

Summary

The recent Kenyan anti-governmental protests appear to have emboldened Ugandan protestors to organize demonstrations in Kampala against government corruption. The protests resulted in the arrest of several demonstrators and a government ban on future protests. Nevertheless, the protestors have already affirmed their intentions, through social media, to continue with the protests, specifically in Bugweri, Pallisa, and Soroti. As the government blames the opposition for the protests, the headquarters of the NUP was raided.

Recent events and developments

On Tuesday, July 23, the first organized protest since the November 2020 riots erupted in Kampala, resulting in a crackdown by the government. The protest opposed the corruption among the Ugandan political elite by demanding the resignation of the Parliament Speaker and Parliament Commissioners who were implicated in a recent corruption scandal. The demonstration has been planned in advance and popularized through social media. The recent anti-government protests in Kenya seem to have emboldened the Ugandan protestors as well. President Museveni denounced the protest, stating the protestors were “playing with fire”. The government made demonstrations subsequently illegal. Furthermore, on July 22, authorities raided the headquarters of the National Unity Platform (NUP) opposition party, which, according to the government, was one of the forces instigating the protest. Bobi Wine, the leader of the party, stated that the police had arrested some party officials. Despite the legal constraints, state propaganda, and heavy police presence to dissuade protestors, the protest went on. Security forces responded by arresting at least 60 protestors, among them a prominent TV presenter and three protest leaders. A court has charged 5 protestors with “common nuisance and idleness” on the same day. On X, several accounts stated that the protests would continue on Thursday, July 25. Furthermore, Bobi Wine stated on X that further planned protests in Bugweri, Pallisa, and Soroti were blocked by the police.

Impact assessment

The anti-corruption demonstrations show the broader implications of the anti-government protests in Kenya which appear to inspire Ugandan protestors to demonstrate against their political leaders. The protests remained peaceful with no clashes between the protestors and the police, even though several protestors were arrested. As the demands of the demonstrators have not been met, it is likely that more protests will occur. Although the police have already blocked attempts at further planned protests, police bans did not dissuade protestors on July 23 in Kampala, meaning that protests will likely occur despite the bans. In case of such a scenario, it is likely that police will be heavy-handed, trying to arrest the demonstrators which might lead to potential clashes. Additionally, further government raids and arrests of opposition leaders might spark outrage among the opposition supporters, further igniting anti-governmental sentiments and bolstering future protests or potential riots. Previous arrest of opposition leader Bobi Wine has sparked two-day riots in 2020, resulting in the death of 19 people. Additionally, roadblocks and checkpoints can also be expected throughout major cities where further protests are expected such as Kampala, Bugweri, Pallisa, and Soroti. Furthermore, should the demonstrations gain traction and become more widespread, an internet blackout imposed by the government is not out of the question as the protestors tend to coordinate their actions through social media. Such a measure has been already imposed during the 2021 Presidential election.

Advice from Forth Global

- Ensure that all employees travelling to Uganda receive a three-day HEAT training prior to deployment.
- Employees should avoid all protests and other public gatherings.
- Employees should refrain from sharing their opinions on the political situation in Uganda.
- Closely monitor the local and international media and liaise with local partners for updates on the political situation and potential protests.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

+31 (0) 35 543 04 37

christiaan@forthglobal.com

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