



# Briefing on Current Zimbabwe Socio-Political Relations

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**Over the past year,** Zimbabwe has entered a period of extreme uncertainty. President Robert Mugabe’s advanced age (92 years) makes executive turnover before the scheduled 2018 elections likely. Both the ruling party and the opposition are in disarray. In this memo, I address three questions that will be central to political developments in Zimbabwe in the near to medium term. These are:

- ▶ What is the likely outcome of the current succession struggle *within* the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF)? Are there “moderates” remaining within the ruling coalition, or have recent purges produced a more hardline party?
- ▶ What are the prospects for regime change in the immediate term? Is an extra-constitutional transfer of power possible? What are prospects for electoral turnover in 2018?
- ▶ Finally, what are the views of ordinary Zimbabweans about their existing political options? Has persistent political crisis eroded Zimbabweans’ commitment to democracy?

I will address each of these questions in turn, but the memo first provides some background information and a brief periodization of the post-2000 period in Zimbabwe. This will inform readers unfamiliar with the context of the relevant legacies and trends that shape current political developments.

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\* Dr. Adrienne LeBas is an Associate Professor in the Department of Government at American University. This research report is the product of independent scholarly investigation and is not finished intelligence. It has not been coordinated with U.S. Intelligence Community agencies. The opinions expressed in this report are solely the author’s and are not those of the National Intelligence University, Defense Intelligence Agency, or Department of Defense. This report has been approved for unrestricted distribution by the Office of Corporate Communications, Defense Intelligence Agency, case #16-232.



STREET SCENE, BULAWAYO, ZIMBABWE. Photo by Shutterstock.com.

## Legacies: 1980–2000

Zimbabwe has been a procedural democracy with multiparty elections since independence in 1980, but elections have rarely been free and fair. The vote in the founding elections in 1980 was split between two nationalist parties, each of which was associated with a different army during Zimbabwe's liberation war. Beginning in 1982, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) government under Prime Minister Mugabe pursued a campaign of repression in western Zimbabwe that resulted in thousands of civilian casualties.<sup>1</sup> The government and military claimed they were targeting dissident members of the armed wing of the rival Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). Violence ended only after the 1987 merger of ZANU and ZAPU into a single party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), which has remained in power to the present. The parties' merger had two important repercussions:

- ▶ ZANU-PF was able to claim a cross-ethnic base. Previously, ZANU support had been concentrated among the Shona, who compose approximately 80 percent of Zimbabwe's population, while ZAPU had attracted support from the Ndebele, who are mostly concentrated in western Zimbabwe and compose about 15 percent of the population.
- ▶ ZANU-PF made the liberation war the central element in legitimizing the party's rule. Participation in the war could be used both to unite ZANU and ZAPU elements within ZANU-PF and to discredit all new opposition challengers.

<sup>1</sup> Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: Report on the 1980s Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands* (Harare: CCJP, 1997).

From 1980 to the present, violence and threatened violence have been a consistent element of ZANU-PF campaign strategies (Kriger 2005). Political discourse and rhetoric reinforce the liberation war as the central defining feature of Zimbabwe's history and politics (Ranger 2004).

*“Zimbabwe has been a procedural democracy with multiparty elections since independence in 1980, but elections have rarely been free and fair.”*

Zimbabwe's institutional framework centralizes power and makes opposition coordination especially important. Although the new constitution adopted in 2013 is intended to curb executive power, Zimbabwe remains a hyper-presidentialized system. The country's electoral rules remain highly majoritarian as well. The 2013 constitution changes the selection process for members of the upper house of the Parliament of Zimbabwe, the Senate, to a more proportional system. However, the vast majority of delegates to the more powerful lower chamber, the House of Assembly, are elected in single-member districts. This electoral system, similar to that in the United States, heavily disadvantages small parties. Under similar rules, fragmentation of the opposition vote has allowed authoritarian ruling parties elsewhere in Africa to remain in office even when they received small pluralities of the popular vote. For instance, in Kenya in 1992, the ruling party retained control of both the presidency and parliament with only about 30 percent of the popular vote. The current fragmentation of the Zimbabwean opposition limits the pressure that opposition voters can place on the ruling party.

