

ELECTION VIOLENCE PREDICTED FOR SECOND ROUND

It is all or nothing for the ZANU-PF regime, whose past record shows it is grimly determined to hold onto power.

By Meshack Ndodana in Harare

With a run-off between Robert Mugabe and opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai looking increasingly likely, there are signs that the Zimbabwean regime will launch a crackdown to ensure victory for the incumbent at all costs.

The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, ZEC, is dragging its feet on announcing the official result of the presidential ballot, although it has said that Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, won the parliamentary election also held on March 29.

Although the MDC has claimed outright victory, most observers think that when the ZEC announces the final



Credit: Lazele

A policeman checks the sealing of ballot boxes at Harare North polling station. Picture taken March 29.

figures, neither of the top two candidates will be awarded over 50 per cent of the vote, requiring them to contest a second round.

Tsvangirai's MDC faction — the bigger of two that contested the elections — initially said that it would take part in a second round, but changed its mind

NEWS IN BRIEF

- The High Court ruled on April 8 that the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, could pursue its legal action to force the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, ZEC, to release the result of the March 29 presidential election. The ZEC had argued that the court had no mandate to rule on the matter.
- Politically motivated violence is resurfacing in rural Zimbabwe, with reports on April 7 that war veterans and ZANU-PF party militia have unleashed violence in three districts in the south of the country.
- The ZEC announced on April 5 that ZANU-PF had won half the seats in the Senate, the upper house of parliament. The opposition took the rest, with Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC faction winning 24 and the other MDC grouping, led by Arthur Mutambara, with the remaining six. In the House of Assembly, the ZEC announced earlier that Tsvangirai's MDC got 99 of the 210 seats, ZANU-PF 97, and Mutambara's faction ten.
- Zimbabwean police arrested a number of election officers, accusing them of conniving with the opposition and miscounting votes in order to rob President Robert Mugabe of victory in the presidential election held on March 29.
- White farmers said that since it was announced that ZANU-PF lost the parliamentary election, a fresh wave of invasions of white-owned commercial farms had started.
- The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace has joined the domestic and international community in urging the ZEC to release the results of the presidential election.

after reports emerged that pro-Mugabe war veterans, youth militia and armed forces had been deployed in rural areas.

Now it says that in order to protect Zimbabweans from a wave of political violence, it will boycott a run-off vote unless the United Nations is invited in to observe the elections.

Tsvangirai warned journalists that ZANU-PF would use violence to ensure victory for Mugabe.

"ZANU-PF is preparing a war on the people such as we saw in 2000 and 2002 [elections]. The run-off is thus a 'run-over' of the people," he said. "I, Morgan Tsvangirai, the legitimate winner of this election will not participate in the run-off. If President Mugabe thinks he can bulldoze his way into a further era of illegitimacy, then history will judge."

MDC to boycott election re-run unless United Nations observers are allowed in.

The consequences of a second election surrounded by violence would be dire, said the opposition leader, who predicted, "A run-off will polarise and traumatise this country. The country does not need another war."

Tapiwa Mashakada, a senior MDC official, told IWPR that his party would not help legitimise Mugabe by taking part in a second round.

"We are not going to expose our people to violence. A run-off is going to be bloody, and we are going to see some of the worst violence ever. We will only participate if a United Nations observer mission is invited to monitor the elections," said Mashakada.

With the parliamentary election handed to their opponents, ZANU-PF officials have everything to lose if Mugabe fails to win a new term.

A member of the party's governing body or politburo told IWPR that ZANU-PF did not trust Tsvangirai, not least because they feared he would take away the farms awarded to many regime insiders by Mugabe's 2000 land reform, in which white farmers were forcibly dispossessed.

The politburo member said Tsvangirai might also sanction the prosecution of Mugabe and others named as culpable in the "Gukurahundi" killings of the Eighties, in which Mugabe's military stand accused of murdering large numbers of civilians in a bid to eliminate political opposition in the Matabeleland and Midland regions.

"Unfortunately, no matter what Tsvangirai says about guaranteeing President Mugabe's safety, we just cannot trust the man," said the ZANU-PF insider. "So if one day he gets a call from [British prime minister] Gordon Brown or [United States president] George Bush and is told to arrest Mugabe, do you think he won't do that and will say, 'I gave him my word'? Obviously not."

The politburo member was referring to Mugabe's oft-stated view that Britain and the US are to blame for Zimbabwe's problems. Statements by Bush and Brown that Mugabe must step down have merely made him more determined to win the run-off.

"If he loses, then Mugabe would have lost to the British and the Americans and to quote him, 'never, never, ever, ever' will we let that happen," said the politburo member.

