

How Arsenal's win makes NRM look bad

Uganda's notoriously passionate Arsenal fans reacted with unprecedented, nationwide euphoria, street parades, concerts and religious thanksgiving services after Mikel Arteta's squad secured the 2025/2026 English Premier League title. This historic victory officially ended the club's 22-year league drought.

I won't hurl the criticism of neo-colonialism at Uganda's Arsenal fans for celebrating a team born in the heart of imperial England. Why be a spoilsport or party pooper when some Ugandans are as happy as their situation will allow them to be? And, indeed, they are happy.

Buoyant Rolex guys across Ntinda were giving out free Rolexes; after you paid for them! Barbers in the same suburb were cutting their own hair and paying onlookers for being there to witness it. I changed my social media handle to @arsenal and wound up with Mr Museveni's number of followers. It was, in the words of a wise man, 'bulaade'.

Of course, one might convincingly argue that Arsenal had waited 22 years to win the Premier League title, so the outpouring of genuine feeling was subsequently overflowing. Whereas the NRM is like Real Madrid on steroids, it has been winning for 40 years. So the reaction of its supporters to its continued rule is routinised by expected outcomes.

However, every election result that returns NRM rule is a renewal of its mandate to rule. Thus, the NRM becomes new again each time it prevails in a political contest. So the celebrations of NRM supporters should be renewed every five years to reflect this renewal.

After all, according to government shills, the NRM exemplifies the immortal words of the 32nd president of the United States by being the 'great arsenal of democracy', by its own estimation.

Oh yes, US president Franklin D Roosevelt coined the phrase "great arsenal of democracy" during a radio broadcast and "fireside chat" on December 29, 1940. Delivered nearly a year before the US entered World War II, his speech called for the country to massively increase military production to supply Great Britain and other Allied forces fighting Nazi Germany.

NRM has also increased its military budgets with the purport of defending Uganda's 'nascent' democracy. By extension, one might conclude that the NRM is the great arsenal of democracy. But if the celebrations surrounding Mr Museveni's umpteenth term were sedate when compared to Arsenal Football Club's recent celebrations, it's doubtful that the NRM would use its paramilitarised arsenal to defend a status quo which indicates its relative unpopularity.

Instead, the NRM's verbal gunners, no pun intended, prefer to pick off opponents to their rule dressed to the nines in Arsenal FC colours. Consequently, genuine celebrations are reserved for the National Unity Platform (NUP) supporters.

I am talking about those NUP supporters who are released from detention and frequently given heroic, festive receptions by their families, party leadership, and community members. These celebrations—often featuring red Arsenal-esque party colours, traditional drumming, and public processions—regularly take place at the NUP headquarters in Makerere Kavule. Thereby proving that support for NRM rule is only as spirited as opposition to it.

Contrast Arsenal fans reaction with what happened when President Museveni won presidential elections this year.



Philip Matogo
Politics

Hyperbole aside, contrast this organic joy with what happened when President Museveni won presidential elections this year. The celebrations following Mr Museveni's January 2026 election victory were, first of all, official, meaning they were predominantly highly structured, State-backed events organised by the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) rather than spontaneous, organic public gatherings.

While thousands of yellow-clad NRM supporters participated enthusiastically, the landscape of the celebrations was shaped by extensive top-down coordination, a countrywide Internet blackout, and heavy security deployments.

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