

# Sovereignty Bill rejected

GEORGEY SERUGO

**KAMPALA** — Parliament has become the latest battleground in a widening national argument over power, money and the meaning of sovereignty.

At the centre of the storm is the Protection of Sovereignty Bill, 2026, a proposed law the government says is necessary to shield Uganda from undue foreign influence. Critics, however, see something far more consequential: legislation that could redraw the relationship between citizen and state, disrupt economic flows and test the limits of constitutional order.

The bill was tabled on April 15, 2026, by State Minister for Internal Affairs David Muhoozi, triggering a legislative process that has since drawn fierce reactions from lawmakers, lawyers, economists, civil society groups and academics. It was referred to the parliamentary committees on defence and internal affairs, alongside legal and parliamentary affairs, for scrutiny.

Its arrival followed a resolution by the ruling National Resistance Movement caucus to support passage, an early sign that the executive considers it a priority.

Yet beyond government benches, resistance has been unusually broad.

More than 90 percent of the people, groups, sectors who have appeared before the joint committee have so far rejected the bill.

Pariyo Dan, a civil engineer, described the backlash as one of the most sweeping in recent parliamentary history.

"The Protection of Sovereignty Bill has provoked unprecedented resistance, not merely from the everyday political actors in our political space but from the broad spectrum of Ugandan society and citizenry," he said in a post on X (formerly Twitter).

He argued that civil society organisations, professional bodies, students and ordinary citizens had spoken "almost in unison" against the proposal.

"In recent legislative history of Parliament, no single bill other than the age limit bill has attracted such sweeping and unified opposition from the general public," he said. "This wasn't merely a matter of partisan disagreement; it was a matter of consolidated national consensus."

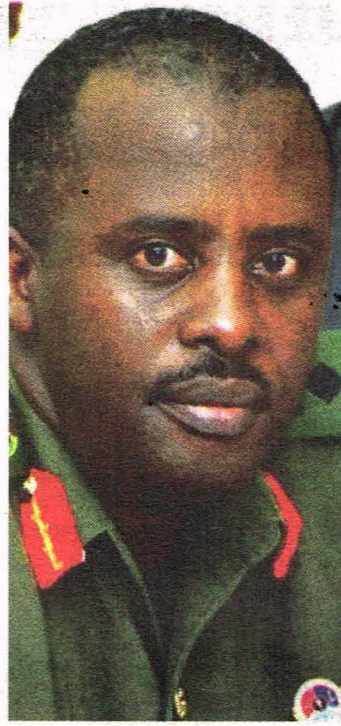
Dan warned that passing the bill despite public objections would amount to governing against the people.

"To proceed with this legislation in the face of such overwhelming public disapproval would be to act on a false mandate," he said. "This bill is not wanted, it is not needed, and it will not serve the common good."

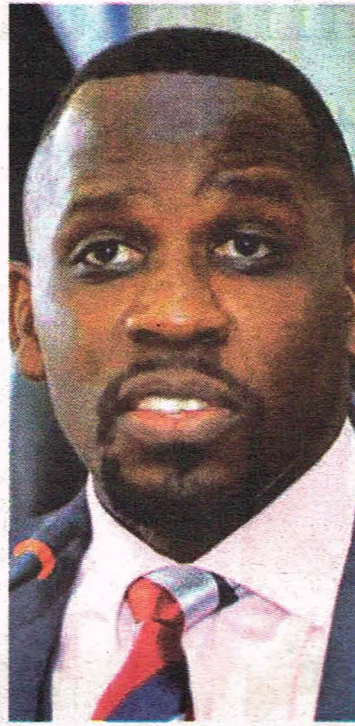
At its core, the legislation seeks to regulate foreign funding and influence inside Uganda. Officials argue that many countries have similar laws and that sovereign states must know who is financing political activity, advocacy and strategic institutions.

But the language of the bill has alarmed opponents.

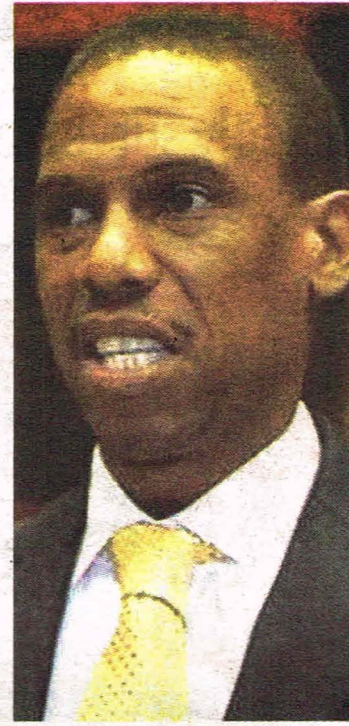
Under the draft law, a "foreigner" would include not only non-citizens, but Ugandan citizens living abroad, foreign governments



David Muhoozi



Joel Ssenyonyi



Kiryowa Kiwanuka

and missions, international organisations, and any entity registered outside Uganda. The minister would also hold the power to designate any person or institution as a foreigner through a statutory instrument.