## Three Periods of Crisis: 2000 to the Present

Zimbabwe's extended political crisis began in 2000, but the post-2000 period can be separated into three separate crisis phases.

### *2000–08: High Party-based Polarization*

This period was marked by highly competitive elections in which the vote was closely split between ZANU-PF and its main opposition challenger, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Despite the formation of a small splinter party in 2005, the main faction of the MDC (MDC-T) continued to monopolize the bulk of the opposition vote throughout the 2000s. From 2005 to the present, there have been complaints about the authoritarian leadership style of Morgan Tsvangirai, current party president and the MDC presidential candidate in 2002 and 2008.



Photo by Shutterstock.com.

The 2000–08 period was characterized by very high levels of party-based polarization, which strengthened both parties' organization and internal cohesion. The language and the strategies employed by *both* the MDC and ZANU-PF reinforced polarization. Polarization increased the divide between the two parties and discouraged both moderation and defection from either party (LeBas 2011). This allowed the MDC to retain the commitment of grassroots activists and voters in spite of high levels of state-sponsored violence. Similarly, ZANU-PF—traditionally a highly factionalized party—was able to enforce a greater degree of discipline and top-down control over its own members. Discipline was reinforced by violence and coercion, primarily by ZANU-PF but also by the opposition MDC as well (LeBas 2006).<sup>2</sup>

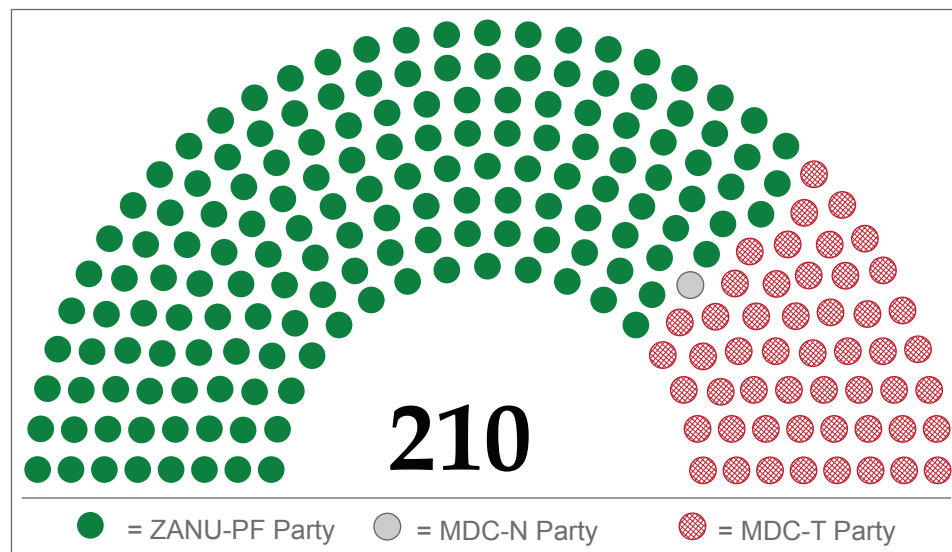
High levels of polarization—and the language of warfare used to describe the confrontation with the MDC—muted debate within ZANU-PF and reinforced Mugabe's control over the party. Several party moderates and technocrats lost their seats in the 2000 elections; others were maneuvered away from influence, including several formerly key members of the Politburo, the party's key decisionmaking body. ZANU-PF politicians with close ties to the president—yet little support from the broader party—became increasingly important over the course of the 2000s. Patrick Chinamasa (current minister of finance, previously minister of justice) and Joseph Made (minister of agriculture) are commonly mentioned as exemplars of this trend. During the polarized and violent politics of the 2000s, hardliners were also rewarded: this was the beginning of the rise of Saviour Kasukuwere (now minister of local government, then MP Mount Darwin) and Oppah Muchinguri (now minister of environment).

<sup>2</sup> Also, David Coltart, "MDC must deal with violence within its own ranks," *Zimbabwe Independent* (May 26, 2006).

