

The Rwandan government has proposed sweeping reforms to the country's electoral system aimed at improving the management of elections, leadership transitions, and the functioning of electoral bodies.

Minister of Local Government, Dominique Habimana presented the draft electoral law to lawmakers, which consolidates reforms made over several years. The goal, he said, is to make elections more efficient, transparent, and manageable while ensuring smooth governance at all levels.

One of the key changes affects the election of district councilors. Currently, all eight councilors are directly elected by the public. Under the new system, voters would elect representatives to electoral colleges, which would then select the councilors.

Habimana said the method, first tested during the 2021 elections amid COVID-19 restrictions, reduces congestion at polling stations and allows voters to be represented indirectly. "Direct election through representatives will ensure citizens are represented without overcrowding the voting process," he said.

The government also proposes that electoral colleges for local and Kigali city leadership be appointed by presidential decree rather than statutory law. Some lawmakers expressed concern this could reduce parliamentary oversight or limit public understanding. Habimana explained the measure is meant to reduce frequent amendments to the electoral law and provide clear, stable guidance for selecting these bodies.

Other reforms include extending the time allowed to hold replacement elections for officials who leave office from six months to one year, giving electoral authorities more time to organize polls, especially when they coincide with other elections. Exceptions would be made if multiple leaders leave simultaneously, to prevent disruption of local governance.

The draft law also seeks to harmonize electoral legislation, eliminating conflicting provisions and clarifying candidate requirements, including necessary qualifications and supporting signatures, addressing concerns about unqualified candidates slowing the process.

While still under review, the proposed reforms are designed to make elections more orderly, accessible, and representative, ensuring continuity in leadership and strengthening governance across Rwanda.