

# Zimbabwe: Tsvangirai agrees to second round of elections

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After weeks of delay since the March 29 elections, Zimbabwe faces a second round presidential runoff. Last weekend Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), finally agreed to stand in the runoff against incumbent President Robert Mugabe.

Results from the first round were delayed until May 2 when the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), appointed by the ZANU-PF government, announced that Tsvangirai had won 47.9 percent of the vote, against 43.2 percent for Mugabe, insufficient for a clear victory. The ZEC has not yet set a date for the runoff, although legally it should take place within three weeks.

Tsvangirai has previously insisted that he was the outright winner and the vote had been rigged. However, rather than allow Mugabe to claim victory, after days of internal debate and no doubt consultations with Western governments, the MDC agreed to take part in the runoff. Tsvangirai put forward a list of conditions for participation in the vote—an end to violent attacks on its supporters, reconstitution of the ZEC, acceptance of international election observers and that neighboring countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) help police the elections—which ZANU-PF has already refused.

The MDC is led by white businessmen and trade union bureaucrats, with a programme to bring Zimbabwe back into free-market capitalism and under International Monetary Fund (IMF) control. It relies on making appeals to the West and has made no attempt to defend its supporters against escalating violence. “We know that another election may bring more violence, more gloom, more betrayal,” Tsvangirai admitted.

Western governments, especially Britain and the United States, have stepped up their denunciations of the Mugabe regime since the election and are mounting a diplomatic offensive to back the MDC. President George Bush raised the issue of Zimbabwe’s government in a recent news conference, saying, “The violence and intimidation is simply unacceptable.”

US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer went further, saying that “the international community has a responsibility to step in and to try to stop that government from beating its own population.” Whatever intervention is being discussed, the US has lost patience with the “softly softly” diplomatic approach to Zimbabwe of South African President Thabo Mbeki. Bush said “it is really incumbent upon the nations in the neighborhood to step up and lead, and recognize that the will of the people must be respected, and recognize that that will come

about because they’re tired of failed leadership.”

Last week US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice telephoned the presidents of Zambia, Botswana, and Tanzania—the most pro-Western countries in the SADC—calling on them to use their influence in Zimbabwe. She pointedly failed to phone Mbeki.

Mugabe and his government were clearly taken aback by the size of the vote against them in the March elections. ZANU-PF lost control of the state parliament in elections that took place simultaneously with the poll for president. It is the biggest electoral setback it has received since coming to power in 1980 after independence was granted.

After a week of internal conflict in the ZANU-PF leadership following the election, with rumors circulating that Mugabe could step down or that some type of power-sharing government could be formed, the hard-line faction around Mugabe decided to delay announcement of results and a runoff as long as possible while it organized brutal repression throughout the country to intimidate all potential opposition.

According to *Africa Confidential*, the repression is being led by Legal Affairs Secretary Emmerson Mnangagwa. He was leader of Zimbabwe’s secret police, the Central Intelligence Organisation after independence, responsible for the suppression and killing of thousands of opponents of ZANU in Matabeleland in the 1980s. As key man in the looting operation carried out by Zimbabwe in the Congo war of 1998-2003, he is one of the richest men in ZANU-PF.

Mnangagwa was demoted by Mugabe in 2004 when it became clear he was attempting to succeed him as president, but came to the fore last year by leading the group in ZANU-PF calling for Mugabe to continue in office.

Mugabe uses his history as a leader of the national liberation movement against the Western-backed white racist regime in the 1970s to pose as an opponent of imperialism, but since taking power in the 1980s his regime supported capitalism and was highly regarded by Western governments. It was only when the IMF measures, which Mugabe had accepted, became too burdensome and undermined the system of patronage by which ZANU-PF rules, and when the MDC was set up and began gaining support, that Mugabe came into conflict with the Western powers at the end of the 1990s.

The economy in Zimbabwe is now in such a perilous state that Mugabe no longer has the means to buy votes and patronage, and even in rural areas, where until recently he could count on support,

ZANU-PF's vote has collapsed. According to official figures from Zimbabwe's Central Statistical Office annual inflation in February this year was 164,900 percent, unemployment is over 80 percent and life expectancy was last recorded at 37 years—largely due to endemic HIV/AIDs. More than 3 million people have fled the country, mainly to South Africa.

