



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

► AFRICA

## BACKGROUND

**Land and Climate.** Known as the “Pearl of Africa” for the variety and beauty of its landscapes, Uganda covers 91,135 square miles (236,040 square kilometers), an area about the same size as Oregon. Roughly one-fourth of the land is arable; 12 percent is reserved for national parks and forests.

Uganda’s climate is influenced by its proximity to the equator, mountains on the eastern and western borders, and large bodies of water. Uganda has two rainy seasons (March–July and September–October). The semiarid northeast experiences frequent droughts. Average temperatures range between 72°F and 92°F (22–33°C) depending on the region and season. Areas around Lake Victoria tend to be cooler even in the dry season. The Ruwenzori Mountains and the Kigezi Mountains in southwest Uganda are cold and misty most of the year.

**History.** Farming and hunting groups lived in the Lake Victoria Basin by the fourth century B.C. Probably Bantus, these people could smelt iron and make a form of carbon steel. Smaller groups eventually came together, and by about A.D. 1000, the Buganda state emerged as the strongest kingdom among several Bantu and other kingdoms.

By the 1800s, the *Baganda* (people of Buganda), ruled by a *kabaka* (king), had a strong army and well-organized administration. However, European exploration and colonization collided with local politics, and Britain had established itself by about 1860. Christian missionaries soon followed, and the British East Africa Company laid claim to the territory in 1888. In reality, Britain had little control, and various religious groups fell to fighting one another. After an 1894 Protestant victory over Catholics and Muslims, the British expanded power and established Uganda as a protectorate. Britain signed a treaty in 1900 with Buganda before signing with three

smaller kingdoms (Ankole, Toro, and Bunyoro). This treaty allowed the Baganda to become colonial administrators. They tended to impose their own culture on neighboring kingdoms, setting the stage for later conflicts.

At the same time, British authorities were bringing in white settlers, Indian laborers, and new cash crops. They built a railroad to improve movement of coffee and cotton. They drew borders that separated ethnic groups and put hostile ones together. Young, educated Baganda working for the British formed the Young Baganda Association in the 1920s and soon replaced older chiefs in the colonial administration.

Ugandans fought alongside the British during World War II, organized as the King’s African Rifle (KAR). Baganda rioted over British economic policies after the war. England later began implementing policies to grant self-rule by 1961. Peaceful independence followed in 1962; Milton Obote of the Uganda People’s Congress (UPC) served as prime minister and King Frederick Walugembe Mutesa II (*Kabaka Freddie*) as head of state. In 1966, Obote suspended the constitution and sent General Idi Amin Dada’s army to seize the king’s palace. In 1967, he abolished the kingdoms and introduced a new constitution that made Uganda a republic with a strong president.

Idi Amin Dada overthrew Obote in 1971, dissolved parliament, and named himself absolute ruler. Over eight years, he eliminated opposition, expelled Indian merchants, ruled with terror, and invaded Tanzania. The Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), comprised of Tanzanian troops and Ugandan exiles, fought back and captured the capital city of Kampala in 1979. Amin fled the country, which then experienced some instability prior to multiparty elections in 1980. Obote and the UPC returned to power in the balloting.

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Obote soon faced war with the National Resistance Army (NRA) under Yoweri Museveni. Some of Obote's officers rebelled in 1985, and he fled. Their attempts to establish a government failed, and the NRA took control of Kampala. Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) reestablished political rule in 1986 and implemented some reforms. A 1995 constitution allowed for nonparty elections in 1996, through which Museveni was elected president. A referendum in June 2000 called on voters to choose between the existing NRM "movement" system and multiparty democracy. Opposition groups had little opportunity to campaign for a multiparty system, so the movement system was officially adopted. Museveni won reelection in 2001 with a large majority, though the opposition argued that fraud contributed to the victory.

The Museveni government's economic liberalization program is attracting new foreign investment, and privatization of state-owned industries is helping the economy to stabilize. Still, government corruption, rebel activity, and the loss of labor to AIDS all hinder expansion and productivity.