### 2009–13: The Global Political Agreement and Power Sharing

Political crisis took its toll on Zimbabwe. By the 2008 elections, ordinary Zimbabweans faced persistent commodity shortages, a thriving black market, hyperinflation, and the virtual collapse of all public services. ZANU-PF was punished for this state of affairs with a near-defeat in the March 2008 harmonized elections. The MDC-T won 47 percent of the parliamentary vote and 99 of 210 seats in the House of Assembly, and the smaller MDC splinter won an additional 10 seats, giving the opposition a working majority in parliament. Though MDC-T presidential candidate Morgan Tsvangirai won 100,000 more votes than Mugabe, he fell short of 50 percent, triggering a second round presidential election for June. In the three months between these elections, ZANU-PF deployed the military nationwide. Intense violence and repression during this period destroyed many of the MDC-T's grassroots structures. After the MDC-T announced that it would boycott the run-off election, Mugabe was reelected with one million more votes than he had won three months earlier.

Faced with intense external pressure from the African Union and the South African government, the three main parties signed a power-sharing agreement in September 2008. The Global Political Agreement (GPA) came into force in February 2009: Tsvangirai was sworn in as prime minister (PM), the leader of the smaller MDC faction was sworn in as deputy PM, and the MDC-T was assigned several cabinet positions. But the power-sharing agreement was never underpinned by strong domestic consensus, and it lacked explicit enforcement mechanisms should one of the parties violate its terms.



2013 HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY RESULTS, ZIMBABWBE. Green is ZANU-PF, Red is MDC-T parties. By NIU graphic designer after Nick.mon.

As I have described in detail elsewhere (LeBas 2014), ZANU-PF practiced “politics as usual” throughout the GPA period, repeatedly violating the terms of the agreement and continuing to use violence against political opponents. Progress on institutional reform was minimal, and state security forces remained politicized. The MDC-T was weakened during this period as well: party leadership neglected the party’s grassroots activists and its civil society partners, and the party struggled to claim credit for the real improvements in living conditions that occurred under power-sharing.

### *2013 to the Present*

The 2013 elections marked a serious setback for opposition in Zimbabwe. ZANU-PF won over 60 percent of the presidential vote, and it won 160 House of Assembly seats to the MDC-T’s 49. Although there was likely some election rigging, the election results accurately reflect an erosion of MDC grassroots structures and popular support during power sharing (LeBas 2014). If the power-sharing period had eroded party-based polarization, the 2013 election results marked its official end. Ordinary Zimbabweans seemed to be exhausted by protracted political conflict, and the election results can possibly be interpreted as acquiescence to continued ZANU-PF rule. In the election’s aftermath, a weakened MDC-T fought over the assignment of blame. Eventually, former MDC-T Finance Minister Tendai Biti and other founding members left to form the splinter MDC-Renewal party. The new weakness of the MDC allowed for the reemergence of long-suppressed divisions within ZANU-PF, as the next section will detail.



ZANU-PF PARTY LEADERS, ZIMBABWE. (Left to right): Robert Mugabe, Grace Mugabe, Emmerson Mnangagwa, Joice Mujuru. Photos by (L-R): Defenselmagery.mil, DanjkRoberts, Richter-Frank Jurgen, Jean-Marc Ferre.



## The Succession Struggle Within ZANU-PF

Politics within the ruling party has undergone dramatic change since December 2014, when sitting vice president Joice Mujuru was removed from her position and subsequently ejected from the party. For much of the 2000s, the struggle to succeed Mugabe was between two factions: one behind Joice Mujuru (vice president, 2004–14) and one behind Emmerson Mnangagwa (current vice president). Both were active in the liberation war, but they drew on very different bases of support. Mnangagwa never had the strong support of grassroots party structures or, indeed, of many key members of the Politburo. Instead, his influence within the party has long been seen as linked to his close personal relationship with Mugabe and to some segments of the military and intelligence communities. Mujuru's power, on the other hand, derived from ZANU-PF's elected structures, its key regional brokers, and her marriage to the powerful former army chief Solomon Mujuru.<sup>3</sup>

