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UGANDA: CIVIC SPACE INDEX 2024

Citizenry perspectives on the trends, patterns and prospects on civic engagement landscape in Uganda

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List of Acronyms

AML/CFT	Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorism Financing
BBS	Buganda Broadcasting Service
CNOOC	China National Offshore Oil Company
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
EACOP	East African Crude Oil Pipeline
FATF	Financial Action Task Forces
FDC	Forum for Democratic Change
FIA	Financial Intelligence Authority
HRDs	Human Rights Defenders
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
NCHRD-U	National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders - Uganda
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NUP	National Unit Platform
ODPP	The Office of the Director of Public Prosecution
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
RDCs	Resident District Commissioners
TV	Television
UCC	Uganda Communication Commission
UHRC	Uganda Human Rights Commission
UPDF	Uganda Defense Police Forces
UPF	Uganda People's Defense Force
URSB	Uganda Registration Service Bureau
US	United States

Acknowledgment

The National Coalition for Human Rights Defenders-Uganda (NCHRD-U) wishes to gratefully acknowledge the invaluable contributions of all individuals and partner organizations towards the publication of Civic Space Index of Uganda Report, 2024.

Since 2021, the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders Uganda has been publishing the Civic Space Index Report, with a progressively improved quality and coverage of assessment. This has been made possible by numerous individual Human Rights Defenders and our 60 partner members who work courageously under challenging circumstances often putting their lives on the line to promote and protect human rights.

The national survey could not have been possible without the exceptional hard work of the NCHRD-U Secretariat for coordinating internal processes with the seven technical thematic working groups namely: Land and environmental rights defenders, Women HRDs, Key populations, Indigenous Peoples, Journalists, youth, and Persons with Disabilities.

We are particularly grateful to our consortium partners; European Union, DANIDA, DanChurch Aid and Witness Radio Uganda for the generous support that enabled us to conduct this civic space index survey. Our deepest appreciation also goes to our partner organizations, which provide critical support to Human Rights Defenders through peer collaboration, capacity building, emergency support mechanisms, and finance for many aspects of our Human Rights Defense work. These partners include but are not limited to Defend Defenders, Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC), Uganda People's Defense Forces, Uganda Police Force, and all Government Ministries, Departments, and Agencies.

Finally, we extend our deepest appreciation to the HRDs and partner representatives who actively contributed to this report as respondents, providing invaluable insights through select key informants' interviews, physical and online surveys that inform this Index.

Foreword

It is my pleasure to write this foreword of the Fourth edition of NCHRD-U's flagship publication, Uganda: Civic Space Index, 2024. The overall purpose of this Civic Space Index is to provide constantly updated information and analysis on the state of space for civil society and citizen activism in Uganda. The Index is a compilation of a succinct review of documented evidence, international and national (datasets and reports), and qualitative assessment of civic space in Uganda according to five dimensions (freedoms of information and expression; rights of assembly and association; citizen participation; non-discrimination/inclusion; and human rights/rule of law).

Over the past decade, both domestic and international rights organizations report that the Government of Uganda has become increasingly intolerant of criticism, whether from civil society or political opposition. This Index and three other Indexes produced in 2021, 2022 and 2023 documented attempts to suppress dissenting voices legally and silence political opposition using controversial laws such as the Computer Misuse Act (2022), the Public Order Management Act (2013), the Anti-Homosexuality Act (2023), the NGO Act (2016), the Anti-Terrorism Act (2002), and the Press and Journalist Act (2000).

NCHRD-U is committed to protecting and promoting the work of Human Rights Defenders and to ensuring that Uganda's civic space environment is safe and secure for all Ugandans and foreigners. We do so by cultivating relationships with local, national, regional, and international stakeholders. This Index is to be used to advocate for the improvement of civic space, network with like-minded organizations, and support the vibrancy of Uganda's civic and political space by building the capacity of individual and organizational HRDs and organizations.

We urge the government to allow civil society to freely contribute to the political, economic, and social life of our societies without restraint, and in line with the constitution of Uganda and other international human rights conventions she ratified. We believe that an enabling civic space will allow individuals and groups to contribute to policy-making that affects their lives, including accessing information, engaging in dialogue, expressing dissent or disagreement, and joining together to express their views.

We believe that reclaiming civic space is a legal process that requires a multi-faceted and harmonized approach that prizes trust between the State arms and civil society. It is our hope that this Index will trigger dialogue on issues affecting civic space, internally with Human Rights Defenders organizations and externally with the government both in invited spaces and by other legal means available.

I encourage you to read the report and join hands with the NCHRD-U in promoting and defending human rights in Uganda. Together, we can create a just and equitable society where fundamental freedoms are protected and human rights are respected.

Robert R. Kirenga

Executive Director

PART I (A):

INTRODUCTION TO THE 2024 CIVIC SPACE INDEX REPORT

1.0 Contextualizing civic space in Uganda 2024

The year 2024, manifested a mixed card of progresses and digressions in as far as aspects affecting civic space were concerned. A number of laudable steps were taken by the government of Uganda at various levels with positive effects on the guaranteeing of a conducive civic space. In the same measure, also noticeable were actions and omissions evident within the country that negatively impacted on civic space. Some of these aspects are summarized herein below in the quest to paint a picture about the background against which this particular index has been measured. A number of outstanding, aspects have been highlighted below, selected for among other reasons, the lack of accountability that they portray on part of state actors, the encroach on civilian space of civil liberties.

Also of importance are Uganda's international obligations under the FATF which demanded a diversity of measures to be undertaken to be delisted from the financial grey list, coming with it implications on CSOs and by extension, civic space especially in relation to access to foreign funding for NGOs. Additionally, herein, the report also notes the rationalization of the NGO bureau and its anticipated repercussions on civic space as an entity that is now under the Ministry of Internal Affairs and no longer autonomous.

a) The Clamp down on Citizenry demands for environmentally compliant extractives models

The year 2024 was also characterized by a sharp contestation between the government and citizens over the climate and environmental effects of the extractives industry in Uganda-more specifically, oil in the Albertine (Lake Albert region). In particular, in August 2024, Uganda saw a substantial intensification in government actions against human rights defenders opposed to the country's oil development projects. Available data reveals that at least 72 individual activists including mainly students were arrested in August alone as bringing the total detentions since May, 2024 to 81 arrests.[1] On August 26, for instance, 21 activists were arrested during a march aimed at delivering a petition against EACOP, while earlier in August, 47 protesting students were taken into custody.[2] These arrests were clad in intimidation tactics, against HRDs and generally civil society in advocating for human rights and environmental protection in light of the substantial risks posed by these oil initiatives.

The protests were predominantly focused against across-the-board oil projects, including the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) and the Kingfisher and Tilenga sites, which are developed by major corporations such as TotalEnergies and China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC).[3] Despite the primarily nonviolent nature of these demonstrations, the Ugandan government through the police and military responded with violence and repression. In 2024, climate change and environmental protection activists faced severe reprisals, including judicial harassment, threats, and even torture. Thus, the quest for the protection of the environment by HRDs remained contentious, and saw the escalation of repression and restricting of civic space for HRDs and civil society organizations especially those operational in environment and oil exploration.[4]

b) The rise and rise of 'drone' arrests and subsequent disappearances of the arrested

In 2024, political participation of some sections of the public continued to be costly considering the extreme state repression visited on them through the security agencies. In particular, and more prominently featuring as victims to this scourge were the supporters of the National Unity Platform (NUP) that alleges that over 100 of their supporters were being held incommunicado in 2024 and before.[5] The state of affairs underscored a climate of fear perpetuated by the government through the aforementioned systematic arrests and abductions geared towards dissenters.[6] Allegations of torture of those arrested, use of violence and brute against them while in detention were also prominent features of 2024 painting a grim picture of the state of protection and

promotion of legal norms and basic human rights owed to every human and more so those alleged to be in conflict with the law.[7] This environment of intimidation, it emerged, is exacerbated by reports of government officials attempting to compromise those in custody, cultivating a narrative of fear intended to deter further opposition.[8] The persistence of these tactics was indicative of the control of civic space and diminishing and discouraging political engagement including halting opposition members of parliament from holding lawful meetings.[9] All this was prevalent despite the diversity of laws that provide for rights of citizens to partake of political activity in their various political groupings of choice.

c) Continued trial of civilians in military courts: a threat to constitutionalism and civic space in Uganda

In 2024, the trial of civilians in military courts continued to pose a significant challenge to civic space engagement in Uganda, undermining constitutionalism and the rule of law. This concerning trend disproportionately affected opposition politicians and their supporters, fostering a chilling atmosphere for political dissent and civic activism. A key example is the 2020 incident in Kalangala, where over 34 National Unity Platform (NUP) supporters were arrested during a campaign and faced severe charges in military courts, despite constitutional provisions that dictate civilians should be tried in civilian courts. By the close of 2024, over 130 civilians linked to the NUP were facing trials in the military tribunal, raising critical issues regarding the separation of powers and justice principles enshrined in Uganda's constitution. This situation is supported by the UPDF Act, which permits military jurisdiction over individuals accused of firearms possession, allowing the military to exert control over civil political dissent.[10]

The Constitutional Court had tried to address this issue (*in the decision of Kabaziguruka v. Attorney General (Constitutional Petition 45 of 2016*), asserting that military court jurisdiction should apply only to active military personnel but to no avail.[11] The implication on civic space that remained glaring was that the growing militarization of governance in Uganda undermines civil rights and institutional integrity, with the military increasingly overpowering civilian institutions in the democratization process.[12] Additionally, the military trials raise significant human rights concerns, including compromised fair trial rights due to lack of impartiality and legal qualifications among military judges.[13]

This climate of militarization has severely hindered the work of human rights defenders, who face repercussions for criticizing military actions. Overall, the persistent trials of civilians in military courts reflected a troubling trajectory towards militarization in Uganda, posing significant threats to democratic governance and enjoyment of participatory rights further restricting civic space.[14]

d) The rationalization of the NGO Bureau and the its likely implication on civic space

In 2024, the government policy of rationalization of government agencies took centre stage including the focus on disbanding the NGO-Bureau. The amendment of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Act in Uganda, as articulated in the 2024 amendment, transforms the National Bureau for Non-Governmental Organizations from a distinct legal entity into a department located within the Ministry of internal affairs.[15] This is exemplified by the dissolution of the board of directors that previously governed the Bureau and the establishment of a new governance structure. The amendment stipulates that the newly structured Bureau.

The streamlined governance structure includes the appointment of a Secretary who will lead the Bureau's secretariat within the Ministry.[16] This Secretary, designated as a public official by the Minister of Internal Affairs and subject to consultation with the Ministry responsible for public service will be responsible for overseeing daily operations, maintaining a register of organizations, and managing funds, but under a revised hierarchy that centers authority within the Ministry rather than an independent Bureau.[17]

In a comparative overview of the old and new Bureau frameworks, significant changes are noted, particularly

in corporate identity, governance structure, functions, staffing, and financial operations. The 2024 Amendment dissolves the Bureau's previous legal status as a semi-autonomous body and integrates its functions entirely into the governmental structure, thereby altering its operational independence and potentially affecting its participatory role in the oversight and regulation of the NGO sector in Uganda.[18] Overall, these changes highlight a shift towards greater governmental control over NGOs, which may influence the dynamics of civil society engagement and support in the country.[19] It remains to be seen, how the now non-autonomous NGO Bureau in its new structure shall impact on civic space in the country.

