

As Rwanda gears up for presidential and legislative elections, experts are predicting a straightforward win for incumbent President Paul Kagame and his ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) party.

It's encouraging that Rwanda, which emerged from a painful genocide in 1994, holds regular elections on a continent where coups are often part of politics. The election will be conducted over a three-day period from July 14 to 16, the three-week campaign concluded on Saturday, July 13.

Rwandans in the diaspora will cast their ballots for the president and 53 members of Parliament on July 14 at the country's diplomatic missions, while within the country, voters will head to the polls on July 15.

On July 16, 24 female members of Parliament, two youth representatives, and one representative of people living with disabilities will be elected by special electoral colleges.

The national electoral body will announce provisional results of the elections on July 20, with the final results set to be announced on July 27, according to the electoral commission's schedule.

Approximately 9.7 million people are eligible to vote in the country of 13.2 million, including 3.7 million youth voters.

Around 100,000 voluntary polling officials will be deployed at more than 2,500 polling stations across the country, with the entire process costing about 8 billion Rwandan francs (slightly above \$6 million), according to the election commission.

### **Who are the presidential contenders?**



Left to Right: Paul Kagame, Frank Habineza and Phillippe Mpayimana

President Paul Kagame is up against familiar rivals: Dr. Frank Habineza of the opposition Democratic Green Party of Rwanda (DGPR) and independent candidate Philippe Mpayimana, the same two contenders he defeated in 2017.

Kagame, 66, first assumed power in 2000 and has since won elections in 2003, 2010, and 2017. In the 2017 polls, he secured more than 98% of the vote, according to official figures.

President Kagame is campaigning on a promise to sustain inclusive development, security, and improve people's livelihoods without leaving anyone behind. He is seeking reelection following a 2015 constitutional amendment that allows him to run for three more terms. These changes allowed him to serve a seven-year third term in 2017, but reduced the presidential term to five years starting in 2024.

Dr. Habineza, the opposition candidate, is a former legislator who joined the recently dissolved Parliament in 2018. In the 2017 election, he finished last with 0.48% of the vote.

Elected vice chair of the Parliament's Social Affairs Committee in 2018, he has been president of the DGPR since August 2009. He previously served as the executive director of the African Greens Federation and as program coordinator for Africa in the Green Forum Foundation, Sweden.

Habineza has promised to tackle issues such as food insecurity by increasing the national budget for agriculture, addressing unemployment, which stands at around 16%, and ensuring sustainable security and wealth. He also initiated legislation to reduce the country's land tax and has pledged to eliminate it if elected.

The third candidate, Mpayimana, is a former French teacher who, until recently, worked as a senior expert at the Ministry of National Unity and Civic Engagement since November 2021.

In the 2017 election, he finished with 0.72% of the vote.

Mpayimana, 54, has also worked in various media houses as a journalist. He has promised to expand access to student loans and to advocate for more living allowances for students if elected.

### **Main political parties**

There are 11 registered political parties in Rwanda, but only two – RPF and DGPR – are fielding presidential candidates. The ruling party enjoys the support of major opposition groups such as the Social Democratic Party (PSD) led by former Foreign Minister Vincent Biruta, and the Liberal Party (PL) led by Donatille Mukabalisa, a former Speaker of Parliament.

Besides the RPF and DGPR, PSD, PL, Ideal Democratic Party, and the Social Party Imberakuri are all fielding parliamentary candidates. The electoral commission has

cleared over 500 contenders for 53 seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

### **Main Issues and Expected Outcomes**

Joselyn Mutoni, a businesswoman based in Kigali, believes security, political stability, unity, and economic development are the core issues concerning Rwandans.

According to Mutoni, Kagame's "impressive" standing among young people and women will secure him their votes.

Alex Tayebwa, a secondary teacher from Bugesera district also foresees Kagame winning. "Kagame will win the presidential elections with the usual share of over 90%. He's backed by nine out of 11 parties, and those that don't support him are the two smallest ones," he said.

"Rwanda will remain stable and peaceful and continue on its trajectory of rapid socioeconomic change. It will remain a highly consequential member of the East African Community (EAC) bloc," he added.

Kagame, who led the RPF during the liberation struggle and stopped the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, should be applauded for his role in bringing peace, reconciliation, and prosperity to Rwanda.

With an average 7% annual growth rate before 2022, Rwanda's economy is one of the fastest-growing in Africa. The business climate is one of the most favorable on the continent, with minimal red tape for economic operators, allowing businesspeople to focus on their enterprises.