

How US aid cuts have hit the ballot box . By Anna Gawel, *Devex Newswire*, 3 Dec 2025

We report on the direct and dire impacts of U.S. aid cuts in Uganda and Nepal.

Voting absentee

I've always found voting in the U.S. to be an intriguing phenomenon. There are high-profile, intensely polarizing races (ahem, Donald Trump) that attract loads of people to the ballot box. But there are also lower-profile races where candidates struggle to muster voter interest despite the fact that local elections can have more impact on daily life. Even when it comes to fiercely contested presidential elections, a sizable chunk of Americans stay home.

But in many countries, voting isn't even an option — or it's a superficial exercise designed to keep a dictator in power. [USAID](#) worked for decades to address this democracy deficit. When the agency was dissolved, that work was largely abandoned, with **nearly 70%** of all U.S.-funded democracy, human rights, governance, and peacebuilding programs terminated by March 2025.

That includes programs in Uganda, where President **Yoweri Museveni** has been in office for 39 years. His strongest challenger, singer-turned-politician Robert Kyagulanyi — known as **Bobbi Wine** — has galvanized a forceful youth following that's made him the frequent target of arrests and restrictions.

Uganda has yet to experience a peaceful transfer of power, so the upcoming general elections, slated for January 2026, are a high-stakes event — [one that USAID tried to prepare Ugandans](#) for with various voter education activities.

Today, all that has been wiped away, leaving behind concerns for Uganda's already-dwindling civic space.

“The regime's **aggressive pushback against donor funding for civil society** has for years contributed immensely to the shrinking civic space,” says **Godber Tumushabe** of the Makerere University School of Law. Now, with U.S. funds gone, he adds, their ability to monitor and observe the electoral process in the upcoming 2026 elections has diminished further.

This doesn't just impact Ugandans; it impacts Americans as well, writes Nakisanze Segawa for Devex's The Aid Report.

“The U.S. is a trading nation,” Tumushabe points out. “**Promoting democracy creates opportunities for their businesses** to trade and survive in this [Ugandan]

economy.”

It’s also a matter of geopolitical influence, as Uganda pivots toward partners such as Russia and China, says **Ahmed Hadji** of the Lincoln Institute of Diplomacy and International Relations. “This alignment could **undermine the U.S.’s strategic interest in the region**,” he argues, “particularly regarding security cooperation and democratic values.”

Read: [US aid cuts shrink Uganda’s civic space ahead of 2026 elections](#)