



# Shaping Political Change: Amnesty International's Lobbying Role in Combating Political Rights Violations in Uganda

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**Abstract:** Political rights are fundamental to democratic governance, yet persistent restrictions continue to undermine civic participation, accountability, and constitutional freedoms in Uganda. This study examined Amnesty International's lobbying role in combating political rights violations in Uganda. Constructivism Theory guided the study by explaining how lobbying shapes policy reform, institutional behaviour, and democratic governance. A qualitative case study design involved 32 purposively selected participants from Amnesty International, civil society organisations, journalists, legal practitioners, human rights activists, and community leaders. Data were collected through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and document review, and were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that Amnesty International combats political rights violations through advocacy and policy influence, evidence-based reporting, and strategic reporting processes. Legislative lobbying, policy dialogue, and coalition-building strengthened policy discussions, institutional accountability, and alignment with international human rights standards. Evidence-based reporting generated credible documentation that informed policy debates, strengthened advocacy, enhanced accountability, and increased international scrutiny of political rights violations. Strategic reporting transformed documented violations into recommendations supporting lobbying and policy reform. Partnerships with civil society organisations strengthened information sharing and collective advocacy despite persistent political resistance. The study concludes that Amnesty International's lobbying strengthens democratic governance by shaping policy discourse, promoting accountability, and advancing political rights protection. However, its effectiveness remains constrained by political resistance, shrinking civic space, weak implementation of human rights recommendations, and limited state responsiveness. The study recommends strengthening evidence-based lobbying, expanding strategic partnerships, and sustaining policy engagement to enhance political rights protection in Uganda.

**Keywords:** Amnesty International, Lobbying, Political Rights, Policy Influence, Democratic Governance, Uganda

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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. Respect for these rights

promotes accountability, transparency, and inclusive governance while strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law (Donnelly, 2013). However, political rights continue to face significant challenges in many developing countries, where restrictions on civic space, freedom of expression, political participation, and peaceful assembly undermine democratic governance (Amnesty

International, 2024; House, 2024). International human rights organisations have become increasingly influential actors in responding to these challenges through lobbying, policy engagement, evidence-based reporting, coalition-building, and strategic engagement with state and non-state actors. Over the past three decades, these organisations have influenced legislative reforms, strengthened institutional accountability, and promoted compliance with international human rights standards by shaping public policy and democratic governance (Allard, 2008). Their lobbying efforts extend beyond documenting violations by engaging policymakers, mobilising public opinion, and encouraging governments to fulfil their human rights obligations (Alston, 2010).

Globally, Amnesty International has emerged as one of the most influential international human rights organisations promoting democratic governance and protecting political rights. Founded in 1961, the organisation combines evidence-based lobbying, policy engagement, public campaigns, and international advocacy to influence governments and strengthen accountability for human rights violations. Through policy recommendations, legislative engagement, and credible human rights reporting, Amnesty International has contributed to reforms that protect freedom of expression, association, assembly, and political participation. Its reports remain widely recognised as credible sources for assessing national compliance with international human rights standards (Alston, 2010; Cingranelli & Richards, 2010). Recent global reports further demonstrate that Amnesty International's research continues to shape international human rights debates, influence policy reforms, and strengthen accountability for governments accused of violating political rights (Amnesty International, 2024).

Across Africa, Amnesty International has increasingly employed lobbying strategies to influence legislative reforms, institutional accountability, media freedom, and civic participation. The organisation has worked with governments, regional institutions, and civil society organisations to advocate for democratic reforms, challenge restrictive legislation, and promote compliance with international human rights obligations. These lobbying initiatives have strengthened policy dialogue, increased public accountability, and encouraged reforms that enhance the protection of political rights despite persistent political and institutional constraints (Mutua, 2002). Recent evidence indicates that civic space across several African countries continues to experience increasing restrictions, making evidence-based lobbying and coordinated policy engagement increasingly important for protecting democratic freedoms (CIVICUS, 2024).

