Dispatch No. 1249 | 4 November 2026

In Uganda, institutions may be regaining trust that had weakened over the previous decade

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 1249 | Stevenson Ssevume Male and Grace Kansiime

Summary

Many scholars see trust in public institutions as critical to achieving social and economic progress (Perry, 2021). Globally, this trust has weakened in the aftermath of major shocks such as the 2007-2008 global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic (Lagarde, 2018; Martin et al., 2025). In democracies around the world, declining trust has been observed in representative institutions – the executive, the legislature, and political parties – while trust in non-representative or "implementing" institutions has remained steady (as with the judiciary) or even risen (as with the civil service and police force) (Valgarðsson et al., 2025).

Extensive scholarship points to three factors that boost institutional trust: effective governance that produces positive outcomes for communities; a perceived lack of financial mismanagement and corruption; and lower levels of income inequality or economic insecurity (Bosio, 2025; Perry, 2021). But elevated trust levels can also pose dangers: Trust in political actors is associated with a reduced willingness to hold them accountable for their actions (Atitianti, 2026).

Africans have historically been more likely to trust their leaders (whether elected freely and fairly or not) than citizens in other regions. Despite declining trust since the mid-2010s, average trust levels on the continent remain above those in Europe and Latin America (Adaba & Boio, 2024; Perry, 2021). And yet, many Africans see government institutions less as disinterested custodians of the national interest than as promoters of the interests of particular ethnic, religious, political, or regional groups (Masheti, 2025).

In Uganda's highly localised system of governance, trust is an essential ingredient in the functioning of government, as it facilitates intra- and inter-organisational relationships, rational decision making, and citizen participation in local-level processes such as budgeting (Kyohairwe, Karyeija, Nkata, Muriisa, & Nduhura, 2022).

How trustworthy are Uganda's public institutions? Recent evidence is mixed. A 2024/2025 survey by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2025) found high levels of trust in the country's justice institutions. Leaders of the security forces – acknowledging citizen concerns about the use of excessive force – have cited rebuilding public trust as an objective of a new inter-force sports competition (James, 2026). Meanwhile, members of Parliament (MPs) believe that corruption and public displays of extravagance have eroded public trust in the institution (Wanyenya, 2026a, 2026b).

Some commentators point to a lack of public trust in the Electoral Commission of Uganda (ECU) as a symptom of wider distrust in the electoral process amid reported arrests of opposition figures, violent attacks against opposition supporters, Internet shutdowns, the removal of presidential age and term limits, and, in the 2021 general election, the ECU's decision to discount ballots from 1,200 polling stations (Kisumbi, 2021). Critics accuse the ECU of disenfranchising potential voters and favouring the incumbent National Resistance Movement (NRM) during elections (Freedom House, 2025).

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Findings from an Afrobarometer survey conducted in January 2025 suggest that key institutions in Uganda may be regaining some public trust that had weakened over the previous decade.

Majorities expressing at least "some" trust in the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF), the police, the courts, the president, the ruling party, Parliament, and their city or district council all gained strength in the 2025 survey after recording declines in earlier survey rounds. Even trust in the electoral commission improved, though it remains a minority position.

Religious and traditional leaders also maintain high levels of public trust, while trust in opposition political parties remains weak.

Citizens hold mixed views on the influence of social media on public discourse, and frequent consumers of social-media news express less trust in key public institutions than those who rarely or never get news from social media.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Ten survey rounds in up to 45 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 10 surveys (2024/2025) cover 38 countries. Afrobarometer's National Partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Uganda, led by Hatchile Consult Ltd., interviewed a nationally representative random stratified probability sample of 3,000 adult Ugandans in January 2025. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Margins of error are larger for subgroup analyses (e.g. demographic groups) due to smaller sample sizes. For more on our sampling methodology, click here. This is the 14th Afrobarometer survey conducted in Uganda since 2000.

Key findings

- Most Ugandans say they trust religious leaders (85%), the president (77%), the Ministry of Health (77%), nongovernmental organisations (73%), and the army (73%) "somewhat" or "a lot."
- Trust in the president surged by 13 percentage points between 2024 and 2025.
    - Trust levels also increased for other representative institutions: from 49% to 55% for Parliament and from 47% to 57% for local councils.
- While seven in 10 citizens (69%) trust the ruling NRM "somewhat" or "a lot," fewer than half place their trust in the electoral commission (48%) and opposition political parties (35%).
    - Trust in the ruling party is up by 14 points since 2024, returning to roughly the level it enjoyed a decade ago (71%).
- Security forces enjoy broad credibility: Almost three-fourths (73%) of respondents have faith in the army, while 59% trust the police.
- Confidence in the judiciary is at its highest level (60%) of the past decade.
- Unelected community leaders are widely trusted: Religious and traditional leaders are viewed as trustworthy by 85% and 66% of Ugandans, respectively.

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- Ugandans who often use social media are less likely to trust public institutions than infrequent users and non-users.

