

LONDA 2025

DIGITAL RIGHTS & INCLUSION IN AFRICA REPORT

Uganda

Country Report



PARADIGM
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Uganda

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Executive Summary

The 2025 Uganda Londa report employs TheScore Index developed by Paradigm Initiative to evaluate the state of digital rights and inclusion in Uganda. The report concentrates on themes such as freedom of expression, privacy, access to information, and the impact of legal frameworks on digital engagement, aiming to measure compliance with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACH-PR) Declaration on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information (The Declaration) using a mixed-methods approach, incorporating quantitative data and case

studies to analyse key thematic areas. The report notes significant progress in Uganda's digital infrastructure since 2016, including higher internet penetration and the introduction of legal measures like the Data Protection and Privacy Regulations 2021. However, it also highlights ongoing critical issues, including internet shutdowns, censorship, and a digital divide exacerbated by socioeconomic factors. The report advises increasing public awareness of digital rights, strengthening the enforcement of data protection laws, and ensuring fair access to digital resources, especially in rural areas and among marginalised groups, to foster a more inclusive digital environment.

Introduction

The Republic of Uganda is a landlocked country in East Africa, bordered to the east by Kenya, to the north by South Sudan, to the west by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to the south-west by Rwanda, and to the south by Tanzania.¹ However, 30.03% of Uganda’s population is urban (15,430,672 people in 2025), while 72.3% lived in rural areas at the start of 2025² with a median age of 16.9 years.³ 50.4% of the population is female, while 49.6% is male⁴ and its population increased by 1.4 million, or 2.8%, between early 2024 and the start of 2025.⁵ Since 1986, Uganda’s president has remained Yoweri Museveni under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) political party.⁶

The 2025 Londa Uganda report analyses digital rights and inclusion in Uganda, offering critical recommendations for improvement and compliance with the Dec-

laration using TheScore Index developed by Paradigm Initiative.

Uganda has progressed in developing its digital infrastructure and legal frameworks for the digital economy which has led to the significant growth of internet penetration with a high proportion of the population having access to a broadband signal, expansion of mobile money and digital banking which has led to increased access to financial services,⁷ the enactment of legal frameworks such as the Data Protection and Privacy Act, 2019 and the establishment of the Personal Data Protection Office (PDPO) in 2021 are notable legislative steps toward safeguarding personal data and privacy; and the adoption of various e-governance platforms and a “chain-linked approach” to integrate digital technologies into public service

1. Uganda <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uganda> (accessed on November 15, 2024 at 16:00 EAT)
2. Simon Kemp. (3 March 2025). Digital 2025: Uganda <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-uganda> (accessed on November 8, 2025)
3. Uganda Population <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/uganda-population/> (accessed on November 8, 2025)
4. DIGITAL 2025: UGANDA <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-uganda> (accessed on November 8, 2025)
5. DIGITAL 2025: UGANDA <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-uganda> (accessed on November 8, 2025)
6. Uganda <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uganda> (accessed on November 8, 2025 at 15:47 EAT)
7. Fiona Luboga. (Sep 5, 2024). Uganda’s Journey of Progress and Digital Transformation since Independence <https://ict.go.ug/media/articles/ugandas-journey-of-progress-and-digital-transformation-since-independence>

delivery, including the justice system, to improve efficiency and transparency.

Despite this progress, critical digital rights issues remain unresolved and, in some cases, have worsened. These include internet shutdowns, censorship, and social media blocks during elections, which severely restrict access to information. Platforms such as Facebook remain blocked as of December 2025. Repressive laws, such as the 2011 Computer Misuse Act (amended in 2022), have been used against users, and surveillance technologies, including facial recognition, lack transparency and safeguards. A digital divide persists between urban and rural areas and along gender lines, due to limited access to smartphones, electricity, and digital literacy. Reliance on a national digital ID system marginalises about 40% of the population without IDs.⁸ Additionally, awareness of digital rights is low, and enforcement of data laws remains weak.

Internet Access

And Disruptions

Internet access remains a fundamental human right in Uganda, according to Uganda's 1995 Constitution, specifically Article 29(1)(a), which guarantees the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to receive and impart information and ideas through any media of one's choice.⁹ Uganda has seen various efforts, including advocacy by civil society organisations promoting digital rights and legislation aimed at improving access to internet services.¹⁰ However, challenges remain, including restrictions during social disturbances and internet censorship. In January 2025, there were 14.2 million internet users in Uganda, which increased by 1.0 million (+7.8%) between January 2024 and January 2025, with an internet penetration rate of 28% of the total population¹¹ Uganda's internet adoption rate increased by a relative 4.9% (+130 basis points) during the same

8. Michael Aboneka. (2025). Uganda's Digital ID Barrier Worsens as Court Delivers Blow to Access <https://digitalrightsalliance.africa/ugandas-digital-id-barrier-worsens-as-court-delivers-blow-to-access/>
9. Constitution of the Republic of Uganda <https://ulii.org/akn/ug/act/statute/1995/constitution/eng@2018-01-05> (accessed on February 06, 2025 at 2:28 pm South African time)
10. <https://www.ucc.co.ug/download-category/performance-reports/> (accessed on February 09, 2025)
11. Simon Kemp. (3 March 2025). Digital 2025: Uganda <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-uganda> (accessed on November 8, 2025)

period. Factors such as limited access to electricity in rural areas, low digital literacy levels, and the high cost of internet-enabled devices such as computers and smartphones are some of the obstacles affecting internet usage.¹² Despite widespread network availability, recent GSMA data indicates that 4G population coverage has reached 96%, yet internet adoption remains low (22%), which creates a significant usage gap.¹³ This significant disparity is due to various persistent barriers, including the high cost of smartphones, sector taxes, and limited digital literacy among the populace.¹⁴

Laws and measures for fostering meaningful access include the Uganda Communications Act, 2013¹⁵, digital literacy programs implemented by the govern-

ment¹⁶ and various organisations in Uganda, affordability initiatives to reduce internet costs, and deployment of community networks by the government and organisations to improve internet access in remote areas.¹⁷

In 2025, there were several discussions with Tanzania to develop a resilient network and increase bandwidth through the new route provided by Kilimanjaro Telecom to address long-standing challenges with last-mile connectivity and reliability to lower the cost of internet in Uganda.¹⁸ By July 2025, Uganda had started assembling its own local production of digital devices to reduce costs and expand access at the Namanve and Mbale industrial parks.¹⁹ Additionally, in 2025, Airtel Uganda and MTN Uganda significantly

12. Gillwald, A., Mothobi, O., Tusubira, F., & Ndiwalana, A. (2019). *The State of ICT in Uganda (Policy Paper No. 8; Series 5: After Access – Assessing Digital Inequality in Africa)*. Research ICT Africa. https://researchictafrica.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019_After-Access-The-State-of-ICT-in-Uganda.pdf (accessed on November 8, 2025)
13. *What is the Digital Divide? (GSMA)* <https://www.gsma.com/breaking-barriers-closing-the-digital-divide/> (accessed on January 31, 2026)
14. Simon Kemp. (3 March 2025). *Digital 2025: Uganda* <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-uganda> (accessed on November 8, 2025)
15. <https://www.ucc.co.ug/download/uganda-communications-act-2013/> (accessed on January 13, 2026)
16. *Digital Literacy Training for Local Government Officers PDM* <https://ict.go.ug/media/news/digital-literacy-training-for-local-government-officers#>
17. Ambrose Okai. (22 May 2025). *Oyam Women Embrace Rural Broadband to Bridge Digital Divide* <https://ugandaraadionetwork.net/story/oyam-women-embrace-rural-broadband-to-bridge-digital-divide> (accessed on November 30, 2025)
18. Amon Katungulu. (July 22, 2025). *Uganda and Tanzania Strengthen ICT Partnership to Boost Regional Digital Connectivity* <https://nilepost.co.ug/news/274541/uganda-and-tanzania-strengthen-ict-partnership-to-boost-regional-digital-connectivity> (accessed on November 28, 2025)
19. *The Independent*. (July 22, 2025). *Uganda and Tanzania strengthen ICT partnership* <https://www.independent.co.ug/uganda-and-tanzania-strengthen-ict-partnership/> (accessed on November 28, 2025)

advanced their 5G networks, enhancing coverage and service quality, especially in rural areas.²⁰ Despite this progress, Uganda's internet connectivity remains uneven, with some areas having high speeds while others remain underdeveloped, particularly in rural regions. The most popular form is mobile data, which is more prone to fluctuations due to factors such as network congestion during peak usage times and weather conditions. Although urban regions benefit from faster and more stable connections due to the expansion of fibre and 4G/5G networks, a digital divide between cities and rural areas remains, and the country's overall average still lags behind that of developed nations.²¹ As of November 2025, 35 internet service providers (ISPs) were connected to the Uganda Internet Exchange Point (UIXP).²²

The cost of internet access and devices is the primary barrier to internet access and

use, particularly for low-income households. The average price of one gigabyte (GB) of prepaid mobile data is US\$1.11 (approximately UGX5,000), representing up to 16.2% of the average Ugandan's monthly income.²³ This is higher than the Broadband Commission's "1 for 2" target, which recommends that 1GB of data should cost no more than 2% of the average monthly income to be considered affordable because Ugandans spend roughly US\$2.87 per month on internet data, which is a significant burden when weighed against mandatory basic needs or services such as food and healthcare.²⁴ Internet costs are affected mainly by the 5% digital services tax introduced in July 2023 by the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA), which continues to impact the digital ecosystem by targeting non-resident companies that earn income from providing digital services in Uganda.

