

## AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

### Zimbabwe Election Briefing August 2023

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#### Zimbabwe Summary 21 August 2023

***President Emmerson Mnangagwa (2017-present) remains the front-runner ahead of the 23 August general election with the playing field heavily skewed in favour of his ruling Zanu-PF party. Polls ahead of the election send mixed signals with some predicting an outright Mnangagwa win while others see a triumph for opposition Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) leader Nelson Chamisa. A credible election is key for Mnangagwa to continue his re-engagement with the West as he seeks to solve a choking external debt crisis and end 21 years of sanctions. Key numbers point to lower candidate participation in this year's election. A run-off will be held on 2 October if no presidential candidate gets more than 50% of the votes.***

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#### Mnangagwa tipped to win tilted election, result to be disputed

President **Emmerson Mnangagwa** (2017-present) remains the front-runner to win the 23 August election, which is being held under conditions heavily tilted towards the ruling **Zanu-PF** party.<sup>1</sup> At least 11 candidates are vying for the presidential seat, but Mnangagwa's main challenger is **Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC)** leader **Nelson Chamisa**.

Zanu-PF is pitching infrastructure development as its trump card in the re-election bid, highlighting that this has been self-financed but glossing over the fact that this was due to sanctions. Meanwhile, the opposition is pledging to reverse the decades-long economic decay, fight corruption and revive a collapsed healthcare system.

The 2023 vote comes with lower expectations of hope and change from the electorate than in 2018 when optimism was high that Mnangagwa, fresh from ousting former strongman **Robert Mugabe** (1986-2017), would usher in much-needed democratic and economic reforms. Five years into Mnangagwa's rule, conditions have not changed much from the Mugabe era.

The electoral playing field is heavily skewed in favour of the ruling party, which has used state institutions to close the democratic space. The opposition has lamented biased police, with 109 of their rallies banned since March 2022, the latest being a 9 July gathering that was meant to launch the CCC's campaign.<sup>2</sup> Two high-profile opposition leaders, **Job Sikhala** and **Jacob Ngarivhume**, are currently jailed on what Mnangagwa's critics say are politically motivated charges. **ISS Africa** reported on these issues in May 2022:

*"The ruling party looks set to retain power given its advantages of incumbency and manipulation of state resources, unlimited access to public media, and the benefits of an enduring conflation of party and state. There is also the military factor, which unofficially guarantees election victory."<sup>3</sup>*

Prevailing conditions make the prospect of the two key parties disputing the election result highly likely. Even if the CCC wins, with the courts, police and army and the **Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC)** seemingly in favour of the ruling party, a legal transfer of power cannot be

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<sup>1</sup> ISS Africa, 26 Jul 2023

<sup>2</sup> Newsday, 19 Aug 2023

<sup>3</sup> ISS Africa, 23 May 2022

guaranteed. The ZEC remains one of the country's least-trusted institutions. The opposition says the body is populated by former military officials who are not known for their impartiality, raising fears that the military has positioned itself as the kingmaker in Zimbabwe's political power configuration.

If Zanu-PF wins, the CCC will protest as it did in 2018 and seek court redress but it is unlikely to get fair treatment from the courts. The **Constitutional Court**, led by **Luke Malaba**, rubberstamped Mnangagwa's controversial victory in 2018. Mnangagwa controversially extended Malaba's term by five years in 2021 through constitutional amendments.

The court's hand has already been in evidence in this year's vote after it refused to hear an appeal by former Zanu-PF political commissar **Saviour Kasukuwere** whom the **Supreme Court** had barred from contesting as a presidential candidate.<sup>4</sup> The court ruling was a boost for Mnangagwa as Kasukuwere's participation was likely to split the Zanu-PF vote and increase the chances of an election run-off, a scenario that would increase the stakes and uncertainty for the ruling party.

