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Country Brief | Zimbabwe

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Zimbabwe gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1980. With a relatively industrialized economy and a firm agricultural base, it was labelled the 'bread basket' of Southern Africa. Today, the country remains entrenched in an economic and political crisis. It failed to establish itself firmly on the path to multiparty democracy and after a decade of violent political contestation, the three principal political parties, the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and the two formations of the Movement for Democratic Change, (MDC-T and MDC-N) entered into a power-sharing agreement mediated by South Africa on behalf of SADC in 2008. However, the parties remain locked in a political standoff. The formation of the inclusive government led to greater political freedoms and laid the foundation for economic recovery; yet these gains have been threatened and rolled back.

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Democratic space in Zimbabwe increased following the formation of the inclusive government in 2009, but has currently shrunk to critical levels as ZANU PF threatens to hold simultaneous local, parliamentary and presidential elections under the 1980 Lancaster House Constitution in order to break the political impasse and re-establish their power. Public and private space is increasingly authoritarian and militarised. This has had an adverse effect on civil society organisations which have found it difficult to lobby and advocate for the Zimbabwean people. The constitutional reform process has been obstructed and the threat of elections has distracted the MDC as well as regional and international actors from applying significant pressure to see the reform process through. The majority of targeted restrictive measures in place were renewed by the European Union in 2011 and maintained by the United States, complicating the prospects for a unified position by SADC, the AU and the West on a peaceful democratic transition in Zimbabwe.

MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES

At independence, the country had two major political parties, ZANU led by Robert Mugabe and PF ZAPU led by Joshua Nkomo. ZANU, in a bid to become dominant, orchestrated a campaign against alleged dissidents called "Gukurahundi" and in the process killed more than 20 000 civilians in Matabeleland and the Midlands (PF ZAPU dominated areas) during the early

1980ies. A unity agreement between the two liberation movements, signed in 1987, brought an end to the “purges” giving birth to ZANU PF and ushering in a de facto one-party state. From 1987 until the formation of the MDC, no viable opposition party emerged in Zimbabwe, although several small parties have contested national elections since the early 1990s.

The MDC was formed in late 1999. Less than a year after its inception, the party joined civil society in mobilising the masses to vote against the state’s draft constitution in the 2000 referendum. Other factors such as inflation, ZANU PF retrogressive policies, increasing poverty and the steady reduction in living standards contributed to its growing support, from urban labour in particular. The party split in 2005 over participation in the senatorial elections, with one faction headed by Morgan Tsvangirai [anti-senate] and the other by Arthur Mutambara [pro-senate]. Following a subsequent struggle over the name ‘MDC’, Tsvangirai’s faction named their party MDC Tsvangirai (MDC-T) and Mutambara’s faction originally named their party MDC Mutambara (MDC-M). However, 2011 began with a further power struggle between Mutambara and newly elected party leader Welshman Ncube. Ncube eventually took Mutambara’s position within the inclusive government; MDC-M is now referred to as MDC-N.

The 2008 harmonised election saw MDC-T emerge as the party with the most popular support; however, following widespread violence perpetrated by ZANU PF and a fraudulent presidential run-off, ZANU PF, MDC-T and MDC-N entered into the power-sharing Global Political Agreement (GPA) in February 2009.

OTHER KEY POLITICAL STAKEHOLDERS

The security sector, led by the Joint Operations Command (JOC), is a key political stakeholder. JOC is controlled by high ranking ZANU PF officials such as Defence Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa, the Defence Force Commander Constantine Chiwengwa and his deputy Phillip Sibanda, Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri, Director of Prisons Services Paradzai Zimondi, Air Vice Marshall Perence Shiri and Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono. The JOC has been the driving force behind ZANU PF operations since 1999 and orchestrated the state-sponsored violence in the period between the March and June 2008 elections. It has become the impetus behind the push for elections in 2012 and the withdrawal of ZANU PF from the GPA.

The suspicious death of General Solomon Mujuru in August 2011, who many referred to as a ‘King Maker’ for his perceived influence within ZANU PF, was a watershed moment for Zimbabwe. Along with Chiwengwa and Mnangagwa, his wife Joice Mujuru is believed to be among the three contenders vying for the presidency in a post-Mugabe Zimbabwe. Mujuru’s suspicious death, and other events that include the suspension of district coordinating council elections following accusations of meddling evidenced in the deployment of several senior army and Air Force officers in Manicaland and Midlands provinces, as well as the “illegal” hiring spree by the army and Interior Ministry without the consent of the Ministry of Finance or relevant Parliamentary Portfolio Committees, suggest that the military is positioning itself to influence the outcome of a referendum or an election.

DEMOCRACY

Rule of law

Democracy and the rule of law are grossly imperilled by the current regime. Greater international pressure and the inclusion of the MDC led to a decrease of political repression, human rights abuses and growing economic hardship inflicted on the country by its own government. However, the independence of the judiciary has been eroded by political pressure and a raft of legislation restricting freedom of speech and assembly, increasing powers of arrest and deten-

tion and, the virtual elimination of the independent press. The democratic gains made since 2008 are increasingly being rolled back. There has been an increase in political violence and intimidation orchestrated by youth militias and war veterans in the rural areas and suburbs of Harare and Bulawayo. Additionally, human rights defenders and journalists are increasingly subject to harassment, arbitrary detention and arrest. As the country thrusts toward a possible constitutional referendum and elections, the erosion of rights is a worrying indication that the past will be repeated.