There is already fear that the newly restructured NGO Bureau, now subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs with heavy military oversight, will suffer from a significant loss of independence and credibility. The dismantling of its distinct legal personality removes essential capabilities, such as entering contracts or conducting beneficial transactions, which historically facilitated collaborations with both local and international partners.[20] This transformation into a government department restricts its operational capacity, raising concerns about the validity and performance of existing partnerships. As a result, the Bureau faces considerable challenges in building new collaborative efforts that are critical to its function and sustainability.

Moreover, the perception of the Bureau as being heavily influenced by military leadership further exacerbates distrust among potential partners, who might view engagement with it as risky. The military's involvement presents a worrying shadow over the Bureau's autonomy, causing apprehension regarding how it might prioritize its operations under such oversight. Consequently, the diminished attractiveness of the Bureau as a collaborative partner threatens its operational effectiveness and overall stability, which could lead to a broader detrimental impact on the NGO landscape in Uganda.[21] This situation underscores the need for a reassessment of governance structures to ensure that the Bureau can fulfill its mission without undue influence and maintain positive relationships within the civil society sector.

e) The Delisting of Uganda from the FATF grey list and implications on civic space

In 2024, Uganda was officially delisted from the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) grey list wherein it has been subject to increased monitoring process, due to its previously identified anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing (AML/CFT) deficiencies.[22] After Uganda's commitment to implement an Action Plan aimed at resolving these deficiencies within agreed timeframes, with oversight from FATF including on-site evaluations, Uganda was delisted.[23] This freed Uganda from the subjection to enhanced scrutiny from the FATF, allowing the country to navigate its financial and regulatory landscape with less oversight.

But the above also had implications on civic space, for, reduced monitoring can foster a more favorable environment for civil society organizations. With the FATF no longer imposing strict regulations, civic actors may experience increased operational freedom and improved access to funding without the constraints associated with heightened scrutiny.[24] This could enhance the capacity of civil society to engage in advocacy, development, and community support activities, potentially revitalizing civic engagement and participation in governance issues. However, it also underscores the importance of maintaining the progress made to ensure continued compliance with international standards, which remains crucial for securing Uganda's civic space in the long term.

1.1 General & specific objectives of the survey

The overall objective of survey was to examine the state of civic space in 2024 in Uganda through citizenry perspectives highlighting the emerging trends, patterns, the challenges and opportunities for state and non-state actors in protection of this space.

1.1.1 Specific objectives of the survey

1) Conduct an assessment of key issues affecting civic space in five (05) identified regions within the last one year-2024.

2. Within the above report, conduct a trendy analysis bench marked on last year (2023)'s civic space analysis to highlight any developments, trends, or changes in the civic space.

3. Conduct an assessment of the challenges prevalent in the realization of a conducive civic space for the various stakeholders.

4. Identify and propose the relevant recommendations necessary for the improvement of civic space in the country. These could include recommendations for government policy, actions for civil society organizations (CSOs), or other stakeholders to enhance civic participation, freedom of expression, and the overall health of civic engagement.

1.1.2 Methodology of the survey

The methodology for compiling the Civic Space Index in Uganda-2024 was a comprehensive and multifaceted approach that relied on both qualitative and quantitative data sources. Here's an expanded outline of the methodology based used:

I. Data Sources

a) Key Informants' Perceptions

Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society practitioners. The index primarily gathered insights from individuals who are actively engaged in promoting human rights and democratic governance in Uganda across various parts of the country. This group provided subjective rankings and assessments regarding the state of civic space, including perceived restrictions and enablers of human rights. The practitioners' opinions are essential as they reflect the lived experiences and observations of people directly affected by state policies and actions as they navigate around the civic space.

b) Desk Review

The research included a thorough review of relevant legal documents, reports, and literature related to the subject matter. This encompassed firstly, international human rights treaties-examining the covenants and treaties Uganda has ratified, which set standards for human rights protections.

Secondly were domestic laws and an analysis of the same to examine whether they align with or deviate from international norms regarding civic engagement.

Thirdly are reports from various entities-these include data from national and international research organizations, UN agencies, credible NGOs, academic institutions, and government bodies.

II. Analysis of State actions, omissions and practices

The methodology critically examined how government actions or inactions affected civic space in 2024. This involved assessing the effectiveness of existing laws in protecting civic freedoms and instances where state actions may restrict civil society engagement through legal or extralegal measures. Focus was also geared to government agencies and agents' pronouncements and policies that had an effect on civic space in 2024.

III. Respondent assessment dimensions

The index assessed nine key aspects that affect civic space dynamics both severally and collectively. Within

these aspects are questions that were populated into an online tool that were disseminated to the purposively selected respondents (earlier described) who filled them according to their experiences and perspectives informed by their works. The portal provided a wide data base of responses from the various respondents from which this report has been generated. The aspects probed are summarized below;

A. **Human Rights and the Rule of Law**

I. According to your assessment, do you think Uganda is heading in the right direction on adherence to human rights and the rule of law over the past year (Jan -December, 2024)?;

II. Below is a list of six civic space dimensions of interest to this survey. Please select the top three rights or freedoms that you believe are most violated in Uganda.

B. **Freedom of Expression online and offline**

I. Is freedom of expression guaranteed by law and respected in practice in Uganda?

II. Is internet freedom guaranteed by law and respected in practice in Uganda?

III. In your opinion, what is the likelihood of Uganda having another internet shutdown?

C. **Media Rights and Journalist Freedoms**

I. Is media freedom guaranteed by law and respected in practice?

II. Have you seen any of the following actions being directed at journalists or media workers over the past 2 years?

III. How frequent would you say journalists and media workers are targeted in police brutality and arbitrary arrests incidents because of their work?

D. **Access to information**

I. Is access to information guaranteed by law and respected in practice in Uganda?

E. **Support institutions to the realization of civic space**

I. What Institutions would you rank to be the worst violators of the civic space in the past 12 months?

II. Please tell us how much trust you have in each of the following institutions.

III. In your opinion, how do the following institutions rank in corruption?

F. **Freedom of Assembly**

I. In your opinion has the Right of assembly been respected in practice in the past 12 months?

G. **Freedom of Association**

I. In your opinion has the Right of association been respected in practice in the past 12 months?

H. **Right to political participation and marginalized groups**

I. How would you say your right to participate as a citizen has changed in the past 12 months?

II. Do women have equal civil rights and equal access to civic space?

III. Do minority groups such as LGBTQ+ have equal civil rights and equal access to civic space?

IV. Do youth have equal civil rights and equal access to civic space?

V. This is a list of selected civic space activities. Please rate how important you think they are in the exercise of your right to participate in public affairs to ensure your voice is heard and to influence decisions.

I. **Civil Society organizations civic space operational environment**

i. How would you rate the current NGO legal registration and operating environment in 2024?

ii. How would you rate the operating environment of NGOs and CBOs under the NGO Act, 2016 for

the year 2024?

iii. Do you think citizen participation and peaceful activism is overly politicized?

1.1.3 Rating of Uganda Civic Space Index

In a complimentary measure, the survey also builds on other existing studies and indexes of measurement undertaken by other international and regional entities such as the CIVICUS Monitor. Where possible, the survey has also undertaken a comparable analysis with the previous indexes to provide trends and patterns of civic space trajectories in the country.

Pursuant to and in tandem with the previous civic space indexes, this particular 2024 report also adopted the measure within the five civic space dimensions to the effect that Ugandan civic space can be adjudged as taking any of the following trajectory after examination:

Dimensional Measure	Criterion
a) Protected Space;	I. All principles for the specific dimensions are met; II. The country respects all relevant international treaties it has ratified by amending its domestic legislations so as not to contradict with the provisions of the international treaties. III. The country's protection mechanisms are Effective
b) Partially Protected Space;	I. Ratification and enacting legislations that protect the relevant dimension; II. There are protection mechanisms in place; III. There are legal loopholes that can restrict civic space if not properly checked
c) Restricted Space;	I. Presence of legislations that restrict the space provided in the ratified international treaties or in the mother law (e.g. constitution). II. Some of the international treaties are not ratified III. Ineffective protection mechanism
d) Non-existing space	I. Civic space is completely denied; there is no provision for its protection

1.1.4 Respondents of the survey

a) Gender

Gender of Respondents

- 60% Male
- 38% Female
- 2% Others

The respondents, purposively sampled, (224 in total) were spread into male, female and others, as per the tool of survey. Of the total respondents, 60% were male, 38% female, while 2% catered for others.

b) Regional representation

Regional Representative of Respondents

- 36% Northern
- 33% Western
- 28% Eastern
- 3% Central

More respondents participated from Northern Uganda, contributing 36% of the respondents, while Western Uganda followed closely, contributing 33%. The least number of respondents came from the central region which emerged last (with 3% of the respondents), quite far smaller compared to the Eastern region that contributed 28% of the respondents.

c) Respondent age group

Age Group of Respondents

- **45%** 26-35 Years
- **37%** 36-45 Years
- **15%** 46+ Years
- **3%** 18-25 Years

From the findings, the survey attracted a substantial number of respondents between the ages of 26-35- in the mid-young adult/early middle-aged range, as the highest making 45% of the respondents. The age category between 36-45 (the late early middle-aged to middle-aged range) made 37% of the respondents. Coming in the third place and providing some diversification, was the category of 46+, a significant group of older respondents contributing 15% while the last group of 18-25 had the least representation at 3%.

PART I (B):

CIVIC SPACE IN 2024: PRELIMINARY DYNAMICS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

1.2 Introduction

Under this section, the report delves into the evolving land scape of civic space in Uganda for the year 2024, synthesizing key findings that illuminate the dynamics influencing among others, civil society, rights and freedoms, political engagement, and citizenry participation. Through a comprehensive analysis of current trends, data and contextual factors, herein, challenges and opportunities that shaped civic engagement in 2024 within the country are discussed.

The exploration not only highlights the state of civic space in 2024 but also provides insights into how these dynamics interact and ultimately affect human rights and democratic practices in Uganda and how citizens navigate their rights, advocate for their communities and engage with the political processes that govern their lives amidst violations from state actors.

1.2.1 Human rights and the rule of law

Under this civic space aspect, respondents were asked: According to your assessment, do you think Uganda is heading in the right direction on adherence to human rights and the rule of law over the past year (Jan -December, 2024)?

Age Group of Respondents

- **83%** No
- **10%** Yes
- **7%** Not sure

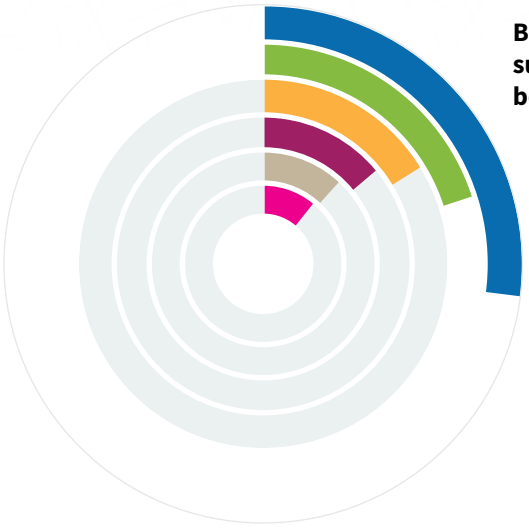
The responses indicated a generally negative perception of Uganda's human rights and rule of law situation in the year 2024. Out of the total responses, a worrying significant majority of up to 83% believed that Uganda was not heading in the right direction regarding human rights and rule of law. Only 10% felt positively about Uganda's rule of law trajectory. Following closely was a minority 7% that averred uncertainty about the state of human rights and rule of law. Worryingly, this percentage (83%) has continued to rise compared to civic index of 2022 wherein, 73% of Ugandans believed that the country was not headed in the right direction in relation to rule of law and human rights. This upward trend of 10%, in negative sentiment, highlights a growing and heightened discontent among citizens regarding the deterioration of human rights and fundamental legal principles in the country, on the eve of the general elections in 2026.

