

Controversial laws passed by 11th Parliament

The legacy of the 11th Parliament has been shaped by rushed laws, fierce battles and enduring questions over rights and governance issues.

BY ELIZABETH KAMURUNGI

Article 79(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda confers the mandate to make laws on the Parliament, which is composed of elected members representing citizens.

In fulfilment of this duty, the 11th Parliament, over its five-year tenure, passed over 130 laws.

After taking oath as a Member of Parliament for Bukedea District in the 12th Parliament yesterday, Ms Anita Among said the 11th Parliament goes down in history as one of the most "remarkable."

"The 11th parliament has been very good. It has done a lot of work."

A key mark of this, perhaps, is the controversial laws passed, among them the Protection of Sovereignty Bill, 2023; the Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023; the UPDF Amendment Act, 2025, the Coffee Amendment Act, 2024, among others. All these laws faced stiff resistance or scrutiny, attracted animated debate, and were processed at an unusual speed.

The Protection of Sovereignty bill, 2026

This was the last Bill passed by the 11th parliament and is still awaiting assent by the president to become law. The law was presented, processed, and passed on one hand; the government argues that it will protect Uganda from foreign interference. On the other hand, critics say the bill is ambiguous, will stifle civic engagement, and likely cause economic sabotage.

It among others states that an agent of a foreigner who influences policy-making decisions faces a prison sentence of up to 10 years, a fine of Shs1b, or both. The law also requires every Ugandan

who receives more than Shs 400 Million a year to declare the funds with the Minister or face a penalty.

The UPDF Amendment Act, 2025

Parliament passed the UPDF Amendment Act in record seven days, allowing for the trial of civilians in military courts. The Bill was passed shortly after the Supreme Court ruled that the trial of civilians in military courts was unconstitutional. The introduction of the bill elicited opposition from activists and opposition leaders. Critics argued the law was a political tool designed to suffocate dissenting voices under the guise of national security.

The Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023

The Anti-Homosexuality law received overwhelming support from conservative cultural and religious sections in Uganda, but at the same time, condemnation from the international community. It prohibits any form of sexual relations between persons of the same sex and the promotion or recognition of sexual relations between persons of the same sex.

Rationalisation bills.

The rationalization of Government Agencies and Public Expenditure was first mooted in 2018, with estimations it would save the country Shs1trillion, and bring efficiency in government ministries.

President Museveni, the main proponent of the policy, and his Cabinet had long ago agreed to the rationalization, and only needed the legislature to adjust the different legal regime accordingly. Several laws were tabled, but the process ran into some headwinds.

In April 2024, members of Parliament blocked the rationalisation and merging of several government agencies, key among them the Uganda Coffee Development Authority, NAADS, the Dairy Development Authority, UNRA, among others, marking the first public defiance to calls by President Museveni to support the process. MPS argued the agencies had achieved success that would be undermined by their return to the ministries.



Speaker Anita Among chairs the House on May 5. PHOTO/PARLIAMENT X HANDLE

The war on rapex climaxed with the National Coffee Amendment bill 2024.

The coffee amendment bill

This was perhaps the most contentious of the rationalisation bills. Tabled on March 27, it sought to return the activities of UCDA to the Ministry of Agriculture. But several stakeholders opposed the move, leading to a showdown in parliament.

Throughout its processing, the Bill was characterised by a war of words between the proponents led by President Museveni, and the opposing side that worried the merger would undo the coffee success story. For months, it was push and pull, laced with tribal undertones.

On October 24, another attempt to process the Coffee Bill failed following dramatic scenes that forced the Speaker, Anita Among, to suspend the House. Leader of Opposition in Parliament, Joel Ssenyonyi, led the team opposed to the merger and put up a spirited fight, questioning procedures and processes in the processing of the bill.

On the day it was eventually passed, Parliament descended into chaos and physical altercations, with some legislators forcefully removed from the House and a media blackout on the proceedings.

The Computer Misuse Act, 2022.

While it was later annulled by the court, the 11th parliament had overwhelmingly supported the Computer Misuse Act, which put in place even stricter controls on freedom of expression. The tightened penalties on unauthorised access to information or data, unlawful sharing of any information relating to a child, hate speech, and the sending or sharing of malicious or unsolicited information.

Proponents of the Bill, including Speaker Anita Among, who presided over the sitting, did not shy away from the law that human rights activists argued would clamp down on fundamental rights of expression and block legitimate public criticism.

But the Constitutional court annulled the entire Law on a technicality that

Parliamentary rules were not followed.

The court also struck down key provisions of the Act, including Section 11, which criminalised unauthorised access to data, and Section 23, which penalised sharing information about children without consent. And Section 26, which criminalised the sharing of information deemed to ridicule, degrade, or demean others, is a provision widely criticised for being vague and prone to abuse.

Sections 28, criminalizing sending malicious information relating to another person, and Section 29, prohibiting the misuse of social media through sharing prohibited information under a disguised or false identity, were annulled as well. The annulment also called into question the manner in which the 11th Parliament conducted contentious business.

Other laws that attracted intense debate and scrutiny include the National Social Security Fund Amendment Act, which allowed for mid-term access of up to 20 per cent for savers who turn 45 and have saved consistently for 10 years. This was a shift from the previous requirement of only accessing one's savings upon attaining the age of 55. The law also opened up to allow for voluntary contributions and introduced mandatory contributions from all employers regardless of staff size.

The 11th parliament also passed laws, including the Public Health Amendment Act, 2022, the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Control Act, 2023, to control the possession and trafficking and regulate the cultivation and gathering of prohibited plants; the Competition Act, 2023 was passed to promote and sustain fair competition in markets in Uganda; to prevent practices harming competition in markets in Uganda;

Other laws include the National Climate Change Act, 2021, to guide climate change response measures; the Mining and Minerals Amendment Act, 2022, to regulate mineral resources; and the Petroleum Supply Amendment Act, 2023, which made the Uganda National Oil Company Limited the supplier of all imports to the licensed oil marketing companies of petroleum products for the Ugandan market.

Parliament also passed a raft of laws to save the country's image, which was sullied by money laundering concerns. These included the

In the last meeting of the NRM Caucus this month, Chief Whip Hamson Obua defended all the controversial bills, calling them important and meant for the well-being of the country and Ugandans.