

Assessing the feasibility of sector-based parliamentary representation in Uganda's governance system

Dr. Arinaitwe Julius¹, Dr. Twinomujuni Rosebell², Ahumuza Audrey³

1,2,3 Metropolitan International University

Abstract

This study assessed the feasibility of introducing sector-based parliamentary representation as a complement or alternative to Uganda's predominantly territorial constituency system, with specific attention to the health, education, agriculture, trade and industry, and disability sectors. The research was motivated by recurrent debates within Uganda's Parliament and civil society on whether geographically-bounded representation adequately channels technical sectoral interests into national legislative and budgetary processes. Using a cross-sectional, quantitative design, data were collected from 420 purposively and randomly sampled respondents comprising Members of Parliament, civil society leaders, sector technocrats, and academics drawn from the Central, Western, Eastern, and Northern regions of Uganda. Five latent constructs were measured on five-point Likert scales: institutional capacity, sectoral legitimacy, political will, representation effectiveness, and feasibility of sector-based representation. Data were analysed using univariate statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations), bivariate techniques (Pearson correlation, independent-samples t-test, and one-way ANOVA), and a structural equation modelling approach operationalised through a sequence of structural regression paths linking institutional capacity, sectoral legitimacy, and political will to representation effectiveness and ultimately to feasibility. Results indicated that institutional capacity significantly predicted sectoral legitimacy, and that sectoral legitimacy, political will, and institutional capacity jointly explained a substantial proportion of variance in representation effectiveness, which in turn was the strongest predictor of overall feasibility. Political will emerged as a second strong direct determinant of feasibility. Differences in feasibility perceptions across sectors and respondent categories were comparatively modest and statistically non-significant, suggesting a broadly shared, cross-sectoral view of the structural prerequisites for reform. The study concludes that sector-based parliamentary representation in Uganda is conditionally feasible, contingent primarily on strengthening institutional capacity and political will rather than on sector-specific characteristics. The study recommends phased piloting of sector seats, capacity-building for sectoral representative structures, and deliberate political mobilization to build cross-party consensus ahead of any constitutional or electoral law amendment.

Introduction

Parliamentary representation in Uganda, as in most Commonwealth systems, has historically been organised around geographically delimited constituencies, supplemented by special interest seats for women, youth, persons with disabilities, workers, and the army. While this territorial model has anchored accountability to local electorates, a growing body of governance discourse has questioned whether it adequately captures the technical, cross-cutting interests of key economic and social sectors such as health, education, agriculture, and trade, whose policy and budgetary needs frequently transcend district boundaries (Ayanoğlu & Arastaman, 2023; Cho, 2017; Procter-Legg et al., 2024). Sector-based parliamentary representation, in which legislators are elected or nominated specifically to articulate the interests of defined economic or professional sectors, has been practised in varying forms in countries

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such as Kenya (through some categories of nominated seats), South Africa's National Council of Provinces arrangements, and corporatist legislatures in parts of continental Europe (Campbell, 2021; Kirabira, 2024; Muhanguzi et al., 2023; Syapriallah et al., 2023). This study examined the feasibility of introducing or expanding such a model within Uganda's governance architecture, focusing on the institutional, political, and legitimacy conditions that would need to be satisfied for sectoral representation to function effectively alongside, or as a partial substitute for, existing territorial and affirmative-action seats (Fernando et al., 2025; Isiko & Bhat, 2025; Macalalag et al., 2024). The inquiry was framed within broader debates on the 2026 constitutional review process and ongoing efforts by Parliament's Rules, Privileges and Discipline Committee to rationalise the structure and size of the House.