The December 2014 ejection of Mujuru from ZANU-PF was a surprise, even though the fortunes of the two factions had varied over the 2000s. Consensus within the party had been that Mujuru would eventually prevail due to her organizational muscle and high-level backers in the Politburo.<sup>4</sup> Mujuru's appointment as vice president post in 2004 was viewed as a near-confirmation of her position as Mugabe's successor, especially since Mnangagwa was removed from his position as ZANU-PF secretary of administration at roughly the same time. In 2007–08, Mujuru's fortunes fell, as rumors circulated that she and her husband were plotting to oust Mugabe. In 2012, however, Mugabe and the ZANU-PF Politburo moved sharply against a now-ascendant Mnangagwa, who had seized control over many of the party's grassroots structures, allegedly through bribery. Mugabe announced the nationwide dissolution of ZANU-PF's elected District Coordinating Councils (DCCs), stating that they were being used to "divide the party." The party also started a process of reforming its own internal party constitution to reinforce top-down control over the selection of candidates and the composition of the Central Committee, the larger of the two party decisionmaking bodies.

This laid the groundwork for the current situation. The weakening of ZANU-PF grassroots structures and internal democracy allowed for Mugabe's unilateral dismissal of Mujuru and 16 cabinet ministers and deputies at the 2014 meeting of the ZANU-PF congress, which is held every four years. Mujuru supporters suspended from party positions include many of the party's most senior political heavyweights, such as former state security minister and ZANU-PF Secretary of Administration Didymus Mutasa. The 2012 dissolution of the DCCs justified further purges of Mujuru supporters from party structures in 2015, an exercise spearheaded by new ZANU-PF commissar and Minister of Local Government Saviour Kasukuwere. Over 140 party members were expelled or suspended, including seven members of Parliament.

<sup>3</sup> *Along with Josiah Tongogara (deceased 1979), Solomon Mujuru led ZANU's liberation army before independence. He subsequently integrated the ZANU and ZAPU armies into a single national army after 1980, and he served as army chief until 1992. He died in 2011.*

<sup>4</sup> *Members of the Politburo are selected by the president from those elected by provincial party structures to the Central Committee, which is a much larger party organ (currently 300 members) that meets less frequently than the Politburo. The Presidium is composed of the president, the party's two vice presidents, and the ZANU-PF national chairperson. Prior to 2014, the Presidium was elected by the party; after amendment of the party constitution, the rest of the Presidium is now directly selected by the president.*

Are there moderates remaining within ZANU-PF, or have these purges produced an even more hardline and anti-democratic ruling party? Mujuru has long been seen by outsiders as representing more moderate elements within ZANU-PF. A Mujuru presidency probably would have resulted in some moderation of current ZANU-PF economic policy and lessened use of violence and repression against the opposition. Within Zimbabwe, for instance, it is rumored that Mujuru opposed the military deployment after the 2008 elections and argued instead for concession to the MDC. But hardline elements have long been ascendant within ZANU-PF, and many of the party's true moderates, notably former Finance Minister Simba Makoni and former Minister of Home Affairs Dumiso Dabengwa, left the party before the 2008 elections. More progressive and pro-democratic elements were purged as early as 2000.

In the aftermath of Mujuru's dismissal and subsequent ejection from ZANU-PF, Mnangagwa initially emerged as the likely successor to Mugabe. He was named one of two vice presidents, and he took over much of the day-to-day business of the presidency. He also has the support of many within the military establishment. The Mnangagwa faction's gains, however, came at the cost of ZANU-PF's internal party democracy and checks on Mugabe's discretionary authority. Changes to the party's constitution have given the president full control over appointments to the Presidium and the Politburo. Even if Mnangagwa were to stabilize his control over party structures, he could be removed from his position by Mugabe without any consultation with party structures or the Central Committee. Furthermore, despite Mnangagwa's position as first vice president, neither the party nor national constitution specifies clearly the order of succession.

Mujuru's ouster should be seen as detrimental for both political stability and human rights in Zimbabwe. Mnangagwa is certainly less moderate than Mujuru, but her removal has opened space for two dangerous developments in ZANU-PF internal politics. First, Mujuru's ouster has resulted in much greater power for Generation 40 (G40), a group of younger ZANU-PF politicians who should be seen as hardliners opposed to both economic liberalization and political opening.<sup>5</sup> One of G40's most prominent members, current Minister of Higher Education Jonathan Moyo, was the architect of Zimbabwe's repressive media and public order laws. ZANU-PF's current national chairperson, Saviour Kasukuwere, first came to prominence within the party for his role in orchestrating extensive violence from 2000 to 2008 in his home constituency of Mount Darwin. He subsequently spearheaded the economic indigenization push, and he is now in charge of the powerful Ministry of Local Government. Kasukuwere's role as ZANU-PF commissar will further expand the influence of G40, as he is in charge of rebuilding grassroots party structures weakened by the dissolution of the DCCs in 2012.