"Conclusively, the index finds: The state of civic space in Uganda is deteriorating, with a staggering 83% of respondents in 2024 expressing the belief that the country is not moving in the right direction concerning human rights and the rule of law. This increase from 73% in 2022 underscores a growing consensus on the alarming decline in Uganda's commitment to safeguarding fundamental freedoms and upholding legal principles."

A number of national issues inform this narrative, with the emerging prominent five being the mistrust in the judiciary as a neutral arbiter of political disputes; a weak parliamentary arm of government under the siege of NRM majority members of Parliament with continued accusations of corruption and a rubber stamp institution.

Thirdly, the clamp down on dissenting voices both online and physical (suppression of youth protests), especially the opposition political parties and outspoken youthful activists online. Fourthly, the restrictive space for the operational of CBOs, NGOs and the general civil society, partly through the burdensome administration barriers of regulatory authorities to which the CSOs must adhere. And lastly, the military overreach into civilian spaces, and brute of security agencies against individuals and groups of individuals expressing divergent views from those of the prevalent government.

1.2.2 Most violated rights and freedoms in 2024



Below is a list of six civic space dimensions of interest to this survey. Please select the top three rights or freedoms that you believe are most violated in Uganda.

- **27%** Freedom of expression, media, and digital freedoms
- **20%** Freedom of Peaceful assembly and to Petition
- **16%** Freedom of association
- **14%** The Right of Access to Information
- **12%** Rule of law
- **11%** Non-Discrimination and Inclusion

From the findings is prevalence of a high concern regarding fundamental civic rights in Uganda, particularly focusing on the following key dimensions:

a) Freedom of Expression was indicated as the most violated right, with majority of the survey participants (27%) emphasizing its importance in the context of civic engagement and political discourse.
b) Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and to Petition followed closely as the second most cited dimension, indicating significant public concern (20%) around the ability to gather and express dissent peacefully. This suggests that issues related to civic participation and public gatherings are were perceived as heavily restricted in 2024.
c) Freedom of Association appeared frequently (16%), suggesting that respondents were worried about the restrictions on forming and joining organizations or groups of their choice, particularly for political or social activism.

It is worth noting that many respondents selected combinations involving "Freedom of Expression" and

"Freedom of Peaceful Assembly," suggesting that these two areas may be interconnected in how civic freedoms are experienced. For instance, limitations on expression may affect the nature and efficacy of peaceful assembly.

d) The Right of Access to Information is also highlighted (14%), showing that many feel the need for transparency and openness from government and institutions. The "Right of Access to Information" was frequently selected alongside other freedoms, indicating a perceived relationship between access to information and overall civic freedoms.
e) Rule of Law, while indicated less frequently, is nevertheless critical, emphasizing concerns about arbitrary actions and the lack of fairness in legal proceedings. "Rule of Law" is noted in connection with other dimensions, emphasizing that many respondents link effective legal frameworks and enforcement to the health of civic space.
f) Finally, Non-Discrimination and Inclusion is noted, reflecting concerns about equality and the treatment of marginalized groups.

Conclusively, there was a clear concern expressed by survey respondents regarding the state of civic freedoms in Uganda, with a specific emphasis on freedom of expression, assembly, and association. The repeated selection of these dimensions' highlights perceived systemic issues that stifle civil liberties. The frequent coupling of these freedoms suggests that restrictions in one area may lead to violations in others, indicating a broader environment of constraint for civic engagement.

1.2.3 Insight into State institutions meant to foster the realization of civic space

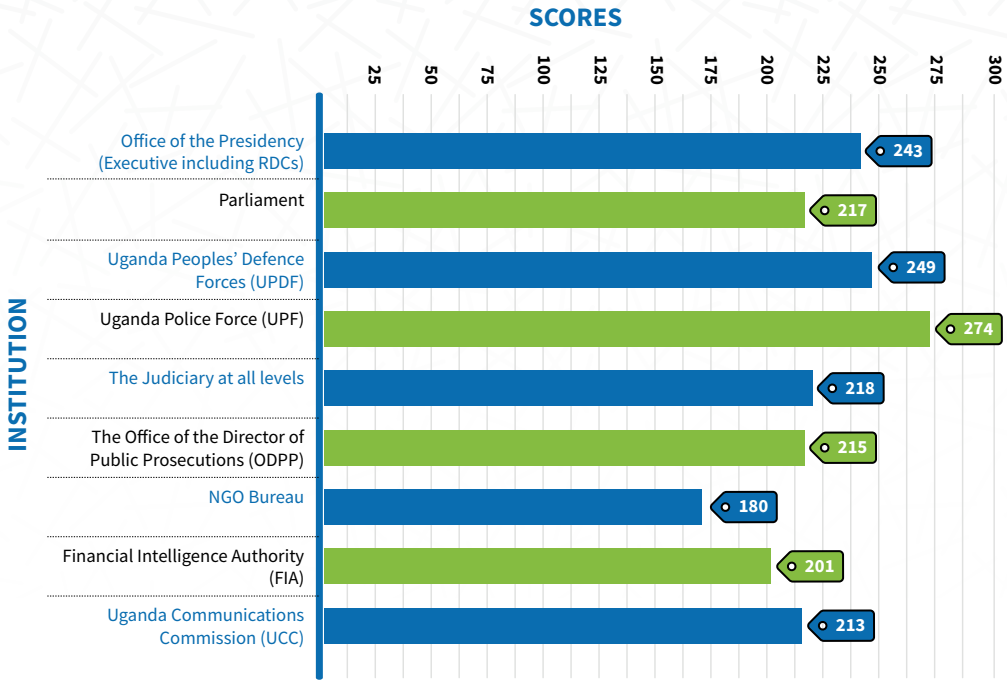
Tracing the State institution violators of civic space 2024

The analysis below arising from the data gathered reviews the perceived violations of civic space by various institutions in Uganda over the years of /20232024 under review. It is based on the provided rankings and total scores emerged from respondents to the survey question reproduced below. These scores indicate the extent to which each institution is viewed as a violator, with a higher score reflecting a worse reputation concerning threats to civic space. Institutions are ranked on a scale of 1-5, with 5 indicating the greatest level of concern. A breakdown of these rankings is provided herein below:

Table I: What Institutions would you rank to be the worst violators of the civic space in the past 24 months? (Rank on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the worst and 1 being least problematic)

INSTITUTIONS	TOTAL SCORE	RANK
1. Office of the Presidency (Executive including RDCs)	243	3
2. Parliament of Uganda	217	5
3. Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF)	249	2
4. Uganda Police Force (UPF)	274	1
5. The Judiciary at all levels	218	4
6. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP)	215	6
7. NGO Bureau	180	9
8. Financial Intelligence Authority (FIA)	201	8
9. Uganda Communications Commission (UCC)	213	7

Diagram II: Worst violators of civic space in Uganda in 2023/24



From the findings;

a) **The Uganda Police Force, ranked highest for violations** (rank 1, with a total score of 274). These concerns, arguably, stem from a diversity of witnessed public play-outs of excessive force during public order management episodes, suppression of peacefully assemblies mainly by the opposition politicians and harassment of dissenting voices. This score suggests a significant public sentiment of distrust and fear regarding police actions and their impact on civil liberties.

These respondents' views above are arguably fortified by and underscore a pressing alignment with the contemporary scrutiny of the Uganda Police Force, particularly in light of the U.S Department of State's announcement of travel sanctions against four senior officers for gross human rights violations, including torture and cruel treatment.[25] The imposition of sanctions serves as a crucial reminder of the importance of addressing human rights violations at all levels.

The Uganda Law Society in its quarterly rule of law review for the year 2024, noted as well the continued violations of human rights, in particular, the right to personal liberty by the Uganda Police Force, further aligning with the findings of this survey.[26]

b) **The UPDF follows closely as the second most violator of civic space in Uganda (rank 2, with a total score of 249).** Given its military nature and mandate, the UPDF's involvement in civic matters within the internal borders of the country-mainly in civil distress during demonstrations has led to disregard for human rights due partly to excessive force. This relatively high score is a reflection of the widespread concerns relating to militarization of and in public spaces and the potential threat to exercise of freedoms and rights.

The above findings on police and military as the lead violators do-not differ much from similar surveys by the Uganda Human Rights Commission which bases on actual human rights complaints received by its various offices across the country. The commission has previously, since 2022, ranked the two-UPF and UPDF amongst the top three lead violators of human rights in the country.[27] The two most complained about violations are the freedom from torture and deprivation of personal liberty.[28]

The public, in the fight back to defend their civic space against these violations especially by police officers, have resorted to suing individual police officers using the various laws such as the human rights enforcement act, the anti-torture law and also private prosecution.[29]

c) **The Office of the Presidency** which is the host entity and has supervisory roles over the Resident District Commissioners (RDCs) was ranked third (rank 3, with a total score of 243) slightly rivalling police. This further reveals citizenry and HRDs concerns about the executive overreach and abuse of power in the suppression of dissent at least, at the district level where the RDCs as the heads of the district security committees yield enormous power and influence.

d) **The judiciary ranked 4 with a score of 218,** highlighting concerns about its independence and fairness especially in political cases wherein accusations of impartiality and associated delays in court decisions.

e) **The Parliament ranked 5,** as a violator arising from criticism for the potential role in the enactment of laws that not protect or actively undermine civic freedoms and omissions manifest its lack of exerting oversight on state transgressions on civic space rights and freedoms.

f) The Uganda Communications Commission had a total score: 213, ranking 7, raising concerns of media and general freedom of expression; the Financial Intelligence Authority (FIA) ranked 8, with a relatively lower score, indicating that it is viewed as less of a violator compared to other institutions. Concerns still exist regarding processes that are perceived as targeting organizations for political reasons. In finality, the relatively lower scores assigned to institutions such as the NGO Bureau imply that while they present challenges, their perceived threat level is less acute compared to law enforcement and political entities.

