V-Dem INSTITUTE

COUNTRY BRIEF

No. #11, 14 September 2021

Regime Type: Electoral Autocracy

Pandemic Violations: Major

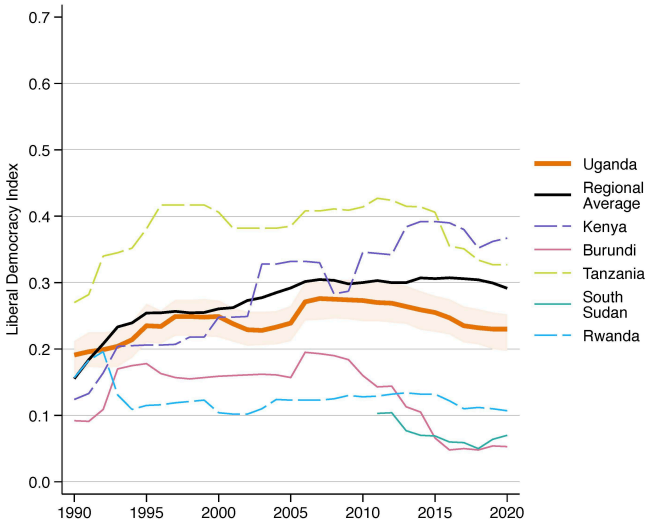
Uganda

- Uganda's 2020 score on the liberal democracy index is very low and not significantly different from the 1990s.
- Equality before the law and individual civil liberties declined substantially since 2015 and is in 2020 significantly below the score in 1990.
- Uganda's response to the Covid-19 pandemic included abusive enforcement, discriminatory measures, and restrictions to the media, making Uganda one of the top violators of democratic standards in the world during the pandemic.

1. Ongoing Absence of Liberal democracy in Uganda 1990-2020

Uganda has been classified as electoral autocracy since 1996. Figure 1 shows its trend on the liberal democracy index since 1990[1], compared to neighboring countries and the regional average in Sub-Saharan Africa.

FIGURE 1. LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX, 1990-2020



Light orange area: 95% confidence intervals for Uganda (thick orange line).

Uganda has not seen any substantial improvement during the period, and the score of 0.19 in 1990 is not significantly different from the score of 0.23 in 2020.

Compared with Tanzania and Kenya, Uganda has been lagging behind on the development of liberal democratic institutions since the early 2000s. While Burundi, South Sudan, and Rwanda continue to place below Uganda, it has consistently been rated lower than the sub-Saharan average since the early 1990s.

FIGURE 2. ASPECTS OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY, 1990-2020

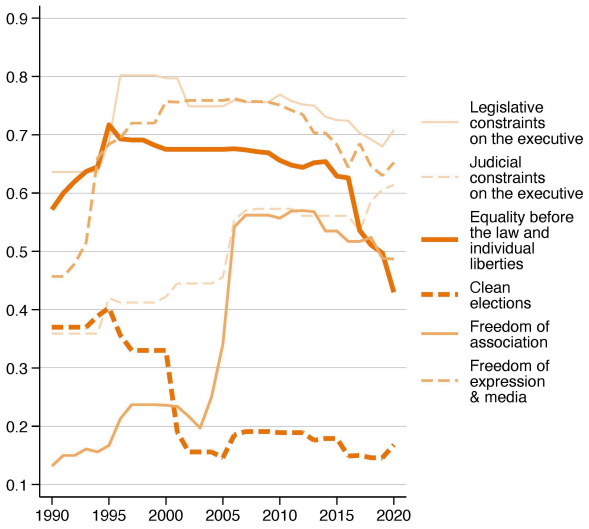


Figure 2 displays the trends on the six indices that make up the liberal democracy measure. The indicator showing the most drastic negative changes in recent years is equality before the law and individual liberties: it rose in the early 1990s to a high of 0.72 in 1995, declined slightly over the next decade to 0.63 in 2016, and then dropped substantially in the last three years to an all time low scoring 0.43 in 2020.

While Freedom of expression & media as well as Legislative constraints on the executive improved slightly over the last two to four years, they both remain at lower levels in 2020 than in the late 1990s/ in early 2000. Freedom of association exhibits a similar development: it improved considerably from 0.2 in 2003 to 0.54 in 2006 but has since declined to 0.49. Clean elections, the degree to which the electoral process was free and fair, continues at very low levels (around 0.17) since 2002.

Judicial constraints on the executive increased steadily from 0.36 in 1990 to an all time high of 0.61 in 2020. Unfortunately, this is the only indicator with such a positive development over the past 30 years.

1 For more information on Uganda, see our online graphing tool for the V-Dem data: https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/CountryGraph/

2. Equality before the law and individual liberties in Uganda

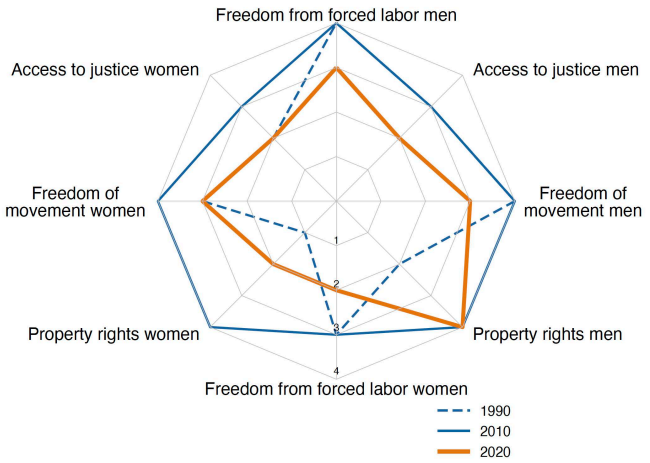
Figure 3 displays the development of the indicators on the equality before the law and individual liberties index in 1990, 2010 and 2020. Graph (a) presents those indicators that are separable by gender. Graph (b) shows those that are measured for men and women jointly.