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<sup>5</sup> *The architects of Mujuru's ouster came from within G40. The key figures were Former Minister of Information Jonathan Moyo, who remains within cabinet and former Women's League head Oppah Muchinguri, who remains in cabinet but did not gain the party vice-presidency that she expected.*

The rise of G40 triggered a wave of intra-party violence over the course of 2015, including clashes between youth gangs allied to G40 and the Mnangagwa faction in Harare.<sup>6</sup> In 2016, Kasukuwere suspended ZANU-PF provincial chairs in the Midlands, Masvingo, and Mashonaland East, who are viewed as supporters of Mnangagwa. Elements of the party structures in these provinces have actively resisted Kasukuwere's new appointments. Kasukuwere's attempt to remake party structures will be further complicated by the very strong opposition of the powerful Zimbabwe Liberation War Veterans Association (ZLWVA) to the G40.

The second destabilizing effect of the Mujuru ouster has been the political rise of the President's second wife, Grace Mugabe, who captured her current position as head of the ZANU-PF Women's League at the December 2014 party congress. G40 may be backing the first lady as a presidential successor, and the state-owned media consistently presents the first lady as an extension of Mugabe. It is unclear whether this support is genuine or whether the first lady is being used to check Mnangagwa and keep the succession question in flux after Mujuru's ouster. Currently, Vice President Phelekezela Mphoko seems aligned to G40, and he may emerge as a viable alternative to both the first lady and Mnangagwa. Should the first lady or Mphoko succeed Mugabe, there could also be backlash from the military, which supports Mnangagwa as a successor, and from the ZLWVA. There is currently a great deal of volatility within ZANU-PF.



By NIU graphic designer.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, the monthly monitoring reports compiled by the Zimbabwe Peace Project, available at [www.zim-peaceproject.com](http://www.zim-peaceproject.com).

## Prospects for Transition

This section addresses different regime change scenarios within Zimbabwe. Given President Mugabe's advanced age and the degree of volatility within ZANU-PF, the possibility of an extra-constitutional transfer of power in Zimbabwe is higher than it has been in the past. It is important to underline, however, that it remains fairly low. Zimbabwe should not be conflated with regimes with higher levels of personalization, weaker state institutions, and a weaker ruling party organization (e.g., Cameroon, Guinea, Burkina Faso). Neither a military coup nor regime change via large-scale protest is likely. In all likelihood, the succession struggle will be waged within the ruling party. The most likely outcome is that Mnangagwa will succeed Mugabe but will need to grapple with greater G40 influence within ZANU-PF. One potential compromise would be giving the faction control over both vice presidents under Mnangagwa. It is highly likely that Zimbabwe will remain an electoral regime with elections held on schedule in 2018 and 2023. Over time, the diminishing popular base of ZANU-PF increases the likelihood of electoral turnover, especially if opposition parties are able to coordinate.

## *Military Intervention*

Several scholars of Zimbabwe have pointed the increasing militarization of state decision-making from 2008 to the present (Mangongera 2014; Bratton 2014). The second round of the 2008 presidential elections—and the military's role in delivering victory to ZANU-PF—resulted in a centralization of power within the Joint Operations Command. The commitment of the military chiefs to the democratic process is unclear, as a handful have made public statements signaling unwillingness to serve under a politician who did not fight in the liberation war. It was Tsvangirai's failure to fight in the liberation war that was at issue at that point in 2008, but lack of liberation war credentials could also be stumbling blocks for Grace Mugabe and other members of the G40 faction.