He concluded by warning, "We will protect our president and ensure that Tsvangirai does not go anywhere near State House."

A former guerrilla from the 1970s war of liberation admitted to IWPR that he had committed murder during an earlier election campaign, and insisted that war veterans would never let Tsvangirai take over.

This man feared a Tsvangirai victory might lead to retribution against people like him. "I have killed, and I

am not the only one who has killed. Who will protect us if Tsvangirai comes into power? We are not going to let him win. Mugabe is going to continue ruling this country," he said.

The performance of both Mugabe and ZANU-PF, scoring more than 40 per cent of the 2.4 million votes cast on March 29, belies the expectations of some who expected voter support for the regime to collapse because of the unprecedented economic decline that has left the country with the world's highest inflation rate.

Since life is close to unbearable for many Zimbabweans, it might seem strange that Mugabe should still get so many votes.

ZANU-PF fears Mugabe could face prosecution under a new regime.

However, Zimbabwean politics run deep, and calls for a fresh start are only part of the picture. The present political environment cannot be divorced from the role of ZANU-PF, and Mugabe personally, in the 1970s war of liberation and in the violence of the post-independence years. Many people, particularly the younger generation, underestimate the effect of Mugabe's credentials on rural voters.

In the Seventies, ZANU's armed wing, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army, ZANLA, left a deep imprint on the ethnic Shona provinces from which it operated, and still affects voting patterns there.

"The legacy of the liberation struggle has left a deeper memory in rural areas than in urban areas," said Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni of the Ferguson Centre for African and Asian Studies at the Open University in Britain. "Memory of a rural guerrilla is in fact a memory of ZANU as an emancipatory force. This memory will take time to pass from peasant consciousness. ZANU is reaping dividends from this consciousness."

Ndlovu-Gatsheni explained how during the insurgency, “ZANU imbibed Maoist mobilisation strategies of the ‘fish and water’ type — the rural peasants became the sea within which ZANLA forces played their politics”.

The post-independence period saw the mass killings of the Gukurahundi campaign, conducted in ethnic Ndebele areas, and later on, violence used during the seizure of white-owned farms and in the election campaigns of 2000 and 2002.

The people involved in past violent action to uphold ZANU-PF's rule have so far enjoyed impunity, and can be expected to do what they can to ensure Mugabe stays their president.

Pre-election violence was notably lacking ahead of the first round, and the MDC was able to penetrate constituencies seen as no-go areas. In the southern Masvingo province, for instance, the MDC won more than half of the parliamentary seats; it won an absolute majority in Manicaland and also snatched some rural constituencies in the ZANU-PF strongholds of Mashonaland East and West and the Midlands.

Many fear Mugabe will not allow this to happen again. The deployment of ZANU-PF militants and war veterans to secure victory would raise the prospect of violent clashes with defiant MDC supporters.

Despite these fears, some ordinary voters told IWPR that the MDC should go into the run-off because people would come out in large numbers to vote against him.

“I hope the MDC won't let us down by refusing to contest the run-off,” said Harare resident Mary Musodzi. “I can tell you that Zimbabweans, who all this time thought it was impossible to beat Mugabe, now realise that people can actually vote him out. Those that did not vote will go and vote, and Mugabe will lose badly in the second round.”

Meshack Ndodana is the pseudonym of a reporter in Zimbabwe. ■

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE MUGABE'S RESILIENCE



Credit: Lazele

People queue for bread beside Mugabe campaign posters. Picture taken March 28.

Reports of President Robert Mugabe's imminent political demise may be exaggerated.

By Nonthando Bhebhe in Harare

Although the result of Zimbabwe's presidential election is still unknown, it is clear that President Robert Mugabe still commands a substantial share of the vote — confounding predictions that his support would crumble away entirely amid growing resentment at the dire state of the country.

As the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, ZEC, continues to withhold the final figures from the March 29 ballot, Morgan Tsvangirai of the main faction of the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, has claimed victory with over 50 per cent.

A source in the ZEC and a member of the ruling ZANU-PF party's politburo member both told IWPR that Mugabe could get up to 45 per cent and Tsvangirai about 48 per cent. This

would mean neither man had an absolute majority so that they would have to contest a run-off.

Jonathan Moyo, a former information minister who is now an independent member of parliament, estimated that Tsvangirai is likely to get 49.4 or 49.5 per cent of the vote, followed by Mugabe with 42.5 or 42.6 per cent.

With the ZEC stalling on its announcement, there are fears that Mugabe's officials are engaged in a last-minute attempt to fix the result in his favour.