Human Rights Watch reports that the population in large parts of Zimbabwe in the period up to the run-off election are being terrorized by the army, by the government-backed militia known as the “war-veterans” and by ZANU-PF supporters. Anyone that is even perceived to be an MDC supporter, in rural areas as well as in the cities, faces intimidation, beatings, arrest and torture. Human Rights Watch have compiled dozens of eyewitness reports showing that ZANU-PF supporters and “war veterans” are drawing up lists of suspected oppositionists who are then targeted. They are also forcing people to attend meetings to swear allegiance to ZANU-PF. Some 30 or so people have been killed and several hundred hospitalized, with a far larger number subject to beatings. Schoolteachers in rural areas who act as vote counters in elections have been targeted. The BBC reports cases of teachers being issued with certificates after a beating to spare them from further attack.

Farm workers have also been attacked, with Zimbabwean human rights group, the Justice for Agriculture Trust, detailing 142 attacks on farms since April 5. The farm workers' trade union says that some 40,000 of its members have been affected. The report states that workers at 36 percent of the 400 commercial farms still in operation, including the small number that are still white owned, have been intimidated, subject to beatings and driven out of their jobs.

The crisis in Zimbabwe is having an impact on South African politics, exacerbating the division in the ruling African National Congress between the faction around President Mbeki and the rival faction supporting Jacob Zuma.

Zuma was elected ANC President last December, defeating Mbeki. He is backed by the trade union bureaucracy in COSATU and the South African Communist Party (SACP). He has used populist demagoguery to win support in an economic climate where South Africa's high growth rate, reflecting the key mining sector, has benefited mainly the established white ruling class and a layer of black businessmen, but has seen growing poverty and unemployment in the mass of the population.

Such is the bitterness of the dispute between the rival factions that Zuma faces a trial for corruption later this year, which the Mbeki faction hopes will prevent him from gaining the presidency in 2009. He previously faced corruption charges and was sacked from office as deputy president by Mbeki, though the case was dropped in 2006. Zuma also faced a trial on rape charges in 2006, for which he was acquitted.

Zimbabwe has become the key issue that Zuma and his advisors are using to garner Western support. He recently toured the capitals of Europe attempting to overcome the concern in business and political circles about his trade union and SACP backing by expressing public criticisms of the Zimbabwe regime. In contrast to Mbeki, who recently even denied that there was a crisis in Zimbabwe, Zuma attacked Mugabe, saying, “I don't think that it

is acceptable in a democratic system that if you lose an election you can stay on by force.”

In Britain he had an hour-long meeting with Prime Minister Gordon Brown, after which they made a joint statement to the press calling for an end to the post-election violence in Zimbabwe.

Zuma is also rising as a star in American political circles as an alternative to Mbeki. *Time* magazine put Zuma in its 2008 top 100 list and in its list of 20 of the world's most influential leaders, explaining that “His pro-poor rhetoric resonates with many ordinary South Africans who have not benefited from Mbeki's business-friendly policies.”

Despite calls from COSATU and the SACP for more state intervention into South Africa's economy, there is no indication that Zuma and his advisors actually want any deviation from the free-market policies pursued by Mbeki. After all, Zuma was vice president throughout the period after the end of Apartheid, when the ANC made clear it would follow IMF prescriptions.

The trade union bureaucracy and the SACP regularly denounce Mugabe and back the MDC—and have been banned from entering Zimbabwe.

Whatever their disagreements about how Zimbabwe is ruled, none of the factions in the ANC have made any criticism of the way Zimbabwean refugees are brutally treated by the South African police and are regularly deported back to their country. Earlier this year the police raided Johannesburg's Methodist Mission that houses Zimbabwean refugees, beat several of the residents and carted some 300 of them to jail.

None of the mainstream political parties, or factions of them, have any perspective for the mass of the population in Southern Africa, whose social conditions are deteriorating daily. The situation in Zimbabwe is only the most acute expression of the situation across the region. The political elite has enriched itself massively at the expense of the majority. The conflict between Mugabe and the MDC or between Zuma and Mbeki is in large part about who has the right to enjoy the material benefits that flow from political power.



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