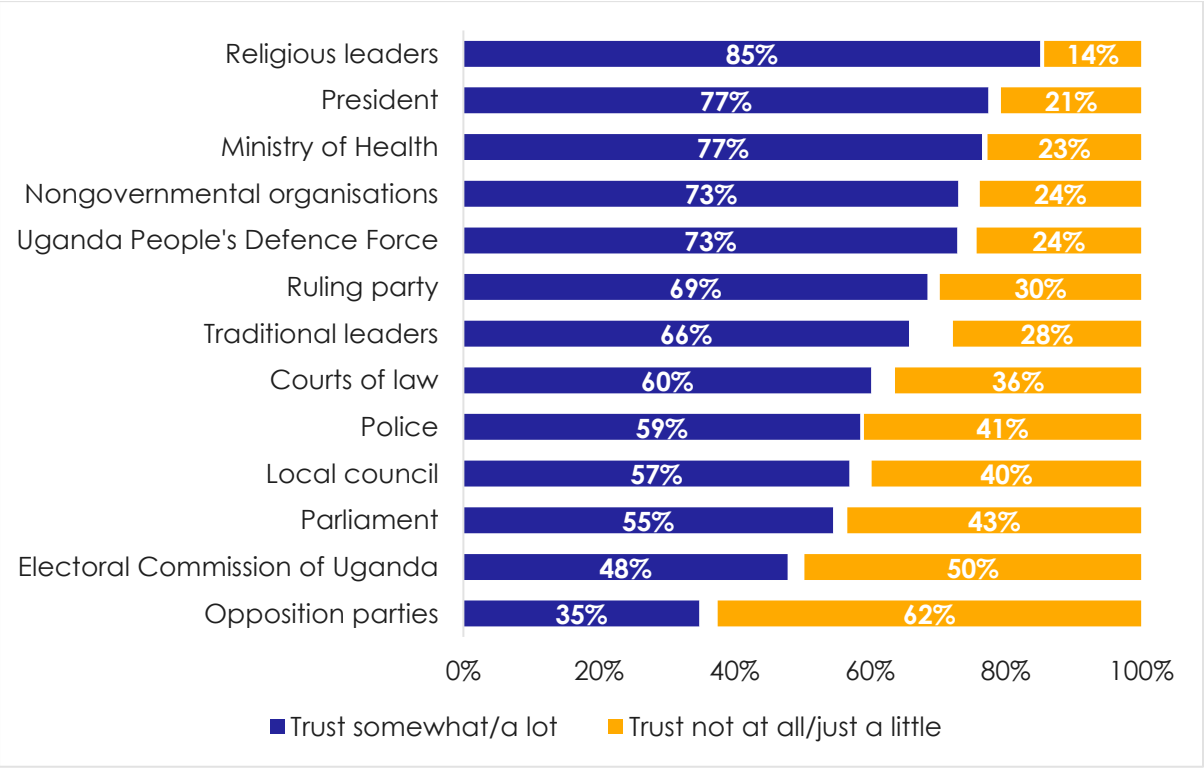
Trust in key institutions

Religious leaders (85%), the president (77%), the Ministry of Health (77%), nongovernmental organisations (73%), and the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) (73%) rank highest among the institutions and leaders included in Afrobarometer's survey that Ugandans say they trust "somewhat" or "a lot" (Figure 1).

About two-thirds say they trust the ruling party (69%) and traditional leaders (66%), while smaller majorities express faith in the country's courts (60%), the police (59%), city or district councils (57%), and Parliament (55%).

At least half of Ugandans say they have "just a little" or no trust whatsoever in the electoral commission (50%) and opposition parties (62%).

Figure 1: Trust in key institutions | Uganda | 2025



Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following or haven't you heard enough about them to say?*

Elected leaders

Majorities express confidence in their elected leaders (Figure 2). Over the past decade, trust in the president has been consistently higher than trust in Parliament and elected local councils, with differences ranging between 10 and 22 percentage points.

Trust in President Yoweri Museveni fell by 15 points between 2015 and 2017, then remained steady before regaining 13 points in 2025. Trust in Parliament and elected local councils hovered around half of the population between 2017 and 2024 before increasing by 6 and 10 points, respectively, in the most recent survey.