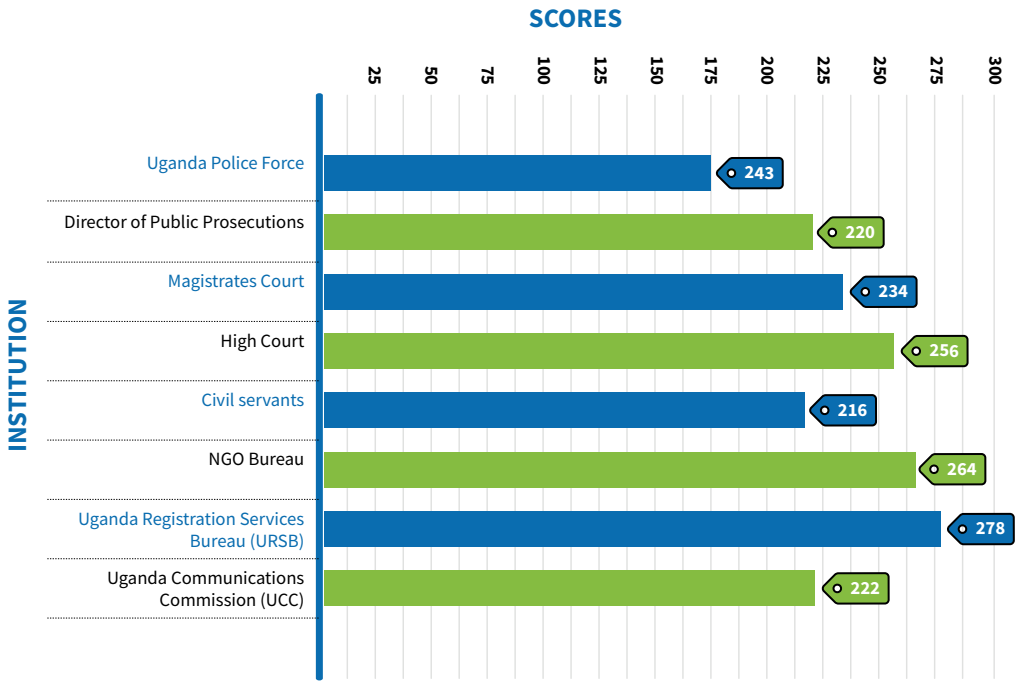
1.2.4 Level of trust in institutions that impact civic space enjoyment

Respondents also provided their insights on the levels of trust they had in a number of government institutions that have an effect on the enjoyment of civic space using a scoring system where 1 signifies trust and 10 represents the lowest. The analsysis presents an overview of how citizens perceive these institutions based on total scores, identifies trends, strengths, and weaknesses across these institutions.

Table V: Please tell us how much trust you have in each of the following institutions. (Note: Score 1 represents the least trust and 10 represents the highest level of trust).

INSTITUTIONS	TOTAL SCORES	RANK
1. Uganda Police Force	175	8
2. Director of Public Prosecutions	220	6
3. Magistrates Court	234	4
4. High Court	256	3
5. Civil servants	216	7
6. NGO Bureau	264	2
7. Uganda Registration Services Bureau (URSB)	278	1
8. Uganda Communications Commission (UCC)	222	5

Graph III: Citizens levels of trust in select Government Institutions relevant for civic space



Findings on overall trust reveal:

a) The trust levels in Uganda's institutions range from a score of 175 for the Uganda Police Force as the least trusted to 278 for the Uganda Registrations Services Bureau (highest score). Some institutions featured in high trust, moderate and low trust as expressed by the respondents.

b) The Uganda Registrations Services Bureau (URSB) emerged as the most trusted (278) followed closely by the NGO-Bureau at second place.

c) On the other hand, the high Court (ranked 3), Magistrates Court (ranked 4) emerged as moderate trust institutions. This suggests, perhaps, that while they are perceived as somewhat credible, there are significant concerns about their impartiality, efficiency, and integrity, all combined, affecting the protection of civic space. Within this category is also the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) and Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) ranked 6 and 5 respectively.

d) Within the low trust institutions that have a dent on civic space include Uganda Police Force and the Civil Servants generally ranked at 8 and 7 respectively. The public perception remains tainted by reports of police brutality, lack of accountability and ineffective law enforcement. All of these taint civic space.

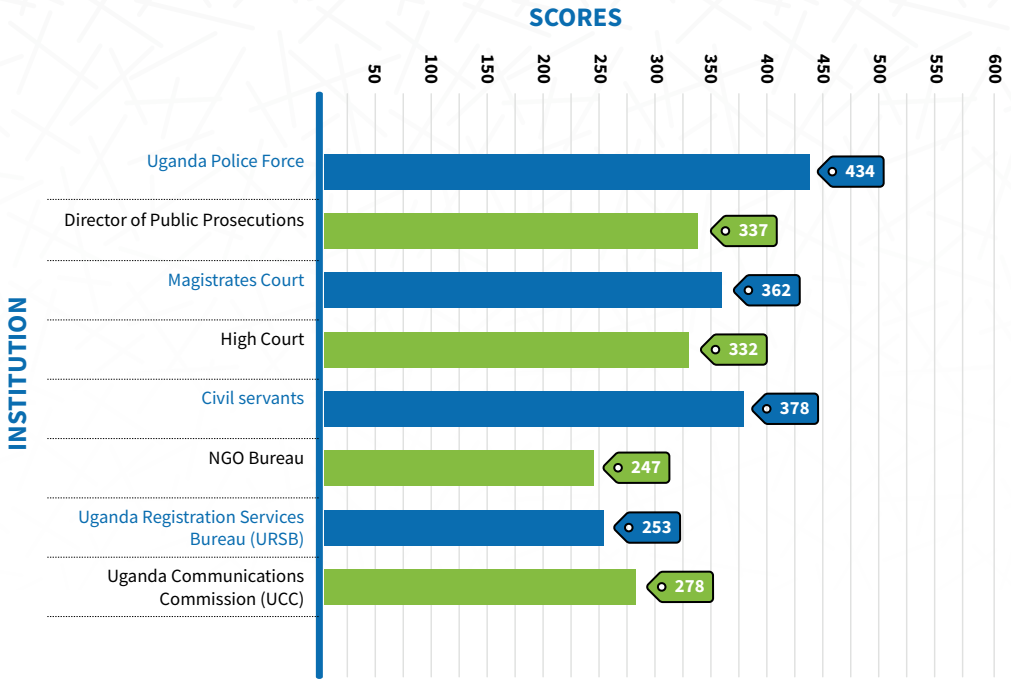
1.2.5 Corruption in government institutions

The data on perceptions of corruption across various institutions in Uganda indicates a prevalent concern among the public about the integrity of key governing bodies. The scores reflect perceptions where a lower score signifies low levels of corruption, and a higher score indicates high levels of corruption. Here is a detailed analysis of the findings:

Table VI: In your opinion, how do the following institutions rank in corruption? (Note: Score 1 represents low levels of corruption and 10 represents the highest level of corruption).

INSTITUTION	TOTAL SCORES	RANK
1. Uganda Police Force	434	1
2. Director of Public Prosecutions	337	4
3. Magistrates Court	362	3
4. High Court	332	5
5. Civil servants	378	2
6. NGO Bureau	247	8
7. URSB	253	7
8. UCC	278	6

Graph IV: Perceptions of corruption in government institutions



Findings reveal:

a) Ranking at No.1 is the Uganda Police Force, perceived as the most corrupt suggesting deep-rooted issues such as bribery, abuse of power and a failure to uphold law impartially. This significantly undermines public trust in law enforcement and can discourage civic participation as citizens may feel unsafe reporting issues or engaging in activism.

b) The civil servants ranked 2nd with a score of 378 indicating a high perception of corruption-perhaps concerns around administrative integrity and ethical behavior in governance. These issues hinder civic engagement, as citizens believe that their voices shall be ignored.

c) Following closely albeit in a moderate category were the Magistrates Court (ranked 3) and the ODPP (ranked 4). The two though reflecting moderate levels of corruption still raise issues of impartiality and effectiveness especially of the judiciary. This is crucial for civic space as a fair judicial system is vital for protecting citizens' rights and enabling them to challenge unlawful actions by state entities.

d) Within the lower corruption rankings is the UCC at 6, the URSB at 7 and the NGO Bureau at 8 indicating some level of trust within these organizations. However, these scores still reflect significant skepticism about their operations. Their lower corruption perception could be attributed to their lower visibility in the public's daily life compared to police and court systems.

1.2.6 Erosion of public trust and engagement

High corruption perceptions, especially within law enforcement and judicial systems, erode public trust in these institutions. When citizens do not believe that institutions act with integrity, they are less likely to engage in civic activities, which further diminishes public participation and accountability.

The pervasive atmosphere of corruption can create a chilling effect on civic activism and dissent. Citizens may fear reprisals or inadequate protections from corrupt practices when expressing their opinions or organizing protests, thus stifling democratic engagement.

PART II:

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND RIGHT TO PROTEST, FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

2.0 Introduction

Part II of the 2024 Index on Civic Space in Uganda delves into critical dimensions of civic engagement by assessing respondent perspectives on the state of freedom of assembly, the right to protest, and freedom of expression. This section aims to capture the lived experiences and views of citizens regarding their ability to gather peacefully, voice their opinions, and participate in public discourse without fear of repression. By exploring these fundamental rights, it seeks to illuminate the realities on the ground, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape of civic space in Uganda, emphasizing the vital importance of these rights in fostering a vibrant and participatory democracy.

2.1 Citizenry perspectives on the right to peaceful protest and freedom of expression

Legal Standard of assembly & associational rights and freedoms:	The Constitution of Uganda, under Article 29 provides for the protection of freedom of conscience, expression, movement, religion, assembly and association. In particular, Article 29 (1) (d) provides that every person shall have the right to—freedom to assemble and to demonstrate together with others peacefully and unarmed and to petition; and (e) freedom of association which shall include the freedom to form and join associations or unions, including trade unions and political and other civic organizations.
Ranked:	Under heightened threat and therefore restricted.

The discourse was guided by the question: is freedom of expression guaranteed law, respected in practice in Uganda?

Is freedom of expression guaranteed by law, respected in practice in Uganda?

- **81%** No
- **10%** Yes
- **7%** Not sure

From the findings, a dominant majority (81%) of the respondents believe that freedom of expression, though guaranteed by the law, was not respected in practice in Uganda, in 2024. This reflects a profound concern about the current situation regarding free speech and the operational environment for expressing dissenting views. Only 12% of the respondents answered YES to the question, indicating confidence in the existence and enforcement of laws protecting freedom of expression. This relatively small number suggests that even those who may acknowledge some legal protections feel they are inadequate or not effectively implemented. 7% of the respondents indicated some level of ambiguity regarding the state of freedom of expression. This uncertainty could stem from varying levels of access to information or differing experiences in personal freedoms, which may leave some without a clear perspective on the situation.

The above findings are not far-fetched considering that in 2024, the socio-political context in Uganda featured a diversity of incidences where individuals, particularly journalists, activists, and opposition figures, encountered serious repercussions for their expressions or writings.

Conclusively, the index finds that: while freedom of expression is legally guaranteed in Uganda, it is not respected in practice, reflecting deep concerns about the effectiveness of these legal protections amid a challenging socio-political environment. Its practice by citizens was under restriction in 2024.

2.2 Citizenry perceptions on the state of the Right of assembly in practice in 2024

In your opinion has the Right of assembly been respected in practice in the past 12 months?

- **50%** Not at all
- **10%** Yes, to some extent
- **7%** I'm not sure

A slight majority (50%) of the respondents believe that the right of assembly was not respected in 2024. This indicates significant dissatisfaction with the current state of civic freedoms and respect for citizens' rights to gather and express themselves collectively. These sentiments have a grounding in and stem from a history of government restrictions on public gatherings and protests, underscoring a pervasive climate of fear related to exercising this right.

However, there is a considerable portion of respondents (47%) who asserted that the Right of Assembly had been respected to 'some extent.' The response is perhaps, informed by the possibility of respondents having witnessed some degree of tolerance or occasional allowances for assembly that did not reflect a robust or consistent respect for the right. The index finds the right to assembly to be under restriction.

