

## Zim may call snap 2023 general polls early next year

NewsHawks by Owen Gagare

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*File pic: Priscilla Chigumba, ZEC Chairperson during the 2018 elections*

PRESIDENT Emmerson Mnangagwa may call snap general elections in the first quarter of next year — in March — after securing a fresh mandate as Zanu PF leader and its candidate in the polls, it emerged during the party’s congress at the weekend.

Inside sources say although constitutionally elections should be held by or before the end of July 2023, indications are Mnangagwa may call early polls in March or April.

This comes as the ruling party is deeply worried and scared stiff of plans by the main opposition CCC led by Nelson Chamisa and civil society to have a parallel ballot-counting and results tabulation, as well as transmission process to counter vote-rigging.

Throughout their just-ended congress, Zanu PF leaders kept on harping on Chamisa and CCC, showing they consider and fear them as a major threat after what happened in Zambia last year and Lesotho recently when opposition parties unexpectedly swept to power. Mnangagwa’s government is viciously cracking down on the CCC.

Two of its MPs, including its senior leader Job Sikhala — now the face of the fight for democratic change in Zimbabwe — and 14 of its activists have been detained on allegations of inciting violence for well over 130 days. There has been an eruption of political violence in many hotspots across the country.

Two opposition activists, Mboneni Ncube and Moreblessing Ali, have been killed as brutality intensifies ahead of the polls. Although Zanu PF won a two-thirds majority in July 2018, its leader — Mnangagwa — scraped through by a disputed wafer-thin margin. Mnangagwa has proved to be far less popular compared to his party.

By contrast, Chamisa is more popular than his party. Zanu PF says it is also gravely concerned about the social suffering among Zimbabweans due to the deteriorating economic conditions which may have a far-reaching impact on the elections.

Zanu PF has over the years been consolidating its grassroots structures, according to the party's central committee report presented at congress. It says this will enable the party to have polling station-based interventions as it seeks to garner five million votes. Closing Zanu PF's congress yesterday, Mnangagwa said he was grateful for being nominated the party's sole candidate in next year's polls.

"As we approach 2023, we must remain in sync and encourage our members to register to vote," he said.

"The party's election manifesto will be launched soon and will be distributed in due course."

Inside sources say Zanu PF is planning to conclude its primary elections before the end of the year, having already established its cells, branches, as well as district and provincial structures restructuring and internal poll processes. Mnangagwa said his party's elections manifesto will be launched soon.

The party has already ordered five million pieces of campaign material. It also now has fleet of branded cars, some of which it bought for itself, while others were purchased by donors and well-wishers. Mnangagwa has also ensured that MPs, who have not been paid salaries and allowances for a long time, get their monies to enable them to campaign for themselves and him too.

The central committee report says Zanu PF has 84 917 cells, 17 496 branches and 3 216 districts countrywide.

"The (District Coordinating Committees) DCCs have become an important cog in ensuring that the grassroots are well-organised and are an integral part of the mainstream mobilization through the emphasis on cells as the nucleus and DNA of the party. This has re-awakened the need to strategise around the polling stations so that we have certainty that our people are really registered to vote," the report reads.

Zanu PF, according to the report, will also continue working with indigenous religious groupings in its mass mobilisation drive, as well as affiliates such as Teachers for ED, Young Women for ED, Journalists for ED, Returnees for ED, Affirmative Action Group and Economic Empowerment Group.

It was also resolved at congress that Mnangagwa will restructure the politburo, the administrative body of the decision-making central committee, to create new portfolios, including one dealing with labour issues.

This is meant to address workers' issues and hopefully get their votes. The party is also targeting artisanal miners, widely known as makorokoza/otsheketsha, in places like Mazowe and Penhalonga, as well as others around country. It is also raising funds through gold mining activities and leveraging its control of mining concessions for political support.

Despite its grand strategy and tactics to win elections, Zanu PF is worried by the parlous state of the economy, including the prospect of civil society organisations independently tabulating results to counter its rigging machinery.

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network and the Election Resource Centre are planning to conduct parallel voter tabulation during the 2023 harmonised elections. In pursuit of that, they will deploy election observers at all polling stations who will also double as CCC agents,” the report says.

“These will send results to their established Command centres and have consolidated results before Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (Zec) announces. If Zec announces what is different from what they have, they are planning to have violent protests. This plan is a recipe for chaos and mayhem as well as a serious security threat.”

Zanu PF, which is pushing for the PVO Bill, wants to curtail the influence of the civil society organisations which it says are “a security threat”.

The party says these civil society organisations are assisting the main opposition CCC’s mobilisation drive.

“In their quest to upset the ruling Zanu PF party support base, the opposition working with their Western handlers, have employed hybrid warfare, ranging from political, economic, social and cyber threats. This has seen the opposition political party penetrating Zanu PF strongholds, particularly rural constituencies,” the report says.

“The main opposition outfit is using NGOs and CSOs as their agents for regime change, with Goal Zimbabwe, Danish Church Aid and Plan International being on record for handing cash handouts ranging between US\$10 and US\$20 per individual in high-density suburbs such as Mabvuku, Highfield and Mbare. In essence, they are acting as the opposition commissars whose activities complement those of the opposition outfit.”

On the economy and national security, the ruling party says price volatility caused by sharp exchange rate movements had become a security threat “which consequently had blighted its chance of a landslide win in the 2023 harmonised elections”.

The party applauded interventions by government, including the introduction of gold coins, which have stabilised the exchange rate. But it called for more measures to strengthen the economy.

“However, there have been concerns regarding the welfare of the population. It would therefore be prudent for the government to address social welfare issues, including service delivery so that as we approach the elections in 2023 the country does not fall into the same predicament that befell it in 2021 whereby the opposition won some of the crucial urban by-elections despite several infrastructural development programmes done by the ruling party.”

Zanu PF usually relies on state institutions, particularly the military, to steal elections. Zec is also widely accused of rigging elections for Zanu PF.

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