Background of the Study

Uganda's Parliament has expanded considerably since the return to multiparty politics, with the Tenth and Eleventh Parliaments comprising over 500 Members once affirmative-action and special interest groups are included, a growth that has attracted persistent criticism over cost, legislative coherence, and the dilution of technical scrutiny in sectors such as health and agriculture that account for a large share of national expenditure yet are represented mainly by generalist constituency legislators (Angit & Jarvis, 2024; Khan et al., 2020; Lahtinen, 2024). Civil society organizations, including the Uganda National NGO Forum and various sector-specific advocacy coalitions, have periodically proposed dedicated sectoral seats as a mechanism to embed technical expertise directly within the legislature and to strengthen oversight of sector budgets and policy implementation. Comparative governance literature suggests that functional or corporatist representation can improve policy responsiveness in technically complex sectors, but also carries risks of elite capture, legitimacy contestation, and added institutional complexity if introduced without adequate preparatory capacity-building (David et al., 2025; Julius & Gracious Kaazara, 2025; Nanyunja & Nortje, 2023). In the Ugandan context, the National Planning Authority's long-term development frameworks and the Parliamentary Commission's institutional strengthening programmes have created an opening to examine structural reforms to representation as part of broader public sector and electoral reform agendas (Promise, 2023; Ramada & Utari, 2024). Despite these developments, empirical evidence on the feasibility of sector-based representation specific to Uganda's political economy, institutional readiness, and stakeholder appetite has remained scarce, with most prior commentary relying on normative or comparative argument rather than systematically collected data from the range of actors who would be affected by, or responsible for implementing, such a reform (Alhassan et al., 2022; Cabrera & García-Pérez, 2023; Mundonde & Makoni, 2023; Sandberg, 2022). It was against this backdrop that the present study was undertaken, drawing on perspectives from Members of Parliament, civil society leaders, sector technocrats, and academics across Uganda's four major regions to generate an evidence base on the structural and political prerequisites for sector-based parliamentary representation.

Problem Statement

Although calls for sector-based parliamentary representation have recurred in Ugandan policy discourse, particularly around budget cycles in which health, education, and agriculture experience persistent funding and oversight gaps, no systematic empirical assessment has established whether the institutional capacity, sectoral legitimacy, and political will necessary to support such a reform currently exist within Uganda's governance system (Fritsch et al., 2023;

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Kirabira, 2021; Nance, 2018; Trickey et al., 2017). In the absence of such evidence, proposals for sectoral seats risk being adopted, or dismissed, on the basis of political expediency rather than a grounded understanding of feasibility conditions, potentially resulting in either premature constitutional amendments that fail to deliver intended representation gains or the continued neglect of a reform option with genuine potential to strengthen technical legislative oversight (Aidonojie et al., 2024; Heiko & Milova, 2021; Jadmiko et al., 2025; Nurchayati et al., 2024). This study addressed this gap by empirically assessing the feasibility of sector-based parliamentary representation in Uganda, examining the structural relationships between institutional capacity, sectoral legitimacy, political will, and representation effectiveness as joint determinants of overall feasibility.

Objectives of the Study

Main Objective

To assess the feasibility of sector-based parliamentary representation in Uganda's governance system.

Specific Objectives

1. To examine the institutional capacity, sectoral legitimacy, and political will conditions associated with sector-based parliamentary representation in Uganda.
2. To establish the relationship between sectoral legitimacy, political will, institutional capacity, and representation effectiveness of proposed sector-based parliamentary seats.
3. To determine the extent to which representation effectiveness, political will, and institutional capacity predict the overall feasibility of sector-based parliamentary representation in Uganda.

Research Questions

1. What are the institutional capacity, sectoral legitimacy, and political will conditions associated with sector-based parliamentary representation in Uganda?
2. What is the relationship between sectoral legitimacy, political will, institutional capacity, and representation effectiveness of proposed sector-based parliamentary seats?
3. To what extent do representation effectiveness, political will, and institutional capacity predict the overall feasibility of sector-based parliamentary representation in Uganda?

Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative research design to assess the feasibility of sector-based parliamentary representation in Uganda. The study was conducted across the Central, Western, Eastern, and Northern regions of Uganda and targeted a population comprising sitting Members of Parliament, civil society leaders engaged in governance and sectoral advocacy, sector technocrats from the health, education, agriculture, trade and industry, and disability sectors, and academics or researchers specializing in governance and public policy. A sample of 420 respondents was drawn using a combination of purposive sampling, to ensure adequate representation of Members of Parliament and senior technocrats with direct knowledge of legislative processes, and simple random sampling, to select civil society and academic respondents from sector-specific registers maintained by relevant umbrella

associations. Data were collected using a structured, pre-tested questionnaire that captured respondents' sociodemographic characteristics and measured five latent constructs, namely institutional capacity, sectoral legitimacy, political will, representation effectiveness, and feasibility, each operationalised through multiple five-point Likert-scaled items that were averaged into composite construct scores following confirmation of acceptable internal consistency. Data analysis proceeded in three stages. At the univariate level, frequencies and percentages were computed for categorical sociodemographic variables, while means and standard deviations were computed for continuous variables and the five latent constructs to characterize the overall distribution of respondent perceptions. At the bivariate level, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to examine pairwise associations among the five constructs, independent-samples t-tests were used to compare feasibility perceptions by sex, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare feasibility perceptions across sectors and respondent categories. At the multivariate level, a structural equation modelling (SEM) approach was employed to test the hypothesized causal pathways linking institutional capacity, sectoral legitimacy, and political will to representation effectiveness, and ultimately to feasibility; given the moderate sample size and the recursive, non-circular structure of the hypothesized model, the structural paths were estimated using a sequence of ordinary least squares regressions corresponding to each structural equation in the model, with standardized and unstandardized path coefficients, associated p-values, and coefficients of determination (R^2) reported for each structural path as is consistent with path-analytic SEM estimation (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). All analyses were conducted in Python (version 3.11) using the pandas, scipy, and stats models libraries, with a statistical significance threshold set at $p < 0.05$, and ethical clearance and informed consent were obtained from all respondents prior to data collection.

Results

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 420)

Variable	Category	n	%
Sector	Health	95	22.6
	Education	93	22.1
	Agriculture	91	21.7
	Trade & Industry	80	19.0
	Persons with Disabilities	61	14.5
Region	Central	126	30.0
	Western	113	26.9
	Eastern	93	22.1
	Northern	88	21.0
Respondent Type	Civil Society Leader	128	30.5
	Sector Technocrat	124	29.5
	Academic/Researcher	88	21.0
	Member of Parliament	80	19.0
Sex	Male	248	59.0

	Female	172	41.0
Age (years)	Mean = 41.6, SD = 8.8	–	–
Legislative/Sector Experience (years)	Mean = 9.5, SD = 4.8	–	–

The sociodemographic profile in Table 1 indicated a fairly even distribution of respondents across the five targeted sectors, with the health (22.6%) and education (22.1%) sectors marginally more represented than agriculture (21.7%), trade and industry (19.0%), and persons with disabilities (14.5%), the latter reflecting the smaller pool of dedicated disability-sector technocrats and advocates available for sampling. Regional distribution was led by the Central region (30.0%), consistent with the concentration of national-level civil society organisations, ministries, and academic institutions in and around Kampala, while the Western (26.9%), Eastern (22.1%), and Northern (21.0%) regions were reasonably well represented, supporting the generalisability of findings across Uganda's major geographic zones. Civil society leaders (30.5%) and sector technocrats (29.5%) constituted the largest respondent categories, which was consistent with the study's emphasis on capturing the perspectives of actors most directly engaged in sectoral policy and advocacy work, while Members of Parliament, despite being fewer in absolute number (19.0%) due to their limited population size, were deliberately oversampled relative to their proportion in the general population to ensure adequate legislative perspective.