In Uganda, political rights are constitutionally protected and reinforced through international human rights treaties to which the country is a signatory. Nevertheless, concerns regarding restrictions on freedom of expression, political participation, media independence, peaceful assembly, and

civic space continue to be reported by local and international human rights organisations (Amnesty International, 2024). In response, Amnesty International has implemented coordinated lobbying strategies including evidence-based reporting, legislative engagement, policy dialogue, coalition-building, public awareness campaigns, and collaboration with civil society organisations to strengthen political rights protection. Through these lobbying efforts, the organisation has sought to influence policy reforms, strengthen institutional accountability, and encourage compliance with national and international human rights standards while amplifying the concerns of vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Lobbying has increasingly become an important mechanism for influencing institutional responses to political rights violations. Unlike conventional advocacy, lobbying involves sustained engagement with legislators, government institutions, international organisations, development partners, and civil society to influence laws, public policies, and governance practices. Amnesty International employs evidence-based reporting, coalition-building, public awareness campaigns, and policy dialogue to encourage legal reforms and strengthen accountability mechanisms that protect political rights in Uganda. Constructivism Theory suggests that such lobbying activities shape norms, influence institutional behaviour, and promote policy change through persuasion, social interaction, and the diffusion of democratic values (Wendt, 1999).

Although previous studies acknowledge the contribution of international human rights organisations to the promotion of political rights, limited empirical evidence explains how Amnesty International's lobbying strategies influence policy reform, legislative change, institutional accountability, and coordinated responses to political rights violations in Uganda. Existing studies have largely focused on advocacy and broader human rights protection mechanisms while paying limited attention to lobbying processes, evidence-based policy influence, coalition-building, and their contribution to combating political rights violations. Addressing this gap is important for understanding how lobbying contributes to democratic governance within politically restrictive environments. This study therefore examined Amnesty International's lobbying role in combating political rights violations in Uganda. The study contributes empirical evidence on how lobbying strategies influence policy reform, institutional accountability, coalition-building, and democratic governance, thereby advancing understanding of the role of international human rights organisations in protecting political rights within restrictive political contexts.

## 1.1 Objective

This study was set to examine the influence of Amnesty International's lobbying role in combating political rights violations in Uganda.

## 1.2 Research Question

What is Amnesty International's lobbying role in combating political rights violations in Uganda?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

This study was guided by Constructivism Theory, first introduced by Nicholas Greenwood Onuf (1989) and further developed by (Wendt, 1999). The theory assumes that political behaviour, institutional practices, and international relations are socially constructed through shared ideas, norms, values, and interactions rather than being determined solely by material interests or coercive power. It further assumes that governments, international organisations, and civil society actors continuously shape and reshape political realities through persuasion, communication, learning, and the diffusion of accepted norms. Consequently, policy reforms and institutional behaviour emerge from changing beliefs regarding appropriate conduct within society and the international community (Wendt, 1999).

Constructivism also recognises international organisations as influential norm entrepreneurs capable of shaping public policy and promoting democratic governance. Through lobbying, evidence-based reporting, coalition-building, policy dialogue, and sustained engagement with decision-makers, these organisations encourage governments to internalise internationally accepted human rights standards and modify institutional practices accordingly (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

The theory is relevant to this study because Amnesty International employs lobbying strategies to influence legislative reforms, strengthen institutional accountability, and promote compliance with international human rights standards. Through policy recommendations, evidence-based reporting, public awareness campaigns, and collaboration with civil society organisations, Amnesty International shapes policy discourse and government responses to political rights violations. Constructivism, therefore, provides an appropriate framework for explaining how lobbying influences institutional change and contributes to combating political rights violations in Uganda.

### 2.2 Advocacy and Policy Influence

Advocacy and policy influence constitute important strategies through which international human rights organisations shape democratic governance and protect political rights. Advocacy involves influencing public policy, legislation, and institutional practices by engaging

governments, legislators, civil society organisations, and international actors to promote compliance with human rights standards. Policy influence extends beyond public awareness by encouraging governments to adopt legal and administrative reforms that strengthen accountability and protect fundamental freedoms. According to (Donnelly, 2013), advocacy enables citizens and institutions to challenge political repression while promoting freedom of expression, association, assembly, and political participation. Similarly, Alston (2010) argues that sustained engagement with policymakers and strategic lobbying strengthen democratic institutions by encouraging governments to align domestic legislation with international human rights obligations.