Rights and freedoms

Freedom House ranks Zimbabwe as one of the least free countries. This is a result of the punitive and restrictive legislation enacted at the turn of the millennium; specifically, the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Broadcasting Services Act. ZANU PF used its then parliamentary majority to pass repressive legislation with the explicit aim of circumscribing the activities of opposition parties and civic groups. The result has been the frustration of opposition activity and civil society engagement. In late 2011, steps were taken to open the airwaves to privately-owned stations; however hopes for reform were dashed in November 2011 when two national private FM radio licenses were awarded to the Government-controlled Zimbabwe Newspapers group and to AB Communications, which is owned by Supa Mandiwanzira, a former journalist linked to ZANU PF.

THE ECONOMIC SITUATION

Zimbabwe's economic recovery is the greatest benefit to materialise out of the GPA. The economy emerged from near complete collapse; with a real growth rate of negative 14.4% in 2008 to an estimated growth rate of 20.1% between 2009 and 2011. However, further economic progress and reform has been hindered by intra and inter-party disputes and a lack of political will among the three principal parties in the inclusive government.

Unemployment estimates vary between 80% and 90% and many Zimbabweans struggle to attain clean water, food and shelter. Few economic reforms have been geared toward the amelioration of the struggles of Zimbabwe's citizens. Instead, the government has focused on expanding its reach into the private sphere of business. The Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act (IEEA) is portrayed by ZANU PF as an attempt to empower Zimbabweans who have been "disadvantaged by unfair discrimination on the grounds of his or her race." The Act will regulate the transfer of majority ownership and management of natural resources and companies. Parallels have been drawn between the IEEA and "successful" land appropriations; however, approximately 40 per cent of land transfers were appropriated to Mugabe and his allies. The result has been the withholding and withdrawal of foreign investment and the disempowerment of Zimbabwe's recovering productive sectors. The World Bank downgraded Zimbabwe's rank on the [Doing Business Index](#) to 171 out of 183 in 2011.

ELECTIONS

Zimbabwe is one country in Africa that has held regular elections since attaining independence in 1980. Until 2000, ZANU PF enjoyed landslide victories in all elections. In the March 2008 elections, the MDC won the majority of seats in both the local councils and the Lower House (Parliament) while ZANU PF won control of the Upper House (Senate). Despite result manipulation, Tsvangirai won the most votes in the Presidential race (47,9% to Mugabe's 43,1%). However, the result manipulation meant that neither candidate gained an outright majority and that a run-off election would be necessary. The run-off was held on 27 June 2008 and Mugabe gained an unsurprising 'landslide victory' as the sole candidate. Tsvangirai had pulled out of the contest in protest against widespread violence. Condemnation of the elections by some

SADC members and the international community led to negotiations and the GPA.

The GPA marked the first time in Zimbabwe's post-liberation history that ZANU PF was no longer the sole party responsible for governance. Halting reform and a prolonged political stalemate have typified the interim government of national unity. In the absence of clear regional leadership, ZANU PF has pushed for early elections in contravention of the timeline laid out in the GPA. South Africa is pressuring the principals to agree to a "road map" for elections including benchmarks that will ensure an electoral environment and processes that meet internationally accepted criteria for free and fair elections. However, ZANU PF has publicly stated that it will not be held to any externally imposed agreements and South Africa's political will to impose a road map is questionable. Currently, the political environment in Zimbabwe is not suitable for elections, which are constitutionally mandated to take place no later than June 2013.

OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

The mistrust and difference in ideology between the three major political rivals prejudices the likelihood and success of a political solution. Concerted regional and international pressure on the principal parties presents the best opportunity to press for the reforms enumerated within the GPA and keep Zimbabwe on the path toward stability and greater democratisation.

Pressure is slowly building on the principle parties, especially ZANU PF, to hold elections. At the same time, the lack of an anointed successor within ZANU PF continues to take precedence over the implementation of reforms. The military leadership has positioned itself as a formidable threat to Zimbabwe's democratisation. Any transfer of power after Mugabe is dependent on the perceived threats to personal interests held by leadership within the military.

Currently, it is believed that if elections are to go forward without engaging the military, they would be nothing more than an academic exercise. In particular, individuals in the military are concerned about protecting their assets and business interests, as well as seeking amnesty. The military and ZANU PF loyalists want to ensure that even if the MDC gains political power, ZANU PF controls economic resources and ensures that members of the military can maintain their wealth. The military is now stripping state assets and abusing social justice programmes, for example, empowerment legislation that is meant to be used for the beneficiation of citizens, to enrich elites within their ranks. Moreover, the militarisation of the Chiadzwa diamond fields and failure of the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme members to halt the sale of diamonds, despite well documented human rights abuses, has greatly benefited ZANU PF. Members and supporters of ZANU PF are rewarded with self-enrichment schemes and remuneration while profits made from diamond sales bypass the Treasury and directly fund ZANU PF and military activities.