

# Democracy in the feeds: TikTok, X and the making of Uganda's digital public sphere.





**Just click** this icon  
to explore the data  
on the online platform

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01

# Executive summary

The democratic implications of social media represent one of the most pressing and widely debated issues of the contemporary era. However, although these democratic implications provoke concern worldwide, anxieties are currently manifesting differently across contexts shaped by their unique economic, cultural and political realities. Focusing on Uganda, this study maps public participation and political

discourse particularly on X and TikTok to understand the nature of online civic engagement in Uganda's networked publics and how this engagement influences the country's e-democracy.

Here, data was collected through data scraping and digital ethnography in parallel which was then analysed as per the findings presented across this report.

This study finds that Uganda occupies a unique position on the continuum between an emerging and a stunted e-democracy as considered from the three stages of e-democracy (Ali, 2023) from the emergence stage, to the adoption and consolidation phases and, finally, the maturity phase. That is, it is emerging in the sense that internet penetration remains low with only a fraction of Ugandans online, which makes digital civic engagement the preserve of a connected minority. Yet, it is simultaneously stunted because even within the connected public, meaningful adoption through democratic participation is constrained by a number of structural constraints.

Specifically, this study observed that Uganda's networked publics are fundamentally heterogeneous, reflecting deep social fragmentations where identities like age and education shape distinct platform preferences and political stances. While the digital sphere shows signs of Uganda being an emerging e-democracy, it is simultaneously stunted by a restrictive regulatory landscape including frequent internet shutdowns in electoral periods. In response to such crackdowns, this study observed a shift toward alternative, surveillance-resistant communication channels like Bitchat and Telegram to evade state reach.

Participation often manifests as spectatorial or reactive, characterized by passive consumption on TikTok and endorsement through retweets on X, rather than original authorship. This discourse shows a heavy inclination toward visual communication, specifically through a shadow lexicon of memes, satire, and coded language which allows citizens to navigate around constrained environments. The fleeting nature of this discourse, understood as "slacktivism," frequently fails to translate into material democratic power. Uganda's networked environment is further steered by a diverse array of political influencers and citizen media, alongside bad-faith actors who deploy coordinated inauthentic behaviour as smokescreens to manufacture consensus. Lastly, while X maintains a more pluralist and issue-based discourse compared to other platforms, its recommendation algorithms remain foundational in steering polarized public discourse.

Finally, before concluding, a number of recommendations are put forward toward supporting broader e-democratic prospects for Uganda including, among others, the need to review regulations which stifle citizen expression online, the need to support citizen digital and AI literacy, as well as the need to develop transparent, rights-based social media guidelines on electoral periods among other suggestions.



02

# Background

As Africa and indeed Uganda's digitisation project deepens, the relationship between ICTs and democracy under the umbrella term e-democracy in much of the region remains a fringe area of interest in comparison with the rest of the ICT for development agenda issues. For instance, Uganda's Digital Vision 2040, like many other African nations, primarily envisions ICT supporting economic and infrastructural growth with online civic

engagement being only of secondary importance.

E-democracy, a subset of e-government, broadly denotes the harnessing of the capabilities of technologies and the internet to revolutionise the way citizens engage in civic life and how democratic processes unfold with prospects to empower citizens, bolster civic participation and enrich democratic governance (Ali, 2023). At the

heart of this is how citizens' engagement in decision-making processes can be advanced. In this sense, e-democracy, also synonymously called digital democracy, does not just look at the procedural use of ICTs in democratic processes but further encompasses the informal practices of civic engagement, including online deliberation, grassroots mobilisation, public scrutiny of power, and networked activism (Dahlberg, 2011).

For this study, e-democracy is observed through the lens of social media's relationship with civic engagement during Uganda's 2025/26 general elections, considering that these digital platforms increasingly function as key sites of democratic expression and contestation. The country has approximately 18.5 million internet users and an estimated over 11 million social media users (UCC, 2025), representing around 24.6 per cent of the 45,905,417 Ugandans (Census 2024). Importantly, over 70% of those internet users are aged between 15 and 35, positioning young people at the centre of the digital public sphere (UCC, 2025).

The trajectory of internet adoption in Uganda traces back to the late 1990s (Lubwama, 2023), where access, like in many African nations, was largely confined to academic institutions before gradually extending to government and eventually

the broader public domain. Commercial internet access took root in the early 2000s, but it wasn't until around 2015 that smartphone adoption and widespread connectivity began to meaningfully expand. The story of social media as a tool for civic engagement, however, finds its inflection point in the wake of the Arab Spring, specifically during the 2011 walk-to-work protests (Mutya, 2022) where platforms like Twitter (now X) emerged as key spaces for mobilising dissent, coordination of action and amplifying citizens' voices. Since then, the primary digital public square adopted by Ugandans has been social media platforms.

Against that backdrop, defining this digital public square becomes foundational for understanding civic engagement therein. The 'networked publics' framing is adopted to support this definition endeavour. Here, networked publics refer to publics that are restructured by networked technologies, including both the space constructed through networked technologies and the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice (Boyd, 2010). Put simply, Uganda's networked publics refer to the complex and multidirectional virtual communities of Ugandans across different social media platforms, encompassing both the digital spaces themselves and their diverse use by users who navigate them differently.

Uganda's networked publics are defined by their dynamism and fragmentation, rooted in the country's deep social heterogeneity where identities along the lines of gender, ethnicity, age, religion, education, income and occupation, among other factors, shape both political positions and platform preferences. For instance, these intersecting identities produce a multiplicity of stances within digital spaces, from defenders of the status quo to opponents, the apathetic, and those engaged for economic gain.

This heterogeneity also manifests in how different groups adopt and use specific platforms. For example, between 2010 and 2015, Facebook dominated usage among urban, youthful and aspirational Ugandans, establishing itself as a vibrant digital public arena until government restrictions on the platform in 2021 (Wilson Centre, 2025). X, by contrast, has remained the domain of the elite class, including journalists, technocrats, opposition figures, policy analysts, influencers, activists, et cetera, constituting a smaller but influential space for robust debate with approximately 700,000 users. Whatsapp, with over 10 million users, also functions as a critical civic tool for civic organising and information sharing. Since COVID-19, however, TikTok has emerged as the platform of the masses, now accounting for roughly 50% Uganda's internet traffic with 11.3 million subscribers (UCC, 2025) and

as such, democratising grassroots political expression in ways older, elite-dominated platforms like X cannot match.

Beyond user heterogeneity and platform inclinations, Uganda's networked publics are actively shaped by regulatory and political dynamics, as witnessed most notably in the Ugandan government's blocking of Facebook since 2021 (CIPESA, 2025) to date, as well as the recurring internet shutdowns during general elections (Anthonio and Roberts, 2023). Following Facebook's pre-election report documenting government-led coordinated inauthentic behaviour, authorities blocked Facebook, with the president condemning its "arrogant" interference in local politics. Yet while it remains restricted, citizens and state actors alike continue accessing the platform via VPNs, revealing the limits of state control on digital spaces.

Furthermore, while outside the scope of this study, it is worth noting parallel developments across the broader technological landscape with repercussions on citizen engagement. For example, in the lead up to the January 2026 elections, Fanon (NTV Uganda, 2026), a locally grown application designed to provide voters with detailed polling station information, was shut down, illustrating a persisting irony between state championing of youth-led innovation and ICT growth



# 03



# Methodology

## → Study objective

The study's main objective was to investigate how X, TikTok, and other social media platforms, including the use of artificial intelligence therein, are shaping public discourse and civic engagement in Uganda's electoral context.

## → Study design

This exploratory study employed a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative methods provided generalizable insights, while qualitative methods added contextual depth and nuance. Both strands were analysed and integrated into this consolidated report.

## **Qualitative Approach**

Digital ethnography was conducted over ten weeks between 15th November, 2025 and 26th January, 2026, with researchers embedding in X and TikTok primarily, and occasionally in Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and offline media to allow for cross-platform observation of narratives. Weekly observations were systematically captured using an ethnographer's notebook which, at the end of the study, were analysed through thematic analysis to identify patterns in political discourse and political participation online. To mitigate researcher bias, especially given the temptation towards subjective reporting on politically related issues, triangulation of evidence was used to corroborate findings alongside consistent researcher reflexivity to guard against subjectivity. Additionally, a participatory action research component enabled expert review and validation of mid-term findings, which are also integrated into this report. Lastly, an initial literature review guided the parameters for the data science work.

## **Quantitative Approach (Data Science)**

Data was scraped from X, Facebook, and TikTok across two periods; pre-election (1st July to 1st December, 2025) and post-election (1st December, 2025, to 22nd January, 2026), although no TikTok data was collected in the post-election window. A total of 998,924 pre-election posts and

149,916 post-election posts were collected across all the platforms. The pre-election data comprised 826,198 posts from TikTok, 11,631 from Facebook, 109,397 from X, and 26,460 from the X lexicon dataset. The post-election data included 52,844 posts from X, 9,151 from Facebook, and 87,921 from the X lexicon dataset.

For data collection on X, a dual scraping strategy including a lexicon-based approach, as well as an accounts-mapping approach, were used. TikTok and Facebook solely followed an accounts-mapping strategy. Overall, approximately 100 accounts per platform were mapped and selected based on visible political engagement, influence, quality of discourse and not just high engagement metrics. The data collected from these accounts, comprising public posts, constitutes the quantitative dataset, which was then analysed using Python (Pandas, Seaborn, Matplotlib, NumPy) and NLP techniques, where text in Luganda was translated using Google Translate API. Lastly, AI usage analysis was done using Meta's facebook/bart-large-mnli model through a zero-shot classification approach, while bot detection was performed using the Botometer API, which classifies X accounts as bot or human based on profile features, network structure, activity patterns, language, and sentiment.

## ➔ Study limitations

➊ **Translation dependency:** Sentiment, emotion, and AI usage analyses highly relied on translated Luganda text. Although Google's translation models are continually improved, inaccuracies persist, particularly for low-resource languages such as Luganda. These translation errors directly influence the performance of sentiment and emotion classification models, which rely on the semantic fidelity of the translated text. This limitation also propagates to the AI usage analysis, as the model operates on the translated outputs and is therefore susceptible to the same sources of noise.

➋ **Keyword-based limitations:** Keyword-based analysis proves not to be conclusive for reliable class identification as the approach relies heavily on the presence of predefined keywords, and the absence of critical or context-specific terms can result in misclassification or failure to assign a class altogether. This reduces its effectiveness in capturing nuance or implicit meanings within the text.

➌ **Botometer coverage gaps:** Limitations were observed in the bot detection process using the Botometer API. During testing, several accounts, particularly newly created accounts from 2023 onwards, did not return results. This suggests potential

issues with the API's data pipelines or coverage of recently created accounts, which may bias bot prevalence estimates.

➍ **Researcher bias:** Ethnographic observation, despite triangulation and reflexivity, carries inherent risk of subjective bias since researchers carrying out these observations were broadly documenting their own social media timelines and conversations dominant therein and as such, possibly projecting their own echo chamber noise.

➎ **Facebook data inaccuracies:** Data collected from Facebook, accessed via VPN due to the platform restrictions in Uganda, may carry inherent inaccuracies stemming from the restricted access conditions.

Still, despite these constraints, the combined analyses still offer a meaningful and informative perspective on the dynamics of electoral discourse and digital culture in Uganda.

## ➔ Ethical Considerations

Social media research bears a distinctive ethical burden in terms of the researcher's duty of care. While social media information is widely considered to be publicly





# findings

The findings presented below synthesise and integrate the full body of data collected and analysed, reflecting the multiple complex factors shaping Uganda's digital political engagement and evolving e-democracy. The findings are organised under two broad sections with accompanying subthemes in each section. The first section addresses the question: *how is political participation performed in Uganda's networked publics?* This section

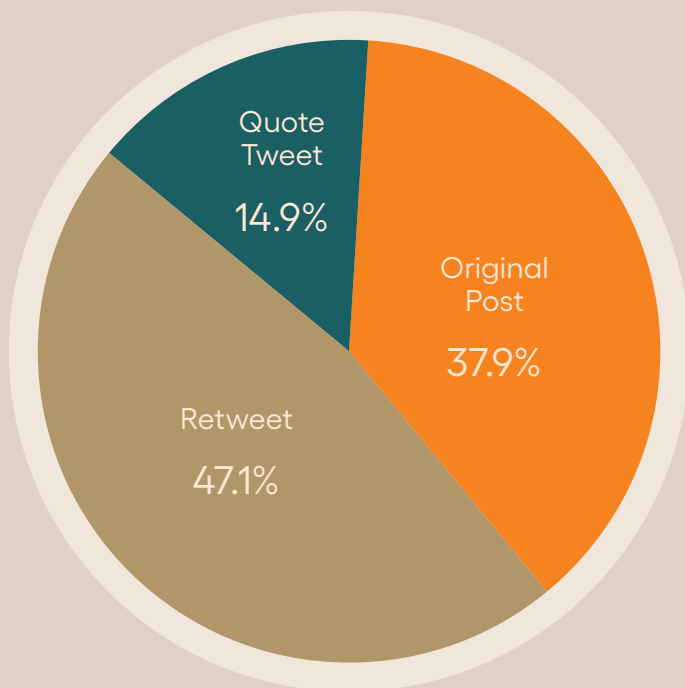
maps the engagement types and modes of engagement which characterise citizen participation across the study platforms. The second section responds to the broader question of *what shapes political discourse within Uganda's networked publics*, examining the structural, relational and contextual dynamics which influence how political talk unfolds and is mediated across the observed social media platforms.

# SECTION A

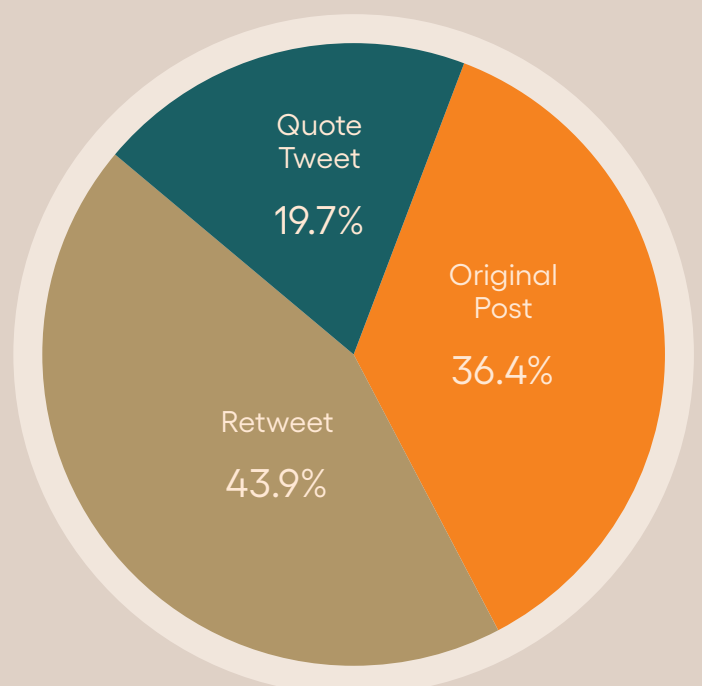
## How is political participation performed in Uganda's networked publics?