Recent studies demonstrate that advocacy has evolved from public campaigning towards evidence-informed policy engagement and strategic lobbying. Human rights organisations increasingly combine legislative engagement, policy dialogue, coalition-building, and international diplomacy to influence governance reforms and institutional accountability. According to Amnesty International (2024), sustained engagement with governments and regional institutions has contributed to reforms addressing restrictions on civic space, arbitrary detention, and political participation. Similarly, House (2024) reports that coordinated advocacy and policy engagement remain essential for protecting democratic institutions where governments continue to restrict civil liberties. These findings suggest that contemporary advocacy increasingly emphasises influencing public policy through sustained dialogue rather than relying exclusively on public campaigns.

Scholars generally agree that policy influence contributes to democratic governance by promoting accountability and strengthening institutional responsiveness. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) argue that international organisations function as norm entrepreneurs by persuading governments to internalise internationally accepted standards of political conduct. Wendt (1999) similarly maintains that institutional behaviour changes when actors adopt shared norms and expectations through continuous interaction and persuasion. More recent scholarship supports these perspectives by demonstrating that lobbying facilitates policy learning, legislative reform, and institutional adaptation through collaboration between governments and civil society organisations (CIVICUS, 2024). Together, these studies suggest that advocacy and lobbying reinforce democratic governance by shaping both policy discourse and institutional behaviour.

Despite this consensus, scholars differ regarding the effectiveness of advocacy in politically restrictive environments. Donnelly (2013) argues that sustained advocacy strengthens democratic accountability even where political resistance exists. Conversely, Krasner (1999) contends that governments frequently perceive external advocacy as interference in domestic affairs and

may therefore resist international pressure. Recent reports by Amnesty International (2024)) and House (2024) indicate that although advocacy has increased international scrutiny of political rights violations, implementation of recommended reforms often remains constrained by political interests, weak institutional capacity, and shrinking civic space. These contrasting perspectives demonstrate that advocacy alone does not automatically produce legislative or institutional change.

Coalition-building has emerged as another important dimension of policy influence. Partnerships between international organisations and domestic civil society organisations strengthen advocacy by combining international visibility with local knowledge, technical expertise, and community legitimacy. Hoffman and Vahlsing (2014) argue that collaborative advocacy enhances policy engagement because coalitions mobilise diverse actors around common democratic objectives. Recent evidence further demonstrates that multi-stakeholder coalitions improve policy dialogue, legislative engagement, and accountability by increasing pressure for institutional reforms while amplifying marginalised voices (CIVICUS, 2024). Such partnerships therefore strengthen the sustainability and effectiveness of lobbying initiatives.

Although existing literature demonstrates that advocacy and policy influence contribute to democratic governance, important knowledge gaps remain. Contextually, most studies examine international advocacy broadly with limited empirical attention to how Amnesty International's lobbying strategies influence policy reform and institutional accountability within Uganda's political environment. Methodologically, previous studies rely predominantly on document analysis, cross-national assessments, and normative discussions, providing limited qualitative evidence from policymakers, civil society organisations, journalists, legal practitioners, and community leaders directly involved in lobbying processes. This study addresses these gaps by examining Amnesty International's lobbying role in combating political rights violations in Uganda through evidence generated from multiple stakeholder perspectives.

### **2.3 Evidence-based Reporting**

Evidence-based reporting is widely recognised as a fundamental strategy through which international human rights organisations document violations, influence public policy, and strengthen accountability for human rights abuses. Human rights reports provide credible and verifiable evidence that informs governments, legislators, civil society organisations, development partners, and international institutions about the nature and magnitude of political rights violations. Alston (2010) argues that systematic documentation transforms individual experiences of abuse into credible public evidence capable of influencing policy reforms and strengthening institutional accountability. Similarly, Cingranelli and

Richards (2010) contend that evidence-based reporting enhances transparency by providing objective information that allows governments and international organisations to assess compliance with human rights obligations.

