



ATTACKS TO CREATE NO-GO AREAS FOR OPPOSITION

Violence by ZANU-PF supporters focused in areas where opposition won unexpected support in first-round elections.

By Jabu Shoko in Harare

Supporters of the ruling ZANU-PF party are targeting opposition activists in an attempt to intimidate voters in the forthcoming re-run of the presidential election.

The opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, says people working for it are being picked off, especially in constituencies where it won seats for the first time in the March 29 polls. A lawyers' group noted that employees of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, ZEC, were also being arrested in these contested areas.

Last week's announcement on the recount of the parliamentary ballot confounded expectations by leaving



Credit: Lazele

A victim of recent political violence shows the results of a beating by ZANU-PF supporters. Picture taken May 3.

Deliberate policy of targeting MDC activists and non-partisan election officers.

the original results intact, with ZANU-PF controlling 97 against the 99 won by the main MDC faction, led by Morgan Tsvangirai. Arthur Mutambara's MDC faction won ten seats, and has indicated it will work with Tsvangirai's group, though

NEWS IN BRIEF

- The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, ZEC, may have to postpone the second round of the presidential election to make the necessary preparations, its head George Chiweshe told AFP news agency on April 6. By law, the vote should take place within 21 days of the announcement of first-round results, which finally happened on May 2, but Chiweshe said his commission had powers to override this.
- Following the ZEC's May 2 announcement that neither of the two leading candidates won the 50 per cent of the voted needed for

victory in the presidential election, Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, held off on saying whether he was prepared to take part in a second round. He says he has already won with just over 50 per cent, while the ZEC awarded him 47.9 per cent, more than the incumbent Robert Mugabe with 43.2 per cent. The authorities said on May 5 that they would not accede to any preconditions that Tsvangirai might set for taking part.

- The Catholic Church in Zimbabwe has urged the electoral authorities to delay a second vote because the

country was "too traumatised" by political violence, and another ballot would only aggravate the situation.

- Violence has continued in rural areas, in a pattern that suggests ZANU-PF is trying to re-establish its control over the electorate in traditional stronghold areas where it lost seats to the MDC in the parliamentary election. On May 5, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expressed alarm at the reports of rising violence and intimidation, and said he was consulting with African leaders on how to help resolve the crisis.

contrary to media reports, the two have not formally reunited.

When the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, ZEC, finally released the result of the presidential election on May 2, it ruled that neither Tsvangirai nor the incumbent Robert Mugabe had surpassed the 50 per cent mark needed for victory. It said the opposition leader got 47.9 per cent, beating Mugabe's 43.2 per cent but still necessitating a run-off vote to decide the winner.

Tsvangirai has not yet announced whether he is prepared to contest the second round, since his party calculates that he won outright with 50.3 per cent of the vote.

Assuming Tsvangirai does agree to run, the Mugabe administration has everything to play for, especially in those rural areas which were regarded as ZANU-PF's heartland but which turned against it and voted MDC in the parliamentary ballot.

The violence targets areas where the ZANU-PF vote fell away in the first round.

The opposition says Mugabe has already unleashed a campaign of violence designed to drive out MDC activists and force the rural population back into line behind ZANU-PF. It says 20 of its supporters have been killed and thousands of others assaulted by the security forces and irregular groups like the war veterans.

"Over 20 MDC activists have been killed in just one month," said Nelson Chamisa, spokesman for the Tsvangirai faction. "Only over the past two days, five MDC activists have been killed by ZANU-PF militia soldiers. Before they raided our headquarters, the place was more of a casualty department or a refugee camp than an office, as it was filled to capacity with villagers that had fled

their rural homes. These people have nowhere to go and their villages have been declared no-go areas for them and their families."

Information trickling in from the countryside indicates that some of the areas worst affected by the campaign of violence are regions traditionally seen as Mugabe strongholds — the three Mashonaland provinces, Manicaland and Masvingo.

Fleeing MDC activists "have nowhere to go and their villages have been declared no-go areas for them and their families" — opposition spokesman Nelson Chamisa.

Chamisa said the five most recent killings included a woman shot dead by soldiers in Manicaland, two male MDC supporters attacked by ZANU-PF paramilitaries in Mashonaland Central, and a polling agent for the opposition who died after an assault by war veterans and other Mugabe loyalists in the Midlands, an area where support for the ruling party support is weak.