### → Engagement types

Distribution of Tweet Types (Original vs. Retweets)



**Figure 1:** X accounts pre-election data



**Figure 2:** X accounts post-election data

### Engagement Composition for Top 10 Participants

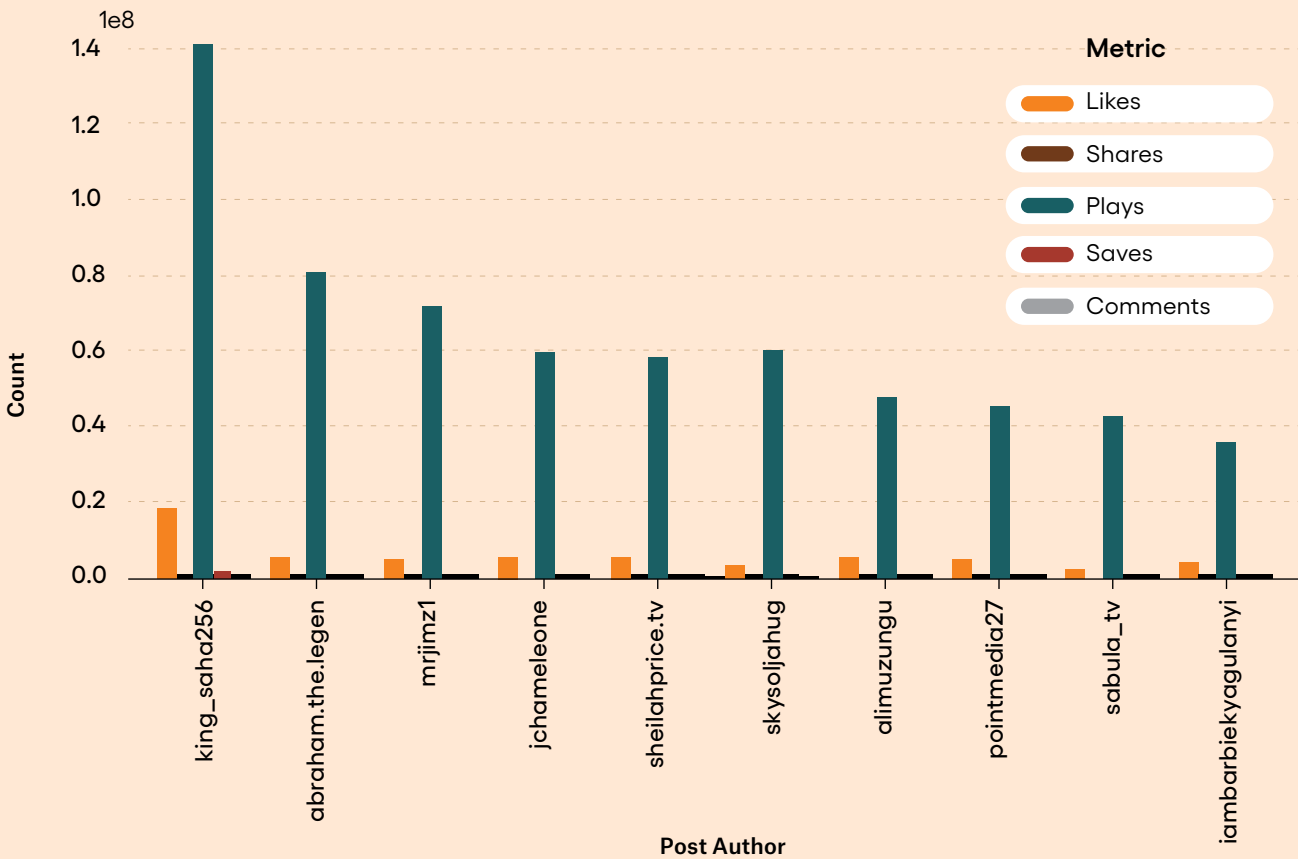


Figure 3: TikTok data



Understanding how Ugandans perform political participation online can be analysed through how they engage with content. On X, the data reveals a predominantly reactionary form of engagement. As shown in the charts above (Figure 1 and 2), across both pre-election and post-election periods, retweets constituted the largest share of activity, i.e., 47.1% and 43.9%, respectively, suggesting that endorsement through amplification rather than original authorship is the primary way users participate in

political discourse. Original posts remained relatively the same at around 37% while quote tweets increased modestly from 14.9% to 19.7% post-election, perhaps reflecting a heightened desire to contextualise or contest content during the peak electoral moment. Yet even this increase leaves quote tweeting a minority practice.

On TikTok, the engagement picture is starker. Considering the engagement composition of the top 10 most engaged

participants (Figure 3), video views dwarf all other metrics. Likes register minimally, while comments, shares, and saves are nearly invisible in the data. This suggests a predominantly spectatorial public where users consume political content at scale but rarely react to, comment on, or disseminate it.

Therefore, where X users participate through amplification, TikTok users participate through passive consumption, raising questions about the depth of engagement beneath the platform's massive reach. Together, however, these patterns paint a picture of Ugandan networked publics as spaces where active contribution remains the exception, not the norm.

### Which Post Type Gets the Most Engagement?

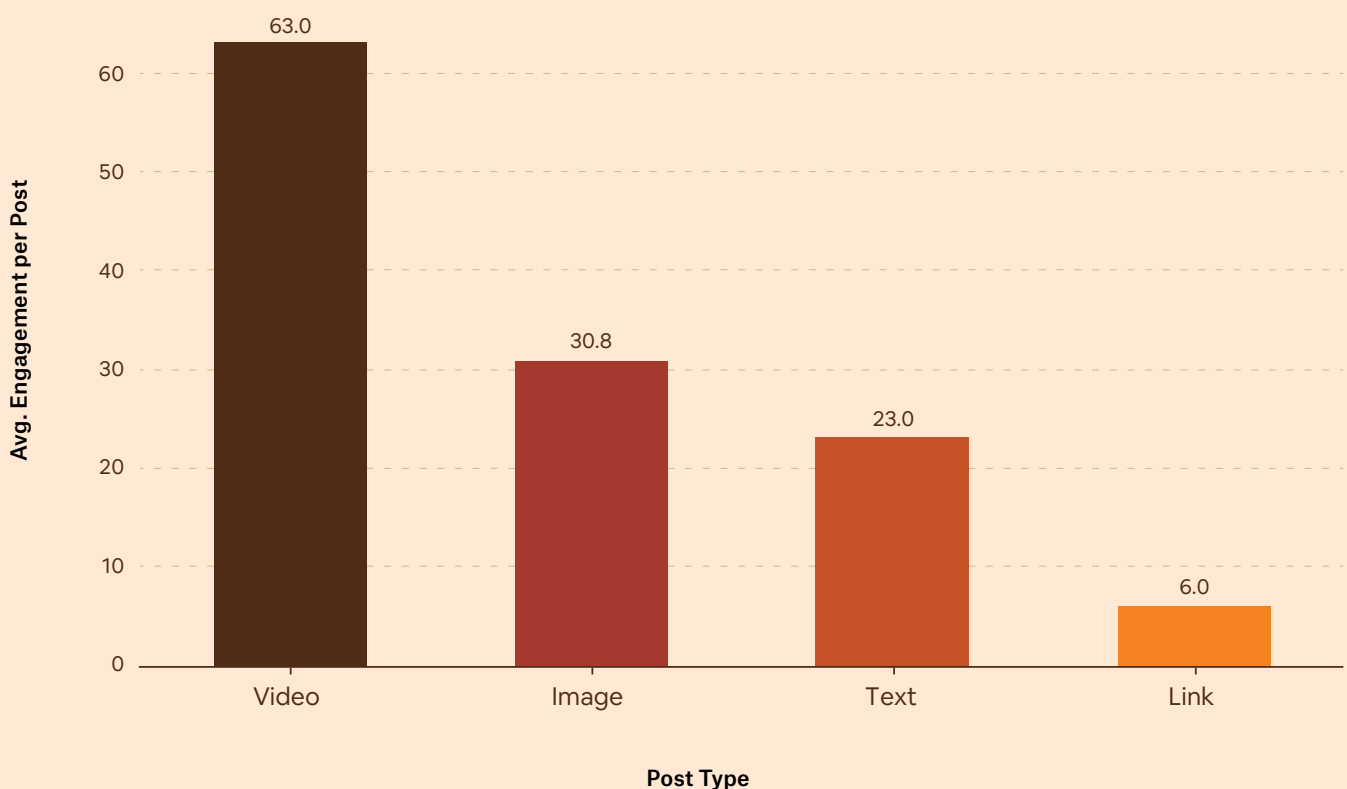


Figure 4: Facebook data



### Total Engagement by Media Type

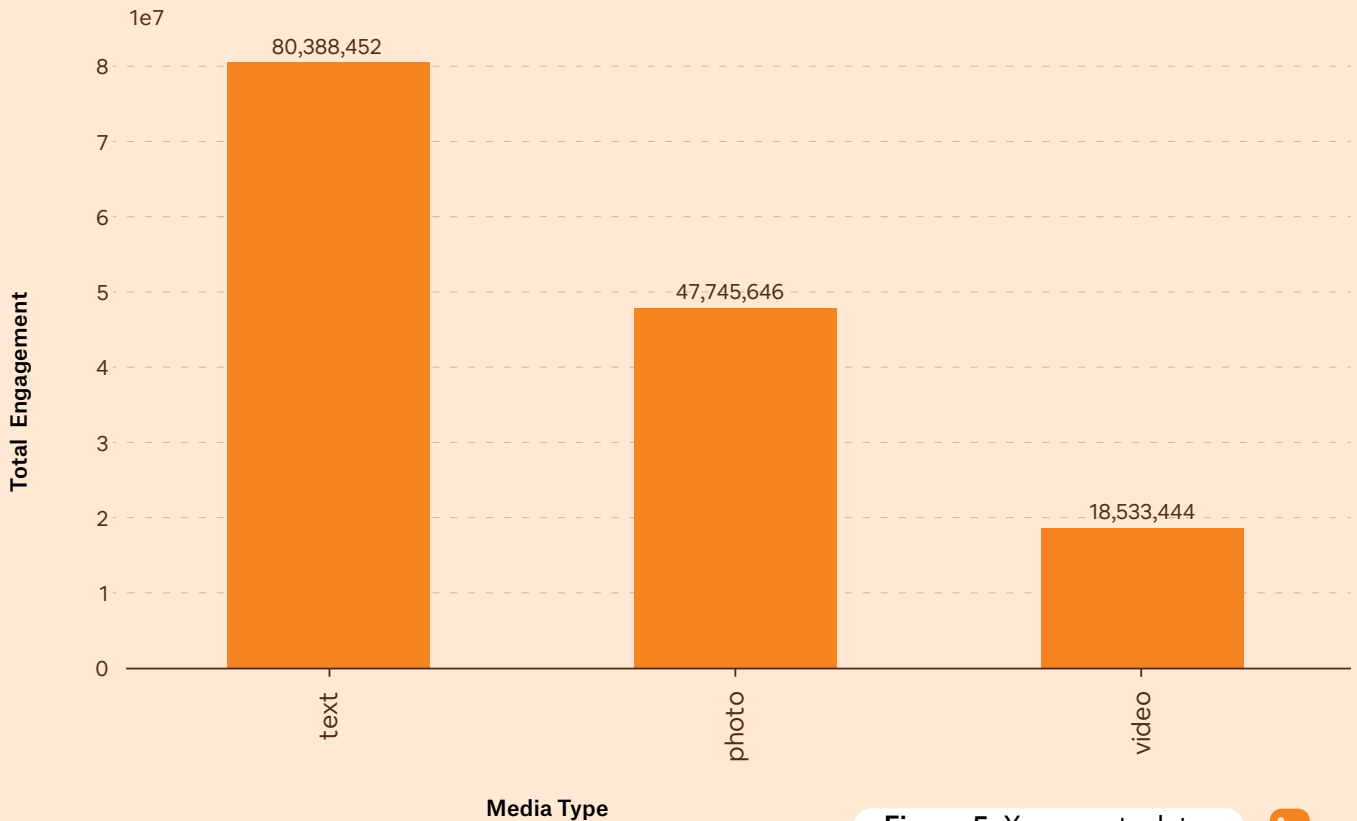


Figure 5: X accounts data



Analysis of what forms of content dominate political discourse is also useful in understanding how Ugandans perform political participation online. The data on the whole shows a general inclination toward visual communication. For instance, on Facebook (Figure 4), video dominates discourse, accounting for 63% of engagement, followed by images at 30.8%, text at 23% and links trailing behind at just 6%. On X (Figure 5), which is a text first platform, video growth was observed too, even as text remains predominant as of now. On the other hand, TikTok’s massive user base further underscores this visual communications inclination by Ugandans, given its predominant reliance on video. It can thus be deduced that, across platforms,

Ugandans have a preference for visual formats of communication online.

More generally, this study observed that visual culture manifests in distinct forms. For example, citizen journalism, primarily in the form of videos captured and shared by ordinary Ugandans, has flourished, especially enabled by platforms which lower publishing barriers. On the other hand, artistic expression, particularly in the form of musical performances during campaigns, featured prominently among the most viral content (see Annex Section A), suggesting that culture and politics are deeply fused in digital spaces. But perhaps the most significant visual form in the digital space today is the meme.



