

## Looming Zimbabwe ‘uprising’ echoes overthrow of Mugabe as calls mount to oust Mnangagwa

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24 Mar 2025



*Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa at a rally against US-imposed sanctions in Bulawayo on 25 October 2024. (Photo: EPA-EFE / Munashe Chokodza)*

Zimbabweans are bracing for a repeat of the events of November 2017 that led to the ousting of Robert Mugabe who had ruled the country with an iron fist for 37 years.

Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa’s second and last term in office is hanging by a thread after former freedom fighters backing his deputy, Constantino Chiwenga, called for an “uprising” on 31 March, demanding that he resign following allegations of massive corruption, nepotism and a litany of other charges.

Mnangagwa – who came to power through a military coup, led by then army chief Chiwenga, that ousted former president Robert Mugabe in November 2017 after accusing Mugabe of being surrounded by criminals – promised a raft of key democratic and economic reforms to save the country from economic collapse. But war veterans now feel that the president has reneged on his promises and presided over a floundering economy characterised by favouritism, cronyism and organised looting of the national cake.

With only three years before the expiry of his last constitutional term of office, Mnangagwa’s loyalists are campaigning for the Zanu-PF leader to remain in office beyond 2028. But Mnangagwa (82) has [told Zimbabweans](#) that he will not seek an extension of his term, claiming he is a “constitutionalist”.

The constitution prohibits Mnangagwa from contesting in the 2028 presidential elections.

Riled by this campaigning, ex-combatants led by Blessed Runesu Geza – a former member of Parliament and member of the ruling party’s highest decision-making body, the Central Committee, until recently when he was [expelled for fanning factionalism](#) – are now calling for Mnangagwa to step aside and make way for a new leader, accusing the president of presiding over a corrupt governing system, poisoning Chiwenga and granting tenders to his henchmen and close family members, among a host of charges.

Mnangagwa is yet to respond to many of the allegations against him.

After the Zimbabwe Republic Police’s national spokesperson, Paul Nyathi, [declared Geza a wanted man](#), detectives allegedly harassed Geza’s wife and briefly detained her, demanding to know her husband’s whereabouts.

The militant Geza, who was the first war veteran to call for [Mugabe's resignation](#) before the 2017 coup, went into hiding and only [reappeared on social media](#) several weeks later, in military uniform, reigniting calls for Mnangagwa's ousting and openly declaring that the bulk of the country's former liberation fighters were backing Chiwenga to take over from his boss.

It remains unclear whether the country's army would participate, as it did in 2017 when it rolled out tanks onto the streets. However, some Zanu-PF and army sources told Daily Maverick the involvement of the army in the planned protests is possible given Chiwenga's close links to the army hierarchy.

"General Chiwenga is a decorated military man who has worked directly with the current generals in the army. Despite the fact that President Mnangagwa has a relationship with (current army chief) General Valerio Sibanda, Chiwenga still commands a lot of respect of the command element within the defence forces. Whether the army will bring out tanks depends on how Chiwenga wants to manage the succession issue within Zanu-PF and government," a military source said.

[Chiwenga](#) has kept mum on Geza's claims and his alleged presidential ambitions, although he publicly criticised corruption at a national event broadcast on television, at which Mnangagwa's supporters sang revolutionary songs denouncing him, while Chiwenga's supporters hit back at the same event.

As pressure mounts on Mnangagwa to leave office, the president is fighting back by cracking down on dissent, with Alpha Media Holdings journalist [Blessed Mhlanga](#) the latest victim. Mhlanga was arrested after he broadcast Geza's interviews on AMH's Heart and Soul TV. He has been denied bail twice after he was accused of transmitting messages that could plunge the country into chaos.

Media and human rights watchdogs have criticised Mhlanga's arrest, saying it undermined media freedom in Zimbabwe.

Some of the war veterans who are reportedly working with Geza have also gone into hiding, but Mhlanga's arrest has not deterred Geza from calling for Mnangagwa's resignation.

"What we are calling for on March 31 is not a demonstration but an uprising. We want to warn (police commissioner, General) Stephen Mutumba to ensure that no demonstrator will be arrested or injured," said the war veteran in announcing the date of countrywide protests.

"Mnangagwa must go and he must go now because Zimbabwe will be a shell by the time he leaves," added Geza who also accused the president of looting the country's natural resources, such as gold, using cronies and his children as fronts.

The police chief [said he had no authority](#) to sanction mass protests.

Immediately after Geza called for the protests, Mnangagwa allegedly held crisis meetings with some of his henchmen at State House and his Precabe Farm in Kwekwe, about 200km southwest of the capital, Harare.

Zanu-PF deputy secretary for youth affairs, John Paradza, has warned that the ruling party's youth wing will thwart the protests.



*Zanu-PF deputy president Constantino Chiwenga (left) and President Emmerson Mnangagwa at the National Stadium in Harare on 28 July 2018 in the run-up to elections on 30 July 2018. (Photo: EPA-EFE / Yeshiel Panchia)*

“What we want to say and promise Your Excellency is that as long as me and Honourable (Tino) Machakaire (Zanu-PF secretary for youth affairs) remain leaders of the youths whom you see in attendance there would be no demonstration that will succeed under our watch,” Paradza said at a function attended by Mnangagwa.

However, former Zanu-PF political commissar Saviour Kasukuwere, who served as cabinet minister under Mugabe and went into exile following the 2017 election, said Zimbabweans had a constitutional right to protest and remove a government.

“It is the people’s right to protest if they feel the leadership have gone astray. Geza equally has a right to make the call. Beyond 2028 will be stretching it too far,” said Kasukuwere, now a critic of the ruling Zanu-PF who was barred from contesting the presidency in previous elections.

Following threats by war veterans to embark on nationwide protests, some countries, including Australia, have issued warnings to their citizens to [refrain from travelling to Zimbabwe](#) for safety reasons.

Geza claimed he was working with some opposition leaders, such as Nelson Chamisa, Tendai Biti, Douglas Mwonzora and other unnamed officials in the government and ruling Zanu-PF, to usher in a new government after the protests. It was not clear what form his proposed new government would look like, although some key opposition figures are not convinced that there would be a transitional arrangement pending fresh elections. After the November 2017 coup, Zanu-PF single-handedly embarked on a process to appoint Mugabe’s successor without consulting the opposition, despite the opposition participating in the protests that resulted in Mugabe’s forced resignation.

Chamisa, the country’s main opposition leader who controversially lost to Mnangagwa in the 2023 general elections [condemned by the Southern African Development Community and other international observers](#), has neither denied nor confirmed that his supporters would be party to the 31 March protests.

“Zimbabwe needs leaders who see governance as both a service and a sacred duty to serve God’s people to enhance integrity, progress and prosperity to a nation. Zimbabwe shall be known for good governance, exemplary, fantastic policies, values, rights and the rule of law. We will set an example in everything,” Chamisa said.

Former finance minister Biti is on record calling for a transitional government to extricate the country from economic collapse and implement key democratic reforms before fresh elections are held. **DM**

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