The bulk of the military establishment is currently aligned behind Mnangagwa. Should Mugabe die while in office, would the military take action to ensure his succession to the presidency? This seems unlikely for several reasons, even if another successor is named. First of all, despite the military's expanded role in state decision-making, there is no history of direct military involvement in politics in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has never experienced a coup, and influential military figures, including Solomon Mujuru, have always exerted influence through the party rather than independently of it. The culture and tradition of party-based rule is strong in Zimbabwe. Second, the current regime has safeguarded the loyalty of the military by granting it privileged access to resources. Though diamond revenues have dwindled over the past 2 years, the military chiefs now have substantial resources and business ventures beyond government. Patronage could be used to remove military objections to a non-Mnangagwa successor. Thirdly, any military action would need to be justified with reference to the liberation war. Given the questionable loyalty of

the ZLWVA to the military brass, this would be a risky move. The ZLWVA has significant organizational muscle, and segments of its membership remain loyal to Mujuru. Neither Mnangagwa nor the G40 would want to provoke large-scale protest by the ZLWVA, which has destabilized ZANU-PF governments in the past.

### ***Protest-led Removal of the Ruling Party***

This is even less likely than a military intervention. Large-scale protests and work stoppages organized in 2002 by a united MDC, which then had the full support of civil society, were insufficient to remove the ZANU-PF regime. Since 2002, the MDC has splintered, and the mobilizing capacity of its civil society partners has eroded. Zimbabwe's once-powerful centralized trade union structures have weakened, and less than 20 percent of its labor force is now in formal employment. The opposition's power to organize large-scale protest is significantly diminished.

The fragmentation of the opposition landscape also makes protest-led transition unlikely. None of the opposition parties would have much to gain from calling for large-scale protest at this stage. The opposition parties' respective levels of popular support are unknown at this point, and large-scale protest could unify a divided ZANU-PF and even open space for Mujuru to broker an alliance with her old party. Both the MDC factions and politically-oriented civil society would want to avoid strengthening or unifying ZANU-PF, especially at a time when opposition forces are heavily splintered.

### ***Electoral Turnover in 2018***

The main obstacle to ZANU-PF's removal via the ballot box in 2018 is the fragmentation of opposition parties. Joice Mujuru has now launched her own party, Zimbabwe People First (ZPF). The MDC Renewal faction, led by former MDC Finance Minister and founding member Tendai Biti, has now been renamed the People's Democratic Party (PDP).<sup>7</sup> The popularity of both the PDP and ZPF is unknown. The MDC-T ejected 21 members of Parliament who were linked to Biti, but both the MDC-T and the PDP boycotted 2015 by-elections triggered by these ejections. The opposition boycott allowed ZANU-PF to win the two-thirds majority that it now holds in Parliament, but it also makes it difficult to assess the likelihood that opposition parties can retake these seats in 2018.

It is difficult to predict the degree to which Mujuru will reshape the election landscape in 2018. The PDP and other opposition parties are in alliance talks with Mujuru's ZPF, but the main MDC-T faction has repeatedly refused discussion of an alliance with Mujuru. In addition, there are several former ZANU-PF politicians who lost their seats in 2015, after contesting as independent candidates. If these individuals or ZANU-PF's suspended provincial party chairs joined Mujuru's ZPF, this could potentially strengthen the party in ZANU-PF's traditional strongholds. Mujuru was

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<sup>7</sup> MDC splinters led by Elton Mangoma and Welshman Ncube, as well as other smaller opposition parties, are likely to be electorally irrelevant going forward.

popular with many ZANU-PF members in the past, but it is unclear if her base of support has been substantially eroded by the 2014 ZANU-PF campaigns against her, which included allegations of corruption and attempts to discredit her liberation war record.

In terms of parliamentary control, the likely fragmentation of the opposition vote will give a significant advantage to ZANU-PF. The majority of the seats in the House of Assembly are allocated in single-member districts. If opposition parties run candidates against one another, they risk splintering the vote and allowing ZANU-PF to retain these seats with bare pluralities of the vote. Taking Parliament from ZANU-PF will therefore require the erosion of ZANU-PF support *alongside* some coordination of Zimbabwe's main opposition parties.

