



Mugabe Wins Again in the 2013 Zimbabwe Elections: What does it imply?

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On July 2013, Robert Mugabe, 89, one of the oldest African leader who has led Zimbabwe since he helped end white-minority rule in 1980, won another (seventh) term by defeating his main opponent Morgan Tsavangiri with 61 per cent of the votes. His ZANU-PF party won 158 of the 210 parliament seats, as against 50 seats by Tsavingiri's party MDC (Movement for Democratic Change), giving it a two-thirds majority. He has now been able to secure a tight control on power, after sharing it for the past five years with Tsavangiri. But the debate about the election outcome still continues. For Tsavingiri and the Western governments the election result is not legitimate, while for the African monitors and Chinese observers it is free, fair and peaceful. However, beyond these contestations, the question is what makes Mugabe win again and with such a big margin and what does this outcome imply for Zimbabwe?

The anxieties about the conduct of elections that it was not fair cannot be dismissed. Reported allegations regarding fake registration receipts and millions of voters being turned away, are yet to be investigated by the election authorities. But one cannot say with surety that these irregularities were the only reason that led to Tsavangiri's defeat. The regional elections observers did not believe that flaws in the electoral process could have changed the outcome. In

fact it is the culmination of various factors that eventually made Tsavangiri succumb to Mugabe's landslide victory. Mugabe's popularity, policies and party's campaign strategies worked in favour for him.

Mugabe is admired as a defiant nationalist by many Africans. He commands large swathes of popular support in Zimbabwe, particularly for his anti-Western tirades. The constant assaults from the West have boosted his popularity. He has been adept in playing such criticisms against him to his strengths. For instance he once said 'if standing for my people's aspirations makes me a Hitler' let me be a Hitler a thousand times'. For many Zimbabweans he is not just a politician, but one who leads a cause. The cause is to give back the African his dignity, through returning land and resources taken away by Europeans during colonialism.

His policies, to empower local Zimbabwe people through 'indigenising' foreign-owned companies and compelling them to hand over at least 51 per cent, exploited anti-Western sentiment. Such policies went down well among Zimbabwe's largest electoral constituency, particularly the unemployed, especially in rural areas. Various reports indicate that most of the locals in the rural areas voted for his ZANU-PF party. His party's election campaign centred on the slogan "indigenisation and empowerment".

Tsavangiri on the other hand promised for reform programs that would see resurrection of the economy through foreign direct investments. He spent a great deal of time outside the country, lobbying the European Union and the US to help him. Analysts say that he lacked both the leadership skills to draw Zimbabweans together into a vision of a new Zimbabwe and political skills to make it happen. During his election campaign he indulged in more negative campaigning against Mugabe, rather than putting out a proper governance and recovery plan for Zimbabwe.

As far as campaign strategy is concerned, the MDC party was strategically inept. The ZANU-PF party, moved ahead with a strategy since the last elections in 2008, while the MDC party was spending most of their energies in fighting for appointments in different ministries. ZANU-PF party worked hard to rebuild its base, register the voters in the rural areas, where two-thirds of the population live, and where the election was decided. Moreover MDC party did not

have the sense of unity and purpose in their campaign, which the ZANU-PF party had. Mugabe's landslide victory was therefore a result of his popularity, policies and his party campaign strategies, against which Tsavangiri and his party did not appear a better alternative.

What does this election outcome imply? At the domestic level the party is going to dominate Zimbabwe's political landscape for the next five years. A ZANU-PF government would try to demonstrate that it could perform better than the outgoing GNU. Analysts said this will not only enable ZANU-PF to implement its policies for indigenisation and empowerment, but also provide an opportunity to the party to finally resolve the succession of Mugabe. Though ZANU-PF succeeded in the elections partly because of unity, analysts say there would likely be renewed struggle in the party, as the battle to succeed 89-year-old Mugabe intensifies.

At the regional level, the election outcome will have ramifications, particularly concerning the issue of stability and democracy. This election allowed both the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) to take a united approach, wherein they considered stability to be more important than democracy. For AU and SADC, it was important that the election was free and peaceful without any violence and that made them endorse it as credible despite the irregularities. In a way, this election has been a kind of unifying force for regional and continental organizations which have witnessed differences in the past.

As far as the European Union, the United States and other countries are concerned, they are likely to remove the targeted sanctions they had imposed, especially after the African Union and SADC endorsed these elections. Western countries had promised to remove sanctions on condition that elections should be peaceful, free and credible. The endorsements of the elections by the African regional groups have made it easier for the Western world to remove the sanctions.

For Mugabe and his party, amidst the current political and economic challenges, hopes and expectations, the next five years will be a testing time. It remains to be seen how he and his party respond to them and how they deliver.

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