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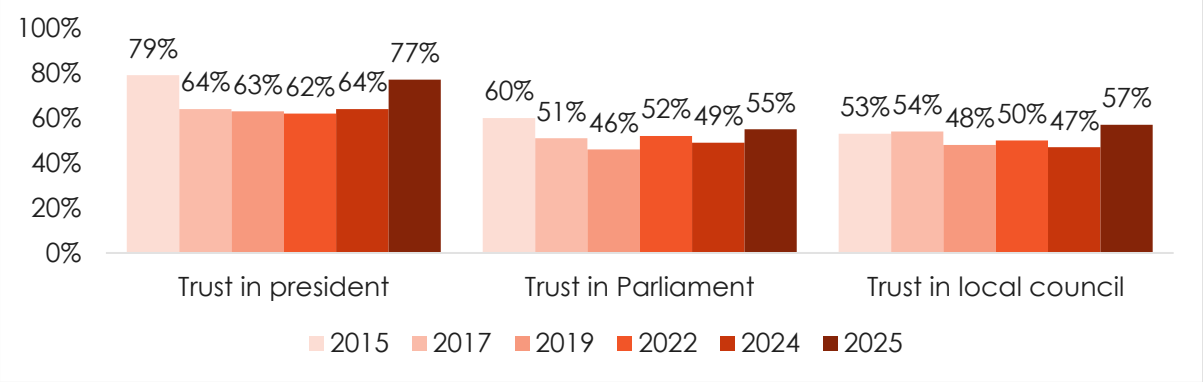
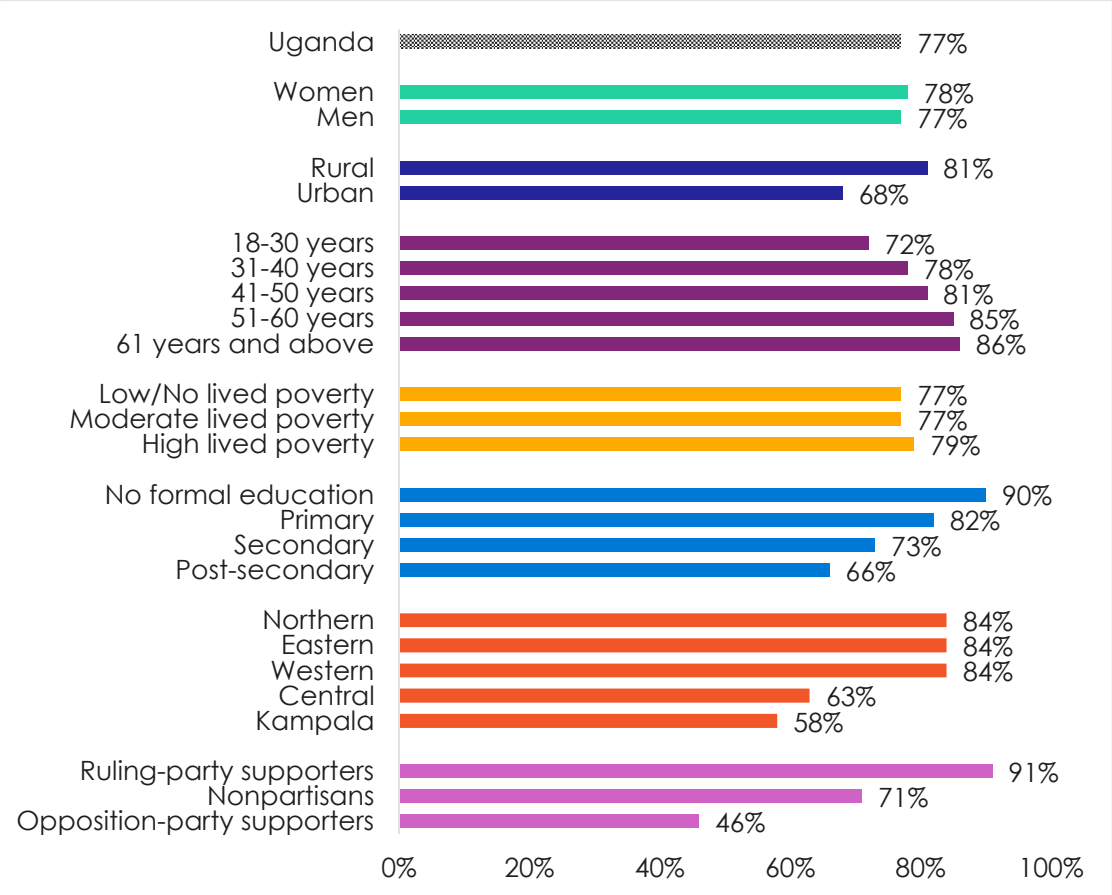
Figure 2: Trust in elected leaders | Uganda | 2015-2025



Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The president? Parliament? Your district or city council? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")*

Presidential trust levels rise with age (from 72% among 18- to 30-year-olds to 86% among those aged 61 and up) and fall with greater education (from 90% among adults with no formal schooling to 66% among those with post-secondary qualifications) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Trust in the president | by demographic group | Uganda | 2025



Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The President? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")*

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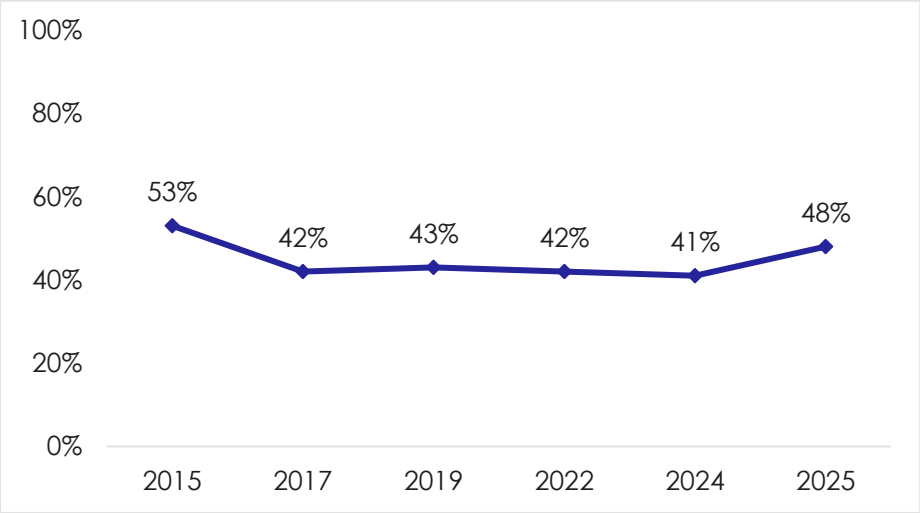
Residents in Central Uganda (63%) and Kampala (56%) are far less likely to trust the president than residents in the Northern, Western, and Eastern regions (all 84%). In general, urban residents are less trusting than their rural counterparts (68% vs. 81%).

Unsurprisingly, supporters of the ruling NRM (91%) are more likely to voice confidence than those who feel no affiliation with any party (71%) and supporters of an opposition party (46%).

The electoral commission

Fewer than half (48%) of citizens say they trust the ECU (Figure 4). While this share is up by 7 percentage points since 2024, the trust level remains below what it was in 2015 (53%).

Figure 4: Trust in the Electoral Commission of Uganda | Uganda | 2015-2025



Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The electoral commission of Uganda? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")*

Women (52%) and rural residents (53%) are more likely to trust the ECU than men (44%) and city inhabitants (35%) (Figure 5).

Trust levels increase modestly with age and decrease sharply with education status. Residents of Kampala (26%) and opposition-party supporters (22%) are especially distrustful.

More than one-third say they trust the commission "a lot" among Northerners (42%), respondents with no formal education (36%), and ruling-party supporters (34%).