### Top 15 Dominant Hashtags

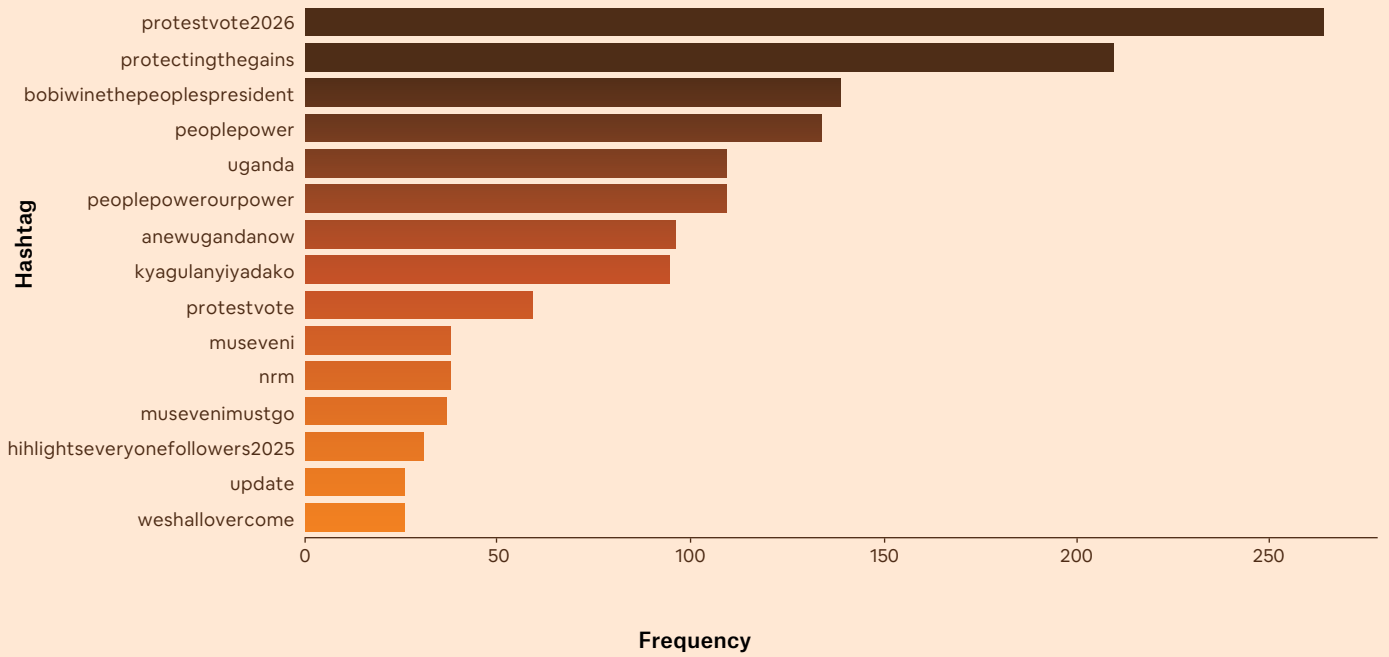


Figure 6: Facebook pre-election data

### Top 15 Dominant Hashtags

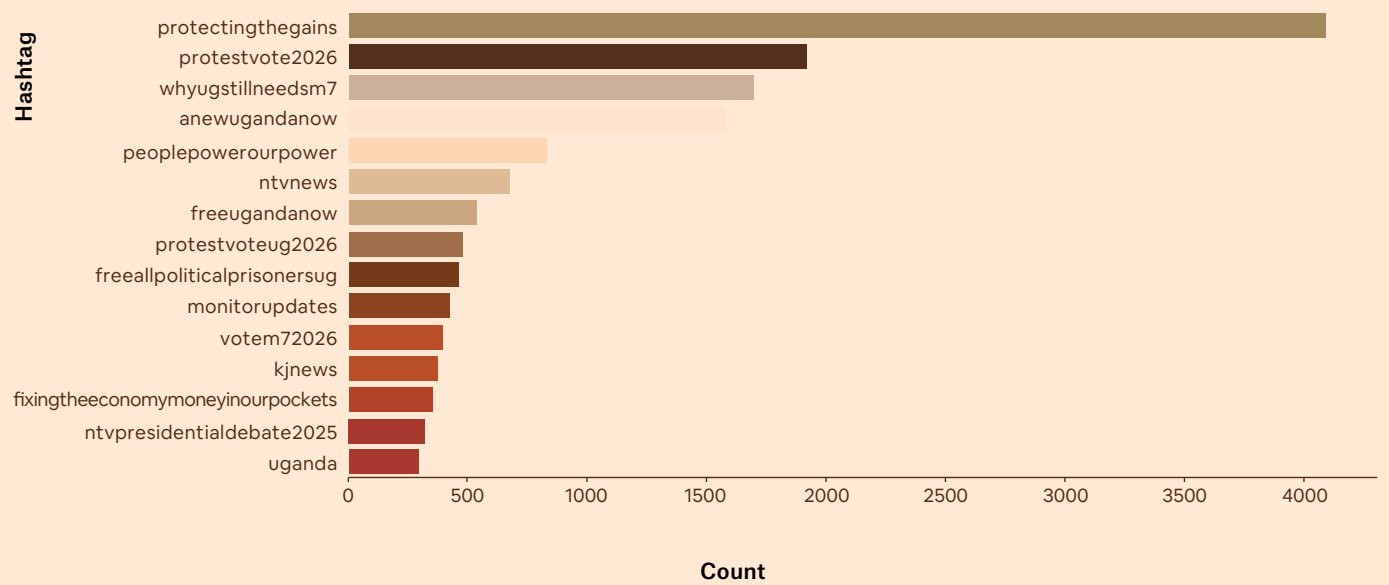
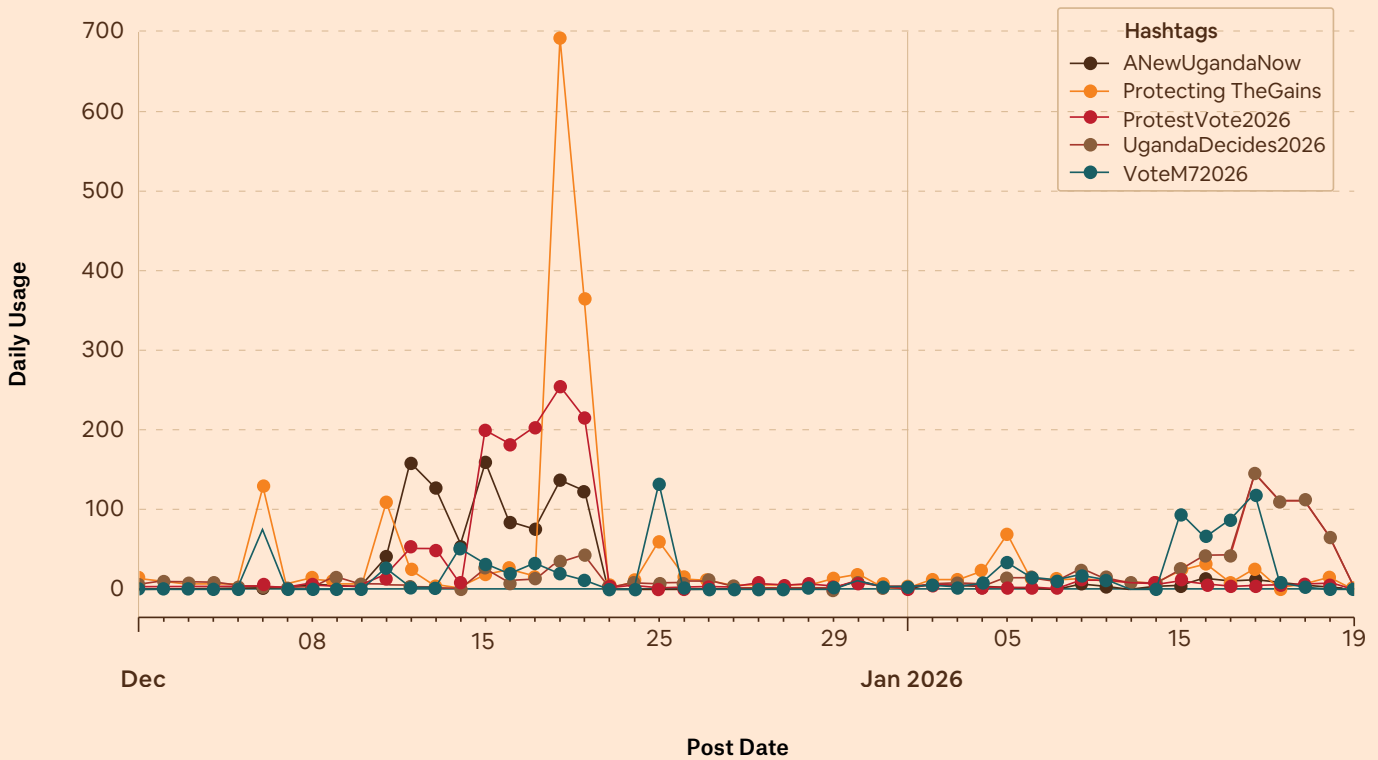


Figure 7: X accounts pre-election data



### Evolution of Top 5 Hashtags Over Time



**Figure 10:** X lexicon post-election data

Furthermore, in continued analysis of how political participation is performed online, this study observed that the hashtag endures as a prominent feature of Uganda's networked publics, serving as a tool for coordination, amplification, and issue-framing across platforms. Analysis of dominant hashtags across Facebook, X, and TikTok (Figure 6,7,8,9,10) reveals a landscape shaped overwhelmingly by partisan interests. As seen in the tables above, the most viral hashtags were predominantly party-affiliated, ranging from candidate slogans, party tags, candidate names and campaign phrases like #ProtectTheGains and #ProtestVote2026, which dominated discourse. This generally

reflects the electoral context, however, where supporters, party representatives and paid influencers deploy hashtags to frame and amplify narratives around their candidates.

Yet, particular ethnographic observations complicate this picture. While hashtags were observed to trend, they often did so in the absence of corresponding organic engagement which suggested coordinated pushes for their virality rather than a grassroots resonance. Many citizens, in fact, rarely use hashtags in their daily political engagement, viewing them as tools hijacked by specific powers or interests, political or commercial, as opposed to being

purely authentic expressions of collective concern. This perception has probably been reinforced by the spill over of commercial influencer culture, where hashtags function as KPIs meant to drive virality even in the absence of real interest in particular issues and endorsement by the general public. In other cases, particular hashtags were observed to be used in derision by actors across the political spectrum.

Nonetheless, hashtags retain mobilising potential, especially as observed within civil society and media actors who continue to deploy them for awareness raising, accountability and governance campaigns such as the 2025 #UgandaParliamentExhibition and the #KampalaPotholeExhibition used by Agora, a civil society organisation, demonstrating their utility in directing public and institutional attention to public service functionality. Figures like Sarah Bireete, Eddy Mutwe and opposition leader Dr Kizza Besigye also featured in hashtag-driven solidarity campaigns, underscoring that while partisan use dominates, the hashtag remains a contested space where civic voices can still organise. Ultimately, Uganda's hashtag publics tell of a dynamic landscape, like much of the engagement landscape, where organic engagement and virality-driven campaigns co-exist in parallel.

## ➔ Modes of engagement

Beyond the broader engagement types lies the question of how Ugandans orient themselves politically within digital spaces, i.e., the modes of engagement that characterise participation. This study observes that most prominently, social accountability was at the centre of political discourse. From citizen use of online spaces to monitor electoral processes to critiquing institutions and demanding responsiveness from those in power, this mode of engagement dominates political discourse within Uganda's networked publics. Furthermore, this engagement typically unfolds within a broader pattern of asymmetric communication where state and political actors primarily broadcast information rather than engage dialogically with citizens on various issues, leaving citizen-to-citizen interaction as the dominant form of political conversation. This persisting one-way communication model points to minimal realisation of ideals of e-democracy, such as bridged communication between state and citizens.

Additionally, citizen engagement on policy-related or political issues typically appears as quick and short-lived, with low issue cycle attention recorded across all platforms. TikTok's short-form video and X's engagement-driven feed also

further account for this fleeting treatment of crucial political discourse. The local phrase “we move” captures this ethos where conversations flare and fade, with new issues trending daily and sustained discourse happening only minimally. This fleeting nature of discourse has been likened to the issue of voice without power, where, in the absence of sustained conversations, minimal tangible outputs are realised from social media discourse in what is largely referred to as ‘slacktivism’ (Glenn, 2015). This inability to translate digital discourse, especially that which involves mobilisation for particular offline outcomes, was largely observed during the election, where massive low voter turnout, despite seemingly intense digital activity, suggested a persisting gap between virtual voice and material realities.

Other common modes of engagement observed included more ambiguous practices, which, nonetheless, are taking root in how Ugandans engage in politics online. For example, a growing tactic is naming and shaming, which involves individuals bypassing formal accountability mechanisms by publicly identifying

and exposing alleged wrongdoers, from corrupt officials to perpetrators of electoral violence. This approach relies on negative networked visibility functioning as a form of disciplining these individuals, particularly where citizens believe justice will be delayed or not served. Further, *schadenfreude*, which means the pleasure derived from others’ misfortune, also appears to fuel much engagement, typically manifesting as “hate-watching” and celebration when disfavoured figures lose office or face scandal or loss. While this mode of engagement serves an ambiguous purpose in civic expression, either simply as a cathartic release or as a substitute for justice or mere spectacle, users on these platforms appear to believe it, too, fills gaps left by the absence of institutional accountability.

Ultimately, as explored in this section, Uganda’s political participation online is defined by rich, creative expression, yet overall, one that remains reactive, fleeting and generally constrained when it comes to translating digital voice into democratic power.



### Post Distribution Over Time

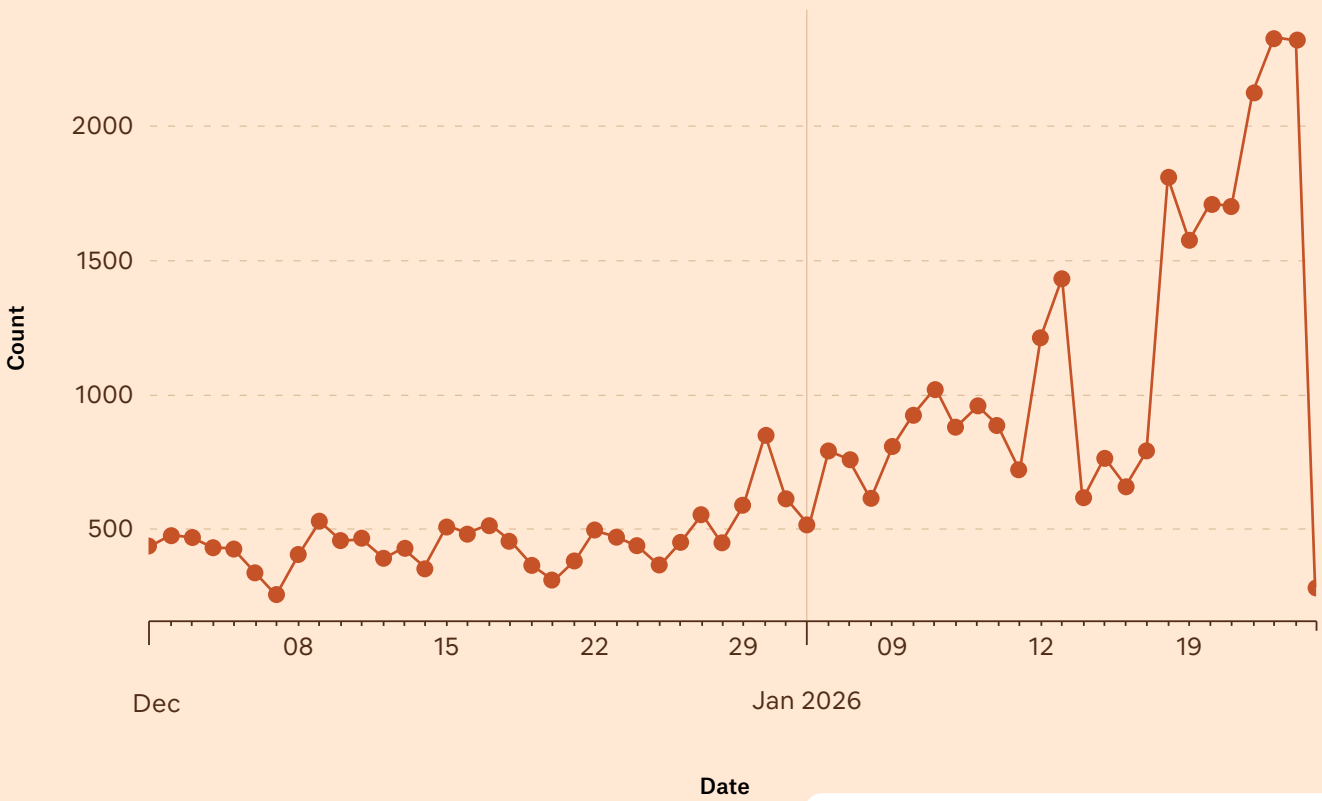


Figure 12: X accounts data post-election

### Post Distribution Over Time



Figure 13: pre-election X accounts data



### Post Distribution Over Time

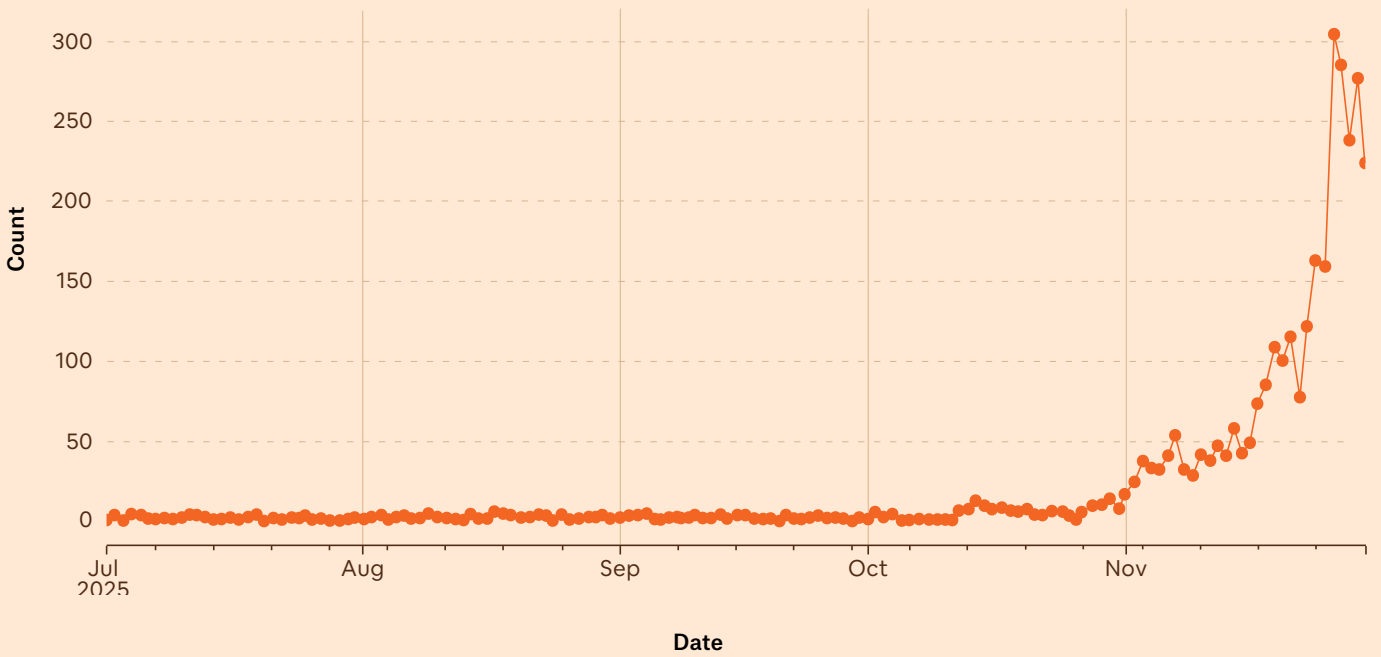


Figure 16: Facebook pre-election data

### Post Distribution Over Time

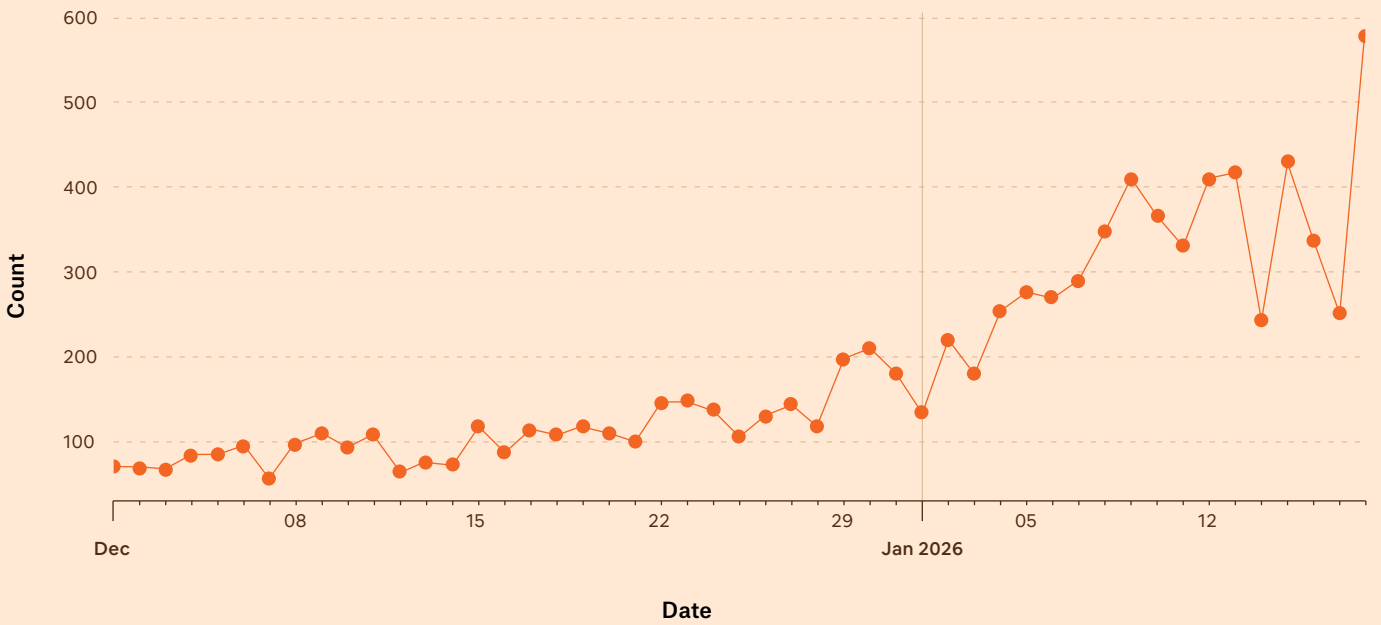


Figure 17: Facebook post election data

Post distribution over time offers a foundational lens for understanding the contours of political discourse within Uganda's networked publics. Across the seven-month study period (July 2025-January 2026), platform data reveal a striking pattern. Despite being situated within a high-stakes political period, i.e., the electoral cycle, political engagement remained remarkably low compared to platform user bases. On X (Figure 12,13,14,15), home to approximately 700,000 Ugandan users, average daily political posts hovered below 200, peaking only briefly at 2000-4000 posts. TikTok (Figure 11), which accounts for roughly 50% of Uganda's internet traffic with over 800,000 posts in this data, saw political engagement hit at most 1200 posts, which is only a fraction of its massive user base. The Facebook user base (Figure 16 and 17), although understandably limited due to the platform's blockage in the country, registered 300 posts at its peak of political engagement thereon.

