

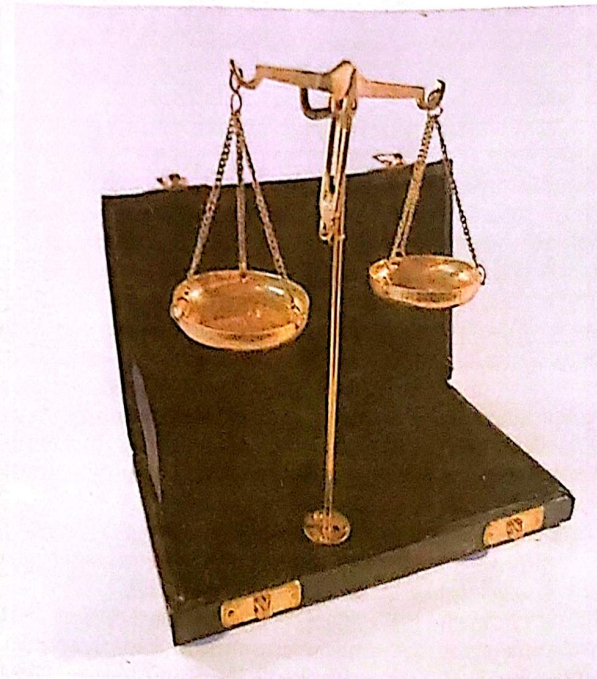
# Sovereignty Bill: A balancing act of legal, moral dilemma

Uganda's Protection of Sovereignty Bill 2026, has, more than ever, sparked public discourse. The Bill has mounted a heated debate ranging from its content to its implications for different sectors of the economy. However, there has been limited space to interrogate the intentions of this Bill; mainly questioning whether its object is to address a legal and moral question regarding Uganda's sovereignty.

If we're to focus on the legal grounds of sovereignty, then the moral grounds get stifled. Whereas the legal grounds seek to invoke and operationalise Article 1 of Uganda's Constitution, which vests authority and power in the people to exercise their sovereignty in accordance with the same Constitution, the moral grounds suggest that in the current global context, the country's sovereignty is not just a legal principle but an asset that ought to be protected at all times.

To somehow expound more on the moral grounds, one needs to appreciate whether protection of the country's sovereignty needs to be operationalised through legislation. In fact, protection of the country's sovereignty, if not well defined, may, for instance, paralyse the citizens as evidenced by the tough clauses introduced in the Protection of Sovereignty Bill currently before Parliament.

This begs a lengthy discussion on what sovereignty is and not, depending on the country's context. Specifically, Art 2(7) of the United Nations (UN) Charter defines sovereignty as a principle of non-



interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign states. Sovereignty, therefore, may among others, imply safeguarding domestic interests against undue foreign influence. While addressing the Congress of Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs in March 2025, Russian President Vladimir Putin decried the diminishing sovereignty among many European countries.

Despite the magnitude, this is an indicator that no country is immune to foreign interference. For instance, countries with colonial legacies are at a higher risk of losing their sovereignty. Such invasion, although no longer direct, is now dressed in the neo-colonialism banner. Its agents include, among others, multinational companies, media, and cultural imperialism.

It's not surprising that developing countries are more vul-

nerable to foreign interference than their counterparts. First, their economies depend on foreign life support, thus making them susceptible to foreign interference. Literally, economic power has a big influence on the country's sovereignty, just as the saying goes; "He who pays the piper calls the tune."

Does this suggest that weaker economies are more likely to surrender their sovereignty? The answer is a big yes. Does the remedy lie in a protectionist law such as the Sovereignty Bill? Certainly not.

The need to strengthen local capacity across all spheres of the economy may, by far, cushion the country's sovereignty from foreign interference. Still, countries should strive to cultivate patriotism as the microcosm of sovereignty.

When patriotism is resident in the hearts of citizens, the protection of sovereignty by

the citizens finds soft landing. Patriotism, however, has caveats. It's neither forced nor taught in homes or schools. Rather, it should be intrinsic and inherent. The role of the State in harnessing patriotism should be well-calibrated. It should also be intentional, quite often requiring governments to create a conducive social, political, cultural, and economic environment where all citizens, irrespective of their differences, can thrive.

As the discussions continue, whether it's convenient or not for Uganda to enact the Protection of Sovereignty Bill, one may argue that there's no urgency for such legislation.

This, however, doesn't indicate that Uganda's sovereignty is under no threat, especially with the current tide of globalization, where extension of political, social, economic and cultural dominance is a symbol of power.

The focus should, however, shift to giving the citizens the opportunity to find a collective definition of what amounts to Uganda's sovereignty and whether the existing guardrails for protecting Uganda's sovereignty require tightening to suit the current national and global context. Uganda's policy wonks need to further study the implications of such a bill and where else such a law has worked or not. If this is not done, the country may in the future suffer dire consequences of importing a policy template to fix a moral issue with a repressive legal solution.

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