

Zanu PF determined to win at all costs

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Zanu PF supporters

As Zimbabweans ready themselves for the crunch polls expected next year, there is a feeling that the elections will be largely characterised by violence, of similar magnitude to the one seen in 2008.

The election preparations are already in shambles. That means that the African election observers (from the Southern African Development Community and the African Union) as well as those of us looking on from the outside are unlikely to reach credible conclusions.

It will be difficult to answer questions of whether the polling was free and fair or even who won.

Violence in the Zimbabwean context is complex. There have been waves of government-sponsored violence in Zimbabwe since the 1980s — the violence after the 2008 elections was only the most recent.

And then there was violence perpetrated by the State in the August 2018 post-election protests, where armed security agents shot dead six protesters and civilians.

The late former President Robert Mugabe ran a security State based on terror, the intensity of which varied with the circumstances. But, it was always there.

Fear of violence is deeply entrenched among many Zimbabweans, especially outside of the Zanu PF support base.

There are plenty of anecdotes that ruling party-aligned security services have reminded potential opposition voters of that history, and the mere reminder engenders sufficient fear to have the desired consequences.

There is also the rural/urban dichotomy. Violence in urban areas is much more easily observed than in the countryside.

Yet it is in the rural areas that violence has been widespread in the past.

Zimbabwe remains a rural nation; it is in the countryside that most voters reside.

Mugabe, his successor Emmerson Mnangagwa and his dominant Zanu PF party have been especially strong among parts of the peasantry.

Violence in Zanu PF-dominated areas against political and ethnic outsiders could have some popular support.

In any event, unless it is of a significant magnitude, election observers — and the outside media — are unlikely to see it.

Yet it could have a significant impact on the outcome of the elections.

Finally, for hardliners in Zanu PF, the legitimacy of the State comes not from constitutions or elections, but rather from fealty to the heritage of the independence struggle.

Zanu PF is the custodian of that heritage. It will, therefore, try to ensure victory at any cost. — **CFR**

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