Across both graphs, the expansion of individual liberties from 1990 to 2010 is followed by a contraction to equal or worse levels in 2020. In panel (a), all civil liberties except property rights for men declined compared to 2010. The effect is especially pronounced for women. Panel (b) presents a similar trend where no improvements can be found compared to 2010, and both impartial public administration and freedom of religion is at lower levels than in 1990.

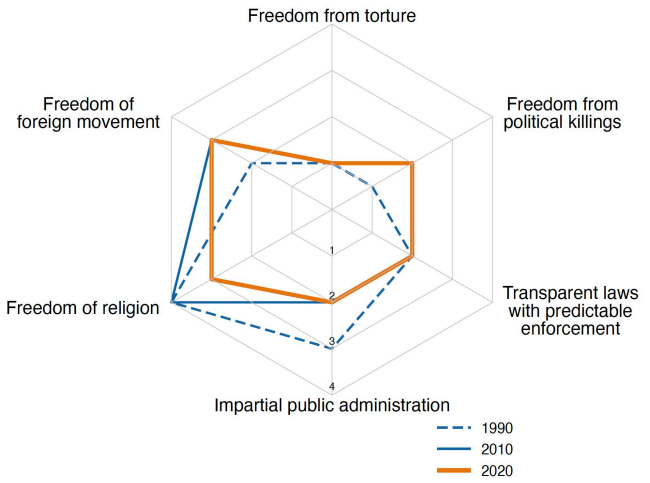
Looking closer at panel (a), we see that freedom from forced labor, freedom of movement, access to justice and property rights were either mostly or fully developed for men & women in 2010. Since then, every indicator (except property rights for men) decreased, some of them (freedom from forced labor for men & women, or freedom of movement for men) below their 1990 values.

FIGURE 3. INDICATORS IN INDEX OF EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW AND INDIVIDUAL LIBERTIES 1990/2010/2020

(a) INDICATORS SEPARABLE BY GENDER[2]



(b) JOINT INDICATORS FOR MEN & WOMEN



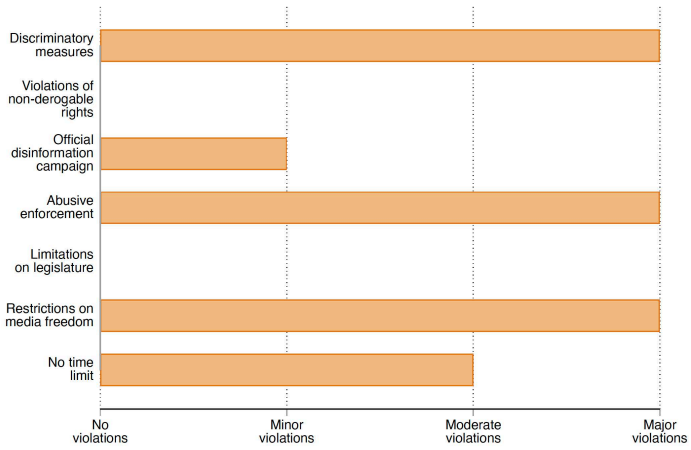
In 2020, all indicators declined for women compared to 2010. For women in 2020, all indicators in panel 3(a) score either 2 or 3 suggesting that the respective individual liberties of women are protected, but only inconsistently (score 2) or mostly (score 3). Most notably, property rights for women dropped from 4 in 2010 to 2 in 2020, but remained at highest levels for men.

Panel (b) shows that freedom from torture has been at 1 for all three years, reflecting a common use of torture by public authorities. Even though scoring slightly higher than in 1990, Freedom from political killings and transparent laws with predictable enforcement remain rather limited. Their current scores of 2 suggests that political killings still occur occasionally and that transparency and enforcement of the law remains rather arbitrary in some parts of the country. The impartiality of the public administration as well as freedom of religion decreased compared to 1990. The Impartial public administration score went down from 3 in 1990, to 2 in 2010 and 2020, showing that today the law is only modestly respected by public officials. Fr eedom of religion was at a maximum level in 1990 and 2010, but dropped to 3 in 2020, meaning that freedom of religion is now only mostly respected by authorities. Freedom of foreign movement increased from 2 in 1990, to 3 in 2010 and 2020, showing that it is mostly respected by authorities in these years.

3. Uganda during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Figure 4 presents the extent of violations of democratic standards between March 2020 and June 2021[3]. Uganda ranks as the 6th worst violator during the pandemic. This is primarily due introducing abusive enforcement, discriminatory measures, and restrictions on the media in the pandemic response.

FIGURE 4. VIOLATIONS OF DEMOCRATIC STANDARDS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



2 Note that the scale for property rights ranges from 0-5, whereas the other indicators range from 0-4.

3 More information and an interactive dashboard for the Pandemic Backsliding data can be found here: https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/PanDem/