### THE PEOPLE

**Population.** Uganda's population of 25.6 million is growing at 2.96 percent annually. Only 12 percent of the population lives in urban areas. More than half is age 14 or younger.

The nation's 48 distinct groups follow four main linguistic lines: Bantu, Nilotic, Nilo Hamite, and Sudanic. The largest Bantu group is the Baganda (13 percent) of central Uganda. Other major groups include the Bagisu, Banyankole, Basoga, Bunyoro, Batoro, and Banyarwanda. Among the Nilotics are the Acholi, Lango, Alur, and Jabwor. The Nilo Hamites are the Iteso and the nomadic, warrior Karamojong of northeast Uganda. Sudanic peoples in the West Nile region include the Lugbara, Kakwa, and Madi.

**Language.** English is the official language for government, education, and commerce. Baganda speak Luganda, a dominant language in the center and west, and Acholi and Lango speak Luo. Kiswahili joins Luo as prominent in the north. Generally, people speak their own native language or dialect first, a regional tongue, and then English if educated. Those who speak English well are highly respected. Most languages are named for the tribes that speak them (i.e., the Karamojong speak Akarimojong and the Iteso speak Ateso).

**Religion.** Most Ugandans are Christian; Catholics and Protestants comprise the largest denominations. Pentecostals and other smaller groups are growing. Sudanic peoples are mostly Muslim. Islam was introduced by Arab traders in the early 19th century, while Christianity came to Uganda in 1875. Most Christian churches built schools and health centers, so many people converted to Christianity even though they continued indigenous practices. Many Christians and Muslims today maintain indigenous beliefs, performing rituals for ancestors and gods at private shrines. Some people practice traditional rites exclusively. Regardless of one's religion, nearly all Ugandans have a high level of respect and fear for spirits, demons, and God.

**General Attitudes.** Ugandans treasure their heritage and place great importance on families and clans. In addition, they value economic prosperity, education, and spirituality. An educated man who speaks English well and owns a car and/or a house commands great respect. Western devices such as video cameras, mobile phones, and so forth are highly sought after symbols of wealth in urban areas. International travel is admired. A growing adoption of Western culture and individualistic

habits disturbs many older people, who encourage schools to teach traditional values through song, dance, and drama.

In rural areas, appearing wealthy is also important, but the symbols are different: land, cattle, multiple wives, and bicycles. Everywhere, beauty is valued in women, and lighter skin is desired most. Ugandans admire a person who is generous, friendly, and willing to help others. It is considered immature to express anger or extreme negative emotions in public.

**Personal Appearance.** Ugandans wear Western-style clothing to offices or the market. Rural people reserve their best clothes for important days or visits. Imported secondhand attire from North America and Europe is very popular and dominates local markets. Revealing clothing such as mini-skirts are considered a disgrace for women, but they are becoming common among young educated girls in Kampala. Traditional *gomesi* (a many-layered dress) and *kanzu* (a long, embroidered cotton gown for men) are worn mostly in central Uganda but also elsewhere. Many women wear wraparound skirts with blouses and shoulder wraps. The Karamojong wear traditional clothing unless traveling to other districts.

### CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

**Greetings.** Ugandans stand to greet elderly or high status persons who enter a room. Bantu girls kneel to greet elders. Women, too, greet men while kneeling. Educated urban women are more likely to bend their knees rather than kneel. Initial verbal greetings are followed by several inquiries about family, work, and other matters. Actual greetings depend on the language but begin with some version of "How are you, sir/madam?" (in Luganda: *Musibityendo ssebo/ngabo?*), "How are the home people?" (Lysonga: *Koddeyo?*), or "How did you sleep?" (Luo: *Ibuto aber?*). The response is usually "Fine, and you?" (Luo: *Ber, ibuto aber?*). In Kiswahili, a casual "Hello!" is *Jambo!* Young Baganda might say *Ki kati?* (What's up?) and respond with *Ayendi, ki kati?* (I'm fine, what's up?). In Luo, such an exchange is *Kop ang'o?* (What issues?) and *Kop pe* (No issues).

