometime in 1999. From 1999, Muhoozi Kainerugaba was taken through a series of accelerated promotions and held several senior command and presidential advisor positions. In April 2013, the then Coordinator of Intelligence Services, Gen. David Sejusa aka Tinyefuza, wrote to the Director General of the Internal Security Organisation asking him to investigate reports of a plot to assassinate senior officers opposed to a “Muhoozi project” to groom Muhoozi Kainerugaba for the presidency.¹²² When the letter was published in May 2013, the police occupied the premises of the Daily Monitor and Red Pepper newspapers for about ten days.¹²³

At the time of Sejusa’s letter, Muhoozi Kainerugaba vehemently denied the existence of a “Muhoozi project” aimed at ensuring he was in the queue to succeed his father. He asserted that Uganda is not a monarchy and that the power to govern lies with the Ugandan people, not a single individual.¹²⁴ A similar position was stated by President Museveni who was quoted telling

¹¹⁸. Ibid., 71

¹¹⁹. Ibid., 70

¹²⁰. Kenneth Kazibwe, Kabamba: The beginning of the story of 27 guns and 42 people, NilePost, January 26, 2018, accessed at <https://nilepost.co.ug/featured/7952/kabamba-the-beginning-of-the-story-of-27-guns-and-42-people> on March 20, 2025

¹²¹. Emmanuel Mutaizibwa, The rise of Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, Daily Monitor, accessed at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/the-rise-of-gen-muhoozi-kainerugaba-3742016> on March 20, 2025

¹²². https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/gen-muhoozi-politics-3807830#google_vignette

¹²³. Daily Monitor, “Probe assassination claims, says Tinyefuza”, May 6, 2013, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/probe-assassination-claims-says-tinyefuza-1542336>; Al Jazeera, “Ugandan police end newspaper siege”, May 30, 2013, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2013/5/30/ugandan-police-end-newspaper-siege>.

the Qatari-based Al Jazeera television during an interview in New York that “that man is an army officer who is not interested in politics.”¹²⁵ In spite of these incessant denials, both Muhoozi Kainerugaba and his father continued to create a *fait accompli* situation that could eventually make a Muhoozi Kainerugaba presidency inevitable. Museveni continued to move his son through the ranks of the military.

In June 2021, Muhoozi Kainerugaba was appointed the commander of the UPDF Land Forces replacing Lt. Gen. Peter Elwelu. As Commander Land Forces, Muhoozi Kainerugaba embarked on addressing a series of political campaigns disguised as birthday parties in celebration of his 48th birthday (Figure 15). The “MK project” instantly started to manifest in what came to be known as the MK Movement brazenly promoting Muhoozi Kainerugaba’s bid for the presidency in contravention of Article 208(2) of the Constitution, which requires the UPDF to be non-partisan, and of the UPDF Act, which bars serving officers from active partisan politics. On March 8, 2022, Muhoozi Kainerugaba took to Twitter (now X) to declare that he would be retiring from the army. He tweeted:

“After 28 years of service in my glorious military, the greatest military in the world, I am happy to announce my retirement. Me and my soldiers have achieved so much! I have only love and respect for all those great men and women that achieve greatness for Uganda everyday.”

In the history of the NRA and the UPDF hitherto, it was only President Museveni who enjoyed the monopoly of referring to what was supposed to be a national army as “my army”. Indeed, since that time, he became more open in taking actions that implicitly or directly pointed to his interest in bequeathing the UPDF to his son. Muhoozi Kainerugaba was sued jointly with the then CDF Gen. Wilson Mbadi and the Attorney General in May 2022 for failing to uphold the law restricting serving army officers from engaging in active politics.¹²⁶

In October 2022, Muhoozi Kainerugaba was relieved of his appointment as the Commander Land Forces, but promoted to a 4-star general¹²⁷. His removal followed a barrage of careless tweets including one where he threatened that he could capture Nairobi in 2 weeks. The Twitter storm prompted a rare apology from President Museveni, who is never accustomed to apologising for anything.¹²⁸ But in terms of Uganda’s transition politics, Muhoozi Kainerugaba’s pipping ceremony was a moment of significance in the character of the UPDF. In the absence of the Commander-in-Chief, nobody within the hierarchy of the military or political leadership was considered worthy of presiding over the ceremony. Thus, the responsibility was assigned to another member of the “unholy trinity”¹²⁹ – Museveni’s brother and Muhoozi Kainerugaba’s uncle Caleb Akandwanaho aka Saleh Salim, who at that time was not known to hold any official position in the military.

¹²⁴. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23029129>; <https://www.voanews.com/a/uganda-debied-president-museveni-succession-plan/1656565.html>

¹²⁵. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/museveni-i-m-not-grooming-my-son-for-president--1554350>

¹²⁶. The petition has never been heard by court and the petitioner – Mr. Gawayu Tegulle – currently lives in self-imposed exile in the United States.

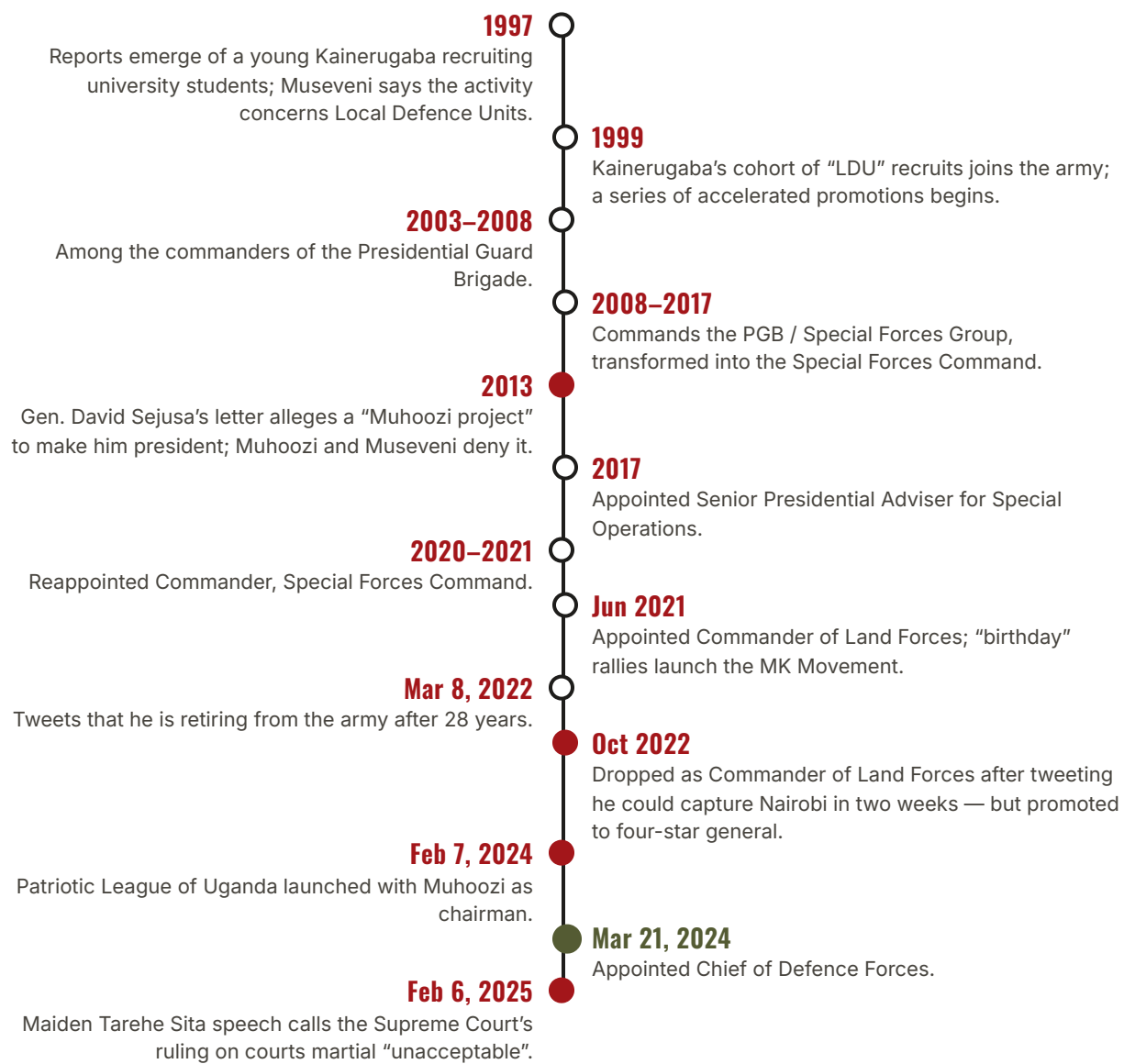
¹²⁷. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/muhoozi-dropped-from-clf-promoted-to-general-3973026>

¹²⁸. Al Jazeera, “Ugandan president apologises for son’s tweets on annexing Kenya”, October 5, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/5/ugandan-president-apologises-for-sons-tweets-on-annexing-kenya>; Eagle Online, “Muhoozi pipped as a four-star General”, October 10, 2022, <https://eagle.co.ug/2022/10/10/muhoozi-pipped-as-a-four-star-general/>; KFM, “Gen Muhoozi hands over office to Lt Gen Kayanja”, October 10, 2022.

¹²⁹. See Godber Tumushabe and Job Kijja, 2021: Uganda Political transition scenarios to 2026 and beyond: the Crested Crane, the storm in the tea-Cup, or the Warrior Mad King. Kampala. 58 @mkainerugaba

During the same period, Muhoozi Kainerugaba became more open declaring himself the “next president of Uganda” via his X account.¹³⁰ In a barrage of tweets in December 2022, Muhoozi Kainerugaba declared: “I believe in Jesus Christ, and I believe in my father, General @KagutaMuseveni. I certainly do not believe in NRM. In Marxist terms, it is probably the most reactionary organization in the country.” On February 7, 2024, a group of self-proclaimed MK Movement self-seekers¹³¹ led by Eastern Uganda NRM Chairman Mike Mukula declared the formation of a political pressure group called the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU) with Muhoozi Kainerugaba as its Chairman.¹³² In spite of the brazen display of indiscipline by Muhoozi Kainerugaba by engaging in active political mobilisation which is against the constitution and the UPDF army code of conduct, his father promoted him to a 4-star general and ultimately appointed him the CDF on March 21, 2024.

FIGURE 14 The Avenger: The rise of Muhoozi Kainerugaba from LDU recruiter to Chief of Defence Forces



Source: Authors' compilation from sources cited in this chapter.

130. @mkainerugaba on X (formerly Twitter).
131. <https://nilepost.co.ug/editors-choice/161628/some-people-close-to-gen-muhoozi-are-self-seekers-says-museveni>; <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/mixed-signals-as-mk-movement-unveils-new-group-4517942>
132. <https://www.independent.co.ug/from-mk-movement-to-the-patriotic-league/>

Being one of the leading and controversial Twitter (X) “warriors”,¹³³ Muhoozi Kainerugaba’s regular reference to the UPDF as the NRA, the Chwezi army or the army of Christ amount to psycho-social warfare against the professional men and women of the UPDF – the institution envisaged under the 1995 Constitution. Indeed, in his maiden *Tarehe Sita* speech on February 6, 2025, Muhoozi Kainerugaba spoke of the UPDF and its predecessor – the NRA – as the “foundation upon which democracy and social-economic transformation can be realised”.¹³⁴ According to Muhoozi Kainerugaba, “the historical mission of the UPDF ... predates the laws being debated today”. He characterised the Uganda Supreme Court decision declaring the trial of civilians in the army court martial as a very unfortunate development and “quite unacceptable”¹³⁵ and asked his father to expedite enactment of a law to reverse the court decision. At this same celebration, the Minister of Defence and Veteran Affairs, Jacob Oboth Oboth, who should have given the policy speech about national defence and security and the role of the UPDF, was reduced to introducing the dignitaries in attendance to the President.

To Museveni and Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the NRA is the constitution and the law, and everything, including the 1995 Constitution, is subordinate to it. The rise of Muhoozi Kainerugaba from an alleged LDU personnel to a CDF who brazenly engages in partisan politics, threatens to arrest, torture or kill his father’s political opponents to upending Uganda’s foreign policy is the clearest manifestation of Museveni’s deliberate scheme to transition Uganda and the UPDF to his son or another chosen successor. What is noteworthy though is that this process can be observed throughout the last 25 years of the post 1995 constitution where the Army has been elevated as the supreme authority, and in some cases projected as the only functional institution in the country.

The art of deception: Birthday parties as a political platform, 2022–2025

Since 2022, Muhoozi Kainerugaba’s birthday on April 24 has been the most visible stage of the “Muhoozi project”. **Figure 15** maps where the events were held and what happened at each. In April 2022, while he was Commander of the Land Forces, the 48th birthday became a national programme. On April 20, supporters at a rally in Masaka wore T-shirts reading “Muhoozi K is our next president”. On April 23, he flagged off a birthday run from Kololo Ceremonial Grounds, city roads were closed, and a free concert followed at the Lugogo Cricket Oval.¹³⁶ The Prime Minister was guest of honour, and ministers, MPs and senior UPDF officers attended. Guests chanted “our next president”, and Muhoozi Kainerugaba described the youth as “the strongest force in Uganda right now”.¹³⁷

The next evening, the President hosted a state dinner at State House, Entebbe, attended by President Paul Kagame of Rwanda on his first visit to Uganda in about four years. President Museveni described his son as “a gift to us in our young days of struggle”; President Kagame told

¹³³. Patrick Ilunga, DR Congo threatens to sever links with Uganda over Muhoozi tweets, Daily Monitor, accessed at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/congo-in-threat-to-links-with-uganda-over-muhoozi-s-x-tweets-4885490> on March 20, 2025 105 106

¹³⁴. UPDF, “Statement of the CDF-UPDF at the 44th Tarehe Sita Anniversary, Kyotera, Greater Masaka Region”, February 7, 2025, <https://www.updf.go.ug/tarehe-sita/statement-of-the-cdf-updf-at-the-44th-tarehe-sita-anniversary-kyotera-greater-masaka-region/>; Pulse Uganda, “It’s unacceptable’ – Muhoozi rebukes Supreme Court in fiery Tarehe Sita speech”, February 6, 2025.

¹³⁵. Gertrude Mutyaba and Al-Mahdi Ssenkibirwa, Gen Muhoozi joins father in criticism of Supreme Court, Daily Monitor, accessed at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/gen-muhoozi-joins-father-in-criticism-of-supreme-court-4916974> on March 20, 2025

¹³⁶. The Independent, “All set for Muhoozi birthday run”, April 21, 2022.

¹³⁷. Daily Monitor, “Muhoozi explains what his 48th birthday signals”, April 25, 2022; The Conversation, “Museveni’s first son Muhoozi: clear signals of a succession plan in Uganda”, May 2022.

the guests that “greater generals are those who win peace”.¹³⁸ The celebrations resumed in Jinja at the end of May, where Muhoozi Kainerugaba, in military fatigues, opened a regional women’s football championship, and he announced on X that “all our forces in the Western sector will assemble in Mbarara”, although no record was found that the Mbarara event took place.¹³⁹ In May 2022, a lawyer petitioned the Constitutional Court to stop the serving general’s political activities.¹⁴⁰ In September, the President defended the parties as the work of supporters which had “exhibited the spirit of the resistance movement”.¹⁴¹

After his removal from the Land Forces in October 2022, the celebrations moved to the regions and into diplomacy. In April 2023, a rally in Kabale marking his “official” 49th birthday was tied to the re-opening of the Katuna border with Rwanda, and he met Gen. Kale Kayihura, the former Inspector General of Police.¹⁴² In Masindi, the MK Movement’s vice chairman for Western Uganda held a “Kasiki” for “our next President”, whom he called the “standby generator”.¹⁴³ Muhoozi Kainerugaba himself spent the day in Kigali with President Kagame, accompanied by two Cabinet ministers. The event had been billed as a regional celebration, but was in the end a private one.¹⁴⁴

In 2024, now CDF and chairman of the PLU, Muhoozi Kainerugaba held no rally. He marked his 50th birthday by planting trees with Special Forces Command (SFC) soldiers at Luttaguzi Barracks and opening a neonatal unit at a military hospital in Entebbe. The President and First Lady hosted a dinner at which the First Lady gave him 100 cows.¹⁴⁵ In April 2025, the 51st birthday run at Kololo, themed as “an MK climate change mitigation plan”, was flagged off by the Commander of the Land Forces, Lt. Gen. Kayanja Muhanga, with the Minister for Kampala and the executive director of the Kampala Capital City Authority. Muhoozi Kainerugaba himself was conspicuously absent from the event.¹⁴⁶

From the above, four implications follow for Uganda’s political transition. First, the purported birthday celebrations serve as a way around the constitutional requirement that the army be non-partisan: a serving general could tour the country, gather crowds and hear himself hailed as the next president without declaring a candidacy. The celebrations give the CDF the tool of deniability while breaking the law and violating the very Constitution every CDF swears to defend. Second, it has fused the state, the army and the family. Public roads, state broadcasters, the Prime Minister, ministers, the Land Forces commander and the capital city’s administration have all served a private birthday event. By 2025, the army’s second most senior commander was fronting his superior’s birthday run. Third, it has personalised foreign policy: the rapprochement with Rwanda was staged through a birthday dinner, a border reopening billed as a birthday celebration, and a birthday in Kigali, giving the succession a regional endorsement. Fourth, it has normalised the succession. What was challenged in court in 2022 had become, by

¹³⁸. The Kampala Report, “Key quotes from Muhoozi birthday dinner at State House”, April 25, 2022; The Independent, “Birthday diplomacy of Gen. Muhoozi”, 2022.

¹³⁹. Nairobi News, “Museveni’s son attends sports event in military gear”, May 2022; Let Out News, “Homecoming: Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba takes his birthday celebrations to Western Uganda”, May 31, 2022.

¹⁴⁰. Uganda Radio Network, “Lawyer petitions court over General Muhoozi’s birthday party celebrations”, May 6, 2022.

¹⁴¹. Daily Monitor, “Museveni speaks out on Muhoozi’s parties”, September 19, 2022.

¹⁴². Trumpet News, “Kayihura joins Muhoozi in Kabale”, April 19, 2023; KT Press, “Gen Muhoozi in Rwanda for birthday celebration”, April 2023.

¹⁴³. Plus News and allAfrica, “Masindi fired up for General Muhoozi Kainerugaba 49th birthday ‘Kasiki’”, April 22, 2023.

¹⁴⁴. Muhoozi Kainerugaba on X, March 30, 2023, reported by Nairobi News; Daily Monitor, “Muhoozi’s anti-climax 2023 birthday”, April 30, 2023.

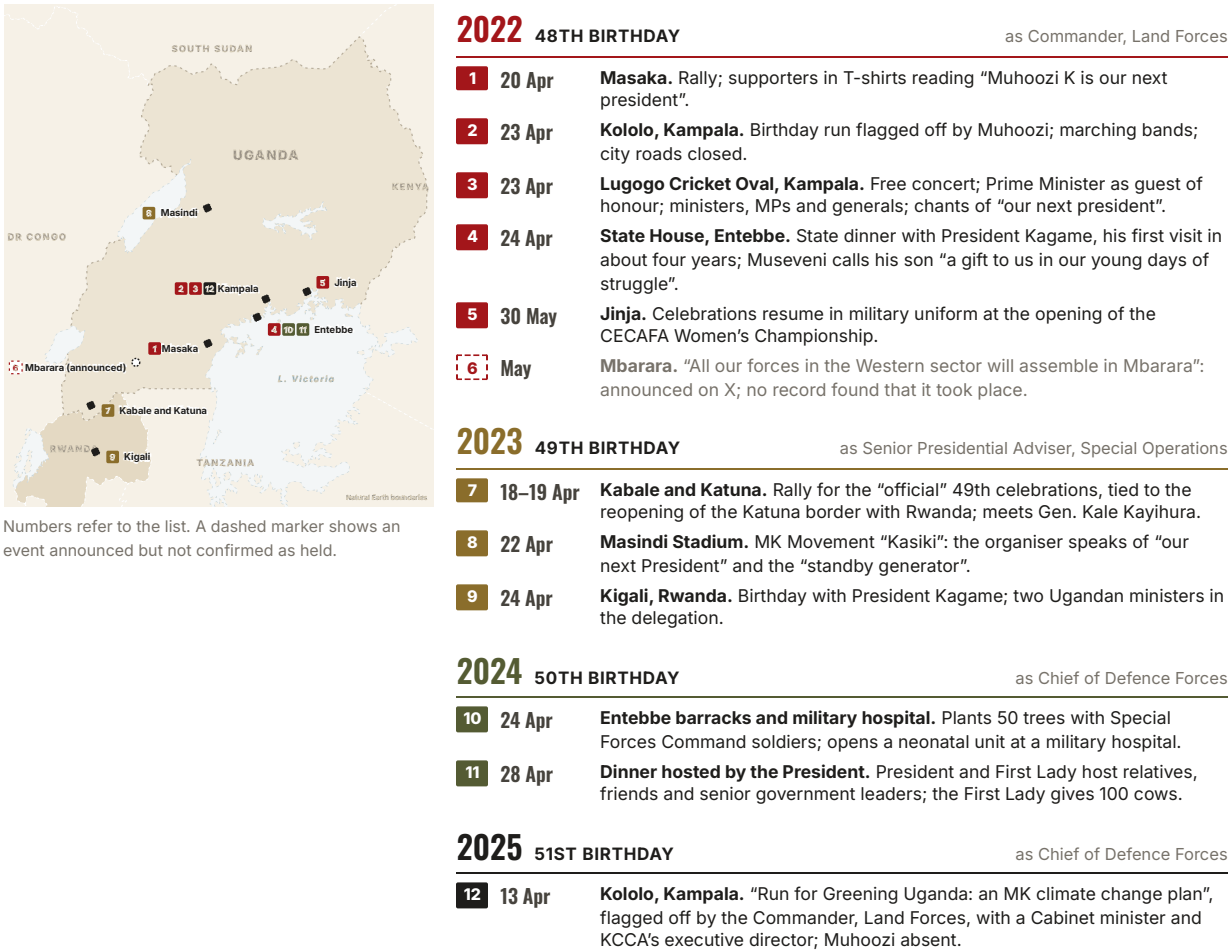
¹⁴⁵. Pulse Uganda, “Muhoozi Kainerugaba celebrates 50th birthday”, April 29, 2024.

¹⁴⁶. Uganda Broadcasting Corporation, “Ugandans rally at Kololo for Gen. Muhoozi’s 51st birthday run”, April 15, 2025.

2025, a routine fixture of the state calendar, endorsed by the President, and the transition it rehearses is a family event rather than a constitutional process.

FIGURE 15 Birthday politics: Where Muhoozi Kainerugaba’s birthday events were held, and what happened, 2022–2025

Four birthdays, twelve events: from a national tour as Commander, Land Forces, to a run fronted by the army’s second most senior commander.



FROM A BIRTHDAY PARTY TO A PLATFORM

2022 · A national tour ORGANISED BY Patriots Club; MK Movement STATE RESOURCES AND OFFICIALS Public roads closed; state broadcasters; Prime Minister, ministers and generals WHAT FOLLOWED Petition to the Constitutional Court (May); the President defends the parties (September)	2023 · Diplomacy and the regions ORGANISED BY MK Movement regional leaders STATE RESOURCES AND OFFICIALS A border reopening; a foreign head of state; two Cabinet ministers WHAT FOLLOWED Billed as a regional event; the Kigali celebration was private	2024 · Inside the army and the family ORGANISED BY The CDF’s office; the First Family STATE RESOURCES AND OFFICIALS Special Forces soldiers; a military hospital; State House WHAT FOLLOWED The son is now head of the army; no public rally	2025 · A party platform ORGANISED BY Organising committee; PLU supporters STATE RESOURCES AND OFFICIALS The Commander, Land Forces; a Cabinet minister; KCCA WHAT FOLLOWED The army’s second most senior commander fronts the son’s birthday run
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Source: The Independent (April 21, 2022; “Birthday diplomacy of Gen. Muhoozi”, 2022); Daily Monitor (April 25, 2022; September 19, 2022; April 30, 2023); The Conversation (May 2022); The Kampala Report (April 25, 2022); Nairobi News (2022; March 30, 2023); Let Out News (May 31, 2022); Uganda Radio Network (May 6, 2022); Trumpet News (April 19, 2023); allAfrica and Plus News (April 22, 2023); KT Press (April 2023); Pulse Uganda (April 29, 2024); Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (April 15, 2025). Events to December 2025.

Upending the locus of Uganda's foreign policy: The general as diplomat

Diplomacy has become another stage for the CDF. Foreign relations are the business of the President and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and defence cooperation that of the Minister of Defence and Veteran Affairs. The UPDF's own record shows how far the point of contact has moved. Between November 2021 and March 2024, the UPDF website records no meeting between the CDF, Gen. Wilson Mbadi, and any ambassador, high commissioner or defence attaché accredited to Uganda. The ambassadors of Japan, Ethiopia, Israel, China and Russia, the South African High Commissioner and the Korean defence attaché were received instead by the Minister of Defence or a Minister of State, seven times in all, while Gen. Mbadi's own foreign engagements, eleven of them, were with military chiefs and defence delegations.¹⁴⁷ No comparable online record exists for Gen. Katumba Wamala (2013–2017) or Gen. David Muhoozi (2017–2021). The press reports occasional courtesy calls, such as the farewell call of the United States Ambassador, Deborah Malac, on Gen. David Muhoozi at Mbuya in November 2019.¹⁴⁸

Under Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba the pattern was reversed. From his appointment on March 21, 2024 to December 2025, the UPDF recorded 24 meetings between the CDF and diplomats accredited to Uganda, about one a month: the ambassadors or high commissioners of Italy, China, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Japan, the Netherlands, Turkey, the United States, the European Union, Kenya, Russia, Sudan, Denmark and France, and the defence attachés of China, the United Kingdom, France and Canada. In the same period, the defence ministers received two. The CDF also met eight heads of state or government, among them Presidents Kagame (twice), Sisi, Ramaphosa, Tshisekedi and Kiir and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.¹⁴⁹

The engagement has combined courtship with confrontation. In October 2024, Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba demanded on X that the United States Ambassador, William Popp, apologise to the President by 9 am on Monday or be asked to leave Uganda.¹⁵⁰ Four months later, he hosted the ambassador and hailed “strong Uganda–U.S. cooperation”.¹⁵¹ In March 2025, Kenya's High Commissioner called on him to apologise for a Nairobi newspaper column, after the CDF's supporters threatened to protest at the High Commission.¹⁵² In May 2025, he warned Europeans to “better be careful”, and the UPDF suspended all defence cooperation with Germany over the ambassador's alleged “subversive activities”, a charge Berlin called “absurd”.¹⁵³

Three implications follow. First, foreign governments now treat the CDF as a principal: the calls that ambassadors once paid on ministers are paid on the President's son, a sign that foreign capitals are positioning themselves for a succession they expect. Second, the shift displaces the civilian institutions that the Constitution charges with foreign relations and defence. In March 2025, the Minister of Defence and Veteran Affairs told Parliament that he had no knowledge of the deployment of UPDF units to Juba, South Sudan, that the CDF had announced on X. Third, it

¹⁴⁷ UPDF website, www.updf.go.ug, categories “Bilateral Relations”, “Diplomatic Relations” and “Diplomatic Partnership”, November 2021–December 2025, read post by post by the authors. The categories begin in November 2021, and not every meeting is reported.

¹⁴⁸ Daily Monitor, “U.S. envoy meets UPDF chiefs ahead of her departure”, November 29, 2019.

¹⁴⁹ UPDF website, www.updf.go.ug, categories “Bilateral Relations”, “Diplomatic Relations” and “Diplomatic Partnership”, November 2021–December 2025, read post by post by the authors. The categories begin in November 2021, and not every meeting is reported.

¹⁵⁰ Daily Monitor, “Apologize or leave Uganda, Gen Muhoozi tells US ambassador in escalating row”, October 2024, <https://monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/apologize-or-leave-uganda-gen-muhoozi-tells-us-ambassador-in-escalating-row--4785452>; The Independent, “US EMBASSY: Apologize for what?”, October 7, 2024.

¹⁵¹ Daily Monitor, “‘We're trying to analyse the situation,’ US embassy source says after Gen Muhoozi posts”, October 4, 2024; UPDF, “Gen Kainerugaba hails strong Uganda–U.S. cooperation in a meeting with American ambassador”, February 12, 2025.

¹⁵² allAfrica, “Kenya's High Commissioner to Uganda apologizes to CDF Muhoozi”, March 2025.

¹⁵³ Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba on X, May 15, 2025 (Table 9); The EastAfrican, “Uganda cuts military ties with Germany over ‘subversive activities’ by envoy”, May 26, 2025.

makes relations with other states hostage to one officer's temper: a dispute aired on X can end defence cooperation with a development partner. The record of four CDFs shows that this is a break with past practice, not its continuation.

A monarchy in the making: Africa's axis of monarchical military regimes

President Museveni's elevation of his son as a potential successor is not an isolated case. It fits a pattern observable across Africa, in which rulers have tried to stage-manage succession by their sons, with varying degrees of success and failure. Four of the six live cases lie in one band from Tripoli to Kigali. In Uganda and eastern Libya, as in Chad before 2021, the son commanded the presidential guard or the army first; in Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, the son was given the vice-presidency together with the defence or another strategic portfolio. Where the scheme has succeeded, as in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2001, Togo in 2005, Gabon in 2009 and Chad in 2021, the son took power through the army or with its backing. Where it has failed, the guard that was built to protect the dynasty has sometimes ended it, as in Gabon in 2023.

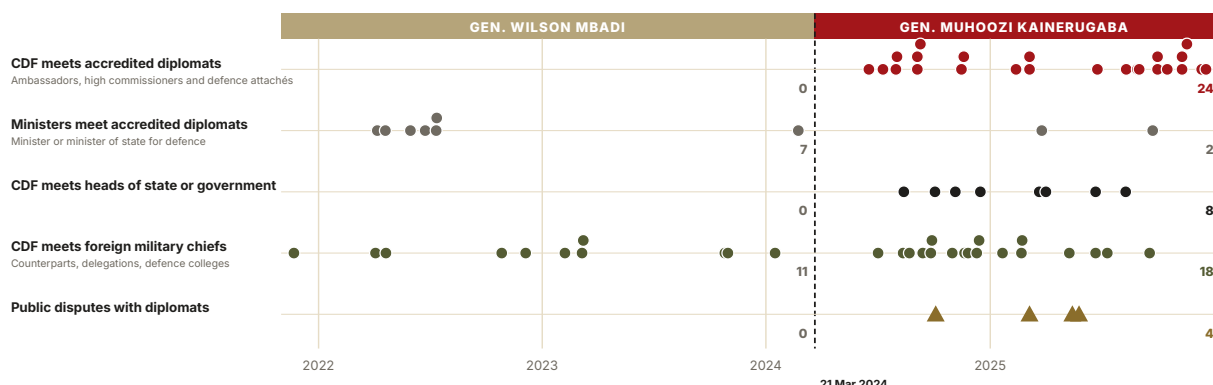
Wherever rulers have attempted to choreograph succession by their sons or relatives, the army has been the first casualty. Rather than building national armies loyal to the constitution, these rulers build personal armies loyal to themselves, which they then bequeath to their chosen successors. A succession arranged in this way upends the constitutionally mandated transition, and replaces the will of the voters with the loyalty of the guard. The UPDF, President Museveni and Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba are no exception.

FIGURE 16 The general as diplomat: The Chief of Defence Forces and the diplomatic corps, 2013–2025

Under his predecessor, ambassadors called on the defence ministers. Under Gen. Muhoozi, they call on the Chief of Defence Forces, about once a month, while the same CDF picks public fights with some of them.



WHO RECEIVES THE DIPLOMATS: THE RECORD ON THE UPDF WEBSITE, NOV 2021 – DEC 2025



FOUR CDFS COMPARED

CHIEF OF DEFENCE FORCES	IN OFFICE	MEETINGS WITH DIPLOMATS ACCREDITED TO UGANDA	MEETINGS WITH HEADS OF STATE	PUBLIC DISPUTES WITH DIPLOMATS
Gen. Edward Katumba Wamala	2013 – 2017	No UPDF online record; none found in the press	None found	None found
Gen. David Muhoozi	2017 – 2021	No UPDF online record; courtesy calls reported, e.g. the US ambassador's farewell call at Mbuya (Nov 2019)	None found	None found
Gen. Wilson Mbadi	Jun 2021 – Mar 2024	0 recorded (Nov 2021 – Mar 2024). Ambassadors were received by defence ministers (7); the CDF met military chiefs and delegations (11)	None recorded	None found
Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba	Mar 2024 –	24 recorded to Dec 2025, from 14 countries and the EU; defence ministers received 2	8 recorded	4: US (Oct 2024), Kenya (Mar 2025), Germany and "Bazungu" (May 2025)

CONFRONTATION AND COURTSHIP: PUBLIC DISPUTES WITH DIPLOMATS

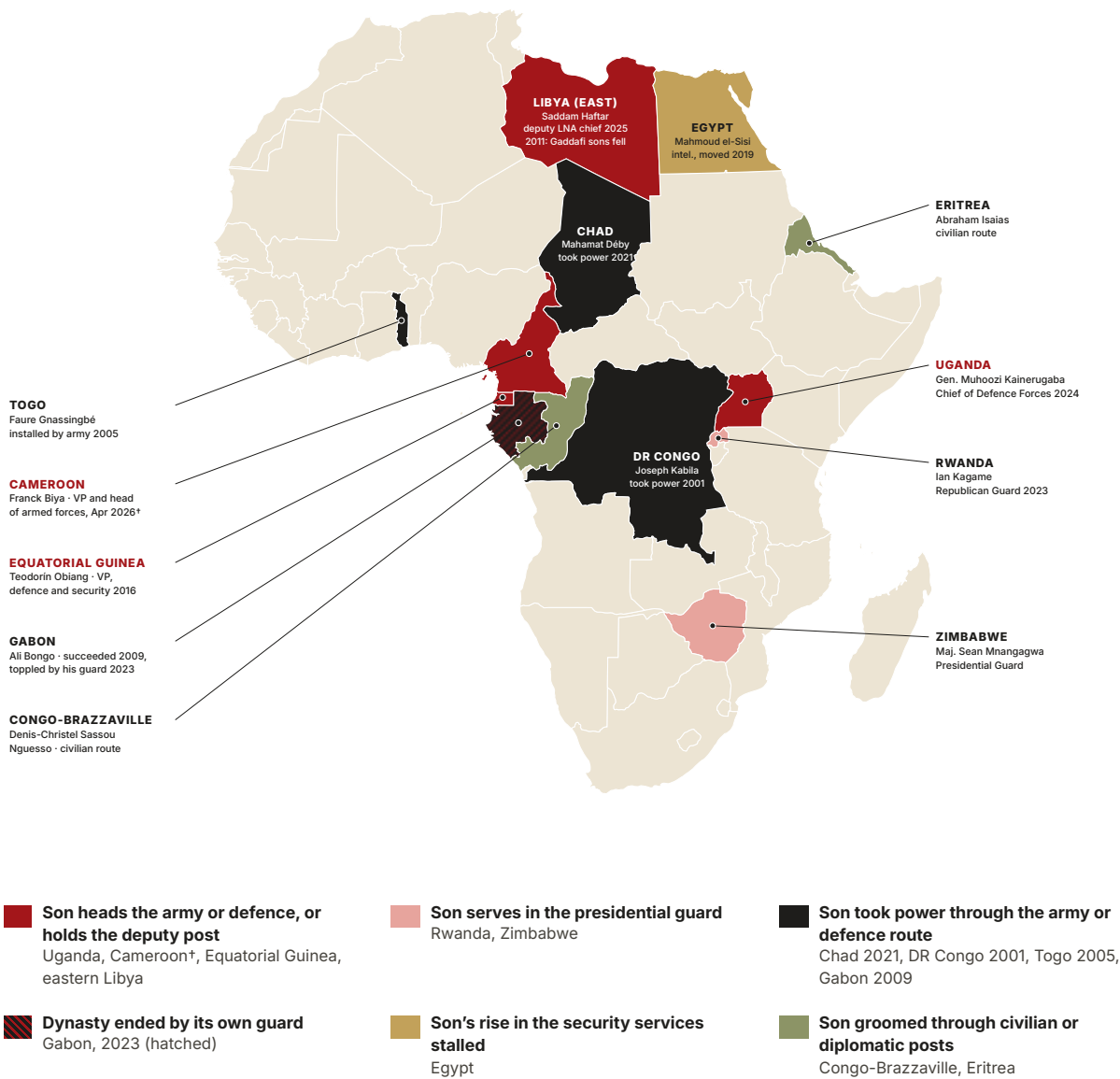
OCT 2024 United States On X, demands that Ambassador William Popp apologise to the President by 9 am on Monday or be asked to leave Uganda. Four months later, he hosts Popp and "hails strong Uganda–U.S. cooperation".	MAR 2025 Kenya Kenya's High Commissioner calls on the CDF and apologises for a Nairobi newspaper column, "Four-star brat", after the CDF's supporters threaten to protest at the High Commission.	MAY 2025 "Bazungu" Posts that Europeans "better be careful. We will deport traitors in public view!" (see Table 9).	MAY 2025 Germany The UPDF suspends all defence cooperation with Germany over the ambassador's alleged "subversive activities"; Berlin calls the charge "absurd".
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Reading the record. Counts are of meetings reported on the UPDF website (categories "Bilateral Relations", "Diplomatic Relations" and "Diplomatic Partnership"), which begin in November 2021; not every meeting is reported. Under Gen. Mbadi the same website reported the CDF's meetings with foreign military chiefs, but none with resident diplomats, who were received by ministers. Numbers at the right of each row: before and after March 21, 2024.

Source: UPDF website, www.updf.go.ug, categories Bilateral Relations, Diplomatic Relations and Diplomatic Partnership (November 2021 – December 2025); Daily Monitor (November 29, 2019; October 4, 2024); allAfrica (March 2025); The EastAfrican (May 26, 2025); Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba on X (May 2025). Compiled by the authors.

FIGURE 17 Africa’s axis of emerging monarchical military regimes: Where rulers have prepared sons for power through the army, 2001–2025

A belt of family succession runs from Libya through Chad and Central Africa to the Great Lakes. In every case in red, the son has been placed in charge of the army or defence, or in the formal line of succession.



Reading the axis

Four of the six live cases lie in one band from Tripoli to Kigali. In Uganda and eastern Libya, as in Chad before 2021, the son commanded the guard or the army first. In Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea he was given the vice-presidency with the defence portfolio. Monarchies where succession is hereditary in law, such as Morocco and Eswatini, are not shown.

* After the book's December 2025 cut-off. Borders are shown for orientation only.

Source: As for Figure 18. Base map: Natural Earth via world-atlas (public domain).

