

Uganda's January 2026 elections to pit Museveni's dictatorship against the bourgeois populism of Bobi Wine

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Uganda will hold presidential elections in January 2026, pitting the four-decade ruler Yoweri Museveni against his main opponent Robert Kyagulanyi, popularly known as Bobi Wine. Museveni, who has been in power since 1986, was formally nominated last week by his National Resistance Movement (NRM) party to seek another five-year term. Days later, electoral officials confirmed Wine's clearance to contest, setting the stage for a rematch of the disputed 2021 elections.

These elections will resolve nothing for the Ugandan masses. Even if conducted fairly, which is highly doubtful given Museveni's track record of electoral rigging and violent suppression of opposition, both he and Wine stand as rival representatives of the same capitalist order. Their contest expresses the conflict between Museveni's established layers of the ruling elite tied to imperialism and Wine's frustrated aspirants from sections of the urban middle class, whose ambitions for wealth and power have been blocked by the regime's monopoly.

Last week, Museveni, the 81-year-old ruler who took power in 1986 at the head of the guerilla National Resistance Movement (NRM), addressed thousands of supporters at Kololo Independence Grounds in Kampala in a staged display of state power.

Pledging "a new chapter" for Uganda, Museveni claimed that the country's GDP had doubled in the last five years, rising from \$34 billion to \$66 billion. He promised ridiculously that by the end of his next five-year term Uganda's economy would be worth \$500 billion. "You have everything today that you lacked in the past: electricity, roads, telephones, manpower, the educated people, and peace," he told the crowd. "That's why we are being flooded by many investors because they are looking for a peaceful and profitable area to invest." He urged Ugandans to "protect what we have built and take a bold leap forward."

Museveni outlined a series of new funds tailored to different social groups. He pledged a special program for unemployed university graduates who have been out of school for two years without work, an expanded "ghetto youth fund" to pacify discontent in Kampala's slums, and additional skilling projects in all 171 districts and municipalities. He promised that "we shall create funds for each respective group to ensure nobody is left behind."

The event was choreographed to project the "strength of the

NRM family." One after another, senior figures queued to glorify the president. The First Lady and Education Minister Janet Museveni appealed to Ugandans to vote for her husband "so that he could finish the plans he started when he rescued the country from the bad leadership." Parliamentary speaker Anita Among declared that Museveni had "ensured peace and security in the country". Former prime minister Ruhakana Rugunda, said Museveni "pulled Uganda out of the dungeon into the proud nation we have today."

These claims conceal the reality that Uganda is one of the most unequal countries in the world. The richest 10 percent monopolise more than a third of the nation's wealth, while the poorest subsist on scraps. Latest figures by Oxfam show that between 2013 and 2017 the number of Ugandans living in poverty rose from 6.7 million to 10 million. Some 41 percent of the population now lives in poverty, with the figure twice as high in rural areas, where over 80 percent of households are considered vulnerable.

Food insecurity is rife, with 56 percent of Ugandans moderately food insecure and 15 percent severely. Less than half the population can regularly access basic staples such as sugar, cooking oil and rice. Half the population is under the age of 15, one of the youngest populations in the world, condemned to a future of mass poverty.

At the other pole stands a grotesquely wealthy elite. Tycoon Sudhir Ruparelia boasts a \$1.6 billion empire in real estate, banking and education. Drake Lubega holds \$850 million in property and manufacturing, Matovu Yanga \$785 million, John Bosco Muwonge \$720 million, and Hamis Kiggundu nearly \$602 million. Charles Mbire and Christine Nabukeera each control fortunes of \$600 million or more. Parliamentary speaker Anita Among was recently exposed for stealing nearly \$900,000 in fictitious travel allowances.

Museveni and his family have amassed billions. He owns one of the country's largest ranches in Kisozi with over 10,000 cattle, a multistorey mansion at Rwakitura that doubles as a diplomatic venue, and extensive land, telecommunications, manufacturing and real estate holdings. Estimates of his personal fortune range up to \$4 to \$5 billion as of 2025.

This parasitic oligarchy enriches itself under a dictatorship that long ago abolished constitutional terms and age limits. The NRM-dominated parliament functions as a rubber stamp of Museveni's

decisions, whilst elections are routinely marred by ballot stuffing, blocked internet access and intimidation. The security forces are led by his son, US-trained General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, elevated to Chief of Defence Forces and openly groomed as heir, who has boasted of torturing opposition bodyguard Eddie Mutwe and threatened to behead Wine.

