



Giving Voice to the Voiceless: Amnesty International's Advocacy and the Promotion of Political Rights in Uganda

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Abstract: Political rights are essential for democratic governance and citizen participation, yet their realisation in Uganda continues to face various restrictions. This study examined the influence of Amnesty International's advocacy role in the promotion of political rights in Uganda. Guided by Constructivist Theory, the study adopted a qualitative approach using a case study design. The study involved 32 participants drawn from Amnesty International, civil society organisations, journalists, legal practitioners, human rights activists, and community leaders knowledgeable about political rights advocacy in Uganda. Data were collected between June and September 2025 through 12 key informant interviews, 2 four focus group discussions, participant observation, and document review, and were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that Amnesty International promotes political rights through human rights advocacy, monitoring and documentation of violations, civic awareness and human rights education, legislative and legal advocacy, media freedom promotion, collaboration with local human rights organisations, protection of human rights defenders, and utilisation of international advocacy mechanisms. These interventions enhanced public awareness of political rights, strengthened accountability for human rights violations, amplified the voices of vulnerable groups, and promoted democratic participation. However, their effectiveness was constrained by political resistance, shrinking civic space, and limited implementation of human rights recommendations. The study concludes that Amnesty International remains an influential actor in advancing political rights and strengthening democratic participation in Uganda. The study recommends strengthening collaboration among human rights actors, expanding civic education initiatives, and enhancing mechanisms for protecting political freedoms and citizen engagement.

Keywords: Amnesty International, Civic Awareness, Democratic Participation, Human Rights Advocacy, Political Rights

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1. Introduction

Political rights are fundamental to democratic governance because they enable citizens to participate in public affairs, express political opinions, associate freely, and influence decision-making processes. International human rights organisations have become increasingly influential actors in promoting and protecting these rights by advocating for accountability, documenting violations, and supporting

democratic reforms across the world. Over the last three decades, international human rights organisations have expanded their engagement with states and civil society, contributing significantly to the advancement of political freedoms and human rights awareness (Allard et al., 2008). Through advocacy campaigns, public education, monitoring, and reporting, these organisations have sought to influence government behavior and strengthen respect for internationally recognised human rights standards.

Globally, Amnesty International has emerged as one of the most influential international human rights organisations advocating for the protection and promotion of human rights. Founded in 1961, the organisation campaigns against human rights violations, mobilises public opinion, and encourages compliance with international human rights laws and standards. Amnesty International has played a significant role in defending civil and political rights by exposing abuses, supporting victims of repression, and advocating for reforms that promote democratic governance and fundamental freedoms. Its reports and advocacy interventions are widely recognised as important sources of information regarding human rights conditions across different countries (Alston, 2010; Cingranelli & Richards, 2011).

In Africa, international human rights organisations have increasingly contributed to the promotion of political rights through advocacy against political repression, unlawful detention, restrictions on freedom of expression, and violations of electoral rights. Amnesty International has been particularly active in advocating for media freedom, protection of human rights defenders, abolition of torture, and promotion of civic freedoms across the continent. These interventions have contributed to increased public awareness of political rights and strengthened demands for accountability among state institutions (Donnelly, 2013).

In Uganda, political rights are protected under the Constitution and various international human rights instruments to which the country is a signatory. Nevertheless, concerns regarding restrictions on civic space, limitations on freedom of expression, political intimidation, and violations of civil liberties continue to be reported by local and international human rights organizations. In response, Amnesty International has undertaken various advocacy initiatives including documentation of human rights violations, public awareness campaigns, engagement with local civil society organizations, and advocacy for policy reforms aimed at strengthening political rights and democratic participation. Through these efforts, the organization has sought to amplify the voices of vulnerable groups and encourage adherence to national and international human rights standards.

Although existing literature acknowledges the contribution of international human rights organizations to human rights promotion, limited empirical attention has specifically examined how Amnesty International's advocacy activities influence the promotion of political rights in Uganda. Much of the available literature focuses on broader human rights protection mechanisms, with less emphasis on advocacy processes and their contribution to civic awareness and democratic participation. This study, therefore, examined the influence of Amnesty International's advocacy role in the promotion of political rights in Uganda.

1.1 Objective

The objective of the study was to examine the influence of Amnesty International's advocacy role in the promotion of political rights in Uganda.