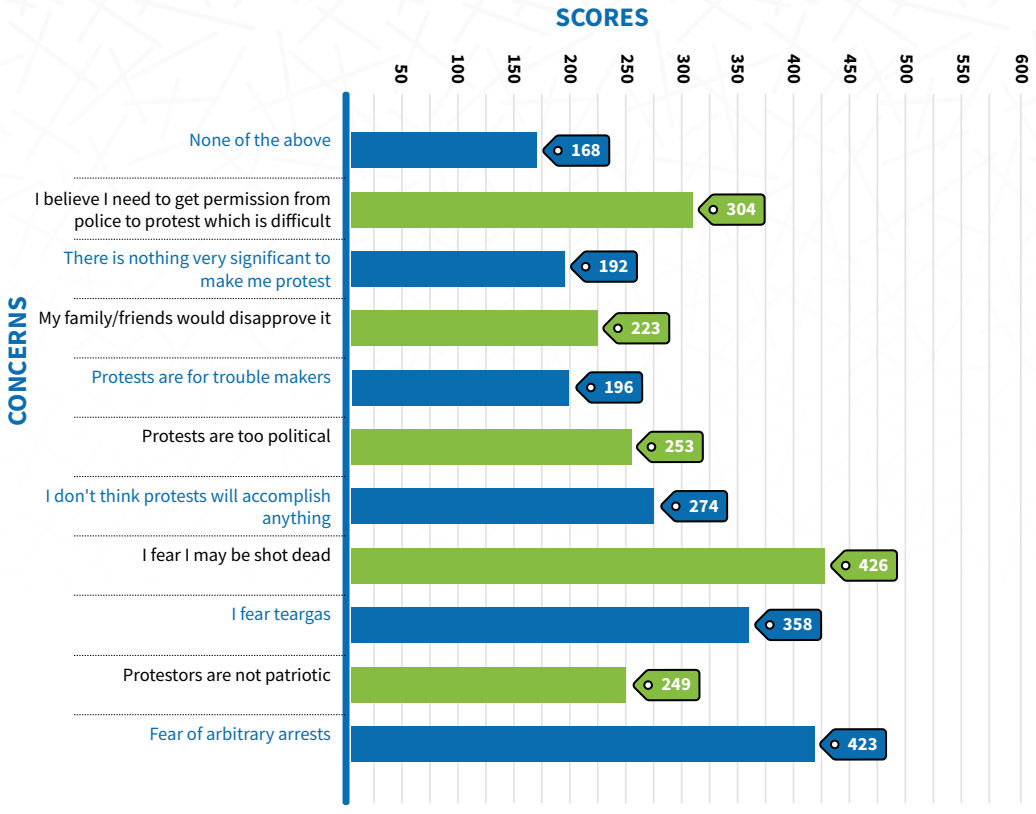
2.3 Citizenry perspectives on the right to peaceful protest and freedom of assembly

Hereunder, this variable sought to assess the citizen perspectives on the barriers that discourage participation in peaceful protests and assembly. Respondents evaluated a variety of concerns that might hinder their willingness to organize or attend protests, using a scoring system where 1 indicates the least concern and 10 signifies a major concern. This helped to draw a clear picture of the factors deterring individuals from engaging in protests, both State engineered among others. Herein is the synthesized data in firstly tabular form and also a graph that explains this phenomenon.

Table III: From the list below, please score the identified concerns depending on which one discourages you least or most from organizing or going to a peaceful protest and assembly? (Tick as appropriate. Note: Score 1 represents 'least concern' while 10 represents 'major concern' that keeps you away from protests)

IDENTIFIED CONCERNS	TOTAL SCORE	RANK
1. Fear of arbitrary arrests	423	2
2. Protestors are not patriotic	249	7
3. I fear teargas	358	3
4. I fear I may be shot dead	426	1
5. I don't think protests will accomplish anything	274	5
6. Protests are too political	253	6
7. Protests are for trouble makers	196	9
8. My family/friends would disapprove it	223	8
9. There is nothing very significant to make me protest	192	10
10. I believe I need to get permission from police to protest which is difficult	306	4
11. None of the above	168	11

Graph I: Concerns regarding participation in peaceful protests



From the findings:

a) The **fear of being shot dead ranked No.1 (Score of 426) as the highest** deterrent in taking part in protests, indicating that individuals are acutely aware of the potential for violence during protests. The urgency of this fear suggests that perceived threats to personal safety and security are paramount and people are willing not to trade it with other concerns. In this way, it emerged that this fear causes self-censure and hence a detriment on the right to assemble peacefully.

b) **Fear of arbitrary arrests came on a close second (score 423, ranked 2nd)** mirroring the concerns of personal safety and protection of civil liberties. This apprehension has capacity to deter individuals from exercising their right to protest and assembly for fear of state overreach and/or police misconduct-signification of distrust in the law enforcement practices related to protests.

c) **Ranking 3 with a score of 358 was the fear of teargas,** which highlights a growing awareness of police brute to demonstrators which ultimately is weighing heavily on individual decisions to participate in such activities.

d) **At number 4 was the belief that seeking police permission is difficult (Score 306, ranked 4).** The mere fact that citizens believe in permission rather than police notification of the intention to demonstrate and protest, tells about the untrue narratives surrounding the exercise of this right. Thus, there is disillusionment by what respondents perceive as an unfair or overly complicated process

surrounding police clearance that infringes on their right to free expression. The process is prohibitive rather than facilitative.

e) Of peculiar concern was the group of respondents, the lowest rated option (of none of the above-ranked 11, with 168 score) which suggests that a small segment of the population does not resonate with these concerns at all, indicating a potential group of die-hards' activists or individuals with confidence in their rights and safety during protests.

Overall, on this aspect, the data illustrates significant fears and safety concerns-particularly the fear of violence- 'being shot dead' and 'fear of arbitrary arrests'-are the primary deterrents preventing individuals from participating in peaceful protests. Additional concerns included the potential for police intervention and the perception that protests are ineffective or politically charged. Other factors, such as familial disapproval and the belief that protests are for 'troublemakers', ranked lower in discouragement. While political and social factors also play a role, they do not constitute as significant a barrier as those related to personal safety and the fear of government action. Understanding these concerns is crucial for appreciating the contemporary evolution of civic space.

2.4 Freedom of Association

The respondent discourse on freedom of association in 2024, was guided by the question: In your opinion has the Right of association been respected in practice in the past 12 months? The responses provide valuable insights into how citizens view their ability to form and join associations, including political parties, NGOs, trade unions, and other groups. Below is a detailed analysis of the data collected.

In your opinion has the Right of association been respected in practice in the past 12 months?

- **54%** Yes, to Some Extent
- **46%** Not at all

Over half of the respondents (46%) believe that the Right of Association has been respected "to some extent." This indicates that while there might be some level of acknowledgment and enforcement of this right, it is not reliably upheld across the board.

The responses suggest that some individuals may feel able to join or form associations, but potentially face limitations, such as bureaucratic hurdles, public intimidation, or restrictions against specific types of associations (especially political ones).

On the other hand, a notable majority of respondents (54%) feel that the Right of Association has not been respected at all in the past year. This perception may reflect ongoing government restrictions on political

organizing or societal pressure against affiliation with certain groups. The sentiment may further suggest instances where members of opposition parties or NGOs have faced harassment or were impeded from conducting their activities. The responses can be viewed in light of Uganda's historical context, where government crackdowns on opposition parties, restrictions on nonprofits, and censorship have raised serious concerns regarding civil liberties.

2.5 Status of Freedom of expression online and offline

Equally important, both as an emerging right and a facilitator of enjoyment of other diverse rights and freedoms, including access to information, was the inquiry into the state of internet freedom both by law and practice. Under this aspect, the survey sought respondents to relate with the question of whether internet freedom was firstly, guaranteed by law and, secondly, respected in practice in Uganda.

Is internet freedom respected in practice in Uganda?

- **79%** No
- **12%** Yes, to some extent
- **7%** Not sure

Findings reveal that a significant majority of the respondents (79%), believe that though by wide interpretation, internet freedom is guaranteed by law under Article 29 as part of the freedom of expression, it is not respected in practice, at least as played out in the year under review, 2024. This is indicative of a strong sentiment of dissatisfaction regarding the state of internet freedoms in the country. A minimal perception of sufficient legal gurantees and respect for internet freedoms obtains in the 12% of the respondents while 9% revealed being unsure of the state of internet freedoms, perhaps due to lack of awareness amongst them on the legal framework and practices on these internet rights and freedoms in Uganda.

Conclusively, the index finds: Internet freedom was partially restricted in 2024.

These sentiments are not far fetched, perhaps informed by the consistent history of internet shutdowns and censorship that has characterised Uganda in the most recent past-in particular-during critical political events including elections and protests.[30] Such State practices can lead to widespread skepticism regarding the respect for internet freedom.[31] Even if there is a semblance of legal guarantees for internet freedom, practices that have come to be common place such as state surveillance, harrassment and arrests of online dissenting voices, such as tik tokers,[32] have weakened public trust in these protections to lead to such divergent perspectives.[33]

2.6 Access to information

The survey sought to examine whether access to information guaranteed by law is indeed respected in practice in Uganda and what was the status of its implementation by government agencies in 2024. Findings reveal a stark contrast between legal provisions and actual enforcement as revealed herein below. The respondents were guided by the question: Is access to information guaranteed by law, respected in practice in Uganda?

Is access to information guaranteed by law, respected in practice in Uganda?

- **74%** No
- **21%** Yes
- **5%** Not sure

Findings show a dominance of negative responses of 74% feeling that access to information is not respected in practice in Uganda as at 2024. Only 21% of the respondents indicated that access to information is respected and guaranteed. These progressive affirmations could be informed by individuals that may have successfully accessed information, though it is also evident that these experiences are not widespread. Another category of respondents is those that were NOT SURE (5% of the respondents)-revealing uncertainty-that could perhaps stem from varying levels of understanding regarding current legal frameworks and practicalities of accessing information in Uganda.

The above responses have wide-ranging implications including a lack of faith in the access to information legal machinery, that can undermine public trust in government institutions, which ultimately affects civic engagement and participation in democratic processes. The low level of affirmative responses, combined with high number of negative ones, highlights systemic issues that hinder access to information, including bureaucratic inefficiencies and an environment where the government may prioritize control over transparency.

The threat to access to information in Uganda is underscored by government-imposed restrictions, which are justified under the pretext of combating fake news and maintaining law and order, particularly during election periods.[34] Many citizens involved in the survey perceive access to information as a myth, citing these government measures and the narrative propagated that internet shutdowns are necessary to prevent destabilization, as unjustified and arbitrary uses of state power aimed at suppressing opposition voices and limiting accountability.[35] Ultimately, findings reveal that citizens perceive access to information not as a guarantee but rather as a precarious privilege that can be revoked at the will of the government, thereby highlighting a significant disconnect between legal guarantees of access and the reality of state control over information.

Conclusively, the index finds: That access to information in Uganda, as in 2024, was partially protected, with 74% of respondents indicating that it is not respected in practice, underscoring a significant disconnect between legal guarantees and the reality of state control over information.

2.7 The state of digital civic space (digital/internet rights)

Digital civic space, on which internet rights are central refers to 'the environment within which human rights and freedoms are enjoyed in online and digital spaces either by individuals or groups of individuals.'[36] It comes at the heels of the advent of technology as a key tool of facilitating expression of oneself and participation in community, governance and political affairs including the right to participate anonymously.

Legal standards of internet rights in Uganda.[37]	Uganda's 1995 Constitution provides for freedom of expression in article 29(1)(a) that states that every person shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression which shall include freedom of the press and other media. By extension, expression freedoms include access to use of internet hence internet rights.
	Article 41 of the 1995 Constitution provides for every citizen's right of access to information held by the State or any other organ or agency of the State

2.8 In your opinion, what is the likelihood of Uganda having another internet shutdown?

In your opinion, what is the likelihood of Uganda having another internet shutdown?