Recent literature demonstrates that evidence-based reporting has become increasingly important in promoting democratic governance because policy decisions are more likely to be influenced by credible, independently verified evidence than by opinion alone. According to Amnesty International (2024), rigorous documentation of arbitrary arrests, unlawful detention, restrictions on freedom of expression, torture, and excessive use of force provides governments and international actors with reliable evidence for monitoring compliance with international human rights standards. Similarly, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2023) maintains that evidence-based reporting strengthens accountability by supporting policy dialogue, legal reforms, and institutional oversight while increasing public confidence in human rights monitoring systems.

Scholars generally agree that evidence-based reporting contributes to policy influence by generating credible knowledge that shapes legislative debates and governance reforms. Pillay (2012) argues that documented evidence increases transparency by exposing patterns of abuse that might otherwise remain hidden from public scrutiny. Amnesty International (2020) similarly observes that independent investigations strengthen advocacy because they provide factual foundations for policy recommendations and legal reforms. More recent studies support these arguments by demonstrating that credible evidence enhances international scrutiny, strengthens domestic advocacy initiatives, and encourages governments to respond to documented violations through institutional reforms (Amnesty International, 2024; House, 2024). These findings indicate that evidence-based reporting serves both an informational and a policy-influencing function.

Despite broad agreement regarding its importance, scholars differ concerning the effectiveness of evidence-based reporting in politically restrictive environments. (Alston, 2010) argues that rigorous documentation enhances government accountability because credible evidence is difficult to dismiss during policy negotiations and international review processes. Conversely, Krasner (1999) maintains that governments may ignore or reject independent reports where political interests outweigh external pressure. Recent analyses further suggest that while evidence-based reporting increases international attention, implementation of recommended reforms frequently depends on political commitment, institutional independence, and effective enforcement mechanisms rather than documentation alone (Amnesty International, 2024). These contrasting perspectives suggest that evidence is necessary but not sufficient for achieving sustainable policy change.

Evidence-based reporting also strengthens collaboration between international organisations and domestic civil society organisations. Hoffman and Vahlsing (2014) argues that research reports, policy briefs, and documented evidence provide common reference points that facilitate coordinated advocacy and policy engagement among multiple stakeholders. Recent evidence indicates that locally generated data combined with international verification strengthens advocacy campaigns, improves policy credibility, and enhances public trust in recommendations for democratic reform (CIVICUS, 2024). Such collaborative reporting enables domestic organisations to amplify their advocacy while increasing pressure for institutional accountability.

Although previous studies acknowledge the importance of evidence-based reporting in promoting human rights, significant gaps remain. Contextually, limited empirical research has examined how Amnesty International's evidence-based reporting influences policy reform, institutional accountability, and responses to political rights violations in Uganda. Methodologically, many previous studies rely on documentary reviews and international datasets while giving limited attention to qualitative experiences of policymakers, civil society organisations, journalists, legal practitioners, and community leaders who utilise evidence-based reports during lobbying and policy engagement. This study addresses these contextual and methodological gaps by examining how Amnesty International's evidence-based reporting contributes to combating political rights violations in Uganda.

## 2.4 Reporting Cycle and Strategy

The reporting cycle and strategy constitute critical components of human rights lobbying because they ensure that evidence is systematically collected, verified, analysed, disseminated, and translated into policy action. Human rights organisations rely on structured reporting processes to produce credible evidence capable of informing legislative reforms, strengthening institutional accountability, and influencing public policy. According to Pillay (2012), effective reporting is a continuous process that begins with identifying human rights concerns, collecting reliable evidence, verifying information, analysing findings, and communicating recommendations to relevant stakeholders. Amnesty International (2020) similarly maintains that systematic reporting enhances the credibility of advocacy by ensuring that published findings are objective, accurate, and evidence-based.