1.2 Research Question

The study was guided by the question: What is the influence of Amnesty International's advocacy role in the promotion of political rights in Uganda?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study was guided by Constructivism Theory, first introduced by Nicholas Greenwood Onuf in 1989 and further developed by Alexander Wendt in the 1990s. The theory assumes that social reality is constructed through shared ideas, norms, values, and interactions rather than solely through material interests or coercive power. Constructivism further posits that state behaviour and political practices are shaped by socially accepted beliefs that evolve through communication, persuasion, and social engagement. The theory recognises international organisations and non-governmental organisations as important actors capable of influencing norms and shaping collective understandings within society. It therefore emphasises the role of advocacy, learning, and norm diffusion in transforming attitudes, institutions, and political behaviour.

The relevance of Constructivism Theory to this study lies in its explanation of how Amnesty International promotes political rights through advocacy and the diffusion of human rights norms. The theory suggests that organisations can influence state conduct and citizen behaviour by shaping perceptions regarding acceptable political practices and democratic values. Amnesty International advances political rights by documenting violations, conducting awareness campaigns, promoting accountability, and encouraging adherence to internationally recognised human rights standards. Through these advocacy initiatives, the organisation helps change societal attitudes toward freedom of expression, association, assembly, and political participation. Consequently, Constructivism Theory provides an appropriate framework for understanding how Amnesty International's advocacy role influences the promotion of political rights in Uganda.

2.2 Amnesty International's Advocacy and the Promotion of Political Rights

Human rights advocacy literature shows that international human rights organisations promote political freedoms by exposing abuses, mobilising public opinion, influencing reforms, and demanding government accountability (Allard et al., 2008; Alston, 2010). Recent reports further show that Uganda continues to experience restrictions on civic space, political opposition activity, and public dissent, making human rights advocacy increasingly relevant (Amnesty International, 2024; Freedom House, 2025). Donnelly (2013) and Christian (2007) further argue that political freedoms enable citizens to participate in governance, express opinions, associate freely, and challenge unlawful state actions. However, Krasner (1999) cautions that external advocacy may be resisted when governments interpret it as interference in domestic affairs. Contextually, much of this literature explains human rights advocacy broadly, but gives limited attention to Amnesty International's specific influence on political freedoms in Uganda. Methodologically, many studies rely on general reports and normative analysis, with limited empirical evidence from local stakeholders affected by advocacy interventions.

In regard to monitoring and documentation, literature shows that evidence-based reporting is central to exposing political rights violations and strengthening accountability (Brown, 2009; Alston, 2010). Recent documentation indicates continuing concerns around arbitrary arrests, unlawful detention, torture, and restrictions on peaceful assembly in Uganda (U.S. Department of State, 2022; Amnesty International, 2023). Cingranelli and Richards (2011) emphasise that Amnesty International's country reports are widely used in assessing state compliance with human rights standards. Amnesty International (2020) also demonstrates how documentation of arbitrary arrests, unlawful detention, torture, censorship, and repression brings hidden abuses into public debate. However, critics observe that documented evidence does not automatically produce reform where political will and enforcement mechanisms remain weak. The contextual gap is that limited work has examined how Amnesty International's documentation specifically shapes political rights promotion in Uganda, while the methodological gap lies in limited qualitative inquiry into how citizens and local actors interpret such reports.

Literature on mass sensitisation and human rights education suggests that civic awareness enables citizens to understand their rights, demand accountability, and participate in democratic governance (Freeman, 2003). Recent civic space assessments also show that citizens and human rights defenders require ongoing rights education, as civil liberties remain under pressure in Uganda (National

Coalition of Human Rights Defenders Uganda, 2022). Donnelly (2013) and Christian (2007) maintain that political rights are meaningful only when citizens understand constitutional protections and democratic processes. Amnesty International Handbook (2002) shows that campaigns, petitions, publications, demonstrations, and community engagement are used to increase awareness of rights. However, the literature also acknowledges that awareness alone may not overcome intimidation, weak institutions, unequal access to information, and low civic participation. The contextual gap is the limited focus on Amnesty International's sensitisation role in Uganda, while the methodological gap concerns the limited use of field-based evidence on how citizens experience such education campaigns.