- **84%** Very likely
- **14%** Likey
- **2%** Unlikely

Findings reveal:

a) Heightened concerns from citizens over a high likelihood of internet shutdown in the near future. A vast majority of respondents **(approximately 84%)** considered the possibility of another internet shutdown in Uganda as ***"very likely."*** This indicates a strong concern about governmental control over internet access and the potential for future disruptions especially in light of the 2025/2026 general parliamentary and presidential elections across the country.

The above citizenry views are perhaps not surprising considering that in the past two electoral cycles of 2016 and 2021, the government restricted access to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, among other social media platforms including, mobile money services. At the time of this survey, Facebook

remained blocked officially by the government in the name of national security leaving the citizenry to improvise access through VPN.[38]

b) The responses indicating ***"likely"*** (14%) and ***"unlikely"*** (2%) show that very few respondents feel optimistic about the situation. The overwhelming sentiment leans toward the expectation that future internet shutdowns are not only possible but probable.

The analysis revealed a clear consensus among respondents that the likelihood of Uganda facing another internet shutdown is very high. The figures underscore a significant public concern about the government's restrictive approach to internet governance and the potential negative implications for the enjoyment of civil liberties-more specifically, internet rights, key for political expression. The overwhelming belief that shutdowns are imminent speaks to the restrictive digital civic space in Uganda on the eve of the 2025/2026 general elections.

The above findings are not so de-associated from like-minded data from both local and international organizations with a particular focus on internet rights in Uganda. For example, the Freedom House assessment of Freedom on Net, for the year 2024 ranked Uganda NOT FREE on the Global Freedom Score and PARTLY FREE with a score of 53/100 for the Internet Freedom Score.[39] The report cites the arrests of users of internet, and the blocking of social media as key challenges eating away on digital civic space in Uganda.[40]

Conclusively: Digital civic space in Uganda is under siege by the tripartite of state practice, the contemporary restrictive laws and a collaborative private sector of the telecom industry. Digital civic space is partially open.

PART III:

CIVIC SPACE AND THE CITIZNERY RIGHT TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

3.0 Introduction

This part of the index report explores the fundamental relationship between civic engagement and the political participation of individuals, particularly focusing on marginalized groups. By posing targeted questions to respondents, the aim was to assess their perceptions of their rights to participate in the political process and to engage in civic activities, as well as to understand the barriers faced by these groups in exercising their democratic rights. This inquiry not only highlights the significance of inclusivity in civic space but also aims to uncover the challenges that hinder equitable political participation, thereby providing valuable insights into the overall health of democracy and civic space protection in Uganda, for the year 2024.

3.1 Right to political participation and civic space activities & marginalized groups

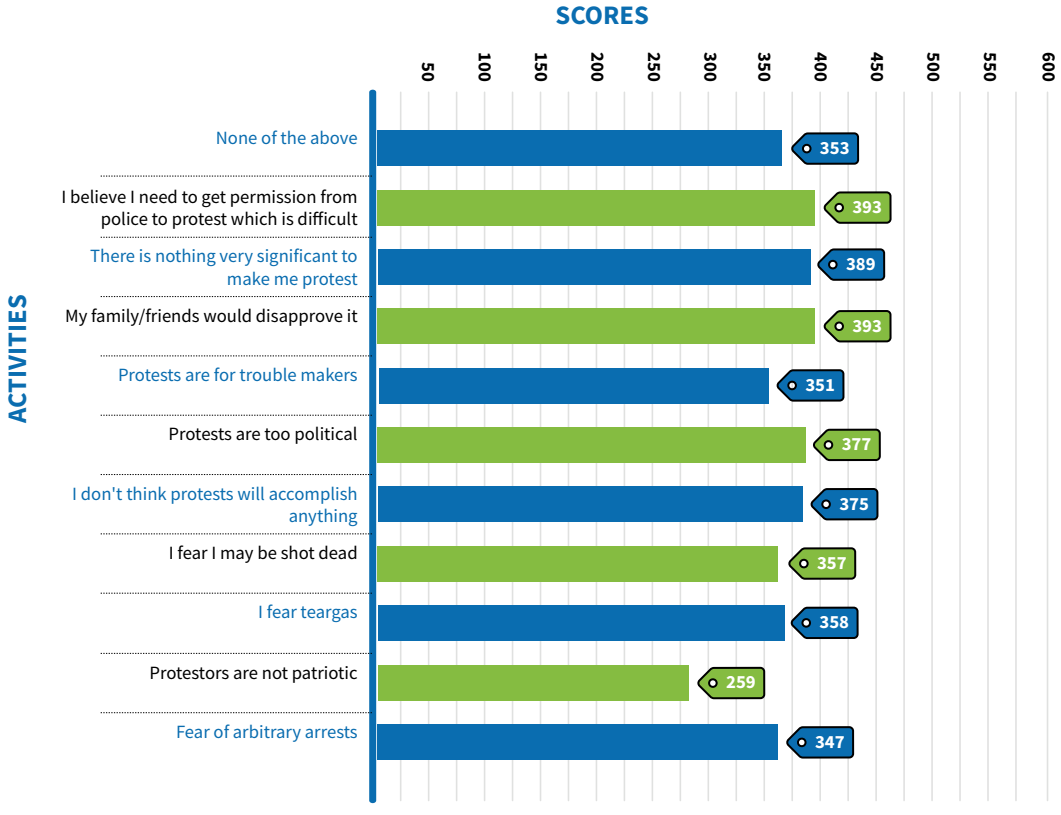
Legal Standard of political participation rights and freedoms:	The Constitution of Uganda, under Article 38 provides for the civic rights and attendant activities. It affirms the right of every Ugandan citizen to participate in the affairs of government, individually or through his or her representatives in accordance with law. And additionally, under Article 38 (2), every Ugandan has a right to participate in peaceful activities to influence the policies of government through civic organizations. Additionally, objective II (democratic principles) within the Constitution provides that civic organizations shall retain their autonomy in pursuit of their declared objectives. Furthermore, under political objective V (fundamental human rights and other freedoms), the Constitution provides that the State shall guarantee and respect the independence of nongovernmental organizations which protect and promote human rights.
Ranked:	Partially protected.

The survey interrogated and presents an analysis of selected civic space activities and their perceived importance among individuals regarding their rights to participate in public affairs, influence decisions, and have their voices heard. Respondents rated various activities on a scale from 1 (least important) to 10 (very important), allowing for an evaluation of each activity's significance in promoting civic engagement.

Table II: This is a list of selected civic space activities. Rate how important you think they are in the exercise of your right to participate in public affairs to ensure your voice is heard and to influence decisions. (Score 1 represents 'least important' while 10 represents 'very important').

CIVIC SPACE ACTIVITIES	SCORE	RANK
1. Sign a petition	353	8
2. Peacefully protesting for a cause	393	1
3. Participating in community meetings	389	3
4. Raising issues with leaders at the village, parish and sub-county level	393	1
5. Raising issues about my community with my MP	351	9
6. Starting up an event or group to address a common challenge	377	4
7. Posting on social media about an issue of interest	375	5
8. Organizing a peaceful protest/assembly on a persistent issue	357	7
9. Seeking access to information from the government agencies and departments	358	6
10. Creating and promoting safe spaces for LGBTI individuals in the community	259	11
11. Speak up and take action to ensure participation of women, PWDs and LGBTI individuals	347	10

Diagram II: Right to political participation and civic space activities



The findings reveal the following:

a) **Priority for the right to protest:** the public gravitates **towards peaceful protests** for a cause as the most important in exercising civic rights, indicating a belief in the power of collective action to effect change. This ranked 1 with a score of 393, signifying the belief in peaceful protests as a platform for amplifying voices and addressing societal issues directly.

b) **Preference for engagement at local government level power structures:** Sharing the same position is the activity of raising issues with leaders at the village, parish, and sub-county level, which ranked 1 with a score of 393. This activity underscores the significance of direct engagement with local leaders, which reflects a belief in the importance of grassroots activism and the effectiveness of addressing concerns at community levels.

c) **Community meeting participation:** To some respondents, participating in community meetings ranked third (score: 389), highlighting the value placed on collective forums for discussion local issues.

d) Among the **middle tier activities,** starting up an event or group to address a common challenge ranked 4 (score: 377) which speaks to the proactive approach to community issues and a strong willingness to collaboratively find solutions.

e) Relatedly, **positing on social media** about an issue of interest was ranked 5 a signification of the centrality of social media in raising awareness and mobilizing support for issues for civic engagement. This also speaks to the recognition of digital platforms as critical tools for communication and advocacy. Following closely was seeking access to information from government agencies which was ranked 6. This showcases the public desire for transparency and accountability.

f) Emerging within the lower ranked activities were **signing a petition** (ranked 8); raising **issues about the community with the Member of Parliament** (ranked 9); which all combined though viewed as important indicated a perception of limited responsiveness or effectiveness of petitions and MPs in addressing constituents' concerns. These two were also seen as less impactful than direct action or local engagement.

Conclusively, the findings reveal:

a) An **emphasis on direct action**-wherein the highest rated activities emphasize direct, collective actions (protest, community meetings) as essential means of civic engagement. This indicates a stronger desire for citizens to actively shape their communities and address grievances.
b) There is a **notable preference for grass roots activities (community focus)** over higher-level or bureaucratic engagements (like discussing issues with MPs) signaling a trust in local grassroots movements to effect change.
c) The **significant rating of social media activities** shows an adaptation to modern tools for advocacy (digital engagement) marking transition in civic participation.
d) Alarmingly though, activities aimed at supporting inclusive representation are rated lower, suggesting a need for continued efforts in raising awareness and value around these issues.

Overall, the data indicates a vibrant civic land scape where citizens prioritize direct engagement and collective action while still needing to bolster support for marginalized communities' voices.

3.2 The changing citizenry right to participate in 2024

This sphere aimed to explore how citizens perceive the evolution of their participatory rights over the past year. By posing the question, "How would you say your right to participate as a citizen has changed in the past 12 months?" to respondents, this inquiry sought to gather insights into their experiences and perceptions regarding civic engagement, expression, and access to democratic processes. The responses helped shed light on the broader trends affecting citizen participation in Uganda, in the context of the evolving political landscape with also a particular focus on women and youth as unique categories.

How would you say your right to participate as a citizen has changed in the past 12 months?

- 63% It worsened
- 27% It has improved
- 10% Not sure

A significant majority (63%) of respondents felt that their right to participate as citizens had worsened over the past year. This overwhelming sentiment suggests that many individuals perceive a decline in their ability to engage in civic activities, such as voting, attending public meetings, or participating in political discussions. Possible reasons for this perception could include increased government repression, restrictions on public gatherings, or reported incidences of intimidation against citizens trying to register their opinions or engage politically.

Only 27% of respondents observed improvements in their rights to participate as citizens. While this indicates a faction of the population believes there have been some positive developments, the relatively low percentage signifies that such improvements are not widely experienced or recognized. This may reflect localized changes or temporary reprieves rather than systematic enhancements in political participation rights.

Arguably, the high rate of individuals reporting worsened conditions highlights significant public discontent with the political environment and governmental policies affecting civic engagement. This sentiment might lead to decreased trust in public institutions and increased apathy or disillusionment among citizens.

3.3 Women equal civil rights and equal access to civic space

Do women have equal civil rights and equal access to Civic Space

- **62%** It worsened
- **23%** It has improved
- **15%** Not sure

A considerable majority of the respondents (62 %) believe that women have civil rights and access to civic space "to some extent." This suggests a recognition of some advancements in women's rights, but it also implies that significant barriers and inequalities still exist. The phrase *"to some extent"* indicates that while progress may have been made, it is neither comprehensive nor sufficient, highlighting areas where women still face obstacles in exercising their rights.

