

Opinion

Incumbency, sole candidacy and lack of competitive politics were hallmark of 2011 Mayoral elections

President Paul Kagame presides over swearing in of Kigali Executive Committee

President Paul Kagame ended the mayoral elections cycle March 1, 2011 by presiding over the swearing-in ceremony of the Kigali City Executive Committee. Mr. Fidele Ndayisaba outgoing Governor of Southern Province is the new Mayor Kigali; Vice-Mayor (Social affairs) Hope Tumukunde Gasatura once *Prefet* of Kigali Ngali (now mostly Gasabo) is an old RPF cadre. The V-Mayor Alphonse Nizeyimana (finance and economic affairs) is an incumbent in that post.

Kagame exhorted the trio to be diligent, humble and to think of Kigali only as a socio-economic hub and not isolated from the rest of country.

The current rate and speed of development in Kigali would be the 'tolerable minimum,' he said. He emphasized cooperation and people-based decisions among Rwandese to settle both internal and external problems. 'The bottom line is that even those who cause these problems are people too. Truth is our strength,' he asserted.

The President also encouraged them to be brave to confront evil. 'What constitutes evil', he said 'is accommodating social injustice, and lack of health and food for the population.' He warned them against complacency on matters of social justice, because 'normally, the people should kick them out without delay'- which he said 'is the hallmark of democracy.'

The trend of incumbency; running unopposed; garnering at least 90% of the vote and having been in the corridors of power, are the common denominator to most of the mayoral or vice-mayoral slots.

Districts Mayors

In the election of District Mayors, out of the 30, only seven (7) are new faces while 19 were incumbents who retained their seats and 4 have been in local administrations as Vice Mayors or Executive Secretary in another district in the case of Nyarugenge Mayor Solange Mukasonga.

Democracy at the bottom, dwindling at top

Media reports show a growing trend of expanding freedom to elections at the Umudugudu and sector level although influence peddling has also been reported. Reports of NEC volunteers telling electors whom to vote for have been recorded, but defiant rejections have also been recorded.

The use of student numbers is a major factor at this stage of local government elections showing a worrying trend among new voters who could in the future be induced to vote as a block on the basis of some promise. There is therefore need to intensify youth voter education.

There are also complaints that some intending contestants were forcefully dissuaded from contesting. A good example is the case of elections of councilors for Ndera Sector, where one candidate Kayumba Casimir was detained by Police on the orders of the Sector Executive Secretary. However, Kayumba has exonerated the Electoral Commission for any wrong doing and has vowed to take legal action against the sector Executive Secretary.

In such an eventuality, vote stuffing and other malpractices cannot be ruled out. There is therefore need to increase transparency for elections of universal suffrage; mayoral seats being put to the public vote to avoid the central government from influencing elections and subsequent distortion of decentralization principles.

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