



INSTITUTE
FOR POLITICS
AND SOCIETY

The First post-Mugabe Elections: A Fresh Start for Democracy in Zimbabwe?

POLICY BRIEF / AUGUST 2018

AUTHOR:
CHARLES NWEZE

WWW.POLITIKASPOLECNOST.CZ

OFFICE@POLITICSANDSOCIETY.CZ

The First post-Mugabe Elections: A Fresh Start for Democracy in Zimbabwe?

Policy Brief – Charles Nweze, August 2018

The tale of a hero that now became an autocrat is the depiction of Robert Mugabe who was a revolutionary guerilla leader and fought white-minority rule in Zimbabwe. His fight for freedom made him to spend several years in jail as a political prisoner. He helped to orchestrate an armed resistance army, this made him to emerge as a war hero and subsequently became the first President of the newly independent Zimbabwe (CNN 2017). Mugabe ascended into power in a nation with a prosperous agricultural sector and manufacturing industry contributing 25% to GDP (Moretti 2017). He inherited a relatively modern economy which was among the most advanced in the region.

The hyper-inflation and economic issues sparked growing discontent and anti-government protest in Zimbabwe called for Mugabe's ruling party (ZANU-PF) to step down, despite all this Mugabe never wanted to leave the helm of power. The adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) prescribed under the recommendation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) also failed to re-launch a startled economic growth and gave further rise to civic unrest (Moretti 2017). Following the economic hardship caused by ESAP, in the year 1997-1998, the government resorted to populism in

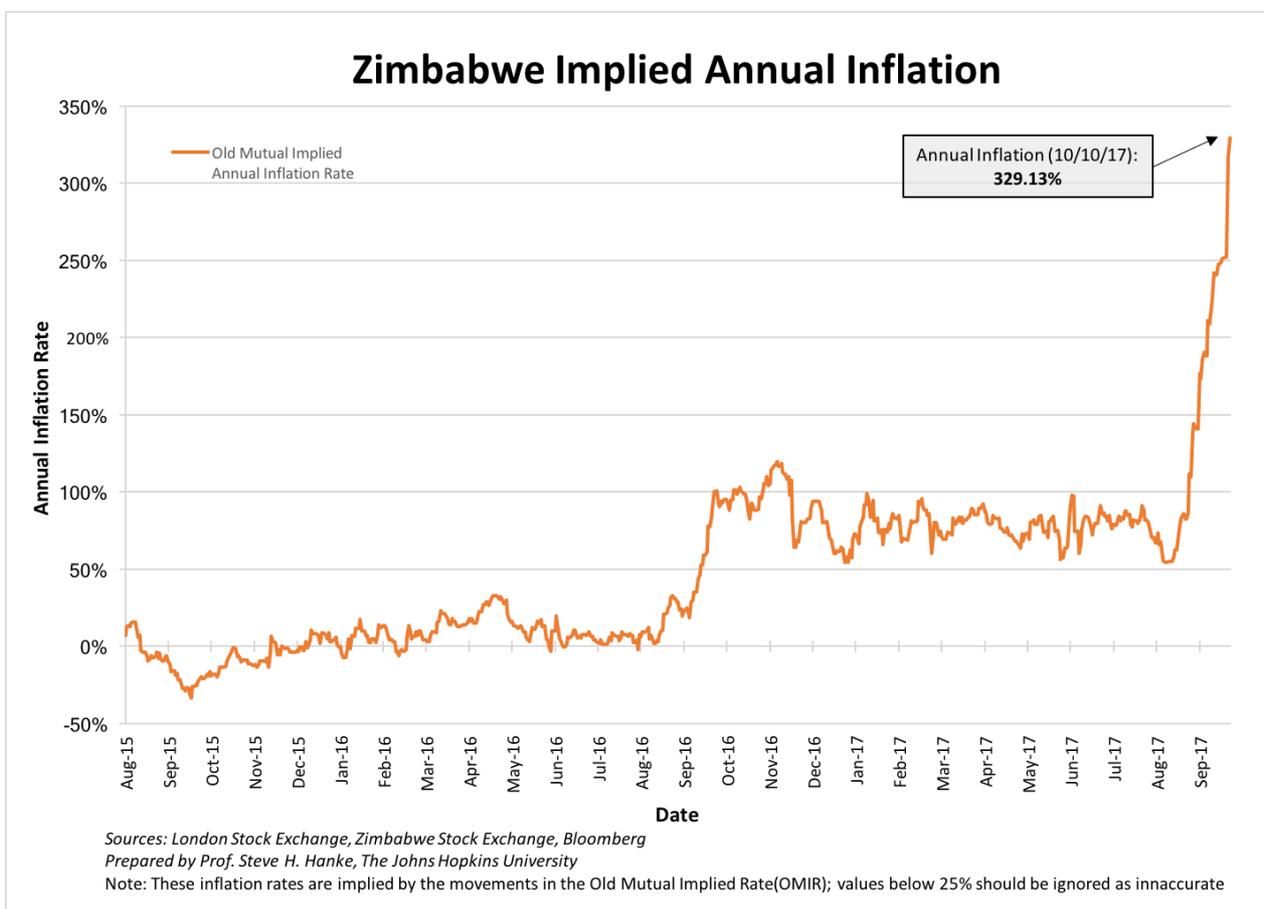
order to maintain the support of traditional allies. The decision to concede to 50,000 liberation war veterans gratuity of Z\$50,000 (USD 4,300) and the entry into the Democratic Republic of Congo war to support the President Kabila also brought about two massive unbudgeted expenditures which precipitated the crash of the Zimbabwean dollar in the stock market and brought about soaring inflation and heavy food prices (Moretti 2017).

