

Zimbabwe: Violence follows disputed re-election of President Mnangagwa

By Chris Marsden
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Parliamentary and presidential elections hailed as the beginning of a new era for Zimbabwe have instead plunged the country into bitter factional struggle.

The declaration that President Emmerson Mnangagwa of the ruling ZANU-PF has been re-elected with a 50.8 percent majority has been rejected by his main opponent, Nelson Chamisa of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)-led Alliance.

Turnout of registered voters was 84.8 percent, indicating the massive interest in securing political change after the end of Robert Mugabe's 37 years as Zimbabwe's leader but also the deep divisions between supporters of ZANU-PF and the MDC-Alliance.

Mnangagwa's majority narrowly tops the 50 percent needed to avoid a run-off. But Chamisa, who secured 44.3 percent of the vote according to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), told a press conference in the capital, Harare, Friday, "We won this election and we are ready to form the next government."

He called the official results "fraudulent, illegal, illegitimate and characterised by serious credibility gaps" and "a coup against the people's will."

Chamisa, a church pastor, added that he would not attend Mnangagwa's inauguration, was seeking support from South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa, and may be filing a court challenge. The press conference was invaded and delayed by riot police.

ZANU-PF had earlier convincingly won the parliamentary elections, taking two-thirds of the 210 contested seats. The ZEC reported ZANU-PF winning 144 seats compared to 61 for the MDC-Alliance.

There is nothing substantial to back up Chamisa's claim of victory, especially given that ZANU-PF can capitalise on its control of the state and much of the media and is still able to mobilise its rural Shona majority base. But the official results nevertheless show the MDC winning the majority vote in many urban areas, including

Harare. It also won the oppressed minority Ndebele tribal areas in Matebeleland North, including the city of Bulawayo, and in the desperately poor Manicaland province to the east, where the minority Manyika ethnic group resides.

On Wednesday, before the delayed presidential result announcement, three people were killed by riot police and army personnel during a pro-MDC protest in Harare that turned violent, with three more dying in hospital. A curfew was mounted, with reports of the army instructing people to leave the town centre.

A raid on the MDC's headquarters was staged the next day to seize documents seeking to prove Mnangagwa's allegations that the violence was planned by the opposition parties and that protesters were armed. A search warrant, seen by the Associated Press, names Chamisa and others including former finance minister Tendai Biti in relation to the crimes of "possession of dangerous weapons" and inciting "public violence."

On Saturday, 24 members of the MDC arrested during the raid on the party's headquarters appeared in court, accused of fomenting and taking part in violent protests. The 16 men and eight women face charges of smashing windows at Zanu-PF's offices, setting fire to vehicles and stone-throwing.

Amnesty International said more than 60 people had been "arbitrarily arrested" in a post-election clampdown in MDC strongholds in Harare and its outskirts. The MDC states that hundreds of its activists are in hiding, with many afraid to seek treatment for injuries. In Chitungwiza, the army reportedly sealed off the home of a close relative of Biti.

The potential for further conflict is clear, with both sides seeking the patronage of the imperialist powers, regional allies such as South Africa and the support of China.

Mnangagwa, who came to power in a coup against

President Robert Mugabe last November, advances himself as the strongman required to restore the order necessary for resumed investment by the major corporations. He celebrated his victory Friday by stating that Zimbabwe was now “open for business... We want to leapfrog and catch up with other developing countries.”

Chamisa heads a party set up by a coalition of white farming interests and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) bureaucracy. He took over leadership of the MDC from Morgan Tsvangirai after he died from colorectal cancer in February. The MDC’s history is one of promising to normalise relations with its imperialist sponsors, including during 2009’s National Unity Government with ZANU-PF. It now finds itself competing directly with the post-Mugabe ZANU-PF for the favours of the major powers.

This left the more than 5 million Zimbabweans who registered to take part in the poll a choice between two right-wing bourgeois factions.

It seems unlikely at this point that the MDC-Alliance will have any immediate success in swaying the imperialist powers away from their post-coup decision to back Mnangagwa.

A US statement urged Mnangagwa to show “magnanimity” but also counselled the opposition to show “graciousness in defeat.”

The African National Congress (ANC) government in South Africa has also welcomed Mnangagwa’s victory.

European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini’s office appealed “for calm and restraint on all sides and for protests to be conducted according to the law.”

The UK Minister for Africa, Harriett Baldwin, stated only that “There is much to be done to build confidence in Zimbabwe’s electoral process.”

A significant element in the calculations of the imperialist powers is to avoid buttressing Zimbabwe’s reliance on China, which has a decades-long relationship with Mnangagwa in his role as Mugabe’s enforcer. Beijing signed off on November’s coup when Mnangagwa and a military delegation visited China shortly before it was staged. It has called the elections “orderly” and urged respect for the “choice made by the people of Zimbabwe.”

China has built a dominant position in overseas investment in key extraction industries and other areas of the economy that Mnangagwa has promised to defend. The August 3 *Guardian* noted how, “In recent years Mnangagwa had been seen as more business-friendly and

pragmatic than many other senior figures in the ruling Zanu-PF party, attractive features to a Chinese government keen to protect investments ranging from mobile phone networks to hydropower and tobacco.”

That same day, the *Economist* asked, “Will the West overlook the ruling party’s political gamesmanship?”

Replying in the affirmative, it predicted that the UK and other major powers, “will utter bromides about the need for Zanu-PF and the MDC to come together. They will continue to list the ways in which the election was not fought on a level playing field. But ultimately they cannot stop Mr Mnangagwa. Nor do some countries want to. Britain has backed the president and his allies for almost three years. It is hardly going to stop.”

The question would ultimately be decided by “Whether Mr Mnangagwa and his military allies can in fact restore discipline to the economy, and give foreign investors certainty...”

Both sides in the factional struggle within the bourgeoisie are offering the banks and global corporations a chance to carve up Zimbabwe and its natural resources at the expense of the working class. This confirms the true character of a coup move against Mugabe.

Mnangagwa and the military exploited popular hostility to Mugabe’s despotic rule to lend legitimacy to a regime-change operation whose real economic and political agenda can only end in yet deeper attacks on working people and the rural poor. It is necessary to restate the central appeal made by the *World Socialist Web Site* in the coup’s aftermath:

“The working class must maintain political independence from all representatives of the national bourgeoisie and the imperialist powers—including both factions of ZANU-PF, the rival MDCs, etc.—and the trade union federations that back them. The advanced workers and youth must begin building a Zimbabwean section of the International Committee of the Fourth International to fight for a socialist Zimbabwe and a United Socialist States of Africa, and to forge a unified movement for socialism with workers in the US, Britain and other imperialist states.”

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