FIGURE 18 From republic to dynasty: Sons, soldiers and succession in Africa, 2001–2025

Across the continent, rulers have prepared sons for power through the army, the presidential guard or the defence portfolio. Four have already taken power this way; four more now hold the top military or defence posts.

THE LADDER: HOW FAR EACH SON HAS CLIMBED

COUNTRY AND RULER	SON	ENTERS ARMY OR SECURITY SERVICE	COMMANDS GUARD OR ELITE UNIT	HEADS ARMY, DEFENCE OR SECURITY	FORMAL HEIR POST	TAKES POWER	POSITION AND OUTCOME
IN PROGRESS							
Uganda Yoweri Museveni, since 1986	Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba b. 1974	● 1999	● 2008	● 2024	○ PLU	—	Chief of Defence Forces; leads the Patriotic League of Uganda; says openly he will succeed
Cameroon Paul Biya, since 1982	Franck Biya civilian	—	—	● 2026†	● 2026†	—	Vice President, Head of the Armed Forces and Minister Delegate for Defence by decree of 4 Apr 2026
Equatorial Guinea Teodoro Obiang, since 1979	Teodoro “Teodorin” Nguema Obiang Maj. Gen. 2018	—	—	● 2016	● 2016	—	First Vice President in charge of defence and security; second VP from 2012
Libya (east) Khalifa Haftar, LNA since 2014	Saddam Haftar with Khaled Haftar	● ✓	● ✓	● 2025	● 2025	—	Deputy General Commander of the LNA (Aug 2025); brother Khaled made LNA Chief of Staff the same month
Rwanda Paul Kagame, since 2000	Ian Kagame 2nd Lt	● 2022	○ 2023	—	—	—	Sandhurst 2022; serves in the Republican Guard close to the President
Zimbabwe Emmerson Mnangagwa, since 2017	Maj. Sean Mnangagwa	● ✓	○ 2022	—	—	—	Presidential Guard officer; in the close-protection detail, Feb 2026†, amid the “2030 agenda”
SUCCESSION ACHIEVED							
Chad Idriss Déby, 1990–2021	Gen. Mahamat Déby	● ✓	● ✓	—	—	● 2021	Presidential guard commander; took power through a military council when his father was killed; elected 2024
DR Congo Laurent-Désiré Kabila, 1997–2001	Joseph Kabila	● ✓	—	● 2000	—	● 2001	Army chief of staff for land forces; installed after his father’s assassination; ruled to 2019
Togo Gnassingbé Eyadéma, 1967–2005	Faure Gnassingbé civilian	—	—	—	—	● 2005	A civilian minister, installed by the army hours after his father’s death; still in power
Gabon Omar Bongo, 1967–2009	Ali Bongo	—	—	● 1999	—	● 2009	Defence minister for ten years before succeeding; overthrown in 2023 by his own Republican Guard commander
COLLAPSED OR STALLED							
Libya Muammar Gaddafi, 1969–2011	Khamis and Mutassim Gaddafi	● ✓	● ✓	● ✓	—	○ x	Sons ran an elite brigade and national security; the regime collapsed in 2011
Egypt Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, since 2014	Mahmoud el-Sisi intelligence	● ✓	● ✓	—	—	—	Senior officer in General Intelligence; moved to a military post in Moscow in 2019

● Post held now ● Post held in the past ○ Partly: member, not commander, of the guard; or a political vehicle instead of an office ○ Bid failed
✓ year not published · † after December 2025

MODEL 1 · COMMAND FIRST

Presidential guard → Army command →

Power through the army

The son controls the guns directly. When the father goes, the army decides, whatever the constitution says.
Cases: Chad 2021, DR Congo 2001; now Uganda and eastern Libya; Rwanda and Zimbabwe at the first step.

MODEL 2 · OFFICE FIRST

Vice-presidency + Defence portfolio → Succession in law

The son is given the constitutional line of succession and the defence ministry, so the army must stand behind a handover that is legal on paper.
Cases: Equatorial Guinea since 2016; Cameroon since April 2026; Gabon’s defence-minister route, 2009.

Source: ISS Today (16 Sept 2026); allAfrica and Graphic Online (Apr 2026); Africanews (2016, 2023); The New Arab and Libya Security Monitor (Aug 2025); News24 (2022, 2023); NewsDay (2022); Zambia Observer (Feb 2026); Mada Masr (2019); Daily Monitor (2021); Wikipedia entries for the persons named. Entries marked † fall after December 2025.

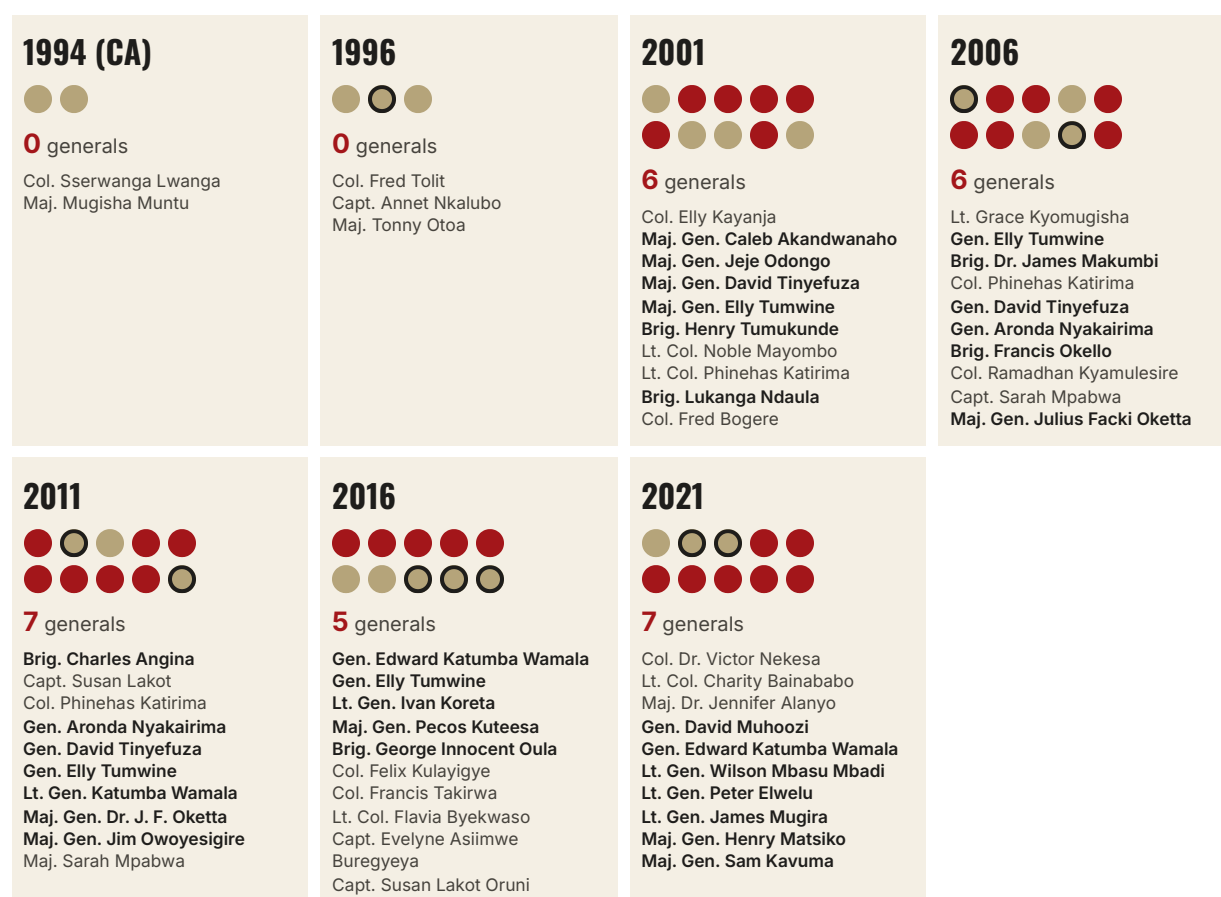
5.3 The army and politics in the post-1995 constitutional dispensation

Under the post-1995 constitutional order, the lines between military and civilian authorities have continued to blur. More than before, active-duty military officers taking up political positions in Government became the dominant trend. It is now established practice that all army officers who are relieved of the CDF position are appointed to Cabinet. Since the promulgation of the 1995 Constitution, Uganda has had eight defence forces chiefs (Figure 20). Of these, it is only Mugisha Muntu who officially retired from the military and went ahead to join elective politics.¹⁵³ As at December 2025, the rest of the surviving former CDFs were still active-duty military officers holding appointive ministerial, and therefore partisan, positions.

Besides, the military's involvement in politics since 1995 has been escalating rather than de-escalating. Over the last 3 decades, the military has increasingly taken up a dominant, and active role in the politics of the day. Using the affirmative action card, the constitution of Uganda provides for ten representatives of the army as a special interest group to be represented in Parliament (Figure 19).¹⁵⁴

FIGURE 19 Army representatives in Parliament by election cycle, 1994–2021

● General officer (Brig. and above) ● Colonel and below ○ Woman representative



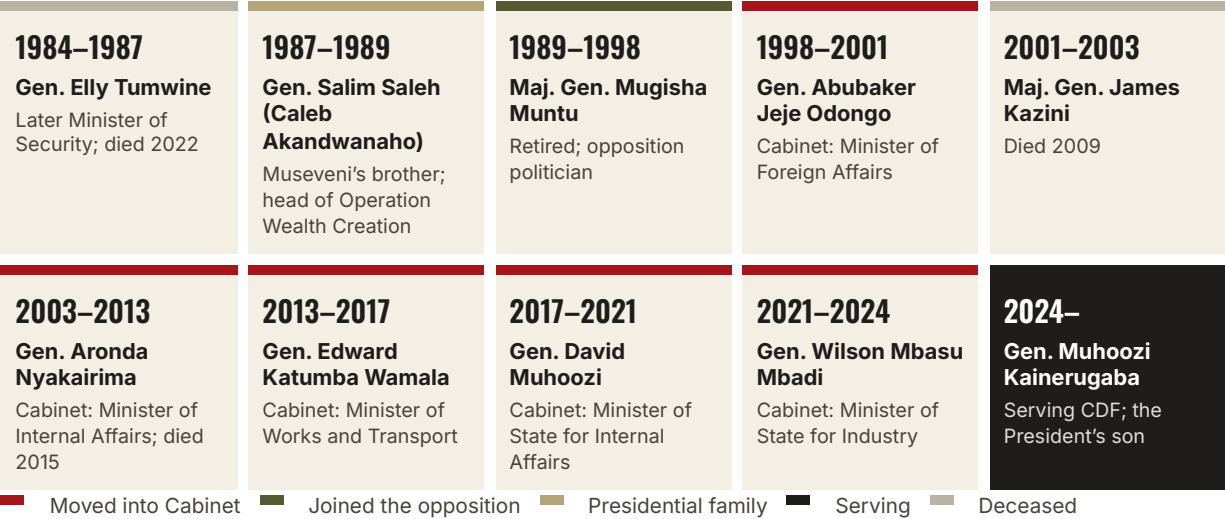
Source: Authors' compilation from Parliament of Uganda records. Lists for the Constituent Assembly (1994) and 1996 are incomplete.

¹⁵³ Joshua Kato, Uganda's longest serving army commander, Saturday Vision, accessed at <https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1320784/ugandas-serving-army-commander> on March 20, 2025

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 48

But the involvement of the military and other elements of the security forces go way beyond the official representation in parliament. Military officers on official or unofficial deployments actively support candidates seeking elective offices,¹⁵⁵ make declaratory statements in support of Museveni’s candidacy during presidential elections,¹⁵⁶ violently intervene in parliamentary sittings, or support parliamentary candidates and, in other cases are the main instruments of violence.¹⁵⁷

FIGURE 20 From the barracks to the Cabinet: Army commanders and Chiefs of Defence Forces since 1984



Source: Authors’ compilation. Positions as at December 2025.

What the army’s representatives have done in Parliament is harder to see than who they are. A reading of 30 sittings from the Parliament’s online Hansard archive, chosen to cover each Parliament from 1996 and the debates where the army had most at stake, shows that an army MP spoke as an army representative in only two, while the division lists that name members show them voting with the government. Measured against the four functions of a legislator, their contribution is concentrated in votes and in seconding motions, with little representation, oversight or scrutiny of the budget, and the seat has served as a bridge from command to Cabinet.¹⁵⁸

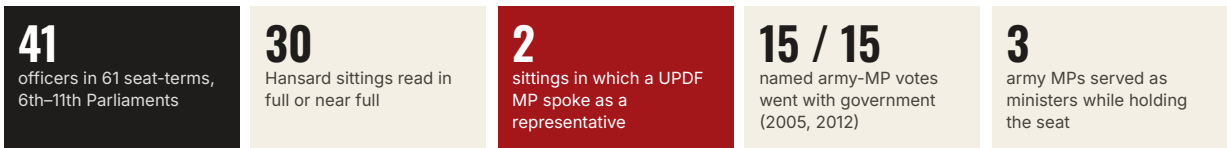
¹⁵⁵ Liam Taylor, How the Army is Swallowing the Ugandan State, Foreign Policy, accessed at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/08/15/uganda-museveni-military-army-state-power/> on March 20, 2025

¹⁵⁶ How the army became part and parcel of national politics, NewVision, accessed at <https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1307015/army-parcel-national-politics> on March 20, 2025

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 81

¹⁵⁸ Authors’ analysis of Parliament of Uganda Hansards, 1998–2025; Daily Monitor, “Are army MPs still relevant today?”, 2013.

FIGURE 21 UPDF representatives in Parliament, 1996–2025: Who sat, and what the Hansard records



WHO HELD THE SEATS

6th 1996–2001	Maj Gen Elly Tumwine	Mugisha Muntu	Henry Tumukunde	Katumba Wamala	Noble Mayombo	Phinehas Katirima
	Ivan Koreta	Anette Nkalubo	Tony Otoa	Fred Tolit		
7th 2001–2006	Lt Gen Aronda Nyakairima	Lt Gen David Tinyefuza	Lt Gen Jeje Odongo	Elly Tumwine	Noble Mayombo	Elly Kayanja
	Phinehas Katirima	Francis Okello	Fred Bogere	Henry Tumukunde	Brig Andrew Gutti	
8th 2006–2011	Aronda Nyakairima	David Tinyefuza	Elly Tumwine	Julius Oketta	Francis Okello	Phinehas Katirima
	Ramadhan Kyamulesire	Grace Kyomugisha Ikiriza	James Makumbi	Sarah Mpabwa		
9th 2011–2016	Gen Aronda Nyakairima	Lt Gen Katumba Wamala	Lt Gen Jim Owoyesigire	Gen David Sejusa	Gen Elly Tumwine	
	Maj Gen Julius Oketta	Brig Charles Angina	Col Phinehas Katirima	Lt Col Sarah Mpabwa	Capt Susan Lakot	
10th 2016–2021	Gen Katumba Wamala	Gen Elly Tumwine	Lt Gen Ivan Koreta	Maj Gen Pecos Kutesa	Col Felix Kulayigye	
	Col Francis Takirwa	Col Innocent Oula	Lt Col Flavia Byekwaso	Capt Susan Lakot	Capt Evelyn Asiimwe	
11th 2021–2026	Gen David Muhoozi	Gen Katumba Wamala	Lt Gen Wilson Mbadi	Lt Gen Peter Elwelu	Lt Gen James Mugira	
	Maj Gen Henry Matsiko	Maj Gen Sam Kavuma	Col Victor Nekesa	Lt Col Charity Bainababo	Maj Jennifer Alanyo	

Spoke as UPDF representative in the sample Minister during the term Broke ranks: abstained or criticised, then removed

Rank shown where the source gives it

WHAT 30 SITTINGS SHOW

6th	9 Dec 1998 Privatisation select ...	16 Dec 1998 Privatisation report;...	22 Aug 2000 Budget: sessional com...				
7th	28 Jun 2005 Constitution (Amendme...	12 Jul 2005 Constitution (Amendme...	30 Aug 2005 Committee of Supply 2...				
8th	23 Aug 2007 Budget; CHOGM expendi...	12 Dec 2007 Questions; committee ...	19 Aug 2008 ICT budget; US\$55m lo...	15 Sep 2009 President's address a...	17 Mar 2010 Emoluments Bill	18 Aug 2010 Committee of Supply 2...	
9th	7 Dec 2012 Petroleum Bill: claus...	6 Aug 2013 Public Order Manageme...	20 Dec 2013 Anti-Homosexuality Bi...	16 Apr 2014 Judiciary Administrat...	10 Sep 2014 Ministerial policy st...	10 Aug 2015 Special sitting: Keny...	
10th	27 Sep 2017 Leave for age-limit B...	19 Dec 2017 Age-limit Bill: 2nd r...	20 Dec 2017 Age-limit Bill: 2nd r...	11 Sep 2019 Supplementary Appropr...	8 Apr 2020 COVID-19 economy moti...		
11th	25 Aug 2021 Ministerial statements	15 Sep 2022 National importance; ...	11 Oct 2023 Ministerial statements	14 Aug 2024 Electricity connectiv...	16 Oct 2024 PAC report: Treasury ...	15 May 2025 Supplementary Appropr...	20 May 2025 UPDF (Amendment) Bill...

No UPDF MP spoke (23) Spoke as UPDF representative (2) Spoke as a minister only (1) Named as seconder only (2)

Silent, but recorded voting with government (2)

Reading the sample. In the 2005 term-limit vote and the 2012 petroleum roll call, every army MP named in the division list voted with the government. None spoke in either debate. The two spoken interventions both came from Gen. Elly Tumwine: in 1998 he demanded that an MP substantiate claims about defective tanks, and in 2017 he reported the UPDF caucus’s consultations on the age-limit bill.

Source: Parliament of Uganda Hansards, read sitting by sitting from the Parliament’s online archive; rosters from Daily Monitor (2013, 2016, 2021) and the division lists. “Spoke” means a recorded speech, question, point of order or information under the member’s name. Most transcripts were read for their first 100,000 characters (about 80–95 percent of a sitting).

FIGURE 22 What UPDF representatives did in Parliament, by function of a legislator, 1996–2025

REPRESENTATION OF THE ARMY, NOT OF VOTERS <i>Museveni told the 2021 intake to be “listening posts” and “a conveyor belt for national issues”.</i> Gen. Elly Tumwine, 20 Dec 2017: reports that the UPDF caucus “consulted across the country” on the age-limit bill and sets out its views as an institution. <i>Hansard</i> UPDF caucus and whip: the army MPs act as a bloc with their own whip (Capt. Susan Lakot in the 9th Parliament). <i>Daily Monitor</i>, 2013 No constituency casework found in the sample: no petitions, constituency questions or matters of national importance from army MPs.	OVERSIGHT RARE, SOMETIMES RESISTED <i>Committee seats exist on paper; floor scrutiny of the executive is almost absent.</i> Gen. Elly Tumwine, 9 Dec 1998: on a point of order, demands that an MP substantiate claims that Uganda bought defective tanks, treating them as privileged security information. <i>Hansard</i> Lt Col Sarah Mpabwa (9th): says she works through the Public Accounts Committee rather than on the floor. <i>Daily Monitor</i>, 2013 11th Parliament committees: Col. Victor Nekesa (Health), Maj. Jennifer Alanyo (Science, Technology and Innovation). <i>Parliament records</i>
LEGISLATION VOTES, NOT VOICE <i>Present for decisive votes on the constitution and on army law; seldom heard in debate.</i> 12 Jul 2005, term limits: Aronda, Tinyefuza, Odongo, Gutti, Katirima, Kayanja, Mayombo and Tumwine named voting AYE on clause 37. <i>Hansard division list</i> Fred Bogere abstained on the 2005 term-limit vote and was later sent on katebe; Henry Tumukunde was replaced after criticising the third-term project. <i>Daily Monitor</i>, 2013 20 May 2025, UPDF (Amendment) Bill: Gen. Elwelu named among the seconders of the second reading; no army MP speech found. <i>Hansard</i> Mugisha Muntu (6th): counted a private member’s bill, co-sponsored with Onapito Ekomoloit, as his main contribution. <i>Daily Monitor</i>, 2021	BUDGET APPROPRIATION FORMAL ONLY <i>No army-MP speech in any budget or supply sitting sampled; their role is to second.</i> Seven budget and supply sittings, 2000–2019: no UPDF MP spoke. <i>Hansard sample</i> 15 May 2025: Lt Gen. Mugira, Lt Gen. Elwelu, Col. Nekesa and Maj. Alanyo named as seconders of the Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2025. <i>Hansard</i> 7 Dec 2012, petroleum roll call: seven army MPs voted with government to reinstate clause 9. <i>Hansard division list</i>
OTHER ROLES SEAT AS A BRIDGE TO THE EXECUTIVE Ministers while holding an army seat: Gen. Elly Tumwine (Security, 10th), Gen. Katumba Wamala (Works and Transport, 11th), Gen. David Muhoozi (Minister of State, Internal Affairs, 11th). In the sample, Muhoozi’s three 2022 interventions were all answers given as a minister. Command and seat combined: serving CDFs and service chiefs have sat as army MPs (Aronda, Katumba, Mbadi). In 2013, four of the 9th Parliament’s generals had not spoken on the floor in two sessions.	
About the record. The Parliament’s online archive holds 1,902 sitting reports for 1996–2025. 1997 is missing, 1996 holds only pre-July sittings of the outgoing NRC, and for 1998–2004 and 2006–2008 no more than 20 sittings a year are posted. The 30 sittings were chosen to cover each Parliament, its budget sessions and the debates where the army had most at stake. Counting every army-MP intervention would need the full set, which the Parliament’s library holds in print.	
Implication. The UPDF seats deliver a reliable block of votes on constitutional and security legislation, and a route from command to Cabinet. They add little to the core work of a legislature. That was the case Parliament’s own Legal Committee weighed in 2019, when it proposed keeping army MPs as non-voting ex officio members.	

Source: Parliament of Uganda Hansards (sample of 30 sittings, 1998–2025); *Daily Monitor* (2013, 2016, January 30, 2021); Asuman Bisiika, *Daily Monitor* (February 13, 2021); Parliament of Uganda news on the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2019. Classification by the authors.

In 2013, Museveni embarked on a process to change the face of government by normalising the appointment of serving army officers in Cabinet. He nominated Gen. Aronda Nyakairima (RIP) for appointment as Minister of Internal Affairs. The appointment was approved by parliament after an acrimonious public debate and subsequent cajoling by the appointing authority.¹⁵⁹ It was challenged in the Constitutional Court by the lawyer Eron Kiiza, but no ruling had been

¹⁵⁹. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/parliament-approves-gen-aronda-as-internal-affairs-minister-1547906> accessed on May 22, 2025.

delivered when Aronda died in September 2015.¹⁶⁰ Since then, every surviving former CDF holds a cabinet position. The ‘silent’ explanation of this illegality is that President Museveni would not like to contend with independent former army commanders given his experience with such other senior army officers. A serving military officer is an obvious candidate for a court martial disciplinary process which is an important instrument for control and retribution.

5.4 Militarisation, religion and faith

Uganda’s history is replete with the common thread of religion, faith and spirituality—with unprecedented impact on our social structure, economics, and certainly politics. Precolonial Uganda was a mixed bag of belief systems and faith traditions that were rooted in the cultural norms and practices of the numerous nations (ethnic nationalities) that constitute present day Uganda. The phases of the Slave Trade (between 1400 and 1900)—itself a form of military conquest—and the attendant plunder of resources in the name of trade, came with Islam because its purveyors were of that tradition. Later, Christian missionaries were sent to Buganda by the Church Missionary Society in 1877, followed by the White Fathers in 1879.

The interplay between traditionalists, Muslims, Anglicans, and Catholics was simultaneously cordial, volatile, and even violent. Islamic and Christian evangelism were welcome in King Mutesa’s (and his successor Mwanga’s) courtyard, but became acrimonious following disagreements over the place of Christianity in the Kingdom of Buganda and its affiliates. Inter-religious conflicts were also fuelled by competition, rivalry, and mistrust in Buganda. One such incident is the execution of converts (today referred to as the Uganda Martyrs), between 1885 and 1887. Missionaries were expelled in the ensuing conflict that arose during the process of designating Uganda a British Protectorate in 1894. These religious rivalries entered into Uganda’s politics in the run up to Uganda’s independence and became the foundations for the oldest Ugandan political parties – Uganda Peoples Congress and the Democratic Party.

During the longest, uninterrupted, and incumbent reign by the Museveni Administration in Uganda’s post-1962 history, the three religions have been present influences and fault lines in the country’s politics. Following the emergence and exponential growth of *Balokole* (Born-Again) churches just about everywhere in Uganda, in just about every parish, the running joke is that there is a church for every Ugandan, more churches than schools and more churches than health centres. This includes new corporate-type and more fringe fellowships like Zoe (led by Elvis Mbonye), Phaneroo (led by Grace Lubega), Covenant Nations Church led by Patience Museveni.¹⁶¹ These churches enjoy friendly relations not just with the incumbent regime, but with the country’s securocrats, and their leaders are often flanked by battle-ready security personnel.

For its part, NRA started out as and, for the longest time, held out as a secular organisation with no attachment to religion, particularly of the foreign, Western kind. The closest that this fighting force came to holding any religious markers is in the use of Islamic *noms de guerre* like Salim Saleh (for Caleb Akandwanaho), Shaban (for Bantariza), Hajji Kassim (for Yoweri Museveni), or Ahmed Mbayo (for Amama Mbabazi). Even then, these aliases were for purposes of concealment, not out of religious conviction.

¹⁶⁰. Daily Monitor, “Petitioner seeks speedy hearing of Aronda case”, June 16, 2014, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/petitioner-seeks-speedy-hearing-of-aronda-case-1574970>.

¹⁶¹. <https://statehouse.go.ug/tag/covenant-nations-church/>

Today, religion and spirituality, and their relationship to violence—particularly when sanctioned by the State, are critical factors to understand in analysing the potential role of the military in Uganda's transition politics discourse. Generally, the association between traditional religion and the military can be described as a love-hate relationship that has been intermittently frosty, but warm and enthused with the 'New Age' religions, notably the Born-Again community.

In this respect, Lt. Gen. (Rtd) Peter Elwelu, a senior army officer who held the positions of Commander of the Second Division, Commander of the Land Forces and Deputy CDF, and who retired in August 2025,¹⁶² represents the extreme of how 'faith' is evolving as an instrument of choice. Besides his military record, which includes the dreaded Kasese massacre of 2016, Elwelu stands out as an embodiment of the infiltration of (and entrenchment in) the church by the military. In 2019, he built a temple (named "Elohim") constructed using wood and stone, designed for offering animal and blood sacrifices to God. The function was attended by the President who, by virtue of this position, is the Commander-in-Chief.¹⁶³ In November 2024, Elwelu razed one of the largest traditional sites, Airiget Ongima, in Usuk, Teso region, to supposedly break the lineage of poverty, division, and bloodshed associated with cultural practices in the region. He referred to the altar as an "altar of darkness" whose witchcraft practices are holding back the people of Teso.

It is worth noting that the leaders of the Pentecostal (Born Again) faith today enjoy the patronage of, and return similar favours to the regime through endorsements during elections, pro-NRM public statements (or prophecies), dedicated prayer sessions, and activities like National Prayer Breakfasts. These have become standard procedure. Prominent names in this respect include Robert Kayanja, Franklin Mondo Mugisha, and Joseph Sserwadda. Notably, senior clerics like Bishop Joshua Lwere (General Overseer of the National Fellowship of Born-Again Pentecostal Churches of Uganda) started out as a child soldier of the NRA rebel force. By way of contrast—with a few exceptions like Sheldon Mwesigwa who played a central role in the endorsement of the removal of the presidential age limit from the Constitution by "discovering" President Museveni's "real" age¹⁶⁴—mainstream (Catholic, Anglican, Adventist and Muslim) religions have either officially exercised restraint in endorsing the actions of the ruling party and its military establishment, or remained largely muted in their response to the unfolding succession debate.

The earlier highlighted practice of the so-called National Prayer Breakfasts,¹⁶⁵ which has become commonplace for State House, the Inspectorate of Government, the Judiciary, and other public authorities, as well as the practice of holding prayers before beginning official duties, or political campaign events under the guise of "thanksgiving"¹⁶⁶ presided over by the top clergy have taken on a life of their own, and have spread to, or been co-opted by security organs. Gen. Peter Elwelu stands out, again, among senior military officers who have led prayers on numerous such occasions.

In the same breath, this paper is alive to meetings that predate the more recent string of meetings with fringe religious groups, including President Yoweri Museveni's numerous

¹⁶². State House Uganda, "President Museveni retires seven UPDF generals", August 8, 2025, <https://statehouse.go.ug/president-museveni-retires-seven-updf-generals-as-he-cautions-them-against-investing-in-risky-ventures/>; Pulse Uganda, "Museveni appoints Gen Elwelu in new strategic role", July 31, 2024.

¹⁶³. YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEdrA224azE>

¹⁶⁴. Museveni celebrates 70 years of baptism, Daily Monitor, Monday, August 07, 2017, accessed at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/museveni-celebrates-70-years-of-baptism-1714060> on March 20, 2025

¹⁶⁵. President Museveni hails National Prayer Breakfasts for uniting Ugandans, accessed at <https://statehouse.go.ug/president-museveni-hails-national-prayer-breakfast-for-being-a-uniting-factor-among-ugandans/> on October 8, 2023

¹⁶⁶. Ministers Mbadi and Kabbyanga to hold a joint thanksgiving ceremony, Messiah Radio, October 8, 2024.

meetings with Owobusobozi Deo Bisaka, “Pastor” Robert Kayanja, “Bishop” Joseph Sserwadda, and “Bishop” Joshua Lwere. With a few exceptions, it has become an established tradition over the years that the President hands out in-kind and cash gifts (particularly to newly consecrated clergy and their umbrella organisations like the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda), and provides military escorts for some of these clergy leaders. The epitome of this co-optation or compromising of the religious clergy was on full display during the COVID-19 pandemic when President Museveni would host these leaders and sometimes preach to them giving the impression of the “supreme cleric” or the “Grand Ayatollah”. In turn, these religious leaders have led prayers in favour of, endorsed, and defended the political establishment. For a regime that has demonstrated that the bulk of its power is rooted in coercion, the patronage by religious leaders confers normalcy and provides tremendous sanitisation for the militarisation of society in ways that are unprecedented in Uganda’s 63 years of independence.

Faith has also been a target of the gun. Between 2012 and 2016, at least eight Muslim clerics and leaders were shot dead, most of them in Greater Kampala and most by gunmen who fled on motorcycles (**Figure 23**). Five of the shootings, including that of the state prosecutor Joan Kagezi, who was leading the prosecution of the 2010 Kampala bombings, came within seven months between December 2014 and June 2015. The same method was later used against the police spokesman, AIGP Andrew Felix Kaweesi, in 2017, the MP Ibrahim Abiriga and the police officer Muhammad Kirumira in 2018, and Gen. Edward Katumba Wamala, who survived an attack in 2021 that killed his daughter and his driver.¹⁶⁷

The police attributed many of the cleric killings to the ADF. But suspects were produced in court bearing marks of torture, the investigation reports were never published, and by 2020 Muslim leaders noted that no one had been convicted for the murders of the sheikhs.¹⁶⁸ In November 2021, after the Kampala bombings, the police themselves shot dead Sheikh Muhammad Kirevu at his home in Nsangi; they said he had tried to escape, while his family said he had been handcuffed and dragged from the house.¹⁶⁹ In a country where guns are everywhere, a decade of unsolved assassinations in the capital has left Muslim communities fearful, and suspicious of the very state that is supposed to protect them.

5.5 The military and cultural institutions

In 1992, the Army Council of the NRA passed a resolution to restore the Kabakaship (leadership of Buganda Kingdom) which had been abolished following the promulgation by President Milton Obote of the 1967 Constitution. An Act of Parliament (Institution of Traditional and Cultural Leaders Bill) was enacted in 2010 to officiate the decision.¹⁷⁰ While it was met with jubilation, this decision highlighted the power that lay in the military establishment. It was apparent (and still is) that Buganda (and other kingdoms) owed their resurrection to the NRA. Needless to say, the decision valourised Museveni as the guarantor of Buganda’s restitution as a cultural institution.

¹⁶⁷. Nile Post, “A list of the major killings committed by motorcycle riding assailants”, 2021; Daily Monitor, “Muslim clerics who have been killed”.

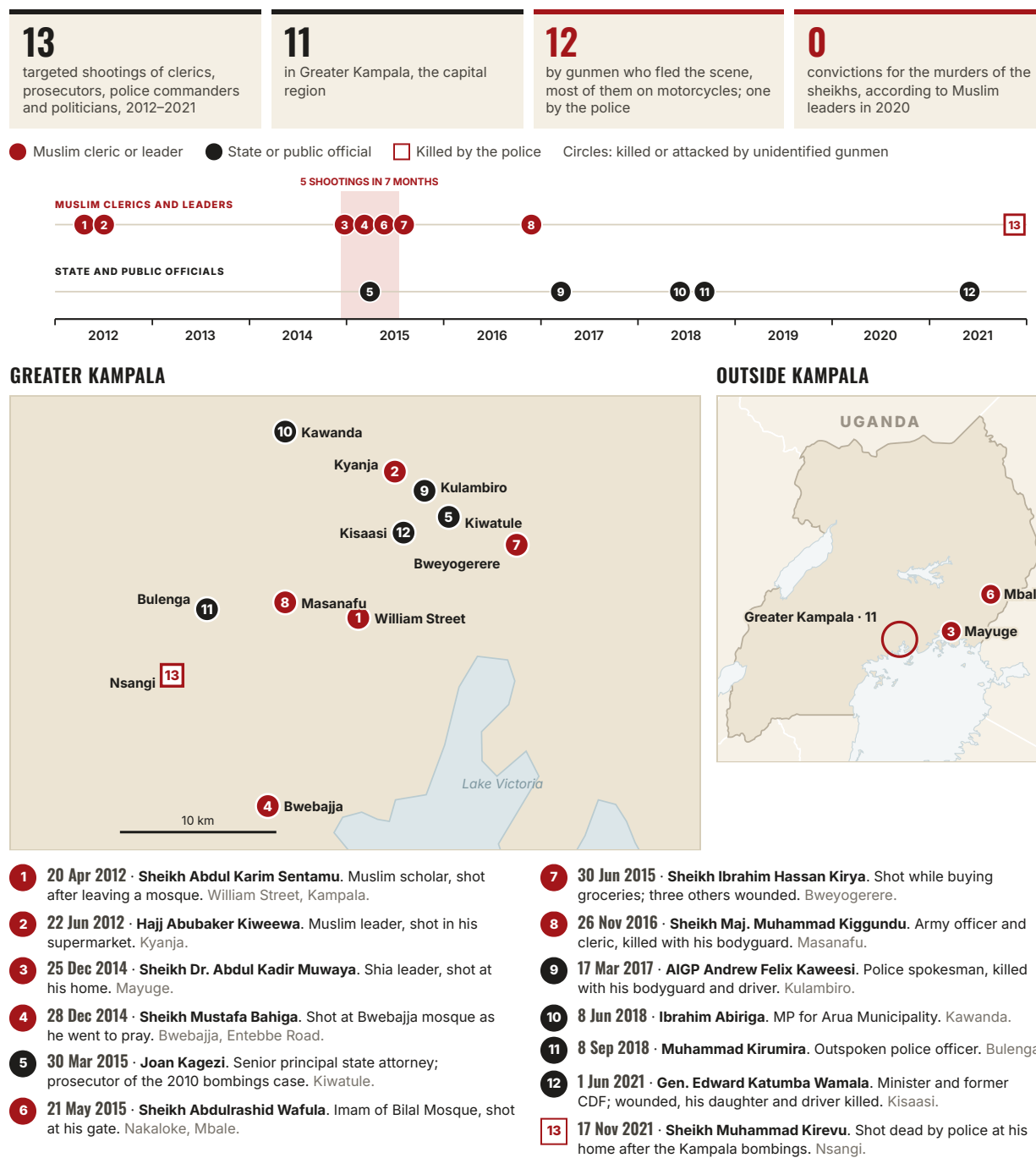
¹⁶⁸. Religion Unplugged, “Death of a sheikh in Uganda resurrects demands on cold case murders”, December 22, 2020.

¹⁶⁹. Religion Unplugged, “Extrajudicial killing of Muslim cleric after Kampala bombings sparks fury in Uganda”, December 10, 2021.

¹⁷⁰. Institution of Traditional or Cultural Leaders Act, 2011. Act 6 of 2011

FIGURE 23 Gunned down: Targeted shootings of Muslim clerics and public officials in Uganda, 2012–2021

Thirteen targeted shootings in a decade, eleven of them in Greater Kampala: the same method, few answers, and in 2021 a cleric killed by the police.



Reading the record. The same method recurs across a decade: a targeted shooting by gunmen who escape, most of them on motorcycles, most of them in the capital region. The police attributed many of the cleric killings to the ADF, but suspects were produced in court bearing marks of torture, investigation reports have not been published, and the killings remain largely unsolved. In 2021 a cleric accused of terrorism was shot dead by the police themselves.

Source: Nile Post, "A list of the major killings committed by motorcycle riding assailants" (2021); Religion Unplugged (December 22, 2020; December 10, 2021); Daily Monitor, "Muslim clerics who have been killed". Sites are plotted at neighbourhood level and are approximate. Boundaries and lakes: Natural Earth.

Ever since the decision, cultural institutions have been beholden to – or are often reminded about – how much they owe their existence to the largesse of the NRA. During peacetime, President Museveni has attended coronations, commemorations, and other related events, no

matter their cultural significance.¹⁷¹

In October 2012, Museveni allowed Maj. Martin Kamywa to retire from the army and be crowned cultural leader of the Bamba community of Bundibugyo district. This followed his (Museveni's) meeting with the Obudhingiya bwa Bamba cultural institution and Bundibugyo Elders' Development Association. This coronation followed Ivan Rwigy Rutakirwa's installation as leader of the Basongora in Kasese district, which angered the Bakonzo, leading to several clashes.

Law enforcement institutions and the armed forces also provide armed escort services to traditional leaders. In situations where there has been disagreement between the ruling establishment and cultural institutions, the President has been known to dress up in military fatigues and make public pronouncements about kingdoms – with thinly veiled threats of abolition. There has also been an observable trend that features the installation of rival cultural leaders, a number of whom are soldiers in the UPDF.¹⁷² Worse, when tensions came to a head in Kayunga in September 2009, in the Rwenzururu kingdom in November 2016,¹⁷³ and across Buganda in November 2020, military force was used to demobilise or subjugate the cultural entities that project themselves as potential sources of or alternative centres of citizens organising.