The 15% of respondents who affirmatively state *"Yes, definitely"* suggests that there is a belief in genuine equality in civil rights and civic access for women among a minority. This sentiment could be reflective of progress in socio-legal frameworks or increased female participation in various spheres. However,

this small proportion indicates that belief in full equality is not widespread, and many remain cautious about the extent of women's rights.

With 23% of respondents expressing that women do not have equal civil rights and access to civic space *"Not at all,"* this indicates a significant concern about ongoing gender disparities. Such sentiments could stem from observed barriers such as systemic discrimination, cultural norms, limitations in political representation, and issues like violence against women. This level of discontent may reflect experiences or observations of women being marginalized in both legal frameworks and practical civic engagement.

Understanding the context in which these responses were given is essential. Cultural, social, and political factors heavily influence women's status in society. Factors such as legislative gaps, persistent patriarchal norms, and lack of resources can limit women's civil rights and access to civic participation. Historical context, including women's movements and changing societal attitudes toward gender equality, may also affect perceptions of women's rights.

3.4 Youth equal civil rights and equal access to civic space

Do youth have equal civil rights and equal access to civic space?

- 62% Yes to Some
- 19% Not at all
- 12% Yes Definitely
- 7% Not sure

Findings reveal that:

a) a significant majority (62%) of the respondents believe that youth have civil rights and access to civic space 'to some extent.' This suggests an acknowledgment of some improvements or rights legally granted but also indicates a recognition that inequalities and barriers-notable limitations remain that prevent full equality and participation for the youth.

b) The 12% of the respondents who answered 'Yes, definitely' represent a minority that perceives a genuine state of equality for youth in civil rights and civic access. This could imply a sense of optimism among these respondents regarding specific policies or societal trends that empower youth. Undeniably, the small percentage also indicates skepticism about whether comprehensive equality is currently attainable for all young people.

c) A significant concern regarding the lack of equality in civil rights and civic space for youth is aired by the 19% of the respondents. This points us to the presence of structural issues and

policies that continue to hinder youth civic engagement.

d) There was also uncertainty amongst the respondents (7%) who were not sure on the status of youth civic rights. This perhaps speaks to lack of awareness and information amongst the citizenry about youth rights and available civic spaces.

3.5 Citizen participation and politicization

This particular segment sought to gauge public perception and sentiments regarding the 2024 landscape of civic engagement and activism within political contexts. By exploring this topic, the survey sought to understand how individuals perceive the interconnection between grassroots efforts and political agendas, as well as the extent to which they believe that genuine acts of public engagement are being co-opted or undermined by partisan interests.

Legal standards of civic participation rights	In Uganda, civic participation rights are primarily guaranteed under Article 38 of the Constitution, which states that every Ugandan has the right to participate in the affairs of government, either individually or through representatives, and to influence government policies through civic organizations. This includes the right to freedom of expression, assembly, and association (Article 29). While these rights are constitutionally protected, their practical exercise can be limited by other laws and government actions (Article 43) of the Constitution.

This inquiry was guided by the following question: Do you think citizen participation and peaceful activism is overly politicized?

Do you think citizen participation and peaceful activism is overly politicized?

- 75% Yes
- 15% No
- 10% Not sure

Findings reveal:

a) There was a manifest prevalence of a strong perception of politicization of civic works. A significant majority (approximately 75%) of respondents felt that citizen participation and peaceful activism have become overly politicized and being overshadowed by political agendas and conflicts thereby subjecting legitimate citizenry criticism against the government as illegal.

b) There was also a marked presence of a minority perspective, i. e15% who felt that it is not overly politicized indicating a view that may see activism as a valid and crucial part of political discourse without excessive manipulation. The 10% of respondents who were "not sure" reflected uncertainty, which may stem from varying definitions of politicization or differing experiences with activism.

By way of implication, the above state of affairs is giving impetus to the erosion of trust, reluctance and feelings of disenfranchisement among the citizenry towards civic initiatives. With legitimate criticism being labeled illegal, citizens fear repercussions for participating in peaceful activism or voicing dissent. This explains the possibility of a chilling effect on citizenry participation.

Conclusively: In 2024, there was a clear perspective among respondents that citizen participation and peaceful activism are excessively politicized. Peaceful civic activism highly restrained.

PART IV:

STATE OF NGO, MEDIA WORKERS AND JOURNALISTS LEGAL AND OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN 2024

4.1 Introduction

Part IV of this index assesses the respondent perceptions on the state of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media workers, and journalists in Uganda in 2024, examining the legal and operational environment that shaped their ability to operate freely and effectively. Respondents were provided a diversity of questions to speak to the theme with a view of probing the efficacy of the legal frameworks in place, alongside the realities on the ground, to illuminate the precarious environment in which NGOs and media professionals operate. Ultimately, the state of the two categories of actors, offers greater insights and indeed has broader implications for civic engagement and democratic governance in Uganda.

4.2 Current NGO legal registration and operating environment in 2024

How would you rate the current NGO legal registration and operating environment in 2024?

- 41% Restrictive
- 32% Very Restrictive
- 19% Progressive
- 8% Very progressive

Findings reveal two moderate positions described in here:

a) A prevalence of restrictive opinions wherein a significant majority (around 72.9% combined) of respondents perceived the NGO legal registration and operating environment in 2024 as either restrictive (41%) or very restrictive (32 %). This suggests a general sentiment that the environment was quite challenging for NGOs to operate within.

The above sentiments can be traced to the government threats of de-registration of NGOs and diversity of intimidation tactics by State agents towards NGOs especially in light of the citizenry protests against corruption that characterized 2024.[41] The President in a veiled attack at CSOs, accused the recipients of foreign funding to be the supporters of protests that were launched and executed by the youth against corruption.[42] He promised to deal with these people who were 'fermenting foreign interests' in Uganda.[43] These verbal attacks on NGOs, coming from the highest level of the Presidency, sent a chilling effect on NGOs, further highlighting the problematic operational civic space in 2024, forcing some to go on the defensive to avert state attacks.[44]

b) There were also notable perspectives of progressiveness albeit limited. Thus, data reveals that only 19% of respondents consider the environment to be progressive, and a mere 8% view it as very progressive. This indicates that there is little optimism about the improvement of conditions for NGOs.

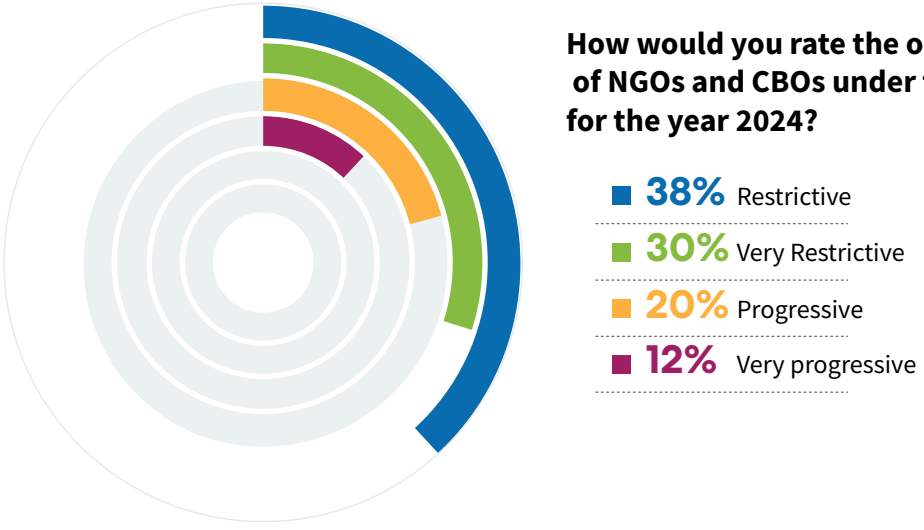
The data reflects a challenging legal environment for NGOs in 2024, with a predominant perception leaning towards restrictions on their operating capacities, since, partly, the government dubbed them corroborators of foreign funders to cause chaos in the country through protests. The significant percentages of those that viewed the environment as restrictive or very restrictive signal notable concerns regarding the ease and support for NGO operations in the country.

Conclusively the index finds: The NGO Legal registration and operating environment in 2024 as was in the previous years, remained partially protected space. The restrictive legal frame, burdensome compliance regulatory framework and inimical state practices combined curtailed the growth of the NGO operational civic space in the country.

4.3 The operating environment of NGOs and CBOs under the NGO Act, 2016 for the year 2024

This index also sought to explore the operating environment of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) in Uganda as defined by the NGO Act of 2016 for the year 2024. By posing targeted questions to respondents, the aim is to assess how the legal framework impacts the functionality, effectiveness, and sustainability of these organizations in their pursuit of social justice, community development, and human rights advocacy. The inquiry specifically investigated whether the environment was **Free, Partly Free, Not Free Or Very Restrictive** as presented by the current regulatory landscape, as well as the extent to which it facilitates or hinders their operations, thereby providing valuable insights into the health of civic space in Uganda. The discourse was guided by the question below: How would you rate the operating environment of NGOs and CBOs under the NGO Act, 2016 for the year 2024?

Chart I: The operating environment of NGOs and CBOs under the NGO Act, 2016 for the year 2024



From the findings, a combined total of 58% of respondents perceived the environment in 2024 as either not free (38%) or very restrictive (20%). This suggests that a significant majority of respondents believed that NGOs and CBOs are facing serious obstacles in their operations under the current legal framework. Only 12% of respondents

felt that the environment was free in 2024, with 30% considering it partly free. This indicates a general lack of confidence in the operating conditions, which may hinder the effectiveness of NGOs/CBOs.

The presence of the "Partly Free" category reflects a nuanced view, where some respondents saw potential and opportunities but also acknowledged significant barriers as inherently intertwined within the current legal framework affecting operations of both CBOs and NGOs.

In final analysis, the data indicated that the operating environment for NGOs and CBOs under the NGO Act of 2016 in 2024 was perceived largely as restrictive. The overwhelming percentage of respondents rating the environment as "not free" or "very restrictive" suggests serious concerns about limitations on freedom and operational capabilities of civil society in the contemporary Ugandan civic space.

Conclusively, the index finds that: The operating environment for NGOs and CBOs under the NGO Act of 2016 in 2024 was partially restricted.

4.4 State of Journalist and media workers' operational environment

The index sough to gain insights into the frequency and nature of police brutality and arbitrary arrests faced by journalists and media workers in Uganda due to their professional activities, ultimately shedding light on the broader implications for press freedom and civic space in the country. The respondents' views were harvested as answers to the question herein below:

How frequent would you say journalists and media workers are targeted in police brutality and arbitrary arrests incidents because of their work?

- **69%** Frequently
- **21%** Not So Frequently
- **10%** Does not occur but the risk is real

The findings revealed prevalence of:

a) a high perception of targeting to the effect that a significant majority (approximately 69%) of respondents perceived that journalists and media workers were frequently subjected to police brutality and arbitrary arrests. This indicates a heightened prevalent concern about the safety and protection of these professionals in their work environment.

Indeed, the above sentiments come not as a surprise considering the challenging year that 2024 was to journalists. It was characterized with attacks on journalists in the course of their work, especially while covering opposition politicians' activities. For example, on August 5, 2024, police officers attacked journalists covering a peaceful protest to the Kenyan High Commission by FDC Katonga faction members protesting the arrest of Dr.

