

Sovereignty Bill treats Ugandans like suspects

It was Julius Nyerere who once said, "The basis of freedom, justice and democracy is the people's right to know." Ugandans deserve to know, not in vague assurances, but in clear terms, why is this Bill being introduced, why now, and who it is really meant to restrain.

For decades, Ugandans abroad have quietly carried responsibilities the state has struggled to meet, funding schools, supporting hospitals, and sustaining entire communities. Their remittances are not a supplement to the economy; they are one of its foundations.

And yet, this is the very constituency now being recast as a potential threat. The proposed Protection of Sovereignty Bill does not merely raise legal questions, it raises a far more fundamental one about the state's view of its own citizens.

That is not a technical adjustment. It is a redefinition of citizenship. MPs cannot avoid the central question: what evidence exists that diaspora Ugandans pose a threat serious enough to justify this level of state control?

Because without that evidence, this Bill looks less like a defence of sovereignty and more like an expansion of political power.

Under such a framework, almost any form of diaspora engagement can be recast as suspicious.

A parent paying school fees from abroad.

A community organisation supported by relatives overseas.

A diaspora association funding scholarships. A Ugandan abroad expressing a political opinion online. All of it can be reframed, at the convenience of those in power, as "external influence."

So the question becomes unavoidable:

Is this Bill about protecting Uganda or about controlling Ugandans?

Because the pattern is familiar. Vague laws are rarely deployed against clear, universally recognised threats. They are used selectively to discipline critics, to deter participation, and to create a climate where citizens begin to silence themselves.

This is how civic space closes, not through one dramatic act, but through ambiguity backed by power.

And the consequences will not be theoretical.

Uganda's diaspora sends billions of dollars home each year. That money educates children, pays medical bills, sustains religious institutions, and keeps small businesses alive. It fills gaps that government programmes have not been able to close.

If Parliament chooses to pass a law that places those contributions under suspicion, it must also accept responsibility for what follows.

Because the reaction will be predictable.

Trust will erode. Engagement will decline. Money will move elsewhere or stop altogether.

At a time when Uganda is actively seeking investment and international credibility, this Bill sends the opposite message: that the state is increasingly uncomfortable with scrutiny even when it comes from its own citizens.

That contradiction is not incidental.

It raises a more uncomfortable possibility: one MPs must be willing to confront honestly.

That this Bill is not primarily about sovereignty at all, but about insulating power from criticism, especially criticism that cannot be easily contained within Uganda's borders. So the burden now lies squarely with Parliament.

Will MPs defend citizens or expand the reach of suspicion? Will they demand evidence or pass a law built on vague fears? Will they protect sovereignty or redefine it in a way that weakens citizenship itself?

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Uganda is not a country without laws. There are already provisions governing national security, financial flows, and public order. If those laws are inadequate, Parliament should identify the gaps precisely and address them directly.

But this Bill does something else. It introduces sweeping, undefined concepts, "foreign influence," "agents," "economic sabotage," "disruptive activity" and then grants wide discretion to interpret them.

That is not careful lawmaking. That is legislative overreach. And MPs know it.

The real danger lies not only in what the Bill says, but in what it enables.

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