5.6 Military takeover of public administration institutions

In a situation of normalcy, serving or retired military officers serving in public service institutions should not be a matter of controversy. However, Uganda under President Museveni is an exception. This is because the militarisation of every segment of Ugandan society is more of an instrument of control and power retention rather than an 'innocent' act of administrative ingenuity. Consequently, the growing visibility of the army in the range of civil and public service institutions cannot be by accident but rather, by design. While the issue of militarisation of the public service requires a more in-depth and longitudinal study, it is possible to piece out general directions that show the extent of the militarisation of the public service.

Over the years, there have been deliberate efforts to build a narrative around the UPDF as a nationalistic, patriotic and incorruptible army. This narrative has expanded to project the UPDF as the only efficient state institution in the country. The default position is that the traditional public service institutions personnel are not patriotic and largely corrupt and unable to support President Museveni's 'economic transformation' agenda. Inevitably, through administrative directives and other default arrangements, the UPDF and military personnel are increasingly taking up the delivery of services that were traditionally a preserve of civilian public service institutions. **Figure 24** shows selected high ranking retired and active duty military officers holding senior policy and decision making positions in public service institutions.

¹⁷¹. Musinguzi Blanshe, "Uganda: Is Museveni ready to take on Buganda Kingdom in a tough fight over land?", The Africa Report, August 26, 2021, <https://www.theafricareport.com/121767/uganda-is-museveni-ready-to-take-on-buganda-kingdom-in-a-tough-fight-over-land/> (accessed March 20, 2025).

¹⁷². Related stories: <https://chimpreports.com/acholi-king-labels-rivals-as-masqueraders-without-authority/>; <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/struggle-for-bugwere-throne-after-rival-leader-is-installed-1870968>

¹⁷³. Human Rights Watch, "Uganda: Investigate killings in Rwenzori region", November 28, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/28/uganda-investigate-killings-rwenzori-region>; Global Voices, "Uganda: Nine dead in Kampala riots", September 11, 2009.

FIGURE 24 Soldiers in the civil service: Selected retired and serving senior army officers in public institutions



5.7 Operation Wealth Creation: A military operation short of war

Military doctrine distinguishes war from “military operations other than war”: deployments in which the army uses its command, discipline and logistics for tasks such as disaster relief or development. OWC is Uganda’s largest such deployment. It is run like a military operation, with a chief coordinator, deputies, a chief staff officer and regional and district coordinators drawn from serving and retired officers, but its terrain is the farm, the parish and the cooperative. It is, in this sense, a military operation short of war: one that carries the army’s chain of command deep into civilian administration without the legal framework, budget discipline or oversight that a civilian programme would require.

The President launched OWC in July 2013, after a pilot with civilian veterans in the Luweero–Rwenzori triangle, with his brother Gen. Caleb Akandwanaho (Salim Saleh) as Chief Coordinator.¹⁷⁵ Saleh had retired from the UPDF in December 2009 and become Senior Presidential Adviser for the reconstruction of Luweero, northern Uganda and the Rwenzori region, saying that he could not do the new work “under military rules”.¹⁷⁶ In June 2014, the coordinators of the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) were dismissed, and about 300 senior army officers were inducted at Makerere University to take over the distribution of farm inputs.¹⁷⁷ Brig. Elly Kayanja (later Maj. Gen., retired in 2022) was named head of OWC in the UPDF in September 2014, and by 2015 officers had been deployed to all 112 districts, as well as constituencies, municipalities and the Kampala Capital City Authority.¹⁷⁸

From the start, OWC operated outside the law. A parliamentary committee reported in May 2017 that it had taken over the roles of NAADS without a proper legal framework and was “guided only by Standing Orders”. Of the Shs1 trillion promised for the programme in 2016/17, only Shs350 billion was released; seed was delivered late, was of poor quality or rotted at sub-county headquarters, and inputs were mismatched to local conditions.¹⁷⁹ At least 68.3 million coffee seedlings were distributed between 2013 and late 2016, and the President himself conceded that about 40 per cent had dried up. When Cabinet rationalised government agencies in February 2021, NAADS lost its semi-autonomous status; Parliament noted that it had abandoned its statutory advisory function while delivering inputs through OWC.¹⁸⁰

The command of OWC illustrates the fusion of the army and the state. The Chief Coordinator, a retired general and the President’s brother, has been the one constant since 2013. Beneath him, six officers drawn from the serving UPDF have served as head or deputy in twelve years: Maj. Gen. Elly Kayanja; Maj. Gen. Julius Facki Oketta, who died in office in 2016; Maj. Gen. James Nakibus Lakara; Lt. Gen. Charles Angina (2017–2021); Maj. Gen. Sam Kavuma (2021–2024), who left to command troops in Somalia; and Brig. Gen. Godfrey Muwanguzi.¹⁸¹ Posts are filled by army orders, and handovers are presided over by generals. By 2024 OWC was organised in 18 regions, and the regional coordinators appointed in 2025 were retired officers: Maj. Gen. (Rtd)

¹⁷⁵. Office of the President, Operation Wealth Creation, <https://presidentialinitiatives.go.ug/operation-wealth-creation/>; UPDF, Operation Wealth Creation, <https://www.updf.go.ug/welfare/operation-wealth-creation/>

¹⁷⁶. New Vision, “Gen. Saleh quits army”, December 26, 2009.

¹⁷⁷. Daily Monitor, “Why MPs want government to stop free seeds distribution”, May 21, 2017.

¹⁷⁸. Office of the President, Operation Wealth Creation.

¹⁷⁹. Daily Monitor, May 21, 2017, reporting the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture.

¹⁸⁰. Parliament of Uganda, Report on the February 2021 Cabinet Decision to Rationalise Government Agencies, Commissions, Authorities and Public Expenditure, 2021.

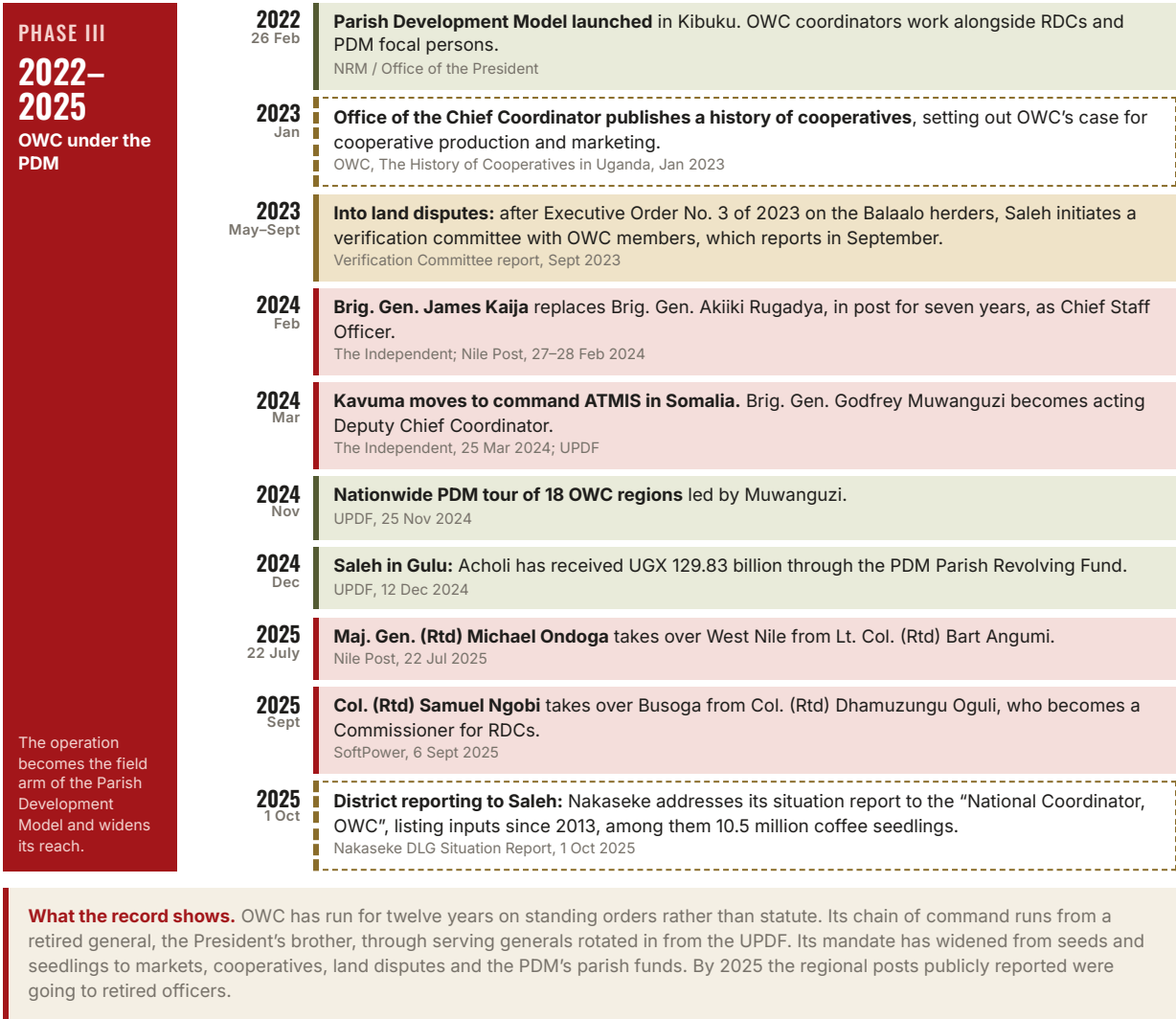
¹⁸¹. Daily Monitor, November 17, 2016 and July 12, 2021; The Independent, February 28 and March 25, 2024; UPDF, November 25, 2024.

Michael Ondoga in West Nile and Col. (Rtd) Samuel Ngobi in Busoga.¹⁸² **Figure 26** sets out the leadership succession and the regional coordinators who could be identified from public sources.

¹⁸². Nile Post, July 22, 2025; SoftPower, September 6, 2025.

FIGURE 25 Operation Wealth Creation: Key milestones, July 2013 – December 2025





Source: Authors' compilation from OWC and Office of the President pages; UPDF releases; Daily Monitor; The Independent; Nile Post; SoftPower; The EastAfrican; New Vision (2009); Parliament of Uganda report on the February 2021 rationalisation; and documents in the authors' collection (OWC cooperatives history, January 2023; Musevenomics select committee report, December 2021; Balaalo verification report, September 2023; Nakaseke situation report, October 2025). The phases are the authors' grouping.

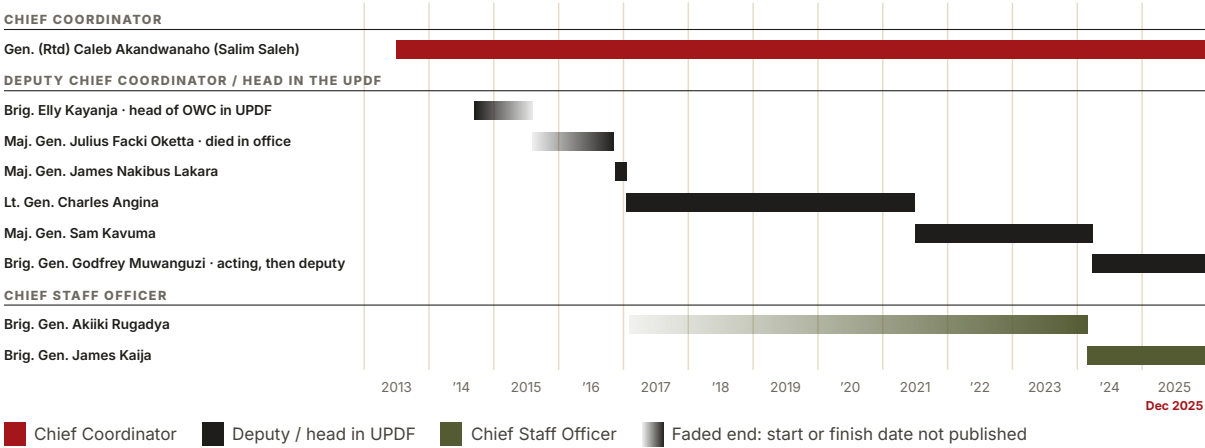
Over twelve years, the operation's mandate has widened far beyond seeds and seedlings (Figure 25). In January 2018 Saleh proposed a second phase built on regional logistics hubs, e-vouchers and market linkages, and reported that OWC already had liaison officers in 25 government agencies.¹⁸³ In December 2021 he presented his concept of "Musevenomics" to the chairpersons of parliamentary committees, who appointed a select committee to align the budget with it.¹⁸⁴ With the launch of the Parish Development Model (PDM) in February 2022, OWC coordinators became the field arm of the government's flagship programme, working alongside Resident District Commissioners and PDM focal persons; in November 2024 the acting Deputy Chief Coordinator toured all 18 OWC regions to drive the PDM.¹⁸⁵ In January 2023, the Office of the Chief Coordinator published its own history of the cooperative movement, and in 2023 Saleh initiated a committee, with OWC members, to verify the presence of Balaalo herders under Executive Order No. 3 of 2023, carrying the operation into land disputes in northern and eastern

¹⁸³. Daily Monitor, "Gen. Saleh suggests changes in Operation Wealth Creation", January 27, 2018.
¹⁸⁴. Report of the Select Committee on Musevenomics presented to General Salim Saleh, Garuga, Entebbe, December 22, 2021.
¹⁸⁵. UPDF, "Operation Wealth Creation strengthens grassroots collaboration for PDM success", November 25, 2024.

Uganda.¹⁸⁶ By October 2025, district local governments were addressing their situation reports to Gen. Saleh as “National Coordinator, Operation Wealth Creation”.¹⁸⁷

FIGURE 26 Who runs Operation Wealth Creation: National leadership and regional coordinators, 2013–2025

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION



REGIONAL AND DISTRICT COORDINATORS NAMED IN PUBLIC SOURCES

REGION	OFFICER AND RANK	LEVEL	SOURCE
West Nile	MAJ GEN (RTD) Michael Ondoga Took over 22 July 2025 from Lt Col (Rtd) Bart Angumi	REGION	Nile Post, 22 Jul 2025
Busoga	COL (RTD) Samuel Ngobi Appointed by the Chief Coordinator, Sept 2025; succeeded Col (Rtd) Dhamuzungu Oguli	REGION	SoftPower, 6 Sept 2025
Teso	COL Abel Ekelot "Regional Coordinator of NAADS/OWC Teso Region", February 2021. Not confirmed for 2025	REGION	@OWC_ug on X, 23 Feb 2021
Acholi	LT COL Samuel Okullo OWC coordinator for Lamwo District; undated	DISTRICT	Lamwo District LG website
Kigezi	LT COL Charles Tebarura OWC coordinator for Kabale District, February 2017	DISTRICT	Uganda Radio Network, 27 Feb 2017

Not publicly identified. OWC works through 18 regions (UPDF, November 2024). For the remaining regions, including Ankole, Lango, Bunyoro, Bugisu and Mubende, and the regional posts for Acholi and Kigezi, where OWC coordinators are reported but not named, no name and rank could be found in public sources up to December 2025. The OWC Establishment or posting orders would settle the list.

Reading the pattern. Six officers have served as deputy or head within the UPDF in twelve years. All were serving generals posted in and out on army orders: one died in office, and one left to command troops in Somalia. Across the same period the Chief Coordinator, a retired general, has been the one constant.

Source: Daily Monitor (November 17, 2016; July 12, 2021); The EastAfrican; The Independent and Nile Post (February 2024); UPDF (November 25, 2024); Nile Post (July 22, 2025); SoftPower (September 6, 2025); @OWC_ug; Lamwo District; Uganda Radio Network. Bar ends are approximate to the month; where a start or end is not published, the bar fades.

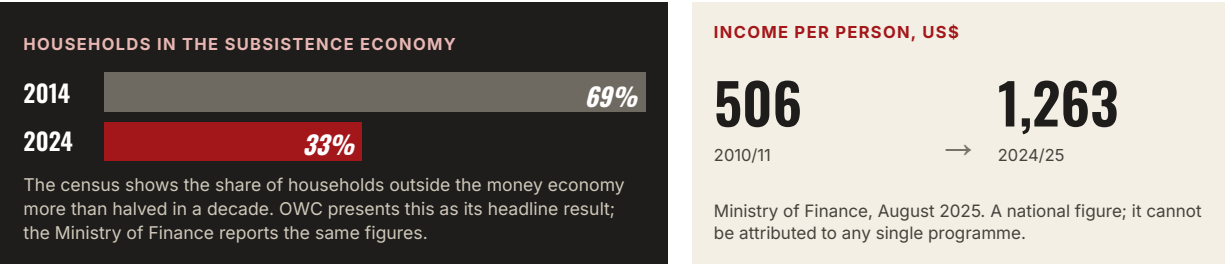
¹⁸⁶. Office of the Chief Coordinator, Operation Wealth Creation, The History of Cooperatives in Uganda, January 2023; Verification Committee, Report on the Verification Exercise to Guide Implementation of Executive Order No. 3 of 2023, September 2023.
¹⁸⁷. Nakaseke District Local Government, Situation Report to the National Coordinator, Operation Wealth Creation, October 1, 2025.

5.7.1 What the numbers show

OWC presents its record as a story of rising household incomes. In a briefing prepared by the Office of the Chief Coordinator, the operation’s headline result is the census: the share of households in the subsistence economy fell from 69 per cent in 2014 to 33 per cent in 2024.¹⁸⁸ The Ministry of Finance reports the same fall, together with a rise in income per person from US\$506 in 2010/11 to US\$1,263 in 2024/25.¹⁸⁹ The same briefing lists the PDM’s 10,589 parish SACCOs, each receiving Shs100 million a year, with Shs3.2 trillion transferred to about 3.27 million people by November 2025; the 34 factories of the Kapeeka Industrial Park in the Luweero Triangle, with more than 6,000 direct jobs; and coffee exports of 7.8 million bags, worth US\$2.21 billion, in 2024/25 (Figure 27).

FIGURE 27 Operation Wealth Creation by the numbers: What the operation claims, and what remains

The share of households outside the money economy has halved. How much of that is OWC’s doing is not known, and one household in three remains outside it.



WHAT OWC LISTS AS ITS REACH AND RESULTS

PARISH DEVELOPMENT MODEL 10,589 parish SACCOs, each receiving Shs100m a year	PDM TRANSFERS, TO NOV 2025 Shs3.2tn to about 3.27 million people	FIELD PRESENCE 18 regions officers in every district, alongside local government and the PDM
KAPEEKA INDUSTRIAL PARK, BY 2025 34 factories 1,000+ products; 6,000+ direct and about 30,000 indirect jobs	COFFEE EXPORTS, 2024/25 7.8m bags worth US\$2.21 billion	COFFEE SEEDLINGS, 2013–2016 68.3m+ distributed; the President said about 40 per cent dried up

WHAT REMAINS, BY OWC’S OWN ACCOUNT

3.5 million households, one in three, still outside the money economy in 2024	7% vs 27% of households farming commercially in Karamoja, against Buganda and Bunyoro	<1% Uganda’s share of a global coffee economy worth about US\$460 billion
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On attribution. These are OWC’s own figures and official statistics. OWC’s presenters are advised to be “modest about attribution”: the fall in subsistence is shared with the PDM, Emyooga, the Uganda Development Bank, infrastructure and macroeconomic stability. No independent evaluation isolates OWC’s contribution.

Source: Operation Wealth Creation, Office of the President, presentation to the Chiefs of Defence of 14 African countries (October 2026; figures to 2025 only); Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (August 20, 2025); Uganda Bureau of Statistics, National Population and Housing Census 2024; Daily Monitor (May 21, 2017) for coffee seedlings.

188. Operation Wealth Creation, Office of the President, “Uganda @ 64: From War to Wealth Creation – Organise, not Agonise”, presentation by Agnes Atim Apea, Chief Technical Adviser, Finance and Investment, to the Chiefs of Defence of 14 African countries, October 2026. The presentation post-dates this publication’s December 2025 cut-off; only figures that refer to 2025 or earlier are used here.

189. Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, “A leap towards prosperity: Uganda’s subsistence households reduced by more than 50%”, August 20, 2025; Uganda Bureau of Statistics, National Population and Housing Census 2024, Final Report.

Three caveats apply. First, attribution: OWC's own presenters are advised to be "modest about attribution", because the fall in subsistence is shared with the PDM, Emyooga, the Uganda Development Bank, infrastructure and macroeconomic stability.¹⁹⁰ No independent evaluation isolates OWC's contribution. Second, what remains: by OWC's own account, 3.5 million households, one in three, were still outside the money economy in 2024, and only 7 per cent of households in Karamoja farmed commercially, against 27 per cent in Buganda and Bunyoro. The briefing concedes that early input distribution outpaced markets and storage, and that repayment of revolving funds is weak in some districts. Third, the record on the ground: a Daily Monitor investigation in November 2016 found seedlings delivered after the planting season and rejected in Gulu, Kole and Koboko, heifers dying soon after distribution, and inputs allocated to "ghost" beneficiaries in Apac.¹⁹¹

5.7.2 The political economy of Operation Wealth Creation

OWC rests on a doctrine that turns poverty into a security threat. The 2004 Defence White Paper named poverty, unemployment and food insecurity as threats to national security, and OWC describes poverty as its "centre of gravity".¹⁹² Its own slogan is explicit: "Security is the platform. Wealth is the purpose." Once poverty is a security problem, the army has a doctrinal claim on the economy, and the household that earns an income is asked to see it as a dividend of the peace that the NRA secured. Prosperity becomes a reason to keep the guns in place rather than a matter of rights and public policy.

The money and the authority run through different channels. OWC has no budget vote and no accounting officer: funds for inputs are voted to NAADS, and PDM money flows to parish SACCOs through local governments. Yet OWC procures and distributes inputs, supervises the PDM and, in its own words, keeps programmes "honest and moving". When Shs932 million for tea seedlings could not be accounted for in 2016/17, OWC's spokesperson answered that the operation "does not control money".¹⁹³ The result is power over public spending without the accountability that goes with it: the Auditor General and the Public Accounts Committee examine accounting officers, not coordinators appointed by army orders.

The resources that pass through OWC's supervision are large and politically valuable. At Shs100 million for each of 10,589 parishes, the PDM alone puts more than Shs1 trillion a year into the parishes, and Shs3.2 trillion had been disbursed by November 2025, on the eve of the 2026 campaign. Inputs and loans are visible, divisible and personal: they reach a named household, through an officer who answers to the President's brother. That is the classic form of patronage, and it reaches every parish. Around it has grown a constituency with a stake in the operation's survival: the officers posted to it, the suppliers and nursery operators who sell to it, and the cooperatives and SACCOs built under its supervision.

The operation also plans to grow. OWC describes its next frontier as moving from the harvest to processing, standards, brands and markets, noting that Uganda's coffee exports were worth less than one per cent of a global coffee economy of about US\$460 billion. That carries the army further into agro-industry, alongside the National Enterprise Corporation (Section 5.8). OWC's

¹⁹⁰. Operation Wealth Creation, presentation of October 2026, speaker's notes: "Be modest about attribution: OWC is one of several government programmes, together with PDM, Emyooga, UDB, infrastructure and macro stability."

¹⁹¹. Daily Monitor, "Faint hope as Operation Wealth Creation limps on", November 12, 2016.

¹⁹². Ministry of Defence, Defence White Paper, 2004, as cited by Operation Wealth Creation, presentation of October 2026.

¹⁹³. Daily Monitor, "Army denies misuse of seedlings funds", March 19, 2018, reporting the Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group and the response of OWC's spokesperson, Maj. Tabaro Kiconco.

own list of risks includes “politicising the uniform”, “crowding out business”, “leakage and corruption”, “dependency on handouts” and “mission creep”. Its plan has a final phase of “handover and exit” to civilian institutions. Twelve years on, the operation has instead absorbed the PDM and widened its reach.

OWC is credited by its supporters with reviving coffee and other value chains, and its defenders see in it the efficiency that the civil service is said to lack. The concern is not that soldiers distribute seeds. It is that a parallel structure, commanded by the President’s brother and staffed through army orders, now sits alongside local governments, line ministries and the PDM, answers to the Commander-in-Chief rather than to Parliament, and reaches every parish ahead of every election. That combination of patronage, presence and command makes OWC one of the clearest examples of the military coup by other means described in this chapter.

5.8 Emergence of a military-industrial complex?

The term “military-industrial complex” is used across the literature to describe the close relationship between a nation’s military, the defence industry that supplies it, and the public sector agencies that provide oversight over this relationship. The potential dangers of this relationship were first articulated by the 34th President of the United States Dwight D. Eisenhower in his 1961 farewell speech where he stated:

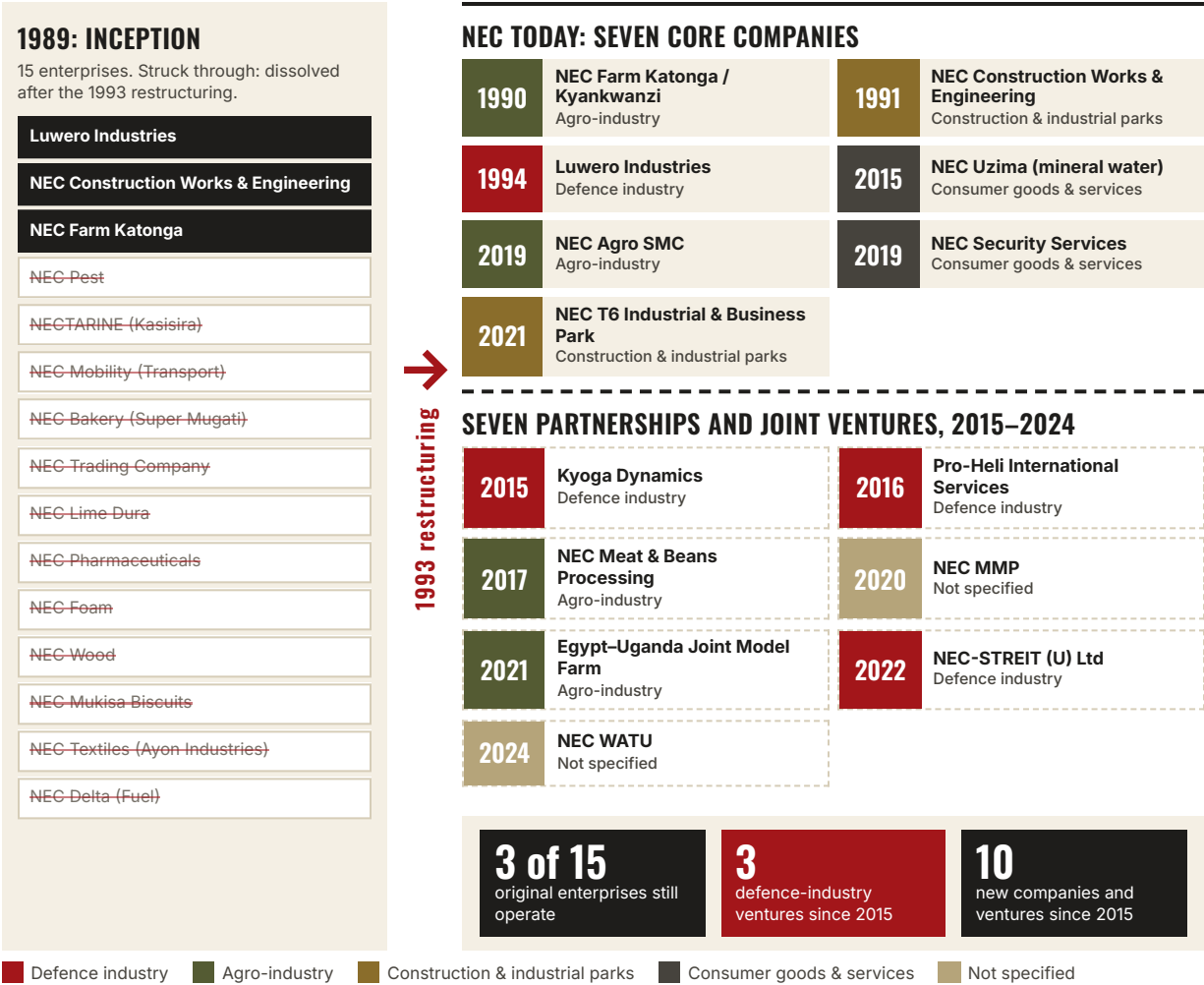
*“In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.”*¹⁹⁴

The National Enterprise Corporation (NEC) is perhaps one of the most positive developments in the country championed by the UPDF and its predecessor – the NRA. NEC championed the adoption of military technology spearheading the production of weaponry and military automobiles. It also became the military’s special purpose vehicle for engaging in productive economic activity. **Figure 28** shows the evolution and transformation of NEC from inception around 1989 to the present.

¹⁹⁴ U.S. National Archives, “President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Farewell Address (1961)”, January 17, 1961, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-dwight-d-eisenhowers-farewell-address>.

FIGURE 28 Evolution of the National Enterprise Corporation (NEC), 1989–2024: Then and now

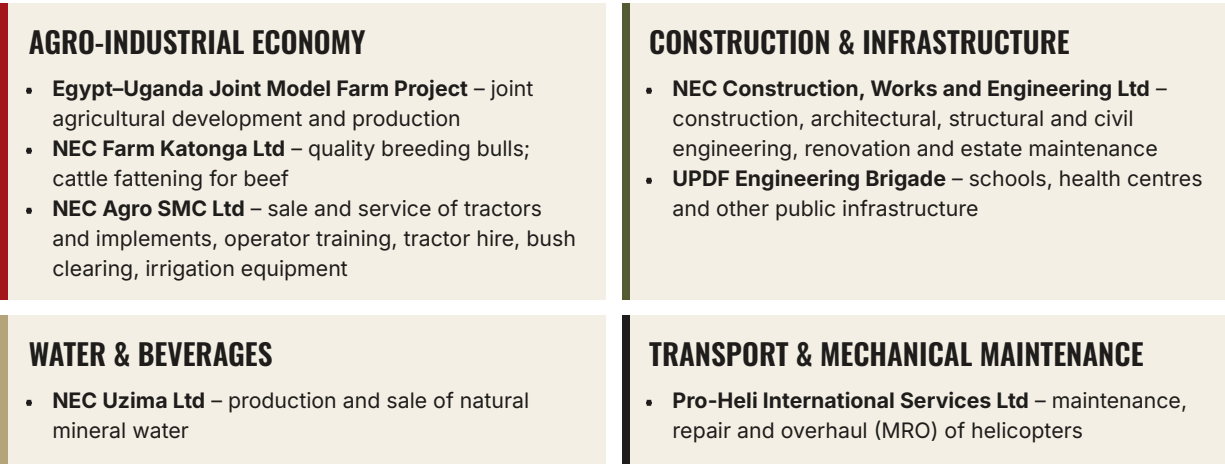
From fifteen enterprises in 1989 to a core of seven companies and seven partnerships, with a new push into defence industry.



Source: Authors' compilation from NEC company information. Sector grouping by the authors.

The footprint of the mainstream UPDF and its NEC establishment in Uganda's economy is expanding both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, the military through NEC subsidiaries and partnerships is expanding its operations in a broad range of sectors covering manufacturing of consumable products such as drinking water, tooth brushes and toothpaste to construction, transport and operation of agricultural farms and facilities (Figure 29). Vertically, the UPDF Engineering Brigade is engaged in business across sectors and levels of government, including construction of schools, health centres and other physical infrastructure.

FIGURE 29 The role of NEC and the UPDF in Uganda’s development activities



Source: Authors’ compilation from NEC company information.

As already noted, the operations of NEC as a hub for military and industrial innovations and efficiency of operations is an excellent case study of a productive military as envisaged under the 1995 Constitution. Public financing of its operations aside, NEC also provides an example of how efficiently private and public sector industrial establishments can be operated. However, the extent of market distortions that NEC can cause are yet to be ascertained. Like the directives to handover major education, health and road construction projects to UPDF Engineering Brigade, there is growing anecdotal evidence that NEC-produced mineral water, Uzima, is the one served at most official Government of Uganda events. The stifling of competition by favouring NEC and the mainstream UPDF entities in procurement can create long-term market distortions that undermine emerging entrepreneurs and businesses. Most importantly, the growing influence and control of the economic levers of the country has the effect of pushing the UPDF further from civilian oversight - a scenario that has profound implications on the country’s political transition discourse.

5.9 Capture of the Uganda Police Force

Historically, Uganda’s Police Force was structured as civilian focused, responsible for the maintenance of law and order, ensuring public safety, and investigating crimes. However, an analysis of leadership appointments in the force reveals a persistent pattern where military generals and high-ranking officers are placed in key police roles. Since 2001, the Inspector General of Police (IGP) position has been predominantly occupied by military personnel, starting with Gen. Edward Katumba Wamala (2001–2005) and followed by Gen. Kale Kayihura (2005–2018), whose tenure was marked by aggressive counter-opposition operations. Other military figures, such as Maj. Gen. Steven Sabiiti Muzeyi and Maj. Gen. Paul Lokech, have served as Deputy Inspectors General of Police. Although the current police leadership under IGP Abbas Byakagaba is not military, it operates within an institutional culture shaped by previous militarised administrations. The long-term impact of this militarisation is evident in law enforcement conduct, where police responses to protests, political gatherings, and crime often resemble military tactics rather than conventional policing strategies.

Beyond top leadership, the structure of Uganda’s Police Force shows an entrenched military presence in strategic departments. The Crime Intelligence Directorate, responsible for

surveillance and intelligence gathering, is headed by Maj. Gen. Christopher Serunjogi Damulira, while the Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID), overseeing major investigations, is led by Maj. Gen. Tom Magambo. The human resources and administration department, vital for managing police personnel and ensuring professional conduct, has also been dominated by military officers, including Col. Jesse Kamunanwire, who has since retired. Additional officers, such as Brig. Godfrey Goloba, who has since returned to the army, and Maj. Lenny Mugalu, have held leadership roles in training, forensics, and operations,¹⁹⁵ further reinforcing a culture where military discipline, hierarchy, and methods supersede civilian policing norms.

The impact of military control over the police is reflected in Uganda's specialised paramilitary units, such as Operation Wembley, which evolved into the Rapid Response Unit (RRU) and the Violent Crime Crack Unit (VCCU).¹⁹⁶ These units, often led by military figures like Elly Kayanja, then a Brigadier, have significantly influenced Uganda's policing landscape, contributing to a decline in civilian trust in law enforcement.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵. Daily Monitor, "Army officers assume police offices", September 2, 2019, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/army-officers-assume-police-offices-1845792>; Pulse Uganda, "Chris Damulira promoted to Major General", June 23, 2025.

¹⁹⁶. <https://ugandaradionetwork.net/story/we-need-an-elite-squad-police-top-management?districtId=553> visited on 20/12/2024

¹⁹⁷. Makanga Ronald Kakumba and Mathias Krönke (2023). Brutality and corruption undermine trust in Uganda's police: Can damage be undone? Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 88, August 2023.

TABLE 6 Notable positions in the Uganda Police Force occupied by serving military personnel, 2000–2025

Position	Name	Years	UPDF rank
Deputy Inspector General	Maj. Gen. Steven Sabiiti Muzeyi	2018–2024	Major General
	Maj. Gen. Paul Lokech	2018–2024	Major General
	Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Tumusiime Katsigazi	2018–2024	Major General
Chief of Staff	Maj. Gen. Abel Kandiho	2018–2024	Major General
	Brig. Jack Bakasumba	2018	Brigadier
Director, Crime Intelligence	Maj. Gen. Christopher Serunjogi Damulira	2019–	Major General (promoted 2025)
Director, Criminal Investigations	Maj. Gen. Tom Magambo	2018–	Major General
Director, Human Resource & Administration	Col. Jesse Kamunanwire	2019–	Colonel (since retired)
Director, Human Resources & Training	Brig. Godfrey Goloba	2019–2024	Brigadier
Director, Forensics	Maj. Lenny Mugalu	2005–2018	Major
Director, Crime Intelligence	Lt. Col. Atwooki Ndahura Birakurataki	2005–2018	Lieutenant Colonel
Other influential figures	Brig. Elly Kayanja – headed Operation Wembley, later the “Flying Squad”, the VCCU and the RRU	2005–2018	Brigadier
	Lt. Col. Peter Musherure	2005–2018	Lieutenant Colonel
	Sgt. Abel Tumukunde	2005–2018	Sergeant

Source: Authors’ compilation from various sources, including Daily Monitor, “Army officers assume police offices”, September 2, 2019. Ranks as at December 2025.

The continued appointment of military personnel in key police positions has created a system where the use of force, intelligence operations, and political control take precedence over conventional law and order policing operations resulting into sustained assault on constitutionally guaranteed personal freedoms and liberties. Indeed the recent policy announced by President Museveni to establish police stations at every sub county under the guise of ‘dealing with coffee thieves’ ought to be seen as part of the broader power game of control of an increasingly agitated population. This increased involvement of military officers in policing not only strengthens a security state model but also aligns law enforcement with political interests rather than the public good. Consequently, Uganda’s Police Force has become an extension of the military, systematically suppressing political dissent, enforcing repressive measures, and operating with impunity, straying from its original mandate.

5.10 Freedom to choose at gunpoint: The army in elections

Elections are the highest expression of a people's power and of citizens' sovereignty. It is through elections that citizens choose those to whom they entrust the authority and power of the state. This section traces the role of the military in Uganda's elections from the late colonial period to the campaign for the January 2026 general elections. It shows that every election held under the 1995 Constitution has been conducted in the shadow of the gun, and that the army's role has grown from providing security to shaping the conditions under which Ugandans vote.

5.10.1 The elections before 1996: From the Legislative Council to the Military Commission

A historical account of elections in Uganda may be traced to the enactment of the Legislative Council (Elections) Ordinance of 1957.¹⁹⁸ Following this legislation, the colonial government organised the first direct elections in 1958, through which the first cohort of Ugandans was elected to the Legislative Council (LEGCO). Another election was held in 1961, contested by the Democratic Party (DP) and the Uganda People's Congress (UPC). Buganda boycotted it, demanding that its representatives be elected by the Lukiiko. DP won 43 seats against UPC's 37 and formed the pre-independence internal self-government, with Benedicto Kiwanuka as Chief Minister. In the build-up to the 1961 elections, the King's African Rifles (KAR), a colonial regiment, was used mainly to enforce order and suppress dissent, while the police and the military were deployed against episodes of resistance such as Buganda's boycott of voter registration.

In 1962, Buganda was allowed to hold indirect elections, through which the Lukiiko nominated 21 representatives of Kabaka Yekka (KY). National Assembly elections were held on April 25, 1962: UPC won 37 seats and DP 24. Lacking a majority, UPC entered what is popularly called a "marriage of convenience" with Kabaka Yekka and formed a government under Milton Obote as Prime Minister. On October 4, 1963, Parliament elected Kabaka Mutesa as ceremonial President. A referendum on the "lost counties" of Buyaga, Bugangaizi and Buwekula followed in 1964, in which Buyaga and Bugangaizi voted to return to Bunyoro.