Legislative and legal advocacy shows that human rights organisations promote political rights by influencing laws, supporting litigation, and aligning domestic legal frameworks with international standards (Alston, 2010). Recent legal and human rights analyses further indicate that Uganda's legal framework continues to raise concerns regarding freedoms of expression, assembly, and association (OHCHR, 2026). Donnelly (2013), Steiner and Alston (2000), and Amnesty International Handbook (2002) emphasise that legal safeguards are essential for protecting freedom of expression, association, assembly, fair trial, and participation in governance. Ball (2019) further shows that legal advocacy in Africa has been used to challenge restrictive laws and promote democratic reform. However, legal advocacy may be weakened by political interference, limited judicial independence, and poor implementation of progressive reforms. The contextual gap is that limited empirical literature explains how Amnesty International's legal advocacy affects Uganda's political rights environment, while the methodological gap is the overreliance on legal analysis rather than stakeholder-based evidence.

Studies on media freedom advocacy demonstrate that press freedom supports democratic accountability, access to information, and citizen participation (Christian, 2007; Donnelly, 2013). Alston (2010), Amnesty International Handbook (2002), and Ball (2019) show that human rights organisations advocate against censorship, harassment of journalists, unlawful detention, and restrictions on independent media. Recent reports confirm that restrictions on expression, online civic space, and media-related freedoms remain significant concerns in Uganda (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Amnesty International, 2024). However, media freedom advocacy remains difficult where governments treat independent journalism as a threat to political stability. In Uganda, reports of harassment, censorship, confiscation of equipment, and restrictions on media coverage reveal a gap between constitutional protections and practice. The contextual gap is the limited focus on Amnesty International's specific

contribution to journalist protection in Uganda, while the methodological gap is the limited empirical evidence from journalists, activists, and civil society actors. Literature on collaboration with local human rights organisations indicates that partnerships strengthen advocacy through local knowledge, community trust, international visibility, and shared resources (Freeman, 2002; Brant, 2014). Anderson (2009), Amnesty International (2020), and Ball (2019) further show that collaboration supports documentation, civic education, victim support, policy advocacy, and access to international human rights mechanisms. However, scholars caution that differences in priorities, dependence on external funding, restrictive civic space, and political interference may weaken such collaborations. Contextually, limited literature explains how Amnesty International's partnerships with Ugandan organisations directly promote political rights. Methodologically, there is limited empirical work capturing the experiences of local organisations involved in such partnerships.

Earlier studies on protection and support for human rights defenders show that activists are central to exposing abuses, supporting victims, and demanding accountability (Donnelly, 2013; Freeman, 2002). Alston (2010), Amnesty International Handbook (2002), and Ball (2019) indicate that protection may include legal assistance, urgent action campaigns, public advocacy, security support, and international visibility. However, protection mechanisms are often reactive and may be insufficient where state institutions are implicated in harassment, detention, and intimidation. Contextually, Uganda presents persistent concerns regarding politically motivated arrests, restrictions on civic space, and intimidation of activists. The methodological gap is that limited empirical research has examined how Amnesty International's protection efforts are experienced by defenders themselves and local advocacy networks.

Furthermore, studies show that international advocacy mechanisms show that treaties, global reports, diplomatic engagement, campaigns, and transnational advocacy networks help promote political rights and pressure governments toward compliance (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Krasner, 1999). Current international reporting continues to position Uganda's political rights concerns within global human rights accountability frameworks, especially regarding civic space, political freedoms, and state accountability (Freedom House, 2025; Amnesty International, 2025). Allard et al. (2008), Amnesty International Handbook (2002), Amnesty International (2020), and Ball (2019) demonstrate that international mechanisms increase visibility of local violations and strengthen demands for accountability. However, their influence is limited where state compliance is voluntary, and governments resist external scrutiny. Contextually, limited literature explains how Amnesty International uses

international mechanisms to influence political rights promotion in Uganda. Methodologically, more qualitative evidence is needed on how local actors perceive the usefulness of global advocacy mechanisms in addressing domestic political rights violations.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

The study adopted a qualitative research approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of Amnesty International's advocacy role in promoting political rights in Uganda (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The approach enabled the exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding advocacy interventions and their influence on political rights promotion. Furthermore, the qualitative approach facilitated the generation of rich descriptive data that provided detailed insights into advocacy processes, civic awareness, and democratic participation within the Ugandan context.