"Thousands of people have been displaced while hundreds have been seriously injured and are hospitalised in various hospitals across the country, as the violence by ZANU-PF militia and youth continues to increase at alarming levels," said Chamisa.

Wayne Bvudzijena, the national police spokesman, said he was still collecting statistics relating to political violence.

The experience of Davias Matiza, 50, from the Mutoko South constituency in Mashonaland East, mirrors that of many MDC supporters. He will not forget the events of April 12, when he only just managed to flee after an attack on his home.

"Armed ZANU-PF thugs burnt down my house. I managed to escape and boarded a bus. The thugs, however, followed me and surrounded the bus and demanded me out of the bus," he told IWPR, speaking from a safe house where he has joined scores of other opposition supporters who have fled the reign of terror in rural areas.

"By the grace of God, I again managed to flee from the scene through the window and run for my dear life. A Good Samaritan gave me a lift to Harare and then I found my way into the MDC head office, but I understand the ZANU-PF thugs and war veterans are still after my life."

Two MDC polling agents in the same Mutoko South constituency were not so lucky. Patience Mapuranga, 30, and Mahwisai Chizanga 40, recalled how ZANU-PF militia accused them of supporting the opposition, kicked them and beat them with whips and barbed wire, and left them for dead.

"ZANU-PF thugs and war veterans are still after my life" — MDC supporter whose house was torched.

Both Mapuranga and Chizanga suffered serious injuries and needed specialist treatment in Harare, about 150 kilometres away.

"We reported the matter to the police, but the police officer handling the issue was also assaulted and accused of supporting the MDC," said a tearful Chizanga, who is in hiding.

Useni Sibanda, co-ordinator of the Christian Alliance, a loose grouping of church organisations which is seeking funds to feed, clothe and accommodate displaced opposition supporters, said Mugabe was trying to push the MDC out of certain areas by targeting its activists on the ground.

"It is a calculated strategy to create no-go areas as the ZANU-PF strategy

for the run-off," said Sibanda. "Between 80 and 90 per cent of the people that have fled due to violence in the rural areas were polling agents for the MDC. So what this means is that come the run-off, the MDC will not have anyone in the rural areas willing to represent them, let alone campaign for them."

Intimidation of ZEC officers designed to let pro-regime forces step in and rig the second-round ballot.

Irene Petras, executive director of Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, ZLHR, said arrests, intimidation and violence targeting the both MDC activists and ZEC polling officers were designed to secure a Mugabe victory.

ZLHR is representing schoolteachers who have been arrested and charged with violating electoral legislation in areas where the opposition won. Many teachers served as ZEC election officers during the March 29 polls.

It described these detentions as "an attempt to ensure that, in the event of a presidential run-off, such officers will refuse to participate, thus allowing the state to justify its use of law enforcement agents, intelligence officers, war veterans and graduates of the National Youth Service Training Programme to manage the electoral process to benefit one presidential candidate, to whom they owe their political and human survival".

ZLHR has called on members of the security forces and other regime activists to "moderate their behaviour" as they should be aware it is illegal to arrest interrogate ZEC officers, and they could face serious consequences for doing so.

Jabu Shoko is the pseudonym of a reporter in Zimbabwe. ■

TEACHERS FALL VICTIM TO RURAL VIOLENCE



Credit: Lazele

Villagers in Mashonaland Central show what is left of their hut, torched by pro-Mugabe forces. Picture taken April 11.

Schools crisis deepens as staff flee reported reign of terror by government loyalists.

By Wonder Madiro in Harare

Hundreds of rural schools in Zimbabwe are battling to reopen for the new term this week because most teachers have fled local violence.

War veterans and militias have reportedly unleashed a reign of terror in the countryside, and although many victims are said to be opposition supporters, ordinary teachers have also borne the brunt.

Teachers' unions say the major targets of the violence are those members who served as presiding officers during the elections. "These are being accused of rigging the elections in favour of MDC (the opposition Movement for Democratic Change)," said Raymond Majongwe, secretary-general of the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe, PTUZ.

"Our teachers are being targeted by the militia. There is no way that they can go back to such dangerous areas."

Timothy Rusere, an English teacher at a rural school in Mutoko about 200 kilometres northwest of Harare, is one of the hundreds of teachers who have fled their schools. He said he left after war veterans attacked the school at midnight.

"They arrived two weeks ago, rounded up all the teachers and started accusing us of supporting the opposition," said Rusere, who is now staying with his in-laws in Harare.

