

A constitution reflects the origins, history, and way of thinking of a country, and is an essential subject of study for diplomats. Uganda is no exception. Like many African countries, Uganda established its own constitution after independence after World War II. This month, I would like to introduce you to the Ugandan Constitution.

1. Changes in the Constitution since Independence

Uganda achieved independence from Britain in October 1962. Since then, the constitution has undergone four changes. The constitution adopted by parliament at the time of independence was Uganda's first constitution however, this constitution was suddenly revised and abolished in 1966 by Prime Minister Milton Obote. Prime Minister Obote unilaterally distributed the new constitution to the mailboxes (pigeonholes) of members of parliament without going through proper procedures, and so the second constitution was also called the "pigeonhole constitution." A new constitution was then adopted by parliament in September 1967.

This was the third constitution since independence however, from the 1970s to the 1980s, Uganda had to go through a long period of turmoil, including a civil war when the famous Idi Amin came to power. From 1967 until the current constitution was adopted, there was a period of turmoil, with the Ugandan constitution being suspended by the Idi Amin regime. The current constitution, enacted in 1995 by the Museveni regime, is the fourth since independence.

2. Contents of the current constitution

We have summarized the main provisions and features of the current constitution, which was enacted in 1995.



Uganda Constitution and Calendar of the Ugandan Parliament

(1) Location of sovereignty

It clearly states that sovereignty resides with the people. Kampala is designated as the capital, and the official language is English with Swahili as the second official language. There are also regulations regarding the national flag and national anthem.

(2) Human rights provisions

The Ugandan Constitution provides for the general right to life, privacy, and education, as well as affirmative action. In other words, it requires the state to ensure that people are not disadvantaged (marginalized) on the basis of gender, age, disability, or other reasons. It is easy to imagine that the Constitution, enacted in a country devastated by a long civil war, was an inspiration to the people and heralded the dawn of a new era.

With regard to political activities, the Constitution stipulates that people have the right to participate in peaceful activities to influence politics through the activities of civil society organizations and the like. However, at the same time, it stipulates that the exercise of these political rights and freedoms must not affect the public interest or the human rights of others, in other words, they must not be abused. As for the political system after independence, Uganda did not have a multi-party system as guaranteed by the Constitution. At one point, the introduction of socialism was considered. In 2005, the Museveni administration held Uganda's first national referendum to ask the people what kind of political system should be stipulated in the constitution. As a result, a multi-party system was chosen, and this was clearly stated in the constitution. At the same time, a single-party system was prohibited by constitutional provisions.

(3) Parliament

Uganda's parliament is unicameral, with members serving five years, the same term as the president. The electoral system is single-seat constituencies, with no proportional representation. A distinctive feature of the Ugandan constitution is that one female member must be elected from each district. This means that half of the Ugandan parliament is automatically female. In addition, 10 member seats are available for the military, 5 for workers, 5 for young people, 5 for people with disabilities, and 5 for elderly people.

In general elections held every five years, Ugandans cast a total of three votes: for the presidential candidate, a single-seat constituency candidate (regardless of gender), and a female district candidate. There are currently 146 districts in Uganda, with a total of 353 single-seat constituencies. The total number of members of the National Assembly is 557 (As of April 2023). The National Assembly is a sessional system. Committees for each field are established to deliberate laws and the budget.

(4) President's Powers

The President is the Head of state, Head of Government and also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and the Fountain of Honour. In the event of an absence of the President, the order of succession is the Vice President, the Speaker of Parliament, and the Chief Justice. The President has the power to appoint the Vice President, the Prime Minister, all Cabinet members and Ministers of State, the Permanent Secretaries of each Ministry, the Chief Justice, Attorney-General, and the Deputy Attorney-General. However, appointments require the approval of Parliament by a simple majority, except for those related to the judiciary.

The President has the power to approve or reject bills sent by the Congress. If a bill is rejected, the Congress will amend it and submit it to the President again. If the President does not approve the bill after it has been amended three times, the results of the Congress' deliberations will become law. In addition, the President also has strong authority over the budget, as he is also the Minister of Finance under a separate law. In this way, one of the characteristics of the budget is that the budget bill also effectively require the President's approval.

One of the characteristics of the current Ugandan Constitution is that the President has

great power, including personnel and budget decisions.

Parliament has the power to remove the President from office and stipulates the requirements and procedures for doing so. This provision has never been invoked since the Constitution came into force.

3. Amendments to the 1995 Constitution

The current Constitution has been amended twice:

(1) 2005

The term limit for the president was abolished in parliament. Previously, the limit was two terms. Currently, there is no specific limit on the presidential term. Also, as mentioned above, a multi-party system was adopted.

(2) 2017

The age limit for the president (75 years old) was abolished. However, when this constitutional amendment was debated in parliament, some opposition lawmakers were adamantly opposed. At one point, fighting broke out in parliament.



National Resistance Movement (NRM) offices

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