3.2 Design

The study adopted a single case study design to facilitate an in-depth exploration of Amnesty International's advocacy role in promoting political rights in Uganda (Yin, 2018). Data were collected between June and September 2025 through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and document review. The design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain rich contextual insights regarding advocacy processes, civic awareness, and democratic participation.

3.3 Population and Sample

The study involved 32 participants drawn from Amnesty International, civil society organisations, journalists, legal practitioners, activists, and community leaders. Participants comprised 12 key informants and 20 focus group discussants selected for their advocacy-related knowledge and experience. Data was collected through 12 key informant interviews and two focus group discussions, each comprising 10 participants. Participants were selected purposively based on their experience and knowledge of human rights advocacy, while the final sample was guided by the principle of data saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.4 Sampling Techniques

The study used purposive sampling to select information-rich participants knowledgeable about Amnesty

International's advocacy activities and political rights promotion in Uganda. Maximum variation sampling was further employed to capture diverse experiences and perspectives from human rights practitioners, journalists, civil society actors, legal experts, and community leaders. These techniques enabled the collection of comprehensive and credible data relevant to the study objective (Patton, 2015).

3.5 Eligibility Criteria

3.5.1 Inclusion Criteria

Participants were included in the study if they:

- Were Amnesty International staff, human rights activists, civil society representatives, journalists, legal practitioners, or community leaders.
- Possessed knowledge or experience regarding political rights advocacy and promotion in Uganda.
- Had interacted with, participated in, or observed Amnesty International's advocacy activities related to political rights.
- Were aged 18 years and above.
- Were available during the period of data collection.

3.5.2 Exclusion Criteria

Participants were excluded from the study if they:

- Had limited or no knowledge of Amnesty International's advocacy role in promoting political rights.
- Had not engaged with issues relating to political rights, human rights advocacy, or democratic governance.
- Declined to provide informed consent.

3.6 Data Collection Methods, Instruments and Measurement of Variables

Data were collected through key informant interviews, focus group discussions and document review to obtain comprehensive information on Amnesty International's advocacy role in promoting political rights in Uganda. The primary instruments included a key informant interview guide, focus group discussion guide, observation checklist, and document review checklist, which were developed from the study objective and relevant literature. Amnesty International's advocacy role was conceptualised through human rights advocacy, monitoring and documentation of political rights violations, mass sensitisation and human rights education, legislative and legal advocacy, media freedom advocacy, collaboration with local human rights

organisations, protection of human rights defenders, and international advocacy mechanisms (Amnesty International, 2002; Amnesty International, 2020; Brown, 2009). Promotion of political rights was assessed through participants' perceptions regarding freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, political participation, civic awareness, accountability, and democratic engagement (Christian, 2007; Donnelly, 2013). The use of multiple methods and instruments facilitated triangulation of evidence and enhanced the credibility, consistency, and trustworthiness of the findings.

3.7 Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of key informant interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and document review. Dependability and confirmability were achieved through maintaining an audit trail of data collection and analysis procedures. Transferability was promoted through detailed descriptions of the study setting, participants, and research processes.

3.8 Data Management and Analysis

Data obtained from key informant interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, anonymized using participant codes, and checked for completeness and accuracy. All transcripts, field notes, observation records, and reviewed documents were securely stored in password-protected electronic files and accessible only to the researcher. The confidentiality and integrity of the data were maintained throughout the study process in accordance with approved ethical guidelines.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedures of familiarisation, coding, theme development, theme review, and interpretation. Analysis was guided by both inductive coding from participants' narratives and deductive coding informed by the study objective, literature review, and Constructivism Theory. The coded data were organised into themes including human rights advocacy, political rights monitoring and documentation, mass sensitisation and human rights education, legislative and legal advocacy, media freedom advocacy, collaboration with local human rights organizations, protection of human rights defenders, and international advocacy mechanisms. Verbatim quotations were used to illustrate key findings. Interpretation was informed by Constructivism Theory's proposition that advocacy influences political behaviour through norm diffusion, awareness creation, and the promotion of shared democratic values.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained from Uganda Christian University Research Ethics Committee (Approval No. UG-REC-026) and subsequently registered with the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST Registration No. SS4661ES. Administrative permission to undertake the study was obtained from relevant institutions and organisational authorities before the commencement of data collection. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants after providing adequate information regarding the study purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without consequences. Confidentiality was maintained through secure storage of interview recordings, transcripts, field

notes, and study documents in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. Anonymity was ensured by assigning identification codes to participants and excluding names or other personal identifiers from transcripts, reports, and publications. Permission was obtained before audio-recording interviews and focus group discussions, and all information collected was used strictly for academic and research purposes.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (n = 32)