The elections planned for 1967 and 1971 did not take place because of the 1966 Kabaka crisis and Idi Amin's coup of January 1971. From 1971 to December 1980, Uganda was ruled by Amin's military junta and then by a series of short-lived administrations under the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) and its army, the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA). The 1980 elections therefore provide the first rear-view mirror on the military's role in Uganda's electoral politics.

The 1980 elections were organised under the Military Commission, which controlled the state from May 22 to December 15, 1980. The Commission was chaired by Paulo Muwanga and deputised by Yoweri Museveni, who was at the same time the presidential candidate of the Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM), an inherent conflict of interest in the management of the elections. The elections were marked by widespread irregularities, including ballot stuffing and interference by military personnel.¹⁹⁹ In a classic case of regime-orchestrated manipulation,

¹⁹⁸ Legislative Council (Elections) Ordinance, No. 2 of 1957.

¹⁹⁹ Justin Willis et al., 2017. "A valid electoral exercise"? Uganda's 1980 elections and the observers' dilemma. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 59(1). See also Commonwealth Observer Group, 1980. *Uganda Elections, December 1980: The Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group*; and *The New York Times*, December 12, 1980.

Muwanga issued a Proclamation at 8 p.m. on December 11, 1980, with retrospective effect from December 10, in which he usurped the powers of the Electoral Commission and declared his decisions on the outcome final and unappealable. The declared result, which returned Milton Obote and the UPC, was rejected by Museveni, who went on to launch the insurgency that brought the NRA to power in 1986.

5.10.2 The 1996 elections: The seeds of manipulation and violence

The next general elections were held on May 9, 1996, after the adoption of the 1995 Constitution. Before then, a series of indirect elections had been held from 1989 to elect local leaders and members of the National Resistance Council under the Resistance Council system. The 1996 elections were held under the “Movement” system, with political parties confined to their headquarters in Kampala. Three presidential candidates contested: Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, Muhammad Kibirige Mayanja and Paul Kawanga Ssemogerere. President Museveni was declared the winner with 74.3 per cent of the votes cast.

Although there were no reports of widespread violence in 1996, two developments planted the seeds of the manipulation and violence that came to define later elections. First, on capturing power the NRA had introduced *chaka mchaka*, a state-funded programme of political and military education. Presented as a vehicle for patriotism and civic education, it carried the NRA’s central message that political parties were sectarian and the root cause of Uganda’s instability, a narrative that President Museveni and NRM politicians have maintained ever since. The programme was suspended in the run-up to the 1996 elections after protests by Museveni’s opponents.

Secondly, isolated incidents of military interference were reported. Mr. Ssemogerere reported that at the Kadogo Army School polling station in present-day Mbarara City, child soldiers from the school were allowed to vote for Museveni several times.²⁰⁰ In Rujumbura County, Rukungiri District, parliamentary candidate Charles Rwomushana and his supporters were reportedly subjected to violence associated with Brig. Jim Muhwezi Katugugu, and an operation codenamed *Tumukyirize* (“we carry him”) was used to harass voters who had signed Ssemogerere’s nomination papers until they withdrew their signatures. Ssemogerere’s rallies from Makerere University to Mbale, Kabale, Moroto, Bundibugyo and Kapchorwa were disrupted with the aid of local police, Local Defence Unit (LDU) personnel, District Internal Security Officers (DISOs)²⁰¹ and Museveni-allied vigilante groups.²⁰² Senior officers also made their loyalties public: Maj. Gen. David Tinyefuza vowed that he would not salute Ssemogerere if he won, while Col. Kizza Besigye, then a serving officer, campaigned for Museveni in Rukungiri.²⁰³

After 1996, the regime used the security forces, especially the police, to enforce the ban on party activities. Civic meetings deemed to be linked to political parties were dispersed. In May 1998, police halted a seminar on the controversial land amendment bill, and in June and July 1998 at least four seminars sponsored by the Foundation for African Development (FAD) and the Uganda

²⁰⁰ Paul Ssemogerere, interview, Sunday Monitor.

²⁰¹ The then District Internal Security Officer for Rukungiri, Lt. James Mwesigye, is variously reported to have masterminded the violence. The same James Mwesigye was later accused of interfering in the 2021 Rukungiri Woman MP by-election. See <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/ec-probes-govt-security-officials-in-rukungiri-poll-1758486>

²⁰² European Union Election Observation Mission, Uganda 2006; The Observer, “Museveni 1996 poll: 3 tricks brought victory”, <https://observer.ug/news/museveni-1996-poll-3-tricks-brought-victory/>

²⁰³ Daily Monitor, “Army on the spot again over partisan politics”, October 31, 2020.

Young Democrats (UYD) were broken up.²⁰⁴

5.10.3 The 2001 elections: The turning point

“I’m not ready to hand over power to people or groups of people who have no ability to manage a nation ... Why should I sentence Ugandans to suicide by handing over power to people we fought and defeated? ... At times the constitution may not be the best tool to direct us politically for it allows wrong and doubtful people to contest for power.” — President Museveni, February 12, 2001²⁰⁵

By 2001, intolerance of political dissent had grown slowly but steadily. The Movement system had been entrenched in the Constitution,²⁰⁶ keeping party-based competition in abeyance. The political landscape was shaken by the emergence of Col. (Rtd) Dr. Kizza Besigye as a challenger to the incumbent. In a detailed indictment of President Museveni’s leadership published on November 6, 1999,²⁰⁷ Besigye argued that the broad-based government of national unity, the cornerstone of the NRM regime, had been progressively undermined:

“... All in all, when I reflect on the Movement philosophy and governance, I can conclude that the Movement has been manipulated by those seeking to gain or retain political power, in the same way that political parties in Uganda were manipulated. Evidently, the results of this manipulation are also the same, to wit: Factionalism, loss of faith in the system, corruption, insecurity and abuse of human rights, economic distortions and eventually decline. So, whether it’s political parties or Movement, the real problem is dishonest, opportunistic and undemocratic leadership operating in a weak institutional framework and a weak civil society which cannot control them ...”²⁰⁸

Besigye was retired from the army on October 20, 2000, and soon declared his candidacy. In November 2000, President Museveni responded, not to the substance of the allegations, but to the procedure of the declaration: “Why wouldn’t a democratically minded Col. Besigye think of consulting these before creating problems for the Movement? This is either indiscipline or intrigue on the part of Col. Besigye and these ‘leading movement personalities’ that have been clandestinely conclave on such important issues, including the future leadership of the country.”²⁰⁹

Museveni’s response read like a coded message to his supporters, and his partisans within the UPDF and allied militia groups went into overdrive against Besigye and his supporters. In January 2001, the Army Commander, Maj. Gen. Jeje Odongo, castigated candidates Besigye and Aggrey Awori for claiming majority support within the army, and then army spokesman, Maj. Phinehas Katirima, disputed a claim by Besigye’s Kasese campaign that most soldiers from the rank of lieutenant supported him.²¹⁰ Brig. Katumba Wamala told a gathering in Mukono that he would rather resign from the army than salute a President Besigye, and Henry Tumukunde, then

²⁰⁴. Human Rights Watch, 1999. *Hostile to Democracy: The Movement System and Political Repression in Uganda*. New York: Human Rights Watch.

²⁰⁵. President Yoweri Museveni, addressing a rally in western Uganda. *The East African*, February 12, 2001.

²⁰⁶. Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995, Articles 69–70 and 269.

²⁰⁷. *The Independent*, “Today in history: Besigye dossier, November 6, 1999”, <https://www.independent.co.ug/today-in-history-besigye-dossier-november-6-1999/>

²⁰⁸. Kizza Besigye, 1999. *An Insider’s View of How the NRM Lost the Broad Base*. Kampala (unpublished).

²⁰⁹. Yoweri Museveni, 2000. Response to Col. Kizza Besigye (unpublished).

²¹⁰. *New Vision*, “Besigye’s Kasese claims UPDF support”, <https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1041648/besigyes-kasese-claims-updf-support>

a serving senior officer, reminded Besigye that the weapons of the Luweero war remained available.²¹¹

The most notorious of the UPDF-allied militias was the Kalangala Action Plan (KAP), led by Maj. Roland Kakooza Mutale, a presidential adviser.²¹² KAP used violence and intimidation, including kidnapping and torture of Besigye's supporters, across the country. Its membership was estimated at between 150 and 800, trained and armed by the UPDF.²¹³ In Rukungiri, Besigye's home district, soldiers of the Presidential Protection Unit (PPU) opened fire after a Besigye rally, killing Johnson Baronda and injuring others. The chairman of the Electoral Commission, Aziz Kasujja, wrote to Museveni urging him to restrain the perpetrators of electoral violence, particularly KAP, but his plea was ignored. On February 4, 2001, a pick-up driven by a UPDF soldier ran into Besigye supporters at Namanve, killing three.²¹⁴

Military intelligence was at the centre of the violence. On February 12, 2001, armed men in civilian clothes and military boots seized the chairman of Besigye's Makindye campaign task force, Hajji Ramathan Muwonge, his son Siraje Wamala and a visitor, Benjamin Kaamu, and took them to Mbuya barracks, where they were beaten. On February 20, 2001, military police and plain-clothes operatives seized Maj. Rabwoni Okwir, head of Besigye's youth desk, at Entebbe International Airport and took him to the headquarters of the Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence (CMI), where he was interrogated and released only after writing a statement disavowing the opposition.²¹⁵

The presidential election was held on March 12, 2001. President Museveni was declared the winner with 69.3 per cent of the votes against Besigye's 27.8 per cent. In *Col. (Rtd) Dr. Besigye Kizza v Museveni Yoweri Kaguta and the Electoral Commission*, the Supreme Court acknowledged widespread violations, including intimidation and violence by the army against opposition supporters, but upheld the election by a 3-2 majority, ruling that the irregularities did not substantially affect the result.²¹⁶ The harassment continued after the polls. Besigye was questioned by the police on March 20, 2001, in connection with treason, held at a roadblock on the Masaka Road on June 30, 2001. In September 2001, he left for exile in South Africa, where he remained until 2005.

A Parliamentary Select Committee on election violence, appointed on February 26, 2002, reported in September 2002.²¹⁷ It concluded that state agents were directly involved, and that candidates and their agents had co-opted government security organs, including the UPDF, LDUs, Internal Security Organisation operatives (DISOs and GISOs), Resident District Commissioners and other "cadres", to carry out violence against opponents.²¹⁸ An estimated 17 people were killed and about 408 arrested.²¹⁹ KAP was singled out for gross electoral violence. The report was considered so sensitive that it was never formally tabled for debate.

The 2001 elections were a turning point. From then on, state-sponsored violence and the use of quasi-military, militia and vigilante groups allied to the military became a hallmark of Uganda's

²¹¹ Daily Monitor, "Army on the spot again over partisan politics", October 31, 2020.

²¹² Human Rights Watch, 2003. *Abducted and Abused: Renewed War in Northern Uganda*.

²¹³ Human Rights Watch, 2006. *In Hope and Fear: Uganda's Presidential and Parliamentary Polls*.

²¹⁴ Daily Monitor, "Bloody incidents that stained past polls"; Human Rights Watch, March 2001. *Uganda: Not a Level Playing Field*.

²¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, March 2001. *Uganda: Not a Level Playing Field*.

²¹⁶ *Col. (Rtd) Dr. Besigye Kizza v Museveni Yoweri Kaguta and the Electoral Commission*, Presidential Election Petition No. 1 of 2001 [2001] UGSC 15 (July 6, 2001); Human Rights Watch, 2006 (noting the Court's findings on army intimidation).

²¹⁷ Parliament of Uganda, Hansard, February 26, 2002.

²¹⁸ Women's International Peace Centre, 2019. *Election Related Conflict and Violence in Uganda*.

²¹⁹ The East African, September 16, 2002.

elections. The gun was slowly upending the spirit of the 1995 Constitution. In February 2004, Museveni commissioned 800 KAP members to spread the Movement gospel ahead of the 2006 elections. In April 2005, Kyadondo East MP Sitenda Ssebalu was quoted as saying that the “top patron of KAP was President Museveni.” The group claimed 150 MPs among its recruits,²²⁰ and a handwritten membership list under the letterhead of the Civic Education for Development Organisation (CEDO)/Kalangala Action Plan (M7 Operation Revival) named five ministers.²²¹

5.10.4 The 2006 elections: Courts martial and militias

The manoeuvres before the 2006 elections were dominated by the campaign to lift presidential term limits. In June 2005, the NRM-O National Executive Committee adopted a motion by Wakiso LCV Chairman Ian Kyeyune to support it, and on June 28, 2005 Parliament voted at second reading to amend Article 105, opening the way to indefinite re-election.²²² Police used tear gas and water cannon to disperse demonstrators in Kampala on the same day.²²³ At the committee stage on July 12, 2005, eight of the army’s ten representatives were recorded voting for the clause lifting term limits.²²⁴ Another representative, Fred Bogere, abstained and was later sent “on katebe”²²⁵, while Brig. Henry Tumukunde, who had questioned the third-term project, was replaced in Parliament. Ruhaama Constituency Member of Parliament Augustine Ruzindana captured the mood in the debate on Article 105(2):

“Mr Speaker, we are in a system in which militarism is a serious governance problem and a serious threat to the possibility of achieving real democracy. What are the characteristics of militarism? The use of the military and other security forces to resolve essentially political problems. The regimentation of society and proliferation of security organisations. Adoption of confrontationist methods and lack of compromise so that every dispute or difference is regarded as a dispute with an enemy, hence the adoption of absolute and final solutions. The concept of security as being based on maximum armament and being the supreme consideration.”²²⁶

In July 2005, Ugandans voted in a referendum to return to a multiparty system. Besigye returned from exile on October 26, 2005, and was arrested on November 14, 2005, on charges of treason and rape. He was accused, with 22 others, of leading a shadow rebel group, the People’s Redemption Army (PRA). The rape charge rested on a 1997 complaint.²²⁷ His first court appearance triggered protests which were met with excessive force, in which one protester was killed. On November 16, 2005, armed men of the Black Mamba Urban Hit Squad besieged the High Court to prevent the release on bail of 14 of his co-accused.²²⁸ On November 22, 2005, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Ruhakana Rugunda, banned all rallies, demonstrations and

²²⁰. New Vision, “150 MPs join Kakooza Mutale’s Kalangala Action Plan”, <https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1126606/150-mps-join-kakooza-mutale-eur-kalangala-action-plan>

²²¹. The ministers listed were Prof. Mondo Kagonyera (General Duties, Office of the Prime Minister), Daudi Migereko (Trade, Industry and Tourism), Kamanda Batarigaya (State Minister for Mineral Development), Hope Mwesigye (State Minister for Parliamentary Affairs) and Sebunya Kibirige (State Minister for Agriculture). Daily Monitor, 2005.

²²². Daily Monitor, “Uganda Constitution at 30: how term limits were removed”, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/video/uganda-constitution-at-30-how-term-limits-were-removed-5207006>

²²³. ReliefWeb, “Uganda: Police disperse opposition demonstration”, June 2005.

²²⁴. Parliament of Uganda, Hansard, July 12, 2005 (division on clause 37 of the Constitution (Amendment) (No. 3) Bill, 2005). See also {elecB}.

²²⁵. “Katebe” means being left without a deployment or being deployed in a position without influence.

²²⁶. Augustine Ruzindana, MP, Parliament of Uganda, Hansard, debate on the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2005.

²²⁷. Col. (Rtd) Dr. Kiiza Besigye v Uganda, HCCS No. 149 of 2005.

²²⁸. Daily Monitor, “Black Mamba’s raid on Kampala High Court: how it happened”, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/black-mamba-s-raid-on-kampala-high-court-how-it-happened-1678378>; International Commission of Jurists, press release, 2005.

seminars related to the trial,²²⁹ and the Minister of Information, James Nsaba Buturo, banned radio talk shows on the case.

On November 24, 2005, terrorism and firearms charges against Besigye and his co-accused were filed in the General Court Martial.²³⁰ The chairman of the court martial, Gen. Elly Tumwine, declared that it was not subject to the High Court, and then presidential adviser Gen. David Tinyefuza said the army would not accept being ordered by judges.²³¹ On January 31, 2006, the Constitutional Court ruled the army's siege of the High Court illegal, but held by three to two that the court martial could try civilians who aid military personnel in committing offences, a question that would return in 2025. The Pan-African Parliament called for Besigye's unconditional release.²³² On December 7, 2005, the Attorney General, Kiddu Makubuya, advised the Electoral Commission that Besigye was not "innocent enough" to be nominated. The Commission nominated him anyway, and the Constitutional Court upheld his nomination in absentia.²³³

Determined to stop Besigye from competing effectively, Museveni's camp employed three tactics: criminal and military charges against the candidate, violence against his supporters, and close surveillance that often stopped him and his supporters from reaching their rallies.²³⁴ Army officers campaigned openly. In Iganga, UPDF Maj. Swaliki Kiswiriri and Lt. Surambaya allegedly campaigned for the NRM-O candidate Ali Kirunda Kivejinja, prompting an Electoral Commission investigation after complaints from FDC MP Abdu Katuntu. And on February 2, 2006, clashes in Iganga left casualties on both sides. A New Vision photographer showed an NRM-O supporter in a yellow T-shirt carrying an AK-47, which the NRM-O described as an off-duty LDU. In Soroti, State Minister Mike Mukula campaigned in uniform with the Arrow Boys militia. In northern Uganda, officers reportedly warned voters that protection would be withdrawn if the NRM lost.²³⁵ On February 15, 2006, Lt. Ramathan Magara, a reserve force officer attached to the office of the Rubaga Resident District Commissioner, fired an AK-47 into a crowd of FDC supporters at Bulange, Mengo, killing two; he was convicted of manslaughter in 2009.²³⁶ On December 18, 2005, the CDF, Gen. Aronda Nyakairima had launched a code of conduct barring security personnel from partisan activity during the elections; its observance was the exception rather than the rule.

The Kalangala Action Plan remained active, and *chaka mchaka* was expanded; in 2007 Museveni declared it mandatory.²³⁷ Besigye's second petition also failed: in *Rtd. Col. Dr. Kizza Besigye v Electoral Commission and Yoweri Kaguta Museveni* [2006], the Supreme Court found widespread bribery, intimidation and violence, but upheld the election by four to three. By then, policing itself had passed into military hands: Maj. Gen. Kale Kayihura, a serving army officer, became Inspector General of Police in 2005 and commanded the force through the 2006, 2011 and 2016 elections. The paramilitary policing units of the period are described in **Box 4**.

²²⁹ New Vision, "Public demos banned", <https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1112653/public-demos-banned>

²³⁰ General Court Martial, Case No. UPDF/GCM/075/05, November 24, 2005.

²³¹ Human Rights Watch, February 2006. In *Hope and Fear: Uganda's Presidential and Parliamentary Polls*.

²³² Pan-African Parliament, Fourth Ordinary Session, Resolution on the unconditional release of Dr. Kizza Besigye, leader of the opposition in Uganda, adopted November 29, 2005 (African Union, December 2, 2005).

²³³ Kabagambe Asol, Faraj Abdullah and the Attorney General v The Electoral Commission and Dr. Kizza Besigye, Constitutional Petition No. 1 of 2006.

²³⁴ Kiiza J., Sabiti Makara and Lise Rakner, 2008. *Electoral Democracy in Uganda*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.

²³⁵ Human Rights Watch, February 2006. In *Hope and Fear*.

²³⁶ Daily Monitor, "Bloody incidents that stained past polls"; Daily Nation, "Four shot dead at Besigye meeting", <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/four-shot-dead-at-besigye-meeting-512392>

²³⁷ BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6907950.stm>

BOX 4 Policing by other means: Joint and auxiliary security units, 2002–2016**Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force (JATF)**

Created under the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2002, and drawn from the army, the police and auxiliary forces under the leadership of the Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence (CMI). Originally aimed at the Lord's Resistance Army, it was repeatedly accused of torture, illegal detention in unauthorised places and, in 2003, the execution of four suspects.

Operation Wembley (2002)

A joint police, Internal Security Organisation (ISO) and CMI operation launched in June 2002 against violent crime in Kampala and other towns, commanded by the ISO's deputy director while the police was itself headed by an army officer. Its squads included volunteers, retired officers and soldiers. Crime fell, but the Uganda Human Rights Commission condemned a shoot-to-kill approach, torture, illegal arrests and detention in barracks and undisclosed locations.

Violent Crime Crack Unit (VCCU, 2003)

Replaced Operation Wembley with the same functions under new leadership, chaired by the Inspector General of Police. The Human Rights Commission registered 48 complaints against it in 2003, against 44 for Operation Wembley in 2002: suspects held without being told why, for up to a year without charge, and routinely tortured.

Auxiliary forces

Beyond the regular police, the army and special units, policing relies on auxiliaries: the Local Administration Police, Local Defence Units and Special Police Constables. Their numbers have been expanded before elections, as with the special constables and "peace protectors" of 2011 and the crime preventers of 2016.

Source: Authors' summary from Human Rights Watch, 2009, *Open Secret: Illegal Detention and Torture by the Joint Anti-terrorism Task Force in Uganda*; Uganda Human Rights Commission annual reports, 2002–2003; and Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 2006, *The Police, the People, the Politics: Police Accountability in Uganda*.

5.10.5 The 2011 elections: Peace protectors, the Kiboko Squad and Walk to Work

Ahead of the 2011 elections, the police under Maj. Gen. Kale Kayihura recruited additional special constables nationwide, ostensibly to secure a free and fair environment, and "peace protectors" in every village. The period also saw the emergence of the Kiboko Squad, a stick-wielding gang reportedly commanded from Kampala's Central Police Station (CPS), that beat opposition leaders and their supporters in broad daylight, with impunity.^{238, 239} The CDF, Gen. Aronda Nyakairima, warned opposition politicians against resorting to violence and said the army would step in if necessary, stressing that Uganda could not afford political instability.²⁴⁰ In Karamoja, the defeated UPC candidate for Moroto Municipality, David Pulkol, a former head of the External Security Organisation, accused the army of acting "like a militia of the NRM", alleging that Special Forces voted in barracks and in several polling areas and that soldiers moved ballot boxes; the army denied the allegations, which were never tested in court.²⁴¹

²³⁸ Sabiti Makara, 2011. *The Management of the 2011 Elections in Uganda*.

²³⁹ The Independent, "Kiboko Squad revealed", September 15, 2009, <https://independent.co.ug/kiboko-squad-revealed>. Police denied that the squad existed.

²⁴⁰ Sabiti Makara, 2011. *The Management of the 2011 Elections in Uganda*.

²⁴¹ Daily Monitor, "Army helped NRM win Karamoja, says Pulkol", February 27, 2011.



UPDF military police confront residents on a street on the outskirts of Kampala during political protests. Source: GLISS Digital Library.

The warnings were followed by a heavy-handed crackdown on the April 2011 “Walk to Work” protests over food and fuel prices, in which security forces used excessive force, leading to deaths, injuries and the detention of opposition leaders. The government restricted media coverage and on at least one occasion blocked social media.²⁴² Together, these actions reflected a growing securitisation of the electoral process, with the police and the military positioned not only as guarantors of order but as instruments of political control.

5.10.6 The 2016 elections: Crime preventers and the CDF’s warning

Before the 2016 elections, various groups emerged, including Crime Preventers, the NRM Poor Youth, the Jobless Brotherhood and the Trust and Justice Solida Crew (TJ Solida). The Crime Preventers programme stood out for its scale and political significance. Launched in 2014 by the then Inspector General of Police, Gen. Kale Kayihura, it aimed to recruit 30 people in every village, about 1.5 million nationwide.²⁴³ As the elections approached, the target was raised to 11 million.²⁴⁴ Although presented as a civilian initiative, crime preventers were trained, given uniforms and batons, commissioned by the President, and in some cases absorbed into the police, without being a gazetted force. Their visible alignment with the NRM, wearing yellow T-

²⁴² Sabiti Makara, 2011; Human Rights Watch, 2011.

²⁴³ Rebecca Tapscott, 2016. Where the wild things are not: crime preventers and the 2016 Ugandan elections. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 10(4), 693–712. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2016.1272283>

²⁴⁴ Women’s International Peace Centre, 2019. Election Related Conflict and Violence in Uganda.

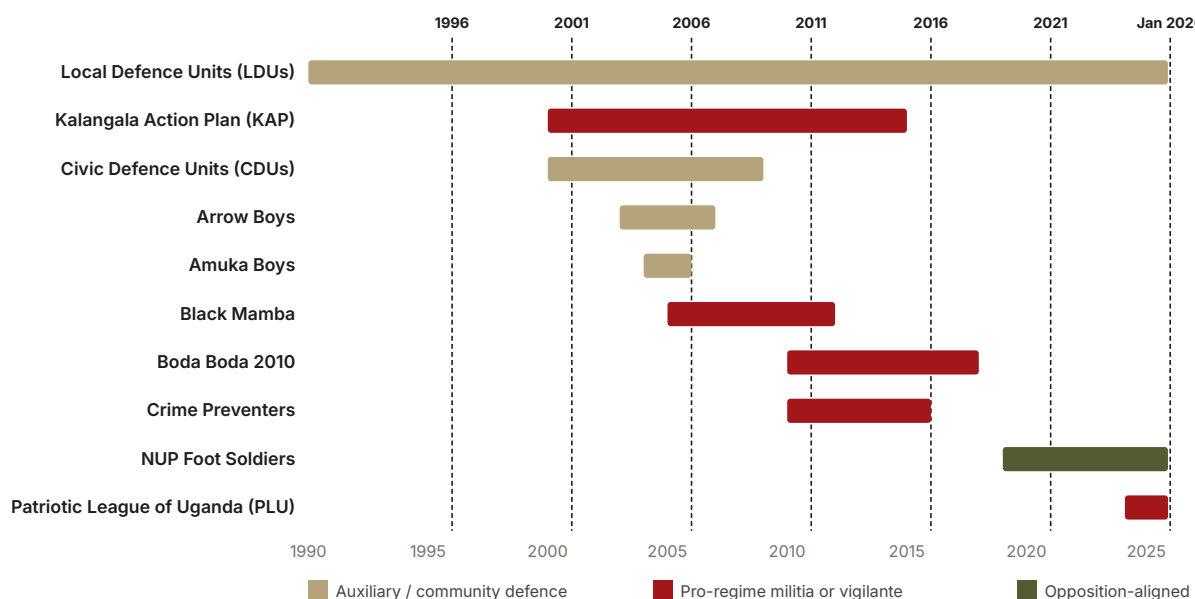
shirts, attending NRM rallies, most of them carrying guns everywhere, and disrupting opposition events, marked a shift towards the institutionalisation of quasi-military civilian groups for electoral ends.²⁴⁵ In response, opposition groups formed their own vigilante-style outfits (Table 7).

TABLE 7 Political vigilante and mobilisation groups across election cycles, 2001–2025

Group	Affiliation	Formed	Election cycles active	Notes
Nyekundire	NRM	2001	2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021	Men, women and youth from Kinkizi East and West (Kanungu) mobilising support for President Museveni and the NRM.
Kikankane Squad	FDC, later NUP	2010	2011, 2016, 2021	Founded by former Kawempe South MP Mubarak Munyagwa and led by Muhammad Ssebugwawo; mobilisation and vote protection. Pledged allegiance to President Museveni in 2022.
NRM Poor Youth	NRM, then Go Forward	2011	2016	Mobilised for presidential candidate Amama Mbabazi.
Jobless Brotherhood	Opposition activists, mainly FDC	c. 2014	2016	Known for “pig protests” and civic action against corruption; confrontational rather than armed.
Power 10 (P10)	FDC	2015	2016	Grassroots mobilisation and vote protection.
TJ Solida Crew	Truth and Justice pressure group	2016	2016	Started by Erias Lukwago's supporters for self-protection against Kakooza Mutale and NRM militias.
NUP Foot Soldiers	NUP	c. 2019	2021	Military-style attire, ranks, insignia and drill; activism and vote protection.
Presidential Vote Protectors	NRM	2020	2021	About 150,000 drawn from all sub-regions, serving as polling agents and observers for the NRM candidate.
Village voter protection teams	NRM	2025	2026	Ten-member teams in each of more than 70,000 villages, drawing on the Office of the National Chairman (ONC) and ghetto structures.

Source: The Independent; YouTube (Kikankane); Uganda Radio Network; Anadolu Agency; Daily Monitor; The Eagle Online; The Africa Report; Daily Monitor (2025), all accessed July 2025. Regional militias that also appeared in election periods, such as the Arrow Boys (Teso), Amuka (Lango, from 2003), Home Guards (Achoili) and the Anti-Stock Theft Unit (Karamoja), are shown in Figure 30.

²⁴⁵ Women's International Peace Centre, 2019.

FIGURE 30 Informal and semi-formal security formations in Uganda, 1990s–2025, against the electoral calendar

Source: Authors' compilation from Militias Database, Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch, Daily Monitor, The Observer, The Independent and New Vision. Periods approximate. Other formations cited in this paper – the Kiboko Squad, the Black Mamba urban hit squad and the Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force – are not shown.

The army's leadership spoke directly to the outcome. On January 28, 2016, the then CDF, Gen. Katumba Wamala, warned that losers had “no right to destabilise the country” and should “accept and go back and mourn in peace”.²⁴⁶ Dissent within the ranks, by contrast, was punished: Gen. David Sejusa was arrested in February 2016 for “partisan politics” after calling the election a sham and urging a boycott, and was taken before the court martial.²⁴⁷ Kayihura publicly admitted sanctioning the beating of Besigye's supporters, before backtracking on the confession. In 2019 the United States sanctioned him for gross human rights abuses.²⁴⁸ When Besigye had himself sworn in as “president” on May 11, 2016, he was arrested by the army.

In *Amama Mbabazi v Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and Others* [2016], the petitioner alleged abductions and interference by military elements, including the Special Forces and Crime Preventers. The Supreme Court acknowledged widespread violations and failings by the Electoral Commission but upheld the result. Later that year, in November 2016, a UPDF assault on the Rwenzururu palace in Kasese, commanded by Brig. Peter Elwelu, left more than 100 people dead. King Charles Wesley Mumbere and others were arrested and charged, and families of the victims reported continued intimidation.²⁴⁹

5.10.7 The 2021 elections: Live bullets, abductions and a siege

The 2021 elections saw the most lethal use of the gun since 2001. In October 2020, Brig. Deus Sande, commander of the Mechanised Brigade, told NRM mobilisers in Masaka, in full army uniform, that “we are not planning a handover, actually we are consolidating”. The army

²⁴⁶ Daily Monitor, “Army boss warns on election chaos”, January 28, 2016.

²⁴⁷ Africanews, “Uganda arrests army general weeks before elections”, February 1, 2016.

²⁴⁸ United States Department of the Treasury, designation of Kale Kayihura, September 13, 2019.

²⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch, “The legacy of Uganda's Kasese massacre”, November 27, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/11/27/legacy-ugandas-kasese-massacre>

disowned the remarks and promised disciplinary action, but he was later promoted to Major General.²⁵⁰ On November 18, 2020, the NUP presidential candidate, Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu (aka Bobi Wine), was arrested for allegedly violating COVID-19 regulations. The protests that followed were met with tear gas and live fire from the police and the UPDF, which was deployed in Kampala in armoured vehicles. The army spokesperson described the situation as “war-like”.²⁵¹ The Minister for Security, Gen. Elly Tumwine, declared that “police have a right to shoot you and kill you if you reach a certain level of violence”.^{252,253} Going by the government’s own account, at least 54 people were killed. President Museveni pledged compensation for only 22 of them, describing the rest as rioters. This study found no record of anybody having been held accountable for the violence and killings that ensued.²⁵⁴

“The Minister for Security, Gen. Elly Tumwine, declared that “police have a right to shoot you and kill you if you reach a certain level of violence”.

Abductions by plain-clothes operatives in unmarked vans, known as “drones”, became the signature of the campaign. On March 4, 2021, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Gen. Jeje Odongo, tabled in Parliament a list of 177 people held in military detention since November 18, 2020. Four days later, the President acknowledged that the SFC was holding 50 people for “treasonable acts”.²⁵⁵ In December 2020, the chairman of the US House Foreign Affairs Committee, Eliot Engel, asked the US Treasury and State Department to sanction Lt. Gen. Peter Elwelu (Land Forces), Maj. Gen. James Birungi and Maj. Gen. Don Nabasa (SFC) and Maj. Gen. Abel Kandiho (CMI), among others.²⁵⁶ After the January 14, 2021 vote, soldiers and police besieged Kyagulanyi’s home at Magere on the outskirts of Kampala and remained there even after the High Court ordered them to leave on January 25.²⁵⁷ Resident District Commissioners, several of them army officers, banned opposition rallies in districts such as Lira and Kitgum. One of them, Lt. Col. James Mwesigye, then RDC of Mbarara, told civil servants to “solicit votes for President Museveni”.²⁵⁸

The courts began, slowly, to scrutinise military partisanship. In Abim District, Capt. Omara, a serving UPDF officer, was declared winner of the LC5 chairmanship. His opponent, Mr. Ariko, argued that the candidacy violated the law barring serving officers from partisan politics; after an initial dismissal, the Court of Appeal ruled in Ariko’s favour and declared the candidacy illegal, establishing a precedent for military neutrality in elections.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁰. Daily Monitor, “Army on the spot again over partisan politics”, October 31, 2020.

²⁵¹. Al Jazeera, “Uganda: troops move to quell protests over Bobi Wine arrest”, November 19, 2020.

²⁵². Nairobi News, “The day ex-Ugandan military boss Elly Tumwine issued shoot-to-kill order”.

²⁵³. BBC News, “Bobi Wine protests: Shoot to kill defended by Uganda minister”, November 21, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-55016519>; Club of Mozambique, “Uganda minister: Police have a right to kill you”, November 23, 2020.

²⁵⁴. Human Rights Watch, “One year later, no justice for victims of Uganda’s lethal clampdown”, November 18, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/18/one-year-later-no-justice-victims-ugandas-lethal-clampdown>

²⁵⁵. Human Rights Watch, “Uganda: end enforced disappearances of opponents”, March 11, 2021.

²⁵⁶. Daily Monitor, “Violence: US congressman zeros in on seven SFC, UPDF, police chiefs”, December 10, 2020.

²⁵⁷. The EastAfrican, “Soldiers remain at Bobi Wine’s home despite court order”, January 26, 2021.

²⁵⁸. Al Jazeera, “How Uganda’s rural ‘eyes and ears’ prolong Museveni presidency”, July 15, 2022.

²⁵⁹. Daily Monitor, “It’s illegal for serving soldiers to participate in politics – court”, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/it-s-illegal-for-serving-soldiers-to-participate-in-politics-court-4525892>

5.10.8 Towards 2026: The UPDF as the new electoral management body?

The trajectory sharpened after 2021 around the person of Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba. As a serving general, he announced in March 2023 that he would run for president in 2026 and in February 2024 rebranded his “Muhoozi Project” as the PLU, which he chairs, even as the courts held that serving soldiers may not take part in partisan politics. On March 21, 2024, his father appointed him CDF. In September 2024 he declared his support for his father’s bid for a seventh term. In November 2024, Kizza Besigye was abducted in Nairobi and arraigned before the General Court Martial. On January 31, 2025, the Supreme Court ruled that civilians cannot be tried by military courts. The army spokesman, Col. Chris Magezi, responded that the court martial would continue to try Besigye, and Parliament subsequently restored the military trial of civilians in the UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025.

During the Kawempe North by-election on March 13, 2025, the UPDF was deployed in force, with hooded soldiers displaying war-front hardware. Campaign rallies for the National Unity Platform were broken up with tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition.²⁶⁰ At least 22 NUP supporters were arrested, beaten and charged with offences ranging from unlawful assembly to malicious damage, and some required medical treatment after detention.²⁶¹ Soldiers and an anti-terrorism unit beat at least 18 journalists covering the vote on voting day. The army spokesman attributed the assault to “misunderstanding and miscoordination”.²⁶² On April 27, 2025, Bobi Wine’s chief bodyguard, Edward Ssebuufu (aka Eddie Mutwe), was abducted and went missing for days. The CDF, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, later announced on X that Mutwe was “in my basement” and that he would be released only on the President’s orders. Heavily armed soldiers raided the NUP headquarters the following day. On May 2, 2025, the Uganda Human Rights Commission declared the detention unlawful.²⁶³

The UPDF also became a direct claimant on the election budget. In January 2025, it requested UGX 138.4 billion to oversee security for the 2026 general elections, while the Uganda Police Force sought UGX 300 billion. Together the two institutions were seeking more than UGX 438 billion, equivalent to over half of the Electoral Commission’s projected budget of UGX 838 billion.²⁶⁴ This allocation underscores how securitised the electoral environment has become, and how far the army has moved from a neutral guarantor of security towards an instrument of political enforcement.

²⁶⁰. Daily Monitor, “NUP final campaigns end in teargas, bloodshed”, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/nup-final-campaigns-end-in-teargas-bloodshed-4961166>

²⁶¹. Daily Monitor, “NUP final campaigns end in teargas, bloodshed”, March 2025.

²⁶². Reporters Without Borders, as reported by Citizen Digital, “Ugandan army severely beats 18 journalists covering by-election”, March 21, 2025.

²⁶³. Reuters, “Uganda’s military chief says missing opposition official is in his basement”, May 2, 2025; Uganda Human Rights Commission, May 2025.

²⁶⁴. Parliament Watch, “Parliament questions UGX138bn UPDF budget for 2026 election security”, <https://parliamentwatch.ug/news-amp-updates/parliament-questions-ugx138bn-updf-budget-for-2026-election-security/>



Supporters in NRM campaign T-shirts, some carrying sticks, at campaign events for the 2026 elections. Source: Screenshots of a post on TikTok; original photographer unknown.

The CDF's own words leave little doubt about the role the army now claims. On August 24, 2025, he wrote that NUP would “face it off with UPDF at every polling station in Uganda”.²⁶⁵ On December 6, 2025, UPDF soldiers blocked Kyagulanyi on the Gulu airfield road and beat members of his security team.²⁶⁶ On December 15, 2025, Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba told voters that there was “no need to hang around saying that they are protecting votes” and warned that those who caused trouble would be “dealt with swiftly and with all the tools we have at our disposal”,²⁶⁷ and on December 27, 2025, the army spokesman described the UPDF as “highly capable, organised, proficient and lethal” in response to NUP's call to protect the vote.²⁶⁸

Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba's personal messaging on X has intensified anxiety over the military's neutrality. His posts attack opposition leaders and openly declare support for the NRM, placing the military at the centre of the political contest and transforming it from a background institution into an active, partisan player. The strategic intent of this messaging is increasingly clear: to prepare the terrain for an NRM victory in 2026, enforce loyalty within military ranks and civilian structures, normalise impunity and collapse the distinction between personal ambition and state authority. The posts combine violent threats, personal attacks, xenophobic nationalism and zealous loyalty to the President, presenting the opposition not as competitors but as enemies of the state (Table 8). In practical terms, the army is being rebranded less as a protector of national security and more as an enforcer of electoral outcomes, and the silence of

²⁶⁵. Biiso FM, “Gen Muhoozi warns NUP ahead of 2026 elections, says UPDF will guard every polling station”, August 24, 2025.

