

Opinion

Bobi Wine's exile strategy: Copying Besigye's failed script

Imitating a political idol can offer various perceived benefits, from personal psychological validation to increased social mobilisation. However, as social learning literature indicates, these benefits often come with significant risks to personal autonomy.

This tension is clearly seen in the path of National Unity Platform (NUP) leader Robert Kyagulanyi, aka Bobi Wine. Recently, Kyagulanyi left Uganda, claiming that security forces were trying to arrest him. In doing so, the "man from Kamwokya" seems to follow a familiar political script written by his predecessor and former political idol, Dr Kizza Besigye.

This strategic retreat closely mirrors the events of 2001, when Dr Besigye fled to South Africa after a tough electoral defeat by President Museveni. Like Bobi Wine, Besigye insisted that his return would be on his own terms. When he finally came back in 2005, he received a hero's welcome, a calculated effort to rebrand himself that was temporarily successful.

Both Kyagulanyi and Besigye must face a hard truth: the era of militancy has reached a point of diminishing returns.



Obed Katureebe
Politics

This exile period allowed Besigye to reset his political image, resulting in his strongest electoral showing in 2006, where he received 37 percent of the vote and cut President Museveni's margin to 59 percent. However, history shows that while exile can provide a temporary shield and a chance for rebranding, it often cuts off the vital connection between a leader and the immediate, real struggles of their supporters on the ground.

Kyagulanyi now seems to be looking for a similar "sabbatical" in Western capitals. By stepping back from the immediate political fight, he hopes to return with a fresh image and revive his activism ahead of the 2031 presidential race.

Since moving from music to politics, Kyagulanyi has carefully shaped his image after Besigye, adopting a stance of defiance

and militant rhetoric.

Both leaders seem to believe that Ugandan voters link leadership with military-style bravado, often seeing moderate, "decent" political involvement as a kind of "quiesling" or betrayal. For their supporters, the draw is in the promise that their leader can challenge Museveni through raw militancy and defiance.

The main problem with this strategy is that both Besigye and Kyagulanyi have chosen to run in the area where President Museveni is strongest. Museveni's 40-year rule depends on clever political moves and risky tactics, using his background as a guerrilla leader to weaken opponents who try to out-militarise him. By choosing defiance over a policy-driven approach, the Opposition falls into a trap that gives the incumbent a clear advantage. When Opposition focuses on military language, they meet the State on its strong ground, instead of shifting the debate toward social and economic issues like developing human capital and creating value that the public cares about as alternatives.

Furthermore, Kyagulanyi's "exile" may be less about safety and more about avoiding increasing internal accountability. After the 2021 and 2026 election cycles, serious questions emerged regarding NUP's performance. Despite claims of State interference, many supporters felt the campaign failed to connect nationally, seeming more like a regional wave than a true nationwide movement.

There is a growing feeling among the base that they risked their livelihoods and safety for a man who lacked a clear, actionable plan to secure victory beyond the ballot box.

By leaving the country, Kyagulanyi effectively hits the "pause" button on these internal fires. In the silence of exile, he hopes that time will lessen the impact of these difficult questions about his leadership style and the party's strategic direction.

However, being absent during an internal crisis can also be seen as a lack of resolve. While he speaks at international summits via video link, the void left in local leadership allows for further division within the NUP ranks. Besigye's "failed script" showed us that while the international community may applaud and impose sanctions, it is the strength of local institutions and grassroots unity that ultimately determines political survival.

Ultimately, both Kyagulanyi and Besigye must face a hard truth: the era of militancy and defiance has reached a point of diminishing returns.

You know about the new see Shujaa campaign to fight As a huge ly happeni the status (the success chief, Gen M tunity to cl Allied Dem The late G making AD offensive a was credit broke the ance Army whipped t ation in no LRA was s refuge in G So, will G that will fi the ADF tr (It's moot)

I spent t 28, 2021, a mat in su for a barb At the n diplomat countries ing Mr Pf general. There w I got talk we reach

Tr

The r ades gye, The five yea Wine, h after ne the Jan This i Uganda years of (NRM). business ty siege of State deputy to polic Ms Li ba, the uty pr Ugand only fo Both f Muwa MP an is on r the po Trea even i of Dr enga napp 2024, befor prem tiona Mo behi He is only Ky kno bee son tior