

Strong nations are built on strong institutions

The independence of Parliament is one of the most important foundations of any democratic society. Parliament is not merely a building where politicians gather to debate national issues.

It is the institution through which the people exercise their sovereign authority. Members of Parliament are elected to represent citizens, protect public resources, hold the executive accountable, and defend the Constitution. The moment Parliament becomes controlled by fear, intimidation, or powerful individuals acting behind the scenes, democracy itself begins to weaken.

Across Africa, it is common for the majority party in Parliament to produce the speaker and deputy speaker because they command the numbers.

In countries such as South Africa and Botswana, ruling parties have historically secured these positions through parliamentary majority. However, democratic maturity is measured not by who wins these offices, but by whether the institution remains independent after leadership is elected. Once chosen, a speaker is expected to rise above partisan interests and defend the dignity and integrity of Parliament. Other African democracies have shown the importance of institutional independence. In Kenya, coalition politics and strong parliamentary competition have often forced leaders to build consensus across political divides.

In Ghana and Zambia, parliamentary committees and opposition voices have remained active enough to challenge abuse of power and demand accountability from government officials. These examples demonstrate that Parliament earns public respect when it protects the interests of citizens rather than serving political influence or elite control.

For Uganda, this debate is even more important. The incoming 12th Parliament arrives at a time when public confidence in

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democratic institutions is under serious strain. Ugandans are increasingly witnessing public displays of influence where powerful individuals openly direct MPs on who to support for parliamentary leadership positions. Such behaviour creates the impression that elected representatives are not free to make independent decisions on behalf of their constituents but are instead expected to obey political orders from influential actors seeking to demonstrate power and control.

This is dangerous for democracy. Parliament is supposed to act as an independent check on power. When MPs are pressured or instructed on whom to support, Parliament risks becoming an extension of elite interests rather than the voice of the people. Accountability weakens, fear replaces independent thinking, and public trust in democratic institutions begins to collapse.

Uganda has already seen the consequences of what happens when power goes unchecked. The controversies and allegations of corruption, abuse of office, misuse of parliamentary authority, and extravagant spending severely damage the image of the institution.

If MPs cannot independently choose their own leaders without pressure, or interfer-

ence, then serious questions arise about the state of Uganda's democracy. Citizens may begin asking whether power still belongs to the people or whether elections are becoming mere formalities whose outcomes are controlled elsewhere.

A democracy cannot survive when institutions become weaker than individuals. Strong nations are built on strong institutions, not powerful personalities. Parliament must never become a rubber stamp designed to satisfy political interests or reward loyalty to individuals. It must remain a place of debate, accountability, courage, and independent thought where national interests come first. MPs must remember that they are servants of the people, not agents of powerful political actors.

The 12th Parliament has an opportunity to restore public trust and defend the dignity of the institution. Parliamentary leadership elections should be free from coercion, intimidation, and external interference.

Once elected, leaders of Parliament must act impartially and protect the independence of the House regardless of political affiliation. Respect for dissenting views, strong parliamentary committees, and transparency in decision-making are essential if Parliament is to regain public confidence.

Uganda's democracy is still young, but its future will be shaped by decisions made at moments like this. History will not remember how loudly power was displayed or how many MPs were pressured into line. It will remember whether Parliament defended the will of the people or surrendered its independence to political pressure. The choice before the 12th Parliament is simple: to become guardians of democracy or victims of control.

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