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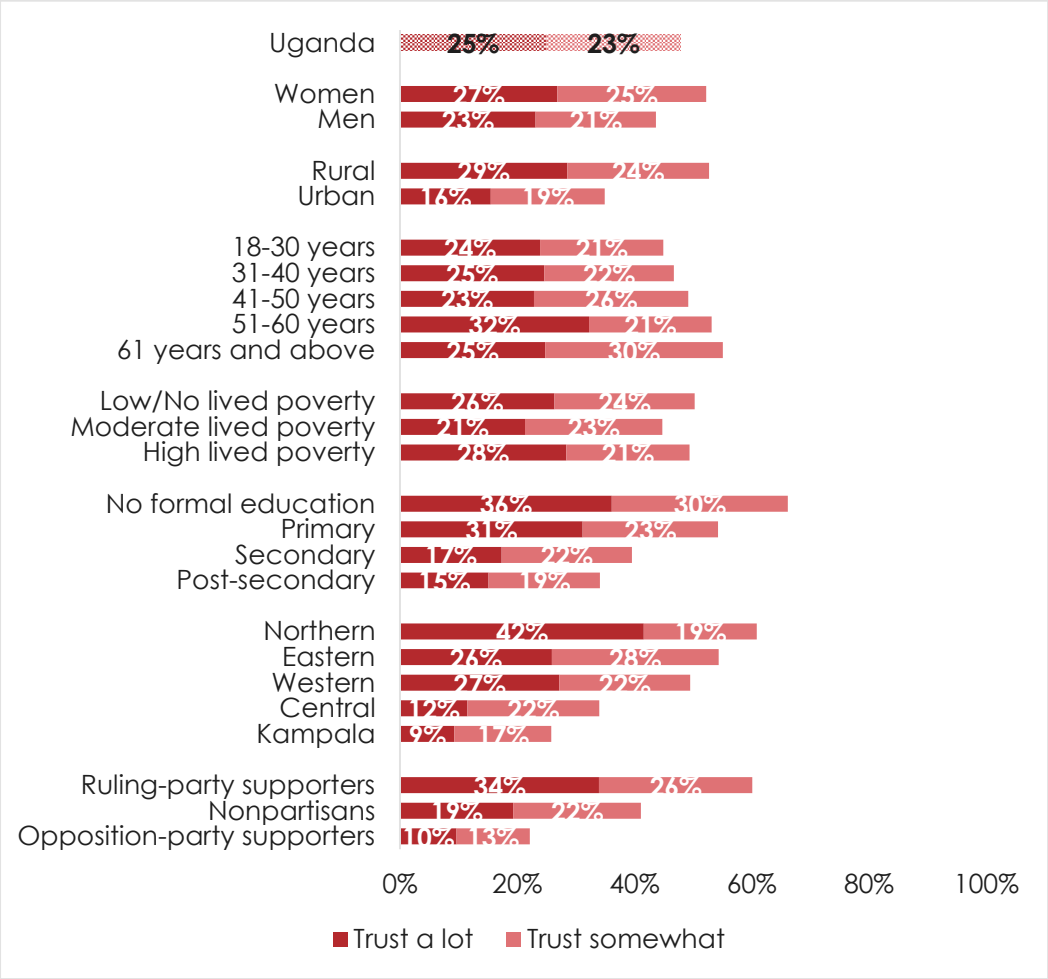
Figure 5: Trust in the Electoral Commission of Uganda | by demographic group | Uganda | 2025



Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The Electoral Commission of Uganda?*

Political parties

Trust in the NRM displays a similar pattern as trust in the president: dropping significantly between 2015 and 2017, remaining steady for seven years, and then regaining the initial loss in the most recent survey round (Figure 6). In contrast, trust in opposition parties has remained at about one-third of the population throughout the past decade.

Education seems to play a major role: Citizens with tertiary education are far less likely than those who received no formal schooling to trust the ruling party (47% vs. 85%), and more likely to trust opposition parties (40% vs. 29%) (Figure 7).

Only 61% of youth trust the governing party, vs. 79% of the elderly. In the capital and the Central Region, trust is far weaker in the NRM and somewhat stronger in opposition parties compared to other regions. There are barely any differences across lived-poverty status.[1]

[1] Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Lekalake (2025).