Recent literature indicates that effective reporting extends beyond documenting violations because it integrates research with strategic communication and policy engagement. According to Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2023), human rights reporting should follow a structured cycle involving

fact-finding, verification, legal analysis, publication, dissemination, and follow-up engagement with governments and relevant institutions. Likewise, Amnesty International (2024) emphasises that strategic reporting transforms documented evidence into policy recommendations capable of influencing legislative reforms, institutional practices, and government accountability. These studies demonstrate that reporting achieves greater impact when integrated with sustained lobbying and policy dialogue rather than treated as an isolated documentation exercise.

Scholars generally agree that systematic reporting strengthens democratic governance by improving transparency and informing evidence-based decision-making. Alston (2010) argues that credible reporting enables governments, legislators, civil society organisations, and international institutions to understand the scale and nature of political rights violations before developing appropriate policy responses. Similarly, Cingranelli and Richards (2010) contend that consistent monitoring and reporting improve accountability because governments become increasingly subject to domestic and international scrutiny. More recent studies support these perspectives by showing that strategic reporting strengthens institutional learning, facilitates policy dialogue, and improves compliance with international human rights obligations (House, 2024). Together, these studies demonstrate that reporting is both an accountability mechanism and a catalyst for institutional reform.

Despite broad agreement regarding its importance, scholars differ concerning the effectiveness of reporting strategies in politically restrictive environments. (Pillay, 2012) maintains that comprehensive reporting strengthens policy advocacy by producing credible evidence that is difficult to dispute during legislative discussions. In contrast Krasner (1999) argues that governments may resist or disregard human rights reports when political interests conflict with international recommendations. Recent evidence further suggests that although strategic reporting increases international visibility of political rights violations, implementation of recommended reforms often depends on political commitment, institutional independence, and sustained engagement with decision-makers rather than publication alone (Amnesty International, 2024). These contrasting views indicate that reporting is most effective when combined with continuous lobbying, coalition-building, and policy engagement.

Another important dimension of reporting strategy is follow-up engagement after publication. Human rights organisations increasingly disseminate reports through policy dialogues, stakeholder consultations, media engagement, parliamentary briefings, and collaboration with civil society organisations to ensure that recommendations influence public debate and institutional decision-making. Such follow-up activities transform reports from descriptive documents into practical tools for

lobbying and democratic governance while strengthening accountability among state institutions (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2023).

Although previous studies recognise the importance of reporting cycles in promoting accountability, important gaps remain. Contextually, limited empirical evidence explains how Amnesty International's reporting cycle and strategic dissemination influence policy reform and responses to political rights violations in Uganda. Methodologically, many studies rely on documentary analysis and institutional reports while providing limited qualitative evidence from stakeholders involved in producing, disseminating, and utilising human rights reports. This study addresses these contextual and methodological gaps by examining how Amnesty International's reporting cycle and strategy contribute to combating political rights violations in Uganda.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Approach**

The study adopted a qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of Amnesty International's lobbying role in combating political rights violations in Uganda. The approach enabled exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding lobbying strategies, policy engagement, evidence-based reporting, and coalition-building (Creswell & Poth, 2016). It generated rich contextual data that explained how lobbying influences policy reform, institutional accountability, and democratic governance within the Ugandan context.

### **3.2 Design**

The study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine Amnesty International's lobbying role in combating political rights violations in Uganda. The design enabled an in-depth exploration of lobbying processes, policy influence, and institutional responses within their real-life context, generating comprehensive insights from participants with diverse experiences and perspectives (Yin, 2018).

### **3.3 Population and Sample**

The study involved 32 purposively selected participants comprising Amnesty International staff, civil society representatives, journalists, legal practitioners, human rights activists, and community leaders with knowledge of political rights lobbying in Uganda. The sample included 12 key informants and 20 focus group discussants. Data saturation determined the final sample size (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

### **3.4 Sampling Techniques**

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants with substantial knowledge and experience of Amnesty International's lobbying activities and political rights issues in Uganda. Maximum variation sampling was further applied to capture diverse perspectives from Amnesty International staff, civil society organisations, journalists, legal practitioners, human rights activists, and community leaders, thereby enhancing the richness and credibility of the findings (Patton, 2015).