The government has also continued to enforce a 12% tax on internet data as

20. Joan Kaberia. (December 17, 2025). Airtel Expands 5G Beyond Kampala <https://cioafrica.co/airtel-expands-5g-beyond-kampala/> (accessed on January 31, 2026)
21. What is the Internet Speed Like in Uganda? <https://allinafricasafaris.com/what-is-the-internet-speed-like-in-uganda/> (accessed on November 30, 2025)
22. The Uganda Internet eXchange Point <https://www.uixp.co.ug/networks> (accessed on November 28, 2025)
23. Paul Murungi. (Wednesday, September 06, 2023). Internet users spend average of Shs5,000 on data monthly <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/business/markets/internet-users-spend-average-of-shs5-000-on-data-monthly-4359906> (accessed on January 31, 2026)
24. Dorothy Nakaweesi. (Thursday, September 25, 2025). Internet surge: Ugandans are spending more on data than ever before <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/business/markets/internet-surge-ugandans-are-spending-more-on-data-than-ever-before--5205000> (accessed on November 30, 2025)
25. Posted at 7:07 PM · Apr 29, 2021 via user: Nemz @AmanyaNemz https://twitter.com/Parliament_Ug/status/1387800653356060672 (accessed on November 30, 2025)

part of a tax package adopted under the Excise Duty (Amendment) Act 2021.²⁵ Research on the 12% tax found that it disproportionately affected women's access to the Internet.²⁶ By early 2025, 37.6% of Uganda's social media user identities were female, while 62.4% were male, with 16.9 % of Uganda's total internet user base (regardless of age) using at least one social media platform in January 2025.²⁷ Even though the prices of data are competitive in the East Africa region, Uganda still lags behind Kenya and Rwanda in terms of overall affordability relative to average income.²⁸

The device cost is relatively high, with smartphones priced at US\$38-39, which represents approximately 39% of GDP per capita and 96% of income for the

poorest 40% of Ugandans.²⁹ This is mainly due to taxation, which accounts for approximately 35% of an entry-level smartphone's price, thereby further hindering internet access. This makes future phones the most commonly owned for their affordability and durability.³⁰ The high cost of internet devices and data services, relative to income, creates a digital divide in Uganda. Despite improved coverage, affordability keeps many offline.³¹ In 2025, there were no reported connectivity restrictions or new government-imposed limitations on social media platforms, although access to Facebook remained restricted, hence partial social media restrictions.³² However, some users can still access Facebook using virtual private networks (VPNs) and selected Wi-Fi networks.³³ According to NetBlocks,

26. Rehema Kahunde. (February 2, 2023). Taxation, gender, and internet access: lessons from Uganda <https://global-dev.blog/taxation-gender-and-internet-access-lessons-uganda/> (accessed on November 30, 2025)
27. Simon Kemp. (3 March 2025). Digital 2025: Uganda <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-uganda> (accessed on November 30, 2025)
28. Dorothy Nakaweesi. (Thursday, September 25, 2025). Internet surge: Ugandans are spending more on data than ever before <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/business/markets/internet-surge-ugandans-are-spending-more-on-data-than-ever-before--5205000> (accessed on November 30, 2025)
29. Betty Ndagire. (Wednesday, November 12, 2025). 70 percent of Ugandans remain offline, says GSMA <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/business/technology/70-percent-of-ugandans-remain-offline-says-gsma--5261488> (accessed on January 31, 2026)
30. Betty Ndagire. (Wednesday, November 12, 2025). 70 percent of Ugandans remain offline, says GSMA <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/business/technology/70-percent-of-ugandans-remain-offline-says-gsma--5261488>
31. Digital divide widens as smartphone costs keep millions of Ugandans offline, says report <https://www.ugbulletin.co.ug/digital-divide-widens-as-smartphone-costs-keep-millions-of-ugandans-offline-says-report/>
32. Arthur Arnold Wadero. (Friday, August 12, 2022). Facebook to remain shut as govt talks with tech giant stall <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/facebook-to-remain-shut-as-govt-talks-with-tech-giant-stall-3912172> (accessed on November 30, 2025)
33. Timothy Kalyegira. (Sunday, December 07, 2025). Museveni's Facebook 'ban' <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/museveni-s-facebook-ban--5288966#story> (accessed on January 31, 2026)

which calculates the economic cost of internet shutdowns utilising the Cost of Shutdown Tool (COST), it estimates that since Facebook was blocked in Uganda in January 2021, Uganda loses annually US\$347,559,903, approximately UGX1,294,269,808,851.³⁴ As of early 2025, 38.6 million cellular connections were active in Uganda, accounting for 76.2% of the population. This means that the number of mobile connections in Uganda increased by 3.9 million (+11.1%) between the start of 2024 and the beginning of 2025.³⁵ Based on GSMA Intelligence data, it is suggested that now 86.5% of mobile connections in Uganda are considered “broadband”, meaning they connect via 3G, 4G, or 5G mobile networks, and the rise of eSIMs has made this even easier over recent years.³⁶ However, the 2024 National Population & Housing Census report highlighted significant differences in internet usage by gender, with 11% of men reporting internet use compared with 8% of women. It also showed regional disparities, with Buganda (19%) having the highest proportion of internet

users, whereas Karamoja (3%) had the lowest. Uganda has made progress in internet access and digital engagement, aligning with the ACHPR Principle 38 on non-interference in the context of media and freedom of expression, as set out in the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa (2019).

Online freedom of expression and access to information

Uganda’s legal system grants broad powers to restrict digital expression. The Computer Misuse Act, 2022, under Section 29(5), criminalises many online activities, such as “sending unsolicited messages” and “sharing malicious information,” with vague terms that grant authorities broad powers to arrest content protected by

34. Netblocks Cost of Shutdown Tools <https://netblocks.org/cost/>

35. Simon Kemp. (3 March 2025). Digital 2025: Uganda <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-uganda> (accessed on November 30, 2025)

36. Ibid

37. Uganda Steps Up Pressure on Social Media Critics Ahead of 2026 Polls <https://cipesa.org/2025/04/uganda-steps-up-pressure-on-social-media-critics-ahead-of-2026-polls/> (accessed on November 30, 2025)

38. Access Now. (19 May 2025). How Uganda’s anti-LGBTQ+ laws entrap people online <https://www.accessnow.org/uganda-anti-lgbtq-entrapment-laws/> (accessed on November 30, 2025)

the Constitution. Even though false news (2004) and sedition (2010), which were contained in the Penal Code Act (Cap. 120), were repealed, their manifestations remain through practices.³⁷ The Ugandan government has continued to restrict free expression online, cracking down on social media users and imposing multi-year prison sentences. A May 2025 report from Access Now documented at least 17 individuals who were arbitrarily detained or charged under Uganda's anti-LGBT+ laws from May 2023 to March 2025 after online entrapment or deception.³⁸ Freedom House and WOUNET also report that women's freedom of expression is also limited by online gender-based violence, trolling, and self-censorship.³⁹

Concerns remain about the accessibility of information related to the ACHPR's operations and its independence from government influence.⁴⁰

Uganda was one of the first African countries to establish a right-to-information law with the Access to Information Act

(ATIA) in 2005, followed by the Access to Information Regulations in 2011, which aligns with the principle of guaranteeing legal rights to access information held by public bodies.⁴¹ This legislation aims to promote access to information, foster government transparency, and encourage citizen participation in decision-making. Since the enactment of ATIA, the Ugandan government has initiated several programs to enhance access to information, including the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, which is responsible for formulating ICT policies and managing national infrastructure. There is supposed to be an Information Commission to oversee the act's implementation and handle complaints, though it has not yet been established, which leaves a major gap in the legal and institutional framework.⁴² Most of these efforts are positive but insufficient when considered against the legal rights guaranteed. This is because it is hampered by challenges such as political will and slow response times. Increased efforts in public education are necessary

39. Women's Freedom of Expression: What Are The Challenges & Their impacts to women's participation in Digital Spaces? <https://wougnnet.org/womens-freedom-of-expression-what-are-the-challenges-their-impacts-to-womens-participation-in-digital-spaces/> (accessed on November 30, 2025)
40. Ronald Musoke, 'Uganda: Is UCC Going Rogue?' (5 December 2017) *The Independent (Kampala)* <https://allafrica.com/stories/201712050069.html> (accessed on November 18, 2024)
41. CIPESA, 'The State of Access to Information in Uganda' <https://cipesa.org/wp-content/files/briefs/report/Position-Paper-The-State-of-Access-to-Information-in-Uganda.pdf> (accessed on November 19, 2024)
42. AFIC. (31/05/2024). Access to Information in Uganda: Prospects and Hurdles <https://www.africafoicentre.org/access-to-information-in-uganda-prospects-and-hurdles/> ((accessed on November 30, 2025)

to bridge the gap between legislation and practical application.