In year 2000, Mugabe passed a law introducing land dispossession of white farmers without compensation and openly resorted to intimidation against them and their workers. By 2009, 12 million hectares of land had been taken away from white farmers and only about 200 of them remained in the country. The subsequent eviction of white skilled landowners had a disastrous consequences and a country once considered the food basket of Southern Africa witnessed a tremendous drop in agricultural production which was caused by the inability of the new land owners (Mugabe's family and affiliates) to run the farms productively. Another issue was fiscal mismanagement and unsustainable public expenditure, mostly devoted to the payment of civil servants made the government unable to ratify the debt contracted with IFI,

leading IMF to suspend Zimbabwe voting right in 2003(CNN 2017). The crash of Zimbabwean stock, loss of investors' confidence and drainage of banks fund, also hundreds of companies were forced to close. This led to several job lost and the capacity utilization of the manufacturing sector declined from 44.9% in 2012 to 39.6% in 2013 (Moretti, 2017). This subsequently led the country to accrue a cumulative deficit of \$25 billion between 2013 and 2015.

decades. With rising economic and hyper-inflation, the discontent and anger in the country reached an unprecedented intensity galvanizing pro-democracy activist and fed up citizens to demand for change and accountability for ruling elites.

This protest erupted first in Beitbridge as a result of the abrupt ban on imports, this protest had a wide-range of grass-roots movement, attracting thousands of Zimbabweans to join in national



Source: Forbes 2017.

Robert Mugabe held his fist of power by making sure that he massively rigged each election organized in Zimbabwe, by using the military to intimidate the voters, thereby ensuring that his political party ZANU-PF dominated political position in the country for

shut-down in Harare and other major cities in the country. This riots swept also in the largest city of Bolawayo, Gweru, Kwekwe and Masviage where citizens joined the shut down demanding the dismissal of the bank notes and the resignation of Mugabe.

In 2017, Mugabe sacked his long-time ally and vice president Emmerson Mnangagwa, thereby paving the way for his wife Grace to succeed him. This sparked a general uproar and there was a military intervention/coup which subsequently led to the resignation of Robert Mugabe on 21st November, 2017 as the President of Zimbabwe after long 37 years in power. This was highly unprecedented and a new face for democracy in Zimbabwe. After he resigned his political party ZANU-PF appointed Mnangagwa to be the interim president of Zimbabwe. He promised more economic stabilization and reforms in order to help solve the critical state of hyper-inflation in Zimbabwe.

For the first time in history Zimbabwe had its first presidential election in July 30, 2018, and it was the first election that did not have Robert Mugabe as a contending candidate. Emmerson Mnangagwa has attempted to rebrand Zanu-PF, pledging to heal divisions and rebuild the country. Millions of Zimbabweans queued for hours to cast their ballots. The vote attracted a high turnout of 70% and was monitored by international observers (CNN 2018). This is the first election for the former British colony since long-serving ruler Robert Mugabe was ousted in a military coup in 2017.

The main contenders to take the presidency were the interim President Emmerson Mnangagwa, of Zanu-PF party, and an opposition leader Nelson Chamisa of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Alliance (BBC News 2018). The campaign was free of violence and open. However, the

conditions were not equal; the state media devoted itself practically exclusively to the government and Mnangagwa. Mnangagwa being the incumbent president had more access to state money than his opposition candidates leading to a more prominent campaign, especially in the remote parts of Zimbabwe. It was also alleged that the chiefs of local tribes were supporting the ruling party because they are dependent on financial support from the state (Lindner 2018).