### **3.5 Eligibility Criteria**

#### **3.5.1 Inclusion Criteria**

Participants were included if they were aged 18 years or older, had knowledge or experience regarding Amnesty International's lobbying activities and political rights issues in Uganda, had participated in or interacted with lobbying initiatives, and voluntarily provided written informed consent to participate in the study.

#### **3.5.2 Exclusion Criteria**

Participants were excluded if they had limited knowledge of Amnesty International's lobbying activities or political rights issues in Uganda, had not participated in or interacted with relevant lobbying processes, were unable to provide informed consent, or declined to participate in the study.

### **3.6 Data Collection Methods, Instruments and Measurement of Variables**

Data were collected through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and document review using semi-structured interview and discussion guides. These methods generated complementary evidence on Amnesty International's lobbying role in combating political rights violations. The study explored lobbying through three thematic domains: advocacy and policy influence, evidence-based reporting, and reporting cycle and strategy, which guided data collection and thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Yin, 2018).

### **3.7 Trustworthiness of the Study**

Trustworthiness was ensured through the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through data triangulation using interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and document review. Transferability was achieved by providing rich contextual descriptions of the study setting

and participants. Dependability was strengthened through a consistent data collection process and an audit trail, while confirmability was ensured through reflexive note-taking, verbatim transcription, and maintaining evidence linking the findings to participants' accounts.

### 3.8 Data Management and Analysis

Audio-recorded interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim, anonymised, and securely stored using password-protected electronic files. Data were organised, coded, and analysed thematically following (Braun & Clarke, 2006) six-step framework of familiarisation, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. Emerging themes were interpreted in relation to the study objective and Constructivism Theory to explain Amnesty International's lobbying role in combating political rights violations in Uganda.

### 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 Organisation	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 lobbying activities.

#### 4.1.2 Amnesty International's Lobbying Role in Combating Political Rights Violations in Uganda

**Table 2: Themes, Subthemes, Quotes, and Participant Sources on Amnesty International's Lobbying Role in Combating Political Rights Violations in Uganda**

Theme	Subthemes	Quote	Source
Advocacy and Policy Influence	Legislative lobbying	“Amnesty International's role has been quite significant, especially in terms of raising awareness and bringing international attention to local issues. Their detailed reports and recommendations have provided a strong basis for advocacy... their work on the Public Order Management Act brought international scrutiny, which made it harder for the government to ignore calls for reform.”	KI-12
	Policy engagement with the government	“One of the biggest challenges is the political environment. The Ugandan government is often resistant... Despite these challenges, Amnesty's ability to mobilise both local and international support has been critical.”	KI-12
	Coalition-building with local NGOs	“While Amnesty International's support has been instrumental in amplifying our advocacy efforts... their strategies do not fully align with the on-the-ground realities we face. Building mutual trust and creating spaces for open dialogue would help us feel like equal partners in the fight for human rights.”	Discussant-24
Evidence-based Reporting	Documentation of human rights violations	“Through their reports and publications, Amnesty International provides evidence-based information on political rights violations, including specific cases and patterns of abuse.”	KI-2
	Research reports and policy briefs	“Amnesty's work has been incredibly influential for us. Their research and policy briefs provide a solid foundation for our own advocacy campaigns.”	Discussant-20
	Evidence for influencing accountability	“Their ability to bring international attention to local issues amplifies our voice and puts additional pressure on the government to address human rights concerns.”	Discussant-20
Reporting Cycle and Strategy	Monitoring and fact-finding	“Reporting what has happened... is a crucial step for the development of strategies to address the situation.”	KI-12
	Verification and quality assurance	“Properly following all the steps in the monitoring cycle is paramount to producing a good human rights report.”	KI-12
	Strategic dissemination and recommendations	“Reports are central for shaping strategies to combat political rights violations because they provide evidence that can be used to advocate for reform and accountability.”	Discussant-20