Additionally, Uganda's 1995 Constitution guarantees citizens the right to access information held by the state, with some limitations for security and privacy.⁴³ This right is also recognised by international frameworks, including Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.⁴⁴ The Access to Information Act of 2005 grants citizens the right to access information, but in practice, many face challenges.⁴⁵ Section 3(d) of the Act requires that citizens access information within 21 days. However, delays caused by fear and bureaucracy often make this right difficult to exercise, especially for journalists and human rights enforcers. These barriers hinder residents' access to information, thereby contradicting the principle of expeditious access outlined in the ACHPR. While the Act should allow public access

to information affecting citizens, Article 41 of the Constitution and other sections limit this right to information held by public bodies, excluding private companies and civil society, because it is the duty of state actors to provide information necessary to protect human rights.

In contrast, non-state actors do not have the same obligations. However, this exclusion of other entities raises concerns about the practicality and efficiency of accessing information, which is critical to compliance with Principle 26(a) of the ACHPR. The ATIA primarily covers information from public bodies, excluding private entities, and limits access to protect rights. Despite these obstacles, radio is still the primary information source with 68% of Ugandans relying on it, though its usage is declining, especially in urban areas.⁴⁶ Television usage remains widely used as a source of information and entertainment. Internet and social media usage have increased.⁴⁷ Word of mouth

43. <https://cipesa.org/wp-content/files/briefs/report/Position-Paper-The-State-of-Access-to-Information-in-Uganda.pdf> (accessed on November 11, 2024)

44. <https://cipesa.org/wp-content/files/briefs/report/Position-Paper-The-State-of-Access-to-Information-in-Uganda.pdf> (accessed on November 11, 2024)

45. <https://chapterfouruganda.org/sites/default/files/downloads/The-Access-to-Information-Act-2005.pdf> (accessed on November 11, 2024)

46. 'The power of radio in Uganda's climate fight' (February 12, 2025) <https://acme-ug.org/2025/02/12/the-power-of-radio-in-ugandas-climate-fight/> (accessed on November 30, 2025)

47. Stephen Kalema. (7 February 2025). Radio listenership on Decline: How Digital and On-Demand Content Are Reshaping Uganda's Media Landscape <https://www.watchdoguganda.com/news/20250208/177745/radio-listenership-on-decline-how-digital-and-on-demand-content-are-reshaping-ugandas-media-landscape.html> (accessed on November 30, 2025)

as a source of information rose significantly from 4% to 16%.⁴⁸

In 2025, Uganda's regulatory environment for online content raised concerns about its alignment with the principles set out in the ACHPR, particularly the rights to freedom of expression and access to information. In recent years, the Ugandan government has implemented stringent measures under the Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act, 2022, specifically Section 3 (Unauthorized Access), Section 4 (Unauthorized Use of Computer Misuse), Section 5 (Cyber Harassment), Section 6 (Cyberbullying), and Section 7 (False or Misleading Information) which lay together the groundwork for increased control and regulation of online speech, which many critics perceive as a means to stifle dissent and limit freedom of expression in Uganda, and additionally through actions by the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) to control online discourse, often justifying them as necessary for national security and public order. However,

human rights experts broadly view these laws and their enforcement as failing to respect rights, owing to vague language, lack of transparency, and their use to suppress dissent and media freedom.⁴⁹

Government-controlled content includes Facebook blocking, platform monitoring and requests, media bans, internet shutdowns, platform content removal, and regulations on social media use, as well as the monitoring and potential removal of content deemed inappropriate by authorities. For instance, in October 2025, a government ban was imposed on the Nation Media Group, which drew criticism from civil society for breaching press freedom and constitutional rights.⁵⁰ Additionally, the government is actively acquiring social media monitoring tools and invoking laws such as the Computer Misuse Act to prosecute users of platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) for online speech.⁵¹ Between April and June 2025, TikTok removed more than 1.5 million Ugandan videos for violations, including hate

48. <https://www.independent.co.ug/radio-still-most-popular-media-in-uganda/> (accessed on November 11, 2024)

49. Uganda Steps Up Pressure on Social Media Critics Ahead of 2026 Polls <https://cipesa.org/2025/04/uganda-steps-up-pressure-on-social-mStrategiesedia-critics-ahead-of-2026-polls/>

50. CPJ. (October 30, 2025 12:36 PM EDT). Ugandan authorities ban Nation Media Group from parliamentary, presidential coverage <https://cpj.org/2025/10/ugandan-authorities-ban-nation-media-group-from-parliamentary-presidential-coverage/> (accessed on December 2, 2025)

51. NOELYN NASSUUNA AND HELEN NAMYALO KIMBUGWE. (7 April 2025). Uganda's Move to Procure Social Media Tracking Tool: A New Threat to Digital Rights and Freedoms <https://www.defendersprotection.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Ugandas-Move-to-Procure-Social-Media-Tracking-Tool-.pdf> (accessed on December 2, 2025)

speech, misinformation, and obscenity.⁵² Uganda ranked 29th worldwide for video deletions during this period.⁵³ This figure surpasses Kenya's 592,000 and South Africa's 420,000. Thousands of videos in Nigeria were also affected.⁵⁴ Facebook has been continuously blocked, and during a presidential address on youth concerns on November 30, 2025, President Yoweri Kaguta stated, "I had to teach Facebook a lesson. They thought that without them Uganda wouldn't survive. We had to make sure that Facebook knows we are unstoppable".⁵⁵ This prompted Ugandan citizens to anticipate additional 'lessons' ahead of the January 2026 presidential elections. In July 2025, Google's actions were found to violate Uganda's Data Protection and Privacy Act 2019 by failing to register as a data controller and by illegally transferring data, highlighting ongoing regulatory issues and gaps in legal oversight. On November 8 2024, four Ugandan complainants filed a complaint with the Uganda Personal Data Protection Office (PDPO) against Google for failing to register and

for conducting cross-border data transfers without approval. On November 5 2025, Google withdrew its appeal following discussions led by the ICT Minister, marking a significant milestone in African digital rights and platform accountability.⁵⁶ Google acknowledged the PDPO's authority, began compliance efforts, and emphasised that Ugandan data rights are non-negotiable. Uganda has a complex legal framework governing digital rights, including Article 29 of the Ugandan Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech, expression, and the press.

The Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act 2022 is the main law for regulating online content, which criminalises various online actions such as sharing "malicious information," engaging in "Hate speech" (vaguely defined), using social media under a "disguised or false identity," and distributing "unsolicited information." In January 2023, the Constitutional Court annulled Section 25 of the 2011 Act, which penalised "offensive communication," but

52. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DQ56DU5D51u/?hl=en> (accessed on January 31, 2026)

53. TikTok deletes 1.5 million videos posted by Ugandans <https://www.trtafrika.com/english/article/c2d9004f3b13> (accessed on December 2, 2025)

54. Ibid

55. <https://www.facebook.com/AtekerTV/posts/president-kaguta-museveni-i-had-to-teach-facebook-a-lesson-they-thought-that-wit/1331784655628337/> (accessed on January 31, 2026)

56. Emmanuel Ngwa. (28 November 2025). Google withdraws appeal in Uganda privacy case — victory for digital rights across Africa? <https://ngwaspenn.com/google-withdraws-appeal-in-uganda-privacy-case-victory-for-digital-rights-across-africa/> (accessed on December 2, 2025) ecological and rule-of-law

the 2022 amendment, specifically Section 17, retained similar broad provisions.⁵⁷

Recent years have seen a rise in arbitrary arrests, judicial harassment, and torture of environmental and land rights defenders. Lawyer Eron Kiiza, known for environmental and rule-of-law advocacy, was detained. This trend reflects broader suppression of rights to peaceful assembly and expression under Ugandan law (Article 29 of the Constitution) and international law (Articles 19 and 21 of the ICCPR).⁵⁸

On March 13 2025, two journalists were injured and their equipment confiscated at a private residence where Opposition Leader Joel Ssenyonyi and NUP Secretary-General Lewis Rubongoya visited to investigate ballot pre-ticking ahead of the Kawempe North by-election. Stephen Kibwiika of NTV/Spark TV was severely assaulted during the event on March 12.⁵⁹ Kibwiika, a journalist, faced severe harassment while covering suspected electoral misconduct in Kawempe. After receiving a tip-off from

the Leader of the Opposition, he and his team witnessed individuals removing vehicle number plates. They were violently attacked by plainclothes assailants, resulting in Kibwiika sustaining injuries from batons and kicks, and ultimately surrendering his camera.⁶⁰ This incident highlights a troubling trend of violence against journalists, including Thomas Kitimbo of NBS TV, who was injured and had his phone taken, underscoring the broader attacks on media freedom during the Kawempe North campaign.⁶¹ When HRNJ-Uganda contacted the police, Deputy Spokesperson Luke Oweyesigire denied any security involvement and urged that any complaints be filed at Kawempe Police Station for investigation.⁶² The Kawempe North by-election has seen violence, with over five journalists attacked, including Miracle Ibra of Top Television, who was hospitalised in critical condition, Steven Mbidde of NTV, Stephen Kibwiika, and Thomas Kitimbo of NBS TV.⁶³