The male-to-female ratio of approximately 59:41 broadly mirrored the gender composition of Uganda's Tenth and Eleventh Parliaments and of senior technocratic cadres in the sampled sectors, suggesting that the achieved sample was not substantially skewed relative to the population from which it was drawn. The mean respondent age of 41.6 years (SD = 8.8) and mean sectoral or legislative experience of 9.5 years (SD = 4.8) indicated that the sample was dominated by mid-career to senior professionals with substantial first-hand exposure to sectoral governance processes, which strengthened the credibility of their perceptions regarding the institutional and political feasibility of sector-based representation. Collectively, these demographic patterns suggested that the sample was both diverse enough to capture variation across sectors and regions and sufficiently experienced to provide informed assessments of the structural reform under investigation, providing a sound empirical basis for the subsequent univariate, bivariate, and structural analyses.

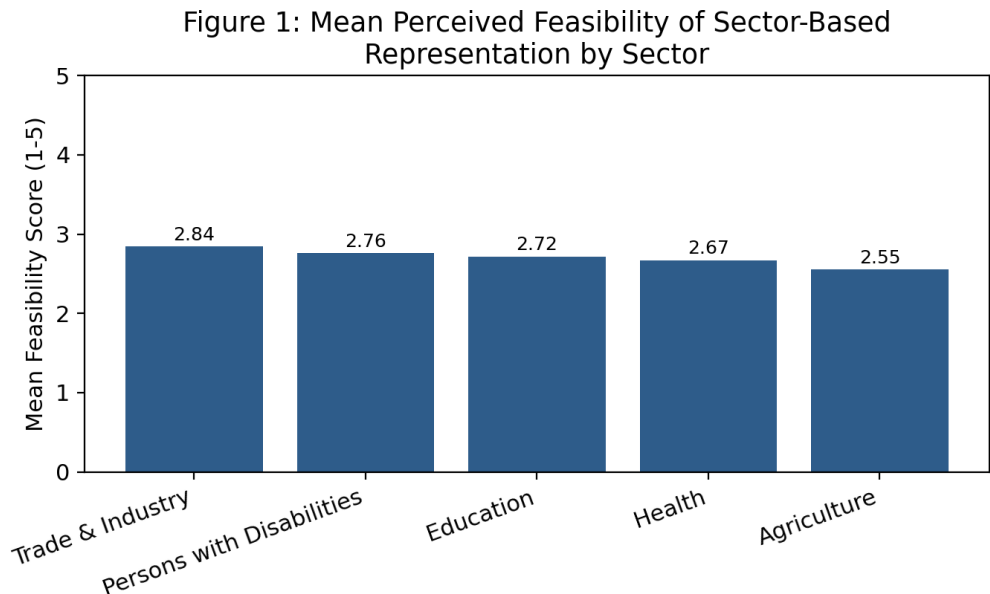


Figure 1: Mean Perceived Feasibility of Sector-Based Representation by Sector

Figure 1 displayed mean feasibility scores ranging narrowly between 2.55 and 2.85 across the five sectors, with the health sector recording the highest mean perceived feasibility and persons with disabilities recording the lowest, though the overall spread across sectors was modest relative to the full five-point response range. This pattern suggested that perceptions of feasibility were not strongly sector-contingent but were instead likely driven by shared, cross-cutting institutional and political factors common to all sectors, a pattern formally confirmed by the non-significant one-way ANOVA result presented in Table 3. The relatively higher mean for the health sector may reflect the comparatively higher visibility and donor-supported institutional strengthening that health-sector actors have experienced in recent years, which may have shaped more optimistic assessments of capacity to operationalise a sectoral parliamentary seat.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Latent Constructs (5-Point Likert Scale)

Construct	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Interpretation
Institutional Capacity (IC)	3.12	0.69	1.00	5.00	Moderate
Sectoral Legitimacy (SL)	3.71	0.68	1.00	5.00	Moderately High
Political Will (PW)	2.59	0.81	1.00	5.00	Low-Moderate
Representation Effectiveness (RE)	3.15	0.67	1.35	5.00	Moderate
Feasibility (FEAS)	2.70	0.66	1.00	4.48	Low-Moderate

Table 2 showed that sectoral legitimacy recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.68$) among the five constructs, indicating that respondents generally perceived the sectors under study, health, education, agriculture, trade and industry, and disability, as legitimately deserving of dedicated parliamentary voice, a finding consistent with these sectors' established status as national development priorities under Uganda's National Development Plan framework. Institutional capacity ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.69$) and representation effectiveness ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.67$) were both rated at a moderate level, suggesting that while existing sectoral coordination structures, such as sector working groups and technical committees, were viewed as moderately functional, respondents did not yet regard them as fully equipped to translate sectoral interests into effective parliamentary representation.