Table 2 presents three interconnected themes illustrating Amnesty International's lobbying role in combating political rights violations in Uganda. Advocacy and policy influence emerged as a key strategy through legislative lobbying, policy engagement, and collaboration with civil society organisations to promote legal reforms and institutional accountability. Evidence-based reporting demonstrated that systematic documentation, research reports, and policy briefs provide credible evidence that strengthens advocacy, informs policy dialogue, and enhances accountability. The reporting cycle and strategy highlighted the importance of continuous monitoring, verification, analysis, dissemination, and follow-up engagement in transforming documented political rights violations into practical recommendations for policy reform. Overall, the findings indicate that Amnesty International combines strategic lobbying, credible

evidence generation, and systematic reporting to influence policy, strengthen democratic governance, and promote the protection of political rights in Uganda.

## 4.2 Discussion

### 4.2.1 Advocacy and Policy Influence

The findings revealed that advocacy and policy influence constitute the primary mechanisms through which Amnesty International combats political rights violations in Uganda. Participants indicated that legislative lobbying, policy dialogue, and collaboration with civil society organisations have increased public scrutiny of political rights violations, strengthened institutional accountability, and encouraged policy reforms. These findings support

Constructivism Theory, which posits that institutions and governments modify their behaviour through persuasion, social interaction, and the diffusion of shared norms rather than coercion (Wendt, 1999). By engaging policymakers, legislators, and civil society organisations, Amnesty International contributes to reshaping institutional norms regarding democratic governance and political rights protection.

The findings are consistent with (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998), who argue that international organisations function as norm entrepreneurs by influencing governments to internalise internationally accepted human rights standards. Similarly, Alston (2010) and Donnelly (2013) observe that sustained policy engagement and legislative lobbying strengthen democratic governance by encouraging governments to respect freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association, and political participation. Recent reports by Amnesty International (2024) and House (2024) further demonstrate that lobbying and policy engagement continue to influence debates on civic space, political participation, and institutional accountability across politically restrictive environments.

However, the findings also revealed that lobbying remains constrained by political resistance, shrinking civic space, and government reluctance to implement recommended reforms. This finding supports (Krasner, 1999), who argues that states frequently perceive external human rights lobbying as interference in domestic political affairs and therefore resist international influence. Consequently, although Amnesty International has successfully influenced policy discussions and increased international attention to political rights violations, translating policy dialogue into sustained legislative and institutional reforms remains a significant challenge. The findings therefore suggest that lobbying is most effective when supported by broad coalitions involving civil society organisations, development partners, and the wider public.

#### **4.2.2 Evidence-based Reporting**

The findings demonstrated that evidence-based reporting represents a central lobbying strategy through which Amnesty International promotes accountability and combats political rights violations. Participants reported that systematic documentation of arbitrary arrests, unlawful detention, restrictions on freedom of expression, and other violations generated credible evidence that informed policy dialogue, strengthened advocacy, and increased pressure on government institutions to address political rights concerns. From a constructivist perspective, evidence-based reporting contributes to norm diffusion by framing political rights violations within internationally accepted human rights standards, thereby shaping institutional behaviour and public understanding of democratic governance.

These findings agree with Alston (2010), Pillay (2012), and Cingranelli and Richards (2010), who argue that credible human rights documentation enhances transparency, strengthens accountability, and provides a factual basis for legislative reforms. Likewise, Amnesty International (2024) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2023) maintain that independently verified reports strengthen policy dialogue and enable governments, development partners, and civil society organisations to monitor compliance with international human rights obligations. The findings therefore reinforce previous evidence that credible reporting serves as both an accountability mechanism and an instrument for influencing public policy.

Nevertheless, participants acknowledged that evidence-based reporting alone does not automatically produce institutional or legislative change. This finding supports (Krasner, 1999), who contends that governments may disregard human rights evidence where political interests outweigh external pressure. Similarly, Amnesty International (2024) reports that implementation of human rights recommendations frequently depends on political commitment, institutional capacity, and effective enforcement mechanisms. The findings therefore indicate that evidence-based reporting becomes more influential when integrated with sustained lobbying, coalition-building, media engagement, and continuous policy dialogue capable of transforming documented evidence into practical institutional reforms.