### Mixed signals from polls ahead of election

Results of surveys carried out ahead of the election appear to be sending mixed signals with some pointing to a Mnangagwa win while those that tip Chamisa to triumph have all come with a big disclaimer – the election must be free and fair for the opposition to win. Events in the run up to the vote show that the current conditions do not appear to conform with the **Southern African Development Community's (SADC)** election guidelines, nor do they provide an even electoral playing field.<sup>5</sup>

Recent research published by **pan-African** survey network **Afrobarometer** and **United States**-headquartered **Fitch Solutions** shows that Zanu-PF and Mnangagwa are leading the polls. Afrobarometer recorded a decline in those indicating they would vote for the CCC, from 33% in 2022 to 27% in 2023.<sup>6</sup> As with previous surveys, Afrobarometer found that 27% – a major potential swing vote – would not reveal their preferred party. Fitch's report pointed to the advantages, including benefits from government agriculture schemes attributed to Zanu-PF's generosity, as the main drivers of its potential victory.

Conversely, a survey conducted for the **Brenthurst Foundation** by the **United Kingdom**-based **SABI Strategy Group** in January using an in-depth 15-minute questionnaire showed Chamisa would win 53% of the vote to Mnangagwa's 40%, but again, only if the election is free and fair.<sup>7</sup> Approximately 47% of voters surveyed believed the 2023 election would not be free and fair compared with just 38% who say it will be – "*cheating in the counting process*" was cited as the greatest threat to a free and fair election (41%), with 29% citing "*the government abusing its power*" and 21% citing "security force violence".

Results of another poll released by **Zambia**-based **Elite Africa Research** in July said Chamisa and his CCC party would win the elections by a margin of between 8% and 9% – if the elections are free and fair.<sup>8</sup> The poll of 2,000 registered voters, conducted in June, also found that if the elections were held then, 47.6% of respondents would vote for Chamisa, while 38.7% would vote for Mnangagwa. Under such a scenario, Zimbabweans would have to go to the polls again on 2 October as no presidential candidate would have won more than 50% of votes in the first round.

<sup>4</sup> News24, 8 Aug 2023

<sup>5</sup> ISS Africa, 26 Jul 2023

<sup>6</sup> VoA Zimbabwe, 10 Jul 2023

<sup>7</sup> Mail&Guardian, 8 Feb 2023

<sup>8</sup> Daily Maverick, 11 Jul 2023

## Credible election key for Mnangagwa's re-engagement with West

Economic hardship, runaway inflation and currency shortages are the greatest challenges threatening Mnangagwa's re-election, but he has been quick to pass the blame for the economic decay on the sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by **Western** countries, namely the US. Since his election to power in 2018, Mnangagwa has been reaching out to the West under his re-engagement drive, seeking support not only to end the sanctions and rejoin the **Commonwealth**, but to have Zimbabwe's external debts cleared so it can access new lines of credit. However, the US, Commonwealth, **European Union (EU)**, and more importantly the debt clearance issue, the **African Development Bank (AfDB)**, have stipulated a free and fair election as a pre-condition for any further talks.<sup>9</sup>

Zimbabwe is in a debt crisis, with foreign debt reaching \$12.8 billion in December 2022 prompting the AfDB to lead a campaign for push for a debt restructuring deal with Zimbabwe's major creditors.<sup>10</sup> The country has been unable to access new lines of credit due to arrears that have accumulated on the debt since 2000, estimated at \$6.3 billion as of the end of September 2022. Mnangagwa has moved to reassure sceptical development partners and creditors that his government is committed to the implementation of key reforms critical to resolving the country's debts and arrears.

The AfDB, US and the EU have all said the upcoming national election is a key yardstick to measure **Harare's** sincerity in its promise to restore the rule of law. AfDB president **Akinwumi Adesina** said at the last debtors' dialogue meeting held in May:

*"The people of Zimbabwe and the international community will be watching very closely. The full weight of re-engagement with the international community will depend on this. It will also depend not just on the election, but the entire electoral process that guarantees a credible election."<sup>11</sup>*

While Mnangagwa has done well to ensure violence is limited in the run-up to the election, it is unlikely the playing field will be considered level enough for observers to declare the election free and fair. This could impact Mnangagwa's chances of pursuing re-engagement with development partners, which could be detrimental, as Zimbabwe desperately needs to have foreign lines of credit availed again if it is to continue with its ambitious infrastructure development that Mnangagwa has pitched as his re-election trump card.