Such practices have led to self-censorship that stifles dissent and suppress-

57. Uganda Steps Up Pressure on Social Media Critics Ahead of 2026 Polls <https://cipesa.org/2025/04/uganda-steps-up-pressure-on-social-media-critics-ahead-of-2026-polls/> (accessed on December 2, 2025)

58. Ibid

59. HRNJ Uganda. (March 13, 2025). Escalating Attacks on Journalists During Kawempe North By-Election Raise Serious Concerns <https://hrnjuganda.org/?p=10151> (accessed on December 3, 2025)

60. Ibid

61. Ibid

62. HRNJ Uganda. (March 13, 2025). Escalating Attacks on Journalists During Kawempe North By-Election Raise Serious Concerns <https://hrnjuganda.org/?p=10151> (accessed on December 3, 2025)

es critical voices, which are crucial to a healthy democratic society. The ACHPR emphasises the importance of freedom of expression as an inherent feature of democratic governance. Article 9 of the Charter explicitly states that every individual shall have the right to express and disseminate their opinions within the law. Uganda's current approach to content moderation and censorship may be inconsistent with these commitments, as it significantly limits citizens' ability to engage freely in public discourse. Moreover, the enforcement of content moderation policies often lacks transparency and due process, further complicating the situation. Reports of arbitrary arrests and harassment of journalists, bloggers, and activists have highlighted the risks faced by those who seek to express dissenting opinions or share information that counters government narratives.⁶⁴ Advocacy efforts are vital in promoting a more open and accountable governance framework in an increasingly connected world.

Gendered disinformation

Addressing gendered disinformation is crucial for ensuring a fair electoral landscape and combating gender inequality in Uganda.⁶⁵ Disinformation often manifests through the manipulation of information, demonisation of gender equality ideals, and various forms of abuse, including trolling and body shaming. Women, specifically women in leadership, journalists and human rights defenders, are frequently the primary targets of gendered disinformation, which marginalises their decision-making participation. Women leaders in Uganda, Kenya, and South Africa have reported experiencing AI-generated deepfake assaults and threats of physical violence, a rising concern in 2025.⁶⁶ A survey across Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Senegal, and South Africa found 28% of women experienced online violence.⁶⁷

63. Consolate Namyalo. (March 12, 2025). NUP's Rubongoya, Journalist Injured in Kawempe By-Election Drama <https://chimpreports.com/nups-rubongoya-journalist-injured-in-kawempe-by-election-drama/> (accessed on December 3, 2025)
64. Brian Byaruhanga, 'Navigating the Threats To Journalism in Uganda' (June 30, 2023) <https://cipesa.org/2023/06/navigating-the-threats-to-journalism-in-uganda/> (accessed on January 14, 2025)
65. Muhamadi Matovu, 'How gender focused misinformation impacts women in Ugandan politics' (WED 10 JUL, 2024 12:35) <https://nilepost.co.ug/politics/206987/how-gender-focused-misinformation-impacts-women-in-ugandan-politics> (accessed on November 18, 2024)
66. Pius Serugo. (Tuesday, December 2, 2025). Digital violence in East and Southern Africa: Urgent action needed to protect women and girls online <https://nilepost.co.ug/news/307562/digital-violence-in-east-and-southern-africa-urgent-action-needed-to-protect-women-and-girls-online> (accessed on December 3, 2025)
67. Ibid

Additionally, 42% of female African parliamentarians reported online death, rape, or abduction threats.⁶⁸ Martha Karua, a female politician from Kenya, was targeted for being a woman and single, accused of indecisiveness and responsible for the 2008 post-election chaos, with social media blamed for taking part in violence.⁶⁹ The impact of gendered disinformation extends beyond individual harm; it undermines public discourse and diminishes women's credibility, discouraging their political engagement. Many women withdraw from political processes due to intimidation tactics, while those with multiple identities often face heightened discrimination and hate speech. For instance, former Speaker of Parliament Rebecca Kadaga and Doreen Nyandura have been identified as targets of gendered disinformation campaigns.⁷⁰

Another example is Dr Miria Matembe, a well-known politician and women's rights advocate, who filed a defamation lawsuit against Ofono Opondo, a government spokesperson, for making sexist comments about her during Uganda's political show on NBS Frontline, including claims that her husband left her for a housemaid.⁷¹ The civic space for women journalists is shrinking due to gender-based violence, affecting their well-being and press freedom.⁷² In Uganda, fear of attacks often prevents critical reporting. The mental health crisis among journalists worsens, with many suffering from burnout, trauma, and anxiety. New threats include disinformation, cyber-attacks, online media regulation, and ethical issues related to AI. Furthermore, a Sudanese hacker compromised Uganda's telecoms, with leaked data exposing journalists to identity theft and potential harm.⁷³

68. IPU report highlights widespread sexism & violence against women MPs in Africa <https://www.bgipu.org/activity-reports/widespread-sexism-and-violence-against-women-in-african-parliaments-according-to-new-ipu-report/> (accessed on December 3, 2025)
69. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/thekenyatimes/posts/1377113230217692/> (accessed on December 3, 2025)
70. WOUNET. (March 2025). Women in Journalism and Politics: Countering Gendered Disinformation in Uganda <https://woungnet.org/download/women-in-journalism-and-politics-countering-gendered-disinformation-in-uganda> (accessed on December 3, 2025)
71. Sandra Aceng. (24 September 2025). The Role of Multistakeholderism in Countering Gendered Disinformation in Africa <https://www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/role-multistakeholderism-countering-gendered-disinformation-africa> (accessed on December 3, 2025)
72. Examining the gendered dimensions of Journalists safety based on Unesco's JSI on IN Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda <https://www.africafoicentre.org/examining-the-gendered-dimensions-of-journalists-safety-based-on-unesco-jsi-on-in-kenya-tanzania-and-uganda/> (accessed on November 18, 2024)
73. AFIC. (20/06/2025). One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Uganda's Slippery Media Landscape in 2024 <https://www.africafoicentre.org/one-step-forward-two-steps-back-ugandas-slippery-media-landscape-in-2024/> (accessed on December 3, 2025)

Misinformation also politicises gender equality efforts, silencing women and perpetuating negative perceptions of their roles. Gender stereotypes and hypersexualisation in politics aim to discredit women, causing many to withdraw from public life. Social media enables the rapid dissemination of harmful narratives, and anonymity can be exploited to spread derogatory comments and misinformation. Additionally, algorithms that prioritise engagement may promote divisive content, further marginalising women candidates and reinforcing gender stereotypes. Although laws like the Computer Misuse Act exist, there is a lack of specific policies addressing gendered disinformation in Uganda.⁷⁴ Some laws, like those against hate speech and disinformation, have been misused to silence women, journalists, and activists instead of protecting them. Organisations now push for laws on Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) to fill legal gaps, holding offenders and service providers accountable. The Sexual Offences Bill doesn't define TFGBV, limiting its effectiveness.⁷⁵

While Part I of the Bill mentions sexual offences and digital platforms, it lacks a clear TFGBV definition, making it less effective against online sexual offences. It's crucial to include a clause defining TFGBV in accordance with international standards and Ugandan law, including the 1995 Constitution, the Data Protection Act 2019, the Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act 2022, the Penal Code Cap 120, and the Uganda Communications Act 2013.⁷⁶

Data Protection and

Cybersecurity

Uganda's legal framework is supported by the Data Protection and Privacy Act 2021 and the Personal Data Protection Office (PDPO), the regulator. This sets a comprehensive basis of data handling because the law applies to all entities controlling or processing personal data by mandatory registration with the PDPO, including

74. <https://nilepost.co.ug/politics/206987/how-gender-focused-misinformation-impacts-women-in-ugandan-politics> (accessed on November 18, 2024)

75. CIPESA. (February 25, 2025). CIPESA and Partners Advocate for Inclusion of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in Uganda's Sexual Offences Bill <https://cipesa.org/2025/02/cipesa-and-partners-advocate-for-inclusion-of-technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence-in-ugandas-sexual-offences-bill/> (accessed on December 3, 2025)

76. Ibid

offshore ones handling Ugandan citizens' data.⁷⁷ In 2025, Uganda has seen some significant development in its data protection enforcements, such as Uganda's PDPO's increased enforcement, issuing a landmark ruling against Google LLC—the first criminal conviction under the country's Data Protection and Privacy Act, Cap 97.⁷⁸ Dated July 18 2025, the verdict finds Google breached data transfer rules and must comply within 30 days. The case originated from an November 8 2024 complaint by four Ugandans, accusing Google of unlawfully collecting, processing, and transferring their data without safeguards.⁷⁹ This sets a precedent for multinational companies on platform accountability.

