Local Government Elections in Tanzania: Why NEC Should Take Over their Management

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Abstract

Any free and fair election should be managed by an organ or Electoral Management Body (EMB) that is respected and which does not have any bias for or against those who are contesting. The EMB should be above partisan party politics. This article notes that the manner in which elections at mitaa, vitongoji and vijiji levels have been conducted in Tanzania fell short of the aforementioned attributes. The current practice is that the Minister responsible for local governments has substantial authority over the supervision and coordination of local government elections. The Minister is one of the Members of Parliament and a member of a political party participating in the elections. This practice traverses acceptable democratic principles, which demand that the organ that manages an election should not side with any of the contestants and be above political parties. Democratic elections must be guided by the idea that the EMB has the trust and confidence of all stakeholders, and not otherwise. This was not the case in the three civic elections held in Tanzania in 1993, 1999 and 2004. The problems observed in these civic elections warrant the immediate need for reforms in managing grassroots elections. After going through the structure of local government authorities, the electoral system, and drawing on some practices of other countries in relation to the management of both general and local government elections, the article thus argues that the management of both general and local government elections should be taken over by a reformed National Electoral Commission, whose independence will no longer be called into question.