Moyo, however, dismissed allegations of vote-rigging, saying this would be difficult to arrange and the final result was likely to reflect the true situation.

But even by the MDC's count, Mugabe has scored upwards of 40 per cent of the vote.

The results of the parliamentary election held the same day as the presidential ballot have been released, and show that ZANU-PF got 97 of the

210 seats in the lower House of Assembly, two less than the 99 won by Tsvangirai's MDC.

Even adding in the ten seats won by the other MDC faction led by Arthur Mutambara and assuming the two groups would cooperate on legislative matters, the opposition would still not have the two-thirds majority needed to pass the constitutional changes seen by many as central to political change in Zimbabwe.

Even though the MDC won most seats in parliament, it does not have enough to push through constitutional change.

These results reflect the constituency-based system used for the parliamentary election. The continuing strength of ZANU-PF is reflected in the raw numbers, which suggest it actually won more votes overall than Tsvangirai's MDC — 45.94 compared with 42.9 per cent.

Turnout was disappointing; of the 5.9 million registered voters, only 2.4 million actually took part in the election.

Mugabe's opponents see him as a hero-turned-dictator whose policies have led to economic collapse over the last ten years and whose record on human rights and political freedom is abysmal. They say he has manifestly failed to address massive problems such as rising poverty and hunger, corruption, bad governance, and high mortality rates as the health system collapses and HIV/AIDS grows.

For some of Mugabe's critics, it is enough that ZANU-PF has been pushed aside as the governing party and that he has either lost or been forced into a second round. These setbacks are reminiscent of the experience of other African liberation movements which overstayed their time in power and never recovered after performing poorly in elections.

That was the case in Zambia, where the United National Independence Party lost a 1991 election and has performed dismally since then. The same happened in Malawi, where Kamuzu Banda's Malawi Congress Party never bounced back from its 1994 defeat, and in Zambia, where President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia lost to former trade unionist Frederick Chiluba in 1991.

Yet in Zimbabwe, there are clearly still significant numbers of people who still support Mugabe and believe his achievements outweigh his failings. They believe his rhetoric that the West is to blame for Zimbabwe's problems and point to his role as liberator and now defender of the national interest, high literacy levels, and land reforms that were ostensibly intended to improve livelihoods.

If there is blame to be apportioned, these people look to Mugabe's entourage, whom they hold responsible for systemic corruption and inefficiency.

This group of voters is mistrustful of Tsvangirai, and suspects, for example that he is sympathetic to the white farmers dispossessed by Mugabe's 2000 forcible land redistribution, and might seek to restore their property if he were elected.

For Mugabe allies in ZANU-PF, this close-run election amounts to a sort of victory against arch-enemies Britain and the United States, in that the results at least show that Mugabe is not as unpopular as some thought and the ballot has not been a walkover for Tsvangirai.

Political analysts say neither ZANU-PF nor Mugabe should be underestimated. The president has proved remarkably resilient despite frequent predictions of his imminent demise.

Analyst Brian Kagoro suggested that the MDC would do well to put its declaration of victory on hold.

"It's not over until it's over. I am not celebrating. There is nothing yet to

celebrate," he said. "I am sorry to pour water on your celebratory mood."

Pondai Bamu, a Zimbabwean academic at the Transitional Justice Institute at the University of Ulster, Belfast, gave a similar assessment prior to the elections.

Significant numbers of people still support Mugabe and believe his rhetoric.

"The problem with commentators on Zimbabwean politics is that we have tended to think with our emotions and so we speak with little objectivity," he predicted. "After March 29, a lot of us will be very disappointed because what we hoped would happen will not have happened. Frankly speaking, Morgan Tsvangirai will not be able to command the majority to become president."

The ZANU-PF politburo member told IWPR that his party was ready for a presidential run-off and still believed Mugabe could win.

He said people should not underestimate the ruling party's ability to patch up internal differences and unite in the face of its greatest ever challenge. What was at stake here, he said, was political survival, not just for the president but for ZANU-PF itself, which did not want to go down like other liberation movements that lost elections.

"We believe that we can cover the gap," said the politburo member. "President Mugabe is not yet down and out until Tsvangirai beats him with the required 50 per cent-plus. He will never give up even if it means a third or fourth round."

Nonthando Bhebhe is the pseudonym of a reporter in Zimbabwe. ■

WORLD PRESS APPEAL TO ZIMBABWE NEIGHBOURS

US and UK media say countries in the region should pressure Mugabe to accept election results.

By Erica Beinlich in London

As Zimbabwe awaits the outcome of the March 29 presidential election, influential international media have called on neighbouring countries to ensure that the will of the people is respected.