Additionally, some of the cases of personal data misuse by the state and private sector include Uganda's first data protection conviction on July 10 2025, which marks a significant milestone in digital privacy enforcement through a

case against Nano Loans Microfinance Ltd. The director was found guilty of operating without PDPO registration and unlawfully processing personal data, resulting in a fine and a criminal record.⁸⁰ This shifts data violations from civil to criminal offences, impacting sectors such as finance, healthcare, and e-commerce. It encourages companies to review compliance, emphasising data protection at the executive level, particularly in debt recovery involving borrower information.⁸¹ The case sets a regional precedent, demonstrating that data laws can be enforced amid rapid digital growth in East Africa. This case confirms that digital rights are enforceable and underscores the importance of legal compliance to foster trust and growth in Africa's digital economy.⁸²

In December 2025, a finance manager at Vuka Africa Ltd was fined UGX100,000, approximately US\$27, and if he defaulted, sentenced to two months in jail after

77. Paul Mbuga and Ruth Muhawe. (23 July 2025). Uganda's Data Protection regulator clarifies compliance requirements for offshore entities <https://www.dlapiper africa.com/en/uganda/insights/2025/CLIENT-ALERT> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

78. Business Times Uganda. (July 25, 2025). Uganda's data protection office finds google in breach of privacy law <https://businesstimesug.com/ugandas-data-protection-office-finds-google-in-breach-of-privacy-law/> (accessed on December 3, 2025)

79. Ibid

80. Alice Namuli Blazevic., Patrick Mugalula. (30 September 2025). Uganda's First Data Protection Conviction: A New Era for Digital Privacy Enforcement in Africa <https://lexafrica.com/2025/09/uganda-data-protection-conviction-digital-privacy-enforcement-africa/> (accessed on December 4, 2025)

81. Ibid

82. Ibid online and offline privacy

admitting to not registering the company with the PDPO before handling client data.⁸³ This act violated Section 29 (1) of the Data Protection and Privacy Act 2019 and regulations 15 of the Data Protection and Privacy Regulations 2021.⁸⁴ The case underscores the need to enforce the mandatory registration requirement for all data controllers and processors in the country.

While Article 27 of the Constitution protects individuals' privacy,⁸⁵ the Data Protection and Privacy Act of 2019, effective April 2021, faces challenges in enforcement.⁸⁶ NITA Uganda and UCC have raised awareness by providing guidelines and digital security training, though reaching SMEs remains a considerable challenge.⁸⁷ Additionally, on 3rd September 2025, NITA-U and the Personal Data Protection Office launched the "Beera Ku Guard" campaign, a nationwide effort to empower Ugandans to protect their personal data

and privacy. It aims to raise awareness of cybersecurity, data protection, and online and offline privacy. Uganda's cybersecurity strategy 2022-2026 aims to strengthen digital security but raises human rights concerns due to its broad language, particularly in the Computer Misuse Act.⁸⁸ Terms like "unlawful access" and "misuse" could unfairly criminalise legitimate activities such as political expression and information sharing. The 2011 Act's vague language may be exploited against critics and journalists, granting law enforcement extensive surveillance powers and potentially infringing on privacy.⁸⁹ The Personal Data Protection Office (PDPO) introduced a Data Protection and Privacy Compliance Toolkit after stakeholder consultations last year to help organisations comply with the Data Protection and Privacy Act, Cap 97, reflecting Uganda's commitment to data protection.⁹⁰ Uganda's Ndagga Muntu digital ID system is transitioning

83. Juliet Kigongo. (Thursday, December 04, 2025). Kampala finance manager sentenced over illegal data collection <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/kampala-finance-manager-sentenced-over-illegal-data-collection-5286350> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

84. Ibid

85. CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA, 1995. https://www.ngobureau.go.ug/sites/default/files/laws_regulations/2020/12/Uganda%20Constitution%201995.pdf (accessed on November 28, 2024)

86. Privacy Scorecard Report 2021 <https://www.unwantedwitness.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Privacy-Scorecard-Report-2021.pdf> (accessed on November 18, 2024)

87. Business Times Uganda. (August 4, 2025). Cybersecurity and data protection challenges facing SMEs in Uganda <https://businesstimesug.com/cybersecurity-and-data-protection-challenges-facing-smes-in-uganda/> (accessed on December 3, 2025)

88. <https://v45.diplomacy.edu/resource/ugandan-national-cybersecurity-strategy-2022-2026> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

89. <https://cipesa.org/2025/04/uganda-steps-up-pressure-on-social-media-critics-ahead-of-2026-polls/> (accessed on December 5, 2025 of ID)

to a more secure ‘smart ID’ with biometric capabilities, with nationwide renewal and registration starting in May 2025. About 17.2 million new registrations and 5 million renewals are planned before the 2026 elections. The new ID system will feature security features such as Multiple Laser Images (MLI), Machine-Readable Zones (MRZ), QR codes, and 2D barcodes, with plans for e-IDs without expiry dates.⁹¹ The government emphasises the ID’s importance for access to services such as education, pensions, and banking, warning that all services will rely on it. Civil society is disappointed that a June 2025 High Court ruling upheld the ID’s mandatory use despite 40% of the population lacking one, risking increased digital exclusion for vulnerable groups.⁹² Despite these issues, digital ID also faces challenges related to digital exclusion, awareness, registration efficiency, and the lack of alternatives. Civil society advocates for transparent, rights-based oversight to protect privacy

and prevent misuse. This adherence to ACHPR’s Principle 42 on privacy and the protection of personal data will ultimately reinforce democratic participation and public trust.

Uganda’s domestic laws align with principles in the regional and international instruments such as the AU Convention on Cybersecurity and Personal Data Protection (the Malabo Convention) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, specifically principle 42 concerning personal data protection legislation.⁹³ However, the country has not yet ratified the Malabo Convention.⁹⁴

Privacy and surveillance

Uganda’s legal framework enables widespread surveillance justified by security

90. PDPO Launches Toolkit to Empower Organizations Comply <https://www.pdpo.go.ug/news/pdpo-launches-toolkit-to-empower-organizations-comply> (accessed on December 4, 2025)
91. Davidson Ndyabahika. (May 19, 2025). ResearchUganda’s National ID Delivers \$1.35 for Every \$1 Invested <https://news.mak.ac.ug/2025/05/ugandas-national-id-delivers-1-35-for-every-1-invested/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)
92. Michael Aboneka. (2025). Uganda’s Digital ID Barrier Worsens as Court Delivers Blow to Access <https://digitalrightsalliance.africa/ugandas-digital-id-barrier-worsens-as-court-delivers-blow-to-access/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)
93. Media Defence.(February 2025). Data Privacy and Data Protection – sub-Saharan Africa <https://www.mediadefence.org/resource-hub/data-privacy-protection-sub-saharan-africa/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)
94. Ratify the Malabo Convention, a call to Government of Uganda as we mark the Human Rights Day, 2019 <https://www.unwantedwitness.org/ratify-the-malabo-convention-a-call-to-government-of-uganda-as-we-mark-the-human-rights-day-2019/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

concerns but raises human rights concerns. Laws like the Regulation of Interception of Communications Act, 2010, allow monitoring with judicial approval, but oversight is limited, creating opacity and accountability problems.⁹⁵ The Anti-Terrorism Act, 2002, grants broad powers that are often used to target opposition, journalists, and activists. The Uganda Communications Act, 2013, gives the Communications Commission control over infrastructure and surveillance, with SIM registration aiding monitoring.⁹⁶ The 2011 Computer Misuse Act, amended in 2022, criminalises vague online offences that are frequently used against journalists and activists. Although the 2019 Data Protection and Privacy Act establishes data principles, it excludes security data, allowing unchecked surveillance. These laws foster extensive monitoring with limited oversight, risking privacy, free expres-

sion, and civic participation.⁹⁷ The 2017 Anti-Terrorism Act permits the interception of communications without sufficient judicial oversight, impacting civil society and freedoms. It also highlights laws that lead to arbitrary arrests and criminalise dissent.⁹⁸ Human rights defenders, journalists, and opposition members face increased surveillance, harassment, and imprisonment, eroding democracy. For instance, Canary Mugume, a journalist from NBS Television, stated that Apple had previously sent him a warning message, indicating he was a potential target of government-linked spyware intended to monitor his personal or professional data.⁹⁹ Southeast Asian spyware targeted opposition groups and civil society, compromising devices. Israeli-made surveillance software, mainly used by police, extracts data to track dissenters, lawyers, and journalists.¹⁰⁰ The 2025 cyber surveil-

