

Zimbabwe Incumbent President, ZANU-PF Re-elected in Historic Poll

Opposition forces reject outcome seeking to continue western sanctions and attempted isolation

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Featured image: Zimbabwe MDC-A instigated violence on August 1, 2018 in Harare

National harmonized parliamentary and presidential elections in the Southern African state of Zimbabwe were held on July 30.

Over 70 percent of the electorate participated in the voting where some 23 presidential candidates and dozens of political parties were on the ballot.

This is the first election since the resignation of former President Robert Mugabe during late November 2017. His predecessor, President Emmerson Mnangagwa, has attempted to set the stage for improving the national economy through reforms aimed at lifting sanctions imposed nearly two decades ago by western imperialist states.

The Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) ruling party won two-thirds of the seats in the legislative branch of the republic. Results announced by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) Chairperson Justice Priscilla Chigumba said that Mnangagwa won 50.8 percent of the vote while his closest rival, Nelson Chamisa of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDC-A), garnered 44.3 percent. Other smaller parties combined made up the remaining 4.9 percent of the votes.

Zimbabwe electoral laws mandate that if any leading candidate for president acquires less than 50 percent of the votes there will be a runoff contest between the two top candidates in a matter of weeks. Mnangagwa tallied over 50 percent and was therefore declared the victor.



Zimbabwe President Emmerson Mnangagwa at ZANU-PF gathering in Harare.

Numerous international monitoring teams came into Zimbabwe for the run-up and actual voting. This has been a tradition for many years although after 2000, a number of teams, particularly those from states which have imposed sanctions on the country, were barred from participation.

Election monitors from the African Union (AU), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), United Nations, European Union (EU), the United States, Commonwealth of Nations, People's Republic of China, among many others were on the ground in Zimbabwe to assess whether the poll was free and fair along with making a determination about the accuracy of the outcome.

Veronica Gwaze wrote on the regional view of the July 30 elections in an article published by the state-owned Zimbabwe Herald noting that:

"The Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC countries (ECF- SADC) has congratulated Zimbabwe and its various political parties on the manner in which they conducted themselves during the 2018 electoral period. In its preliminary report, ECF-SADC head Justice Semistocles Kaijage said a spirit of tolerance and restraint was prevalent during the campaign period. On polling day, the mission reported, most polling stations allowed for smooth flow of voters and the secrecy of the vote was safeguarded."

During the day of the voting there were no reported incidents of violence across the vast nation which borders South Africa, Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi and Botswana. Reports from the monitoring teams and the media indicated that the process was conducted in a calm, transparent and efficient manner.

Despite the claims of vote rigging by the opposition MDC-A, there was no specific evidence cited which could substantiate these allegations. The terms of the elections were agreed upon by all parties involved which allowed observers to verify the counting and tabulation.

A key trading partner and decades-long political ally of Zimbabwe, the People's Republic of China's head of its monitoring group reported that the electoral system was working properly and approved of the results. Zimbabwe Herald reporter Ishemunyoro Chingwere interviewed Liu Guijin of the Chinese team noting:

"[A]s a good friend of Zimbabwe, China had been very helpful in the past with Zimbabwe's development process and was definitely going to continue on the same path after the elections. The peaceful and democratic elections, he said, will also send a positive signal to the Chinese investors, whom he said should up their investments in the country. He also urged the Zimbabwean private sector to take advantage of Chinese entrepreneurs and business counterparts who will be coming into the country in search of business opportunities." (Aug. 2)

MDC-A Sparks Violence on August 1: Six People Confirmed Dead

Nonetheless, the MDC-A continued throughout the counting, verification and tabulation process to make claims through both social media and the international press that the ZEC was rigging the outcome. By the conclusion of the voting on July 30, Chamisa was already claiming that he had won the elections prior to any significant number of the votes having been counted.

When the ZEC announced the results of the parliamentary voting on August 1 giving the ruling ZANU-PF Party an overwhelming majority, it was denounced by the MDC-A as fraudulent. Hundreds of opposition supporters began staging a demonstration in the capital of Harare demanding that Chamisa and MDC-A be declared as the winners.

Both police and military units were deployed in response to the demonstration which soon turned violent. Dozens of vehicles were vandalized and set alight. Later government and ZANU-PF offices were physically attacked by demonstrators throwing bricks and other missiles at the buildings.

Tires were left burning in the streets while protesters went on a rampage. Early reports said that three people died in the melee. The following day on August 2, the Zimbabwe police confirmed the deaths of six people directly related to the disturbances.

Various elements within Zimbabwe society as well as the government placed blame for the destruction and death on the MDC-A supporters. Some said the riot was staged in order to cast aspersions on the ZANU-PF government tainting the electoral process and providing a rationale for the continued embargo by the West against Zimbabwe.

Dr. Obert Mpofu, the Minister of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage, wrote in an editorial on August 3 emphasizing:

"We condemn in the strongest terms these acts of violence which have reared their ugly face in Harare CBD (Central Business District) and we attribute to the MDC Alliance. The Government of Zimbabwe places full responsibility for the violence, destruction of property, injury and loss of life on the MDC-Alliance which has continuously and persistently churned out hate speech, inflammatory language and displayed propensity for violence since February 2018. MDC-Alliance's political leadership has over the past three months heightened and psyched up their members to commit violence at political

rallies, addressing Press conferences and even on social media.” (Herald)

International Dimensions of the Zimbabwe Situation

The attitude of the MDC-A is not surprising to anyone who has followed their political trajectory since 2000. Every election held during this time period in which they did not win has been denounced as illegitimate.

This current MDC-A configuration is actually an alliance of seven different parties which are by no means united even among themselves. Certain elements in the alliance of convenience objected to the tactics utilized on August 1 which resulted in the deaths and unwarranted destruction of government and private property. The MDC-A, as well as its previous iterations, are supported both politically and financially by interests in the western countries which have maintained draconian sanctions on Zimbabwe for nearly two decades. Obviously there is a concerted attempt to continue their economic war against the state in an effort to overthrow ZANU-PF as the ruling party.

It will be up to the ZANU-PF government and political leadership to develop a strategy for moving forward in regard to their relationship with the United States, Britain and the EU since these countries hold the key to the lifting of sanctions. Zimbabwe under the previous leadership of President Mugabe adopted a “Look East” policy where priority was placed on cultivating trade and joint economic projects with governments within the Global South.

China has demonstrated historically its commitment to expressing solidarity with Zimbabwe through partnerships and investment. Neighboring Republic of South Africa has rejected calls by the imperialist states to engage in a blockade against Zimbabwe. President Mnangagwa has gone out of his way to mend relations with the world capitalist nations which continue to impose sanctions on the country. All of these western governments were allowed to send observers into Zimbabwe for the elections.

The entire SADC region recognizes that Zimbabwe must be supported in order to guarantee stability and progress throughout the sub-continent. This holds true as well for the AU. With the ongoing combined efforts of the progressive forces inside the country and the international community Zimbabwe will survive.

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