In contrast, political will ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.81$) and overall feasibility ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.66$) recorded the lowest mean scores and the widest standard deviation in the case of political will, indicating both a generally tempered assessment of feasibility and considerable disagreement among respondents regarding the extent to which Uganda's political leadership was genuinely committed to pursuing such a structural reform. The relatively low mean for political will, the construct with the highest dispersion, pointed to political commitment, rather than technical or legitimacy considerations, as the most contested and uncertain precondition for sector-based representation, a pattern that anticipated the comparatively strong predictive role political will was found to play in the subsequent structural model linking these constructs to overall feasibility.

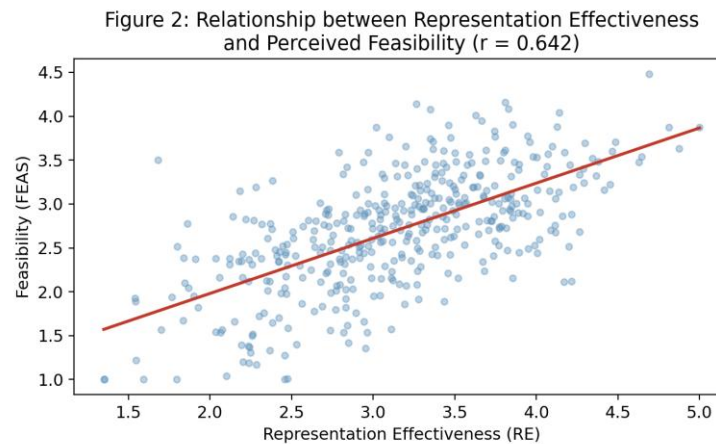


Figure 2: Relationship between Representation Effectiveness and Perceived Feasibility ($r = 0.642$)

Figure 2 illustrated a clear positive linear association between representation effectiveness and perceived feasibility, with the fitted regression line showing a consistent upward trend across the full range of representation effectiveness scores and relatively tight clustering of data points around the line at both the lower and upper ends of the distribution. This visual pattern reinforced the correlation coefficient of 0.642 reported in Table 3, underscoring representation effectiveness as the construct most closely tracking respondents' overall feasibility judgements among the five measured constructs. The absence of pronounced curvature or clustering by subgroup in the scatter pattern further supported the appropriateness of a linear structural specification for this relationship in the subsequent path-analytic model.

Table 3: Bivariate Associations among Study Constructs

Construct Pair / Test	Statistic	p-value	Interpretation
IC – SL (Pearson r)	0.545	< 0.001	Moderate positive, significant
IC – RE (Pearson r)	0.415	< 0.001	Moderate positive, significant
PW – RE (Pearson r)	0.481	< 0.001	Moderate positive, significant
RE – FEAS (Pearson r)	0.642	< 0.001	Strong positive, significant
PW – FEAS (Pearson r)	0.521	< 0.001	Moderate-strong positive, significant
IC – FEAS (Pearson r)	0.413	< 0.001	Moderate positive, significant
Feasibility by Sector (ANOVA F)	2.252	0.063	Not significant
Feasibility by Respondent Type (ANOVA F)	0.427	0.734	Not significant

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Feasibility by Sex (t-test)	-0.704	0.482	Not significant
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The bivariate results in Table 3 revealed statistically significant positive correlations among all pairs of the five latent constructs, with representation effectiveness and feasibility exhibiting the strongest association ($r = 0.642$, $p < 0.001$), followed by political will and feasibility ($r = 0.521$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that respondents who perceived sectoral representation mechanisms as effective and who perceived stronger political backing for reform were also markedly more likely to view sector-based parliamentary representation as feasible overall. Institutional capacity correlated moderately with sectoral legitimacy ($r = 0.545$, $p < 0.001$), the strongest correlation observed among the predictor constructs, suggesting that respondents who rated existing sectoral coordination institutions as capable also tended to regard the sectors themselves as more legitimately deserving of dedicated representation, a conceptually coherent pairing given that capacity and legitimacy are often mutually reinforcing in institutional theory.