Three teachers known to be active members of the opposition, he said, were severely beaten up, "When they said they would come the next day to deal with the rest of us, I knew things were getting bad so the next morning I packed my bags and left."

Rusere's colleagues, who stayed, sustained serious bruises during the attack. They have since fled the school.

The prospect of a run-off presidential vote is not helping matters, either.

The ruling ZANU-PF lost control of the lower house of parliament in the March 29 elections, for the first time since Zimbabwe became independent from Britain in 1980. Many believe President Robert Mugabe also lost the presidential election to MDC's Morgan Tsvangirai, although the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, ZEC, has said neither candidate secured the required 50 per cent and a second round is therefore necessary.

The violence took off in the aftermath of the polls.

"Hate speeches are being uttered against teachers. Some are being systematically assaulted," said Majongwe. The union said it has told teachers to abandon their schools once threats are made.

"Hate speeches are being uttered against teachers. Some are being systematically assaulted" — Majongwe.

PTUZ, which represents about 12,000 teachers, said it would call a national solidarity strike if there were further reports of violence against teachers.

The situation has worsened the crisis in the education sector, which has already been hit by a massive brain drain. Reports say 8,000 teachers have left the country since the beginning of the year because of poor working conditions.

Thomas Karwe, who teaches mathematics in Dambamadzura in Gokwe, said he was warned by some of his colleagues against coming back to the school because his name was at the top of a hit list.

"They said the war veterans had come to the school looking for me," said Karwe. "I will not be going back to work until my security is assured.

"My workmates tell me that some of the houses at the school have been taken over by militias who are camping there."

Teachers have long been regarded as community leaders and opinion-formers, particularly in the rural areas, and often they have found themselves the target of militias loyal to the governing party.

"Our members are being brutalised" — MDC spokesman Nelson Chamisa.

Mavis Rugare, a teacher from the mining town of Shamva northwest of Harare, was part of a group of people who fled their homes after an attack by ZANU-PF militia in mid-April.

She narrated her ordeal at the hands of ruling party supporters to members of the media at the offices of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association, Zimrights.

"My house was burnt and everything taken away from me, including my cellphone and teaching items," she said.

Rugare is one of the hundreds of opposition supporters who are seeking refuge at safe houses set up by the MDC.

A report released on April 30 by Zimrights told of the extent of violence in both rural and urban areas, where property is being destroyed and people are being displaced and assaulted.

"A humanitarian crisis is unfolding and we are hoping other organisations will be able to help. The official number of those displaced so far is about 400 but this is just the tip of the iceberg of what is happening in our country at the moment," said Kucaca Phulu, Zimrights national chairperson.

About 300 MDC supporters who had sought refuge at the party's central offices in Harare were arrested on April 25 but released without charge the following week.

"Our members are being brutalised," said MDC spokesman Nelson Chamisa.

The government, however, has denied that ZANU-PF has been responsible for any of the violence, saying instead that the MDC was to blame.

Mugabe's chief spokesperson, George Charamba, released a statement on April 29 in which he accused the opposition of deliberately stirring up tensions.

"There is a flurry of distortions and irresponsible statements which are vainly calculated to heighten tension to spark incidents of politically motivated crimes around the country," said Charamba.

Scenes described by victims reminiscent of "a country at war" — Zimbabwe Peace Project.

But human rights organisations have been reporting an upsurge in politically-motivated violence cases throughout the country.

The Zimbabwe Peace Project said in its latest report that it had noticed an "alarming increase" in incidents of violence and human rights abuses committed by soldiers, adding that accounts by some of the victims were "synonymous with a country at war".

For example, an MDC supporter in Uzumba, once a ZANU-PF stronghold, told of how he was "nearly castrated" by assailants, just because he had chosen to support the opposition party.

Wonder Madiro is the pseudonym of an IWPR journalist in Zimbabwe. ■

ELECTION IMPASSE SPURS EMIGRATION

Zimbabweans have been voting with their feet amidst mounting political uncertainty.

By Yamikani Mwando in Bulawayo

A few weeks before the March 29 elections in Zimbabwe, Timothy Mthombeni decided he was not going to wait long enough to cast his ballot.

The 40-year-old father of four had a job but decided to leave for South Africa and send for his family once he had settled there.

He was sure life would get worse after the elections, not just as the economic crisis deepened and food shortages became greater, but also because he foresaw an outbreak of violence if the outcome was disputed.