Furthermore, the January 2026 election period also specifically revealed the fragility of political discourse in Uganda's networked publics. On 13th January, the government ordered a total internet shutdown lasting five days, which coincided with the 15th January election. When internet access was partly restored on the 17th, with persisting restrictions on social media, a sharp but brief spike in political engagement followed as observed in the data above (particularly X data- Figure 12, 15). Yet within two to three days, engagement plummeted back

to pre-shutdown averages. This rapid abandonment of political conversations thus further underscores the characteristic nature of Uganda's online civic culture that, even when conditions seem to allow, sustained political discourse remains elusive, pointing to a stunted digital public sphere where engagement is event-driven, episodic and quickly exhausted.

Collectively, this low engagement and inability to maintain momentum on political issues during the electoral period when civic stakes are highest, paints a picture of an online civic crisis and raises fundamental questions about the depth and reach of e-democracy in the country. Given that civic culture is critical in supporting the negotiation of norms and values which generate the normative and cultural resources required for a functioning democracy, what does a crisis in Uganda's online civic culture then mean? For instance, ethnographic observations indicated that the majority of public discourse across all platforms was about entertainment. While civic participation requires certain preconditions, including political literacy and a shared concern for democratic values, generally, what does it mean for the Ugandan citizenry to be largely absent from the negotiation of norms and values that shape their democracy? While answering this question is outside the scope of this study, these reflections are key for democracy practitioners seeking to understand and strengthen civic engagement in Uganda.

## ➔ Artificial intelligence usage and impacts on political discourse

Artificial intelligence (AI) continues to take root as a defining variable in conversations around democracy and digital discourse globally. In 2024, the super election year involving over half of the world's voters, numerous forecasts warning of AI's impacts on electoral integrity worldwide were issued, especially as relates to AI-driven misinformation and disinformation (World Economic Forum, 2024). While subsequent studies found far minimal incidences compared to the size of anticipated fears (Elliot, 2024), concerns around AI use in electoral and other democratic contexts

have not receded. Moreover, as generative AI tools like Grok, ChatGPT and Claude become increasingly accessible and more embedded in social media platforms, their potential to shape political discourse even heightens the concerns around AI. It also goes without saying that the proponents of widespread AI development and adoption conversely believe that AI will be pivotal in supporting democratic engagement. This section outlines the role of generative AI in Uganda's networked publics, asking how, if at all, it is influencing civic discourse therein.

### Over-Time Distribution of AI Usage in Tweets

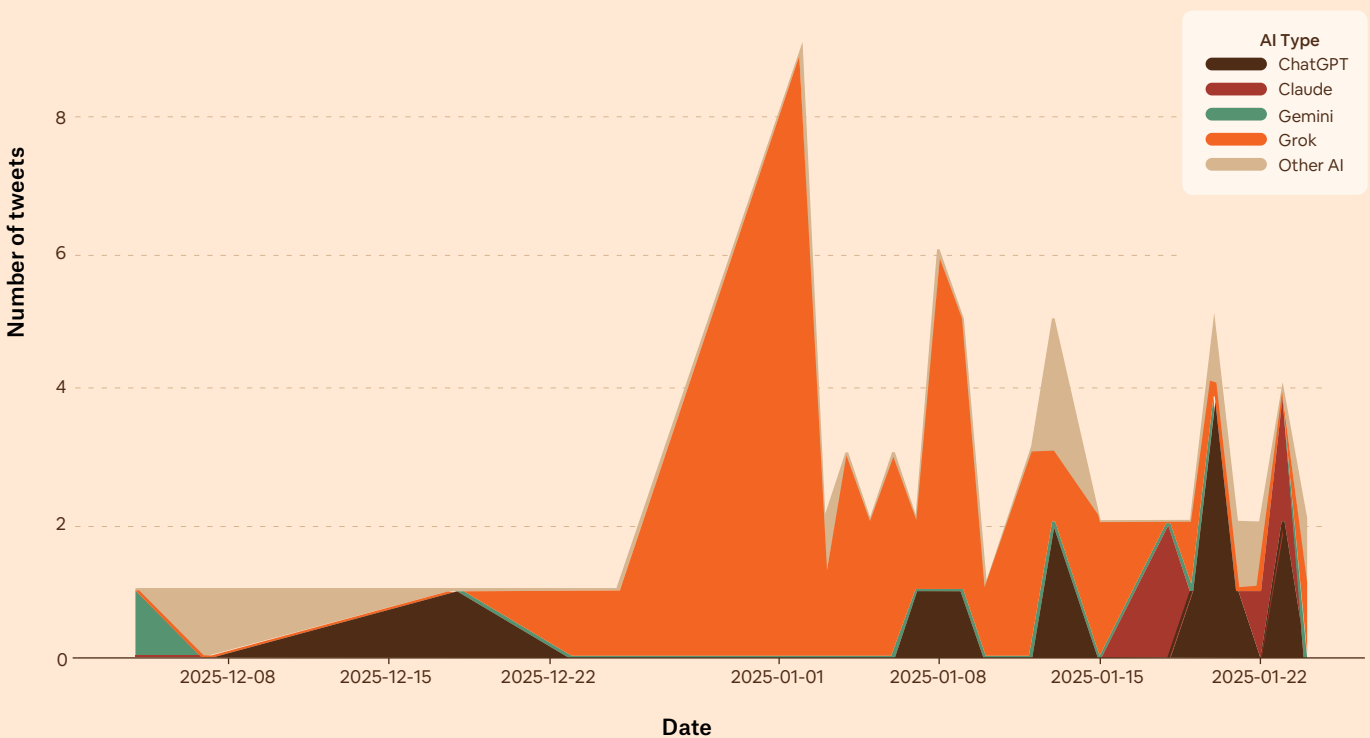
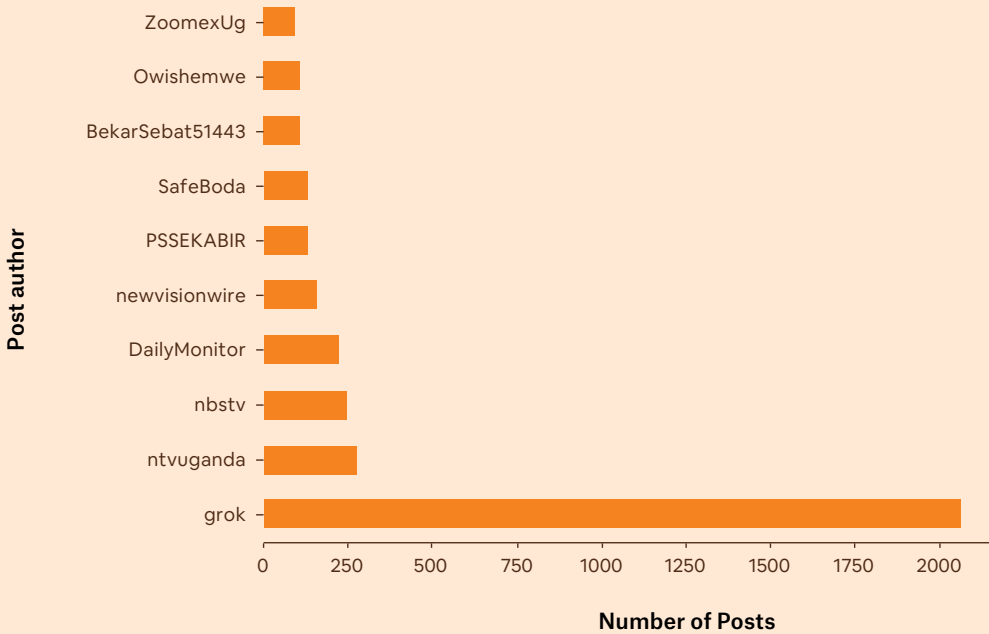


Figure 18: X accounts data post-election



### Top 10 Most Active Pages (By Post Volume)

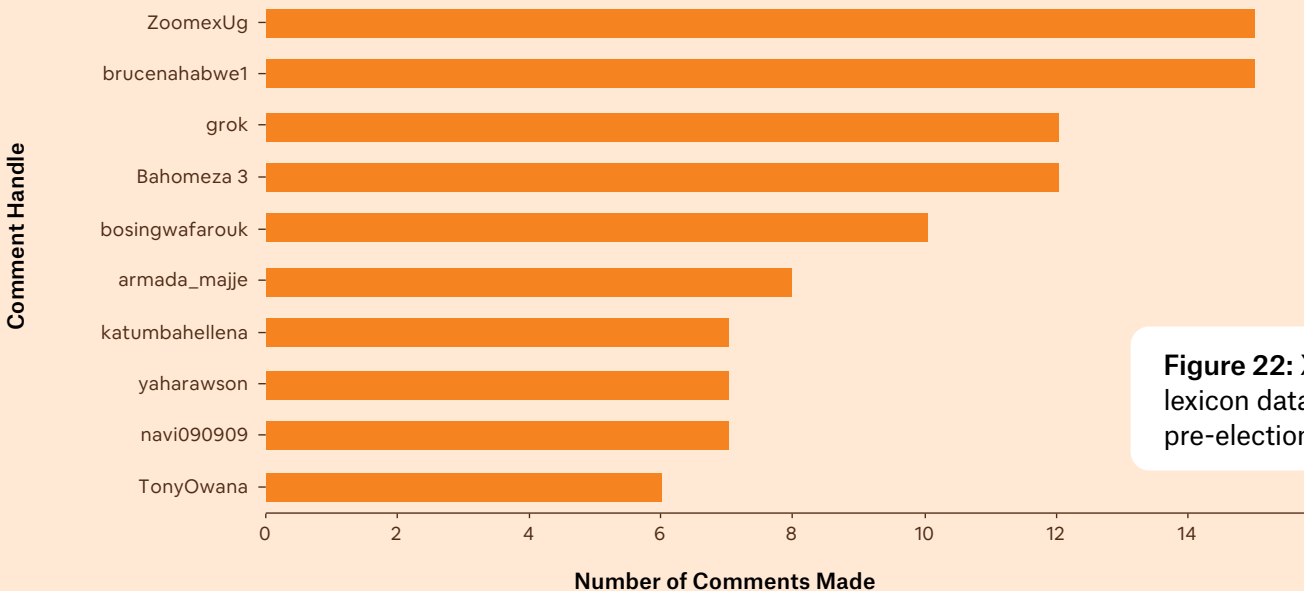


**Figure 21:** X lexicon data post-election

Beyond the incidence of specific AI tools, the data in the graphs above (Figure 20 and 21) reveals Grok’s emergence as a central actor in Uganda’s political discourse on X as it ranks among the top 10 most active post authors, both in the pre- and post-election periods. In the latter dataset, Grok authored over 2000 posts, securing the position of the single most active account,

while it authored over 500 posts before the election, marking its increased engagement over time. This volume is not negligible as it suggests that AI is not simply mediating political talk but is actively contributing to, and potentially steering, the substance of public discourse within Uganda’s networked publics.

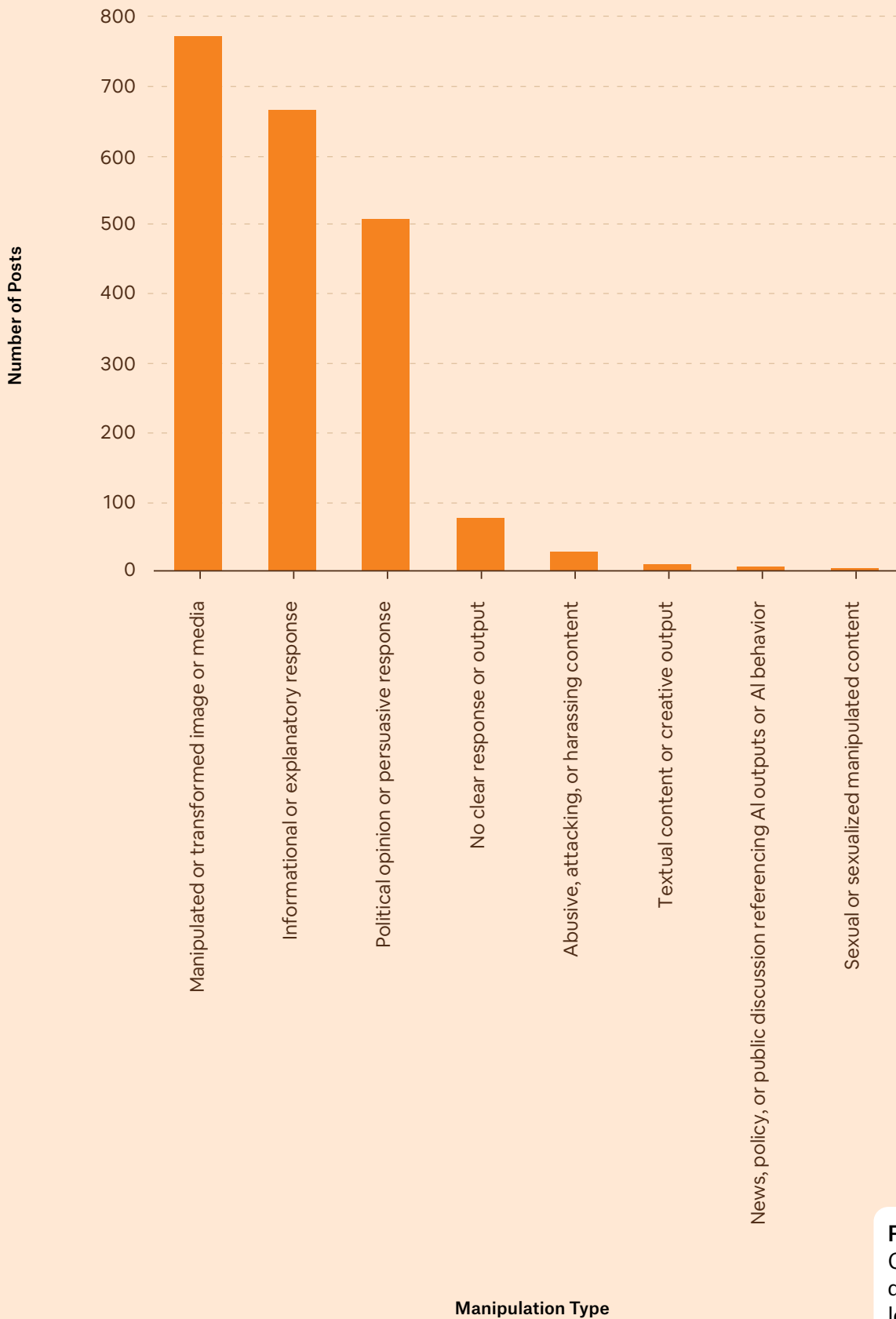
### Top 10 Most Active Commenters



**Figure 22:** X lexicon data pre-election



## Distribution of AI-Assisted Requests



**Figure 24:** Grok posts type distribution - X lexicon data post-election

The usage of AI within Uganda's networked publics in the context of civic engagement shows a distribution of purposes as seen in the graph above (Figure 24). The largest category, comprising nearly 800 posts, involves requests to manipulate or transform images and media for political reasons with informational or explanatory response requests coming second with close to 700 posts. Political opinion or persuasive response generation accounted for the third biggest volume, with close to 500 posts. At the lower end, abusive, attacking and harassing content registered below 50 posts, while sexually manipulated media accounted for less than 50 posts as well. This distribution suggests that within Uganda's networked publics, AI is being deployed primarily for information access and verification as well as media manipulation, with overtly hostile uses remaining marginal. Still, although hostile uses remain statistically marginal, the presence of widespread manipulated media signals risks towards increased growth of malicious content, especially sexualised content and consequently, prevalence of tech-facilitated gender-based violence (TfGBV), requiring sustained attention to this category of AI-generated content.

Away from the quantitative observations documented above, ethnographic observations allowed for a more particular understanding of AI usage across other

platforms, including TikTok, Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp. Generally, while minimal pervasiveness of deepfakes was still observed across these platforms, especially in the form of fabricated video and audio content, this content's intent was more specifically observed as being used to ridicule opponents using sarcasm and humour, often through visibly manipulated videos of politicians and in other instances, as sophisticated attempts to manipulate public opinion. Additionally, the liar's dividend, where political actors claim genuine content is AI-generated, was minimally observed.