95. Franklin Draku. (Tuesday, August 05, 2025). Ugandans under State surveillance ahead of 2026 elections <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/special-reports/elections/ugandans-under-state-surveillance-ahead-of-2026-elections--5143732> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

96. Franklin Draku. (Tuesday, August 05, 2025). Ugandans under State surveillance ahead of 2026 elections <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/special-reports/elections/ugandans-under-state-surveillance-ahead-of-2026-elections--5143732> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

97. Franklin Draku. (Tuesday, August 05, 2025). Ugandans under State surveillance ahead of 2026 elections <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/special-reports/elections/ugandans-under-state-surveillance-ahead-of-2026-elections--5143732> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

98. Franklin Draku. (Tuesday, August 05, 2025). Ugandans under State surveillance ahead of 2026 elections <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/special-reports/elections/ugandans-under-state-surveillance-ahead-of-2026-elections--5143732> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

99. <https://www.biometricupdate.com/202508/fresh-concerns-over-impact-of-ugandas-expanding-digital-surveillance> (accessed on 31 January 2026)

100. Surveillance/Spyware: An Impediment to Civil Society, HRDs and Journalists in East & Southern Africa <https://www.unwantedwitness.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Report-06.06.2025-FINAL.pdf> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

lance report notes a rise in phishing and malware attacks targeting civil society, disrupting campaigns and threatening the use of encrypted apps.¹⁰¹ Growing fear of infiltration undermines trust, discourages organisation, and suppresses protests. NGOs face suspension or are forced to share sensitive data under anti-government accusations. Overall, laws like the Computer Misuse Act create a chilling effect, causing activists and journalists to self-censor out of fear.¹⁰²

Safe city initiatives and national ID systems have increasingly adopted facial recognition technology, sparking concerns over privacy, discrimination, and freedom of assembly as human rights issues. Data breaches pose a significant threat, risking long-term harm to individuals.¹⁰³ Alongside breaches, there are worries about unauthorised surveillance and the potential misuse of biometric information. The safe

city programme also employs facial recognition CCTV in public spaces. Using biometrics for mass surveillance is a serious infringement on the right to privacy, a fundamental human right outlined in Article 27(2) of the 1995 Ugandan Constitution.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, there are concerns that biometric surveillance could reinforce societal biases and discrimination¹⁰⁵, and that awareness of law enforcement's real-time facial recognition efforts may undermine civil liberties.¹⁰⁶

In April 2025, Uganda also embarked on a journey to purchase social media tracking tools through UCC, capable of monitoring and tracking social media activity, including users who use VPNs to access Facebook, which has been blocked since the January 2021 national elections.¹⁰⁷ On December 4 2025, the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) cautioned people using VPNs to access Facebook that

101. <https://www.unwantedwitness.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Report-06.06.2025-FINAL.pdf> (accessed on 31 January 2026)

102. Franklin Draku. (Tuesday, August 05, 2025). Ugandans under State surveillance ahead of 2026 elections <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/special-reports/elections/ugandans-under-state-surveillance-ahead-of-2026-elections--5143732> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

103. <https://www.identity.com/privacy-concerns-with-biometric-data-collection/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

104. Uganda's facial recognition technology threatens Privacy <https://www.unwantedwitness.org/ugandas-facial-recognition-technology-threatens-privacy/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

105. <https://www.identity.com/the-intersection-of-artificial-intelligence-ai-and-biometrics/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

106. <https://www.identity.com/the-intersection-of-artificial-intelligence-ai-and-biometrics/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

107. Surveillance and digital rights principles for use of FRT: Policing FRT the rights risks and harms <https://inco.net/pillars/surveillance-and-digital-rights/principles-for-use-of-frt/policing-frt-the-rights-risks-and-harms/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

they are subject to legal action.¹⁰⁸ This is a significant privacy invasion, mass surveillance and potential censorship under the guise of national security.

The Parliament has multiple accountability committees that oversee governance by fulfilling their constitutional roles of passing legislation and scrutinising the executive branch. However, these committees face challenges in ensuring their reports are accepted and that the government takes prompt corrective action. Uganda's oversight system violates ACH-PR principles 38 and 39(4) regarding online Content Removal Without Process, as the government frequently blocks social media during elections or protests and employs tracking tools without transparent, public, or judicial procedures, thus breaching due process. Principle 41 (Invasion of Privacy) allows broad, unreviewed powers under the Anti-Terrorism Act; the absence of independent oversight, vague legal language, and lack of accountability mechanisms heighten the risk of arbitrary, unlawful interference. Intelligence agencies report directly to the President, further compounding concerns.

Developments in ICT and emerging technologies

Uganda is currently in the foundational stage of developing a comprehensive AI regulation that aligns with UNESCO's global ethical standards, with a strong emphasis on human rights and economic development and ensuring ethical data governance, aiming to finalise it in 2025.¹⁰⁹ Concerns about artificial intelligence (AI) are growing as computer scientists predict that intelligent systems will increasingly take over decision-making tasks from humans.¹¹⁰ According to the 2024 Government AI Readiness Index report by Oxford Insights, Uganda ranks 132 out of 193 countries in AI development based on government, technology, and infrastructure.¹¹¹ Despite this low ranking, local AI experts and organisations have trained 2,567 individuals to train one million Ugandans by 2030 to improve perceptions of generative AI.¹¹² The Ugandan government is also deploying AI technol-

108. Stuart Ampaire. (December 4, 2025). UCC Warns Facebook Users: 'You Are Not Invisible' <https://chimpreports.com/ucc-warns-facebook-users-you-are-not-invisible/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

109. Uganda AI Regulation: Digital Policy and Legal Framework <https://digital.nemko.com/regulations/uganda-ai-regulation> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

110. <https://www.independent.co.ug/ugandans-fear-artificial-intelligence/> (accessed on November 9, 2024)

111. Government AI Readiness Index 2024 <https://oxfordinsights.com/ai-readiness/ai-readiness-index/> (accessed on January 8, 2024)

ogies in various agencies to enhance efficiency, improve accuracy, address environmental challenges, bolster security, and provide personalised services to citizens.¹¹³ Debates have taken place regarding the inclusion of AI regulations in the upcoming Copyright and Neighbouring Rights (Amendment) Bill, 2025.¹¹⁴ However, the Uganda Registration Services Bureau (URSB) dismissed suggestions from legal experts and the Law Development Centre (LDC) to incorporate AI regulation into the Bill.¹¹⁵ Additionally, Section 8 faced criticism for overlooking digital streaming platforms, which leads to income losses for artists. There have also been proposals for a platform accountability framework, including mandatory registration, transparency reports, algorithm disclosures, and revenue-sharing rules, to ensure creators receive at least 50% of net profits.¹¹⁶

The Ugandan government is actively applying AI across vital sectors such as

agriculture, health, finance, and education.¹¹⁷ These initiatives demonstrate how Uganda's digital transformation is enhancing services, increasing productivity, and improving citizens' quality of life, especially Uganda's active move toward a significant effort to establish a formal regulatory framework through actions such as drafting the Artificial Intelligence Bill, 2025.¹¹⁸ Collaboration with the legal community, academia, and the United Nations aims to establish necessary regulations. It is also essential to consider the ethical concerns and social implications of AI adoption, including data privacy, security risks, the digital divide, and job displacement. Addressing these issues is vital for achieving sustainable outcomes in Uganda. The integration of AI technologies in Uganda has the potential to improve efficiency and security, but it must align with the ACPHR's principles, including Principle 39.

112. https://www.ntv.co.ug/ug/news/business/uganda-ranks-low-on-global-ai-index-as-experts-aim-to-train-1-million-4824128#google_vignette (accessed on November 16, 2024)

113. <https://apsdpr.org/index.php/apsdpr/article/view/770>

114. Prisca Wanyenya. (August 23, 2025). Lawyers Warn Uganda Risks Exploitation Without AI Copyright Safeguards <https://parliamentwatch.ug/news-amp-updates/lawyers-warn-uganda-risks-exploitation-without-ai-copyright-safeguards/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

115. Ibid

116. Ibid

117. Fiona Luboga. (Mar 20, 2025). Shaping Uganda's AI Future <https://ict.go.ug/media/news/shaping-ugandas-ai-future> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

118. <https://www.scribd.com/document/846217865/Artificial-Intelligence-Bill-Draft> (accessed February 5, 2026)

Digital Inclusion

Uganda advances digital inclusion for persons with disabilities (PWDs) by providing grants for digital literacy and training, reaching more than 1,000 PWDs, and by advocating for accessible ICT. Uganda's Constitution affirms principles of non-discrimination and accessibility. Therefore, exclusion from ICT services isolates PWDs from vital resources such as e-government, e-health, and e-commerce.¹¹⁹ Laws such as the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2019, require more vigorous enforcement to ensure accessibility and active participation. Initiatives like the National Digital Observatory are advancing the goal of fostering digital inclusion and accessibility. They act as a centralised platform that supports PWDs, ensuring their inclusion in Uganda's digital transformation.¹²⁰ A call for proposals from the Uganda Communications Com-

mission (UCC) and the Uganda Communications Universal Service Access Fund (UCUSAF) seeks to promote digital inclusiveness for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) through ICT innovation and digital literacy initiatives.¹²¹ The ICBVI course on general digital skills training for the visually impaired, under UCC/UCUSAF, is in progress, aiming to equip PWDs with digital skills for empowerment.¹²²