Mnangagwa has completed key infrastructure projects such as major roads and dam projects which have not only boosted the country's agricultural production but have also helped Mnangagwa to energise his political base.<sup>12</sup> However, without access to foreign loans, Mnangagwa has had to use the budget to fund the projects. Payments to local contractors flooded the market with Zimbabwean dollars, crashing the currency and stoking a fresh round of hyperinflation, which has emerged as the most significant issue in the election.

The local currency's freefall has triggered price hikes that have decimated earnings, isolating Mnangagwa even further from voters, both rural and urban. The damage has been especially deep among the civil service and the security forces, who are key to state power.

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<sup>9</sup> ISS Africa, 29 May 2023

<sup>10</sup> Newswire, 20 Jul 2023

<sup>11</sup> AfDB, 16 May 2023

<sup>12</sup> Newswire, 17 Aug 2023

## Key election numbers and dates

- This year's election is the ninth election since independence in 1980. It is a harmonised election with presidential, parliamentary, and council (ward) elections held at the same time. A total of 6.5 million people have registered to vote across the 12,340 polling stations in the country's 10 provinces.
- 11 candidates are contesting in the presidential election, down from 23 in 2018. There are 637 candidates competing for the 210 seats in the lower house of parliament, the **National Assembly**, down from 1,648 in 2018. Furthermore, only 19 political parties are taking part in this election, down from 55 parties in 2018. There are just 10 independent candidates in the 210 seats.
- There are only 70 female candidates out of 637 National Assembly candidates, down from 237 in 2018. There is also no female presidential candidate, compared to four in 2018.
- The CCC has failed to register candidates in 92 councils, mainly in rural areas, giving the ruling Zanu-PF a head start. In 2018, there were only 51 councils in which Zanu-PF was uncontested. There are a total of 1,878 wards to be contested in 2023 in which 4,800 candidates from different parties have registered to compete, down from 6,796 candidates in 2018.
- For members of parliament and council candidates, the person who has the most votes wins. However, in the presidential race, a candidate needs more than 50% of the vote to be declared the winner, failing which there will be a run-off election between the top two. A possible run-off is scheduled for 2 October.
- Since the enactment of the 2013 constitution, the National Assembly comprises 270 members. Of those, 210 are elected through single-member constituencies. The remaining 60 seats are specifically designated for women and are allocated using proportional representation across 10 constituencies, each containing six seats.
- The ZEC is printing 7,126,600 ballots for the presidential election to cater for 6,623,511 voters, 7,098,750 for the 6,597,865 voters in the parliamentary elections, and 6,861,650 for council elections. According to the ZEC, the numbers of printed ballots for the three elections are different because there will be no parliamentary election in **Gutu West** as the poll there has been postponed after the death of one of the nominated candidates. There are also fewer ballots for council elections because ZANU-PF is uncontested in 91 seats. Extra ballots are printed as contingency to account for loss and damage.
- According to the **Electoral Act**, results for any of the elections should be announced within five days from the close of polling. If a presidential candidate is unhappy with an election outcome, he or she can seek legal recourse by appealing to the Constitutional Court of Zimbabwe. The candidate or his or her representatives can approach the court within seven days after election results are announced and after exhausting all available legal remedies to address their grievances. The court will then hear and determine the election dispute, and its decision will be final and binding. According to the Act, any election challenge or petition must be lodged within seven days after the announcement of the election results. The Constitutional Court has a maximum of 14 days to hear and determine the matter.

## Planner

23 Aug 2023 **(Zimbabwe)** General elections  
 22 Sep 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decision  
 2 Oct 2023 **(Zimbabwe)** Scheduled election run-off  
 Nov 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** 2024 National Budget  
 31 Dec 2023 **(South Africa)** Expiry of special residence permits for Zimbabweans living in South Africa

## Chronology

20 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *New Zimbabwe*. **Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP)** spokesperson **Paul Nyathi** says 19 officers have been arrested after ZRP members indiscriminately attacked people in Harare's central business district;

19 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Newsday*. Opposition **Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC)** says the **Zimbabwe Republic Police** have banned three more of its rallies scheduled for **Mashonaland Central** province, bringing the total number of its banned gatherings to 108 since March 2022;