Overall, however, the more pressing concern lies not in the prevalence of this fabricated content but in audience perception. While many documented deepfakes are visibly identifiable as such for most users, much of the audience, especially older audiences and those with lower education levels, remains unaware that they are engaging with manipulated content, leaving them vulnerable to undetected manipulation of their political opinions. This, therefore, poses the challenge that even when deceptive AI-generated content may remain statistically marginal, the potential impact on public discourse could be greater, considering audience knowledge on AI and its manifestations.

Lastly, and particularly pertinent to discussions around AI and political discourse, is the wider influence of recommendation algorithms over information environments (Llanso, 2021). By prompting users to continuously explore related content, algorithmic features such as in TikTok's "For You Page" (FYP) can lock individuals into ideological and interest-based echo chambers. This incessant reinforcement of an individual or group's views has significant consequences on political tolerance of divergent views, especially with regard to these algorithms often amplifying bigoted, false, or extreme

viewpoints, which increasingly work to undermine opportunities for pluralist discourse. Even worse, with platforms favouring sensationalist, polarising, and politically controversial content for their commercial ends of sustained user engagement, this has further implications for shaping public opinion negatively. As such, when set alongside the comparatively growing impact of deepfakes observed in Uganda's current context, algorithmic amplification emerges as the more immediate and structurally embedded force shaping political discourse online.

## ➔ Actors influencing political discourse

This section turns to the actors shaping political discourse within Uganda's networked publics, which analysis is done specifically through the lens of political influencers. The focus on political influencers is driven by two observations from this study's earlier findings: first, the low civic engagement that characterises Uganda's digital spaces, and second, the predominance of shared content, i.e., retweets and reposts, as well as reactive engagement, such as liking, over original authorship of content by most people in these spaces. Together, these point to a minority of users who disproportionately shape the contours of political talk online, which makes them critical subjects of inquiry.

Scholarship on political influencers, particularly in the African context, remains nascent, rendering their definitional clarity essential. While influencers are broadly understood as social media users who cultivate followings through perceived expertise and authentic audience relationships in which they leverage their social clout to promote causes ranging from brand advertisements to social justice causes, the political variant of influencers operates in a greyer zone at the intersection of markets and democracy (De Gregorio and Goanta, 2022). Political influencers are hereby thus defined as content creators who endorse political positions, social causes, or candidates, through media they produce and/or share on given social media

platforms. Typically, they do so with the purpose of exerting political influence over audience members, performing allyship for a political or social cause, to access monetary and other gains or combinations thereof (Riedl, Lukito, & Woolley, 2023), and function at the intersection of politics, platforms and influence.

According to the above definition, a diverse array of influencers arises, including politicians who are social media savvy, journalists who opine on different political issues, opinion leaders on various socio-political or economic issues, nonhuman actors such as bots, as well as ordinary citizens whose online storytelling frames others' perspectives. Notably, the last category speaks to the democratising potential of influence on social media platforms, although this ideal is often tempered by continuities of traditional agenda-setting hierarchies in which gendered and other prejudiced patterns of engagement endure, and mainstream advertising logics continue to structure whose voices gain prominence online (Duffy and Meisner, 2023). Additionally, from a platform perspective, these influencers also tend to understand and work around platform dynamics in ways that support maximum reach and amplification of their messages.

Ultimately, these groups of political influencers make the fold of the modern-day opinion leader online, framing discussions, shaping perspectives, and mobilising audiences with their influence. More specifically, political influencers serve audiences across two interlocking functions. First, they provide information access wherein audiences seek them out for analysis, interpretation, and framing of political issues. Secondly, they offer relational aspects to their audiences through a degree of instant conversations which build affective relationships of trust, for example, in the form of remote friendships between them and their followers (Wang, Chan-Olmsted, & Zhou, 2025). This relational dimension is what transforms their engagements into trusted relationships whose impact is followers not only consuming information from them, but even more, making them trusted sources for forming political opinions.

Understanding who these actors are and how they operate is thus foundational to grasping the dynamics of political discourse in Uganda's networked publics.

### Top 10 Most Active Participants by Engagement (TikTok)

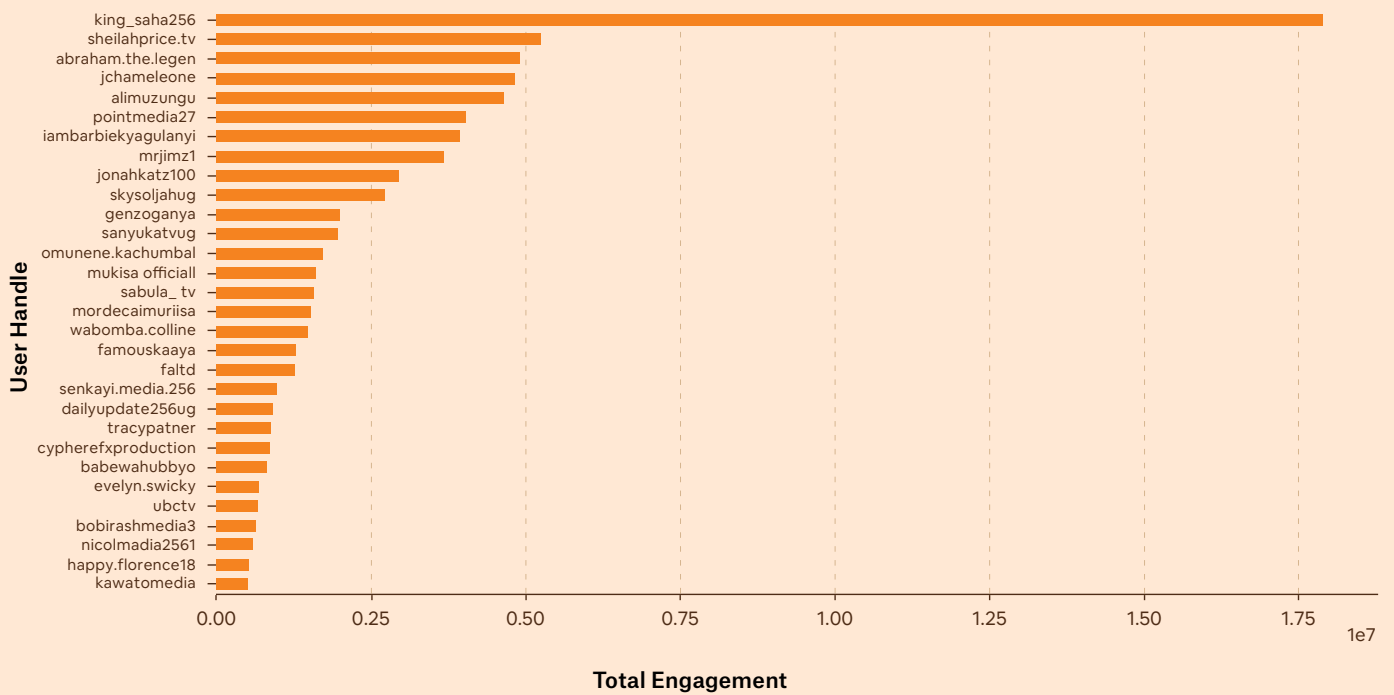


Figure 25: TikTok data

### Top Authors Targeting Elections (by Hashtags)

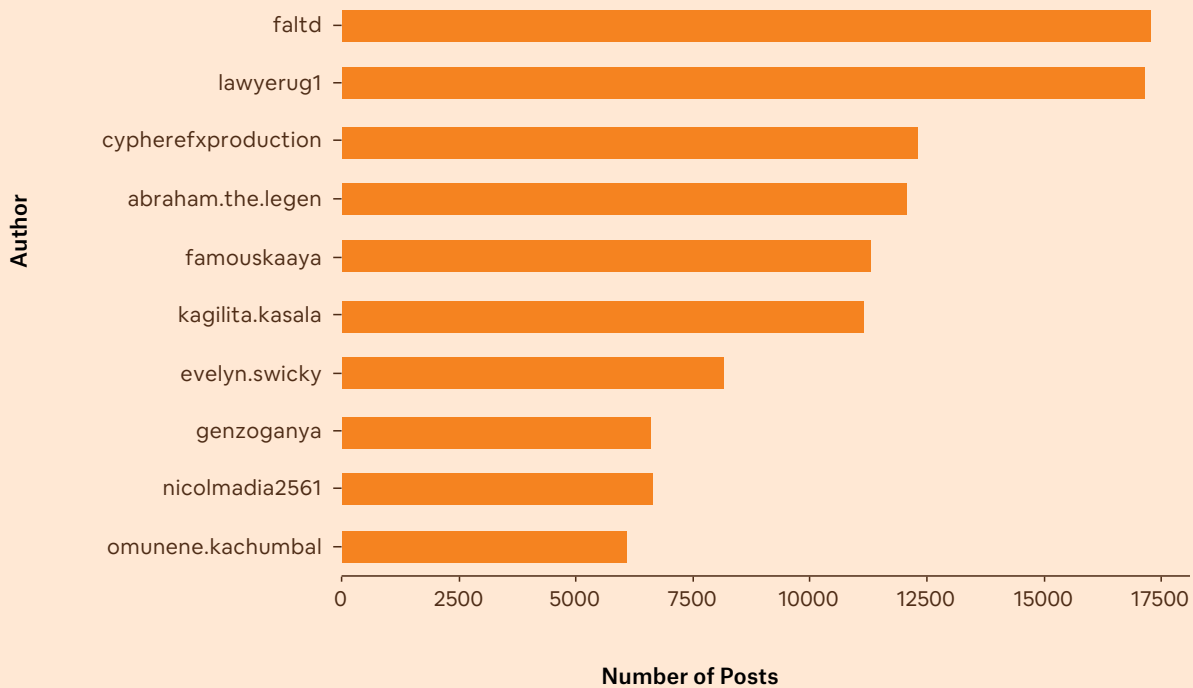


Figure 26: TikTok data

Analysis of the top 20 most active participants by engagement on TikTok (Figure 25 and 26) reveals a distinct composition of political discourse drivers. Citizen media platforms, especially run as para-journalistic spaces by social and political commentators or as partisan affiliates and promoters of particular political positions or candidates, dominate the space. These commentary pages engage primarily in the local dialect, Luganda, accounting for about 12 of the top 20 (60%) and commanding the largest share of political engagement. This study observes that their grassroots orientation, including the use of local parlance and language, resonate strongly with TikTok's mass subscriber base, positioning them as key intermediaries between political developments and public understanding. Following these are popular musicians, comprising 2 of the top 20 (10%), whose cultural cachet translates into significant political engagement when they enter civic

conversations. Ordinary citizens who have organically built substantial followings through political storytelling make up another 5 (25%), while the remaining slots are occupied by local celebrities who command significant engagement as well.

Notably, among the top 10, citizen media remain the majority, reinforcing their centrality in shaping political discourse, which in effect makes them the key political influencers for the TikTok landscape steering analysis, framing debate and shaping political conversations which reach Uganda's largest digital audience. It should also be noted that these citizen media or popular individual pages tend to be partisan in nature, and in essence, acting as party or candidate mouthpieces, which makes them potent propaganda or disinformation agents. This is actively shaped by their para-journalistic stance, which favours subjectivity over factual, objective reporting and analysis.

## Engagement Share: Top 20 Accounts vs Others

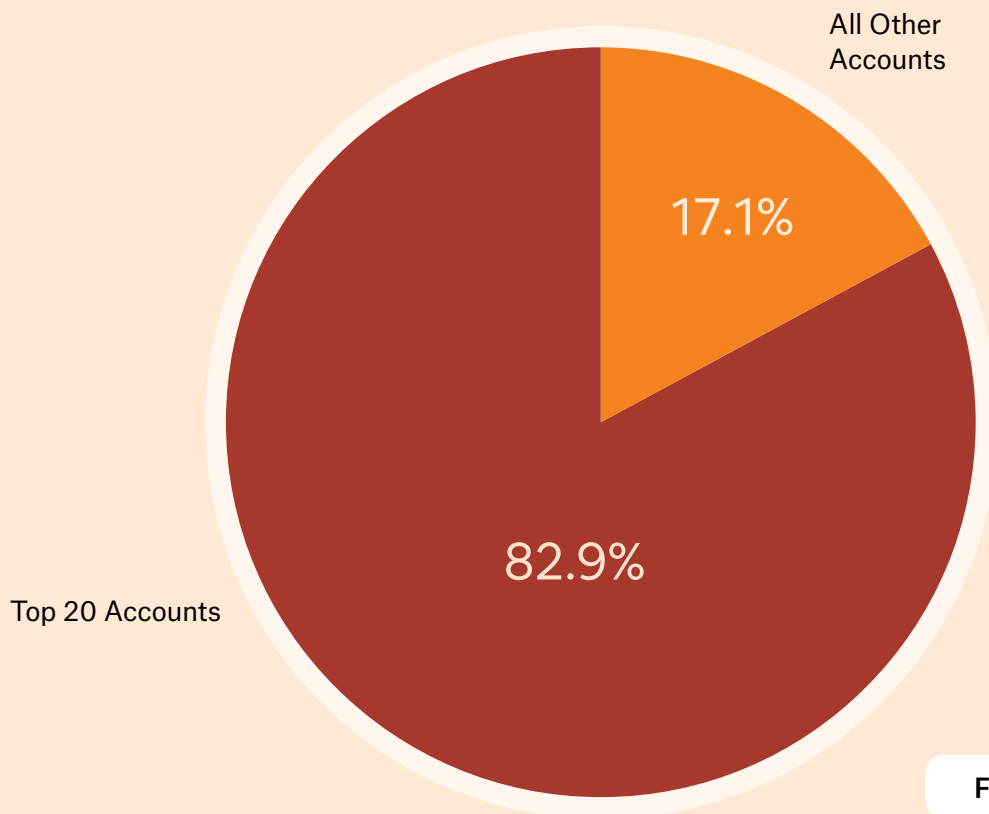


Figure 27: TikTok data

Critically, these top 20 accounts alone account for 82.9% of total political engagement captured in this study's dataset (Figure 27), compared to 17.1% spread across the rest of the accounts. This concentration highlights the reality

that political discourse on TikTok is steered by a small cluster of influential pages and individuals, many of whom are citizen media platforms engaging with millions of citizens at scale.



On Facebook, analysis of the ten most active participants by engagement shows a similar concentration of influence to TikTok in terms of actor category, with changes observed between actor composition in the pre-election and post-election datasets (Figure 28 and 29). Only two actors appear consistently across both periods, suggesting a fluid landscape. Citizen media again dominate, accounting for approximately seven of the top ten slots, ranging from independent bloggers to partisan pages affiliated with political parties or candidates. These party-aligned pages function quite distinctly from general citizen media, with their activity moving beyond information sharing to

active narrative framing in favour of their candidates while simultaneously attacking their political opponents. As such, they promote their candidates, push back on opposition narratives, and shape discourse through content designed to attract supporters and delegitimise rivals. The remaining slots are occupied by individual users who have built organic followings through sustained political commentary, though their presence is marginal within the top tier of engagement on Facebook. Together, these actors, including citizen media and party mouthpieces, function as key political influencers on Facebook, steering political conversation through creative content and partisan positioning.

