

How to keep Kagame in power beyond 2034

In June 2010, I was invited by a foreign think tank to write a situational paper on Rwanda's 2010 presidential elections. Although I am always reluctant to write about Rwanda's politics, I committed. As the Bakonzo say, a big yam does not eat itself. So, I wrote the paper and later abridged it for publication in the Ugandan media.

The piece was published in Uganda on July 18, 2010, headlined Rwanda: Forget 2010 poll, the real thing is in 2017.

The elections were held on August 9, 2010, and president Paul Kagame won with over a 93 percent vote. However, I had argued in the paper that no percentage of electoral victory would capture President Kagame's larger-than-life disposition in Rwandan politics.

Now, according to the Rwanda's Constitution, president Kagame qualifies to run for office only once: in the 2029 presidential elections, when he will be running for his last term of office ending in 2034.

But with our experience with Mr Museveni in Uganda, it is not unfathomable (please mark the double negatives!) that President Kagame may need to remain in office beyond 2034.

As a liberation movement, the DNA of the RPF and its ideological outlook is influenced by Kagame's person and personality. Whether he is popular or not, he is a very critical political player in Rwanda. He took over command and political leadership of the RPF at a very challenging time and led it to success: toppling the Habyarimana government and stopping the genocide.

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Whatever his shortcomings, no one can take away that feat from him. But we are yet to see his biggest achievement; the peaceful handover of power to his successor in 2034.

Now, 2034 is really very far away. So, why am I spending a public resource (this column space) on a matter that has no material currency? Because a Rwandan professor living in the US has recently been painting a picture where President Kagame would not be in the regional geo-political equation in 2034.

And me being me, I would like to make some proposal that would make President Kagame remain relevant in Rwanda and the region beyond 2034.

Am I joining the people who say that without Kagame Rwanda would not exist? Or that a section of the Rwandan population would face an existential threat? No. For I am not stupid to bet the existence of a com-

munity on the person and personality of a mortal man (be it Kagame or another). That would be dangerous.

But the reality in Uganda makes us think otherwise. The trend things are taking, one may be tempted to think that Uganda may not exist without Mr Museveni. So, maybe Rwanda may not exist without Paul Kagame? Oh yeah, after Kagame's departure, the Rwanda whose president calls the president of a neighbouring country an idiot will cease to exist.

In all honesty, Rwandans have a situation on their hands: here is a leader who is so loved that he always wins elections by over 99 percent of the votes. And here is a stubborn constitution that bars him from leading his people after 2034.

So, my suggestion is simple. Just do the Godfrey Binaisa-Milton Obote thing in 1967: throw out the stubborn constitution and write another. This time, Rwandans should remember to put in escape valves and provide for the fact that only President Kagame can lead their country.

The new constitution could for instance, provide for political parties to control the presidency. A scenario like that of South Africa, where a ruling party can recall the head of state and president.

With that, our dear leader would be made life president for the RPF. More like the Ayatollah guy of Iran.

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