Since the joint elections took place, opinion pieces published in leading US and the UK newspapers have pressed southern African states to do what they can to ensure ballot results are properly processed and adhered to, so that votes for change in Zimbabwe were not cast in vain.

Although official results from the presidential poll have yet to be announced, the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, has already claimed victory.

**“The leaders of neighbouring African countries must now make clear that the will of the Zimbabwean people must be upheld”
— The Independent.**

According to the Zimbabwe Election Commission, the main faction of the MDC won a majority of seats in parliamentary elections held on the same day, with 99 seats, while the ruling party, ZANU-PF, took just 97.

“The leaders of neighbouring African countries must now make clear that the will of the Zimbabwean people must be



Credit: Lazele

Observer from the Southern African Development Community SADC at a polling station in Harare. Picture taken March 29.

upheld,” said The Independent on April 1. “The vote in Zimbabwe has already been recorded loudly.”

Mugabe may have got away with rigging the last two elections in 2002 and 2005, but this time, it seems, his defeat is so overwhelming that it would be hard for him to manipulate his way out of trouble.

“Whether Mr Mugabe succeeds in imposing fraudulent election results will depend on whether other governments in southern Africa... resolve, at least, to do something about the situation,” agreed the Washington Post, in an editorial on April 1.

If the incumbent president were to refuse to accept defeat, the South African Development Committee, SADC, charged with overseeing the elections, could probably pressure him into backing down by threatening him with isolation, it said.

But, the Post warns, “if [SADC members] tolerate another fraud and

another entrenchment by Mr Mugabe, the disgrace will be theirs”.

The results, it said, will reflect on the whole of Africa and affect its standing in the world.

“At stake for Africa is the credibility of its institutions and their commitment to the rule of law,” said the Financial Times on March 31.

**SADC members face “disgrace” if they tolerate election fraud
— Washington Post.**

The responsibility for ensuring fairness falls squarely on two men, said the Times of London on March 31 — South African president Thabo Mbeki and British Foreign Secretary David Miliband.

According to the opinion piece, the South African president must communicate to the rest of Africa

whether the election results were “plausible or whether they are a product of shameless manipulation”.

South African president Thabo Mbeki must tell the rest of the continent whether election results were “plausible or whether they are a product of shameless manipulation” — Financial Times.

The SADC tasked Mbeki with overseeing talks between the MDC and ZANU-PF in an attempt to resolve the political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe. However, the MDC claimed talks collapsed after Mugabe announced the March 29 date for elections, without introducing reforms the opposition had called for.

Rigged elections in Zimbabwe could do further damage to South Africa’s diplomatic reputation, following the failure of the talks, said the article.

But regardless of the election results, Times columnist Bronwen Maddox

urged Britain “to help the shattered country more actively than it has done so far — and it will have no excuse for not doing so”.

The Los Angeles Times on April 2 agreed that Zimbabwe urgently required outside assistance. “Whether Mugabe departs gracefully or dies in office years from now, Zimbabwe will need international help to end the culture of kleptocracy and to learn from bitter experience how better to govern itself,” it said.

Not only must the international community help Zimbabwe get out of this situation because it is the right thing to do, but also because it had a hand in getting the country to this point in the first place, said Business Daily Africa, in an apparent reference to the legacy of colonialism.

Regardless of who has played a role in plunging Zimbabwe into its current state, other editorials said that the results of March 29 will mark a significant change in the country — brought on by Zimbabweans themselves.

Basildon Peta, in a column in The Independent on March 31, wrote that while he is sure that Mugabe’s reign is finally coming to an end, he is not

convinced the transition will occur smoothly. “Mr Mugabe will probably declare himself the victor despite the results,” he wrote. “But he will now have to contend with a different nation.”

“All the stuffed ballot boxes in the world may not drown out Saturday’s cry of rage” — Simon Tisdall in The Guardian.

In the “Comment Is Free” section of The Guardian on March 31, Simon Tisdall outlined Mugabe’s possible options when the results are announced — from stepping down peacefully to imposing martial law in a “Musharraf gambit”, a reference to Pakistan’s current president.

Yet “all the stuffed ballot boxes in the world may not drown out Saturday’s cry of rage”, he wrote. “Zimbabwe’s political fundamentals changed irrevocably this weekend.”

Erica Beinlich is an IWPR reporter in London. ■

The Zimbabwe Crisis Report is an initiative of IWPR-Africa’s Zimbabwe Programme. This programme promotes democratization and good governance with Southern Africa and contributes to the development of a culture of human rights and the rule of law. Focusing on Zimbabwe the programme has three core components —

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