### Engagement Distribution: Top 10 Authors vs Rest

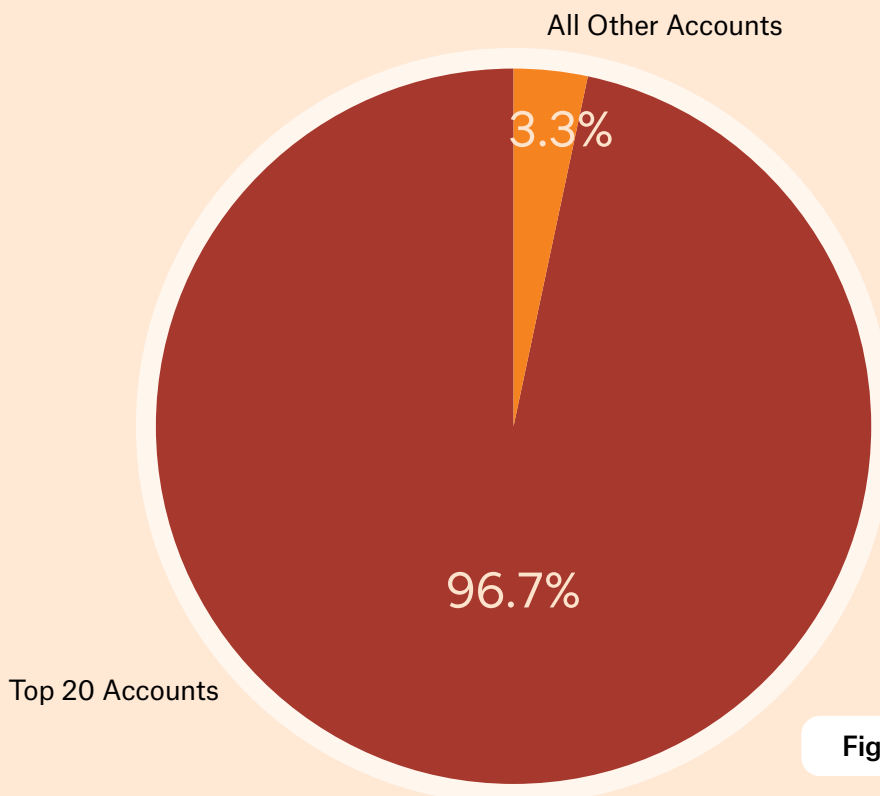


Figure 30: Facebook data



### Top 10 Most Active Pages (By Post Volume)

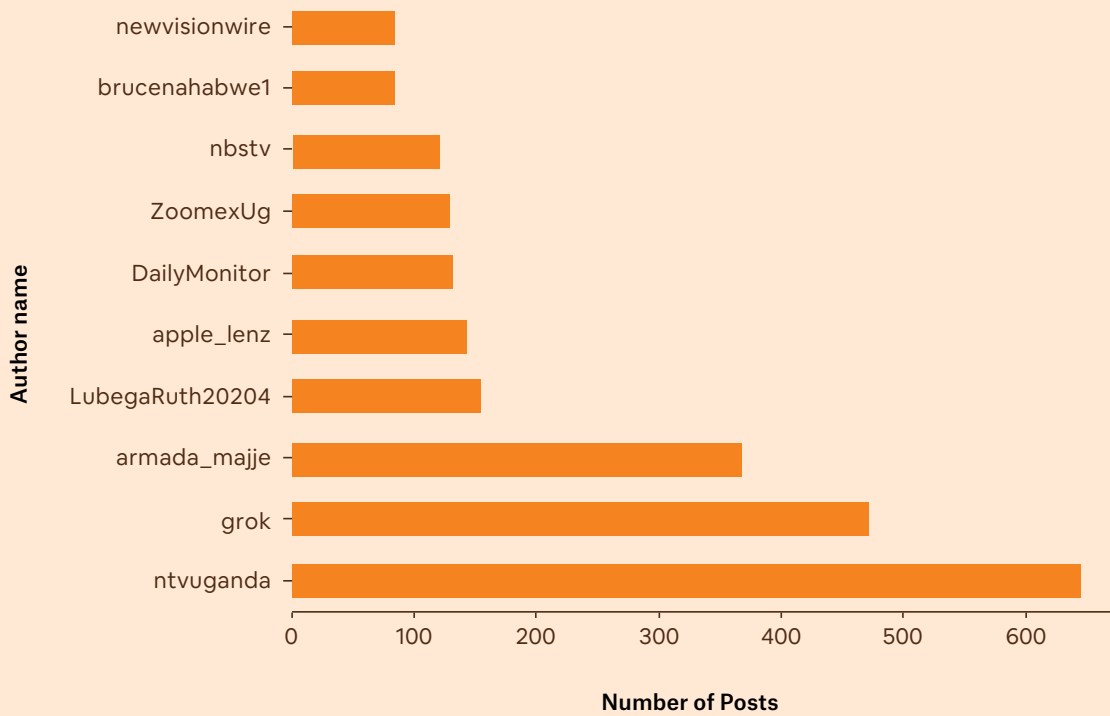


Figure 32: X lexicon data pre-election

### Top 10 Most Active Participants by Engagement (Twitter/X)

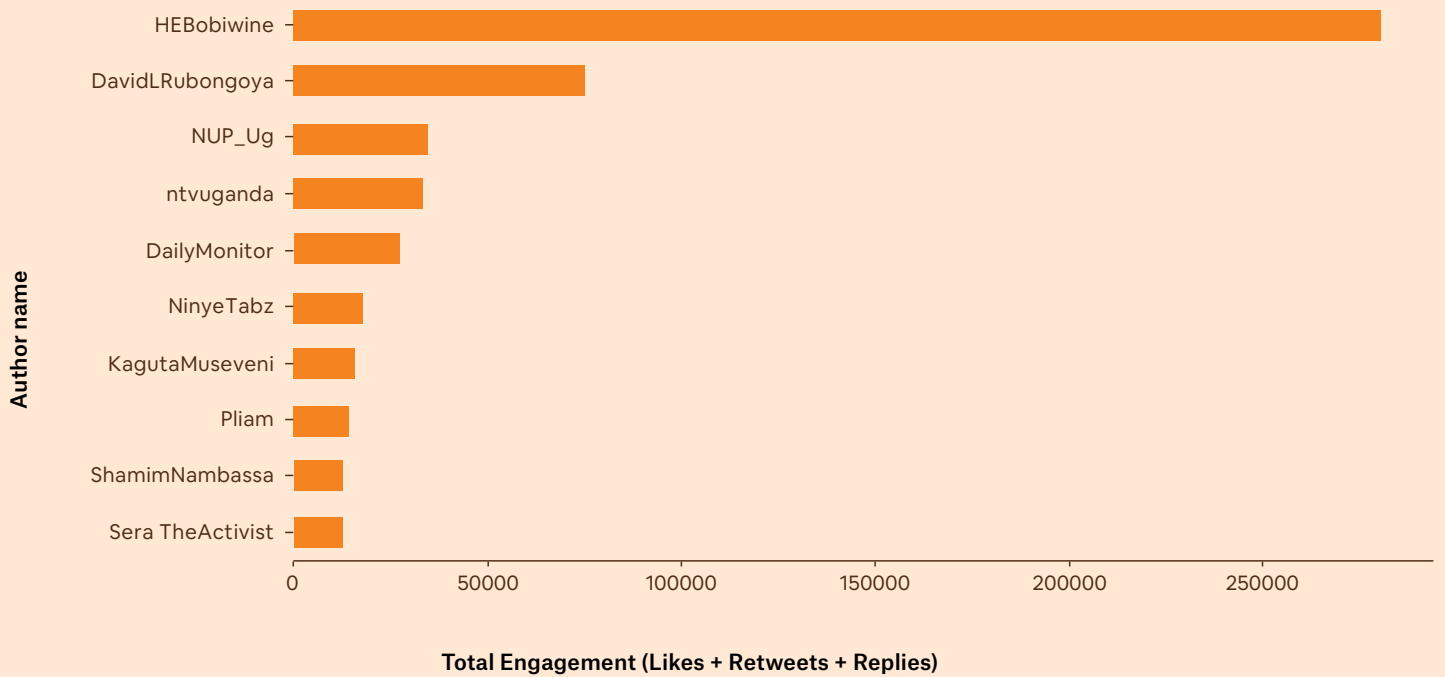


Figure 33: X lexicon data – pre-election

## Top 20 Most Active Pages With Original Posts

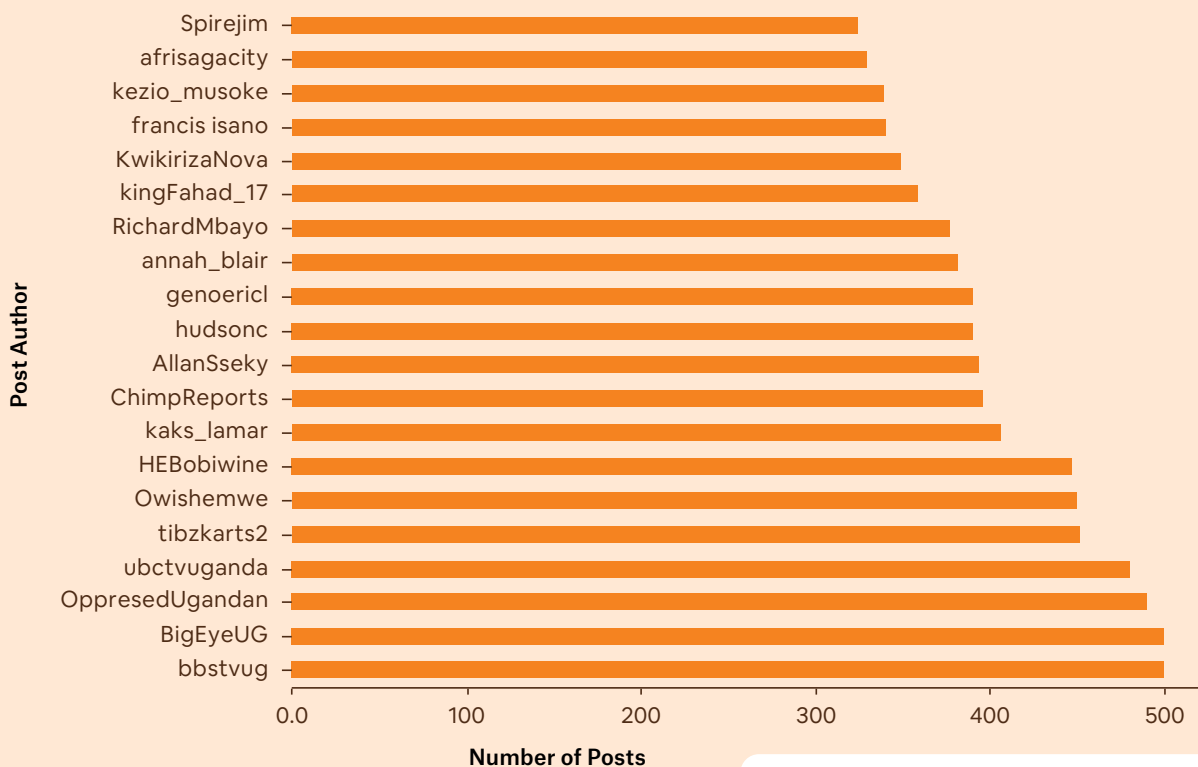


Figure 34: X lexicon data – post-election data

## Top 10 Most Active Participants by Engagement (Twitter/X)

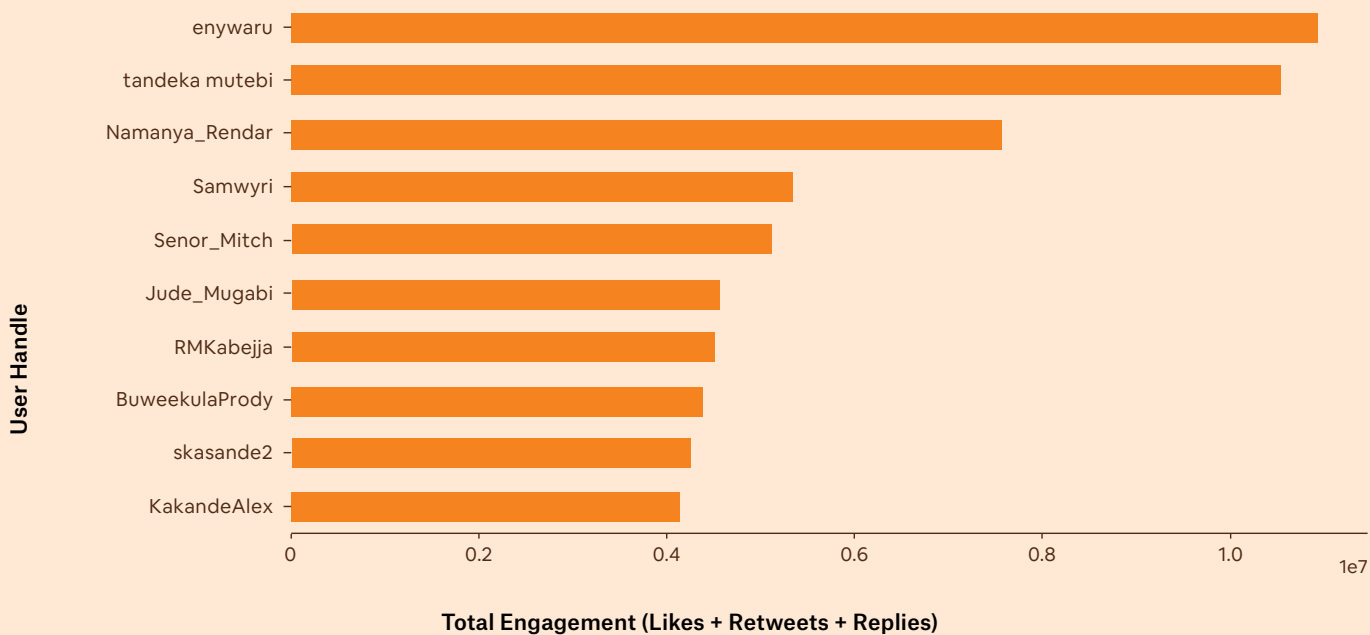
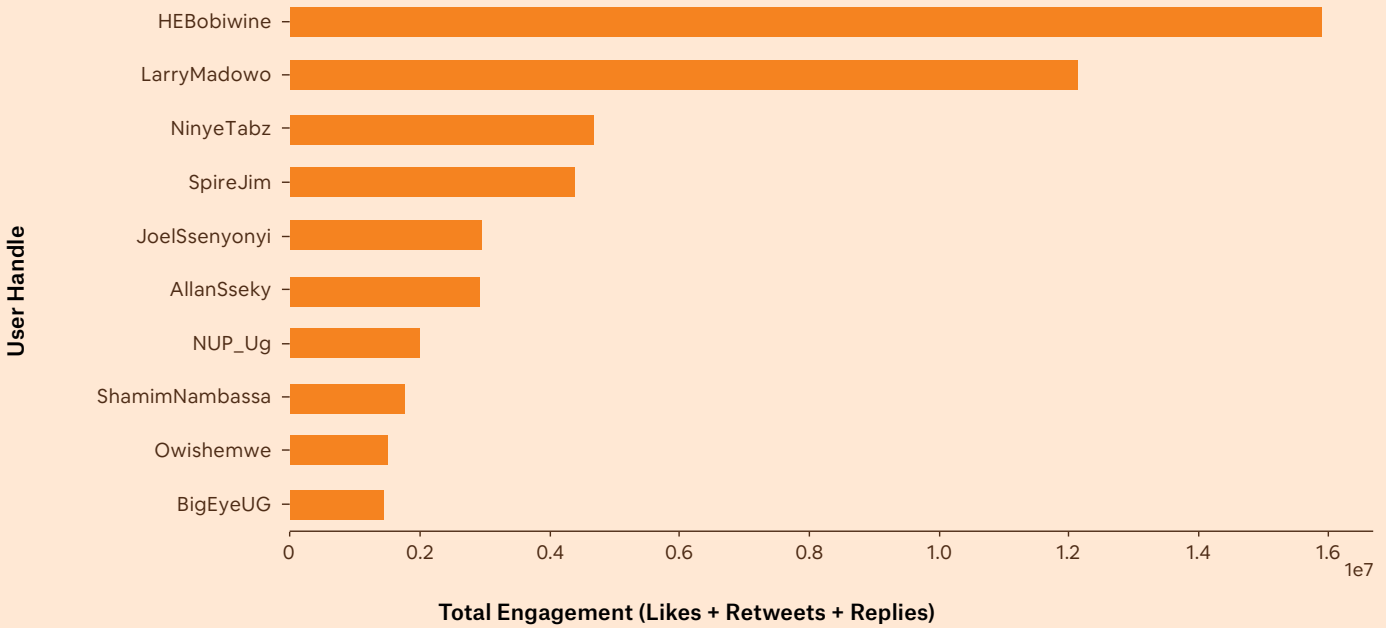


Figure 35: X accounts data – post-election

### Top 10 Most Active Participants by Engagement (Twitter/X)



**Figure 36:** X lexicon data – post-election

Analysis of X exhibits the most dynamic political influencer landscape across the three platforms studied, with variations observed across different data collection approaches and electoral periods. Pre-election account data (Figure 31), i.e., top 20 by engagement, shows a diversity of actors, including four journalists, four lawyers, two politicians, four citizen media and partisan pages, and a majority of citizen commentators, including ordinary Ugandans who have built followings through sustained political analysis and commentary across social, political, and economic issues. Pre-election lexicon data showing top 10 post authors (Figure 32) shifts the picture with media houses dominating content generation, together with Grok emerging as the second most

active account, which points to AI’s growing footprint within the online public discourse fabric. Noticeably, measured by engagement rather than posting activity (Figure 33), political candidates and political party pages take the lead, suggesting that while media produces the most content, candidates and partisan pages drive conversation.

On the other hand, post-election account data of the top 20 original authoring pages (Figure 34), as well as the top 10 participants by engagement (Figure 35), see citizen voices ascend to dominance, likely due to the peak electoral period this data was captured in, followed by a few media houses in the dataset. Minimal bot activity is observed, too, with one user in

this dataset identified as non-human. Post-election lexicon data (Figure 36), however, instead returns to a mix of actor categories, including political candidates, journalists, international actors, political party representatives and spokespersons, as well as a sect of influential citizens, a number of whom are commercial influencers in their daily lives online.

Generally, though, across all datasets, a consistent observation emerges, which is that political discourse on X is shaped by a rotating cast of actors, as shown in the sections above, making it more participatory than the more lopsided models of engagement observed on TikTok and Facebook. As such, deductions can thus be made that the platform hosts a more pluralistic influencer ecology, even as AI actors like Grok grow as critical actors there.

