

After Anita Among: Is NRM about to learn a difficult political lesson?

Ugandan politics has always revolved around power, loyalty, and control. Yet, beneath the visible structures of government lies a more complicated political architecture—one built not only on institutions but on influential individuals who become indispensable to the system. For the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM), few figures in recent years have embodied this reality more than former Speaker Anita Annet Among.

Whether admired or criticised, Among's rise from a relatively lesser-known legislator to one of the most powerful political figures in Uganda was neither accidental nor cosmetic. It reflected the emergence of a political operator who, in a remarkably short period, became deeply embedded in the ruling establishment's machinery of mobilisation, parliamentary management, and elite coordination.

The difficult question facing the NRM today is this: if Among's political influence weakens or if she exits the centre of power altogether, what happens to Museveni's hold over Parliament and the ruling party's political machinery? For years, President Museveni has maintained control through an intricate balancing act. He has mastered the politics of reward and discipline, regional balancing, patronage, and institutional management. Parliament, despite its constitutional independence, has increasingly functioned within this broader ecosystem of political control. But parliamentary control in Uganda has rarely depended on formal authority alone.

The official structure tells only part of the story. Behind caucus resolutions, voting patterns, and parliamentary discipline lies another layer of politics: persuasion, political networking, resource mobilisation, strategic alliances, and influence-building. In Ugandan political language, this is simply called mobilisation. Among became especially relevant because she appeared to master this terrain. Within political circles, she has long been

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viewed as more than a Speaker. Supporters describe her as an effective organiser who strengthened NRM cohesion in Parliament, mobilised women and youth structures, expanded influence in eastern Uganda, and rallied support for government positions during politically sensitive moments.

Critics, on the other hand, argue that her influence was amplified by access to State power and informal networks of patronage. Some political observers have alleged that her political capital partly rested on her ability to financially support or politically facilitate MPs and grassroots actors—a claim frequently repeated in Uganda's political discourse but rarely documented publicly in ways that can be independently verified.

Yet, perception itself matters in politics. If enough legislators believe a political figure possesses influence, resources, and access to the centre, that perception alone can become power. This is where the question of Parliament becomes particularly important.

Museveni's dominance has historically depended on a disciplined parliamentary majority. While the NRM enjoys numerical strength, numbers alone do not guarantee loyalty. Parliamentary cohesion often requires active coordination, mediation of competing interests, and political management.

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tures. The danger for the NRM is not necessarily open rebellion; it is fragmentation through silent dissent. MPs who feel politically exposed, unsupported, or disconnected from power centres often become unpredictable. Internal competition intensifies. Regional blocs emerge. Opportunism replaces cohesion. The irony is that systems built around highly influential individuals eventually become dependent on them. If Among indeed became one of the key informal stabilisers of parliamentary politics—as many insiders privately suggest—then weakening her without building an alternative political coordination structure could create consequences that extend beyond one politician. This presents President Museveni with a familiar but difficult calculation. On one hand, allowing strong anti-corruption measures against powerful political actors could reinforce the image of accountability and discipline within government—particularly at a time when public frustration over corruption remains high.

On the other hand, removing politically effective mobilisers carries political risks, especially in a pre-election environment where loyalty, financing, and grassroots coordination become increasingly important.

The NRM has historically survived internal tensions because Museveni has been exceptionally skilled at managing competing power centres without allowing any single faction to become uncontrollable. But history also shows that long-ruling parties become vulnerable when institutional discipline weakens and personal networks begin to compete for influence. The deeper question, therefore, is not merely what happens to Among.

The bigger question is whether Uganda's ruling party has built institutions strong enough to survive the weakening of powerful political brokers—or whether the system remains heavily dependent on personalities.

For now, Museveni still holds the centre. But every political system eventually reveals whether power truly resides in institutions or in the individuals who quietly make them work.

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