Kizza Besigye.[45] They also damaged a video camera belonging to one of the journalists from the BBS TV.

b) the combined total (adding the "Not so frequently" and "Does not occur but the risk is real" categories) indicated that 30% of the respondents either think that targeting does not happen often or that it does not occur at all, but acknowledged the existence of risk. However, this is a much smaller proportion when compared to those who perceive frequent targeting of journalists. The data reflected a dominant sentiment of risk among journalists, suggesting that even in cases where direct incidents may not be frequently reported, the fear of potential police action remained significant.

The analysis shows that a substantial portion of respondents viewed police brutality and arbitrary arrests against journalists as a frequent occurrence. The high percentage of those affirming frequent targeting highlights serious concerns for press freedom and the protection of media workers and a degeneration of civic space.

Conclusively, the index finds that: the operational environment for media workers and journalists was restricted, characterized by frequent attacks by security agencies, in the course of execution of their journalistic duties.

4.5 Media rights and journalist freedoms in practice

Legal Standard of journalists/ media rights and freedoms	The Constitution of Uganda, under Article 29 provides for the protection of media freedom. In particular, Article 29 (1) (a) provides that (1) Every person shall have the right to— (a) freedom of speech and expression which shall include freedom of the press and other media;
Ranked:	Under threat and therefore partially restricted.

Gender of Respondents

- 60% Male
- 38% Female
- 2% Others

A clear majority (91%) of the respondents believe that media freedom in uganda is not respected in practice. This overwhelming sentiment reflects significant concerns about the state of press freedoms and the challenges faced by journalists and media in Uganda, in 2024, more specifically.

On the other hand, only 9% of the respondents indicated that they believe media freedom is guaranteed

and respected. Whereas this minority could suggest that some individuals perceive positive aspects of the media landscape, perhaps pointing to certain instances of journalistic independence, low percentage still indicates that such beliefs are not widely held or may be isolated cases rather than reflective of a broader trend. Clearly, even if there may be legal gurantees in the Constitution, as indeed there are, the sentiments expressed speak to concerns from citizens of a contradictory state practice that inhibits media freedoms enjoyment.

Conclusively, the index finds: Media freedoms were restricted in practice, in 2024.

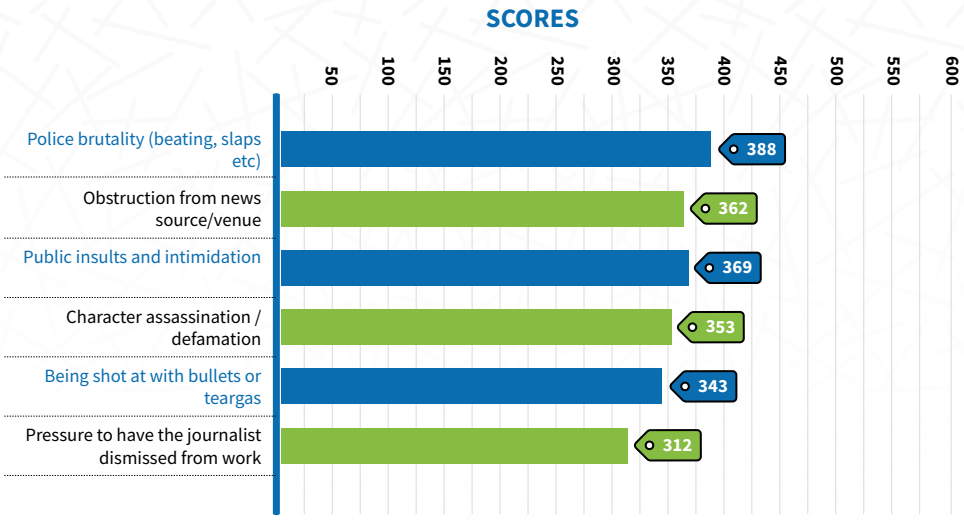
4.6 Actions directed at journalists and media workers

Also examined were respondent perspectives on the status of journalists and media rights and freedoms by analyzing the actions directed at them over the past two years. Respondents were asked to score various forms of aggression, intimidation and obstruction faced by journalists on a scale from 1 (absence of action) to 10 (repeated action). A breakdown of the analysis of these findings herein after follows:

Table IV: Have you seen any of the following actions being directed at journalists or media workers over the past 2 years? (Note: Score 1 represents 'absence of the specific action' and 10 represents 'repeated actions')

ACTIONS BEING DIRECTED AT JOURNALISTS OR MEDIA WORKERS	SCORES	RANK
1. Police brutality (beating, slaps etc)	**388**	**1**
2. Obstruction from news source/venue	**362**	**3**
3. Public insults and intimidation	**369**	**2**
4. Character assassination / defamation	**353**	**4**
5. Being shot at with bullets or teargas	**343**	**5**
6. Pressure to have the journalist dismissed from work	**312**	**6**

Graph II: Media and Journalists Operational Environment Challenges



Findings reveal that:

a) **Police brutality ranks No.1** indicating that a considerable number of respondents have witnessed severe physical aggression directed at journalists. It suggests a troubling trends where law enforcement officials are not only dimissing the neutrality of the press but also actively working against it. Such actions continue to hinder press freedom, instill fear amongst journalista and undermine public trust in law enforcement agencies.

b) **The second ranked was public insults and intimidation (score of 369 and ranked 2)** which represents a signifncant concern as it connotes a hostile environment that discourages journalists from doing their job. This public intimidation serves to chill journalistic inquiry and expression thereby creating a culture of fear.

c) **The obstruction of journalists from news sources/venues emerged 3rd at 362 respondents.** This prevents journalists from accessing information, sources, or locatons essential for their reporting and hence affecting, by extension, the public's right to informed discourse. Herein is an effort to control narratives and limit the scope of journalistic activities with long term consquences on media independence.

d) Other observed responses included the shooting at journalists with live bullets or tear gas endangering their physical safety and threatening their lives (ranked 5); pressure to have journalists dismissed from their work (ranked 6) often targetted to media owners from external actors mainly with State influence, a manifest sign of censorship and control over media narratives. Such threats to job security lead to an unsettling precedent where journalists may be coerced into presenting biased or suppressed news, hindering free expression and independent journalism. The sacrificial lamb in all this is civic space degeneration.

Overall, findings reveal that the journalists and media workers, in the year-2024, faced significant challenges, ranging from pysical threats to systemic attempts at censorship and intimidation. The

data underscores the hostile environment in which journalists operated in 2024, reflecting significant challenges to media freedom and their ability to report effectively. The prevalent forms of aggression reflect not only individuals' safety concerns but also broader implications for journalistic integrity and freedom. The findings call for attention to the need for better protection of journalists and their rights within the broarder context of civic space and freedom of expression.

Conclusively, the index finds that: The operational environment within which journalists operated in 2024, was hositle and inimical to the floursihing of journalistic intergrity and freedom.

CONCLUSION

Table 1: Overall Rating Table of Uganda's Civic Space in 2024

CIVIC SPACE THEMATIC INDICATORS	PROTECTED	PARTIALLY PROTECTED	RESTRICTED	NON-EXISTING
1. Media Rights and Journalist Freedoms			**x**-Indicating significant challenges for journalists and media workers in exercising their rights freely.	
2.Operational environment for journalists and media workers			**x**- Evidence involving media professionals facing threats, censorship, and barriers to their work documented.	
3.Freedom of expression online and offline			**x-** Manifestations of overt ongoing limitations on individuals' ability to express themselves freely, both in digital and non-digital spaces.	
4.Access to information		**x-** Evidence of some avenues for information access existence while emphasizing persistent obstacles rendering the right stale in practice.		
5.Right to Assembly			x- some allowance for peaceful gatherings only written in law, but evidence of significant restrictions.	
6.Right to peaceful protest			**x-** while protests remained permitted in law and to some extent in practice, they were still subject to immense, unjustifiable and illegitimate limitations and risks.	
7.Freedom of Association			x- a challenging environment for individuals and groups to form and join organizations freely remained in 2024.	
8.Right to political participation and civic space activities			**x-** significant barriers that hinder active participation in civic and political life remained.	

9.Women civil rights and equal access to civic space		**x-** there are mechanisms supporting women's rights in civic engagement, though challenges remain including violent politics.		
10.Youth civil rights and equal access to civic space		**x-** some positive developments in supporting youth participation in civic matters were available but amidst a highly forceful approach to opposition youth and critical youth bloggers online.		
11.The NGO Legal registration and operating environment in 2024		**x-** NGOs have some framework to operate but face bureaucratic and practical challenges that hinder their effectiveness significantly such as burdensome reporting demands.		
12.The operating environment for NGOs and CBOs under the NGO Act of 2016 in 2024		**x**-See above		
13. Citizen participation and peaceful activism			**x-** serious obstacles for citizens who wish to participate in activism remained including government oppression, punitive laws.	
14.Digital civic space		**X-** though access to internet is widespread-online civic engagement, activism, and communications faced severe repression, including imminent fears of internet shutdowns and stringent censorship laws such as the Computer misuse law.		

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):

1. Strengthen legal and advocacy capacities to challenge restrictive laws. CSOs should invest in legal expertise and strategic litigation to challenge laws and policies (such as the NGO Act amendments and restrictions on civic freedoms) that restrict civil society operations. Building robust legal defenses and advocacy campaigns can push for more autonomous and inclusive civic space.
2. Enhance Collaboration and Mutual Support to Protect Civic Space by taking actionable steps including:
    i. Establish cross-sector alliances among NGOs, media workers, youth groups, women's organizations, and marginalized communities to amplify advocacy efforts and share resources.
    ii. Create mutual support mechanisms such as legal aid pools, safety monitoring networks, and rapid response teams to assist activists, journalists, and CSOs facing repression.
    iii. Coordinate joint campaigns, petitions, and public awareness drives emphasizing unity and shared objectives, thereby reducing fragmentation and fostering collective resilience.

3. Enhance digital security and remote engagement strategies. CSO should develop and implement comprehensive digital security protocols for staff and members to safeguard online activism and communication. Leverage encrypted platforms and alternative digital tools to continue advocacy and mobilization despite internet restrictions or surveillance.

4. Foster partnerships and regional networks for collective action. CSO must collaborate with regional and international civil society networks to share resources, strategies, and solidarity campaigns. Such partnerships can amplify influence, provide protection, and create pressure for policy reforms to safeguard civic space.

5. Enhance community-based civic engagement and education. There is need to focus on grassroots civic education programs that empower citizens with knowledge of their rights, civic responsibilities, and safe participation methods. Community-level engagement can circumvent some top-down restrictions and foster resilient local activism.

B. Government and security agencies

1. Implement clear, transparent protocols for crowd and protest management. The UPDF and UPF should adopt non-violent, rights-respecting crowd control policies, including training officers on human rights standards during demonstrations, to reduce excessive use of force and arbitrary arrests.

2. Establish independent oversight and accountability mechanisms for military and police. Government should create internal and external oversight bodies to monitor and investigate police and military misconduct during civic events, with consequences for violations to rebuild public trust.

3. Clearly delineate and restrict the role of the military in civilian civic matters to prevent militarization of civic space and protect democratic principles.

C. Development Partners

1. Advocate for policy reforms and international accountability. Use diplomatic channels and multilateral platforms to urge the Ugandan government to reverse restrictions on civil liberties, operational independence of NGOs, and media freedoms. Tie continued funding and partnership support to compliance with international human rights standards.

D. NGO Bureau

1. Develop clear, fair, and accessible registration and compliance procedures. Simplify administrative processes and reduce bureaucratic hurdles to enable NGOs to operate effectively without undue interference or delays.

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