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# In Uganda, Parliament passes laws, TikTok passes the judgment

There is a moment that now plays out almost every time a Ugandan politician steps in front of a camera. Within minutes of a press statement, a parliamentary address, or a televised interview, the original footage has been clipped, captioned, slowed down, sped up, and reshaped into something the speaker never intended. By the time it circulates widely, it belongs not to the person who said it, but to the people who reinterpreted it.

A budget speech lands in Parliament. Hours later, it is a meme on TikTok, a skit on a podcast, a thread of commentary on X. The numbers have been extracted, the minister's expression frozen at the most unflattering moment, and the most quotable line stripped of its context and rebuilt into something else entirely. The message has not just been shared. It has been edited, contested, and returned to the public as a new object, carrying new meaning.

What makes this remarkable is how it inverts the traditional logic of political communication. For most of Uganda's post-independence history, formal channels shaped what most people knew and when they knew it.

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> **Gilbert Beyamba**
> **Social Media**

That architecture has not disappeared. But it is now in daily competition with a far more distributed and irreverent one.

Citizen journalists, meme pages, content creators working in Luganda and other local languages, and ordinary people with smartphones are all participants in shaping what a political moment means.

In one of our most recent studies conducted with CIPESA, an ICT policy think tank, the House of Seshat examined Uganda's social media landscape during the 2026 elections and found this dynamic operating at significant scale: political content across TikTok, X, and Facebook was being continuously remixed, reframed, and recirculated by actors with no formal media affiliation and no obligation to preserve the original intent.

The direction of influence has also shifted in ways that are not always visible. Traditional commentators and political figures are increasingly responding to conversations that originated in informal digital spaces, rather than setting the terms of those conversations. Memes and short videos are not merely reacting to the agenda. They are, with increasing frequency, creating it.

Satire has proven particularly well suited to this environment. A meme can interrogate a policy decision without mounting a direct confrontation. Humour travels faster than analysis. And in a legal environment where direct criticism carries real risks, the ambiguity of satire is not a weakness. It is the point.

Which brings us to the Protection of Sovereignty Bill, 2026, which Parliament passed after contentious debate and a series of amendments. The Bill has attracted attention for its sweeping restrictions on foreign funding, its initially proposed treatment of diaspora Ugandans as legal foreigners, and its criminal penalties of up to 20 years for a range of broadly defined offences. But one clause deserves particular scrutiny in this context. Clause 13 criminalises the publication of knowingly false information that "weakens, undermines or damages" Uganda's economic system. Although narrowed, the clause still leaves room for broad interpretation. The amended provision now requires proof that the information was knowingly false and applies specifically to agents of foreigners, but it still does not clearly define what constitutes economic harm or destabilisation.

A journalist, researcher, or online commentator who publishes findings that a government official deems economically damaging could, under this provision, face prosecution.

Read alongside the broader digital landscape, this is significant. For years, the contest over political narrative in Uganda has been fought through memes, clipped videos, podcast commentary, and coded satire. Citizens found ways to participate in political discourse precisely because the informal, distributed nature of social media made control difficult. The Sovereignty Bill represents a move to address that difficulty not by engaging with the substance of public criticism, but by raising the cost of producing it.

The budget speech will still be delivered from the podium. The question is what happens to the person who clips it, captions it, and sends it to their WhatsApp group with a comment the government does not like. That question is no longer hypothetical. It is before Parliament now.

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