That definition alone has ignited fears over how far the law could reach.

The term "agent of a foreigner" is similarly broad. It includes individuals or organisations involved in political activity who receive or disburse funds linked to foreign interests. Advocacy groups, policy actors, civic mobilisers, political financiers and those supporting candidates could all potentially fall within its scope.

In effect, critics say, the bill creates a system of state oversight over politically relevant activity whenever foreign money is involved.

Leader of Opposition Joel Ssenyonyi has become one of the bill's most vocal parliamentary critics, focusing especially on Ugandans in the diaspora.

According to Ssenyonyi, Ugandans abroad send home an estimated \$2.5 billion annually in remittances, making them one of the country's most important economic lifelines.

"These are Ugandans with families, businesses and investments back home," he said during committee proceedings. "They pay school fees, they build homes, they participate in national development. Why should they be treated as foreigners whose voices are restricted?"

His argument goes beyond symbolism. In many Ugandan households, diaspora remittances are not abstract financial statistics. They pay rent, fund medical bills, support education and keep businesses afloat.

Ssenyonyi also challenged any notion that Parliament is obliged to approve the bill.

"This committee has the power to reject government business," he said. "Let us not create the impression that this bill must pass at all costs. It is within your

authority to say no."

The controversy has also exposed tensions inside Parliament itself.

Bukooli County North MP Stephen Baka Mugabi, who chairs the legal and parliamentary affairs committee, faced calls to ensure a fair and independent review. Ssenyonyi openly warned against executive pressure.

"Unless you are acting under duress, this committee has full authority to decide the fate of this bill," he said.

Outside Parliament, legal scholars say the deeper issue is constitutional.

Asiimwe Anthony, vice president of the Uganda Law Society, argued that sovereignty under Uganda's Constitution belongs to the people, not the executive.

"The bill effectively transfers sovereignty from the people to the executive," he said. "It empowers the minister and a yet-to-be-established security apparatus to determine what constitutes government interest and to punish dissent."

He further argued that if the bill alters the constitutional locus of sovereignty, then Article 260 would require a referendum.

"This bill attempts to make such changes without consulting Ugandans. In its current form, it is unconstitutional and cannot stand."

Economists, meanwhile, are focused on practical consequences.

Godber Tumushabe, associate director at the Great Lakes Institute for Strategic Studies, said the law could unsettle sectors that rely on cross-border flows.

"This law goes beyond politics; it touches the core of economic activity," he said. "Banks, tourism operators, NGOs and businesses that rely on cross-border transactions will be directly affected."

One disputed provision would require recipients of significant foreign funds above a set threshold to seek ministerial authorisation.

"That kind of bureaucratic burden signals either a misunderstanding of how the

economy works or a deliberate attempt to control it," Tumushabe warned.

Former Aruu County MP Samuel Odonga Otto offered an even blunter view.

"This is being framed as a political issue, but it will hit the economy hardest," he said. He suggested ordinary Ugandans may fear receiving legitimate support from friends or relatives abroad.

"I might hesitate to accept money from a friend in London if I have to report it to a minister who may be politically opposed to me," he said.

The academic community has raised separate concerns.

In a memorandum to Parliament, Jude Ssempebwa, chairperson of the Makerere University Academic Staff Association, warned that routine academic life could be caught in the bill's net.

"These provisions would affect study abroad programmes, collaborative research, publications and intellectual exchange," the memorandum states.

With Ugandan universities heavily reliant on foreign grants and partnerships, he said, the cost could be severe.

"Research funding is already limited locally. Restricting international collaboration would cripple the sector."

Prominent lawyer Phillip Karugaba highlighted what he described as practical absurdities within the draft.

"If a Ugandan living abroad is considered a foreigner, then even officials on diplomatic assignments could fall under that category," he said.

He also cited Uganda Law Society president Isaac Ssemakadde, who has operated from exile.

"Would the Law Society then be classified as an agent of foreigners? Would it require ministerial approval to function?"

The government insists those fears are overstated.

Attorney General Kiryowa Kiwanuka defended the bill as a necessary effort to protect national interests while preserving economic openness.

"Yes, Uganda needs aid, but not at any cost," he said. "We must guard against funding that undermines our values or influences our national direction."

He said the bill is not intended to block foreign direct investment, but to regulate activities that may compromise sovereignty.

Still, he acknowledged the dilemma at the heart of the debate.

"We must carefully weigh growth against security. That balance is critical."

That may be the defining question now before Parliament.

Uganda is a country deeply connected to the outside world, through remittances, trade, tourism, research, diplomacy and investment. Yet it is also a state increasingly attentive to influence, political financing and strategic autonomy.

The Protection of Sovereignty Bill sits precisely at that crossroads.

Whether lawmakers see it as a shield or a threat may determine not only the fate of the bill, but how Uganda defines openness in the years ahead.

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