

# Ugandan politics now resembles a Netflix series

Civil society groups in Congo-Brazzaville are challenging the integrity of last weekend's presidential election, which handed veteran leader Denis Sassou Nguesso, already in power for 42 years, another term in office. Bertrand Menier Kounianga, spokesperson for the civil society platform CAPGED, said the vote was rigged from start to finish and called it a "Nintendo" election.

In Brazzaville, the machinery of state was deployed to ensure the 82-year-old leader secured a landslide of nearly 95 per cent, while the internet was cut. Opponents were erased from the board, with figures like General Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko and André Okombi Salissa languishing in prison on trumped-up charges.

Nintendo is a popular Japanese video game console. The defining feature of the Congo election that mirrors the game is the illusion of choice within a closed system where one man holds the controller, and the high score is fixed in the software before the first coin is even dropped.

However, this phenomenon is not an isolated Congolese bug.

Uganda's electoral cycle, which concluded on January 15, 2026, saw opposition leader Robert "Bobi Wine" Kyagulanyi's campaign curtailed by security forces. In the days before polling, the internet was cut off, and the results that followed carried the air of being engineered rather than tallied at the ballot box.

We have seen this pattern across the continent: leaders approach elections as little more than an annual medical check-up. From Paul Biya's Cameroon to Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo's Equatorial Guinea, the exercise repeats itself with familiarity. The opposition is reduced to a token presence, its defeat pre-ordained, so that incumbents can extend their decades-long hold on power.

From Paul Biya's Cameroon to Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo's Equatorial

When the executive branch cannot simply command what it wants, it buys it.



Charles Onyango-Obbo  
Ear to the Ground

Guinea, the process is a repetitive loop in which the opposition is merely a non-playable game character, designed to lose so the hero can reach the next level of his decades-long rule.

Yet it is not only Nintendo patterns that one observes in our local politics. Other aspects of governance are lifted from the frames of a dynastic streaming or TV series. We are increasingly seeing the rise of the presidential household as the supreme organ of state, where sons, wives, and brothers hold the levers of power. In Uganda, the President's son, General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, serves as the Chief of Defence Forces. At the same time, the First Lady, Janet Museveni is the minister of Education and Sports.

Ugandan politics now feels like a Netflix series, with each season scripted around the same cast of characters, recycled plotlines, and cliff-hangers that never resolve.

In Equatorial Guinea, the flamboyant Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue sits as vice president and minister of Defence, and in Congo-Brazzaville, the president's son, Denis-Christel Sassou Nguesso, serves as the minister of International Cooperation. This suggests a shift towards something akin to *Game of Thrones*, where bloodline is a highly prized currency. The national treasury is

treated like a State House piggy bank, much like the Lannisters managing Casterly Rock while the masses scrap for bread below in the mud.

This familial grip extends into the very bedrock of our development through the construction of faulty infrastructure. In Uganda, the sagas of the Isimba and Karuma dams feel like a live-action version of *The Wire*. This gritty drama explores how institutional decay leads to systemic corruption, with bosses getting rich off bad projects while the public suffers.

Isimba has been battling a mix of cracks and corrosion since its 2019 launch, while Karuma finally crossed the finish line in late 2024 after a 12-year delay and a budget exceeding \$1.7 billion. It is a typical story: a few men get rich, the intermediaries take a cut, and the public is left with a crumbling shell. Then there are the phantom projects, into which money is poured year after year with little to show for it.

The Lubowa International Hospital in Uganda is the most famous of these, a multi-million-dollar ghost. Over \$397 million in promissory notes have been issued, yet the site remains a skeletal dream. We can take a small sliver of comfort in knowing we are not alone. Lubowa has at least seen a few buildings rise, which sets it apart from the National Cathedral in Accra, Ghana. That project, championed by President Nana Akufo-Addo, is a \$58 million void that critics call the "most expensive hole in the world", serving only as a stagnant pit for mosquitoes to breed.

When the executive branch cannot simply command what it wants, it buys it. In Uganda, the sight of MPs selling their votes to pass legislation is a scene straight out of *House of Cards*, featuring the master manipulator President Frank Underwood, who uses bribery and "brown envelope" diplomacy to turn a legislature into his personal rubber stamp. The representatives of the people become little more than paid extras in a political soap opera.

Mr Onyango-Obbo is a journalist, writer and curator of the "Wall of Great Africans". X@cobbo3