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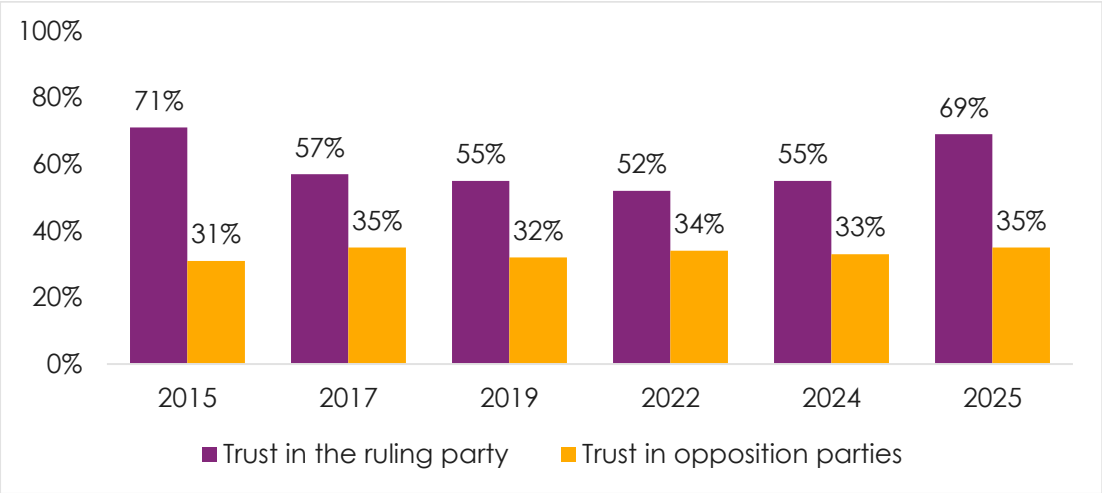
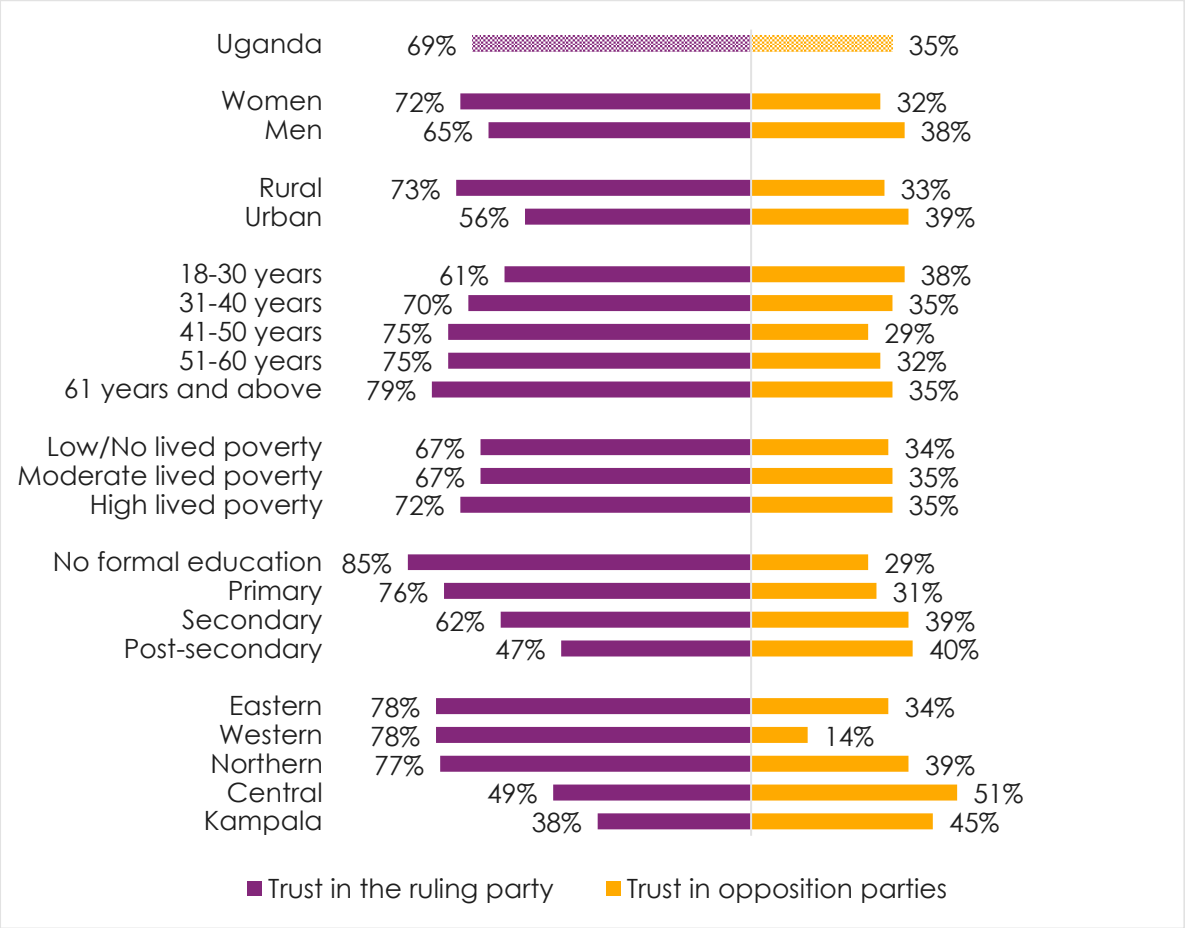
Figure 6: Trust in political parties | Uganda | 2015-2025



Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The ruling National Resistance Movement or NRM? Opposition political parties? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")*

Figure 7: Trust in political parties | by demographic group | Uganda | 2025



Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The ruling National Resistance Movement or NRM? Opposition political parties? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")*

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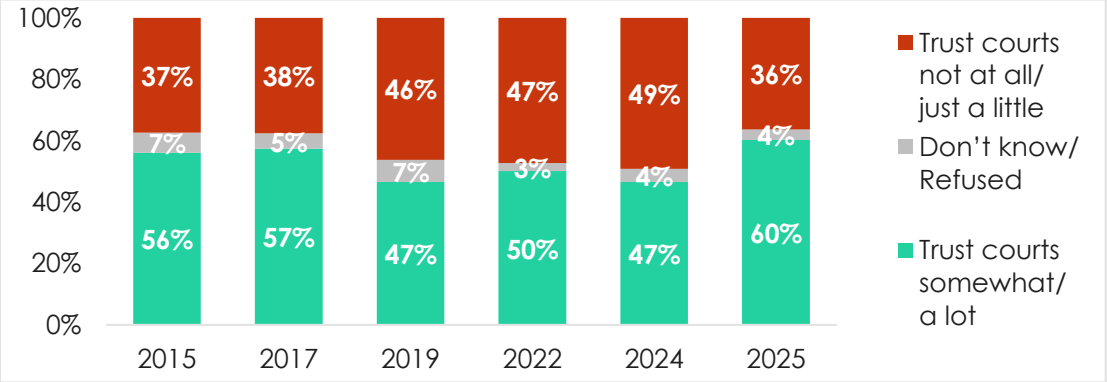
The judiciary

Between 2019 and 2024, Ugandans were about evenly divided as to whether the country's courts of law were trustworthy or not (Figure 8). In 2025, the pendulum has swung toward trust with a gain of 13 percentage points: 60% now say they trust the courts "somewhat" or "a lot," the highest level of the past decade.

