



President Museveni (left) with EU officials at State House Entebbe in April 2024. The EU at the event announced a Shs163.3 billion donation to Uganda to tackle deforestation and promote sustainable agriculture. PHOTO: COURTESY OF EU IN UGANDA

EU's delicate balancing act in Uganda

Hesitant. With the EU now almost solely focused on anti-poverty projects, analysts say the main reason for the EU to pussyfoot around alleged human rights abuses is because the UPDF is a crucial partner in containing conflict across the Great Lakes region.

ZAM REPORTERS

The European Union (EU) does not provide electoral support to the Ugandan State because of human rights abuses by its government, led by 81-year-old Yoweri Museveni. But it is also not supporting grassroots activists in their fight for democracy in the country. "We were told we should not support troublemakers."

Ever since Uganda's 2016 General Election, marred by claims of fraud and violence, the EU has significantly reduced its direct involvement in funding or observing elections in the country. Even specific funding for election-related programmes was phased out following

the violent 2021 election, when scores of people were shot in the streets by security forces.

According to an account received from the EU, the only funding formally allocated to support democracy in Uganda in the run-up to the 2026 elections was €2 million (Shs8.8b) in 2024, given to the Netherlands Institute for Multi-Party Democracy for training, dialogue, and capacity building for political actors and youth, through projects such as its "Democracy Academy".

Recent elections in January 2026 were once again marked by allegations of mass arrests, killings, and kidnappings.

The EU has not supported the human rights activists currently still searching prisons for confirmation of detentions, deaths, or torture. Civil society fund-

ing has dried up since 2021, when the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) government closed a multi-donor fund called the Democratic Governance Facility (GDF), which had previously assisted pro-democracy activists and independent investigative journalism. The President said the fund "undermined" government authority.

Under increasing fire

Ever since, civil society and the Opposition have come under increasing pressure in the country. On January 15, election day, this culminated in the killing of at least 15 Opposition supporters, eight of whom were reportedly killed by security operatives at the home of an MP.

MP Muwanga Kivumbi, the Opposi-

tion National Unity Platform (NUP) deputy president for the Buganda region, was arrested and charged with terrorism, joining a list of hundreds currently incarcerated.

Prosecution alleges that Kivumbi and his co-accused orchestrated attacks on Kibibi Police Station and the Butambala Electoral Commission tally centre without regard for public safety.

National leader of the NUP, Robert Kyagulanyi, aka Bobi Wine, and his family say they faced persecution in the aftermath of the January polls and are currently in exile. Opposition doyen Kizza Besigye, who was abducted in Nairobi, Kenya, in December 2024 and renditioned to Uganda, remains detained in Luzira, Uganda's largest prison on the outskirts of Kampala.

The human rights and accountability platform, the Agora Centre for Research, says it has documented hundreds of arrests during and after the January elections. Despite a nationwide internet shutdown, the team, in coordination with 30 journalists across the country, continued to receive constant reports of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arrests, and State brutality.

"I don't think I slept for more than

three hours a night between January 13 and early February," says Agather Atuhaire, Agora's team leader. "During the period the Internet was cut off (by the government), I was continuously on the phone with our colleagues across the country. When the Internet was restored, photos and videos to support the information came through. Months later, we are still receiving information about victims we had not known about."

Delivering his victory speech on January 18 at his Rwakitura residence, President Museveni defended the killing of suspected attackers and the continued detention of Opposition figures, arguing that firm security action prevented Uganda from descending into instability after the disputed January 15 election.

"Those who came to [State Lodge] Nakasero on January 13 told me that was the plan. What these people were planning is what happened in Butambala with Kivumbi. They were planning to do it all over... of course, we were ready to deal with them decisively," he told a gathering of dozens of senior NRM and top religious leaders in Kiruhura Dis-

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