²⁶⁶. Daily Monitor, “Bobi Wine braves police, UPDF beatings to campaign in Gulu”, December 7, 2025.

²⁶⁷. Daily Monitor, “2026 elections: cast your vote and go home, Gen Muhoozi warns”, December 15, 2025.

²⁶⁸. Daily Monitor, “UPDF is lethal, Magezi warns opposition over vote protection plan”, December 27, 2025.

the UPDF and of the Commander-in-Chief suggests institutional endorsement of the CDF's position. The heavy military deployments and the display of guns throughout the electoral process continue a pattern in which every regime since the colonial period has relied on the gun as the tool of governance and control.

TABLE 8 What the CDF says: Selected posts by Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba on X, April–May 2025

Date	Post (excerpt)	Strategic goal	Implication
21 May 2025	"Why do NUP fools fear me so much? I haven't started. Any who commit crimes against our people will regret it!"	Intimidate the opposition; normalise impunity	The CDF positions himself as judge and jury
21 May 2025	"I am building my new office in Magere ... from there I will watch everything he does."	Surveillance of the opposition leader	Blurs state power and private vendetta
16 May 2025	"Kabobi can hide ... But I will get him!"	Personalise the political rivalry	Reduces political contest to a vendetta
15 May 2025	"If ANYBODY in NUP ... I promise to KILL ..."	Suppress protest through fear	Direct breach of constitutional neutrality
15 May 2025	"We arrested KB ... now Kabobi. You think this is a joke?"	Signal continuity of coercion	Reinforces the precedent of political detention
15 May 2025	"Proud our army beat Eddie Mutwe to a pulp ..."	Justify torture; enforce loyalty	Admission of abuse by the head of the military
15 May 2025	"Bazungu ... better be careful. We will deport traitors in public view!"	Deflect international scrutiny	Danger to observers, media and diplomats
15 May 2025	"I take FULL responsibility ... appetizer."	Take ownership of repression	Institutionalises violence at the top of command
17 Apr 2025	"I am CDF, you are ALL my soldiers ... goal: elect Museveni!"	Militarise electoral politics	Collapses military neutrality
17 Apr 2025	"Museveni must get 80%! I will not tolerate less."	Predetermine the outcome	Normalises a pre-set result
17 Apr 2025	"If not for my father, Besigye would be buried ..."	Dehumanise the opposition	Death threat framed as clemency
16 Apr 2025	"I will abduct Kabobi ..."	Threaten the opposition leadership	Risk of actual abduction; emboldens others
Undated	"Thanks to H.E. Museveni ... We will SMASH them ..."	Cement loyalty to the President	The UPDF as a political tool, not a national army

Source: Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba on X, April–May 2025, as compiled by the authors. Several posts were later deleted. Analysis by the authors. Further posts are reproduced in Figure Figure 44.

5.10.9 Guns turned inward: A timeline of violence, 2018–2025

The violence of election years is only the most visible part of a longer record. Between the 2016 and 2026 elections, the army, its auxiliaries and the police turned their guns repeatedly against citizens: at protests and universities, while enforcing a lockdown, in Karamoja and on the campaign trail. **Figure 31** and **Table 9** set out twenty of the most extreme acts of violence documented from 2018 to December 2025, with a postscript on the January 2026 elections.† Each one killed, tortured or abducted people, or assaulted opposition supporters, students or journalists on a large scale.

The period opened in Arua. On August 13, 2018, during a by-election campaign, Kyagulanyi's driver, Yasin Kawuma, was shot dead. Kyagulanyi, Francis Zaake and four other MPs were beaten in the custody of the SFC and the police, and 36 people were arrested. Kyagulanyi was charged

before a court martial in Gulu. When protests followed, live rounds were fired in Kampala and Mityana, where at least one person was killed, and soldiers beat up a Reuters photographer, James Akena.²⁶⁹ In October 2019, soldiers fired tear gas into halls of residence at Makerere University and beat up students at Lumumba Hall, including students with disabilities, to end a protest over fees.²⁷⁰

In 2020, force was used against citizens even where there was no political contest. Between March and July, 2020, police officers, LDU personnel and soldiers enforcing COVID-19 restrictions killed at least twelve people; LDU members beat vendors and motorcycle riders with wires and sticks.²⁷¹ The killings of November 2020 were followed on December 27, 2020, by the death of Kyagulanyi's bodyguard, Frank Senteza, allegedly run over by a military police truck in Masaka, as two journalists were wounded.²⁷² The abductions of the 2021 campaign left deeper marks. Former detainees described being held in barracks and safe houses, beaten, hung from the ceiling, given electric shocks, raped and having their nails pulled out. "They removed our nails. They beat us. Even our bones," one of them told Human Rights Watch.²⁷³ In November 2021, after the suicide bombings in Kampala, police killed five suspects, among them a Muslim cleric, Sheikh Muhammad Kirevu, at his home.²⁷⁴ A month later, soldiers seized the novelist Kakwenza Rukirabashaija over tweets about the President and his son. He was tortured in military detention and taken to see Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba, who told him to stop writing.²⁷⁵

The heaviest toll was in Karamoja, far from the cameras. After two soldiers and two government geologists were killed in March 2022, Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba, then Commander of the Land Forces, posted that "hell is coming with us!" The army reported killing 309 "warriors" that month and said it had arrested more than 11,600 suspects between July 2021 and September 2022, 672 of whom were sentenced by court martial. None of the killings has been independently investigated. In three months of 2022, the UN human rights office and the Uganda Human Rights Commission recorded 35 complaints of torture and five unlawful killings, among them a man tortured to death in a barracks and a boy shot after going to milk a cow. Former detainees described being suspended from trees and held on smouldering thorns.²⁷⁶ Away from Karamoja, soldiers raided the FDC offices in Omoro on the eve of a by-election in May 2022, assaulting officials and seizing documents.²⁷⁷ In May 2023, two killings in Kampala showed what happens when guns are everywhere and discipline is not: a private soldier shot dead his principal, the Minister Col. (Rtd) Charles Engola, apparently over unpaid wages. Four days later, on May 6, the outspoken vlogger Ibrahim Tusubira, alias Isma Olaxess or Jjaja Iculi, was gunned down outside his home in Kyanja by unidentified armed assailants,²⁷⁸ and nine days after that a police constable shot dead a moneylender over a debt.²⁷⁹

²⁶⁹. Human Rights Watch, "Uganda: Attacks on Opposition Figures, Media", August 21, 2018; The EastAfrican, "Teargas and live bullets in Kampala over Bobi Wine lock-up", August 20, 2018.

²⁷⁰. Human Rights Watch, "Uganda: Security Forces Attack Students, Journalists", November 4, 2019.

²⁷¹. Daily Monitor, "Covid-19: How Ugandans died at the hands of security agents", August 8, 2020; Human Rights Watch, World Report 2021: Uganda.

²⁷². Al Jazeera, "Uganda: Bobi Wine says bodyguard killed in violence ahead of poll", December 27, 2020.

²⁷³. Human Rights Watch, "I Only Need Justice": Unlawful Detention and Abuse in Unauthorized Places of Detention in Uganda, March 22, 2022.

²⁷⁴. Africanews, "Uganda police kill 5, including cleric, after bomb blasts", November 19, 2021.

²⁷⁵. Human Rights Watch, "Uganda: Ensure Justice for Detained, Tortured Author", February 11, 2022.

²⁷⁶. Liam Taylor, "'Hell is coming': The Ugandan army's heavy-handed crackdown in Karamoja", The New Humanitarian, December 1, 2022; The New Humanitarian, "In Uganda's Karamoja, rampant rustling and a militarised response as violence returns", January 26, 2022.

²⁷⁷. Human Rights Watch, World Report 2023: Uganda.

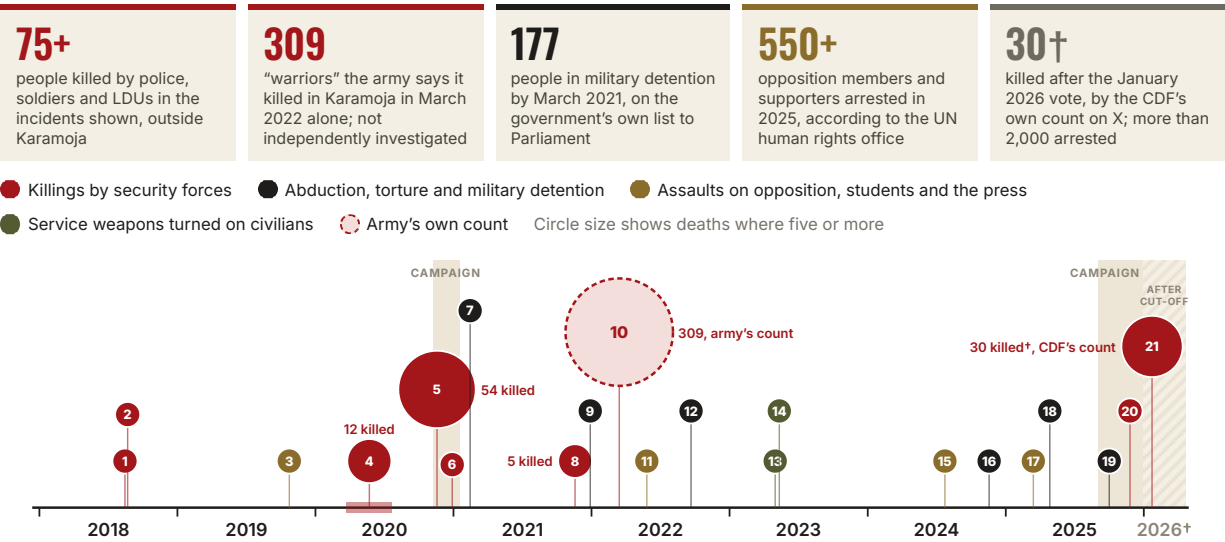
²⁷⁸. Daily Monitor, "Blogger Isma Olaxess shot dead – police", May 6, 2023, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/blogger-isma-olaxess-shot-dead-police-4226036>; The EastAfrican, "Ugandan cabinet minister shot and killed by his bodyguard", May 2, 2023.

²⁷⁹. The EastAfrican, "Ugandan cabinet minister shot and killed by his bodyguard", May 2, 2023; Daily Monitor, "Police officer shoots money lender dead over Shs2m loan", May 12, 2023.

From 2024, the violence turned again on the political opposition and increasingly passed through military custody. In July 2024, police and soldiers arrested 104 young people marching to Parliament against corruption; some alleged torture and sexual assault in detention.²⁸⁰ Besigye’s abduction from Nairobi, the assault on journalists at Kawempe North and the torture of Eddie Mutwe followed. In October 2025, two Kenyan activists, Bob Njagi and Nicholas Oyoo, were seized by masked gunmen in military uniform after attending an opposition event. They were held incommunicado for 38 days, in what the President called “the fridge”.^{281,282} On the campaign trail, security forces raided the hotel of Kyagulanyi’s team in Lira, stripped women supporters during arrests in Mbarara, shot dead a supporter, Mesach Okello, in Iganga on November 28, and beat Kyagulanyi’s team in Gulu on December 6. By December, the UN human rights office counted more than 550 opposition members and supporters arrested in 2025.²⁸³

FIGURE 31 Guns turned inward: The most extreme acts of violence by the army and police, 2018–2025, and January 2026*

Twenty of the gravest acts of violence by soldiers and police from 2018 to 2025, and a postscript after the January 2026 vote†: from shootings in the street to torture in military custody.



Source: As for the table that follows. Selection by the authors: acts by the UPDF, its auxiliaries and the police that killed, tortured or abducted, or assaulted opposition supporters, students or journalists on a large scale. Entries marked † fall after the book’s December 2025 cut-off.

A postscript, marked † because it falls after the paper was completed in December 2025, completes the record. The vote on January 15, 2026 was held under a nationwide internet shutdown. That night, at least seven people were shot dead in Butambala. The police said they had attacked a police station and a tally centre, while the local area MP, Muwanga Kivumbi, said ten of his agents had been killed inside his home. Five more people were shot dead in Luweero and Kalungu.²⁸⁴ After the Electoral Commission declared President Museveni the winner on January 17, with 71.65 per cent of the vote, soldiers filled the streets of Kampala, police raided Kyagulanyi’s home and he went into hiding.²⁸⁵ On January 23, 2026, the CDF wrote on X: “So far

^{280.} Daily Monitor, “Uganda arrests more than 100 for anti-graft protests in Kampala, police say”, July 27, 2024.
^{281.} UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Uganda: Türk deplores intensifying crackdown on opposition and media ahead of elections”, December 3, 2025.
^{282.} AFP, “Uganda president admits Kenyan activists were arrested and held in ‘the fridge’”, The Namibian, November 2025.
^{283.} Chapter Four Uganda, “Human Rights Day, 2025: Urgent call to end electoral violence”, December 10, 2025.; UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, December 3, 2025.
^{284.} Al Jazeera, “At least seven killed overnight in Uganda after tense presidential election”, January 16, 2026; Daily Nation, “12 killed in Uganda as running battles erupt over poll results fury”, January 2026. Post-dates the December 2025 cut-off.
^{285.} NPR, “Uganda’s longtime leader declared winner in disputed vote”, January 17, 2026. Post-dates the December 2025 cut-off.

we have killed 30 NUP terrorists”, adding that more than 2,000 “hooligans” had been arrested. That week he also threatened to hunt down Kyagulanyi.²⁸⁶ The count of the dead was announced not by the police or by human rights monitors, but by the commander of the army himself.

TABLE 9 Guns turned inward: The incidents, and what followed, 2018–2025, and January 2026[†]

2018

- 1 **13 Aug 2018 · Arua.** Yasin Kawuma, Kyagulanyi's driver, shot dead. Kyagulanyi, Francis Zaake and four other MPs are beaten in the custody of the Special Forces Command and the police; 36 people are arrested.
- 2 **19–20 Aug 2018 · Mityana and Kampala.** Live rounds fired at protests; at least one person killed in Mityana. Soldiers beat the Reuters photographer James Akena.

2019

- 3 **24 Oct 2019 · Makerere University.** Soldiers fire tear gas into halls of residence and beat students, including students with disabilities, at Lumumba Hall; 46 students arrested.

2020

- 4 **Mar–Jul 2020 · Countrywide.** Twelve people killed by police, LDUs and soldiers enforcing COVID-19 restrictions.
- 5 **18–19 Nov 2020 · Kampala and other towns.** Police and UPDF fire live rounds at protests after Kyagulanyi's arrest; at least 54 killed, by the government's own count.
- 6 **27 Dec 2020 · Masaka.** Kyagulanyi's bodyguard, Frank Senteza, killed, allegedly run over by a military police truck; two journalists injured.

2021

- 7 **Nov 2020–Mar 2021 · Kampala and Wakiso.** Abductions by “drones”: 177 people in military detention by March 2021. Former detainees describe nails pulled out, beatings and rape.
- 8 **16–18 Nov 2021 · Kampala and the western border.** After the Kampala bombings, police kill five suspects, among them Sheikh Muhammad Kirevu, at his home.
- 9 **28 Dec 2021 · Kampala.** The novelist Kakwenza Rukirabashajja is seized by soldiers over tweets about the President and his son, tortured, and taken to see Gen. Muhoozi.

2022

- 10 **Mar 2022 · Karamoja.** After Gen. Muhoozi posts that “hell is coming with us!”, the army reports killing 309 “warriors” in one month. The killings have not been independently investigated.
- 11 **25 May 2022 · Omoro.** On the eve of a by-election, soldiers raid the FDC offices, assault officials, take money and seize documents.
- 12 **Jul–Nov 2022 · Karamoja.** The UN and the UHRC record 35 torture complaints and five unlawful killings in three months; 600 men are rounded up in Moroto on 21 September.

2023

- 13 **2 May 2023 · Kampala.** Pvt. Wilson Sabiti shoots dead his principal, the Minister Col. (Rtd) Charles Engola, over unpaid wages, wounds the aide-de-camp and kills himself.
- 14 **11 May 2023 · Kampala.** PC Ivan Wabwire shoots dead the moneylender Uttam Bhandari over a debt.

2024

- 15 **22–25 Jul 2024 · Kampala.** March to Parliament against corruption: 104 people arrested by police and soldiers; allegations of torture and sexual assault in custody.
- 16 **16 Nov 2024 · Nairobi.** Kizza Besigye abducted and arraigned before the General Court Martial in Kampala.

2025

- 17 **13 Mar 2025 · Kawempe North.** By-election: hooded soldiers deployed; at least 32 journalists assaulted or their equipment seized.
- 18 **27 Apr 2025 · Kampala.** Eddie Mutwe seized and tortured; the CDF posts that he is “in my basement”.
- 19 **1 Oct 2025 · Kampala.** Kenyan activists Bob Njagi and Nicholas Oyoo seized by masked men in uniform and held for 38 days in what the President called “the fridge”.
- 20 **28 Oct–6 Dec 2025 · Campaign trail.** Lira hotel raid; women stripped in Mbarara; Mesach Okello shot dead in Iganga; soldiers and police beat Kyagulanyi's team in Gulu.

2026[†]

- 21 **15–23 Jan 2026[†] · Butambala, Luweero, Kalungu and Kampala.** At least twelve people shot dead on and after polling night; police raid Kyagulanyi's home and he goes into hiding; the CDF posts “So far we have killed 30 NUP terrorists” and says more than 2,000 have been arrested.

What followed. The only convictions found were of junior personnel: two soldiers jailed for killings during the lockdown, one for 35 years and one for life. A captain was arrested over the Makerere raid, but no findings were published. No record was found of a commander prosecuted for Arua, the November 2020 killings, the abductions of 2020–21 or the operations in Karamoja; the commanders were retained or promoted.

Source: As cited in the text (notes to this sub-section): Human Rights Watch; Daily Monitor; Al Jazeera; Africanews; The New Humanitarian; The EastAfrican; UN human rights office; AFP; Chapter Four Uganda; Parliament of Uganda (March 4, 2021). Selection by the authors: acts by the UPDF, its auxiliaries and the police that killed, tortured or abducted, or assaulted opposition supporters, students or journalists on a large scale. Entries marked [†] fall after the book's December 2025 cut-off.

Three things stand out in this record. First, the scale: at least 75 people were killed by police, soldiers and LDU personnel in the incidents shown outside Karamoja, by the army's own count more than 300 in Karamoja in a single month, and 30 more after the January 2026 vote, by the CDF's own count.[†] Second, the shift in method, from shooting in the street to abduction and torture in military custody, and from the police to the army, with the CDF now personally associated with the mistreatment of detainees. Third, impunity. The only convictions found were of junior personnel, among them two soldiers jailed for killings during the lockdown. No record

²⁸⁶ AFP, “Uganda army chief says 30 opposition supporters killed, 2,000 arrested”, Eyewitness News, January 23, 2026; Reuters, “Uganda detains 2,000 opposition supporters, kills 30 after disputed election, army chief says”, The EastAfrican, January 23, 2026. Post-dates the December 2025 cut-off.

was found of a commander prosecuted for Arua, the November 2020 killings, the abductions of 2020–21 or the operations in Karamoja, and the commanders were retained or promoted. Guns acquired to defend the nation have been turned, again and again, on its citizens.

“Guns acquired to defend the nation have been turned, again and again, on its citizens.

5.10.10 What the record shows

Table 10 summarises the militarisation of Uganda’s electoral processes from 1980 to 2025. **Figure 32** maps 37 documented episodes from 1996 to December 2025 across three forms of involvement: officers speaking for the outcome, force deployed around the vote, and the army’s reach into the processes that surround it. **Figure 33** lists the officers involved and what followed for each of them.

The pattern is consistent across seven electoral cycles. Senior officers have signalled in advance that they would not accept an opposition victory. Force has been concentrated at decisive moments, through the PPU in 2001, the Black Mamba in 2005, the SFC and military detention in 2020–21, and the soldiers deployed at Kawempe North in 2025. The main challenger has twice been placed before a court martial, in 2005 and in 2024. A serving general ran the police through three elections, and by 2025 the CDF had made himself the public face of election security. Officers who acted for the incumbent were retained, promoted or appointed ministers; those who broke ranks were removed or arrested.

The evidence has limits that the argument should respect. No documented case was found of the army itself registering voters, running polling stations or tallying results; in law and in practice, the Electoral Commission still manages the vote. Allegations of soldiers voting several times or moving ballot boxes remain untested in court, and the Supreme Court, while finding army intimidation in 2001, held that it did not change the result. What the record does show is control *around* the vote: of the environment in which citizens choose, of the fate of the challengers and of the response to protest. Command of these has passed from the civilian to the military sphere.

TABLE 10 Militarisation of Uganda's electoral processes, 1980–2025

Election	Key actors (army and paramilitaries)	Key persons	Form of involvement	Trend
1980	Military Commission	Paulo Muwanga (chair); Yoweri Museveni (deputy chair and candidate)	Organised the elections; the chairman's proclamation usurped the Electoral Commission	Military-controlled elections; precedent for post-election war
1996	UPDF, LDUs, ISO; chaka mchaka	—	Deployment as election security; political education against parties; isolated interference	Early signs of militarised elections
2001	KAP, PPU, CMI, ISO, LDUs	Maj. Roland Kakooza Mutale	Violent suppression of the opposition; abductions and torture	Rise of paramilitaries; state-sponsored electoral violence normalised
2006	General Court Martial, Black Mamba, KAP, Arrow Boys	Gen. Elly Tumwine; Maj. Gen. Kale Kayihura	Court martial of the main challenger; siege of the High Court; officers campaigning	Deep entanglement of the army in campaigns; neutrality rules breached
2011	Special constables, "peace protectors", Kiboko Squad; UPDF in Karamoja	Maj. Gen. Kale Kayihura; Gen. Aronda Nyakairima	Beatings of opposition supporters; Walk-to-Work crackdown; alleged multiple voting	Quasi-legal paramilitaries; army–police coordination; media control
2016	Crime Preventers; Special Forces Command	Gen. Kale Kayihura; Gen. Katumba Wamala	Target of 11 million crime preventers; CDF's warning to losers; arrest of a dissenting general	Civilian militias institutionalised
2021	UPDF, Special Forces Command, CMI, LDUs	Brig. Deus Sande; Gen. Elly Tumwine	At least 54 killed; 177 in military detention; siege of the candidate's home	Lethal repression; courts begin to scrutinise partisanship
2025 (Kawempe North)	UPDF, JATT, Special Forces Command; PLU	Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba	Hooded troops; 18 journalists beaten; abduction of Eddie Mutwe	Overt military force in a by-election
2025–26 campaign	UPDF, police, PLU	Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba; Col. Chris Magezi	UGX 438 billion sought for security; "UPDF at every polling station"; military trial of civilians restored	Militarised election budget; the army as guarantor of the outcome

Source: Authors' compilation from the sources cited in this section.

FIGURE 32 The army and Uganda's elections, 1996 – December 2025: 37 documented episodes

37	54	177	2	1
documented episodes across seven electoral cycles	killed in the November 2020 crackdown, by the government's own count	people in military detention after the 2021 vote (Interior Minister, March 2021)	courts martial of the main challenger, Kizza Besigye: 2005 and 2024	soldier convicted for an election killing in this record: Lt Magara, 2009
Strength of evidence: J Court or official finding A On the record or officially admitted R Independent report C Allegation, denied or untested				
	SPEAKING FOR THE OUTCOME Officers' statements on who may win, and on the courts and voters	FORCE AROUND THE VOTE Deployments, violence, detention and abductions	REACH INTO THE PROCESS Courts martial, command of the police, candidates, siege	
1996 Museveni v Ssemogerere	1996 Maj. Gen. David Tinyefuza vows not to salute Paul Ssemogerere if he wins. R Daily Monitor	Nothing documented in this search	1996 Col. Kizza Besigye , then serving, campaigns for Museveni in Rukungiri. R Daily Monitor, citing W. Byanyima	
2001 Museveni v Besigye	2001 Brig. Katumba Wamala says he would quit the army rather than salute a President Besigye. R Daily Monitor 2001 Henry Tumukunde , then a serving senior officer, warns Besigye that weapons from the Luweero war remain available. R Daily Monitor	Feb–Mar PPU soldiers in Rukungiri; Johnson Baronda shot dead after a Besigye rally. A UPDF soldier's pick-up kills three supporters at Namanve. R HRW 2001; Daily Monitor Feb Military police seize Besigye's youth leader Maj. Rabwoni Okwir at Entebbe and take him to CMI. R HRW 2001 2001 Kalangala Action Plan of presidential adviser Maj. Kakooza Mutale implicated by a parliamentary select committee. J Parliament; Daily Monitor	6 Jul Supreme Court cites army intimidation and assault of opposition supporters, but upholds the result 3–2. J HRW 2006 on the ruling	
2006 Museveni v Besigye	17 Jan Gen. Elly Tumwine , court-martial chair: the court martial is not subject to the High Court. A HRW 2006 2 Feb Gen. David Tinyefuza : the army will not accept being ordered by judges. A HRW 2006	15 Feb Lt Ramathan Magara fires an AK-47 into FDC supporters at Bulange; two killed. Convicted of manslaughter, 2009. J Daily Monitor Jan UPDF officers allegedly campaign for the NRM candidate in Iganga; LDU men armed at a rally. C HRW 2006	Nov 2005 Besigye sent before the General Court Martial; Black Mamba squad besieges the High Court. Constitutional Court rules the siege illegal. J HRW 2006 2005–18 Gen. Kale Kayihura , a serving army officer, commands the police through three general elections. A Official record	
2011 Museveni v Besigye	Nothing documented in this search	Feb Karamoja : losing candidate David Pulkol says the UPDF acted "like a militia of the NRM". The army denies it. C Daily Monitor	Feb Special Forces allegedly vote in barracks and in several places, and soldiers move ballot boxes. Untested in court. C Daily Monitor	
2016 Museveni v Besigye, Mbabazi	28 Jan CDF Gen. Katumba Wamala to losers: "accept and go back and mourn in peace". A Daily Monitor	2016 Gen. Kayihura admits sanctioning beatings of Besigye supporters; later sanctioned by the US (2019). A US Treasury; press	Feb Gen. David Sejusa arrested for "partisan politics" after urging a boycott; tried by court martial. A Africanews 11 May Besigye arrested by the army at his mock swearing-in. R Press reports	
2021 Museveni v Kyagulanyi	Oct 2020 Brig. Deus Sande , in uniform: "We are not planning a handover ... we are consolidating". Later promoted Maj. Gen. A Daily Monitor Nov 2020 Gen. Elly Tumwine , Security Minister: "Police officers have a right to kill and shoot you." A Nation 31 Dec 2020 Lt Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba tweets attacks on Bobi Wine, then deletes them. A Press reports	18–19 Nov 2020 Troops deployed in Kampala after Kyagulanyi's arrest; at least 54 killed, by the government's own count. A HRW; Al Jazeera Nov–Feb 177 people in military detention (Interior Minister, 4 Mar 2021); 50 held by the SFC (President, 8 Mar 2021). A HRW 2021 Dec 2020 US Rep. Engel seeks sanctions on Lt Gen. Elwelu, SFC commanders Birungi and Nabasa, and CMI chief Kandoho. R Daily Monitor	15–26 Jan Soldiers besiege Kyagulanyi's home after the vote and stay despite a court order to leave. J The EastAfrican 2020 RDCs , some of them army officers, ban opposition rallies; one, Lt Col. James Mwesigye, tells civil servants to "solicit votes for President Museveni". R Al Jazeera 2022	
2026 Campaign, to Dec 2025	Jan–Feb 2025 Gen. Muhoozi , CDF, threatens to behead Bobi Wine and says Besigye will leave prison "in coffin or on his knees". A Reuters; AllAfrica 24 Aug 2025 Gen. Muhoozi : NUP "will face it off with UPDF at every polling station in Uganda". A Muhoozi on X 15 Dec 2025 Gen. Muhoozi : no need to "hang around" protecting votes; troublemakers will be "dealt with swiftly". A Daily Monitor 27 Dec 2025 Col. Chris Magezi , army spokesman, calls the UPDF "lethal" in reply to NUP's vote-protection call. A Daily Monitor	13 Mar 2025 Kawempe North by-election : soldiers beat at least 18 journalists; army cites "miscoordination". A RSF; Citizen 27 Apr 2025 Eddie Mutwe , Bobi Wine's bodyguard, seized. Muhoozi: "He is in my basement". Soldiers raid NUP headquarters. J Reuters; UHRC 6 Dec 2025 UPDF soldiers block Kyagulanyi in Gulu and beat members of his security team. R Daily Monitor	2023–24 Gen. Muhoozi , serving, says he will run for president (Mar 2023) and chairs the PLU; named CDF in Mar 2024. A Press reports Nov 2024–Besigye abducted in Nairobi and tried by court martial. Supreme Court bars military trial of civilians (31 Jan 2025); Parliament restores it (UPDF Amendment Act 2025). J Supreme Court; Act 8 of 2025	

Source: Human Rights Watch (2001, 2006, 2021); Supreme Court of Uganda, Presidential Election Petition No. 1 of 2001; Daily Monitor (2011, 2016, 2020, 2025); Africanews (2016); The EastAfrican (2021); Nation; Al Jazeera (2020, 2022); RSF via Citizen Digital (2025); Reuters (2025); US Treasury (2019); UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025.

FIGURE 33 Officers in the electoral record, 1996–2025: Who did what, and what followed

Officers who spoke or acted for the incumbent were kept, promoted or appointed ministers. The two shaded officers, who broke ranks, were removed or arrested.

OFFICER	WHEN	ROLE IN THE ELECTION	CONSEQUENCE
Maj. Gen. David Tinyefuza (Sejusa) Army officer; later presidential adviser	1996; 2006	Would not salute Ssemogerere (1996); army will not take orders from judges (2006).	None. Arrested in 2016 only after turning critic and urging a boycott.
Brig. Katumba Wamala Commander; CDF in 2016	2001; 2016	Would not salute a President Besigye (2001); told losers to “mourn in peace” (2016).	None. Later CDF and a Cabinet minister.
Henry Tumukunde Serving senior officer	2001	Reminded Besigye that Luweero war weapons remained available.	Removed from Parliament in 2005, after criticising the third-term project.
Maj. (Rtd) Kakooza Mutale Presidential adviser; Kalangala Action Plan	2001; 2015	KAP implicated in 2001 violence; training youth against the opposition in 2015.	Named by a parliamentary committee; no prosecution found.
Lt Col. Ndahura (PPU) Presidential Protection Unit, Rukungiri	2001	Named by Besigye over the PPU shooting in Rukungiri.	Sued Besigye for defamation; no finding against him.
Gen. Elly Tumwine Court-martial chair; Security Minister	2006; 2020	Court martial above the High Court (2006); police may “kill and shoot” (2020).	None. Remained a minister until 2021.
Lt Ramathan Magara Reserve force, attached to the RDC office	2006	Shot into FDC supporters at Bulange; two killed.	Convicted of manslaughter, 14 years (2009).
Gen. Kale Kayihura Serving officer as Inspector General of Police	2005– 2018	Policed three elections; admitted sanctioning beatings of Besigye supporters.	Dismissed in 2018; US sanctions in 2019.
Gen. David Sejusa General, by then a critic of the President	2016	Called the election a sham and urged a boycott.	Arrested for “partisan politics”; court martial.
Brig. Deus Sande Commander, Mechanised Brigade	Oct 2020	“We are not planning a handover ... we are consolidating.”	Army promised disciplinary action; later promoted Maj. Gen.
Lt Gen. Elwelu; Maj. Gens. Birungi, Nabasa, Kandiho Land Forces; SFC; CMI	2020	Named over the November 2020 killings and abductions.	US congressional request for sanctions; no domestic action found.
Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba Senior commander; CDF from March 2024	2020– 2025	Presidential bid while serving; threats to Bobi Wine and Besigye; held Eddie Mutwe; “UPDF at every polling station”.	Promoted to CDF. UHRC ruled Mutwe’s detention unlawful.
Col. Chris Magezi Army spokesman	2025	Court martial to continue trying Besigye despite Supreme Court; UPDF “lethal”.	None.

WHAT THE RECORD SHOWS

- **Outcome signalled in advance.** Senior officers said they would not salute or hand over to an opposition winner in 1996, 2001 and 2020. By 2025 the CDF said the army would face the main opposition party at every polling station.
- **Force at decisive moments.** The PPU in 2001, the Black Mamba in 2005, the SFC and military detention in 2020–21, and soldiers at the Kawempe North by-election in 2025.
- **Military law for the main challenger.** Besigye was court-martialled in 2005 and again in 2024. Parliament restored the military trial of civilians months before the 2026 vote.
- **Command of policing.** A serving general ran the police through the 2006, 2011 and 2016 elections, and RDCs, some of them officers, rule on opposition rallies.

WHAT IT DOES NOT SHOW

- No documented case was found of the army itself registering voters, running polling stations or tallying results. In law and in practice, the Electoral Commission manages the vote.
- Claims of soldiers voting several times or moving ballot boxes (Karamoja, 2011) are allegations that no court has tested.
- The Supreme Court found army intimidation in 2001 but held, 3–2, that it did not change the result.
- The evidence therefore supports control *around* the vote: of the environment, the contestants and the aftermath. It does not show control of the count itself.

Implication for the argument. The case that the army has taken over the management of elections is strongest when stated as control of the conditions under which the Electoral Commission works. Command of the security around polling, the fate of challengers and the response to protest have passed from the civil to the military sphere, with the CDF as the public face of election security from 2024.

Source: As for the preceding figure; Daily Monitor, October 31, 2020; The EastAfrican, August 15, 2015; Uganda Human Rights Commission, May 2025. Consequences as reported up to December 31, 2025.

The governance architecture established under the 1995 Constitution was informed by the overbearing influence of the military in Uganda's politics and society. It required that the boundaries of authority between civilian and military authorities be clearly defined, so that responsibility and accountability could be properly assigned. The evidence in this chapter, from the Avenger's rise to the CDF's polling-station warnings, points to a trajectory in which the military is either taking over or covertly displacing the civilian leadership and operations of traditionally civilian institutions, the electoral process among them. The full extent of this takeover deserves a study of its own; yet the evidence already shows that it amounts to a military coup by other means.

FROM THE UPDF BACK TO THE NRA

The framers of the 1995 Constitution declared the aspiration of Ugandans “to build a better future by establishing a socio-economic and political order through a popular and durable national constitution based on the principles of unity, peace, equality, democracy, freedom, social justice and progress.” A national army subordinate to civilian authorities was one of the building blocks for this progress.

However, 30 years later, the transition of the NRA to the UPDF remains incomplete. The commander of the rebel NRA is still the President of Uganda and Commander-in-Chief of the UPDF. Fundamental constitutional safeguards against potential abuses of power such as presidential term limits and presidential age limit have since been removed from the Constitution with the acquiescence of the military²⁸⁷ and the parliament. Increasingly, Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (UPDF) personnel of all ranks are overtly and covertly engaged in subverting the electoral process. State-inspired election violence has become commonplace. As discussed in the following sections, the ongoing administrative restructuring and legal reforms of the military are deliberately or inadvertently perpetuating the personal ownership of the NRA and have the potential to rekindle the ghost of 1966 by putting the army above the citizens and the Constitution. Indeed, President Museveni’s recent remark that Ugandans should “leave the army alone”²⁸⁸ remains the single biggest threat to building a sustainable, stable, durable and prosperous democratic country.

6.1 Administrative engineering of the army: The 2021 UPDF Establishment

The UPDF Establishment is a 2,098-page comprehensive framework setting out the structures and formations of the Ministry of Defence and Veteran Affairs, on the one hand, and UPDF, on the other. Taken at its face value, the strategic level purpose of the UPDF establishment is captured in its preface, written by Museveni as Commander-in-Chief wherein he states thus:

“The UPDF Establishment is a fundamental expression of its vision to transform into a modern, professional, efficient and accountable force anchored on a strong civil– military partnership and

²⁸⁷. Notably, the Presidential Age Limit was removed after the SFC raided Parliament and brutalized MPs that were viewed as opposed to the amendment of the constitution for the same

²⁸⁸. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFUe4B7HxjU> accessed on May 22, 2025.

capable of effectively and efficiently undertaking its missions. This establishment therefore, will strengthen the existing structures, and also define new structural arrangements, roles, responsibilities and functions, reporting mechanisms as well as improve tasking, rationalize recruitment and enable effective personnel management. This renewed configuration will enable UPDF to appropriately improve its deployability and regeneration capabilities.”²⁸⁹

According to Museveni, “the establishment is mainly to address the issues of standardization of structures, roles and functions, organization, enhancing flexibility, simplifying coordination of tasks and improving reliability and performance across services.”²⁹⁰



Copies of the UPDF Establishment are handed over by the Commander-in-Chief, February 17, 2024. The 2,098-page document codifies structures Parliament had refused to legislate.

The UPDF establishment declares that it is motivated by the vision of the UPDF “to transform into a modern, professional, efficient and accountable force anchored on a strong civil-military partnership capable of effectively and efficiently undertaking its missions.” Among other things, the Establishment addresses the following elements: size of the Force; composition; quality; equipment; and personnel and ranking structure.²⁹¹ In relevant parts, the UPDF Establishment provides that it “shapes the relationships within the forces, and between them and other security organizations as well as the other organs of the state.” Among the numerous rationales presented, UPDF establishment claims to give “the force the capacity to partner with other organs of the state, in order to enable it to respond to non-military conflicts that result from deeply rooted social, economic, and cultural conditions that threaten stability.”

²⁸⁹. See preface to the UPDF Establishment 2021. Para 4

²⁹⁰. UPDF Establishment 2021, para 5

²⁹¹. Page 5

The UPDF Establishment has 6 aims that it seeks to pursue: i) aligning the UPDF establishment with the Uganda Defence Doctrine 2015; ii) addressing the gaps and reconciling the UPDF Act, 2005 with the NRA establishment 1992; iii) improving effectiveness of the forces; iv) creating consistency with the changes in technology v) configuring the forces for regional and international engagements; and vi) adopting a flexible posture that reflects preparedness to respond to mission in fulfillment of Uganda's international obligation. The aim of reconciling the UPDF Act 2005 and the NRA establishment of 1992 which predate the 1995 Constitution is particularly curious. Like we have argued throughout the paper, the mindset of the founders of the NRA do not see the difference between the rebel NRA and what was supposed to be a national army established under the 1995 constitution. As further elaborated in the next section, the UPDF Establishment 2021 is an attempt to create a modern version of the NRA in terms of its ownership, command and control.