Titles are used in offices and formal settings. Friends address each other by given name. They might also use nicknames or call someone by their child's name (*Mama Josephine*, or "mother of Josephine"). Young people call older people *auntie* or *uncle*.

**Gestures.** Ugandans greet, eat, and pass items with the right hand; using both hands to receive an item shows appreciation. People do not use the left hand alone. Ugandans usually point with the hand, but lips can also be used. One might show agreement by raising both eyebrows, but this gesture is not used with strangers. Sighing while visiting is impolite. When sitting, one's thighs should be covered. Ugandans gesture freely with their hands when talking to friends. Crossing one's arms at the chest can be seen as an act of defiance.

**Visiting.** Ugandans visit friends and relatives often and unannounced. It is a virtue to have many friends who make frequent visits. Upon entering a home, guests usually remove their shoes. Hosts almost always offer tea or food to guests, who are obliged to accept at least a taste if not an entire portion. Visitors receive the best seat and food. If chicken is served, an honored visitor receives the gizzard. If necessary, hosts will offer their own beds to overnight guests and sleep at a neighbor's. Guests might give hosts food (bread, sugar, salt, a live chicken, white ants, fresh produce) or other useful items like soap. Flowers are for people recuperating from illness or childbirth. Although people socialize at home, especially in rural areas,

they also gather at parks, churches, soccer matches, or drinking places. At the end of a visit, hosts accompany guests part of the way home, or at least to their transportation.

**Eating.** Rural Ugandans eat two meals a day, in the morning and evening. People wash their hands in a basin before each meal; older children ensure younger ones have washed before sitting down. Ugandans generally eat outside, either on a veranda or under a shady tree.

Men usually are served first at a table or seated in chairs, followed by children and women seated on mats nearby. A boy's right to sit at a table depends somewhat on age but more on his level of acceptance in society. For example, a boy of 15 in secondary school may be granted a seat while a 17-year-old boy still in primary school will be on a mat.

Ugandans eat with their "natural fork" (the right hand), especially in rural areas. Rural people eat from a common platter, but urban residents more often use individual plates. Ugandans do not talk during a meal. Parents discourage talking so children do not choke or show food in their mouths and so they will get enough to eat from the common platter.

## LIFESTYLE

**Family.** Village families tend to be large, especially when a man has multiple wives, but affluent families are relatively small. In times of need, Ugandans turn to the extended family for financial support or other assistance, even if it creates a burden for others. People who work away from their home districts are less likely to respond to such obligations. Ugandans pay particular attention to aging parents, who are provided for by the eldest or wealthiest son.

By custom, the father protects the family, buys clothing, pays school fees, tills the ground, and plants crops. Mothers make sure children are fed and clean. A woman keeps house and looks after her husband—preparing his meals, pressing his clothing, and finding water for his bath. Rural mothers weed gardens, harvest crops, and often sell produce in the market. Children begin chores as early as age three, often by rinsing dishes or sweeping. Older girls help their mothers care for younger siblings or work in the garden, while boys tend livestock, run errands, and help their fathers plant crops. Children legally belong to their father, even in divorce.

AIDS has been hard on Uganda's families, often leaving no one to support or care for children. Sometimes, the oldest child simply becomes head of the household over younger siblings. Such children are less likely to go to school, learn traditional values, or be safe from exploitation.

Urban homes are made of cement, have corrugated iron roofs, and contain two or three bedrooms. Rural homes have mud walls and thatched roofs. Northern and eastern groups smear their dirt floors periodically with a mixture of cow dung and soil, which they smooth out with stones to create a flat, hard surface. Karamojong live in walled communities called *manyattas* to protect their livestock and families from raids by rival groups.

**Dating and Marriage.** Young people meet in school, at church, or during festivals. Most have the freedom to date and select their own mate. Villagers often marry by age 18. Urban residents marry between 18 and 25 years.