### Engagement Share: Top 20 Accounts vs Others

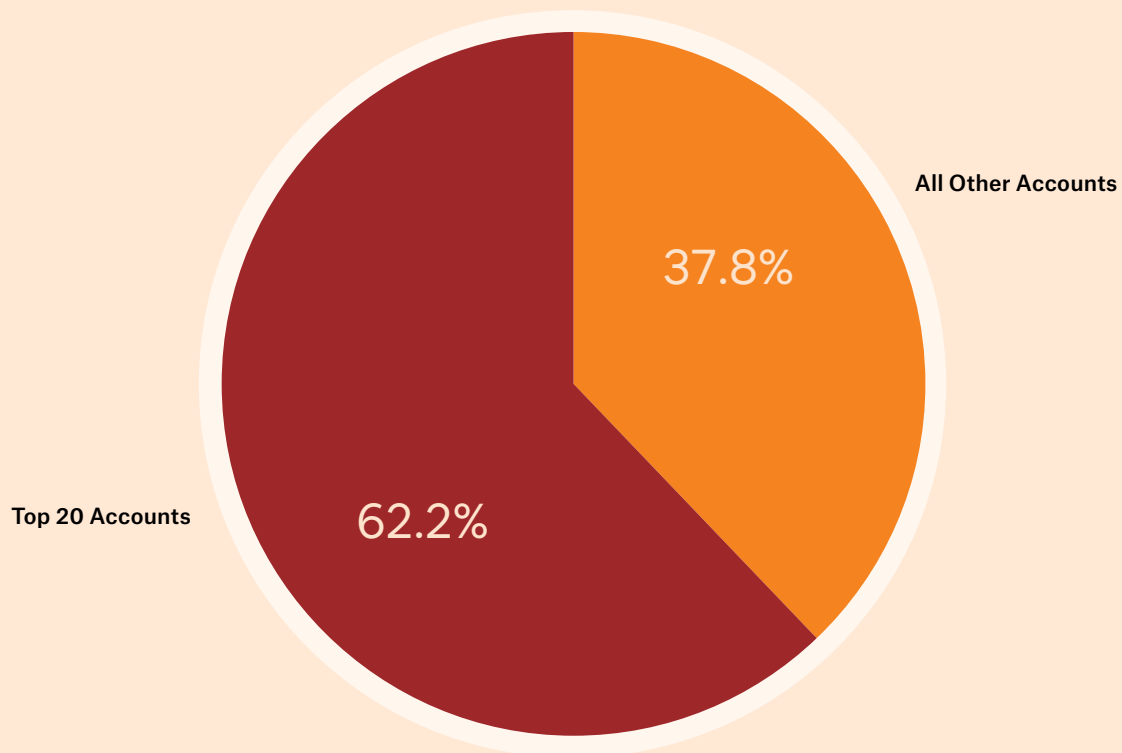


Figure 37: X accounts pre-election data

The more pluralist ecology observed in the sections above is further reflected in the engagement share illustrated in the image above (Figure 37). Taking the example of the X accounts pre-election data, the top 20 accounts account for 62.2% of total engagement, with 37.8% accounting for the remaining accounts mapped. While still concentrated, this shows a notably less skewed distribution compared to Facebook's and TikTok's.

Furthermore, beyond the quantitative patterns, ethnographic observation surfaced a critical dimension which is not immediately visible in engagement metrics, that is, the growing role of money in shaping political influence online. This study observed a marked shift in political advertising expenditure from traditional media, i.e., radio, TV and print, toward online platforms, with political influencers emerging as dominant beneficiaries. These influencers-for-hire tend to operate through embedding political messages in their communications, masked as humour or sarcasm. This growing commercialisation of political influence on social media platforms, therefore, raises fundamental questions about the overall nature of online civic engagement.

More consequentially for understanding the shaping of political discourse online within Uganda's networked publics, political influencing has been observed to

manifest adversely through the emergence of a category hereby termed 'agents of influence'. These political influencers are paid actors who weaponise social media platforms and their influence to drive narratives favourable to various political patrons. These bad-faith actors operate at the nexus of truth, politics, and money, where their engagement is primarily towards deploying information operations such as narrative laundering and attacks on persons or events designed to manipulate public discourse.

Their tactics include coordinated inauthentic behaviour, algorithmic gaming, and strategic distraction intended to flood feeds with content meant to drown out critical conversations or manufacture trending topics in the absence of organic engagement online. Importantly, these operations are increasingly automated as this study observed the high prevalence of bots within Uganda's networked spaces in these influence operations deployed to amplify messages, inflate engagement, and ultimately create illusions of consensus or dissent. A notable example of this behaviour is political party mentions, which in certain instances were observed to have no corresponding engagement, signaling manufactured virality without matching organic discourse following them. This can be seen in the analysis of data on political party mentions in the images below, likely capturing this phenomenon (Figures 38,39,40,41).



### Share of Voice: Mentions per Party

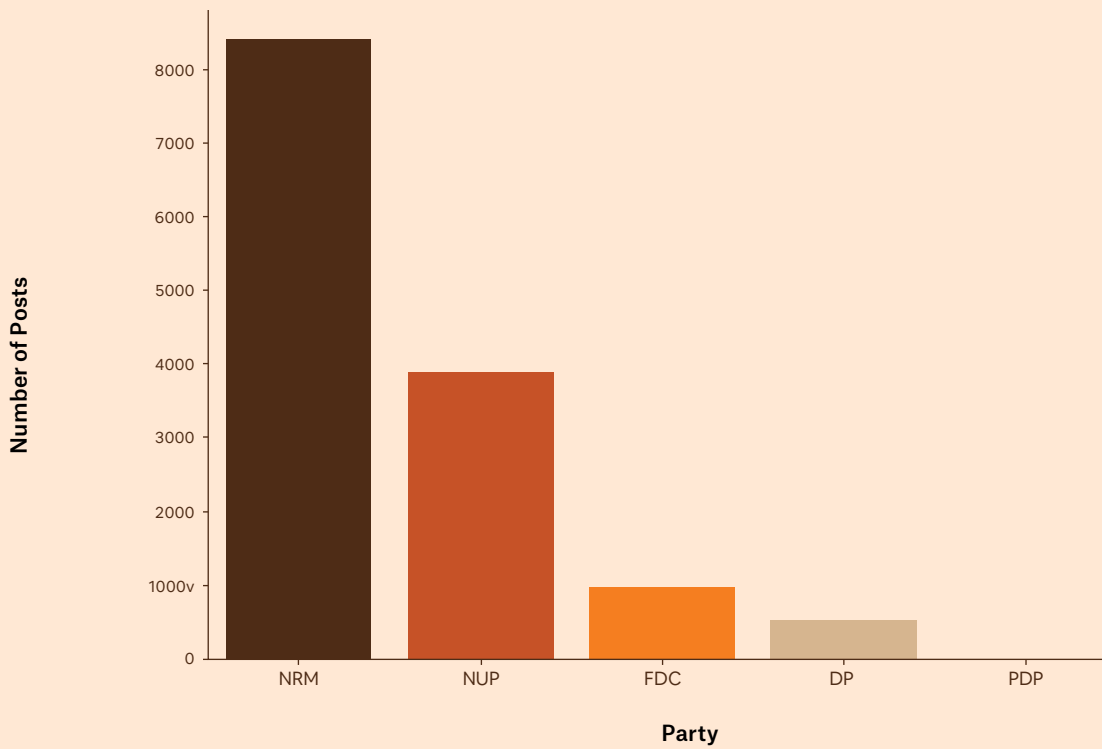


Figure 40: X accounts pre-election data

### Impact: Average Engagement per Post

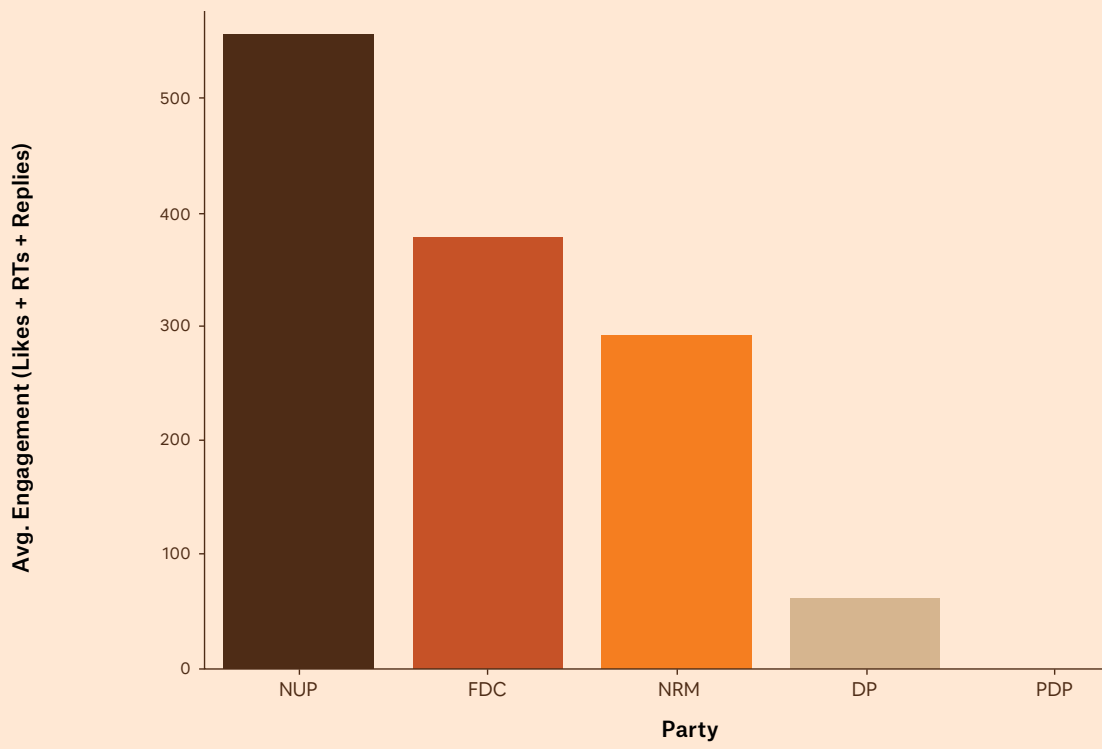
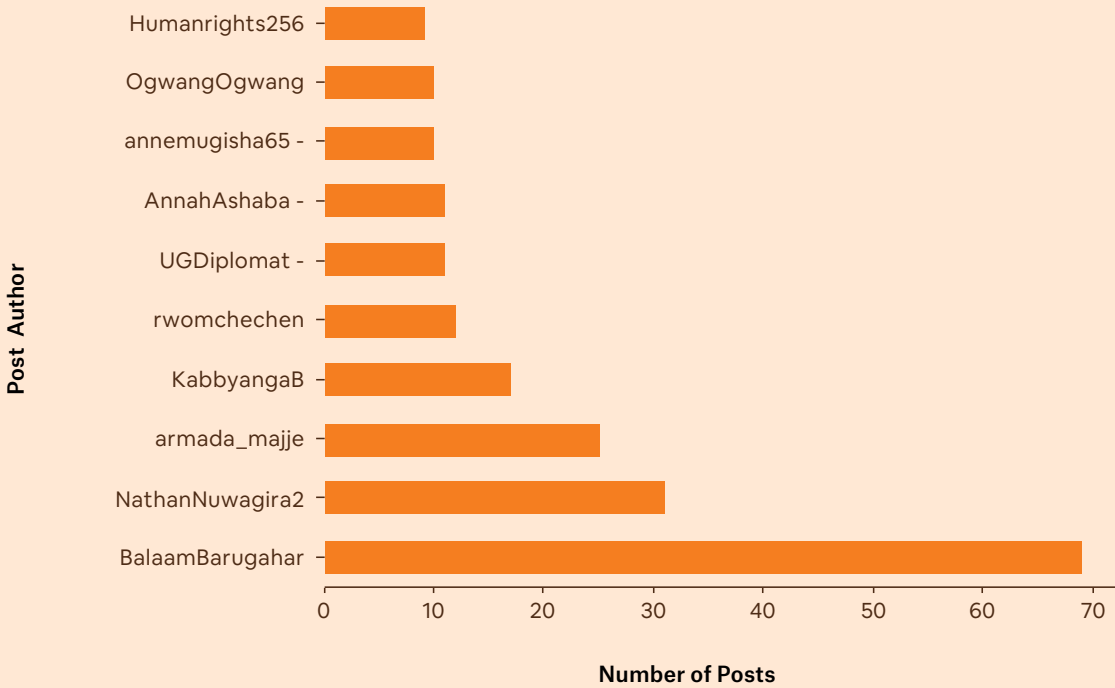


Figure 41: X accounts pre-election data



### Top 10 Authors mentioning MK the most



**Figure 42:** Top authors mentioning MK

Finally, considering the graph above, it should be noted that influence operations happen in parallel to authentic engagement. Specifically, within the top 10 authors mentioning General MK, only three of them were identified as part of the coordinated information campaigns around his account. This also points to the fact that inauthentic

behaviour is easily obscured by the genuine scale of engagement around macro accounts like MK's with over 1.2 million followers, as posts from such an account routinely reach millions of people, making coordinated accounts difficult to distinguish from organic respondents within the broader noise.

### ➔ Stories and narratives which framed public discourse

Beyond the actors driving political discourse lie the narratives themselves. This constitutes the ideas, frames, and stories that captured public attention and shaped online conversation throughout the electoral period. Analysing the most viral content across X and TikTok (in

Annex) reveals distinct patterns in what information circulates widely and why. On TikTok, celebrity endorsements, especially in the form of performances mobilising for particular candidates, as well as emotive content capturing some candidates' lives, dominated the top 10









Finally, and of critical importance to the discussion on narratives shaping public discourse, is the issue of recurring detrimental narratives within the documented political discourse, which bears real potential for social division and intolerance in public attitudes towards certain groups or individuals arising from a highly polarised “us vs them” attitude. Central among these was the framing of civil society and activism itself with frames such as “activists for pay”, “merchants of outrage,” “gig activists,” and so on, which were employed to delegitimise local governance and human rights actors, accusing them of foreign influence and funding specifically to plot “colour revolutions” on behalf of Western interests. This narrative found material expression in the suspension of several democracy-focused NGOs ahead of the election, citing their work as a threat to national security.

Equally pervasive was the deployment of ethnic heuristics, such as the Banyarwanda anti-settler sentiments, which frame several members of the ruling elite as a “foreign” ethnic community in expressing dissatisfaction with them. Other cross-tribal

narratives were also observed, especially surrounding the Baganda, Banyankole and Acholi communities, many of which utilise a historical lens to explain modern-day happenings. These ethnic narratives were observed to sow significant inflammatory discourse among audiences. On the other hand, politicians tended to leverage anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric as a marker of ‘anti-imperialist’ credibility, accusing opponents of selling out to Western values. Meanwhile, peri-urban youth, especially those already navigating constrained economic realities, were routinely labelled “hooligans” or “violent,” a discursive framing that preceded and justified state crackdowns on young protesters.

Ultimately, these narratives reveal how political discourse in Uganda’s networked publics is not merely descriptive but is actually operative in the delegitimation, othering, and disciplining of groups and individuals, highlighting real-world consequences of political discourse beyond the screen.

## ➔ The regulatory landscape shaping public discourse

Lastly, this subtheme examines another critical element shaping public discourse within Uganda's networked publics, i.e., the country's regulatory landscape. This environment, underpinned by fundamental tensions between constitutional guarantees of participatory governance and a growing arsenal of instruments that clamp down on citizen expression, bears significant impacts on how Ugandans ultimately engage on political issues online.

The Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act 2022 is the most consequential of these expression-curtailling instruments. Its vaguely defined offences, such as the "misuse of social media," carrying up to five years' imprisonment, as well as expansively drafted hate speech provisions with highly punitive consequences, such as a ten-year public office ban for convicts, renders great precarity upon citizen engagement. Following the imprisonment of a number of individuals under this Act in the 2025/26 election window alone (CIPESA, 2025), it is no wonder that citizens have either withdrawn from voicing their positions or found creative ways to engage on them, such as through the coded language explained in earlier sections, which overall has contributed to the minimal citizen engagement observed online.

This retreat from active political participation online, prompted by criminal laws regulating expression, is precisely the dynamic international human rights standards caution against (UNHRC, 2018) since such laws ultimately muffle citizen voices, which is a precondition for functional democracy. Uganda's Constitutional Court has previously recognized this danger as well, striking down similarly vague provisions in *Andrew Karamagi & Anor v Attorney General (2022)*. Still, broad offences persist, and prosecutions of activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens continue, but so are legal pushbacks to protect the citizen liberties affected by this law such as the standing challenge of the law in the Constitutional Court (*Human Rights Network for Journalists and 13 others V Attorney General Constitutional Petition No. 37 of 2022*) whose judgment on the constitutionality of the above provisions awaits.

Additionally, regulatory restriction of public discourse has been enabled by direct infrastructural intervention, particularly through internet shutdowns. The January 2026 five-day total internet shutdown imposed across the election week, once again, as in the previous elections, represents one of the most

extreme forms of interference in public discourse, effectively decapitating citizen engagement at the connectivity level. Unlike content moderation regulations which distinguish, even vaguely, acceptable from unacceptable speech, internet shutdowns make no distinctions because they are applied as blanket measures with impacts on almost everyone.