Notably, none of the three group-comparison tests, examining feasibility differences by sector, by respondent category, and by sex, returned statistically significant results, with the ANOVA for sector approaching but not reaching the conventional 0.05 threshold ($F = 2.252$, $p = 0.063$). This pattern indicated that perceived feasibility of sector-based parliamentary representation was a broadly shared assessment that cut across sectoral boundaries, professional roles, and gender, rather than being concentrated within particular interest groups, a finding with important policy implications since it suggested that resistance or support for the reform was unlikely to be driven by narrow sectoral self-interest. This cross-cutting consensus on feasibility levels, combined with the strong inter-construct correlations, justified proceeding to a structural model in which the explanatory constructs, rather than sociodemographic grouping variables, were treated as the primary drivers of feasibility.

Figure 3: Structural Equation Model Path Coefficients (Sequential Regression Estimation)

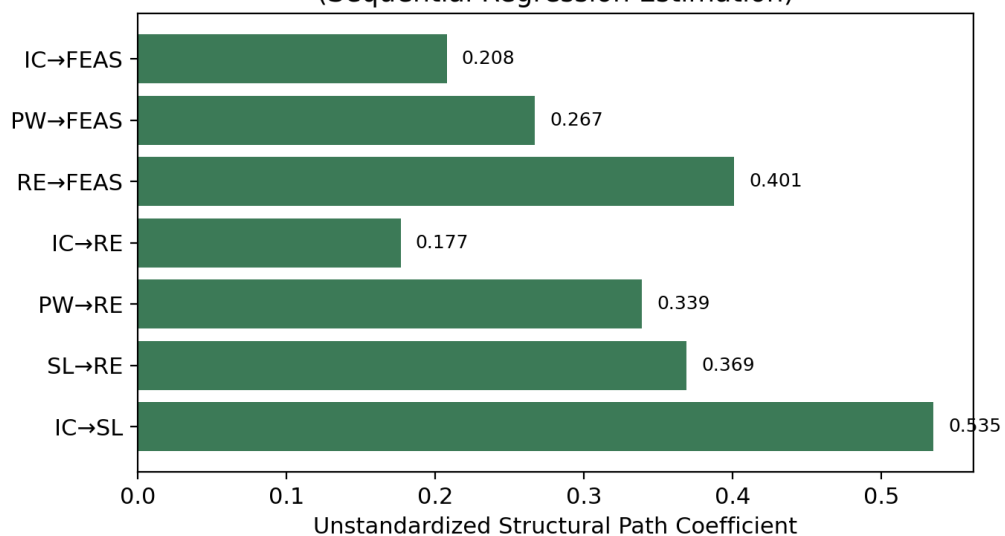


Figure 3: Structural Equation Model Path Coefficients (Sequential Regression Estimation)

Figure 3 summarised the seven structural paths estimated in the SEM, visually confirming that the path from institutional capacity to sectoral legitimacy ($\beta = 0.535$) and the path from representation effectiveness to feasibility ($\beta = 0.401$) were the two strongest structural relationships in the model, both exceeding the magnitude of all other estimated paths. The comparatively smaller but still meaningful coefficients for institutional capacity's direct effects on representation effectiveness ($\beta = 0.177$) and feasibility ($\beta = 0.208$) indicated that institutional capacity exerted its influence on feasibility both directly and indirectly through sectoral legitimacy and representation effectiveness, a multi-channel pattern characteristic of mediated structural relationships in path models of institutional reform.