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Age	20–29 years	11	34.4
	30–39 years	5	15.6
	40–49 years	8	25
	≥50 years	8	25
Gender	Male	22	68.7
	Female	10	31.3
Marital Status	Single	6	18.7
	Married	14	43.8
	Divorced	8	25.0
	Widowed	4	12.5
Highest Level of Education	Diploma	6	18.7
	Degree	10	31.3
	Masters	12	37.5
	PhD	4	12.5
Position Held	Senior Manager	4	12.5
	Middle Manager	3	9.4
	Supervisor	3	9.4
	Officer	13	40.6
	Volunteer	9	28.1
Duration with Organization	5–10 years	18	56.3
	11–15 years	8	25.0
	≥16 years	6	18.7

A majority of participants were male (68.7%, n = 22) and had worked with their organisations for 5–10 years (56.3%, n = 18). This suggests that the study largely captured perspectives from male respondents with considerable experience and familiarity with organisational advocacy and political rights promotion activities.

4.1.2 Influence of Amnesty International's Advocacy Role in the Promotion of Political Rights

Table 2: Themes Emerging on Amnesty International's Influence in Promoting Political Rights in Uganda

Theme	Sub-themes	Key Evidence / Influence	Verbatim Illustrations
1. Human Rights Advocacy	- Promotion of freedoms (expression, assembly, association, participation) - Advocacy for accountability	Exposed abuses (e.g., crackdown on Bobi Wine protests); amplified voices of oppressed groups; positioned as a "voice for the voiceless".	"Our goal is to ensure that every individual, regardless of their background or circumstances, is able to enjoy basic human rights such as freedom of expression, assembly, and association." (Discussant-5)
2. Political Rights Monitoring	- Documentation of violations - Reporting and evidence-based advocacy	Reports on arbitrary arrests, censorship, protest bans, torture (e.g., Makindye barracks); highlighted systemic abuses to international community.	"Through their reports and publications, Amnesty International provides evidence-based information on political rights violations, including specific cases and patterns of abuse." (KI-2)
3. Mass Sensitization & Human Rights Education	- Awareness campaigns (Write for Rights) - Public education workshops, school curricula	Mobilized global solidarity; educated citizens on political rights and legal recourse; empowered civic participation.	"Amnesty International conducts mass awareness campaigns utilizing various communication channels to disseminate information about political rights principles." (Discussant-3)
4. Legislative & Legal Advocacy	- Lobbying for law reform (POMA, Uganda Communications Act) - Strategic litigation	Challenged repressive laws (e.g., Social Media Tax struck down); promoted reforms to align with international human rights standards.	"In the case of Uganda, Amnesty International can advocate for legislative reforms to protect media freedom...push for the amendment or repeal of laws such as the Uganda Communications Act." (Discussant-5)
5. Media Freedom & Protection of Journalists	- Advocacy for press freedom - Support for legal challenges - Partnerships with journalist groups	Worked with HRNJ-U; campaigned against restrictions on independent media; filed petitions to protect journalists' rights.	"Collaborating with local media organizations and journalists in Uganda would be crucial in advocating for legislative reforms." (Discussant-4)
6. Collaboration with Local Human Rights Groups	- Partnerships (e.g., HURINET-U) - Resource & information sharing	Strengthened local activism capacity; ensured accurate documentation of abuses; provided financial/moral support to local defenders.	"Amnesty International works closely with HURINET-U...to monitor and document human rights violations, advocate for policy changes, and provide legal support to victims." (KI-7)
7. Protection of Human Rights Defenders	- Urgent action campaigns - Security and relocation support - Support to prisoners' families	Mobilised global network to secure release/protection; provided security equipment, safe passage, and family assistance.	"Amnesty International stepped in and provided security equipment for the activist's office, including surveillance cameras and alarm systems." (KI-6)
8. Global & Institutional Leverage	- Use of international treaties (UDHR, ICCPR, African Charter) - Annual global reports & campaigns	Positioned Uganda's violations within the global human rights framework; pressured the government through international visibility and scrutiny.	"The yearly reports act as a wake-up call for the government and other stakeholders...making it difficult for the authorities to deny or ignore the issues at hand." (Discussant-12)