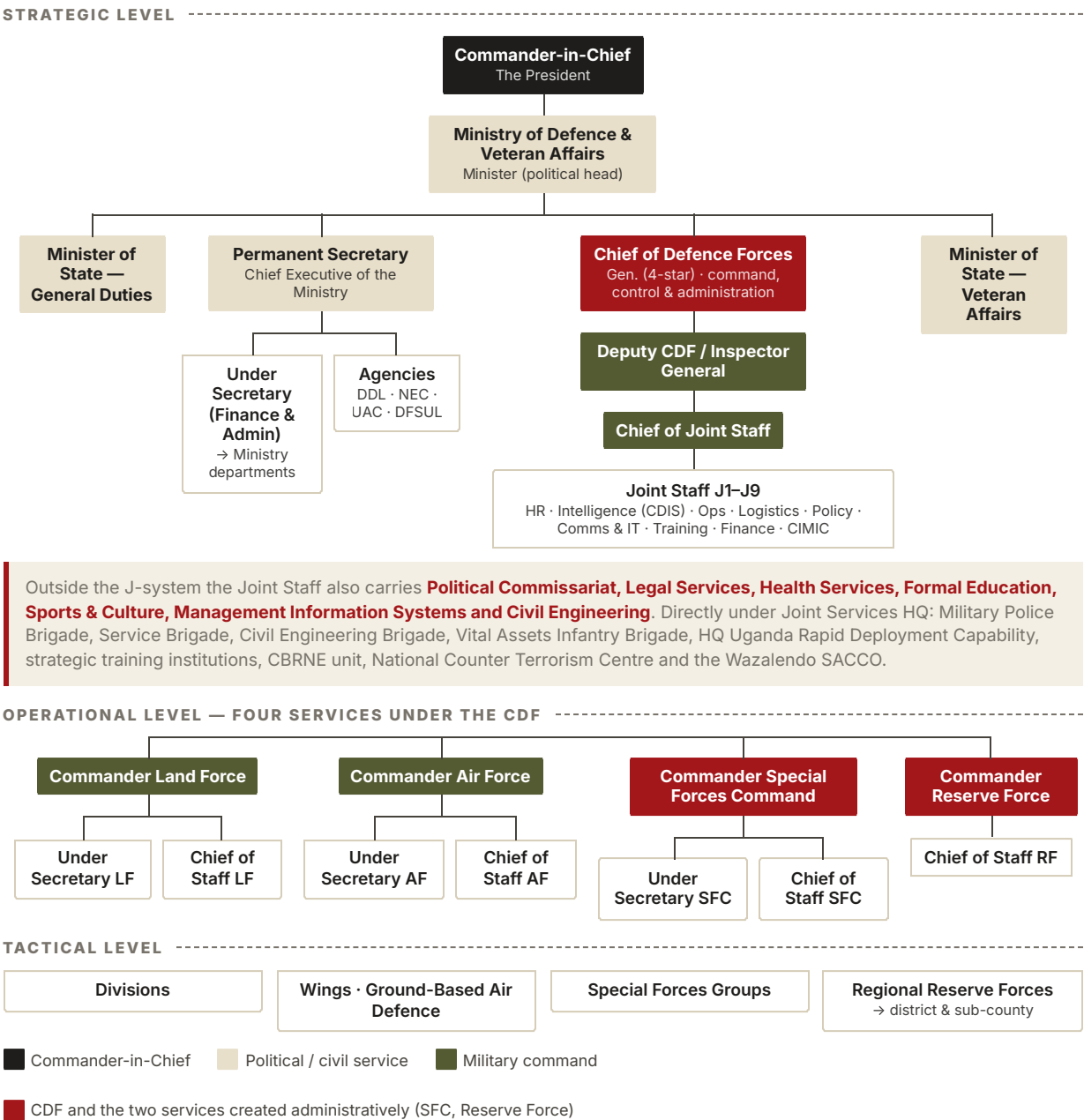
The Establishment lays out a fairly complex organisational structure and staffing plans. The most curious aspect of this structure is that a president as commander in chief is considered to be part of the Ministry of Defence and Veteran Affairs. In a traditional ministry set up, a president is not considered to be a part of a ministry. This is mainly because a president is the appointing authority of the minister and hence the latter represents the former. The reflection of the Commander-in-Chief in the organisational structure of the ministry is therefore a misnomer.

Secondly, the ministry organogram designates selected institutions and offices as being at a strategic level. The Establishment declares that the President and Commander-in-Chief, the Minister of Defence and Veteran Affairs as the delegated political head of the ministry, and the Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) who exercises the overall, operational command and control of the Forces to make up the "strategic leadership of the UPDF". Accordingly, the MoDVA and "the UPDF headquarters provide political and strategic guidance to the force with respect to policy development, planning, and management of national defence, while putting into consideration both political and military conditions". However, this arrangement does not show any link to the Defence Forces Council as established under the UPDF Act 2005 or the proposed amendment to the Act. There is clearly an attempt to mix up matters of defence policy with matters of command and control of the military without showing the boundary lines for effective vertical or horizontal accountability as well as civilian oversight.²⁹²

²⁹². At the time of writing this paper, CDF Muhoozi Kainerugaba had tweeted about the deployment of the UPDF forces on a mission to support the South Sudanese Government of Salva Kiir in Juba, the capital. The Minister of Defence, Oboto Oboto, told a session of parliament that he had no knowledge of such deployment. A military assistant to the CDF, a one Chris Magezi, tweeted that the Minister was not supposed to engage in the UPDF's operational matters, and that he would "in due course be brought up to speed". Chris Magezi on X, March 12, 2025.

FIGURE 34 The UPDF command structure under the UPDF Establishment, 2021 (simplified)

The Commander-in-Chief sits at the top of the Ministry's own organogram. Command authority runs from the C-in-C to the Chief of Defence Forces, who delegates it to the four service commanders (para. 3.3).



Source: UPDF Establishment, 2021, Figure 2-1 (Structure of MoDVA and UPDF Joint Services HQ), Figure 3-1 and paras 2.7, 3.3–3.4, 3.7–3.9. Simplified and redrawn by the authors. DDL – Department of Defence Land; NEC – National Enterprise Corporation; UAC – Uganda Air Cargo Corporation; DFSUL – Defence Forces Shop Uganda Ltd.

It is also curious that the Establishment document declares that “the Ministry of Defence and Veterans’ Affairs (MoDVA) is an organ of the State under the security sector.”²⁹³ Does this mean every ministry is considered an “organ of the State” or this is a special status for the MoDVA? Ordinarily, ministries are administrative departments or political structures that represent organisation of government by a president. They can be changed in terms of both form and

²⁹³. UPDF Establishment 2021, para 2.1, pg 9.

mandate by any newly elected president. It is therefore not clear why the authors of the UPDF Establishment found it important to declare the MoDVA an organ of State.

The UPDF Establishment provides the structure for command and control of the UPDF.²⁹⁴ Under the structure, the command and control authority of the Commander-in-Chief is delegated to the CDF, who also delegates such authority to service commanders.

However, the Establishment suggests that below these officers is the Joint Staff Headquarters (JSHQs) as “the highest military level of Command and Control responsible for policy, military strategy, management and administration of the UPDF.” It is important to note that this mix up between policy, strategy, operations and administration runs through the entire Establishment document.

TABLE 11 Composition of the UPDF Joint Services Headquarters

1 Chief of Defence Forces	2 Deputy CDF and Inspector General	3 Chief of Joint Staff
4 The Joint Staff	5 Defence Referral Hospital	6 Joint Headquarters Brigade Group
7 Strategic Training Institutions	8 HQ Uganda Rapid Deployment Capability	9 Defence Forces Rehabilitation & Vocational Centre
10 Military Police Brigade	11 Service Brigade	12 Civil Engineering Brigade
13 Vital Assets Infantry Brigade	14 Defence General Depot	15 Defence Ordnance
16 Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear & Explosives (CBRNE)	17 National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC)	18 Wazalendo Savings & Credit Cooperative (WSACCO)

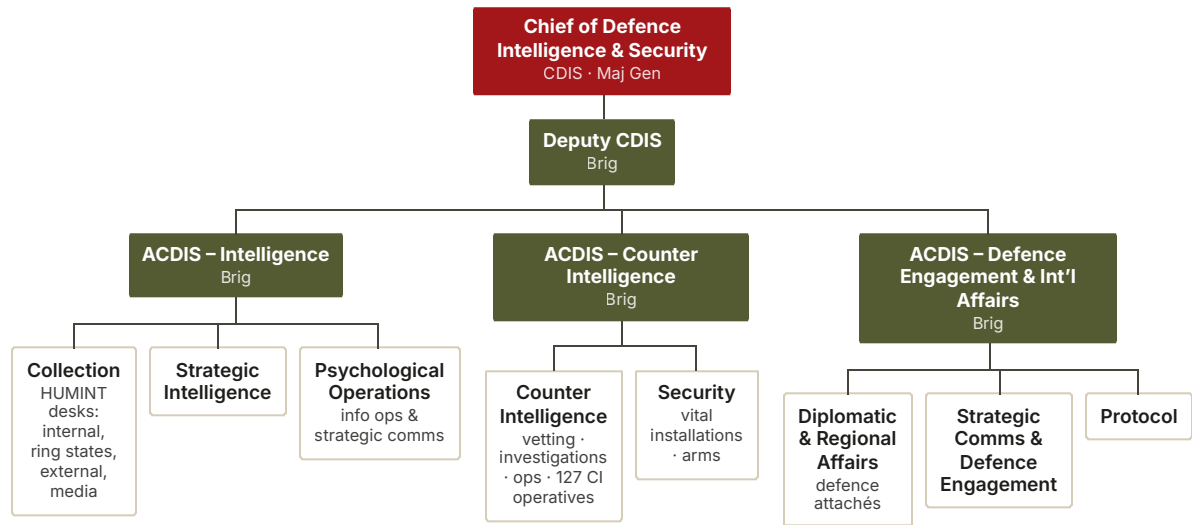
Source: UPDF Establishment, 2021, para. 3.7.

²⁹⁴. UPDF Establishment Pg 57

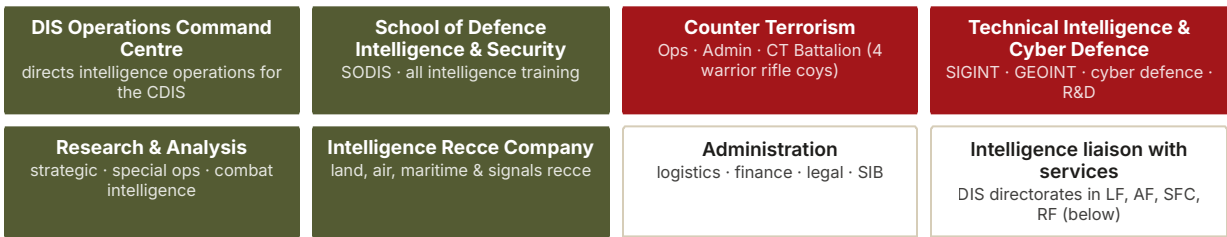
FIGURE 35 The intelligence architecture of the UPDF: The Chieftaincy of Defence Intelligence and Security (J-2)

The Chief of Defence Intelligence and Security (CDIS, Maj Gen) provides intelligence to all levels of command, advises the CDF and coordinates intelligence-sharing with other security organisations. Total establishment strength: **1,979** (129 officers, 1,850 other ranks).

STRATEGIC LEVEL — JOINT SERVICES HQ



DEPARTMENTS AND UNITS UNDER THE CDIS



OPERATIONAL & TACTICAL LEVELS



ESTABLISHMENT STRENGTH BY ELEMENT

Counter Terrorism (incl. CT Battalion)	511
School of Defence Intelligence & Security	469
Administration	266
ACDIS – Counter Intelligence	244
Intelligence Reconnaissance Company	174
Technical Intelligence & Cyber Defence	114
ACDIS – Intelligence	80
ACDIS – Defence Engagement & Int'l Affairs	45
Research & Analysis	29
Office of the CDIS	19
DIS Operations Command Centre	17
Office of the DCDIS	11

SELECTED MANDATES, IN THE ESTABLISHMENT'S WORDS

- Counter intelligence:** “monitoring subversive activities within own Forces”; vetting and investigations.
- Psychological operations:** “conduct information operations on targeted audiences in order to influence them”.
- Strategic communication:** “enhance the legitimacy of government through explaining the efficacy of its programmes”.
- Counter terrorism:** tactical squads with other agencies; “a data bank on terror suspects”; counter-radicalisation.
- Cyber defence:** protect UPDF ICT; digital forensics and “information gathering”.
- Intelligence Recce Coy kit:** COMINT direction-finding, communication jammers, handheld UAVs, phone-extraction (Cellebrite UFED) and forensic imaging tools.

Source: UPDF Establishment, 2021, paras 3.47–3.105; Figures 3-10 to 3-21; Table 3-50 (strength summary). Simplified and redrawn by the authors.

6.1.1 The Special Forces Command

The UPDF Establishment codifies the Special Forces Command (SFC) and the Reserve Force (RF) service as new component services of the UPDF. It should be observed that at the time of the enactment of the UPDF Act 2005, the government sought to legislate the then Presidential Guard Brigade (PGB) and the reserve force as distinct services of the UPDF. The PGB was at the time a distinct security outfit purposed for the protection of the president. It was also a controversial outfit because it was considered to be mainly comprised of Ugandans from the Bahima ethnic group and Ugandans of Rwandan origin which was also alleged by numerous conspiracy theories to be the ethnic background of incumbent President Museveni. Available record also shows that the commanders of the SFC and its predecessor outfits have always been drawn from Ankole region or Western Uganda. In addition, the PGB was considered a very undisciplined group of army officers.

In principle, the proposal to legislate the PGB into the UPDF act was rejected by the 7th parliament. However, the building of the PGB and its transformation into the SFC as well as the organisation of the reserve force into a standing army continued outside the legal framework. Today, the SFC is a fully-fledged service, constituting a parallel force to the regular UPDF. The force has its own land forces, air-force, intelligence and other components of a regular army.

On the other hand, legislators of the 7th parliament questioned why a reserve force needed to be legislated as part of standing army and advocated for a separate legislation to govern recall of reservists and how they would be compensated.

6.1.2 The Reserve Force

Like the transformation of the Presidential Guard Brigade (PGB) and the Special Forces Group (SFG) into the SFC, the process of establishing the reserve force also proceeded outside the confines of the law as set out in the UPDF Act, 2005. President Museveni proceeded to establish an elaborate command and control structure of the Reserve Force housed under the ministry of veterans affairs.²⁹⁵ This structure is now codified in Chapter 7 of the UPDF Establishment 2021. According to the Establishment document, the “Reserve Force (RF) is organized in accordance with Section 4(1)(b) of the Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces Act, 2005.”

The mission of the Reserve Force is to support the UPDF and other security agencies in promoting and enhancing national peace and security and other strategic objectives, both in war and peace times.²⁹⁶ It is important to observe that the Establishment provides for the Reserve Force as an integral part of the UPDF, and yet the mission statement seems to look at it as an external structure designed, “to support the UPDF and other security agencies”.

²⁹⁵. See UPDF Establishment 2021. Chapter 7.

²⁹⁶. Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces Act, 2005 (Act 7 of 2005)

TABLE 12 Role of the Reserve Force

PEACETIME a. Engage in economic production. b. Mobilise and sensitise the civilian population towards economic production and the war effort. c. Support the maintenance of security in Uganda. d. Support civil authorities in case of disasters. e. Reinforce civil authorities with professional skills as the need arises.	WAR: PRE-HOSTILITIES a. Gather intelligence and disorganise the enemy's war preparations. b. Mobilise logistics.	WAR: COMBAT PHASE a. Operate covertly behind enemy lines. b. Reinforce the regular forces in combat when necessary. c. Assist in the evacuation of casualties. d. Participate in the logistics support chain. e. Carry out other duties in the rear assigned by the commander.	POST-HOSTILITIES Participate in operations to pacify the country.
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Source: UPDF Establishment, 2021, Chapter 7.

FIGURE 36 An army down to the sub-county: Structure of the Reserve Force under the UPDF Establishment



Source: Redrawn from the UPDF Establishment, 2021.

The Reserve Force includes; personnel seconded from regular forces; retired Officers and discharged militants; auxiliary forces, state security organisations and such other citizens of Uganda as have undergone military training under Article 17(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995.

BOX 5 Sources and organisation of the Reserve Force

- I. The sources of the reserve forces shall include:
 - a. personnel seconded from the regular forces;
 - b. retired officers and discharged militants;
 - c. auxiliary forces, state security organisations and such other citizens of Uganda as have undergone military training under Article 17(2) of the Constitution.
- II. Membership of the Reserve Forces shall be restricted on the basis of:
 - a. human resource requirement determined by threat analysis and other security considerations;
 - b. age;
 - c. health, especially physical and mental fitness; and
 - d. any other factors as may from time to time be determined by the High Command and the Defence Forces Council.
- III. Notwithstanding subsection (2), whenever the need arises, any retired officer or discharged militant or any member of the auxiliary forces who has not been absorbed into the reserve forces may be called upon for service in the reserve forces.
- IV. Regulations made under this Act shall clearly define the sources of the reserve forces, the command structure, command authority and command relationship within the reserve forces and between the reserve forces and the regular forces.

Source: UPDF Establishment, 2021.

The Establishment provides for a Defence Reserve Support Council (DRSC) with the mandate “to promote the benefits of Reserve Force Service to employers and the community.” Besides the Minister of Defence and Veteran Affairs and the CDF, membership of the DRSC may be drawn from appropriate government ministries, agencies, departments, industrial networks, business entities, trade unions and other relevant community groups. The members of the Council are appointed by the CIC with advice from the High Command. However, the organogram of the Reserve Force suggests that the DRSC operates autonomously but below the office of the Commander of the Reserve Force. Yet, it is difficult to appreciate how a structure chaired by a Minister and with the membership of the CDF would be placed at such hierarchy with the structure of the force.

The UPDF Establishment 2021 represents the most comprehensive reform and reorganisation of the UPDF since the forces baptism from the National Resistance Army (NRA) in 1995. The defence review process during the first half of 2000s was completed at the time of the enactment of the UPDF legislation in 2005. The law therefore did not incorporate the proposed restructuring of the forces to bring them into conformity with the foundational principles set out in the constitution. However, reforms proposed by the review were pursued through administrative actions and hence were largely devoid of the civilian oversight envisaged under article 208 of the Constitution. The Establishment Document largely constitutes a codification of all the changes that were implemented in the UPDF for the period 2004-2021.

The formulation of the Establishment document provided yet another opportunity to implement the fundamental constitutional principles of a national army – accountability and subordination to military authority. On the contrary, the Establishment constitutes a fundamental shift in the balance of power between the army and the civilian authorities by shifting the command of the military from the Commander-in-Chief to the Chief of Defence through some form of delegated

authority. This shift in the balance of power continues to be evident across the entire architecture of the military and informs the reforms proposed by the UPDF amendment bill 2025.

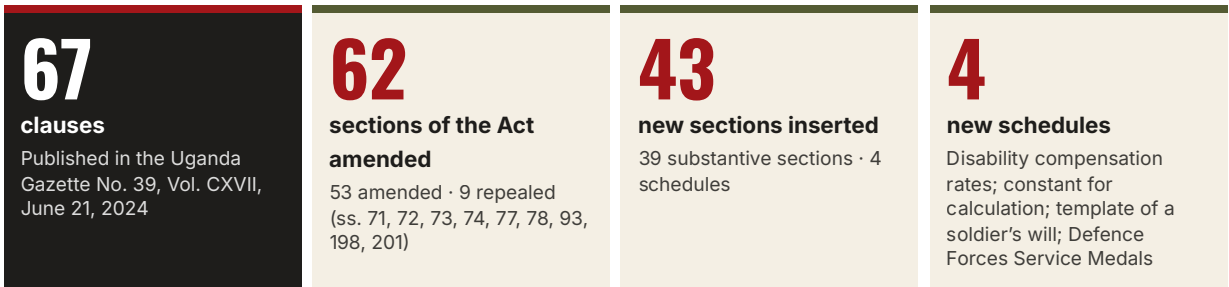
6.2 Legal engineering of the army: The UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025, reform and repression in the same package

If the 2021 Establishment re-engineered the army administratively, the UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025 enacted the same reversal in law. What the Establishment did by command, the Act does by statute: it writes into the law of Uganda the structures through which the UPDF is being turned back into the NRA.

6.2.1 The legislative conspiracy re-enacted

On June 21, 2024, Government published the “Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (Amendment) Bill, 2024”.^{297,298} As shown in **Figure 37**, the 2024 Bill contained a total of 67 clauses amending some 62 sections and inserting 43 new sections or schedules in the UPDF Act of 2005. Before the Bill was presented for consideration by parliament, the Supreme Court delivered its decision in the case of Attorney General versus Kabaziguruka²⁹⁹ declaring trial of civilians in the court martial unconstitutional and ordering all ongoing or pending trials to cease, and for the affected cases to be transferred to civilian courts.³⁰⁰ In a 3 page statement published on February 1, 2025, President Museveni predictably reacted by “rejecting” the decision of the Supreme Court and ordering his Attorney General to propose amendments to the existing laws to enable trials of civilians in the court martial. At the February 6, 2025 Army Day celebrations, the CDF and Museveni’s son, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, declared the Supreme Court decision “unfortunate” and “unacceptable”.¹³⁴

FIGURE 37 Summary of the changes proposed in the UPDF (Amendment) Bill, 2024



Source: Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (Amendment) Bill, No. 71 of 2024.

On February 7, 2025, President Museveni convened a meeting of his NRM parliamentary caucus which adopted a decision to withdraw the 2024 Bill so that a new draft is prepared to circumvent

297. Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (Amendment) Bill, No. 71 of 2024. Uganda Gazette No. 39, Volume CXVII, 21st June 2024. Bills Supplement No. 6

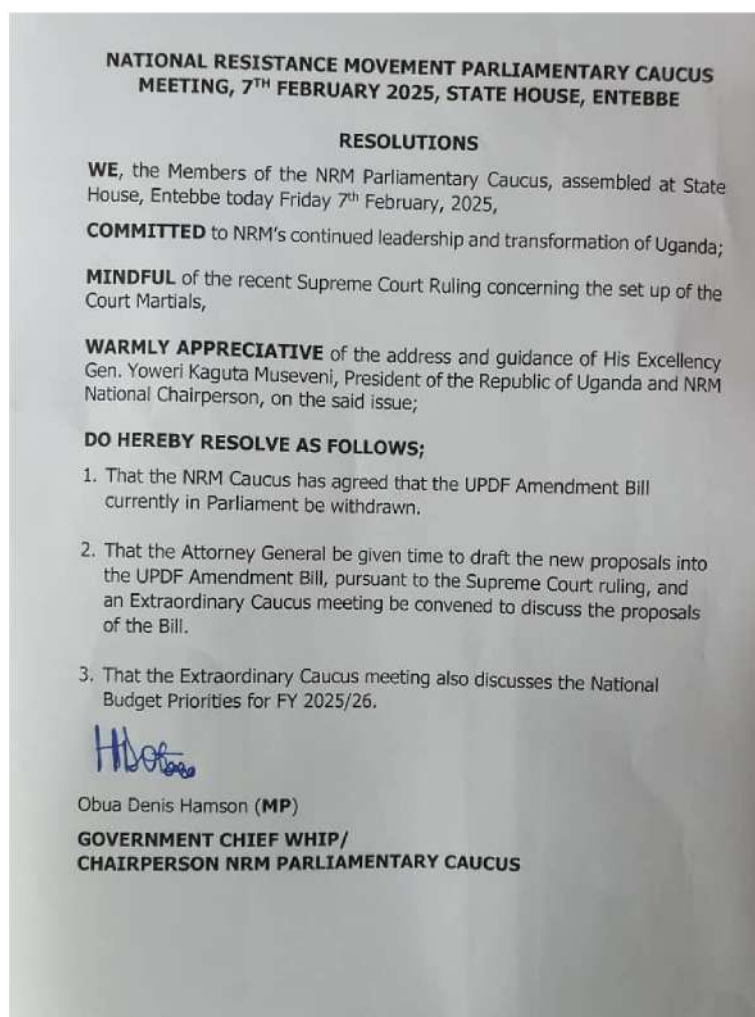
298. This chapter analyses the Bill principally as it stood in the revised draft of February 2025. The UPDF (Amendment) Bill, 2025 was tabled in Parliament on May 13, 2025, passed on May 20, 2025 and assented to by the President on June 12, 2025 (announced on June 16). It came into force on June 27, 2025 as the UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025 (Act 8 of 2025).

299. Constitutional Appeal No. 02 of 2021 (arising out of Constitutional Petition No. 45 of 2016).

300. Court delivered its judgement on January 31, 2025.

134. UPDF, “Statement of the CDF-UPDF at the 44th Tarehe Sita Anniversary, Kyotera, Greater Masaka Region”, February 7, 2025, <https://www.updf.go.ug/tarehe-sita/statement-of-the-cdf-updf-at-the-44th-tarehe-sita-anniversary-kyotera-greater-masaka-region/>; Pulse Uganda, “It’s unacceptable’ – Muhoozi rebukes Supreme Court in fiery Tarehe Sita speech”, February 6, 2025.

the decision of the Supreme Court—never mind the express prohibition by the Constitution³⁰¹, on legislation that seeks to alter the decision or judgment of any court as between the parties to the decision or judgment. The leader of the NRM Caucus and Ajuri County Member of Parliament Hamson Obua stated that rather than introduce piecemeal amendments, it was prudent to withdraw the 2024 bill and replace it with a comprehensive proposal that incorporates the Supreme Court ruling.



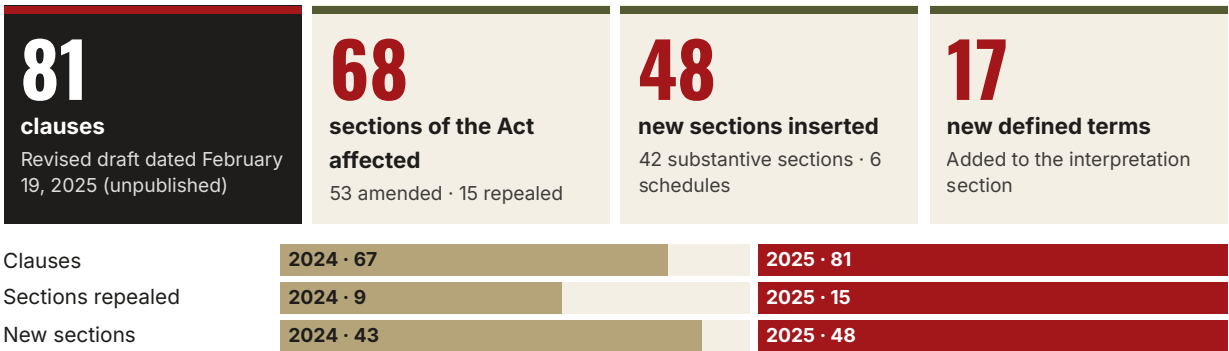
Resolutions of the NRM Parliamentary Caucus meeting at State House, Entebbe, February 7, 2025: Withdraw the UPDF Amendment Bill and redraft it "pursuant to the Supreme Court ruling".

A follow-up NRM caucus meeting in February 2025 received the revised "The Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces Bill, 2025".³⁰² The 2025 Bill contains 81 clauses seeking to amend 68 sections, repeal 15 sections and add 42 new substantive sections. At least 17 new terms are also added in the interpretation section.

³⁰¹. Article 92 of the 1995 Constitution

³⁰². See Revised Draft of 19th February, 2025 (unpublished).

FIGURE 38 Basic facts about the UPDF (Amendment) Bill, 2025 (revised draft of February 19, 2025)



Source: Revised draft of the UPDF (Amendment) Bill, February 19, 2025 (unpublished).

Devoid of serious scrutiny, the UPDF Amendment Bill 2025 can pass as a legitimate and progressive piece of legislation. Looked at this way, the Bill is presented as an effort to correct anomalies within the UPDF by codifying administrative changes within the force, providing for health care and pension services for the members of the force or establishing an “independent” judiciary system whose jurisdiction goes beyond maintenance of basic military discipline to a fully fledged court system capable of trying civilians for certain designated offenses. However, a deeper analysis of the scope, content, timing and legislative history of the Bill shows that the Bill fundamentally changes the structure and balance of power by shifting power from “WE THE PEOPLE” to the military. As President Museveni declared soon after the passing of the Bill, “those children in parliament” saved the country from trouble by passing the Bill and “avoiding a potential confrontation” between him (the army), the legislature and the judiciary. It is therefore important to conclude this paper by paying attention to the fundamental aspects of the Bill.

6.2.2 The scope of coverage of the Bill and the Act

The Bill was passed by Parliament on May 20, 2025 and assented to by the President on June 12, 2025 as the Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (Amendment) Act, 2025 (Act 8 of 2025), which came into force on June 27, 2025.³⁰³ We examine the Bill as tabled, because its legislative history shows what the regime set out to achieve; the principal changes carried into the Act are summarised in **Figure 40**, and where a provision discussed below became law, we say so.

The 2025 UPDF amendment Bill can best be described as driving a vehicle with eyes fixed in the rear-view mirror. On face value, the proposed amendment bill is a legislation about “strengthening” the UPDF. In the rear-view mirror, the Bill resurrects the FRONASA and NRA rebel outfits whose founder was also their leader and commander. This is evident from the proposed institutional architecture, the lack of clear mechanisms for civilian control and oversight of the military, the codification of the structures rejected by parliament but established through administrative action, and the historical hangover of legislating the members of the NRA into the post 1995 constitutional governance architecture of the military. Effectively, the proposed Bill 2025 establishes a parallel military government vested with executive, legislative and judicial powers. By seeking to extend the jurisdiction of military courts over civilians and traditional criminal law offences, the Bill potentially turns every Ugandan into

³⁰³. Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (Amendment) Act, 2025 (Act 8 of 2025), assented to on June 12, 2025, <https://ulii.org/akn/ug/act/2025/8>; The EastAfrican, “Uganda passes law allowing civilian trials in military courts”, May 20, 2025; The Observer, “Museveni signs controversial UPDF Amendment Act into law”, June 16, 2025.

an “unlawful combatant.” By every measure, the proposed Bill completes Museveni’s transformation of the military into an instrument of control and oppression.³⁰⁴

“ By seeking to extend the jurisdiction of military courts over civilians, the Bill potentially turns every Ugandan into an “unlawful combatant”.

TABLE 13 How the objectives grew: The 2024 Bill, the unpublished 2025 draft and the published 2025 Bill compared

Objective	2024 Bill	2025 draft (unpublished)	2025 Bill (published)
Streamline the composition of the organs of the Defence Forces	●	●	●
Autonomy of pensions management; Pension Appeals Board	—	●	◐
Establish a Health Care Service	●	●	●
Establish the Medical Board	●	●	●
Define service offence, court martial, military court and Reserve Force	—	●	●
Restructure and re-establish the courts martial (Art. 129)	—	●	●
Membership, qualifications and independence of courts martial chairpersons	—	●	●
Appeals from the courts martial	—	●	◐
Exceptional circumstances in which civilians are subject to military law	—	●	●
Establish a Military Courts Department	—	●	●
Disciplinary unit for the Military Courts Department	—	●	●
Arms and ammunition that are the monopoly of the Defence Forces; classified stores	—	●	●
Management of veteran affairs	●	●	●
Repeal the Uganda Veterans Assistance Board Act	●	●	●
Number of objectives	5	14	12 + memorandum

● stated objective · ◐ appears only in the memorandum (“intention of the Bill”) · — absent. Courts-martial and civilian-jurisdiction objectives (shaded) appear only after the Supreme Court’s January 2025 ruling.

Source: UPDF (Amendment) Bill, 2024; revised draft of February 19, 2025; UPDF (Amendment) Bill, 2025.

304. In the bail application of Kizza Besigye and Obeid Lutale (High Court, ruling of April 11, 2025), Justice Rosette Comfort Kania found that the sureties were substantial and the other bail requirements satisfied, but nonetheless denied bail, citing the gravity of the charges and ongoing investigations.

FIGURE 39 From establishment to statute: What the UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025 did with the structures of the UPDF Establishment, 2021

How the structures in Figure 34, Figure 35 and Figure 42 map onto what Parliament enacted in May 2025.



The pattern. Parliament wrote into law what the Establishment had already built (the two extra services, the joint command, the health and veterans’ machinery) and widened military jurisdiction over civilians beyond anything in the Establishment. The courts gained legal qualifications and an exit to the civilian appellate courts, but prosecution, adjudication and the political commissariat all remain inside the UPDF. Only the head of defence intelligence appears in the law, as a member of the Joint Military Command.

Source: UPDF Establishment, 2021; UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025 (Act 8 of 2025, assented June 12, 2025); section numbers as in the principal Act (Cap. 330) as amended. Compiled by the authors.

Figure 40 completes the sequence with the UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025, read from the text of the Act as gazetted on June 27, 2025.

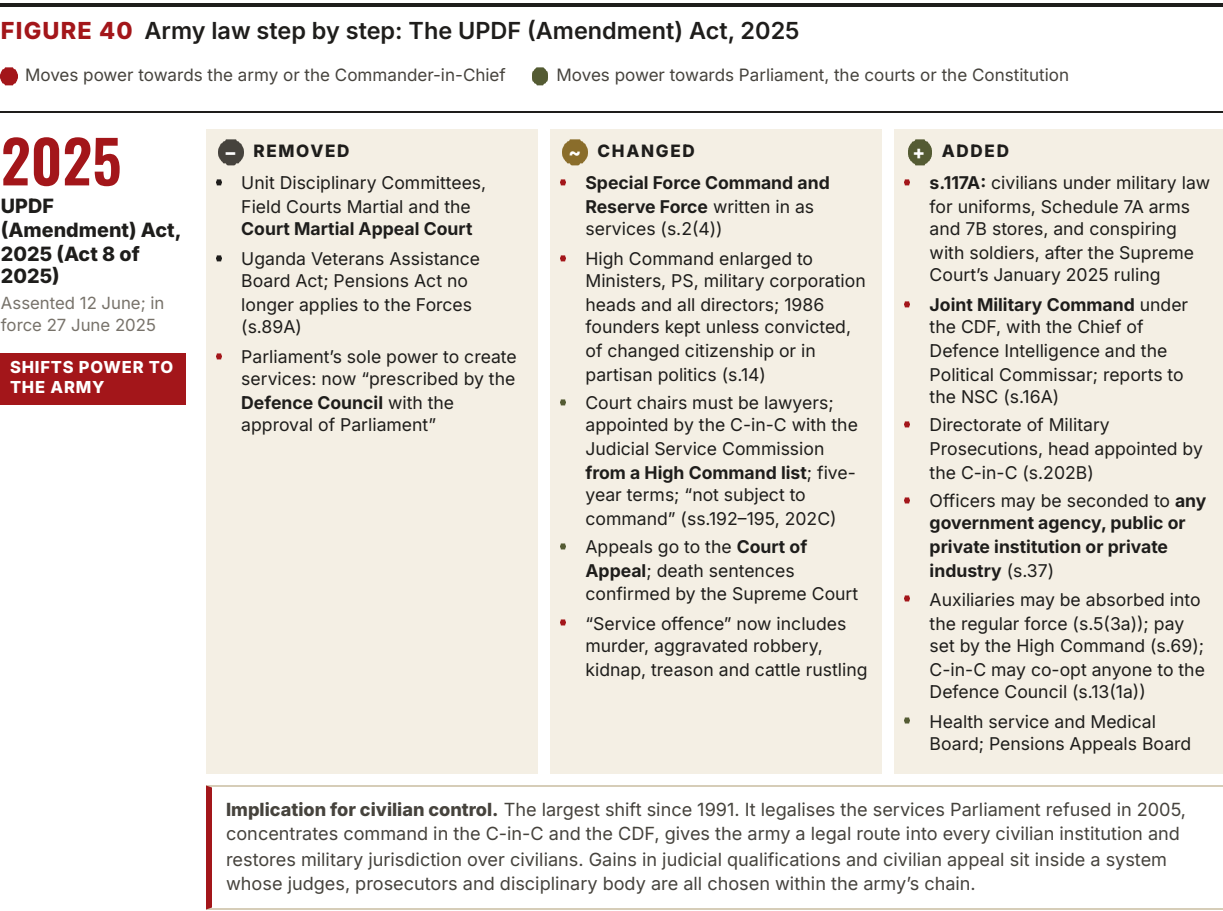
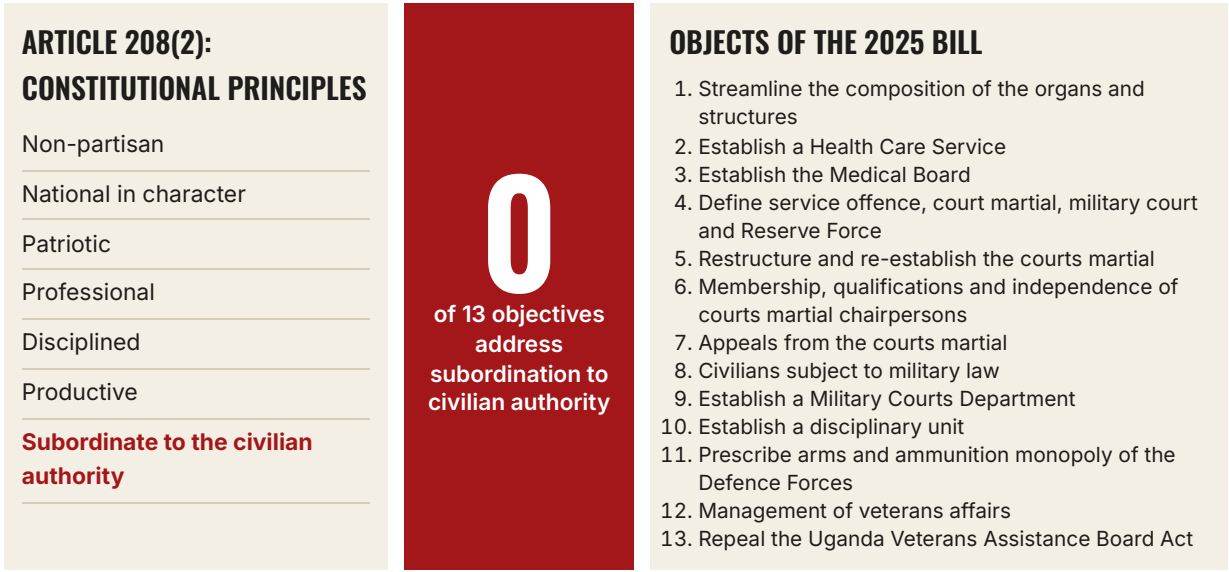


FIGURE 41 The UPDF Amendment Bill’s objectives tested against the constitutional principles of a national army



Source: Constitution of Uganda, 1995, Art. 208; UPDF (Amendment) Bill, 2025. Assessment by the authors.