Uganda is focused on strengthening existing legislation, such as the Computer Misuse Act 2011 and the Anti-Pornography Act 2014, to improve child online safety¹²³, in line with the African Union's digital protection initiatives for Uganda.¹²⁴ Nonetheless, new, comprehensive online-only laws are still under development, prioritising the integration of digital safety into broader policies such as the National Child Policy, enhancing reporting mechanisms (Sauti 116)¹²⁵, and tackling child sexual abuse material (CSAM) through

119. <https://ict.go.ug/media/news/government-formulates-national-ict-for-disability-policy>

120. Digital Inclusion: A Fundamental Right For Persons With Disabilities In Uganda (19 May, 2025) <https://app.ict4personswithdisabilities.org/news/14> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

121. <https://www.ucc.co.ug/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Call-for-Proposals-for-UCCUCUSAF-PWD-Support-Grant-V2.pdf> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

122. <https://ict.go.ug/media/news/digital-inclusion-for-the-visually-impaired-in-uganda> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

123. <https://isoc.ug/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Advancing-the-plight-of-child-online-in-Uganda.pdf> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

124. <https://5rightsfoundation.com/africa-leads-as-first-region-to-adopt-child-online-safety-policy/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

125. <https://endviolenceagainatchildrenconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Uganda-1.pdf> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

stricter penalties and capacity-building, led by UNICEF and local authorities.¹²⁶

Universal Service Fund (USF)

The Universal Service Fund, known as the Uganda Communications Universal Service and Access Fund (UCUSAF), aims to expand telecommunications access in unserved and underserved areas that are not commercially viable for licensed operators. By extending telecommunications access, UCUSAF helps bridge the digital divide and improve equity while supporting SDG 11 for sustainable cities.¹²⁷ UCUSAF receives annual contributions from licensed telecom operators, who pay a 2% levy on their gross revenues, ensuring that underserved populations gain access to essential communication services.¹²⁸

In May 2025, MTN Uganda announced a contribution of UGX 50.55 billion (US\$14.3 million) to the UCC's Universal Service and Access Fund, up from UGX 42.5 billion (about US\$12 million) the previous year.¹²⁹ Similarly, Airtel Uganda contributed UGX 37.9 billion to the UCUSAF, reinforcing its commitment to expanding digital connectivity across Uganda.¹³⁰ This is an 11.4% increase from last year's contribution. To ensure Uganda has safe, fast, reliable, and affordable communication services, Airtel Uganda also launched Uganda's first Spam Alert service as part of its responsible citizenship efforts to combat the global SPAM challenge.¹³¹

In July 2025, UCUSAF enrolled Trainers of Trainees (ToTs) in its maiden e-learning project, aimed at enhancing digital learning in Ugandan primary schools through a Digitally Enabled Community Development (ECD) approach, in line with the Uganda Communications Act 2013 and

126. <https://www.unicef.org/uganda/what-we-do/child-protection> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

127. UCUSAF -Access Infrastructure Program <https://www.ucc.co.ug/ucusaf/access-infrastructure-program/> (accessed on November 18, 2024)

128. JAVIRA SSEBWAMI, 'Airtel pays UGX 34.8Billion to rural telecom fund' (April 4, 2024) <https://www.pmldaily.com/business/2024/04/airtel-pays-ugx-34-8billion-to-rural-telecom-fund.html> (accessed on November 18, 2024)

129. Mtn Uganda (12 May 2025). MTN Uganda announces UGX 50.55 billion contribution to UCC's Universal Service and Access Fund <https://www.mtn.co.ug/mtn-uganda-announces-ugx-50-55-billion-contribution-to-uccs-universal-service-and-access-fund/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

130. <https://extensia.tech/airtel-uganda-contributes-ugx-37-9-billion-to-national-digital-inclusion-fund/> (accessed on December 4, 2025)

131. ChimpReports. (May 13, 2025). Airtel Uganda Contributes Shs37Bn to UCC in Support of Universal Access <https://chimpreports.com/airtel-uganda-contributes-shs37bn-to-ucc-in-support-of-universal-access/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

UCUSAF Strategy IV. Collaborating with Nkumba University, the DECEDA initiative leverages community structures and digital technology to deliver quality education to resource-scarce rural schools, building upon the Holistic E-Learning Platform (HELP). Furthermore, UCUSAF supports over 1,417 secondary and tertiary institutions with computer labs and plans to launch a pilot E-Classroom in selected primary schools by September 2025.¹³²

In March 2025, Members of Parliament also called for increased funding to improve ICT access. A report by the Committee on ICT and National Guidance on the fund's operations highlights a shortage of computers in secondary schools, resulting in overcrowded labs and limited hands-on time for students.¹³³ An assessment revealed that while 90% of respondents own a phone (38% have smartphones), only 10% have reliable internet access, and 62.4% have yet to experience the Internet. More than 80% of respondents earn less than 500,000 Ugandan shillings per month. Despite this, 77% are members of savings groups,

primarily relying on paper-based ledgers for record-keeping, which pose challenges such as fraud and delays—only 3% use automated systems, signalling a need for improvement.

The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) distributed 16,344 tablets to disadvantaged communities in 91 districts through the Uganda Communications Universal Service and Access Fund (UCUSAF).¹³⁴ This initiative aims to enhance the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in rural areas, where educational facilities are severely lacking. Currently, there are only 5,000 schools in rural areas, compared with 10,000 in urban areas, resulting in low school attendance and high dropout rates among children. Many rural schools lack electricity and qualified teachers, prompting the need for solar-powered tablets pre-loaded with educational content. Through UCUSAF, UCC distributed more than 150 tablets to residents in Kalungu District. This tablet distribution is part of UCUSAF's ongoing efforts to improve digital inclusion across Uganda.

132. <https://uccinfoblog.com/2025/07/08/ucusaf-flags-off-trainers-for-maiden-e-learning-project/> (accessed on December 4, 2025)

133. <https://www.parliament.go.ug/news/3634/mps-advocate-better-funding-improve-ict-access> (accessed on December 4, 2025)

134. <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/ucc-moves-to-ratchet-up-digital-inclusion-learning-4879042> (accessed on December 4, 2025)

Having already delivered over 19,000 devices to 120 villages across the country, the programme aims to reach additional households, ensuring every community stays connected in the digital era.¹³⁵

The E-Class Project, launched in partnership with World Vision Uganda, aims to enhance learning in Buikwe, Nakason-gola, and Mpigi districts by incorporating digital tools into classrooms. Thirteen schools were selected to participate in this initiative, each receiving 40 tablets, a laptop, a projector, a charging station, and internet access.¹³⁶ For many students, this marks their first exposure to digital devices, expanding their access to academic content and enriching teachers' lesson delivery.¹³⁷

UCUSAF is exploring future collaborations with institutions like Makerere University Business School (MUBS) to leverage ICT for educational enhancement

and digital inclusion.¹³⁸ A grant application opened in May 2025 for partners to fund a device financing mechanism that helps underserved and unserved communities afford smartphones at half the price, with UCC contributing 50% of the device cost through a cost-sharing model.¹³⁹ Device financing will change the lives of many Ugandans, especially by giving ordinary citizens affordable access to smartphones and other essential tools.¹⁴⁰

Children's rights online

Concerns about children's online safety are increasing as technology evolves, highlighting challenges in protecting their privacy in digital spaces. Although various regional treaties, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Malabo Convention, address child protection, they often do not explicitly safe-

135. <https://techreviewafrica.com/news/2058/uganda-communications-commission-distributes-tablets-to-kalungu-district-boosting-digital-inclusion> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

136. <https://spyreports.co.ug/bridging-the-digital-divide-e-class-project-transforms-learning-in-ugandan-schools/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

137. <https://spyreports.co.ug/bridging-the-digital-divide-e-class-project-transforms-learning-in-ugandan-schools/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

138. <https://news.mubs.ac.ug/principal-meets-ucusaf-director-to-explore-future-collaborations/> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

139. <https://www.ucc.co.ug/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Call-for-proposals22-05-25.pdf> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

140. <https://nilepost.co.ug/business/281768/device-financing-models-empowering-ugandans-to-build-businesses-and-boost-incomes> (accessed on December 5, 2025)

guard children's online privacy rights.¹⁴¹ In Uganda, although privacy rights are constitutionally guaranteed, there is no comprehensive legislation specifically addressing online safety for children. Existing laws, including the Children Act and several cyber laws, provide some protections, but the rise in internet use, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, has heightened the risk of exploitation.¹⁴² The Uganda Communications Commission (UCC) is actively promoting online safety for children through advocacy and awareness campaigns. They, along with the Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT), work to monitor online threats and encourage Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to implement parental controls. However, risks remain significant for children aged 12-17 who engage with social media platforms, where most exploitation occurs through known perpetrators.¹⁴³ Many children do not report incidents due to stigma, fear, or lack of trust in law enforcement. Uganda also faces broader issues such as poverty, high dropout rates, and mental health challenges that further

jeopardise children's safety online.¹⁴⁴ The digital landscape, enhanced by AI tools, creates new opportunities for predators to target vulnerable youths, while a lack of digital literacy among parents and institutions exacerbates the risks children face in the online world.¹⁴⁵ Overall, there is an urgent need for targeted, evidence-based strategies to protect children from online harm.¹⁴⁶

141. https://cipesa.org/wp-content/files/Child_Protection_and_Safety_Online_in_Africa_Report_.pdf (accessed on February 5, 2026)

142. Ibid

143. Ibid

144. <https://nilepost.co.ug/news/308317/experts-warn-of-rising-online-child-exploitation-and-persistent-poverty-in-uganda> (accessed on February 5, 2026)

145. Ibid

146. .