The results in Table 2 show that the most striking finding to emerge from this study was that Amnesty International plays a substantial role in promoting political rights in Uganda through advocacy, monitoring, public sensitisation, legal engagement, strategic partnerships, and protection of human rights defenders. Participants consistently indicated that the organisation contributes to increased awareness of political rights, greater public accountability, and enhanced protection of fundamental freedoms. Taken together, these findings suggest that

Amnesty International remains an influential actor in advancing democratic participation and political rights within Uganda.

The findings revealed that Amnesty International promotes political rights by advocating for freedoms of expression, assembly, association, and political participation while demanding accountability for human rights violations. Respondents described the organisation as a voice for marginalised and oppressed groups whose concerns might otherwise receive limited attention. Through advocacy

campaigns and public engagement initiatives, Amnesty International was perceived to strengthen public discourse on governance, democracy, and human rights.

The findings further revealed that political rights monitoring constitutes a central component of Amnesty International's advocacy strategy. Participants reported that the organisation systematically documents arbitrary arrests, censorship, torture, protest restrictions, and other violations through evidence-based reports and publications. These monitoring activities were perceived to increase transparency, attract international attention, and place pressure on state institutions to respect political rights and democratic principles.

Another important finding was that Amnesty International conducts extensive civic awareness and human rights education programmes. Respondents indicated that awareness campaigns, educational workshops, and community sensitisation initiatives improve citizens' understanding of political rights and available legal remedies. These interventions were considered instrumental in empowering citizens to participate more actively in democratic processes and challenge rights violations.

The study also found that Amnesty International engages in legislative and legal advocacy aimed at reforming laws that restrict political freedoms. Participants noted that the organisation advocates for amendments to legislation affecting freedom of expression, media freedom, and civic participation while supporting strategic litigation intended to protect constitutional rights. Such interventions were perceived to promote greater alignment between national legislation and international human rights standards.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that Amnesty International actively promotes media freedom and collaborates with journalists and media organisations to safeguard freedom of expression. Respondents emphasised that advocacy against restrictions on independent media contributes to a more open environment for public debate and government accountability. These efforts were viewed as essential for strengthening democratic governance and protecting political rights.

The findings also demonstrated that collaboration with local human rights organisations enhances the effectiveness of Amnesty International's advocacy initiatives. Participants reported that partnerships facilitate information sharing, documentation of violations, capacity building, and provision of support to victims of abuse. Such collaborations were perceived to strengthen local advocacy structures and improve the sustainability of political rights interventions.

Finally, the study found that Amnesty International provides protection and support to human rights defenders

through urgent action campaigns, international advocacy, security assistance, and support to affected families. Participants further observed that the organisation utilises international human rights instruments and global reporting mechanisms to increase scrutiny of political rights violations in Uganda. Overall, these findings suggest that Amnesty International's combined advocacy efforts contribute significantly to the promotion and protection of political rights in Uganda.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The study found that Amnesty International promotes political rights through advocacy, monitoring, civic education, legal engagement, media freedom promotion, collaboration, protection of defenders, and international advocacy mechanisms. This supports Constructivism Theory, which explains that organisations influence political behaviour by shaping norms, values, public meanings, and shared understandings through advocacy and social interaction. Amnesty International's role in amplifying oppressed voices and promoting freedoms of expression, assembly, association, and participation demonstrates how advocacy can construct political rights as legitimate public claims rather than private grievances. This finding agrees with Allard et al. (2008) and Alston (2010), who argue that international human rights organisations influence reforms by exposing abuses, mobilising public opinion, and demanding accountability. The finding is further supported by recent reports showing that restrictions on civic space, political participation, and freedom of expression remain significant concerns in Uganda, thereby reinforcing the continued relevance of human rights advocacy interventions (Amnesty International, 2025; Freedom House, 2025).