The presidential contest in 2018 will be more complicated in the absence of opposition coordination. If both Mujuru and Tsvangirai contested the presidency, it is unlikely that any candidate would achieve the 50 percent required to win in the first round. If Mugabe was the ZANU-PF nominee, both Tsvangirai and Mujuru would struggle in a second round, given the President's favorability ratings (discussed further below). If Mugabe was not the party's candidate, the outcome of a second round presidential race would depend, again, on opposition coordination. If Tsvangirai or another opposition politician went forward to a second round, would Mujuru rally her support against ZANU-PF? If Mujuru was the opposition candidate, would MDC-T be willing to campaign for her? Some degree of opposition coordination or unity would be necessary to sustain opposition turnout in the second round of any presidential contest. Without this, any opposition politician could lose to a ZANU-PF candidate in a context of starkly diminished turnout. State-sponsored violence similar to that in 2008 could also doom an opposition presidential candidate in the second round.



By NIU graphic designer.

## Public Opinion in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's political future is likely to be determined by three factors: (1) internal turmoil within ZANU-PF; (2) opposition cohesion; and (3) Zimbabwean public opinion. The foregoing analysis has shown the difficulty of forecasting with regard to the first two factors. We have only partial ability to forecast the third factor as well, but this is an area in which the U.S. government could improve its intelligence and forecasting capabilities. Small investments in polling and innovative survey design in Zimbabwe could shed greater light on possible outcomes of the 2018 elections and popular attitudes toward G40 and Mnangagwa. Here, I briefly review what we do know.<sup>8</sup>

The most significant development during the power-sharing period was the decline of partisan support for the MDC-T alongside strengthening support for President Mugabe and ZANU-PF. In nationally-representative surveys conducted by Afrobarometer and the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI) in July 2015 and November 2014, more than 60 percent of respondents said that they trusted President Mugabe "somewhat" or "a lot." The comparable figures for Afrobarometer surveys in 2005 and 2009 were around 30 percent. Political opinion has shifted even more substantially in terms of public attitudes toward opposition parties. In 2009, over 60 percent expressed some degree of trust in opposition politicians, while only 34 percent of respondents said the same in November 2014.

Partisan affiliation has also shifted against the MDC. Of the 65 percent of respondents who said they felt "close to a party" in October 2005, 51 percent said they supported the MDC-T and only 31 percent supported ZANU-PF. MDC support seems to have reached its peak after the signing of the power-sharing agreement, when 71 percent of those expressing a partisan identity said they supported the party. As suggested above, this level of support has collapsed in favor of ZANU-PF. In November 2014, only 26 percent of those expressing a partisan affiliation chose the MDC-T, while a surprising 58 percent of partisans said they supported ZANU-PF.

*“Zimbabwe’s political future is likely to be determined by three factors: (1) internal turmoil within ZANU-PF; (2) opposition cohesion; and (3) Zimbabwean public opinion.”*

<sup>8</sup> For 2005 to 2014, survey data can be downloaded at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org). The Mass Public Opinion Institute has not publicly released the July 2015 data. Figures from that survey are taken from “MPOI Survey: Mugabe Second Most Trusted Person in Zimbabwe,” VOA News, October 7, 2015.

Can we trust this strengthening support for the ruling party? As others have noted, public opinion data in Zimbabwe is biased by high levels of political intimidation (Bratton, et al. 2016). Fear of political intimidation remains very widespread in Zimbabwe. In November 2014, 42 percent of respondents said that they feared violence and intimidation “a lot” or somewhat.” This is a substantial decrease from the 81 percent of respondents who answered this way in the aftermath of the 2008 elections, but it is still quite high. Levels of dissatisfaction with democracy are similarly suggestive of the toll that violence has taken on ordinary Zimbabweans. In 2009, only 25 percent of Zimbabweans expressed any degree of satisfaction with the way democracy functioned in Zimbabwe, and this figure had only improved to about 33 percent by 2014. The July 2015 MPOI poll found that over 60 percent of Zimbabweans felt the country was on the wrong track.

