

EDITORIAL

Uganda's Eleventh Parliament leaves office with a contradiction that should trouble every citizen who still believes democratic institutions matter. It was energetic, efficient and remarkably productive. It passed at least 166 bills in five years and held more than 450 sittings. Yet for all that legislative activity, the deeper question remains unresolved: did Parliament strengthen Uganda's democracy, or did it gradually weaken its own independence in the process?

That question matters because Parliament is not supposed to function merely as a conveyor belt for government business. In constitutional democracies, legislatures exist to scrutinise power, protect public interest and provide a structured arena where national disagreements are debated through law rather than force. Productivity alone is not democratic success. The quality, transparency and independence of that productivity matter just as much.

Too often, the Eleventh Parliament appeared trapped between speed and scrutiny.

Major laws were routinely fast-tracked under intense timeliness, while critics repeatedly complained about inadequate public participation and shrinking space for dissent within the House itself. The scenes surrounding the National Coffee

The Troubled Legacy of Uganda's 11th Parliament

Amendment Bill captured this deterioration vividly. A parliamentary chamber designed for reasoned argument descended into physical confrontation. The images were embarrassing, yes, but they were also symbolic. They reflected a legislature increasingly shaped by confrontation, political suspicion and institutional fragility.

The subsequent suspension of opposition MPs raised another difficult question: where is the line between maintaining parliamentary order and suppressing dissent? Democracies require discipline, but they also require tolerance for disagreement, particularly in institutions built precisely to manage competing views.

Then came the Anti-Homosexuality Act, perhaps the most internationally scrutinised law of the Parliament's tenure. The legislation exposed Uganda's widening cultural and geopolitical divide. International criticism was fierce. Domestically, however, the law received significant support from conservative and religious constituencies. Parliament understood the political incentives clearly. For many MPs, supporting the bill was not simply ideological; it was electorally strategic.

But while Parliament projected confidence on cultural legislation, it struggled to defend its own credibility against corruption scandals and accusations of self-interest. The Shs1.7 billion service award controversy damaged public trust precisely because it unfolded during a period of economic hardship, underfunded hospitals and struggling schools. To ordinary Ugandans, such payments reinforced the growing perception that political elites increasingly operate within a protected world detached from public sacrifice.

The deeper institutional problem, however, lies beyond individual scandals. Uganda's Parliament operates inside a highly centralised political system where executive dominance remains structurally powerful. In such environments, legislative independence becomes difficult to sustain consistently. Fast-tracking government priorities is rewarded. Resistance often carries political consequences.

That is why the Twelfth Parliament faces a defining choice.

It can continue functioning as a politically efficient but increasingly mistrusted institution, or it can begin rebuilding public confidence by strengthening committee oversight, protecting procedural fairness, respecting judicial decisions and restoring meaningful public participation in lawmaking.

The next Speaker will matter enormously. So will the willingness of MPs, both ruling party and opposition, to remember that their constitutional loyalty is ultimately owed not to political camps, but to citizens and the integrity of Parliament itself.

Uganda does not need a weak Parliament. It needs a trusted one.

Because when legislatures lose public legitimacy, democratic frustration rarely disappears. It simply moves elsewhere, into streets, resentment and growing institutional cynicism.

And no democracy remains stable for long when its citizens stop believing their Parliament truly speaks for them.

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PIUS M KATUNZI *Managing Director*

piuskatunzi@gmail.com

DAVID LUANI *Chief Sub Editor*

imadavid@gmail.com

Plot 29, Kira Lane, Bukoto

P. O. Box 1040, Kampala

Tel: 0393194769

Website: www.observer.ug