He packed his bags and left to join a growing exodus from Zimbabwe.

This week, almost a month after the elections, 50-year-old Tabeth Zvirevo, a former domestic worker in a Bulawayo suburb — where she said wages were not too bad — also crossed the border to South Africa to look for work, blaming continued economic hardship.

“Maybe I would have stayed if [opposition leader Morgan] Tsvangirai had won,” she said.

Zvirevo has children to care for, and having worked all her life, was not about to sit around after her employers left the country leaving her without no source of income.

“I don’t know what to do, but I am not staying here. There are no signs things will improve any time soon,” Zvirevo told IWPR.

She was speaking as the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission began



Credit: Lazele

MDC spokesman Nelson Chamisa at a press conference in Harare. Picture taken April 8.

controversial vote recounts in areas where the ruling ZANU-PF party says it was cheated of victory.

The threat of violence has become real for many in this troubled nation as they flee to neighbouring South Africa.

Human rights groups speak of a dramatic increase in political violence since the March 29 elections.

Zimbabwean human rights groups say there has been a dramatic increase in politically motivated violence since the elections.

Local private newspapers have been running adverts placed by human rights and faith-based groups showing images of the victims of political violence. The photographs show cracked heads, burnt buttocks, burnt feet and swollen mouths.

Mugabe’s supporters are accused of orchestrating a countrywide crackdown against the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC.

MDC spokesman Nelson Chamisa alleges that supporters have been killed by ZANU-PF activists, but Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa has accused the MDC of peddling falsehoods. The MDC’s claims however have been documented by groups including Zimbabwe Doctors for Human Rights, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, the Zimbabwe Peace Project and Amnesty International, among others.

Early this month, the Christian Alliance, an ecumenical grouping of local churches, demanded that “the state media, war veterans and other militias stop fanning the flames of conflict”, after state media showed images of pro-Mugabe war veterans threatening white commercial farmers with violence if they refused to vacate their farms.

The remnants of the 1970s war of liberation have been prominent among

the forces propping up Mugabe, and have been accused of unleashing a reign of terror across the country soon after the March 29 elections.

Many observers say post-election violence has displaced civilians within Zimbabwe and prompted others to leave the country.

“Many people do not see any reason why they should stay here when there are continuing fears of an outbreak of wide-scale violence” — former teacher.

“It is not surprising that many people do not see any reason why they should stay here when there are continuing fears of an outbreak of wide-scale violence,” a teacher who resigned last year told IWPR. “The people of Zimbabwe are being pushed to the edge.”

A month ago, MDC secretary-general Tendai Biti warned that the international community would only be impelled to take action on the Zimbabwe crisis after bodies began filling the streets.

Southern African Migration Project reports an upsurge in the numbers seeking to cross into South Africa.

It appears these fears are shared by many Zimbabweans.

The Southern African Migration Project has reported an upsurge in the number of people seeking to cross into South Africa, impelled by the uncertainty created by the post-election situation.

“No one wants to stay here any more,” said a young woman who had just obtained a travel visa to South Africa for herself and her two-month-old baby. “I am not coming back.”

Despite the numbers of people arriving in his country, South African president Thabo Mbeki shocked the international community by claiming there was no crisis in Zimbabwe when he met Mugabe recently.

“No one wants to stay here any more. I am not coming back” — Zimbabwean on the point of leaving the country.

In the past, organisations like the International Organisation for Migration have attempted to discourage the young, in particular, from leaving Zimbabwe. But for people of all generations, such pleas appear to have fallen on deaf ears.

Yamikani Mwando is the pseudonym of a journalist in Zimbabwe. ■

The Zimbabwe Crisis Report is an initiative of IWPR-Africa's Zimbabwe Programme. This programme promotes democratization and good governance with Southern Africa and contributes to the development of a culture of human rights and the rule of law. Focusing on Zimbabwe the programme has three core components —

information provision, capacity building and dissemination and distribution.

The key purpose is to increase awareness in the Southern African region of the Zimbabwean situation and the implications for regional peace, security and economic development.

It also contributes to the development of regional policy, promotes dialogue and builds bridges within the region. It also raises the Africa wide and international profile of Zimbabwe in the context of the region. Importantly it also builds the skills and capacity of the media to reliably and accurately report political transition, governance and human rights issues.

The programme is managed by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting — Africa. For further details go to www.iwpr.net