Figure 8: Trust in courts of law | Uganda | 2015-2025



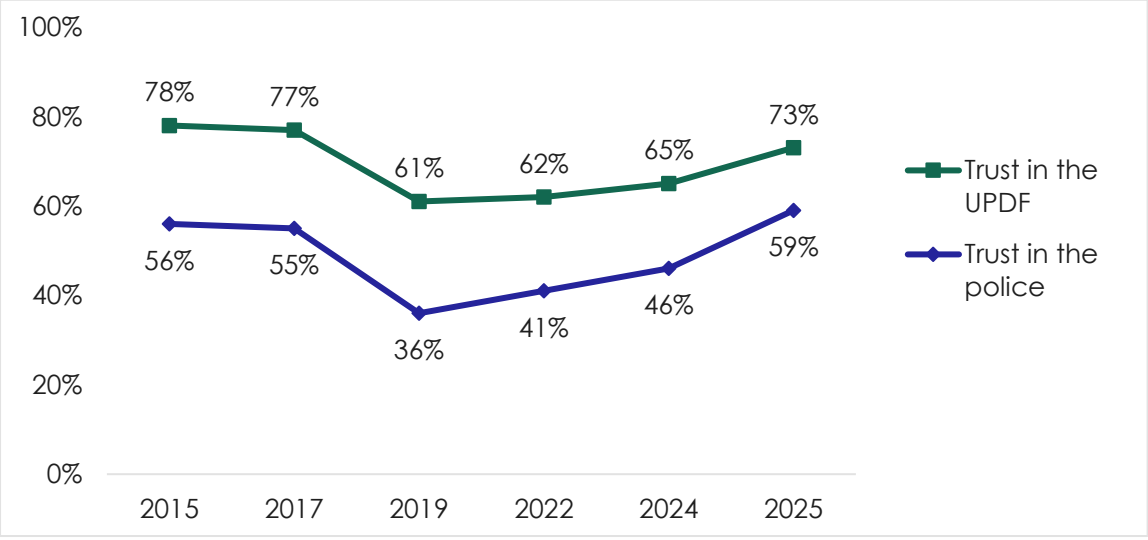
Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Courts of law?*

Security forces

The UPDF has consistently enjoyed greater popular trust than the police over the past decade (Figure 9).

Trust levels have moved in tandem: Confidence in both security forces saw sharp drops in 2019, from 77% to 61% for the military and from 55% to 36% for the police. Subsequent survey rounds saw a gradual recovery, with large jumps in 2025 (an 8-point increase for the military and a 13-point increase for the police).

Figure 9: Trust in the army and the police | Uganda | 2015-2025



Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The police? The Uganda People's Defence Force or UPDF? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")*

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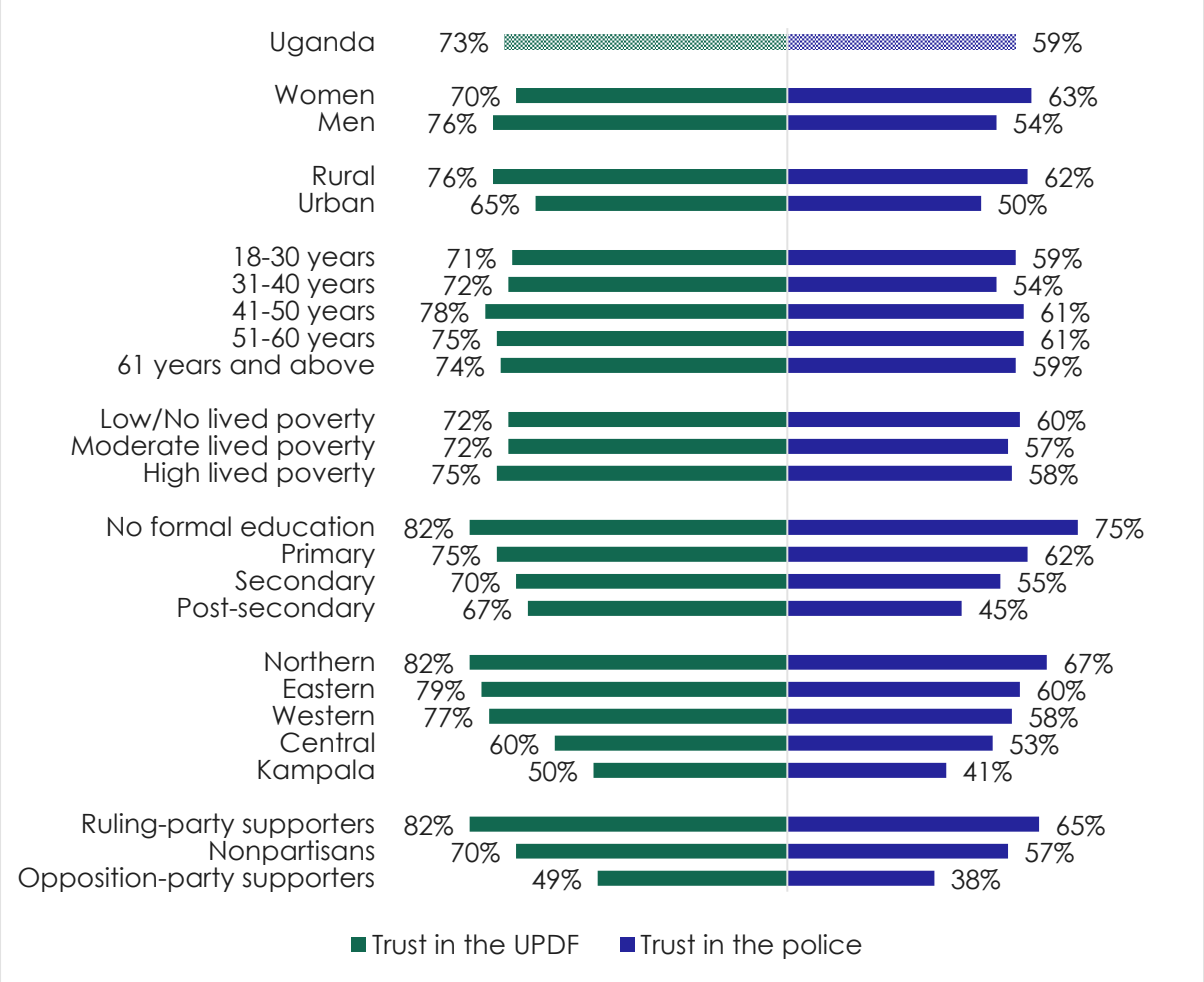
Across core demographic groups, trust levels show similar patterns for the UPDF and the police, with one exception: Men are more likely than women to have faith in the army (76% vs. 70%), while the reverse holds true for the police (54% among men vs. 63% among women) (Figure 10).