6.3.1 Composition of the Defence Forces

Article 210 vests the authority to regulate the UPDF in Parliament. The Constitution establishes boundaries for such legislation to cover:

- a. The organs and structure of the UPDF
- b. Recruitment, appointment, promotion, discipline and removal of members of defence forces and ensuring that members of the UPDF are recruited from every district of Uganda
- c. Terms and conditions of service of members of the UPDF; and
- d. The deployment of troops outside Uganda

In 2005, the composition of the UPDF was prescribed by Parliament to include:

- a. The land forces
- b. The air-force
- c. Any other force prescribed by parliament

However, over the last 2 decades, President Museveni has presided over the metamorphosis of what used to be the Presidential Guard Brigade (PGB) as a dedicated presidential protection unit into the SFC. The SFC is for all intents and purposes a separate formation parallel to the regular army. Under the UPDF Establishment and the proposed legislation, the SFC is expected to be integrated as part of the national army. However, given its control and command structure, it is envisaged that it will remain a specialised parallel force with the capabilities to rival or even be superior to the regular force.

The Reserve Force has also since been established as a standing reserve force akin to the reserve force envisaged under the National Resistance Army Statute 1992. Today, the Reserve Force constitutes an elaborate military structure embedded within the public sphere with command and control structures up to the sub-county level. From a positive perspective, the reserve force members are engaged in a wide range of economic and public service activities. However, the

involvement of its personnel in electoral politics demonstrates its potential as an embedded infrastructure for election abuses and violence.

President Museveni established the NRA in 1981. Through Legal Notice No. 1, of 1986, the NRA captured the Ugandan state and declared itself the Nation's army. The 1991 NRA statute triggered the process of codifying the NRA into a national army which was capped by the 1995 constitution baptising it the UPDF. During the process of enacting the 2005 UPDF Act, Museveni sought to regularise the Presidential Guard Brigade (PGB) and the Reserve Force which was established administratively over a period of 10 years without enabling legislation. However, Museveni ignored the decision of parliament and proceeded to establish the two forces into fully fledged services that he seeks to codify by legislation under the proposed bill. Clause 2 of the proposed Bill proposes to retrospectively regularise these two services to be recognised as part of the composition of the UPDF.

The Bill provides that the UPDF shall be comprised of “(e) any other service prescribed by the Defence Council (emphasis ours) with the approval of parliament.” The term ‘prescribe’ is a term of art in law with profound implications. The mandate of prescribing legislation under the Constitution is reserved for parliament and it is an oxymoron to purport to delegate such mandate to the Defence Forces Council. Besides, the presentation of legislation to parliament is a function of the responsible cabinet minister. There is clearly no justification why Parliament should expect proposals regarding the composition of the UPDF from the Defence Council other than through a Bill presented to it by the responsible minister. In effect, this provision represents another case of where parliament has consistently legislated its powers away to the executive branch of government.

6.3.2 The escape clause: Auxiliary forces

Auxiliary forces are defined under the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces Act, 2005 (as amended) to mean “Home Guards, Local Defence Forces and vigilantes.” This is an escape clause which the regime has previously used to “smuggle” a variety of vigilante groups into the UPDF without conforming to the recruitment procedures prescribed by parliament. The 2025 proposed amendment Bill entrenches this escape clause by further providing that “Members of the auxiliary forces absorbed or called upon for service in the Reserve Force may be absorbed into the regular forces.” This provision implies that a person can raise home guards or local defence units or a vigilante group such as Muhoozi Kainerugaba's PLU, NRM's Vote Guardians or NUP's Foot Soldiers that later gets absorbed into the regular force in contravention of the recruitment procedures prescribed by parliament. Effectively, the current administration is asking parliament to legislate away its powers of regulating recruitment.

The 2025 amendments, now law, overhaul the organs and structure of the UPDF in a variety of ways.

6.3.3 The Defence Forces Council and the High Command

Besides the Commander-in-Chief, the highest statutory organ of the Ugandan military is the Defence Forces Council established under section 13 of the Act.³⁰⁵ The Council is established largely as an advisory organ and generally has no authority over matters of national defence or military policy, which seem to be vested in the President. The amendments as tabled sought to

³⁰⁵. Section 13 of Cap 330

change and increase the membership of the Council by including commandants of training institutions, the Defence Forces Sergeants Major and all Regional Reserve Force Commanders under the Reserve Force.³⁰⁶ In addition, the Act (section 13(1a)) changes the structure of the Defence Forces Council by giving power to the Commander-in-Chief to “co-opt any person to attend a meeting of the Defence Forces Council for the purposes of assisting the Council on a particular matter...” The framers of the Bill do not provide any rationale for such an open mandate given to the Commander-in-Chief, given that this is a statutory organ whose membership should be definitively determined by law.

The High Command is established under section 14 of the Act. The High Command comprises of senior army officers, including the “members of the High Command as of 26th January 1986.”³⁰⁷ The Act now excludes a member of the January 1986 High Command who may have been convicted of any criminal offence or changed citizenship or has joined active partisan politics.³⁰⁸ The Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces Act provided for the membership of the following liberation organisations in the High Command:

- i. National Resistance Movement (NRM)
- ii. Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF)
- iii. Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM)
- iv. Former Uganda National Army (FUNA)
- v. Save Uganda Movement (SUM)
- vi. Federal Democratic Movement (FEDEMO)
- vii. Front for National Salvation (FRONASA)
- viii. Uganda National Liberation Front/Anti Dictatorship (UNLF/ANTI DICTATORSHIP) (RWENZORI FRONT)
- ix. Kikosi Malumu

Again, in this case, the law gives discretion to the President to co-opt the commanders of these groups as members of the High Command. Besides, this discretion is expanded under section 14(1) (m) which allows the President to co-opt “such other commanders and experts” from time to time. Unless this is a case of bad drafting, it is curious that any legislation would fail to determine the definitive membership of these statutory organs of the Army and instead create room for mischief and potential abuse of power. In practice, many institutions exercise discretion to invite non-members to provide technical, expert and other forms of advice and services. There appears to be no rationale for providing for such discretionary powers since the law was first enacted in 2005. It is therefore curious that the proposed amendment to the law is not only silent on the anomaly but also extends it to other organs. Legislating such blanket discretionary powers creates room for the holder of such powers to fundamentally alter the structure of the Council from that envisaged by the legislature.

Generally, the Defence Forces Council should be one of the institutions through which civilian control of the military may be vested. The Defence Forces Council would bring together the civilian and top military leadership to constitute the top policy organ on both military matters

³⁰⁶. Section 6, The Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (Amendment) Bill, 2025 (unpublished draft version of February 19, 2025).

³⁰⁷. Cap 330, Third Schedule

³⁰⁸. Of the surviving members of this group, Yoweri Museveni and Matayo Kyaligonza would be affected. Since Museveni would still be a member of the High Command by virtue of being President and Commander-In-Chief, it is only Kyaligonza who would be directly affected by this provision. The position of the other two surviving members – David Tinyefuza and Salim Saleh Akandwanaho is not clear since their current partisan affiliation cannot be easily ascertained.

and national defence policy. To the contrary, the Defence Forces Council is a bloated forum mainly comprising of military personnel who are also members of the High Command. The proposed Bill perpetuates the current status quo and makes no attempt to de-link the policy function from the administrative and operational functions of the military which would be the preserve of the High Command. The realistic and nuanced position would be to include the top leadership of the army in the Defence Forces Council. These would include the CDF, the Joint Chief of Staff and the Service Commanders.

The current organisational structure of the UPDF as provided for under the Act, as amended in 2025, suffers from three major shortfalls.

First, the structure does not address the division of mandate between what should be a civilian oriented Defence Forces Council with policy mandate and the army oriented High Command responsible for the command, control and administration of the Army. By legislating to make the members of the High Command also members of the Defence Forces Council, the lines of responsibility and accountability are blurred and tilted away from civilian control in favour of military control. Legislative efforts coming 3 decades after the promulgation of the 1995 Constitution should not be reversing to a 1986 position but rather should be focused to fulfilling the promise of the Constitution to establish a military subordinate to civilian authority.

Secondly, the law is overloaded with a wide range of administrative structures. Other than the Defence Forces Council, the High Command, the Joint Military Command, the courts martial and maybe the Defence Forces Fund, most of the other structures are largely of an administrative nature and may not necessarily be provided for by statute. In the pursuit of prescribing functions for these administrative structures, the law ends up mixing up policy mandates with command and control functions and administrative mandates.

Thirdly, it is also difficult to find any reasonable explanations as to why a new UPDF legislation in 2025 is seeking to carry forward the historical baggage of FRONASA and NRA. Over the course of the study, we interacted with several army officers who could only speak off the record given the sensitivity of discussing matters related to the UPDF. The unanimous view which is also reflected in all legislation processes about the UPDF is that the officers and men of the military consider themselves a national army. However, in President Museveni's mind, UPDF is his personal army not much different from his original FRONASA and NRA outfits. The UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025 has no clear provisions that seek to entrench the spirit of the 1995 Constitution. On the contrary, the Act is driven by the UPDF establishment which focuses more on the command, control and administration of the military. In the process, the resulting legislation can only undermine the very principle of subordination to civilian authority which is supposed to be the cornerstone of Uganda's armed forces in the post 1995 constitutional dispensation.

The function of civilian control of the military is through the President's dual role as both president and Commander-In-Chief. However, Uganda is in a unique position in the sense that President Museveni who established the NRA and presided over its declaration as a national army remains its Commander-In-Chief to date. Going by the record and actions of selected army officers who over the years³⁰⁹ either campaign for Museveni or declare that they cannot support another person as president, it is clear that the transformation of NRA into UPDF remains

³⁰⁹. Faustin Mugabe, When soldiers were accused of making political statements, Daily Monitor, May 22, 2022, accessed at <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/when-soldiers-were-accused-of-making-political-statements-3822834> on March 20, 2025

incomplete until the UPDF officers and men can salute another president who is not the rebel leader of the NRA. It is therefore tenable to argue that the UPDF appears subordinate to the Commander-in-Chief not because of its professionalism but because of its historical connection to NRA and its rebel leader.

Another important tier of civilian control over the military is the legislature which is mandated to make laws to govern its establishment, command, control and deployment. The exercise of its mandate is therefore exercised through legislation and budgetary appropriations to finance army operations including promotions, deployment, procurement, etc. In practice, this mandate is also exercised through work of appropriate parliamentary committees, in particular the Committee on Defence and Internal Affairs. However, at the moment, it is clear that the parliament has no control over the military. This is evidenced by a number of recent events. In February 2025, the CDF Muhoozi Kainerugaba ignored a summons by the Defence Committee.³¹⁰ During the February 2025 army day celebrations at Kasasa in Kyotera District, Muhoozi Kainerugaba delivered what would be considered a policy speech regarding the army while the Minister of Defence and Veteran Affairs, Jacob Oboth Oboth, was relegated to peripheral emcee role of introducing to the president the officials who were present for the celebrations.

6.3.4 Unlawful combatants: From military courts to martial law

On November 16, 2024, one of Uganda's leading opposition politicians Kizza Besigye was kidnapped in the Kenyan capital Nairobi, returned to Uganda under unclear circumstances and subsequently arraigned before the General Court Martial. Besigye was charged with one of his aides, Hajj Obeid Lutale, and later with a serving officer, Capt. Denis Oola.³¹¹ The Besigye case followed the now consistent practice where President Museveni uses the court martial to lock up his political rivals ranging from high profile personalities like Kizza Besigye to regular citizens such as young activists that subscribe to the National Unity Platform (NUP). Before the Court Martial, Museveni, as President and Commander-in-Chief, is essentially the complainant, the investigator, the prosecutor, the judge and the executioner.

The controversial nature of the case and the arraignment of the two civilian suspects in the General Court Martial ignited a long standing demand for the Uganda Supreme Court to deliver a judgement in the case of Kabaziguruka³¹² where matters related to trial of civilians in the court martial were meant to be addressed.

The Supreme Court buckled under intense public pressure and delivered its ruling on January 31, 2025. In a 200-page lead judgment, Chief Justice Alfonso Chigamoy Owiny-Dollo set aside the declaration of the Constitutional Court declaring section 117(1)(g) of the UPDF Act which provides that any person, not otherwise subject to military law, who aids or abets a person subject to military law in the commission of a service offence is constitutional. He ordered that all charges, or ongoing criminal trials, or pending trials, before the courts martial involving civilians must immediately cease and be transferred to the ordinary courts of law with competent jurisdiction.

³¹⁰. <https://nilepost.co.ug/gen%20muhoozi%20kainerugaba/237760/muhoozi-rejects-parliament-summons-vows-to-arrest-mps-instead>, visited on 18/04/2025

³¹¹. Nation, "Besigye refuses to take plea at military court", January 2025; Pulse Uganda, "Besigye aide and UPDF officer charged with treason", February 21, 2025.

³¹². Attorney General v Kabaziguruka (Constitutional Appeal 2 of 2021) [2025] UGSC 1 (31 January 2025)

Owiny-Dollo, however, created an escape clause for President Museveni who has long pushed for trial of civilians in the court martial and elimination of the presumption of innocence through denial of bail. Among others, Justice Owiny-Dollo recommended that the Constitution could be amended “to establish superior Courts within the military Court system under Art 129; and clothe them with the requisite jurisdiction and guarantee of independence and impartiality to try specific military offenses of a capital nature and all other capital offenses under existing laws, committed by military personnel.” Justice Owiny-Dollo also recommended that the Executive and Parliament could “make provision in the UPDF Act for trial of civilians in military courts to be only under limited circumstances; and only after the State has concretely demonstrated to the court by verifiable facts, and by objective and serious reasons, the need and justification for recourse to the military court. This must only apply where in relation to the specific class or category of persons and offenses in question, ordinary courts are not in position to undertake such trial.”

Within 24 hours of the Supreme Court ruling, President Museveni came out guns blazing with yet another of his missives that may be characterised as “Letters to Fellow Ugandans, especially the Bazzukulu” (a Bantu word for ‘grandchildren’).³¹³ He characterised the decision as “wrong”, described the judges as “foreign-oriented” and declared that “the country is not governed by the judges”. Museveni called two consecutive meetings of his NRM Parliamentary Caucus and resolved to withdraw an earlier Bill (2024) and replace it with a new Bill that would overturn the Supreme Court decision, largely by entering through the escape window provided by Justice Owiny-Dollo. Muhoozi Kainerugaba, Museveni’s son and CDF speaking at the February 2025 *Tarehe Sita* celebrations declared the Supreme Court ruling “very unfortunate and quite unacceptable”.¹³⁴ Both these men know that the Army is in charge and through the Army, they are in charge.

A revised draft of the Bill was first presented in February 2025. A new clause 117A introduced under Section 30 of the Bill, now section 117A of the Act, provides for the “exceptional circumstances” under which persons other than members of the Defence Forces shall be subject to military law.

³¹³. <https://statehouse.go.ug/h-e-the-presidents-statement-on-supreme-court-decision-against-military-court-martial/>

¹³⁴. UPDF, “Statement of the CDF-UPDF at the 44th Tarehe Sita Anniversary, Kyotera, Greater Masaka Region”, February 7, 2025, <https://www.updf.go.ug/tarehe-sita/statement-of-the-cdf-updf-at-the-44th-tarehe-sita-anniversary-kyotera-greater-masaka-region/>; Pulse Uganda, “‘It’s unacceptable’ – Muhoozi rebukes Supreme Court in fiery Tarehe Sita speech”, February 6, 2025.

BOX 6 Clause 30 of the 2025 draft: Insertion of section 117A — “Other persons subject to military law”

(1) A person, other than a member of the Defence Forces, shall be subject to military law under the following exceptional circumstances —

- a. where the person voluntarily accompanies any unit or other element of the Defence Forces which is in active service in any place;
- b. where the person, while serving with the Defence Forces under an engagement by which he or she has agreed to be subject to military law;
- c. where the person in unlawful possession of arms, ammunition or equipment ordinarily being the monopoly of the Defence Forces, prescribed in Schedule 7A, or classified stores prescribed in Schedule 7B, commits an offence under any written law;
- d. where the person aids or abets a person subject to military law in the commission of, or conspires with a person subject to military law to commit — (i) murder; (ii) aggravated robbery; (iii) kidnap with intent to murder; (iv) treason; (v) misprision of treason;
- e. where the person, without authority, is found in possession of, sells or wears a uniform of the Defence Forces;
- f. where the person is found in unlawful possession of — (i) arms, ammunition or equipment ordinarily being the monopoly of the Defence Forces, prescribed in Schedule 7A; or (ii) classified stores as prescribed in Schedule 7B;
- g. where the person is serving in the position of an officer or a militant of any force raised and maintained outside Uganda and commanded by an officer of the Defence Forces.

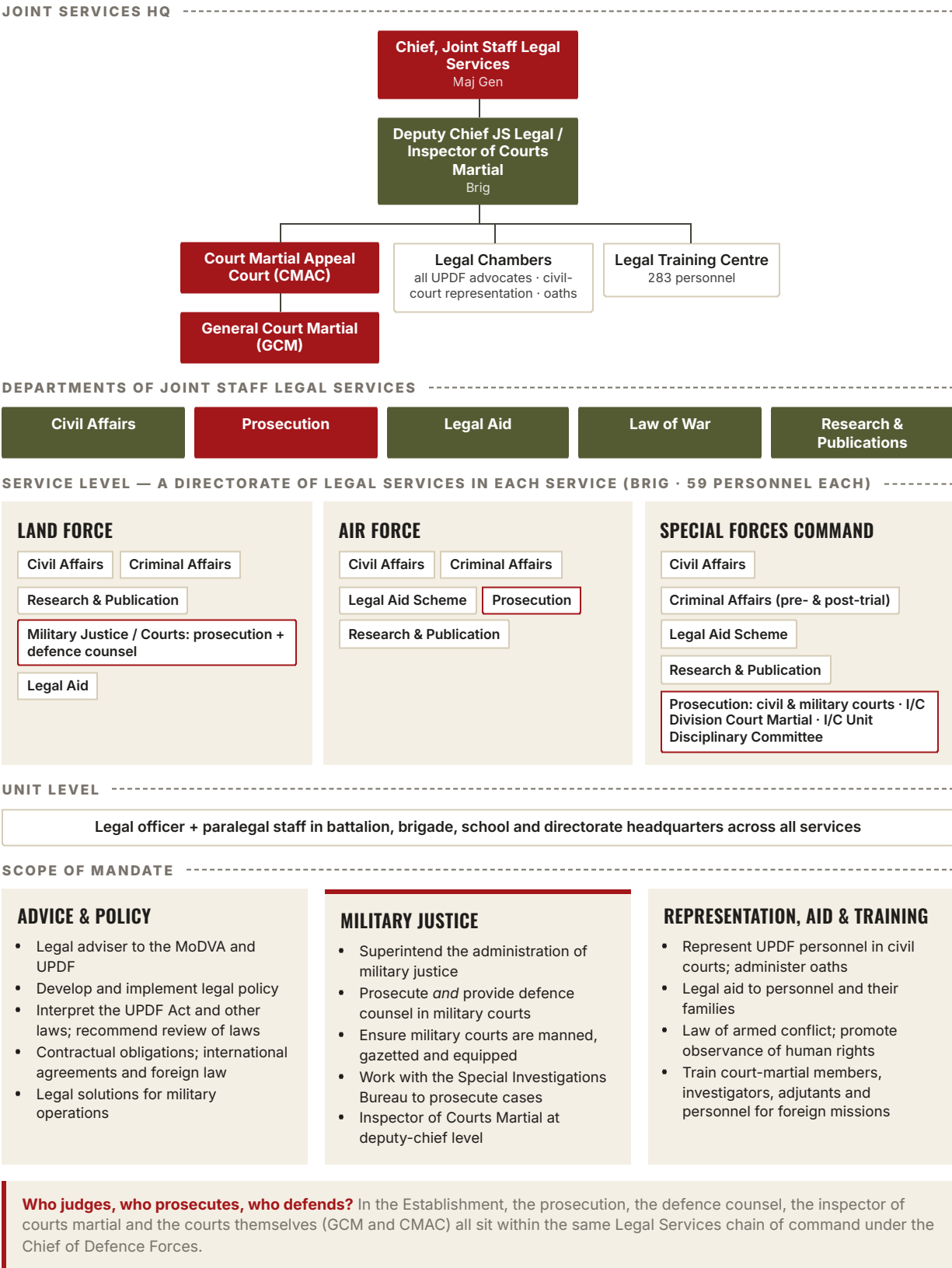
Source: UPDF (Amendment) Bill, 2025, revised draft of February 19, 2025. Emphasis added.

Beside overturning the structure of power established under the 1995 constitution and vesting it in the military, the effect of these provisions is to declare every Ugandan citizen an unlawful combatant. Effectively, if you find yourself near someone with a gun or someone with a gun comes close to you, you can easily find yourself in the court martial. All that President Museveni needs is to get you before the court martial, deny you bail and have you locked up as ‘investigations are going on’. The elaborate appellate structure proposed by the bill represents the authoritarian’s rule book on how citizens can be locked up ‘legally’ until their innocence is established at the end of the process. The bill establishes a military judicial system that provides no remedy for its innocent victims.

Most importantly, the Act establishes an elaborate military judiciary system parallel to the civil judiciary system.

FIGURE 42 The UPDF legal services: Structure and scope of mandate

Joint Staff Legal Services is “responsible for Military Justice, Military Law and Legal advisor to the MoDVA/UPDF” and is “charged with both defence and prosecution of Military law” (para. 3.190). The General Court Martial and the Court Martial Appeal Court appear inside its organogram.



Source: UPDF Establishment, 2021, paras 3.190–3.204 and Figure 3-37 (Joint Staff Legal Services); paras 4.97–4.99 (Land Force), 5.104–5.105 (Air Force), 6.132–6.134 (SFC); Table 3-103. Simplified and redrawn by the authors.

6.3.5 Imposition of martial law

Uganda's judiciary system is grounded in Article 126 of the 1995 Constitution. The Constitution accordingly provides thus:

"126.(1) Judicial power is derived from the people and shall be exercised by the courts established under this Constitution in the name of the people and in conformity with law and with the values, norms and aspirations of the people.

In adjudicating cases of both civil and criminal nature, the courts shall, subject to the law, apply the following principles-

- a. Justice shall be done to all irrespective of their social or economic status*
- b. Justice shall not be delayed*
- c. Adequate compensation shall be awarded to victims of wrongs*
- d. Reconciliation between parties shall be promoted; and substantive justice shall be administered without due regard to technicalities."*

The Constitution provides for two additional important cardinal principles that underpin Uganda's justice system. First, article 128(1) provides, *inter alia*, that "in the exercise of judicial power, the courts shall be independent and shall not be subject to the control or direction of any person or authority." Article 129(1) for its part provides that "the judicial power of Uganda shall be exercised by the Courts of Judicature which shall consist of-

- a. The Supreme Court
- b. The Court of Appeal
- c. The High Court of Uganda; and
- d. Such subordinate courts as parliament may by law establish, including Qadhi's courts for marriage, divorce, inheritance of property and guardianship, as may be prescribed by parliament."

The imposition of martial law presupposes a condition in which the civil courts are unable to enforce their processes and is justified by the necessity of society protecting itself during an emergency period until the civil courts may again resume their proper functions.

"When martial law prevails, the civil power is superseded by the military power, and the ordinary safeguards to individual rights are for the time being set aside, but it is incumbent on those who administer it to act in accordance with the principles of justice, honor, and humanity and the laws and usages of war".³¹⁴

6.4 A parallel military government in formation

Three decades after the promulgation of the 1995 Constitution, President Museveni has effectively established a parallel military government: one that rules by the gun, not by the vote. The Constitution vests the authority of the state in three arms that draw their legitimacy from the people: an executive answerable to Parliament and the electorate, a legislature elected to

³¹⁴. See Digest of Opinions of the Judge Advocate General of the Army, 1912, p. 1079.

make laws, and an independent judiciary that exercises judicial power in the name of the people. Read together, the 2021 UPDF Establishment and the UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025 give the army structures that exercise each of these three functions on its own account, answerable not to the people but to the Commander-in-Chief (Figure 43).³¹⁵

“Three decades after the 1995 Constitution, a parallel military government rules by the gun, not by the vote.”

The executive. At the apex stands the Commander-in-Chief, who is also Chairman of the High Command, an organ whose membership still includes the members of the NRA High Command of January 1986 and which the 2025 Act enlarges to take in ministers, the Permanent Secretary, the heads of military corporations and all directors. Beneath it, the Act creates a Joint Military Command under the CDF, with the Chief of Defence Intelligence and the Political Commissar, which reports to the National Security Council. The Establishment names the Commander-in-Chief, the Minister and the CDF as the “strategic leadership” of the UPDF and places the President inside the Ministry of Defence and Veteran Affairs. Its reach is national: the Reserve Force has command structures down to the sub-county, OWC has officers in every district, and the Act allows officers to be seconded to any government agency, public or private institution or private industry. This is an executive with its own chain of command, its own intelligence, its own economic arm in NEC and OWC, and its own presence in every parish.

The legislature. The power to make rules for the army is passing from Parliament to the army itself. The Establishment, a 2,098-page document adopted administratively in 2021, codified formations, among them the SFC and a standing Reserve Force, that Parliament had declined to legislate in 2005. The 2025 Act then wrote them into law as services of the UPDF and gave the Defence Forces Council, rather than Parliament, the power to prescribe new services, leaving Parliament only to approve them. The High Command sets the pay of auxiliaries, and the Commander-in-Chief may co-opt any person to the Defence Forces Council. The army also sits in the national legislature, through ten representatives, eight of whom voted in 2005 to lift presidential term limits. In effect, the army legislates for itself and helps to legislate for the country.

³¹⁵ Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995, Articles 1, 79, 98–99, 126 and 128; UPDF Establishment, 2021; Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (Amendment) Act, 2025 (Act 8 of 2025), sections 2, 13(1a), 14, 16A, 37, 69, 117A, 192–195 and 202B. The army’s representation in Parliament and the 2005 vote on term limits are discussed in Section 5.10.4.

FIGURE 43 A parallel military government in formation: Three arms of government, constitutional and military

Read together, the 2021 UPDF Establishment and the UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025 give the army structures that exercise executive, legislative and judicial functions, all answerable to the Commander-in-Chief.



Three decades after 1995: a government that rules by the gun, not by the vote.

Source: Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995; UPDF Establishment, 2021; UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025 (Act 8 of 2025), section numbers as amended. Assessment by the authors.

The judiciary. The 2025 Act completes the structure with a system of military justice that runs parallel to the civil courts. The chairpersons of the courts martial are appointed by the

Commander-in-Chief, with the Judicial Service Commission, from a list drawn up by the High Command. The courts try “service offences” that now include murder, aggravated robbery, kidnap and treason, on charges brought by a Directorate of Military Prosecutions whose head the Commander-in-Chief appoints. Section 117A brings civilians under military law for wearing uniforms, possessing scheduled arms and stores, or conspiring with soldiers, months after the Supreme Court ruled such trials unconstitutional. Arrest, interrogation and detention are increasingly carried out by military units, in military facilities, before any civil court sees the suspect. The new requirement that military judges be lawyers, and the right of appeal to the Court of Appeal, do not change the essential fact: the judges, the prosecutors and the disciplinary machinery are all chosen within the army’s chain of command.

What makes this a parallel government, rather than merely an overbearing army, is that each of its arms answers upward to the same person. In the constitutional order, the executive answers to Parliament and to the voters, Parliament to the voters, and the courts to the law. In the military order, the High Command, the Defence Forces Council and the courts martial all answer to the Commander-in-Chief, who is at once the President, the Chairman of the High Command and the founder of the NRA. As the son rises to command the army, the same structure is becoming the vehicle of the succession. Thirty years after the Constitution declared that all power belongs to the people, the government taking shape alongside it rules by the gun, not by the vote.

SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE: THE DAWN OF THE WARRIOR MAD KING SCENARIO

Uganda's 63-year journey from Independence in 1962 to the present has been a traumatising experience of broken promises, unfulfilled pledges, missed opportunities and optimistic resilience about the future. This paper has shown how the spirit of the 1995 Constitution has been undermined, again and again, through the militarisation of civilian-led institutions. With the acquiescence of legislators of the National Resistance Movement (NRM), President Museveni is transforming what the framers of the 1995 Constitution envisaged as a stable and durable constitutional democracy into a constitutional military autocracy. The UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025 completes the alteration of the structure of power that the Constitution established. It restores a parallel military judiciary and turns every citizen into a potential "unlawful combatant". It is not an isolated legal manoeuvre but a structural milestone: it codifies Museveni's long-standing wish to restrict bail and to treat dissent as subversion and economic sabotage, a threat not to an authoritarian regime but to national security.

Our first scenarios paper, published in 2021, set out three possible futures. In the Crested Crane, power passes peacefully, through negotiation, to a new president and a new party. In the Storm in the Teacup, the regime contains the turbulence and the structure of power stays largely unchanged. In the Warrior Mad King, the ruler and his son turn the army on citizens to hold power. We judged the last to be the most likely, but we did not foresee how extreme its violence would become. We described an "unholy trinity" of the President, his son and his brother, in which the son was the *de facto* but not yet the *de jure* commander of the military. Four years later, the son is the Chief of Defence Forces (CDF). This chapter asks how the scenario is likely to unfold through the January 2026 elections and beyond. It does not predict events. It extends into the future, the trends documented in the preceding chapters, using only evidence available up to December 2025, and identifies the signposts by which readers can judge whether the trajectory holds.

7.1 The starting point: Where Uganda stands at the end of 2025

Five conditions, each documented in this paper, define the ground from which the future will unfold.

- i. **The law has been rewritten for the army.** The 2025 UPDF Act restores the military trial of civilians, writes the Special Forces Command (SFC) and the Reserve Force into the law, places a Joint Military Command under the CDF in charge of the war effort, and allows soldiers to be seconded to any public or private body. The 1986 founders of the NRA remain written into its command organs.
- ii. **The army has been handed over to the son.** After a choreographed 25-year rise, Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba was appointed CDF in March 2024 while chairing a political movement, the Patriotic League of Uganda (PLU).
- iii. **The gun is everywhere.** Soldiers command Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), sit in public administration, police the police and run a growing commercial empire, while auxiliaries and vigilante groups multiply around every election.
- iv. **Violence has been normalised and goes unpunished.** From the Yasin Kawuma killing in Arua in 2018 to the 2025 campaign period, the army and the police have killed, abducted and tortured citizens without any commander being held to account.
- v. **The President is ageing, and Parliament has been bought.** At 81, President Museveni is seeking a seventh term. On April 11, 2025, perhaps for the first time, he confirmed in writing that MPs had been paid UGX100 million each (about US\$28,000) to secure their support for legislation of interest to the regime. Through monetary incentives, coercion and economic vulnerability, the majority of NRM MPs have become robotic legislators who meet with him at State House, Entebbe, to plot the next law or supplementary budget.

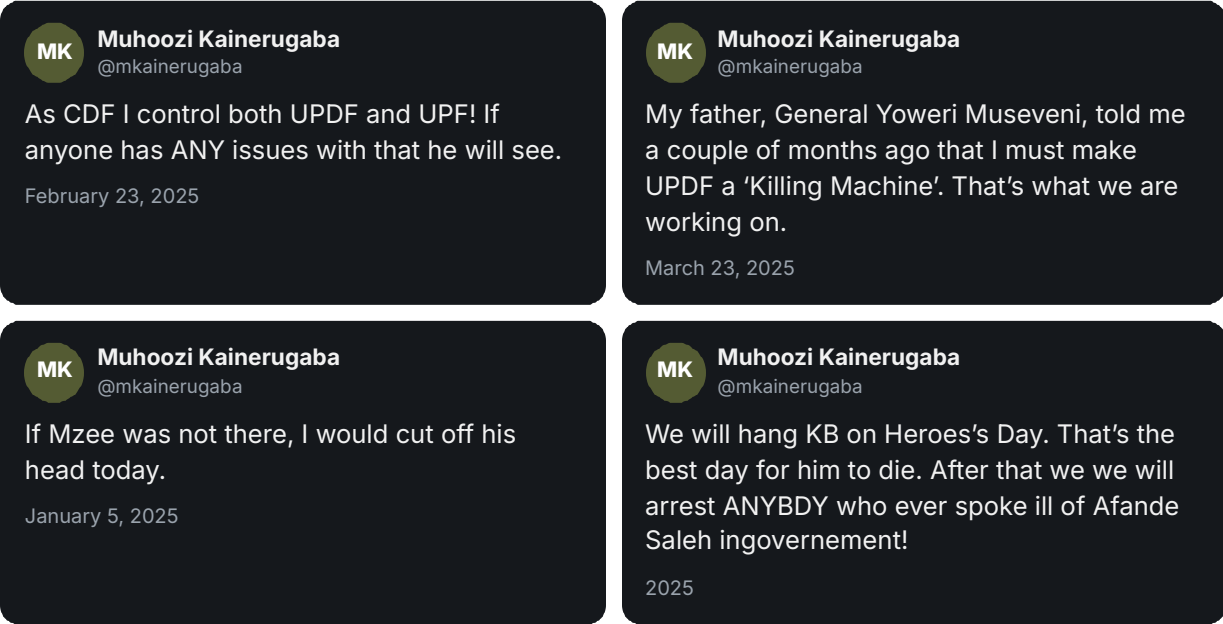
Since his appointment as CDF, Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba has declared his thirst for blood,³¹⁶ threatened to kill Uganda's leading opposition politicians and threatened to arrest members of Parliament (**Figure 44**). Under his tenure, elite units of the Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force (JATT) have been deployed hooded and armed to the teeth, at the Kawempe North by-election among other places.³¹⁷ Whether his father is unable to rein him in or simply acquiesces, the conduct of what should be the nation's most decorated officer portends what is yet to come.

“That Muhoozi Kainerugaba's father, president and Commander-in-Chief is either helpless and not able to rein in his son, or that he is acquiescing in the conduct of what is supposed to be the nation's topmost decorated officer portends what is yet to come.

³¹⁶. In this post on X, he expressed an interest in surpassing President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame's score in "killing his opponents."

³¹⁷. Parliament of Uganda website: <https://www.parliament.go.ug/news/3627/security-excesses-kawempe-north-elections-condemned>, accessed at February 20, 2025; <https://x.com/pwatchug/status/1899700494504804574>

FIGURE 44 “The thirst for blood”: Selected posts by the Chief of Defence Forces on X, 2025



Source: Transcribed verbatim from screenshots of posts on X (formerly Twitter), including original spelling. “UPF” refers to the Uganda Police Force; “KB” to Kizza Besigye. The post of January 5, 2025, aimed at Robert Kyagulanyi (Bobi Wine), is as quoted by Reuters (“Yoweri Museveni’s son Muhoozi Kainerugaba says he wants to behead opposition leader Bobi Wine”, January 7, 2025).

7.2 How the scenario unfolds: Ten trends

On the evidence to December 2025, the warrior mad king scenario is likely to unfold along ten connected trends. The first seven follow directly from the record presented in this paper; the last three are deduced from it. **Table 14** summarises each trend, the evidence behind it and the signposts to watch.

7.2.1 The army is bequeathed to the son, and takes on his violent posture

The handover of the UPDF from father to son will continue, and it will define the character of the army. President Museveni has spent three decades moving his son through the ranks, from LDU recruiter to CDF, and the 2025 Act gives the CDF command of the war effort through the Joint Military Command. The son’s own account of his mandate is explicit: on March 23, 2025, he wrote that his father had told him to make the UPDF a “killing machine”, and “that’s what we are working on” (**Figure 44**). The violence record already shows the shift, from shooting in the streets to abduction and torture in military custody. In this scenario, promotions, postings and retirements will increasingly reward personal loyalty to the CDF. The SFC and the counter-terrorism units will become the main instruments of internal control, and the army will treat citizens who oppose the succession as enemies to be defeated rather than as voters to be won over.

7.2.2 The ageing father retreats, but remains the son’s only source of validation

As he ages, President Museveni is likely to retreat into the background and let his son run the show, while remaining the sole source of the son’s legitimacy. The pattern is already visible. When the son, in posts on social media, threatened to invade Kenya in October 2022, the President apologised publicly, removed him from the Land Forces command but, at the same

time, promoted him to full general. When a lawyer challenged the birthday campaigns in court, the President defended them as the work of supporters with “the spirit of the resistance movement”. The CDF announces deployments on X of which the Minister of Defence and Veteran Affairs says he knew nothing. In this scenario, the President presides over ceremonies and elections and validates his son’s actions after the fact, and no institution other than the father can check the son. The arrangement is fragile, because the son’s authority derives from the father’s. If the presidency falls vacant, the Constitution requires the Vice President to act and a fresh election to be held within six months, and the CDF would command the army that secures that election.³¹⁸

7.2.3 Violence against opponents intensifies, and survivors flee into exile

The CDF is likely to become more violent towards potential and perceived opponents, and many of those who survive abduction and death will flee into exile. His posts have promised to hang Kizza Besigye on Heroes’ Day and to arrest anyone who ever spoke ill of his uncle (Figure 44). He announced that Eddie Mutwe was “in my basement”, and the bodyguard later appeared in court bearing signs of torture. The pattern of exile is established: the novelist Kakwenza Rukirabashaija, tortured in military custody over tweets about the President and his son, fled Uganda in February 2022 and reached Germany with the help of the UN refugee agency.³¹⁹ Exile no longer guarantees safety. Besigye was abducted from Nairobi in November 2024 and taken before a court martial in Kampala, and two Kenyan activists were held for 38 days in what the President called “the fridge”. In this scenario, organisers, MPs, journalists and lawyers face targeted abductions; a generation of activists rebuilds in Nairobi, Europe and North America; and security cooperation with neighbouring governments is used to reach those who leave.

7.2.4 Salim Saleh, the third pillar of the “unholy trinity”, takes over the public service and the economy

Gen. Caleb Akandwanaho (Salim Saleh), the President’s brother, the CDF’s uncle and the third pillar of the unholy trinity, is likely to take a more dominant and conspicuous role in managing the public service and the economy, and to align both with the succession project. The foundations are in place. As Chief Coordinator of OWC since 2013, he commands a parallel structure with officers in every district. It supervises the Parish Development Model (PDM), which had transferred Shs3.2 trillion to about 3.27 million people by November 2025, and it plans to expand into processing and agro-industry. It was Saleh, holding no known military office, who pinned the fourth star on his nephew in October 2022, and the nephew has warned that anyone who “ever spoke ill of Afande Saleh in government” would be arrested (Figure 44). In this scenario, OWC and the National Enterprise Corporation (NEC) become the channels through which inputs, contracts and jobs reach the parishes, public servants answer to coordinators appointed by army orders, and economic patronage is organised around loyalty to the succession project.

³¹⁸. Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995, Article 109; UPDF Act, 2005, section 99, which requires an officer to resign or retire before seeking political office.