Conclusion

This report outlines a complex landscape of digital rights and inclusion, highlighting both notable progress and ongoing challenges. Overall, Uganda has made commendable progress in expanding its digital infrastructure and legal frameworks, yet the country continues to face significant challenges that impede full compliance with the ACHPR Declaration. Despite these gains, ongoing threats to freedom of expression, widespread censorship, and internet shutdowns point to the urgent need for reform. The continuing digital divide, particularly between urban and rural areas, along with barriers faced by marginalised groups, further complicates the digital rights environment.

Moreover, public awareness regarding digital rights remains alarmingly limited, and the enforcement of existing data protection laws is insufficient. The score of 25 underscores the urgent need for reform in Uganda to address these systemic issues, promote human rights, and create an inclusive digital environment for all citizens. While Uganda has established a foundation for digital rights and inclusion, concerted reform efforts are necessary to unlock the full potential of its digital landscape. By focusing on these key development areas, Uganda can improve its ratings under ACHPR standards and foster a more inclusive, rights-respecting digital environment for all citizens.

Recommendations

The Government should:

- Enhance implementation of the Data Protection and Privacy Act, 2019, and ensure robust enforcement mechanisms. This includes regular audits and assessments to

ensure compliance by both public and private entities.

- Develop and implement policies that promote digital rights in accordance with the ACHPR Declaration. Create clear guidelines that protect freedom of expression and access to information.
- Invest in expanding internet infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, to bridge the digital divide.
- Enact legislation prohibiting arbitrary shutdowns of internet services and censorship, especially during elections and civil unrest, to uphold citizens' right to information.
- Amend repressive laws such as the Computer Misuse Act (Amendment) 2022 with problematic restrictions on "unauthorized access" and "abusive communication" broadly interpreted to suppress online dissent, and Penal Code Act (Cap. 120).
- Adopt transparent practices concerning surveillance technologies and data protection to build public trust in data management.
- Develop policies that include marginalised populations in the digital economy and ensure fair access to resources.

The Media should:

- Engage in investigative journalism that highlights issues related to digital rights and holds authorities accountable for breaches. This will contribute to transparency and awareness.
- Ensure media coverage includes perspectives from marginalised groups, particularly those in rural areas, to highlight their challenges and experiences with digital access.
- Collaborate with legal experts and digital rights organisations to ensure accurate reporting on laws and policies affecting digital rights, helping to inform the public.
- Embrace digital platforms to widely disseminate information, particularly during periods of censorship or restrictions on traditional media.

Civil Society Organisations should:

- Actively advocate for the protection of digital rights at local, regional, and national levels by lobbying for policy changes and engaging with government agencies.
- Offer training programs to empower citizens, especially marginalised groups, to understand their digital rights and how to advocate for them. Provide resources to help them understand legal protections and how to navigate the digital landscape.
- Conduct ongoing research to document violations of digital rights and assess the effectiveness of existing laws and policies. Share findings with stakeholders to promote accountability.
- Foster coalitions among civil society groups, the media, and private-sector stakeholders to build a united front to advocate for digital rights and inclusion.

The Private Sector should:

- Implement robust data protection policies that align with the national legal framework and international standards—Prioritise transparency in data use and user consent.
- Provide training and resources to enhance consumers' digital literacy, especially in underserved communities. This can empower users to utilise digital tools effectively and safely.
- Work towards making internet services and digital tools more affordable and accessible, particularly in rural and low-income areas, through innovative pricing models or subsidisation.
- Implement Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives to enhance digital rights, such as funding community-based internet projects or supporting NGOs working in this area.









The Score Index

Uganda, 2025

1 = Totally non-compliant; 2 = Mildly compliant; 3 = Moderately compliant;
4 = Considerably compliant; 5 = Fully compliant

Indicator	ACHPR Principle	2024 Score	2025 Score	2025 Justification
Internet Shutdowns	P38(2)	 3	 2	Even though internet penetration has increased and civil society efforts to improve access to internet services have intensified, Internet shutdowns and censorship during elections, as well as the effects of repressive laws, significantly limit access to information and hinder communication, thereby breaching fundamental rights.
Inexistent laws, policies and other measures to promote universal, equitable, affordable and meaningful access to the internet	P37	 2	 2	While some measures are in place, the lack of adequate laws to ensure equitable internet access and affordability highlights a critical gap that undermines equity and inclusion.
False News Criminalisation	P22(2)	 1	 1	While regulations may address misinformation, they often fail and undermine protections for freedom of expression. They can be misused against dissent, especially given the reference to ar-

Indicator	ACHPR Principle	2024 Score	2024 Score	2025 Justification
				rests related to false news. Additionally, the existence of laws criminalising the spread of what is deemed “false news” imposes a severe limitation on freedom of expression.
Sedition Legislation	P22(2)			Sedition was repealed as an offence in the Penal Code Act. However, critical voices are silenced by laws such as the Computer Misuse (Amended) Act 2022, which restrict free expression and are used to stifle criticism, posing a serious threat to democratic norms. This creates a fear of expression among citizens and the media.
Arbitrary Arrests and Harassments of the Media, HRDs and Citizens	P22(2)			The prevalence of arbitrary arrests and harassment creates an atmosphere of fear and inhibits free speech and civil liberties.
Data Protection Legislation.	P42			While some data protection measures and regulations exist, including ongoing efforts to establish a framework and limited enforcement, there is no independent Data Protection Authority. Implementation remains inconsistent and insufficient, indicating significant challenges in practical implementation and public awareness of safeguards to protect personal privacy effectively.

Indicator	ACHPR Principle	2024 Score	2024 Score	2025 Justification
States interfere and require the removal of online content by internet intermediaries.	P38 and P39(4)			State interference in the removal of on-line content undermines free expression and signals censorship practices that severely restrict access to information and limit the diversity of online viewpoints. The mention of unclear laws that could lead to self-censorship and potential misuse of surveillance laws indicates significant challenges to freedom of expression.
Invasion of Privacy of Communications	P41			Continuous invasions of privacy constitute a significant violation of personal rights and undermine trust in digital communications.
Failure by the government to proactively disclose and disseminate information on digital technologies.	P29(3)			Uganda's legal environment lacks transparency and proactive disclosure related to digital technologies, indicating a failure to ensure access to information.
AI and Emerging Technologies National strategies	P39(6)			While some strategies may exist, such as the National AI Taskforce, their effectiveness and alignment with international standards require further evaluation and enhancement. This is because of substantial concerns over privacy, freedom of expression, and the overarching climate of surveillance and censorship affecting ICT and emerging technologies in Uganda. However, Uganda current-

Indicator	ACHPR Principle	2024 Score	2025 Score	2025 Justification
				ly has a draft Artificial Intelligence Bill 2025 ¹⁴⁷ , which aims to regulate the development and use of AI in Uganda.
Adoption of specific child laws, policies and measures promoting children’s digital safety and privacy online	P37(5)			The current status of child digital safety and privacy in Uganda remains insufficient. While existing frameworks exist, they lack specific provisions to address children’s online safety. More comprehensive policies and laws are needed to adequately address the unique risks children face in the digital environment, including online harassment and exploitation. Additionally, efforts to raise awareness and educate parents, guardians, and children about digital privacy are still limited. There’s a pressing need for collaborative initiatives involving government, civil society, and tech companies to create a safer online experience for children. The African Union’s recent adoption of a Child Online Safety and Empowerment Policy may affect upcoming initiatives in Uganda on child online safety and empowerment.
Digital Inclusion	P37(3)			There are efforts to improve digital inclusion, but disparities in access and utilisation indicate a need for more extensive initiatives. Barriers such as surveillance practices, limited access to technology, and privacy concerns hinder meaningful progress, leaving Uganda below the threshold for substantial compliance.

Total (out of 60):	2024: 28	2025 25	147. Uganda’s AI Bill 2025 Overview (accessed on March 17,2026)
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