Globally, Access Now's #KeepItOn coalition has documented record-high numbers of internet shutdowns driven by political instability and state efforts to curtail dissent. The practice of throttling the internet and total internet shutdowns, often justified under the pretext of national security interests, is thus not exceptional to Uganda and can be traced across Africa and other regions. While harmful expression and its spread are legitimate concerns during electoral periods, taking high-handed measures falls short of a democratic, human rights-based approach. Very instructive in this discussion are the principles and guidelines for the use of social media in elections in Africa by the Association of African Election Authorities. The document's human rights position on the subject makes it very critical as it addresses much of the obscurity surrounding social media regulation in Africa by encouraging Electoral

Management Bodies (EMBs) to adopt clear, comprehensive plans for the responsible use of social media during electoral periods. This allows for a systemic as opposed to ad hoc approach to dealing with challenges that may arise.

More central to regulatory approaches which are respectful of human rights is the clarity on the parameters for restriction of enjoyment of fundamental rights, which follows the 3-part test under international law, including that the action be prescribed in the law, it serves a legitimate aim, and is necessary and proportionate, whereby absence of correspondence to these parameters deems any such action 'arbitrary'. The broad pronouncements of threats to national security (Internet Society Pulse, 2026) by the Communications Regulator, UCC, which were anticipated to emanate from social media largely lack the full force of these three parameters and is thus, arbitrary in nature and infringed on rights such as expression, access to information, freedom of association and the right to participate in the conduct of public affairs among other rights. To this end, digital democracy activists have filed a case (Aboneka, Amumpaire V UCC and others, 2026) at the High Court challenging the internet shutdown on the account of violation of human rights.

Moreover, with repetitive internet shutdowns, citizens live in a state of precarity as this direct interruption in their digital lives becomes the norm over the years, particularly in moments of heightened political stakes, rendering the digital public sphere a thing of state control and not the earlier imagined democratised space for citizen expression and access to information. For instance, besides citizens decrying this measure, oversight bodies such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights have found that this measure violates Article 9 of the African Charter. However, little is observable in terms of how such blanket internet shutdowns may be contained in the future.

The effect of this precarity on discourse is, therefore, that political engagement becomes episodic rather than sustained, and citizens learn that online engagement may be arbitrarily interrupted, discouraging the development of ongoing deliberative practices and, increasingly, prompting citizens to consider alternative digital communication channels which are out of state reach, as in the case of Bitchat, which was earlier cited.

While outside the scope of this study, the internet shutdown's coinciding with mobile money restrictions and the impeding of the functioning of critical data exchange platforms raises questions about the sustainability of the Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) scheme in the Ugandan context, specifically considering questions of the cyber resilience of these critical systems during heightened political periods. Whose interests come to the fore in making such decisions around systems citizens literally depend on for their day-to-day living? The UNGA approved norms on responsible state conduct in cyberspace call on states to ensure they respect UNHRC resolutions on human rights in the digital age. However, this is a more foundational conversation to be had as the nation's digitisation work is further embedded across the board, particularly as a growing digital society and economy. This urgently needed interrogation casts the digital democracy conversation as touching on foundational aspects of our broader digitisation agendas outside of civic engagement alone.



05



# Recommendations

Uganda needs to broadly review its regulatory philosophy surrounding fundamental digital rights such as freedom of speech and expression. The current philosophy, which treats online civic engagement as a 'threat' to be contained, has done more harm in deterring the masses from their core civic duties, as observed in the minimal civic engagement shaped by these punitive laws and instruments on the whole. Consequently, as it stands, there is an urgent need to reform

the laws which infringe on fundamental freedoms around online expression, specifically, the now largely nullified Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act 2022 (CIPESA,2026), such that it aligns with the country's commitment to those freedoms. Advocacy by different democracy and digital rights actors supporting ongoing constitutional petitions and engaging in the broader shaping of a more supportive digital rights framework for the country would advance this goal.

Similarly, there is a need to prioritise the development and implementation of rights-respecting social media guidelines for electoral periods. To move away from the arbitrary nature of the ad hoc internet shutdowns and social media restrictions which undermine democratic processes, Uganda should adopt clear, comprehensive plans for the responsible use of social media during elections, following established African regional and global principles that favour transparency over blanket censorship. Here, the African Electoral Authorities Principles and Guidelines, among other similar frameworks, are a good starting point for embedding transparency and constitutionality in social media regulations during electoral periods.

The country also ought to put in place meaningful oversight mechanisms of algorithmic and AI systems largely underpinned by a multistakeholder dialogue approach. With Grok emerging as a central actor in X-based political discourse, there is a need for greater transparency and accountability around how these systems function in the Ugandan context. Similar to this growing centrality of AI in public discourse is the recommendation algorithms which opaquely shape discourse without any meaningful oversight while bearing serious consequences for societal cohesion. Hereby, platform companies

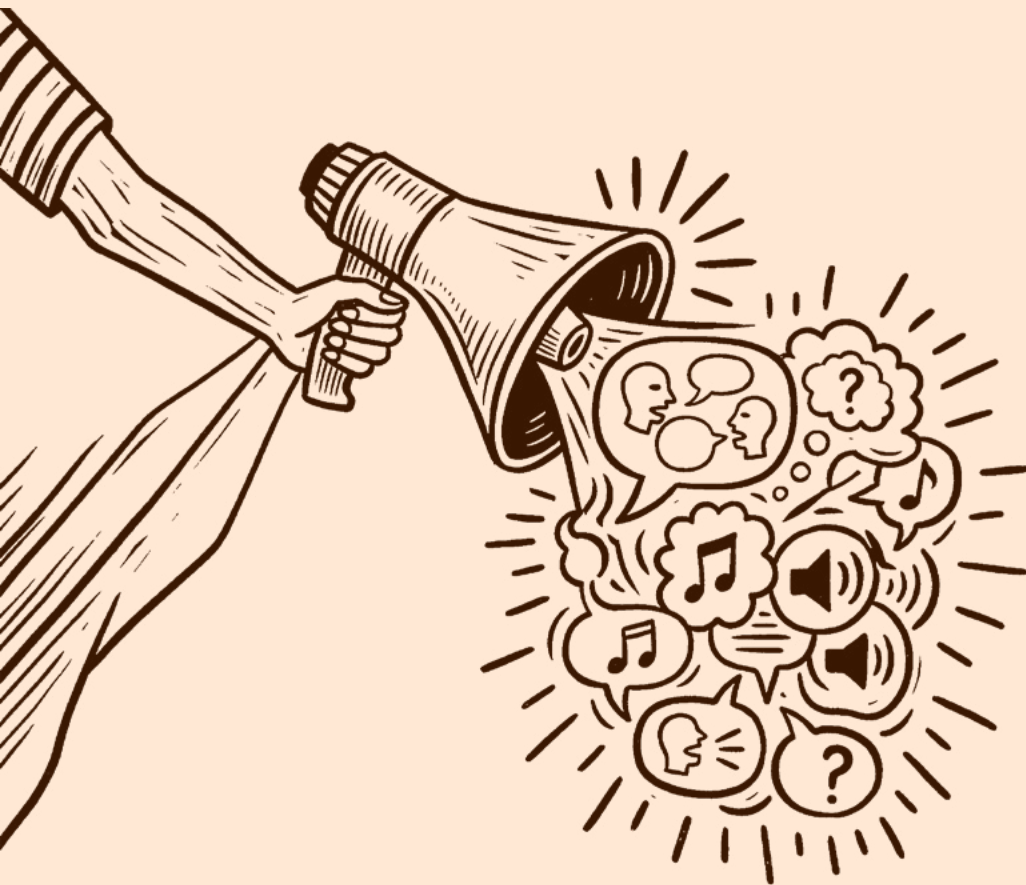
should be engaged, for example to provide country-specific data, especially in the African context, where access to much of this data necessary for public interest has been revoked, as well as actors like civil society actively developing monitoring capacity to track algorithmic impacts on democratic discourse. A multistakeholder, dialogue effort involving platforms, regulators, researchers, civil society and the data science community, among other actors, is encouraged to practically guide the development of context-appropriate guidelines for algorithmic transparency and AI governance.

More generally, there is a need to invest in digital literacy and critical AI awareness to support a more robust e-democracy in the country. Given the low civic participation to the predominance of spectatorial consumption and the growing presence of AI-generated content, democracy practitioners ought to prioritize targeted digital literacy programs focused on helping citizens, especially the old, youth and less educated, to understand and know how to navigate AI-manipulated content but also to understand how recommendation algorithms shape their information environments. Civic education will consequently be very important for getting this information across in as many formats and media as possible.

Further research will also be needed to understand the usage of alternative social media platforms such as Telegram and their impact on democratic discourse and citizen engagement generally. More research is also needed towards understanding broader public attitudes towards electoral technology, as these citizen views could be useful in designing an implementation which captures citizen fears and hopes.

Finally, while it was outside the scope of this study, it will be helpful to further investigate the intersections between

digital democracy and digital public infrastructure as demonstrated in the fragilities imposed by periods deemed sensitive, such as electoral periods, on these foundational digital infrastructures. More consequentially, understanding the resilience of these cyber systems during such periods would be helpful in broadly securing sustainable digital development of our society and economies across countries in Africa and other politically volatile regions.







# Conclusion

In closing, this study mapped Uganda's 2025/26 electoral terrain on X, TikTok and other platforms, revealing a multifaceted social media landscape comprising both elements of progress or resilience in Ugandan's engagement in these platforms but also painting a broad picture of the several retrogressive and curtailing factors to engagement, both contextual and platform innate. From the shadow lexicon which steers much of the political online engagement to the algorithms,

hashtag publics and political influencers shaping narratives and agendas, this study indeed shows the fluid, influential and potent capacity of social media in shaping democratic discourse, albeit operating within a throttled environment. The lingering gap in democratic discourse online, translating into material democratic realities, stands tall here in seeking to understand the impact of this space thus far.

Therefore, this study's observations and recommendations hold significant implications for countries across Africa and much of the global south that exist between aspirations for e-democracy and various realities of digital control, whether by their governments or platform architectures and economies themselves,

which often go hand in hand. This study's granular understanding will be of support in navigating their own unique, although similar, landscapes, and hopefully steer critical dialogue and efforts to jointly negotiate what their national e-democratic priorities are within this globalised, internet landscape.



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# Annex

## 1 Most viral content recorded

X

<https://x.com/HEBobiwine/status/2012774154622144785>

<https://x.com/LarryMadowo/status/2000889204067217479>

<https://x.com/edwinsifuna/status/2011291504375980067>

<https://x.com/statsglobe/status/2012721621912670401>

<https://x.com/HEBobiwine/status/2012148305514385771>

<https://x.com/LarryMadowo/status/2003168923651571734>

<https://x.com/LarryMadowo/status/2012859149072134498>

<https://x.com/georgediano/status/2012538545303392752>

<https://x.com/PaulKagame/status/2013022775435231233>

<https://x.com/UnSubtleDesi/status/1998303343983145470>

The above table is a compilation of the most viral posts recorded across X and TikTok. The X tweets are derived from the lexicon data post-election, while the TikTok data covers the pre-election period.

## TikTok

<https://www.tiktok.com/@skysoljahug/video/7576929067027451148>

<https://www.tiktok.com/@jchameleone/video/7535987839859707142>

<https://www.tiktok.com/@iambarbiekyagulanyi/video/7559302269716548894>

<https://www.tiktok.com/@jchameleone/video/7529828913552428293>

[https://www.tiktok.com/@king\\_saha256/video/7564088466464705804](https://www.tiktok.com/@king_saha256/video/7564088466464705804)

[https://www.tiktok.com/@sabula\\_tv\\_official/video/7576317413667507467](https://www.tiktok.com/@sabula_tv_official/video/7576317413667507467)

<https://www.tiktok.com/@iambarbiekyagulanyi/video/7523851986710678815>

[https://www.tiktok.com/@king\\_saha256/video/7541734115507195192](https://www.tiktok.com/@king_saha256/video/7541734115507195192)

<https://www.tiktok.com/@babewahubby0/video/7576935714080771384>

[https://www.tiktok.com/@king\\_saha256/video/7558079578657393931](https://www.tiktok.com/@king_saha256/video/7558079578657393931)

## 2 Ethnography notebook

### Ethnographer's Notebook | Culture\_of\_Elections | House of Seshat

<b>Researcher Name:</b>	
<b>Week No.</b> <i>e.g. #1</i>	
<b>Week of (Dates):</b> <i>e.g. Saturday, 15 Nov – Friday, 21 Nov 2025</i>	
<b>Date Submitted:</b> <i>e.g. Friday, 21 Nov 2025 (by midday)</i>	
<b>Platform(s) Observed:</b> <i>e.g. X (Twitter), TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, Radio, TV</i>	

#### Instructions on How to Fill in the Weekly Ethnographic Report Template:

- Each report covers the period Saturday morning to Friday by 11:59 pm of the following week.
- Submit your completed report by Friday midday each week.
- The most recent week's report should always appear at the top of your document (Copy and paste new table at the top).
- There's no word limit, but aim for thoughtful and analytical reflections, depth and context are more important than length.
- Include screenshots, hyperlinks, or artefacts to support your observations.
- Note how themes and conversations move between online and mainstream media spaces.
- There is no right or wrong analysis, focus on your interpretations and key highlights while using your judgment, it should show depth, reasoning, and observation.
- Focus on patterns, tone, influence, and meaning rather than counting posts or mentions.
- These reports will form the basis for the weekly team check-in on Mondays.

**Note:** *This Notebook is a guide here to help you structure your weekly analysis, but it shouldn't limit the way you think or observe. Use the sections to organise your reflections so we're able to capture the full picture of what you're seeing both online and offline (events and mainstream media and blogs). You can start with any section you prefer, as long as you complete all of them for each reporting week.*

Section: Guiding Questions / Prompts	Researcher's Detailed Notes
<p><b>1. Focus Theme(s):</b> What were the key themes or narratives observed this week?</p>	
<p><b>2. Key Observations and Your interpretation of said observations:</b> What stood out in online discourse this week; identify patterns, shifts, or recurring language; interpret what these signals reveal about political or civic engagement; note the key terms anchoring these conversations; specify when and how constitutional provisions, electoral laws, guidelines, or official directives are referenced; map how these discussions reflect or distort broader democratic processes.</p>	
<p><b>3. Representative Artefacts:</b> Include filenames, screenshots, or links to key posts, videos, or articles as supporting evidence.</p>	
<p><b>4. Movement Across Media:</b> How did themes move between platforms and mainstream media and vice versa (e.g., radio, TV, newspapers)? Explore shifts or amplification.</p>	
<p><b>5. Use of AI or Manipulated Media:</b> Record any observed use of generative AI, deepfakes, or algorithm-driven amplification.</p>	
<p><b>6. At-Risk Journalists or Actors:</b> Identify any journalists, activists, civic organizations or public figures engaging with these themes who might be exposed or at risk.</p>	

### 3 Acknowledgements

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## Workshop Participants:

No.	Name	Affiliation
1	<b>Bernard Olupot</b>	Influencer, Blogger & Radio host
2	<b>Calvin Rwatooro</b>	International Relations Expert
3	<b>Darren Akoragye</b>	Visual Artist
4	<b>David Muwonge</b>	Uganda Media Centre
5	<b>David Joseph kasule</b>	Content creator
6	<b>Edna Ninsiima</b>	Communication Expert
7	<b>Emmy Eokwir</b>	Founder, Centre for Multilateral Affairs (CfMA)
8	<b>Eshban Kwesiga</b>	The Global Fund for Community Foundation
9	<b>Ibrahim Waiswa Batambuze</b>	The Digital Impact Alliance
10	<b>Isabella Pedun</b>	Lawyer
11	<b>Joseph Tahinduka</b>	Policy Analysis at CEPA
12	<b>Juliet Nanfuka</b>	CIPESA
13	<b>Karagwa Rebecca</b>	Lawyer
14	<b>Maria Alesi</b>	The Fund for Global Human Rights
15	<b>Maureen Andinda</b>	The Young Feminist Fund
16	<b>Michael Aboneka</b>	Partner at Thomas & Michael Advocates
17	<b>Rashid kisejjere</b>	Data scientist and software developer
18	<b>Raymond Qatahar Mujuni</b>	Deputy Director, African institute for Investigative Journalism
19	<b>Reagan Wamajji</b>	Development Expert
20	<b>Ronald Nahurira</b>	Advocate of the High Court
21	<b>Sharon Banura Winyi</b>	Senior Strategy and Business Development Expert
22	<b>Sharon Akankwatsa</b>	Lawyer
23	<b>Sheda Wakabi</b>	Student
24	<b>Stuart Ampaire</b>	Journalist
25	<b>Tricia Gloria Nabaye</b>	Digital Rights Advocate
26	<b>Vicent Lusambya</b>	Reporter at Daily Monitor
27	<b>Uri Ludger</b>	Data Journalist
28	<b>Bobina Zulfa</b>	Tech policy and digital rights researcher
29	<b>Gilbert Beyamba</b>	Technologies & Community Builder



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