Wedding ceremonies are increasingly held in churches, but only with written consent from the couple's parents. Consent is given after a bride-price has been paid in cash, livestock, or clothing and/or household goods. The purpose is to thank the girl's parents for raising her and to compensate them for losing

her. A widow can be inherited by any of a man's surviving brothers. Wife inheritance, along with polygamy, is fading due to AIDS, difficult economic conditions, and exposure to Western culture.

A wedding is preceded by certain essential ceremonies. For instance, among Baganda, a prospective groom selects a spokesman from among his friends and they accompany him to present gifts to his girlfriend and her extended family in an "introduction ceremony." The paternal aunt who will coordinate wedding arrangements receives special gifts. If the gifts and entourage are accepted, the parties celebrate and begin planning the wedding.

Among the Acholi, Lango, and Alur groups, the man writes to the bride's parents expressing his intent to send representatives to an "asking for marriage ceremony." His spokesmen will negotiate the bride-price with the girl's brothers and uncles. The woman's family later visits the man's family for a "seeing the bride-price ceremony." If satisfied, they arrange for a ceremony in which to present the bride-price to the girl's father. Among the Karamojong, the prospective bride picks a strong man to throw a heavy club near the groom's family cattle. The distance the club travels along the herd marks how many cattle will be included in the bride-price. All ceremonies and negotiations can last for days and are cause for eating, drinking, and celebration. Traditionally, once a man sent someone to retrieve his wife from her home, they were considered married. Today, however, civil or church weddings are necessary to complete a union.

**Diet.** A typical breakfast may include tea and bread with margarine. Eggs, fried bananas, or fruit might also be served. For dinner, people eat a starchy staple with a meat stew or sauce and green leafy vegetables. *Matooke* (mashed bananas) steamed in banana leaves is a favorite dish. People also eat *kwon kaal* (millet bread), *chapati* (flat bread), *pasho* (maize paste), rice, cassava, and sweet potatoes. The most popular meats are beef, goat, and pork. Smoked meat in peanut butter and smoked fish in peanut stew are popular in some areas. Ugandans like citrus fruits, mangoes, watermelon, and papaya. Beans, cowpeas, and groundnuts (peanuts) are important sources of protein. Other delicacies include de-winged, salted, and fried white ants or grasshoppers, and meat steamed in a banana leaf.

**Recreation.** *Football* (soccer) is the most popular sport throughout Uganda. Urban residents might also play basketball, lawn tennis, cricket, rugby, and netball (a sport similar to basketball, played only by girls). People like to play cards or the traditional *omweso* (*coro* in Luo), a strategy board game played with seeds or stones. After work, men gather in small drinking places to talk about sports or politics. Women socialize at home, knitting or doing each other's hair while they chat and look after their children.

**The Arts.** Musicians throughout Uganda play drums, harps, xylophones, lyres, and thumb pianos (*okeme* in Luo). Instruments and musical styles may also be specific to a particular ethnic group. For example, Baganda play the *ngalabi* (long drum). The Acholi are known for their dance performances accompanied by the *gwata*, a half gourd struck with metal bicycle spokes.

Folk art fulfills both aesthetic and functional purposes. Baskets, pottery, and wood carvings are the most common forms. The making of batik and bark cloth is typically reserved for women.

**Holidays.** Ugandans celebrate New Year's Day, Liberation

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Day (26 January, when the NRM came to power), Women's Day (8 Mar.), Easter (Friday–Monday), Labor Day (1 May), Martyrs' Day (3 June, the day in 1879 when 22 Christians were killed by Kabaka Muwanga), Independence Day (9 Oct.), Christmas, and Boxing Day (26 Dec.). Muslims celebrate *Idd Fitr*, a three-day feast at the end of *Ramadan*, the holy month of fasting, and *Idd Adha*, the Feast of the Sacrifice. Ugandans travel to their home villages during Christmas for music, dance, and food. Christians attend church on Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

**Commerce.** Businesses are open weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., with a lunch hour at 1 p.m. Banks close by 3 p.m. Urban stores close by 6 p.m. The post office and some businesses are open on Saturday morning. Rural people grow most of their food, but they buy supplies at open-air markets.