The study further found that monitoring and documentation of political rights violations form a central pathway through which Amnesty International promotes accountability. Participants indicated that reports on arbitrary arrests, censorship, protest restrictions, torture, and other abuses provided evidence that made violations difficult to deny. This finding is consistent with Brown (2009), Alston (2010), and Cingranelli and Richards (2011), who emphasise that evidence-based reporting strengthens human rights advocacy by generating credible information on state conduct. From a constructivist perspective, such documentation does more than record abuses; it frames state conduct against accepted human rights norms and shapes how citizens, civil society, and international actors interpret political repression. Nevertheless, the finding also shows that documentation alone is insufficient where political will, enforcement mechanisms, and institutional accountability remain weak. Recent human rights reports similarly document arbitrary arrests, unlawful detention, restrictions on peaceful

assembly, and political intimidation in Uganda, highlighting the continuing importance of monitoring and documentation in promoting accountability (Human Rights Watch, 2025; Amnesty International, 2026).

Regarding mass sensitisation and human rights education, the findings showed that Amnesty International's campaigns and public education initiatives improved citizens' awareness of political rights and available legal remedies. This finding supports Freeman (2003), Donnelly (2013), and Christian (2007), who argue that political rights become meaningful when citizens understand their freedoms and can participate in democratic processes. Constructivism Theory further supports this finding because civic education contributes to norm diffusion by shaping citizens' understanding of what constitutes acceptable democratic practice. The finding suggests that awareness campaigns help transform political rights from abstract legal provisions into lived civic knowledge. However, the finding also confirms earlier literature that awareness alone may not overcome intimidation, weak institutions, unequal access to information, and low civic participation. The finding is also consistent with recent assessments indicating that civic education remains necessary because many citizens continue to face barriers to meaningful political participation and access to information (Freedom House, 2025).

The findings also indicated that Amnesty International promotes political rights through legislative and legal advocacy aimed at challenging restrictive laws and encouraging reforms. This agrees with Donnelly (2013), Steiner and Alston (2000), and Amnesty International Handbook (2002), who emphasise that legal safeguards are essential for protecting freedom of expression, assembly, association, fair trial, and participation in governance. Through advocacy around laws such as the Public Order Management Act and the Uganda Communications Act, Amnesty International was perceived to support alignment between national law and international human rights standards. This reflects the Constructivism Theory because legal advocacy seeks to reshape institutional norms and redefine what governments should regard as legitimate treatment of citizens. Nonetheless, the findings show that legal advocacy remains constrained by political interference, limited judicial independence, and weak implementation of progressive reforms. This observation aligns with recent analyses suggesting that concerns regarding restrictions on civic freedoms, public assembly, and political expression remain relevant within Uganda's legal and governance environment (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law [ICNL], 2026; Amnesty International, 2025).

On media freedom and protection of journalists, the findings showed that Amnesty International advocates against restrictions on independent media and supports

partnerships with journalist groups. This finding is consistent with Christian (2007), Donnelly (2013), Alston (2010), and Ball (2019), who link press freedom to democratic accountability, access to information, and citizen participation. In constructivist terms, advocacy for media freedom helps shape public discourse by protecting spaces where political meanings, grievances, and accountability claims are produced and circulated. The finding therefore suggests that media freedom is not merely a professional concern for journalists, but a broader political rights issue connected to democratic participation. However, the finding also confirms that media advocacy remains difficult where governments perceive independent journalism as a threat to political control or regime legitimacy. Recent studies similarly indicate that independent journalism, digital civic engagement, and online expression continue to face regulatory and political challenges in Uganda (Freedom House, 2025; Amnesty International, 2025).

The findings further demonstrated that collaboration with local human rights organisations strengthens Amnesty International's advocacy role in Uganda. Participants reported that partnerships with local actors enhanced documentation, information sharing, legal support, civic education, and protection of victims. This agrees with Freeman (2002), Brant (2014), Anderson (2009), and Ball (2019), who argue that collaboration combines local knowledge with international visibility and advocacy resources. Constructivism Theory is useful here because partnerships operate as norm-sharing networks through which international and local actors jointly construct meanings around rights, accountability, and democratic participation. However, the findings also support concerns that collaboration may be weakened by restrictive civic space, political interference, resource dependence, and differences in organisational priorities.