Washington and the European capitals have backed Museveni's regime for decades. Over the past twenty years the US has poured more than a billion dollars into military aid, training the units responsible for torture, abductions and disappearances at home and abroad. Under President Donald Trump, Kampala agreed to act as a holding ground for migrants deported from the US.

Uganda ranks first among African states for the scale of military deployments abroad. More than 15,000 troops are stationed in Somalia, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic, serving as a proxy force for imperialism, securing trade routes and shielding the regime's oil infrastructure. The costs are borne by the Ugandan masses. Over \$1 million in this poverty-stricken country is spent every day on troop reimbursements, allowances and hardware, while ordinary soldiers pay with their lives. Since June, Uganda has lost at least 39 soldiers in Somalia, two in Congo and six in South Sudan.

At stake is not only Museveni's grip on power but the interests of global capital. Uganda's interventions in Congo, a conduit for looting its neighbour's vast mineral wealth, have become more tied to the defence of its own energy infrastructure. Attacks by militias in eastern Congo on the country's flagship \$6 billion oilfield projects in the Lake Albert basin, shared with Congo and scheduled to begin commercial production in mid-2026, would jeopardise profits. Uganda's massive militarisation is inseparable from the drive to protect these projects and the determination of imperialism to tighten its grip over the region's resources.

The principal challenger to Museveni is the 43-year-old Bobi Wine. Wine founded the National Unity Platform (NUP) in 2018 and created illusions among urban youth with his denunciations of corruption and repression. In the 2021 elections he secured 3.5 million votes, 35 percent of the total, the largest vote ever won by an opposition candidate. Museveni officially claimed 58 percent; his worst ever result. Wine denounced the outcome as fraudulent and his supporters faced violent crackdowns, with dozens killed and thousands arrested.

Wine has become the symbol of opposition to Museveni, styling himself the "Ghetto President" and appealing to Uganda's massive youth population. "We are fighting for a better Uganda, for the farmers, for the graduates with no jobs, for the ghetto youth whose future is being stolen," he said after he was cleared by the electoral commission. Wine hopes to mobilise young voters and workers in the urban centres of Kampala, Wakiso and beyond.

But he offers no genuine way forward for the working class. He articulates the frustrations of the urban middle class seeking access to the wealth monopolised by Museveni's clique. As Wine said himself, "Our country is one of the richest countries on the planet in terms of natural resources so... our problem is not lack of wealth. Our problem is lack of leadership, leadership that serves the people instead of terrorising them and exploiting them." Wine is worth some \$12 million. His program, "A New Uganda,"

pledges to stabilise the business climate, empower the private sector and attract foreign investors.

Wine offers no opposition to imperialism. He has repeatedly lobbied Washington and London to impose sanctions on Museveni's inner circle, appealing to the very powers that have sustained his dictatorship for four decades. He has raised no objections to Uganda's subordination to the IMF and World Bank, nor to its bloody interventions in neighbouring countries on behalf of imperialist interests. He seeks only to replace Museveni as a more acceptable representative of the bourgeoisie in the eyes of the masses and of imperialism.

Wine's support is concentrated in the cities. The countryside, where long-standing patronage networks dominate, remains loyal to the ruling NRM. Even if he succeeds to expand his base to the rural areas, the regime's control of the security apparatus and electoral machinery makes a fair contest impossible. NUP offices have been raided and supporters abducted.

Ugandan workers, rural masses and youth must be warned. The 2026 election is a contest between rival wings of the Ugandan ruling elite. Neither Museveni nor Wine will speak about the real source of the country's crisis: that inequality, poverty and dictatorship are rooted in the global breakdown of capitalism.

Above all, they will remain silent on war. The genocide in Palestine, waged with the full backing of Washington and its allies for a violent reordering of the Middle East, the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, and the accelerating US preparations for conflict with China form the international context in which Uganda's elections take place. These are not remote events for the Ugandan masses, who experience their impact daily in soaring food and fuel prices.

Africa is being rapidly drawn into the frontlines of US-led wars, above all the drive to confront China. With its vast mineral wealth, strategic location and overwhelmingly young population, the continent is viewed by imperialism as a critical battleground. To imagine that within this framework Uganda can achieve liberal democracy or capitalist prosperity is a cruel illusion.

The decisive question is the independent mobilisation of the working class on a socialist and internationalist program. The central task is the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Uganda and the region, to unite workers and youth across borders in a common fight for socialism.



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