As the 2018 elections approach, the big question is whether opposition parties will be able to take advantage of widespread popular dissatisfaction. Our understanding of the current state of Zimbabwean public opinion would be enhanced by expanded survey research, including the use of sophisticated new survey methods that would account for respondent fear and unwillingness to express over criticism of the ruling party. One open question that could be answered with creative polling is whether Mujuru would be able to attract a significant chunk of past ZANU-PF supporters—and whether her level of support would change substantially in the event that President Mugabe stepped down or died in office. A second open question is whether a reunified MDC could recover its earlier levels of popularity or whether the Biti-Tsvangirai split has done permanent damage to the MDC-T’s earlier cohesive voting bloc. A final question is whether change-minded voters would approve of an alliance between one or more of the MDC factions and Mujuru’s ZPF. Given the potential electoral costs of opposition fragmentation in 2018, it is important to determine if an electoral alliance with Mujuru—who was, after all, a ZANU-PF vice president during intense state-sponsored violence against the opposition—would alienate potential opposition voters. The MDC-T’s current refusal to negotiate with Mujuru may be an attempt to retain its vote base and therefore prevent further decline in opposition support and turnout in 2018.

## Recommendations

Over the past 18 months, Zimbabwe has experienced a significant unraveling of the nationalist coalition that has governed the country since independence. Though the opposition may eventually coalesce around a single candidate in 2018, it is possible that Zimbabwe is experiencing a wider decomposition of the fairly cohesive party system that emerged in 2000. Both of these developments create a great deal of uncertainty about Zimbabwe’s political trajectory and prospects for democratization in the medium term.



Policymakers would do best to encourage the implementation of reforms that can be credibly framed as nonpartisan. The 2013 constitution has expanded guarantees of personal freedoms and limited executive powers, yet much of the required implementing legislation has not been passed. By the end of 2015, Parliament had considered no more than 126 of the 400 statutes that need to be brought into alignment with the new constitution. The Criminal Law Code, the Public Order and Security Act, and the Electoral Act are all currently in contravention of the new constitution. Where possible, support to Zimbabwe's courts could be extended, especially in light of the highly encouraging signs of greater judicial independence over the past year.<sup>9</sup>

Attempts by the United Kingdom and the United States to isolate the ZANU-PF regime have long been ineffective. The removal of targeted sanctions would deny hardline elements in ZANU-PF the ability to use these measures as proof of "neo-colonialism."<sup>10</sup> U.S. policy is likely to have little to no effect on the succession issue, but there may be space for productive engagement with regard to government services delivery and strengthening of democratic institutions. The effective implementation of the 2013 constitution is likely to have a greater impact on long-run democratic success than the outcome of the 2018 elections. Where possible, U.S. policy should support the passage of legislation to implement the provisions of the 2013 constitution; the trend toward judicial independence and protection of the constitution within Zimbabwe's courts; and professionalization of the civil service. A foreign policy focused on normalizing U.S. relations with Zimbabwe could conceivably open up greater space for moderates within ZANU-PF and, at the very least, check the rise of G40. Explicit guarantees that the United States will work with any fairly elected leadership in Zimbabwe would provide greater cover for other elements within ZANU-PF to publicly support Mujuru or advocate for changes of policy if Mnangagwa or Mugabe remains in power after 2018. Overall, U.S. attempts to isolate the Mugabe regime from 2000 to 2008 had only negative effects on Zimbabwean politics. Those mistakes should not be repeated.

Internal politics within ZANU-PF is worrying, but U.S. policy should make no effort to shape the Mugabe succession or signal support for opposition forces. Given the highly politicized nature of the state's security forces, the United States can currently play no positive role in terms of police and security reform or reduction of political violence. Our public rhetoric should focus on supporting the democratic choice of ordinary Zimbabweans. In 2018, Zimbabweans may well vote for the continuation of ZANU-PF rule. It is important that U.S. policy toward Zimbabwe be framed in a way where ZANU-PF victory can exist alongside progress in strengthening democratic institutions and constitutionalism. Good laws and an independent judiciary are far more important in Zimbabwe right now than electoral turnover in 2018.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, the 2016 *Freedom in the World* report issued by Freedom House, which upgraded Zimbabwe's political and civil freedom scores in light of these improvements. This follows a long series of court rulings that have struck down government actions that violate either the new constitution's guarantees regarding human rights or the constitution's constraints on executive power.

<sup>10</sup> Joice Mujuru, who could conceivably emerge as a consensus opposition candidate in the 2018 presidential elections, remains on the current sanctions list. Reconsideration of sanctions prior to the 2018 elections might be wise.

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