## SOCIETY

**Government.** Uganda's president (currently Yoweri Museveni) is head of state and head of government. The prime minister (currently Apollo Nsibambi) heads the executive cabinet. The president is elected to a five-year term; the prime minister is appointed by the president. Members of the 303-seat unicameral National Assembly serve five-year terms. The counties directly elect 214 representatives. Seats are reserved for women (56), the army (10), the disabled (5), workers (5), and youth (5). The remaining eight seats are occupied by government officials. The voting age is 18. Uganda's 48 districts are divided into counties, subcounties, parishes, and villages. Elected local councils function at each level.

**Economy.** Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy; most work is performed by women. Major cash crops include coffee and tea grown in the western and central regions, and tobacco and cotton grown in the north and east. Coffee is being introduced in the north. Uganda is one of the world's largest producers of raw coffee. Other crops include soybeans, maize, and flowers. Fish from Lake Victoria is exported to Europe. The currency is the Uganda shilling (UGX).

**Transportation and Communications.** Uganda's transportation system is not well developed; the few paved roads outside of urban areas become impassable in heavy rains. Buses run between major towns. To reach "up-country" (rural) destinations, people ride aloft cargo in pickup trucks. Wealthier individuals own cars; traffic moves on the left. In cities, people take commuter taxis to work, ride bicycles, or walk. On water, people use canoes, boats, and ferries. In trading centers and smaller towns, people ride short distances on a *boda boda* ("bicycle-taxi" with a padded passenger seat over the rear wheel). Many families own at least one bicycle. Entebbe International Airport links Uganda to global destinations. Planes also fly to islands in Lake Victoria, remote areas, and small domestic airfields.

The public telephone system reaches the entire country but has too few lines to offer complete service. Mobile phones are filling the gap for businesspeople. Uganda's two daily newspapers enjoy wide circulation: the pro-government *New Vision* and independent *Monitor*. The government operates television and radio stations, but private broadcasters also have a voice in many locations.

## DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	147 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women	117 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$1,490
Adult literacy rate	78 percent (male); 58 (female)
Infant mortality rate	88 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	44 (male); 45 (female)

**Education.** Children begin school by age six, attending primary school for seven years. About 40 percent of these students go on to secondary school ordinary level (senior 1–4), and some finish the advanced level (senior 5–6). After each division, students sit for a national exam to determine their advancement. The government pays school fees for four natural children in each family, but rural schools lack materials and facilities. Makerere University (est. 1922) is the most prestigious institution of higher education. Christians are more likely to have a formal education than Muslims, who often emphasize schooling that focuses on the study of the *Qur'an* (Koran).

**Health.** Immunization campaigns are combating diseases such as whooping cough, tuberculosis, diphtheria, measles, cholera, and polio, but malaria and intestinal diseases are still common in rural areas. AIDS is pervasive, and the many deaths caused by the disease have widespread social consequences. However, a national AIDS education effort has reduced rates of infection. Government hospitals exist in every district but are usually short of supplies and personnel. Each of the four major regions has at least one well-equipped mission hospital. Women, who bear an average of seven children, face a high maternal mortality rate.

## AT A GLANCE

### Events and Trends.

- Representatives of Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo met at the United Nations in New York City in September 2003, pledging to end interference in the others' affairs. Uganda and Rwanda were among the six foreign countries that fought in the Congolese civil war. They also supported opposing militia groups in eastern Congo. From 1998 to 2002, the war killed an estimated three million people.
- In August 2003, former Ugandan ruler Idi Amin died in exile in Saudi Arabia.
- The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group in northeastern Uganda, has opposed the Museveni government since 1986. In that time, LRA attacks have killed thousands of people and displaced as many as one million. The group is infamous for kidnapping children and forcing them to fight in battle.

**Contact Information.** Embassy of Uganda, 5911 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20011; phone (202) 726-7100.