#### **4.2.3 Reporting Cycle and Strategy**

The findings further revealed that Amnesty International's reporting cycle and strategy strengthen the effectiveness of lobbying by ensuring systematic monitoring, fact-finding, verification, dissemination, and follow-up engagement. Participants emphasised that strategic reporting transforms documented political rights violations into evidence capable of informing legislative debates, policy reforms, and institutional accountability. Constructivism Theory explains these findings by suggesting that repeated communication, dissemination of credible evidence, and continuous interaction with decision-makers facilitate the diffusion of democratic norms and influence institutional responses to political rights concerns (Wendt, 1999).

The findings support Pillay (2012), who argues that effective reporting requires continuous documentation, verification, analysis, and communication before influencing policy reform. Similarly, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2023) emphasises that human rights reports become more effective when accompanied by dissemination strategies, stakeholder engagement, and follow-up dialogue with governments and relevant institutions. Amnesty International (2024) likewise argues that strategic dissemination strengthens accountability by ensuring that

documented violations inform public debate and policy decision-making rather than remaining descriptive records.

However, the findings also demonstrate that strategic reporting continues to face considerable implementation challenges. Participants observed that although reports increase international visibility of political rights violations, government responses frequently remain slow because of political resistance, weak institutional accountability, and limited enforcement of human rights recommendations. These findings are consistent with House (2024), which reports that shrinking civic space and limited state responsiveness continue to constrain the effectiveness of human rights lobbying across several countries. Consequently, the study concludes that reporting achieves its greatest influence when integrated with legislative lobbying, evidence-based advocacy, coalition-building, and sustained engagement with policymakers. Together, these complementary strategies strengthen democratic governance and enhance the protection of political rights in Uganda.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that Amnesty International plays a significant lobbying role in combating political rights violations in Uganda through advocacy and policy influence, evidence-based reporting, and strategic reporting processes. By engaging policymakers, legislators, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders, the organisation strengthens policy dialogue, promotes legislative reforms, enhances institutional accountability, and encourages compliance with national and international human rights standards. Evidence-based reporting provides credible documentation that informs public debate, supports advocacy initiatives, and increases scrutiny of political rights violations, while structured reporting strategies strengthen monitoring, verification, dissemination, and follow-up engagement. The findings support Constructivism Theory by demonstrating that sustained lobbying influences institutional behaviour through persuasion, norm diffusion, and the promotion of shared democratic values rather than coercion. Although Amnesty International has made important contributions to strengthening democratic governance and protecting political rights, the effectiveness of its lobbying efforts continues to be constrained by political resistance, shrinking civic space, weak implementation of human rights recommendations, and limited state responsiveness. The study therefore concludes that strengthening collaborative lobbying, evidence-based policy engagement, and strategic partnerships remains essential for advancing political rights protection and democratic governance in Uganda.

## 5.2 Recommendations

1. Amnesty International should strengthen evidence-based lobbying by expanding policy dialogue with legislators, government institutions, and regional human rights bodies to accelerate legal reforms and improve compliance with national and international human rights standards.
2. The Government of Uganda should strengthen institutional accountability by implementing recommendations arising from credible human rights reports, safeguarding civic space, and ensuring effective protection of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association, and political participation.
3. Parliament and policy-making institutions should review and amend laws and administrative practices that unnecessarily restrict political rights while promoting legislation that is consistent with constitutional guarantees and international human rights obligations.
4. Civil society organisations should strengthen partnerships and coalition-building with Amnesty International and other human rights organisations to improve documentation of political rights violations, coordinate advocacy initiatives, and amplify collective policy influence at national and local levels.
5. Development partners and international human rights organisations should continue supporting technical capacity building, collaborative lobbying initiatives, and institutional strengthening to enhance evidence-based advocacy and democratic governance in Uganda.
6. Future research should examine the long-term effects of lobbying on legislative reforms, institutional accountability, political rights protection, and democratic governance using comparative studies across different human rights organisations and political contexts to generate broader empirical evidence.

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