19 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Newsday*. **Good Governance Africa (GGA)** CEO **Chris Maroleng** accuses President **Emmerson Mnangagwa** of using crude tactics to win the election at all costs after Maroleng and his team were deported from Zimbabwe on 17 August before they could conduct their research mission on election conditions and challenges;

18 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *The Zimbabwean*. The **European Union Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM)** denies allegations that it is straying from its mandate and interfering in the election process by bribing local journalists to write negatively about the upcoming elections;

18 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Newsday*. **Forever Associates Zimbabwe (FAZ)**, a group associated with the ruling **Zanu-PF**, emerges at the centre of vote manipulation allegations that critics say are a cynical attempt to keep President **Emmerson Mnangagwa** and his party in power; FAZ has made no secret of its task to help Mnangagwa "dominate" the general election;

16 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Newsday*. Opposition **Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC)** files an urgent court application against the **Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC)**, seeking an order to compel the electoral body to disclose details relating to the printing, distribution and serial numbers of the ballot papers for the general elections;

16 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Newsday*. **Zimbabwe Human Rights Monitors Platform** says the ruling **Zanu-PF** accounted for 74% of the recently documented cases of political violence ahead of the general election, with party activists and affiliate **Forever Associates Zimbabwe (FAZ)** cited among the leading perpetrators of political violence;

16 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Reuters*. **China's Canmax Technologies** and **United Kingdom** -headquartered **Premier African Minerals** resolve dispute over a lithium concentrate supply contract that was delayed by a defective processing plant;

16 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *NewsWire*. Zimbabwe's largest platinum producer, **Zimplats**, is importing 50MW of power from **Zambia** while pushing ahead with the construction of a solar plant, as it seeks more energy to power its \$1.8 billion expansion;

15 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *The Independent*. Treasury says taking over the **Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe's (RBZ)** ZW\$ 7.69 trillion (\$1.3 billion) debt will make budget financing for the 2024 fiscal year difficult. President **Emmerson Mnangagwa** issued **Statutory Instrument 108 of 2023** on 15 June which allowed the treasury to assume RBZ's external debt in a measure meant to prevent the central bank from printing money to service its debt;

14 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Newsday*. A study by local think-tank **Public Policy and Research Institute of Zimbabwe (PPRIZ)**, conducted between 27 June and 13 July, shows that 51% of citizens are willing to be bribed to influence whom they vote for;

10 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Newsday*. Government increases the tax-free threshold to ZW\$ 500,000(\$83) from ZW\$ 91,000 (\$15) to boost disposable incomes of those who earn in local currency in the face of a rising cost of living;

8 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Zimlive*. Opposition **MDC-T** leader **Douglas Mwonozora** withdraws from the presidential race citing an unfair electoral field tilted in favour of the ruling **Zanu-PF** party and accuses the **Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC)** of improper conduct;

8 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *News24*. Presidential candidate **Saviour Kasukuwere** is barred from contesting in the 23 August election after the **Constitutional Court** refuses to hear an appeal challenging his exclusion;

6 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Daily Maverick*. Finance minister **Mthuli Ncube** says Harare will do all it can to clear its \$12.8 billion in foreign debt by December 2025 to open fresh lines of credit that would help in revamping the floundering economy;

3 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Newswire*. The **Supreme Court** sets aside a high court decision barring 12 candidates of the opposition **Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC)** from standing in the **Bulawayo** election;

2 Aug 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Newsday*. Policy think-tank **Sivio Institute** says the ruling **Zanu-PF** government has only managed to fulfil 16 of the 234 pledges made in its 2018 election manifesto;

26 Jul 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Bloomberg*. **United Kingdom**-headquartered **Amnesty International** says the government has actively undermined civil liberties and quashed dissent over the past five years, helping entrench the dominance of President **Emmerson Mnangagwa**, who is seeking re-election in the August general election;

24 Jul 2023 **Harare (Zimbabwe)** *Bloomberg*. The **Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency** announces that consumer prices fell in July after the nation's currency strengthened. Consumer prices dropped 15.3%, compared with 75% in June, and rose 101% from a year earlier after a 176% increase in June;

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