The ZANU-PF won the majority seats in parliament in Zimbabwe's historic first election since Robert Mugabe was ousted. Results from the electoral commission showed Zanu-PF won 109 seats against 41 seats for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (Whitfield 2018). The incumbent Emmerson Mnangagwa also won the presidential election according to the electoral commission. He won 50.8% of votes compared to 44.3% for opposition leader Nelson Chamisa (BBC News 2018). The opposition party did not accept this and they accused Zanu-PF of manipulating the election results to their favor. The supporters of the opposition party also held a wide spread protest in major cities in Zimbabwe against this result. Soldiers scrambled hard over protest against alleged electoral frauds and they did not hesitate to shoot dead 6 demonstrators (Lindner 2018).

The European Union election observing committee criticized the delay in announcing the presidential results, other problems they observed where media bias in favor of the ruling party,

voters intimidation and mistrust in the electoral commission, adding that there was an “improved political climate, but un-level playing field and lack of trust” (BBC News 2018). The African Union had a different perception of the election in Zimbabwe and viewed that the election “took place in a very peaceful environment and were highly competitive” (BBC News 2018). They categorically stated that they could not confirm opposition party’s complaint of vote-buying, intimidation by the state and bias by traditional leaders.

The inconsistencies and post-election violence seriously threaten the main goal of last year’s coup against Mugabe – ending international isolation and attracting foreign investment. That is why in the past months the President Mnangagwa has been stripped of Mugabe’s isolation and confrontation policies with the West, he also offered compensation to white farmers who were violently expelled from the beginning of the millennium (Lindner 2018). Mnangagwa before his election triumph also signed an application with the British Commonwealth invariably not excluding Zimbabwe again from the partnership which happened during Mugabe’s regime, thereby achieving a milestone success.

Conclusion

The citizens of Zimbabwe for the first time in 37 years have exercised their civic right of voting and participating in a much freer and fairer election. It is still a puzzle in Zimbabwe since the Zanu-PF that was once the party that Mugabe used during almost four decades of his autocratic regime

retained power under a different ruler that was once the vice-president to Mugabe. Representatives of Zanu-PF in the campaign advocated that the party has changed and would no longer subject the citizens to economic hardship and civic unrest that was experienced during the regime of Mugabe. They promised to pioneer a better economic development, reduction in inflation and social benefits and welfare for the citizens. But only time will reveal if this is truly the new face of democracy in Zimbabwe or simply another face of autocracy by Zanu-PF under a different mask.

References

Forbes. Graph. Zimbabwe Hyperinflates Again, Entering the Record Books For A Second Time In Less Than A Decade. Author: Professor Steve Henke. 28 October 2017. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevehanke/2017/10/28/zimbabwe-hyperinflates-again-entering-the-record-books-for-a-second-time-in-less-than-a-decade/#77b8ee6d3eed>

“Zimbabwe election: Emmerson Mnangagwa declared winner in disputed poll.” BBC NEWS, 3.8.2018 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-45053412>

Jamie Tarabay. “Big turnout in Zimbabwe for first Mugabe-free vote.” CNN, 30.7.2018 <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/07/30/africa/zimbabwe-mugabe-elections-intl/index.html>

David McKenzie & Angela Dewan. “Robert Mugabe resigns after 37 years as Zimbabwe's leader.” CNN, 21.11.2017 <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/21/africa/robert-mugabe-resigns-zimbabwe-president/index.html>

Jamie Tarabay & Tricia Escobedo. “Robert Mugabe: Zimbabwe's war hero turned brutal autocrat.” CNN, 6.12.2017 <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/11/21/africa/zimbabwe-robert-mugabe-profile/index.html>

Josephine Moulds, “These charts show the economic challenges facing Zimbabwe post-Mugabe”. World Economic Forum, 22.11.2017. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/11/these-charts-show-the-economic-challenges-facing-zimbabwe-post-mugabe/>

Kate Whitfield, “Zimbabwe election results 2018: Who is winning election? Will Chamisa or Mnangagwa win?” Express News, 31.7.2018 <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/996623/zimbabwe-election-results-2018-who-is-winning-robert-mugabe-first-election-count>

Joe Devanny, “What should we expect from the Zimbabwean elections”. Mail & Guardian online, 30.5.2018 <https://mg.co.za/article/2018-05-30-what-should-we-expect-from-the-zimbabwean-elections/>

“Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe resigns, ending 37-year rule” BBC NEWS, 21.11.2017 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-42071488>

Moretti Vittoria, “Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe: The Endgame”, Sub-Saharan African Programme, 1/2017. https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/moretti_zimbabwe_en_2017