Only half of Kampala residents (50%) and opposition-party supporters (49%) say they trust the UPDF, while they are even less likely to have confidence in the police (41% and 38%, respectively).

Trust in the police declines as education levels rise, from 75% among uneducated respondents to 45% among those with post-secondary education. Trust in the military shows a similar pattern.

Figure 10: Trust in the army and the police | by demographic group | Uganda | 2025



Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The police? The Uganda People's Defence Force or UPDF? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")*

Religious and traditional leaders

Since Uganda's independence in 1962, religious and traditional leaders have played crucial roles in fostering community development, including by building and managing health facilities, conducting HIV/AIDS advocacy campaigns, investing in sustainable food-

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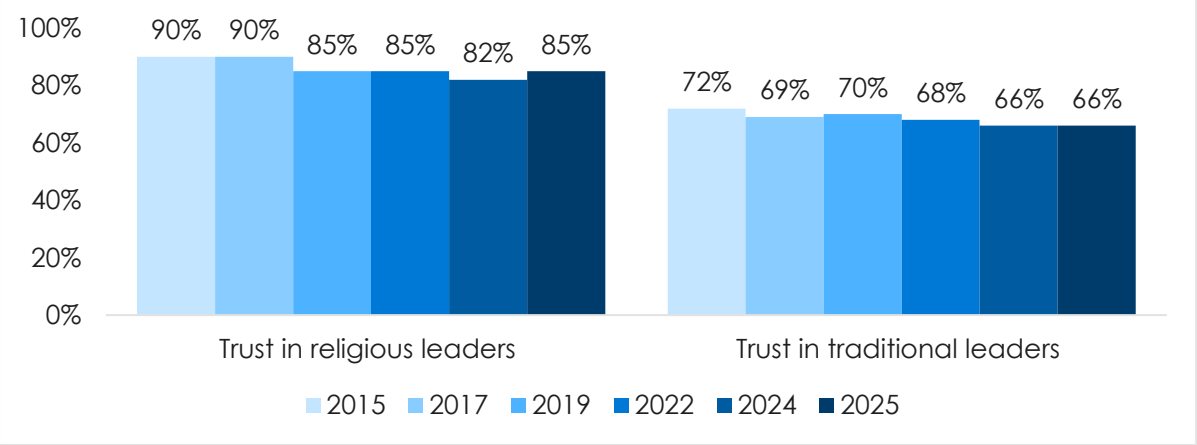
production systems and climate-smart technologies, connecting smallholder farmers to global value chains, running educational institutions, offering scholarships, building sports facilities, promoting youth-empowerment schemes, and undertaking environmental conservation, such as through tree planting (Kavuma-Kaggwa, 2013; UNAIDS, n.d.; Office of the Prime Minister, 2024; Publicist, 2025; Independent, 2026). These activities often parallel government responsibilities, raising the question of whether ordinary citizens consider non-elected leaders legitimate and socially beneficial.

Survey results show that both religious leaders and traditional leaders have consistently retained high trust ratings over the past decade, though they are down marginally compared to 2015 (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Trust in religious and traditional leaders | Uganda | 2015-2025



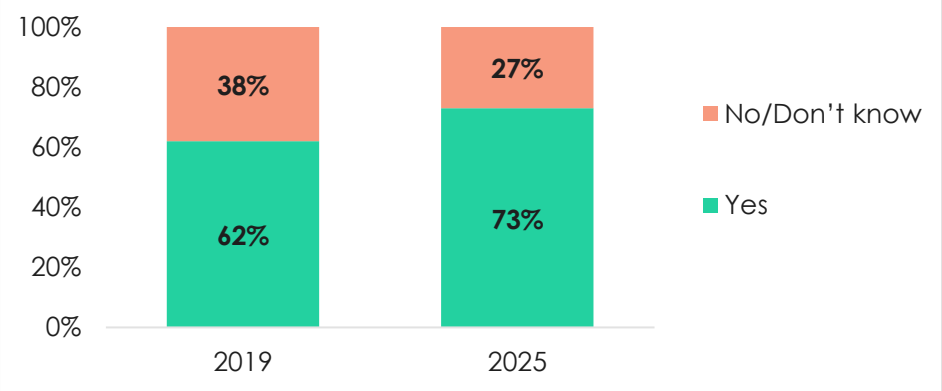
Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Traditional leaders? Religious leaders? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")*

Social media and trust

Ugandans are increasingly using social media, while consumption of news via traditional media channels is declining (Daniel, 2025). Yet many citizens view social media as a vector for disinformation, especially by politicians and political influencers (BBC Media Action, 2026).