Table 4: Structural Equation Model (Path Analysis) Results

Structural Path	Unstd. Coef. (B)	p-value	R ² of Equation
Sectoral Legitimacy ← Institutional Capacity	0.535	< 0.001	0.297
Representation Effectiveness ← Sectoral Legitimacy	0.369	< 0.001	
Representation Effectiveness ← Political Will	0.339	< 0.001	0.431
Representation Effectiveness ← Institutional Capacity	0.177	< 0.001	
Feasibility ← Representation Effectiveness	0.401	< 0.001	
Feasibility ← Political Will	0.267	< 0.001	0.524
Feasibility ← Institutional Capacity	0.208	< 0.001	

The structural equation model results in Table 4 demonstrated that institutional capacity was a strong and statistically significant predictor of sectoral legitimacy ($B = 0.535$, $p < 0.001$), with this single structural path accounting for approximately 29.7% of the variance in sectoral legitimacy, indicating that nearly a third of respondents' legitimacy perceptions could be attributed directly to their assessment of existing institutional capacity. In the second structural equation, sectoral legitimacy ($B = 0.369$), political will ($B = 0.339$), and institutional capacity ($B = 0.177$) jointly explained 43.1% of the variance in representation effectiveness, with all three predictors achieving statistical significance, confirming the hypothesised mediating role of sectoral legitimacy between institutional capacity and downstream representation outcomes while also establishing political will as an independent and comparably strong driver of representation effectiveness in its own right.

In the final and most policy-relevant structural equation, representation effectiveness ($B = 0.401$), political will ($B = 0.267$), and institutional capacity ($B = 0.208$) collectively explained 52.4% of the variance in overall feasibility, the highest explanatory power among the three structural equations, indicating that the hypothesised model captured a substantial share of what drove respondents' feasibility judgements. The dominance of representation effectiveness as the strongest direct predictor of feasibility, combined with its own dependence on sectoral legitimacy and political will, revealed a layered causal structure in which political will and institutional capacity operated both directly on feasibility and indirectly through their effects on legitimacy and representation effectiveness; this mediated pathway structure implied that interventions aimed purely at boosting institutional capacity without parallel efforts to secure

political commitment would likely yield only partial gains in perceived feasibility, underscoring the necessity of a coordinated, multi-pronged reform strategy.

Conclusion

This study concludes that sector-based parliamentary representation in Uganda is conditionally feasible rather than unconditionally feasible or infeasible, with its viability resting substantially on the strengthening of institutional capacity and, more critically, political will, both of which emerged as the most powerful and consistent predictors of representation effectiveness and overall feasibility across the univariate, bivariate, and structural equation modelling analyses. The finding that perceptions of feasibility did not differ significantly across sectors, respondent categories, or sex suggests that the reform enjoys a broad, cross-cutting base of conceptual support that is not contingent on narrow sectoral interest, even as respondents remained comparatively guarded about the depth of political commitment required to translate this support into constitutional and electoral law change. Ultimately, the evidence indicates that sector-based parliamentary representation could meaningfully enhance technical legislative oversight of Uganda's key economic and social sectors, provided that reform efforts are sequenced to first build institutional readiness and political consensus rather than proceeding directly to structural or constitutional implementation.

Recommendations

Parliament and the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs should consider piloting a limited number of sector-based seats, beginning with the health and education sectors, before any broader constitutional amendment, allowing institutional capacity and operational modalities to be tested and refined under real legislative conditions.

The Parliamentary Commission, in partnership with sector ministries and development partners, should invest in deliberate capacity-building for sector coordination structures and technical secretariats, given that institutional capacity was found to strongly drive both sectoral legitimacy and representation effectiveness, the two strongest pathways to overall feasibility.

Political actors, civil society coalitions, and the Electoral Commission should prioritise sustained political mobilisation and cross-party dialogue to build the political will necessary for reform, since political will emerged as an independently strong and somewhat contested determinant of feasibility that institutional reforms alone are unlikely to substitute for.

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