

In Zambia and Kenya, churches provided moral critique during periods of one-party rule. In Zimbabwe and South Africa, bishops

the pulpit. Rather, it is an opposition that has repeatedly negotiated its political

Lessons from recent political developments on Opposition cohesion and fragmentation

Uganda's reintroduction of multiparty politics in 2005 reopened an important constitutional chapter. Article 72 of the 1995 Constitution recognises the right of citizens to form and participate in political organisations, while the Political Parties and Organisations Act provides the legal framework for their registration and regulation. In theory, this framework was intended to foster structured political competition, policy development, and institutional maturity.

Yet nearly two decades later, one persistent question lingers within Uganda's political class: why has the Opposition struggled to consolidate into a durable, cohesive alternative to the ruling establishment?

The emergence of the National Unity Platform (NUP) party marked a dramatic shift in Uganda's Opposition landscape. Its rapid rise energised sections of the electorate, particularly urban youth, and reshaped parliamentary representation after the 2021 General Election. From a mobilisation standpoint, the development was unprecedented in the post-2005 era. However, mass mobilisation and institutional consolidation are not identical.

A central challenge in Opposition politics both in Uganda and comparative jurisdictions is the tension between movement politics and party institutionalisation. Movements like People Power or (NUP) thrive on charisma, grievance, and urgency. Political parties like the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party, by contrast, require durable internal structures, dispute resolution mechanisms, policy coherence, and ide-

Why has Opposition struggled to consolidate into a durable... alternative?



Franco Balya
Politics



ological clarity. Where movements transition into parties without adequate institutional scaffolding, fragmentation often follows.

Uganda's Opposition history has repeatedly demonstrated this pattern. Earlier Opposition formations faced internal splits over leadership succession, strategy, and ideological direction. The legal framework permits party formation and coalition-building, but it does not guarantee cohesion. Indeed, the Constitution protects pluralism meaning fragmentation is legally permissible even when it is politically counterproductive.

The rise of NUP introduced a generational and stylistic shift. It altered Opposition discourse, redefined political branding, and reshaped Opposition numbers in Parliament. Yet it also accelerated the marginalisation of older Opposition actors, leading to diminished inter-party coordination. Rather than

building a broad-based coalition architecture, the Opposition space appeared to reorganise around a dominant new centre of gravity.

Fragmentation within the Opposition has manifested in several forms: strategic disagreements over participation in State processes, divergent approaches to engagement with security agencies, and competing claims of legitimacy within the broader democratic struggle. While political competition within the Opposition is lawful and expected, persistent disunity weakens collective bargaining power.

As Uganda approaches future electoral cycles, the lesson for Opposition forces is clear: cohesion is a strategic asset yet fragmentation a structural liability. The durability of multiparty democracy will depend on the conduct of those in government and the organisational resilience of those who seek to replace them.

For the political class, reflection is timely. In constitutional systems, power alternates not through emotion, but through structure. The question is whether Uganda's Opposition will evolve from episodic mobilisation to enduring institution-building or continue to cycle through phases of fragmentation that dilute its collective strength. The answer will shape not merely electoral outcomes, but the long-term credibility of Uganda's multiparty project.

Mr Balya is an independent political analyst.

ence will be given to insightful articles rather than generalised polemic observations. Attach a portrait and send to editorial@ug.nationmedia.com