The study also found that Amnesty International supports human rights defenders through urgent action campaigns, security assistance, international advocacy, and support to affected families. This finding supports Donnelly (2013), Freeman (2002), Alston (2010), Amnesty International Handbook (2002), and Ball (2019), who view defenders as central actors in exposing abuses, supporting victims, and demanding accountability. From a constructivist viewpoint, protecting defenders sustains the actors who produce, transmit, and defend human rights norms in society. The finding indicates that support for defenders contributes to preserving civic space and maintaining pressure for political rights protection. However, the findings also suggest that such protection may remain reactive and limited where state institutions themselves are implicated in intimidation, detention, or harassment.

Finally, the findings revealed that Amnesty International uses global and institutional mechanisms to position Uganda's political rights concerns within international

human rights frameworks. This supports Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), Krasner (1999), Allard et al. (2008), Amnesty International Handbook (2002), Amnesty International (2020), and Ball (2019), who show that treaties, global reporting, campaigns, and transnational advocacy networks increase international visibility and pressure governments toward compliance. Constructivism Theory strongly explains this finding because international mechanisms work through norm diffusion, reputational pressure, persuasion, and shared expectations of appropriate state behaviour. This interpretation is supported by recent international assessments that continue to place Uganda's political rights environment under global scrutiny regarding civic freedoms, democratic participation, and state accountability (Freedom House, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2025). The finding suggests that Amnesty International's annual reports and global campaigns act as accountability tools by making political rights violations more visible to national and international audiences. Taken together, the findings confirm that Amnesty International's advocacy promotes political rights in Uganda, although its effectiveness remains shaped by political resistance, shrinking civic space, weak enforcement, and limited state responsiveness.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that Amnesty International plays a significant role in promoting political rights in Uganda through human rights advocacy, monitoring and documentation of violations, civic education, legislative and legal advocacy, media freedom promotion, collaboration with local human rights organisations, protection of human rights defenders, and utilisation of international advocacy mechanisms. These interventions contribute to increased public awareness of political rights, greater accountability for human rights violations, enhanced protection of fundamental freedoms, and broader citizen participation in democratic processes. The findings support Constructivism Theory, which posits that advocacy organisations influence political behaviour and institutional practices through norm diffusion, awareness creation, persuasion, and the promotion of shared democratic values. However, the effectiveness of Amnesty International's advocacy efforts is constrained by political resistance, shrinking civic space, limited implementation of human rights recommendations, and weak enforcement of legal protections. The study establishes that Amnesty International remains an influential actor in advancing political rights and strengthening democratic participation in Uganda despite the persistence of institutional and political challenges.

5.2 Recommendations

1. Amnesty International and other human rights organisations should expand civic education and public awareness programs, particularly among youth, women, and marginalised populations, to strengthen knowledge of political rights and enhance meaningful participation in democratic processes. Greater investment in community-based advocacy, human rights education, and grassroots mobilisation would further increase public engagement in governance and accountability initiatives.
2. The Government of Uganda should strengthen the protection of political rights by ensuring effective implementation of constitutional guarantees relating to freedom of expression, assembly, association, and political participation. State institutions should also respond promptly to documented human rights violations and implement recommendations arising from credible human rights monitoring reports to enhance accountability and public trust.
3. Parliament and relevant policy-making institutions should review and reform laws, policies, and administrative practices that unnecessarily restrict civic space and democratic participation. Such reforms should be aligned with national constitutional provisions and internationally recognised human rights standards to promote a more enabling environment for political rights protection.
4. Media institutions, journalists' associations, and regulatory bodies should strengthen initiatives aimed at protecting press freedom, safeguarding journalists from harassment and intimidation, and promoting responsible journalism. Enhanced collaboration between media practitioners and human rights organisations would contribute to greater transparency, accountability, and informed public participation in democratic governance.
5. Civil society organisations should strengthen collaborative advocacy networks and partnerships with international human rights organisations to improve documentation of violations, civic education, legal support, and policy engagement. Stronger cooperation would enhance the collective capacity to promote political rights and advocate for democratic reforms at both local and national levels.
6. Future research should examine the long-term effects of international human rights advocacy on political rights, democratic participation, governance reforms, and state accountability in Uganda. Comparative studies involving different human rights organisations and diverse political

contexts are recommended to generate broader empirical evidence on the effectiveness of advocacy interventions in promoting political rights and democratic governance.

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