Why we must keep discussing 2026 polls

Barely weeks after a deeply contested poll marked by technological failures, intimidation claims and unresolved questions, Uganda risks repeating a familiar cycle of collective amnesia—one that emboldens impunity.

BY TIMOTHY KALYEGIRA

A number of people on social media have been calling on some of us to let go of the 2026 General Election and move on to other things. Their argument is that an election is just an event, it has its time, and when it ends, we must return to work and to other matters.

It is a reasonable argument to make, but I have a few objections. First, I think one weakness of African society is that we move on too quickly from things. We don't have the mental concentration or the sense of seriousness needed to sustain a focus on a topic.

A crime takes place, news media reports indicate that police arrived at the scene and took the body to the government hospital for a post-mortem examination, and that's where the story ends.

We never again hear a follow-up news report on what the police or what medical forensic experts established about the cause of death.

This might, in part, explain why so few books and no encyclopaedia works are published in Africa. The painstaking research, editing, and writing that these involve are too much of a hassle for us.

The January 15, 2026 presidential and parliamentary election is less than three weeks behind us. That's not a long time.

It certainly is too short a time for us to want to move on from such an important five-yearly event. Less than two years ago, we witnessed a botched national population census, so chaotical was it that the exercise had to be extended by several days.

The head of the government statistics body UBOS defended his organisation, the public shrugged its collective shoulders, and life moved on.

There has never been an investigation of why this UBOS exercise ended up so chaotic. Matters that require seriousness, we don't seem to take seriously. Over Shs200 billion was spent by the government to buy biometric voter verification kits for this recent election.

That they failed to work on election day January 15 and most of the country returned to a manual register, can't be something we shrug our shoulders over and move on. What caused the BVVK failure? Was it a virus? Was it because the Internet was off at the time? Was it because polling agents lack sufficient training? Or was it intentionally switched off to enable rigging?

1980 VS 2026

A number of political analysts and journalists have said that 2026 has matched 1980 in terms of rigging, intimidation, and violence. If – as a large section of the public believes – the BVVKs were deliberately failed in order to take us back to the manual voting of 20 years ago, thus making multiple voting in army barracks possible, then the people behind it will feel nothing for citizenry.



The National Unity Platform party leader, Mr Robert Kyagulanyi, aka Bobi Wine, at a camp presidential election. PHOTO/MONITOR

Why has no EC official been arrested or suspended? And why, for the lower Local Council elections on January 27 did these same biometric kits work without an explanation? Had the problem of January 15 finally been discovered and fixed?

Once again, the public just moved on. We won't get very far as a country if we continue to be lassez-faire about important national matters. By contrast, in Europe, North America, and East Asia, people do not move on so easily.

Staying power

Four hundred-page biographies of Alexander the Great, Napoleon, or William Shapespeare are still regularly published and several make it to the bestseller lists.

Television channels like National Geographic, the History Channel, or BBC World regularly air serialised documentaries on anything from Medieval European kings to Stalin's Soviet Union, ancient Greek philosophers, and the Second World War. No topic is ever too stale or distant in history for them to revisit it. A few Ugandans have similar staying power.

The *Daily Monitor* columnist, Nicholas Sengoba, has been posting regular updates on a shooting death from 2024.

January 28, 2026:

"It's Day 402 since PC Charles Bahati from Bushenyi shot dead, Julius Ssekamwa, driver of M/v UAX 480C & 'fled' on a boda boda, from armed patrol policemen. Police 'recovered' only the gun. Let's retweet daily to remind [the IGP] & [police] to produce the suspect."

We could do with much more of this, across all aspects of public life. Part of the reason our politicians and government bureaucrats take us for granted or exploit us, is because of this trait.

Today's screaming and disturbing front-page newspaper headline is forgotten within a week. No follow up by the media, MPs in parliamentary sessions, or the public. Life just goes on. The reason why it's important to keep examining and questioning what happening on January 15, 2026 is what it directly shapes how the next NRM government will behave.

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They will know that impunity, dirty tricks, and a heavy deployment of the army are what delivered the election to NRM candidate Yoweri Museveni.

These behind-the-scenes agents will grow more arrogant and brash in the next five years. They will drive along any side of the road or past traffic lights as they please because they will know they are the ones who made another five years possible.

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