³¹⁹. Africanews, “Author who fled Uganda after ‘torture’ arrives in Germany”, February 23, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn8v9vkkjm0o>

7.2.5 The PLU claims the presidency, and the political class scrambles to align

The PLU, drawing on the power of its chairman as CDF, is likely to become bolder in claiming the presidency for Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba. Driven by fear, patronage, the President's silence and the need for army cover, many NRM politicians and public servants will scramble to align openly with it. The PLU was launched in February 2024 by the NRM's Eastern Uganda chairman, Mike Mukula, and serving MPs sit on its leadership organs. † In June 2026, after this paper's cut-off, the CDF went further: on June 15 he named the new Speaker of Parliament, Jacob Oboth Oboth, and the Deputy Speaker, Thomas Tayebwa, to the PLU Central Committee as his "special envoys to Parliament". Both accepted publicly on X, Oboth Oboth thanking "Gen. MK" for "the unprecedented endorsement and trust" and Tayebwa thanking the "chairman" for "the trust". In accepting partisan appointments from a serving officer, the presiding officers of Parliament acted in violation of their oath of allegiance to the Constitution.³²⁰ They see no problem in supporting a serving officer who openly violates the Constitution they swore to defend. The birthday events show the alignment under way: by 2025, the Commander of the Land Forces, a Cabinet minister and the head of the capital's administration were fronting the CDF's birthday run. The NRM primaries of July 17, 2025, in which ten ministers lost their seats amid violence that the President admitted had caused "some deaths", showed how far the ruling party's own structures had weakened.³²¹ The PLU projects itself as an anti-corruption movement, but the integrity and credibility of some of the leaders within its ranks remain questionable. In essence, joining the PLU is likely to work like taking out an insurance policy: against prosecution, for corrupt leaders; for political patronage, for business people engaged in illicit transactions or seeking access to government procurement; and for security of tenure, for public servants. In this scenario, once the 2026 vote is secured, the PLU openly campaigns for a Muhoozi Kainerugaba presidency in the 2031 elections. Ministers, MPs and senior civil servants declare for it as the price of personal safety, security of office and political patronage, and the NRM becomes a shell around a movement loyal to the son.

“ PLU is perhaps our most contemporary definition of how impunity and cronyism can go hand in hand.

7.2.6 Diplomats shift their attention to the CDF, and fall silent on abuses

Sensing a shift in the centre of power, the diplomatic community is likely to turn its attention tacitly towards the CDF and to become more muted on violence and human rights abuses by the military and affiliated security agencies. The shift has begun (**Figure 16**). Between March 2024 and December 2025, the CDF met diplomats accredited to Uganda 24 times, against none recorded for his predecessor, and met eight heads of state or government. Confrontation has carried no cost. Four months after demanding that the United States Ambassador apologise or

³²⁰. † After the cut-off. New Vision, "Gen. Muhoozi appoints new PLU leaders", June 15, 2026, https://newvision.co.ug/category/news/gen-muhoozi-appoints-new-plu-leaders-NV_235538_062026; New Vision, "Speaker Oboth thanks Gen. Muhoozi for PLU appointment", June 16, 2026, https://www.newvision.co.ug/category/news/speaker-oboth-thanks-gen-muhoozi-for-plu-appoint-NV_235599_062026; Kampala Post, "Gen Kainerugaba appoints Speaker Oboth Oboth, Deputy Tayebwa to overhauled PLU Central Committee", June 15, 2026.

³²¹. State House Uganda, "H.E. the President's statement on the recent NRM primaries", July 20, 2025; Eagle Online, "What next? Ten ministers lose in NRM primaries ahead of 2026 elections", July 18, 2025.

leave, he hosted him and hailed “strong Uganda–U.S. cooperation”, and the suspension of defence cooperation with Germany drew little more than a denial from Berlin. Uganda’s troops in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan make it a partner that Western capitals and neighbours are reluctant to offend (**Figure 45**). The government ended the mandate of the UN human rights office, which closed its Kampala office in August 2023.³²² In this scenario, statements on abuses grow shorter and rarer, security partnerships take precedence over governance, and neighbouring rulers with dynastic projects of their own lend the succession regional legitimacy.

7.2.7 The onslaught on civic space deepens

The onslaught on NGOs, academia, the media and other civic organisations is likely to deepen, through closures, office raids, frozen bank accounts, abductions and arrests. Each of these tools has already been used. In December 2020, the Financial Intelligence Authority froze the bank accounts of the Uganda National NGO Forum and the Uganda Women’s Network on unspecified allegations of terrorism financing.³²³ In January 2021, the President suspended the Democratic Governance Facility, a fund of European donors for governance and human rights work.³²⁴ In August 2021, the NGO Bureau suspended 54 organisations, among them Chapter Four Uganda.³²⁵ Soldiers raided Makerere University in 2019 and the offices of an online broadcaster in 2022. At least 32 journalists were assaulted at Kawempe North in March 2025, and in October 2025 the parliamentary accreditation of journalists from two leading media houses was withdrawn.²⁸¹ With the UPDF Act, 2025, the charges available against civic actors now include offences triable by court martial. In this scenario, the organisations that monitor elections, defend detainees and document abuses are deregistered or starved of funds, their leaders are arrested or driven into exile, and universities and newsrooms practise self-censorship.

³²². JURIST, “UN rights chief closes office in Uganda, expresses concern over human rights violations”, August 6, 2023.

³²³. Daily Monitor, “Govt accuses 2 NGOs of funding terrorism”, December 13, 2020.

³²⁴. Eagle Online, “Museveni suspends Democratic Governance Facility in Uganda”, February 3, 2021, citing the President’s letter of January 2, 2021.

³²⁵. Africanews, “Uganda: Government suspends activities of 54 NGOs”, August 20, 2021.

²⁸¹. UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Uganda: Türk deplores intensifying crackdown on opposition and media ahead of elections”, December 3, 2025.

FIGURE 45 Projecting power abroad: UPDF deployments in Africa, 1996–2025

Since 1996 the UPDF has fought, hunted, kept the peace and protected governments in five countries. At the end of 2025 its troops were in four of them at once, two of them propping up incumbent presidents.

12

deployments in five countries since 1996

4

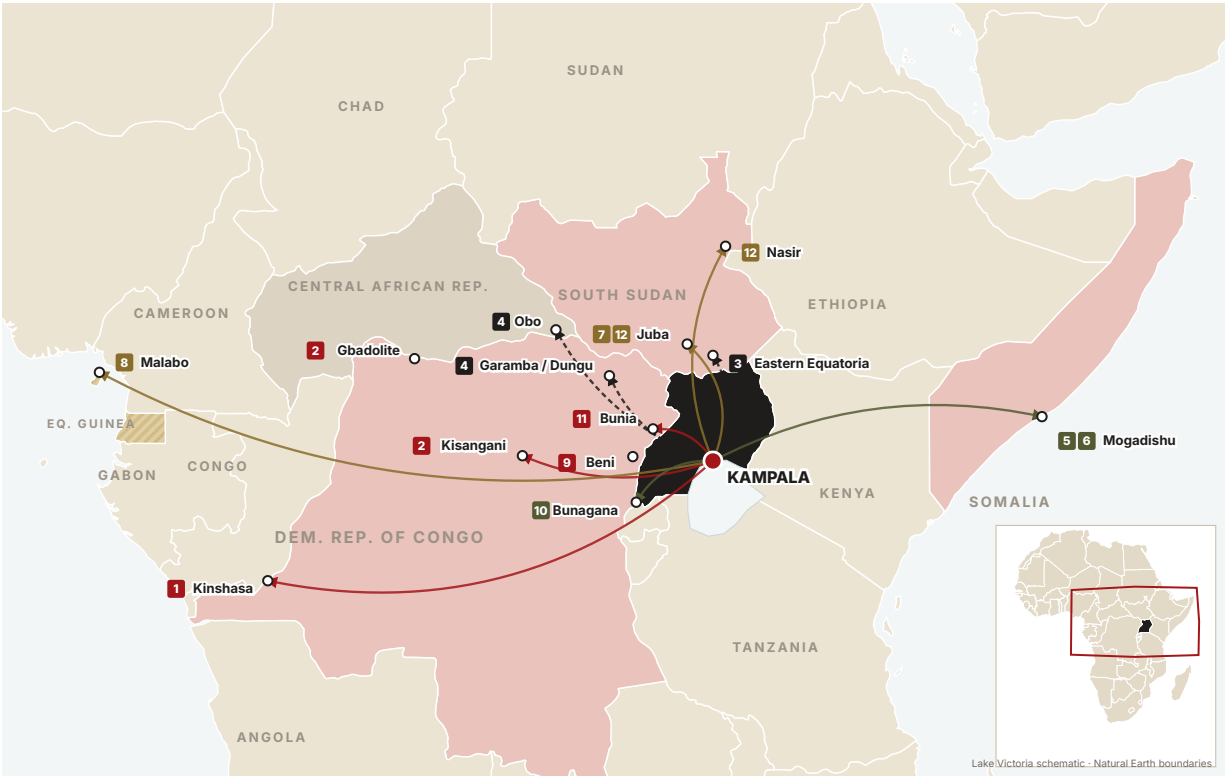
countries with UPDF troops at the end of 2025: DR Congo, Somalia, South Sudan, Equatorial Guinea

5–6,000

troops in Somalia, the largest AU contingent since 2007

US\$325m

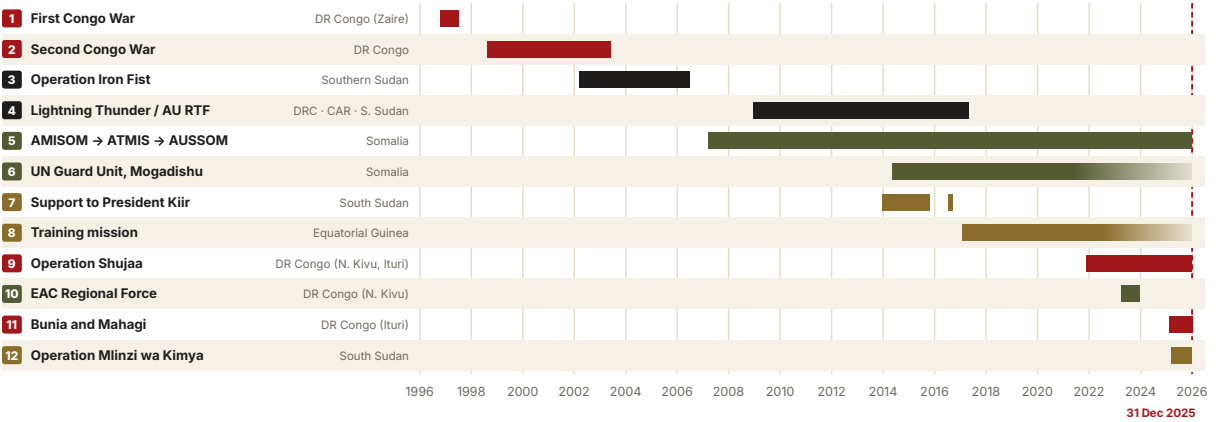
reparations to DR Congo ordered by the ICJ in 2022 for 1998–2003



1 War and intervention 2 Hunt for the LRA 3 AU, UN or regional mission 4 Bilateral support to a ruling government

UPDF present, Dec 2025 Present; current status not published Past theatre only

TIMELINE OF DEPLOYMENTS



NOTES

- 1 First Congo War** (DR Congo (Zaire), 1996–1997). Backed the AFDL march from the east to Kinshasa that installed Laurent-Désiré Kabila, May 1997.
- 2 Second Congo War** (DR Congo, 1998–2003). Occupied much of the north-east with the MLC and RCD rebels; fought Rwanda in Kisangani (1999–2000); withdrew from Ituri in May 2003. The ICJ found Uganda liable in 2005 and fixed reparations at US\$325 million in 2022.

- 3

Operation Iron Fist (Southern Sudan, 2002–2006). Cross-border offensive against LRA bases, with Khartoum’s consent; the LRA moved into Garamba (DRC).
- 4

Lightning Thunder / AU RTF (DRC · CAR · S. Sudan, 2008–2017). Air and ground assault on Garamba (Dec 2008), then a nine-year hunt for Joseph Kony across three countries, with US advisers from 2011; ended April 2017 without capturing him.
- 5

AMISOM → ATMIS → AUSSOM (Somalia, 2007–). First AU troops into Mogadishu, March 2007; largest contingent throughout, about 5,000–6,000 troops; AMISOM became ATMIS (Apr 2022) and AUSSOM (Jan 2025).
- 6

UN Guard Unit, Mogadishu (Somalia, 2014–). Ugandan unit protecting UN staff and premises in Mogadishu from May 2014.
- 7

Support to President Kiir (South Sudan, 2013–2015; 2016). Deployed days after war broke out in Juba, Dec 2013; withdrew after the August 2015 peace deal; brief evacuation operation, July 2016.
- 8

Training mission (Equatorial Guinea, 2017–). About 200 troops from February 2017, 700 by 2020; officially to train the army, reportedly also to protect President Obiang. UPDF said no parliamentary approval was needed. Later status not published.
- 9

Operation Shujaa (DR Congo (N. Kivu, Ituri), 2021–). Joint operations with the FARDC against the ADF from 30 November 2021, with air and artillery strikes.
- 10

EAC Regional Force (DR Congo (N. Kivu), 2023). Contingent at Bunagana and Rutshuru, March–December 2023, as M23 withdrew from the area.
- 11

Bunia and Mahagi (DR Congo (Ituri), 2025–). Took control of Bunia, capital of Ituri, and deployed to Mahagi against CODECO militia, February–March 2025, as M23 seized Goma and Bukavu.
- 12

Operation Mlinzi wa Kimya (South Sudan, 2025–). Special forces, armour and aircraft sent to Juba in March 2025 after the fall of Nasir, to shore up President Kiir; the CDF said Uganda had bombed opposition forces.

What the record shows.

- The missions have moved from wars of intervention (1996–2003) to AU peace operations (from 2007), and now to protecting incumbent governments: Kiir in South Sudan (2013, 2025) and Obiang in Equatorial Guinea (from 2017).
- Command abroad has been a path to the top: Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba was second-in-command of the 2008 Garamba offensive, and Lt Gen Kayanja Muhanga led Operation Shujaa before becoming Commander Land Forces.
- The Constitution (Art. 210) requires Parliament to regulate deployment outside Uganda, yet the Equatorial Guinea and 2025 South Sudan deployments were made by the executive and explained afterwards.

Scope.

- Shows formed UPDF units deployed outside Uganda; officers serving individually in UN missions are not shown.
- The NRA veterans who formed the RPF that invaded Rwanda in 1990 are not shown; that was not a UPDF deployment.
- Status as at 31 December 2025. Where an end date or current strength is not published, the bar fades.

Source: ICJ, Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (2005; reparations 2022); Human Rights Watch; Crisis Group; AU (AMISOM, ATMIS, AUSSOM); UN News (May 2014, UN Guard Unit); Daily Monitor (2017; Jan 2025); Eagle Online (Feb 2017; Feb 2020); The EastAfrican (Dec 2023); VOA (Feb 2025); Al Jazeera and allAfrica (Mar 2025); Bars are approximate to the month; a faded end means the end date is not published. Boundaries: Natural Earth.

7.2.8 Elections become military operations

Elections are likely to be run as military operations, beginning with the January 2026 vote. The army asked for UGX 138.4 billion to secure the 2026 elections. The CDF warned that NUP would “face it off with UPDF at every polling station”, and the army spokesman described the UPDF as “lethal” in response to the opposition’s call to protect the vote. The 2021 precedent, of live bullets, mass abductions and a siege of the main challenger’s home, shows what a contested vote invites. In this scenario, the vote is held under heavy deployment, with abductions before and after polling day and the trial of detainees in military courts. The outcome is secured by force rather than by persuasion, and each successive election, including any held to fill a vacancy, is managed by the CDF.

7.2.9 The law becomes a weapon of the succession

The 2025 UPDF Act is likely to become the main legal instrument of the succession. It turns uniforms, scheduled arms and stores, and conspiracy into offences for which civilians can be tried by court martial. After the Supreme Court ruled in January 2025 that civilians cannot be tried by courts martial, the army announced that the court martial would continue to try Besigye, and Parliament then followed and reversed the ruling. Coupled with the denial of bail to Besigye and his co-accused, Obeid Lutale and Capt. Denis Oola, this shows how detention can be prolonged within the law. With the judiciary severely weakened, staffed in part by what Ugandans now call “cadre judges”, and with judges fearing for their own safety and security of tenure, a pattern is now well established. It can best be described as a military-to-police-to-courts-to-prison pipeline. The army or another security outfit arrests a suspect and holds them

incommunicado, often under torture. The suspect is then handed over to the police, who present them to a court on trumped-up charges, and the court orders their detention on remand. Kakwenza Rukirabashaija was charged and remanded to Kitalya prison after 14 days in unacknowledged military detention; Eddie Mutwe, held in the CDF's "basement", was produced in court bearing signs of torture and remanded. What began as an illegal act by a security agency is thus legalised, step by step, by a compromised police force and by courts of judicature staffed with "cadre" judges, or with judges who are themselves struggling to survive under a military regime.

“What began as an illegal act by a security agency is thus legalised, step by step, by a compromised police force and by courts of judicature.

In this scenario, opponents are charged with treason or with offences under the Act, trials drag on without bail, and the veneer of legality is preserved while the courts lose the power to protect citizens from the army. Literally, by law, every Ugandan perceived to hold views that differ from those of the ruling family becomes a potential unlawful combatant who can be locked up at will, without bail or the guarantee of a fair trial.

7.2.10 Fault lines open inside the regime and the army

The succession is also likely to open fault lines within the regime itself. The NRM old guard, whose ministers were swept away in the 2025 primaries, owes the PLU nothing. Professional officers watch promotions go to loyalty. The shooting of Minister Charles Engola by his own bodyguard in May 2023, apparently over unpaid wages, showed how thin discipline can wear in an army where guns are everywhere. The continental record is a warning. In Gabon in 2023, the guard built to protect a dynasty ended it. In this scenario, the regime responds to these fault lines with purges, retirements and rewards, and the moment of transfer, whenever it comes, becomes the moment of greatest danger.

TABLE 14 The warrior mad king scenario at a glance: Ten trends, the evidence up to December 2025, and the signposts to watch

TREND	EVIDENCE TO DECEMBER 2025	WHAT TO EXPECT	SIGNPOSTS TO WATCH
1 The army is bequeathed to the son	CDF since March 2024; Joint Military Command under the CDF (2025 Act); “make UPDF a killing machine” (March 2025); violence shifts to military custody	Promotions by loyalty; SFC and counter-terrorism units as the main tools of internal control	<i>Purges of senior officers; new SFC and JATT deployments at home</i>
2 The father retreats but validates	Apology and promotion in the same month (Oct 2022); defends the birthday campaigns; Defence Minister unaware of the Juba deployment	The President presides and endorses; the son runs security and foreign relations	<i>Fewer public appearances; the CDF speaking for the state</i>
3 Violence and exile	Threats to hang Besigye; Eddie Mutwe “in my basement”; Kakwenza in exile (2022); Besigye seized in Nairobi (2024); the “fridge” (2025)	Targeted abductions of organisers, MPs, journalists and lawyers; a new generation in exile; cross-border renditions	<i>Asylum claims; renditions from neighbouring capitals</i>
4 Saleh runs the public service and the economy	OWC in every district since 2013; supervises the PDM (Shs3.2tn by Nov 2025); pinned his nephew’s fourth star (2022)	OWC and NEC as the channels of inputs, contracts and jobs; patronage organised around the succession	<i>New coordinators by army orders; OWC moving into processing and procurement</i>
5 The PLU claims the presidency	Launched Feb 2024 with MPs as leaders; ministers and the Land Forces commander at birthday events; ten ministers lose NRM primaries (July 2025)	Open campaign for 2031; ministers, MPs and civil servants declare for the PLU	<i>Signature drives; defections from the NRM old guard; the CDF’s retirement</i>
6 Diplomats turn to the CDF	24 meetings with diplomats and 8 heads of state in 21 months; no cost for confrontations with the US and Germany; UN rights office closed (2023)	Muted statements on abuses; security partnerships before governance; regional dynastic solidarity	<i>Ambassadors’ calls at Mbuya; silence after crackdowns</i>
7 Civic space closes	NGO accounts frozen (2020); Democratic Governance Facility suspended (2021); 54 NGOs suspended (2021); journalists beaten and de-accredited (2025)	Deregistration, raids, frozen funds, arrests of civic leaders; self-censorship in universities and newsrooms	<i>NGO Bureau suspensions; court-martial charges against activists</i>
8 Elections as military operations	UPDF asks UGX 138.4bn for the 2026 polls; “face it off with UPDF at every polling station”; the UPDF “lethal” (Dec 2025)	Heavy deployment, abductions and military trials around each vote; results secured by force	<i>Internet shutdowns; post-election detentions</i>
9 The law as a weapon	Military trial of civilians restored and widened (s.117A); Besigye held without bail; Supreme Court ruling reversed by Parliament	A military-to-police-to-courts-to-prison pipeline: arrest and torture, then charges and remand; courts sidelined	<i>Detainees produced in court after incommunicado detention; civilians before courts martial; bail refused</i>
10 Fault lines inside the regime	NRM old guard swept out in the primaries; Minister Engola shot by his own bodyguard (2023); Gabon 2023 as the continental warning	Purges, retirements and rewards; the transfer as the moment of greatest danger	<i>Arrests of senior officers; open splits in the NRM</i>

Source: Authors’ analysis of the evidence in Chapters 4–6 of this paper, up to December 31, 2025. Trends 1–7 follow from the documented record; 8–10 are deduced from it.

7.3 The road ahead: Three phases and three roads to 2031

The ten trends are likely to play out in three phases (**Figure 46**). In the first, from the campaign to the swearing-in of May 2026, the vote is secured by force, the opposition is broken up through arrests and abductions, and the CDF emerges as the guarantor of the result. In the second, from 2026 to 2030, the succession is consolidated: the PLU campaigns openly, the civil service and the economy are realigned through Saleh’s structures, civic space shrinks, and the diplomatic community adjusts accordingly. In the third, the handover itself takes place by 2031 or earlier.

Three roads lead to that handover. On the first, a choreographed transfer, Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba retires from the army as the UPDF Act requires of officers who seek political office, and stands as the NRM or PLU candidate in 2031, with his father’s endorsement and the army’s protection. On the second, a sudden vacancy, the presidency falls vacant before 2031; the Vice President acts, and an election must be held within six months under the eye of a CDF who commands the army that secures it. On the third, a contested transfer, rival factions within the

ruling family, the NRM or the army refuse the outcome, and the guard built to protect the succession becomes the arbiter of it. On all three roads, the army, not the voter, decides.

FIGURE 46 The road ahead: Three phases and three roads to 2031

THREE PHASES

PHASE 1 · TO MAY 2026 Securing the vote • Heavy deployment; abductions before and after polling day • Detainees before courts martial • The CDF as guarantor of the result	PHASE 2 · 2026–2030 Consolidating the succession • The PLU campaigns openly; the NRM old guard defects or is purged • Public service and economy realigned through OWC and NEC • Civic space closes; exile grows; diplomats adjust	PHASE 3 · BY 2031 OR EARLIER The handover • The son takes, or is given, the presidency • The army decides the manner of transfer
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THREE ROADS TO THE HANDOVER

1 · Choreographed transfer HOW The CDF retires, as section 99 of the UPDF Act requires, and stands in 2031 as the NRM or PLU candidate with his father’s endorsement. THE ARMY’S ROLE Protects the campaign; manages the vote, as in 2021 SIGNPOSTS Retirement from the army; NRM nomination; the father’s public blessing	2 · Sudden vacancy HOW The presidency falls vacant before 2031; the Vice President acts and an election must be held within six months (Article 109). THE ARMY’S ROLE The CDF commands the army that secures a snap election SIGNPOSTS The President’s health and absences; who holds the vice-presidency	3 · Contested transfer HOW Rival factions in the family, the NRM or the army refuse the outcome; the guard built to protect the succession becomes its arbiter. THE ARMY’S ROLE Divided; units choose sides SIGNPOSTS Arrests of generals; splits in the High Command; Gabon 2023
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On all three roads, the army, not the voter, decides.

Source: Authors’ analysis. Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995, Article 109; UPDF Act, 2005, section 99; evidence to December 31, 2025.

The scenario is not destiny. What could change its course is the same set of forces that has checked it in the past: citizens who keep organising despite the cost, judges who rule against the army as the Supreme Court did in January 2025, professional officers who remain faithful to the Constitution, and regional and international partners who decide that stability built on a personal army is no stability at all.

7.4 WE THE PEOPLE: Emergence of an Article 3 citizens’ resistance

The warrior-mad-king scenario rests on one assumption: that citizens will surrender. The 1995 Constitution assumes the opposite. Article 1 vests all power in the people, and Article 3, entitled “Defence of the Constitution”, tells them what to do when that power is usurped (Box 7). It prohibits any person or group from taking or retaining control of the Government except in accordance with the Constitution. It makes it treason to suspend, overthrow, abrogate or amend the Constitution “by any violent or other unlawful means”. It declares that the Constitution does not lose its force when its observance is interrupted, and that those responsible will be tried once the people recover their liberty. Above all, it places on every citizen “the right and duty at all times” to defend the Constitution and to resist those who seek to overthrow the constitutional order, provides that a citizen who does so “commits no offence”, and voids any punishment imposed for it once constitutional order is restored.

“ All citizens of Uganda shall have the right and duty at all times to defend this Constitution, and in particular, to resist any person or group of persons seeking to overthrow the established constitutional order. — Article 3(4)(a)

BOX 7 Article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995: Defence of the Constitution

- (1) It is prohibited for any person or group of persons to take or retain control of the Government of Uganda, except in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution.
- (2) Any person who, singly or in concert with others, by any violent or other unlawful means, suspends, overthrows, abrogates or amends this Constitution or any part of it or attempts to do any such act, commits the offence of treason and shall be punished according to law.
- (3) This Constitution shall not lose its force and effect even where its observance is interrupted by a government established by the force of arms; and in any such case, as soon as the people recover their liberty, its observance shall be re-established and all persons who have taken part in any rebellion or other activity which resulted in the interruption of the observance shall be tried in accordance with this Constitution and other laws consistent with it.
- (4) All citizens of Uganda shall have the right and duty at all times—
 - (a) to defend this Constitution, and in particular, to resist any person or group of persons seeking to overthrow the established constitutional order; and
 - (b) to do all in their power to restore this Constitution after it has been suspended, overthrown, abrogated or amended contrary to its provisions.
- (5) Any person or group of persons who, as required by clause (4) of this article, resists the suspension, overthrow, abrogation or amendment of this Constitution commits no offence.
- (6) Where a person referred to in clause (5) of this article is punished for any act done under that clause, the punishment shall, on the restoration of this Constitution, be considered void from the time it was imposed, and that person shall be taken to be absolved from all liabilities arising out of the punishment.

Source: Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995, Article 3. Clause numbers (1)–(6) follow the Constitution.

The Constituent Assembly that wrote Article 3 had lived through the coups of 1966, 1971 and 1985. It did not limit the prohibition to tanks on the streets: “other unlawful means”, covers the slower takeover documented in this paper, in which the army displaces civilian institutions, tries civilians in its own courts and positions its commander to inherit the presidency. In that sense, Article 3 is the Constitution’s answer to a military coup by other means. It turns every citizen, including every soldier and police officer, into a guardian of the constitutional order.

The record to December 2025 shows that many Ugandans have not surrendered. The Supreme Court ruled in January 2025 that civilians cannot be tried by courts martial, and the Court of Appeal declared the candidacy of a serving officer in Abim illegal.³²⁶ In 2022, a lawyer petitioned the Constitutional Court to stop the birthday campaigns of a serving general, and the Uganda

326. Daily Monitor, “It’s illegal for serving soldiers to participate in politics – court”, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/it-s-illegal-for-serving-soldiers-to-participate-in-politics-court-4525892>. In February 2024, the Court of Appeal declared Capt. Yuventine Omara’s election as Abim District LC5 Chairperson illegal because he contested the political seat while still serving as an active military officer.

Human Rights Commission in May 2025 declared Eddie Mutwe's detention unlawful.³²⁷ Journalists kept reporting from Kawempe North after being beaten. Young people marched on Parliament against corruption in July 2024 despite the near certainty of arrest and state violence. NRM voters removed ten ministers in the July 2025 primaries, and the Katikiro of Buganda, Charles Peter Mayiga, publicly condemned the violence that accompanied them. Opposition supporters kept organising through a campaign in which more than 550 of them were arrested. The cost has been high, and some have been driven into exile, but the resistance is real.

A citizens' scenario, rooted in Article 3, would see that resistance become organised, peaceful and sustained. Its main elements follow from the evidence in this paper:

- i. **Name the takeover and document it.** Record every abduction, detention and trial, and preserve the evidence. Article 3(3) anticipates that those who interrupt constitutional order will one day be tried; the record kept now is the evidence of that day.
- ii. **Use the law that remains.** Challenge the 2025 Act and every unlawful detention in the courts, support judges who uphold the Constitution, and make the cost of defying court orders visible.
- iii. **Defend the vote peacefully.** Register, vote, monitor polling stations, record and publish results, and refuse to be intimidated away from the ballot.
- iv. **Organise in solidarity.** Religious, cultural, professional and civic bodies, trade unions, students and the media can protect those who are targeted, provide legal aid and refuse to lend their legitimacy to the succession.
- v. **Appeal to the citizen in uniform.** Soldiers and police officers are citizens bound by Article 3 like everyone else. The Constitution requires the army to be non-partisan and subordinate to civilian authority, and no order to abduct, torture or partisan service can override that duty.
- vi. **Hold the political class to its oath.** MPs, ministers and local leaders swore to defend the Constitution, not a family. Citizens can make their choices on the succession a matter of public record.
- vii. **Seek regional and international solidarity.** African and international human rights mechanisms, and partners who fund or train the army, can be asked to treat the defence of Uganda's Constitution as a condition of partnership.

Article 3 does not license violence, and this paper does not call for it: violence is the terrain on which the warrior king is strongest and citizens are weakest. Its power lies in numbers, persistence and legitimacy. The signposts of the citizens' scenario are the mirror image of those in **Table 14**: court rulings that are obeyed, officers who decline unlawful orders, broad coalitions across party, faith and region, rising turnout despite intimidation, and leaders who refuse to align with the succession. If the gun is everywhere, so are the citizens. Their refusal to surrender is the road back to the Kololo of June 2031 imagined at the start of this paper, where power passes peacefully from one president, and one party, to another.

³²⁷ Invoking Article 53(2)(a) of the Constitution and Rule 31 of its procedural rules, the Uganda Human Rights Commission declared Eddie Mutwe's military detention unlawful on May 2, 2025, warning that defiance would trigger constitutional proceedings and contempt proceedings. See <https://ugmirror.com/index.php/2025/05/02/uhrc-orders-updf-to-release-eddie-mutwe-from-military-detention/>; Uganda Radio Network, "Wangadya orders Muhoozi to release Eddie Mutwe", May 2, 2025.

7.5 When the gun is everywhere

As this paper has shown, President Museveni has used the legislative process, administrative practice and impunity to reshape and retain ownership, command and control of the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF). The UPDF has become a lethal fighting force, projecting Uganda's power abroad by intervening in conflicts at Museveni's will. At home, it has shown uncompromising loyalty to its NRA rebel commander. The UPDF has many highly educated professionals who may be patriotic to the core, but its command and control structure is designed to control and dominate every part of Uganda's public and civic sphere. The "independent" military judiciary completes the expropriation of power from the people and the civilian institutions of the state to the military, and its consolidation in the Commander-in-Chief and the CDF.

More than two decades ago, during the debate on the UPDF Bill, the then Member of Parliament for Bugabula County, Salaam Musumba, summed up the mischief in the proposed legislation: *"From the way the Bill is modeled, the future conflict that this Bill is preparing for is an internal one. Therefore, you need PGB of this magnitude; therefore, you need veterans to hang around; therefore you need so and so to be around. What will we do without them? I think that is hard because we are legislating for a future defence force, not the past; the past is gone. I cannot be one of the people who say that the past does not matter because it does."* Two decades later, the PGB has been unlawfully transformed into a service, and the Reserve Force into part of the regular army.

The 2025 Act keeps the names of the owners of the NRA as it existed on January 26, 1986. With a six-figure payout to each member, President Museveni asked Parliament to throw out another cardinal pillar of the 1995 Constitution: the subordination of the military to civilian authority. By establishing a parallel military judiciary, Parliament has taken the "honour" of unleashing the warrior mad king scenario. When the father and the son deliver its full package, there will be nobody to stop it, because the gun is now everywhere: in the barracks and the parish, the courtroom and the ministry, the campaign and the embassy.

“ President Museveni asked Parliament to throw out another cardinal pillar of the 1995 Constitution – the subordination of the military to civilian authority. By establishing a parallel military judiciary, Parliament has taken the “honour” of unleashing the warrior mad king scenario.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent to us—and we hope, to the reader—that the topography of Uganda’s terrain has historically – from as far back as the onslaught of colonial rule – been shaped by the barrel of the gun. It was the gun that significantly facilitated the imposition of British rule, entrenched successive post-Independence regimes, helped rebel groups to mount formidable challenges to sitting governments, and has played a pivotal role in enabling the entrenchment of the incumbent Museveni regime. The evidence presented throughout this study validates our central argument: it is the gun, not the citizens, that is being used to subvert a constitutionally mandated political transition process and instead to enable a succession process that may produce another African monarchical military authoritarian presidency.

In this respect, the cannons that sit atop a number of hilltops in the capital city and other major towns (commonly referred to as Bomas or Independence Grounds) are not merely historic or aesthetic; it is a testament to the footprint of the gun in our contemporary history and the present-day. Now at the crossroads of transition that the country finds itself, it is beyond conjecture that the various security institutions of the country cannot be ignored in any analysis that seeks to understand their place and role in its political and economic future.

It is an indictment of the nature and quality of politics that has characterised Uganda’s journey thus far that four Constitutions later, the gun is yet to be subordinated to civilian control. Yet it is not an exclusively dark tale with no upside: a number of the formal institutions under our microscope (particularly law enforcement, intelligence, and the armed forces) have played a constructive role in maintaining law and order, defending the territorial integrity of Uganda, supporting humanitarian response operations, and enforcing or keeping peace beyond the country’s borders. These laudable contributions have unfortunately been tainted by the misuse of these institutions by successive regimes that have weaponised the services of the men and women in uniform for partisan purposes.

“Four constitutions later, the gun is yet to be subordinated to civilian control.”

The law tells the same story. Tracked across five instruments from 1991 to 2025, the questions that decide whether the army is subordinate to civilian authority have mostly been answered in favour of the Commander-in-Chief and the army (**Figure 47**). The only exception is the 1995 Constitution, which was never given full effect in the army's own law.

FIGURE 47 Tracking civilian control through five instruments, 1991–2025

Eight questions that decide whether the army is subordinate to civilian authority, answered for each law. Colour shows where each answer places power.

	1991 NRA Statute	1995 Constitution	2000 Cap. 307	2005 UPDF Act	2025 Amendment Act
Who sets the army's strength?	NRA Council and the NRC in closed session	Parliament to regulate the force (Art. 210)	UPDF Council and Parliament in closed session	President in the Defence Council; Parliament dropped	Unchanged: President in the Defence Council
Who creates new services or forces?	NRA Council prescribes	Parliament, on organs and structures (Art. 210(a))	UPDF Council prescribes	Parliament prescribes	Defence Council prescribes, Parliament approves; SFC and Reserve Force written in
Do the 1986 founders sit in the command organs?	Yes: "original members" of 1986, unnamed	Silent	Yes, unchanged	Yes, named in the Schedules	Yes; out only if convicted, of changed citizenship or in partisan politics
Can civilians be tried by courts martial?	Yes: aiding soldiers; arms "monopoly of the Army"	Independent courts (Arts. 126, 128); military courts only as Parliament establishes (Art. 129(1)(d))	Yes, unchanged	Yes (s.119(1)(g)–(h)); struck down by the Supreme Court, January 2025	Yes, restored and widened (s.117A): uniforms, scheduled arms and stores, conspiracy
Who appoints military judges, and for how long?	High Command; one-year terms	—	High Command; one-year terms	High Command; one-year terms	C-in-C with the JSC, from a High Command list ; five-year terms; legal qualifications
Where does the final appeal lie?	Court Martial Appeal Court (military)	Courts of Judicature (Art. 129)	Court Martial Appeal Court	Court Martial Appeal Court	Court of Appeal ; Supreme Court confirms death sentences
Soldiers and politics	A "politicised" army; NRA Council advises the President on policy	Non-partisan army (Art. 208(2)), but ten army MPs (Art. 78)	Unchanged	Officers must resign before seeking political office (s.99)	Unchanged, plus secondment to any public or private body (s.37)
Who directs war and deployment?	High Command advises the President	Parliament to regulate deployment abroad (Art. 210(d))	High Command advises the President	Peacekeeping needs Parliament; peace enforcement by the President	Joint Military Command under the CDF directs the war effort, reports to the NSC

The pattern. Only the 1995 Constitution moved most answers towards civilian authority, and it was never given full effect in the army's own law. The 2005 Act gave Parliament some ground and took some back. By 2025, the army sets its own size with the President, initiates new services, sits in every civilian institution by secondment and again tries civilians, while the 1986 founders remain written into its command.

Source: NRA Statute, 1991; Constitution of Uganda, 1995; UPDF Act, Cap. 307 (revised edition 2000); UPDF Act, 2005 (Act 7 of 2005); UPDF (Amendment) Act, 2025 (Act 8 of 2025). Section numbers are those of each instrument. Assessment by the authors.

In the final analysis, the high points and pitfalls of the armed forces and security institutions in the country's democratisation journey are difficult to gauge. We have presented a mixed body of evidence that shows how these institutions have upheld the existence of the State, facilitated security of the person and property, while at the same time being accomplices in the subversion of constitutionalism, in just about every conceivable way.

Ultimately, the resolution of the impasse that our analysis exposes rests with the citizens of Uganda, as Africans elsewhere have done, to sustain ongoing and prospective efforts to struggle for the collective soul of the country which, for as far back as we can see, is haunted by the gun in its multiple incarnations.

Throughout the last more than one and half a century, Ugandans across generations have witnessed what happens when citizen and state power are appropriated with force and consolidated without accountability. The world is littered with experiments that prove that “liberation movements” often turn into dynasties, parliamentarians transform into robotic machines acting as rubber stamps and cheerleaders of autocratic rulers, and political dissent becomes a passport to exile. In all such cases, governance models that depend on a single individual, on a particular moment in a nation’s history or even on a myth, are not sustainable models but rather memories waiting to collapse. An Article 3 collective citizens’ resistance is, and will remain, the enduring solution to subdue the Gun and return Uganda to the constitutionally mandated political transition mechanisms.

GUNS EVERYWHERE

The Military and Transition Politics in Uganda

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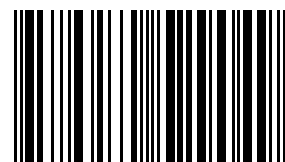
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