As of 2025, nearly three-fourths (73%) of Ugandans say they have heard of social media, up from 62% six years prior (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Are you aware of social media? | Uganda | 2019 vs. 2025



Respondents were asked: *Have you heard about social media, for example, Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp?*

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Citizens who have heard of the technology are extremely optimistic about its potential to inform people about current events (96%) and help them to have more impact on political processes (83%) (Figure 13). However, most also believe that it results in wider acceptance of false news (78%) and growing political intolerance (73%).

Figure 13: Social media's perceived influence on public discourse | Uganda | 2025

Respondents who have heard about social media were asked: *Regardless of whether you personally use social media yourself, please tell me whether you agree or disagree that social media:*

Makes people more informed about current events?
Helps people have more impact on political processes?
Makes people more likely to believe false news?
Makes people more intolerant of those who have different political opinions?

Social-media use is associated with lower trust in public institutions (Figure 14). Citizens who consume at least one form of social media "a few days a week" or "every day" are less likely than those who consume it less frequently or not at all to say they have faith in key public institutions that the survey asked about. The largest gaps between frequent users and infrequent users/non-users are for the ruling party (-22 percentage points), the electoral commission (-18 points), the president (-14 points), and Parliament (-14 points).

The one exception concerns opposition parties, for which trust is higher among frequent social-media users (41%) than among infrequent users/non-users (32%).

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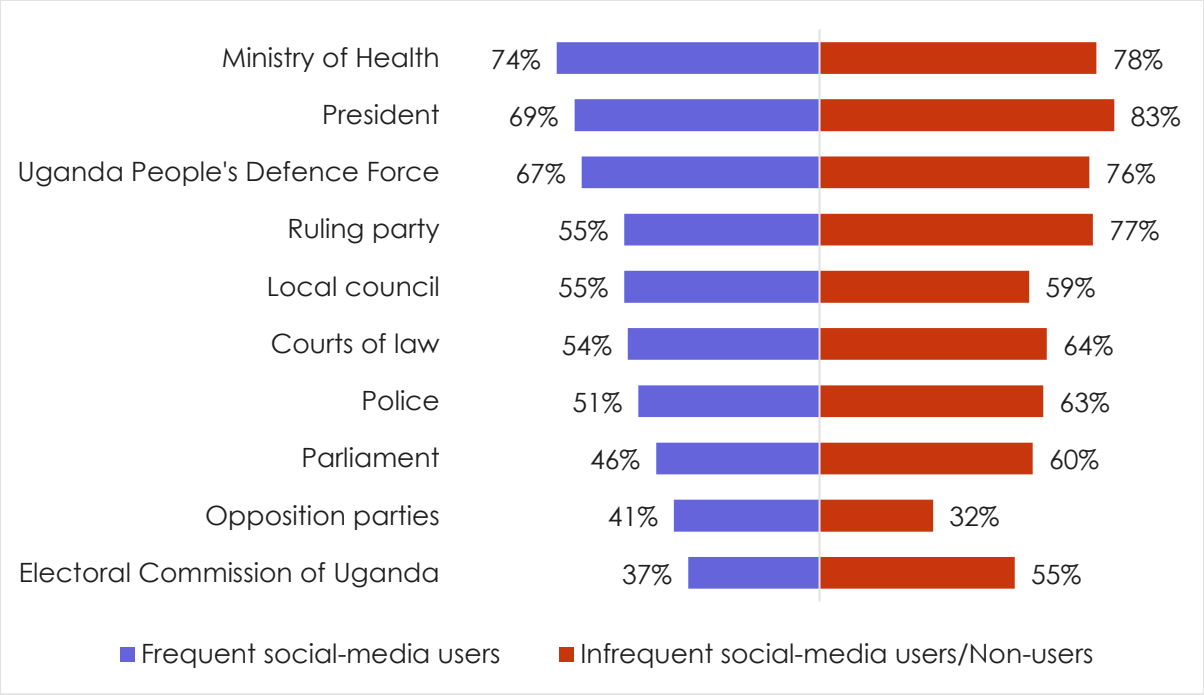
Figure 14: Trust public institutions somewhat/a lot | by frequency of social-media news consumption | Uganda | 2025



Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot") ("Frequent users" correspond to respondents who say they consume at least one form of social media "every day" or "a few days a week," while "Infrequent users/Non-users" consume social media less frequently or never.)*

Conclusion

Majorities of Ugandans express trust in key public institutions, from the army, police, and courts to the president, ruling party, Parliament, and local council. Notably, trust levels for all of these institutions gained strength in the 2025 survey, approaching or exceeding levels recorded a decade ago after falling in the intervening years.

Religious and traditional leaders also maintain high levels of public trust, while fewer than half of citizens express confidence in the electoral commission and opposition political parties.

Location, education, and party affiliation display consistent patterns in institutional trust: Rural residents, less-educated citizens, and ruling-party supporters express greater trust in most key institutions than urbanites, more-educated respondents, and opposition-party supporters and nonpartisans. In contrast, survey participants who often get news from social media are less likely to express trust in key institutions.

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