

Lacoste and litigation: the Zimbabwe election explained

By [Patrick Walker](#)

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Robert Mugabe's resignation in November 2017 did not bring with it the expectation of political change. Whilst Zimbabweans sang in the streets, the world held its breath for the next political bombshell that would surely hit the African nation of 16 million. After a bloody election, questions are still being raised regarding Zimbabwe's ability to fix Mugabe's legacy.

At the age of 93, the man who was at the time the world's oldest leader had clung on to power for 37 years. Mugabe was best known for his policy of 'anti-colonialism', which John Sentamu, the Ugandan-born Archbishop of York called 'the worst type of racism'. Mugabe's administration forcibly redistributed land and wealth from the white minority to the black minorities, whilst simultaneously devastating villages opposed to his rule through a movement the President called 'Clean out the Filth'. Like Idi Amin before him in Uganda, the leader united his country against the regime of its former colonial master, and subsequently destroyed it under dictatorial control.

Another legacy of Mugabe's tyranny is the state of the country's economy. Zimbabwe is landlocked, and has trouble exporting its huge mineral resources, leading to a ballooning trade deficit. It has also failed to industrialise: crops like tobacco and sugar are its second largest export (21%) after raw minerals according to the UN Comtrade database. The government typically fails to raise funds for projects because most of Zimbabwe's citizens are employed informally, with no taxable income. Industrialising the economy and boosting education were two of the largest talking points in the 2018 election.

Despite that legacy, the campaign was relatively civil. Mugabe's party, Zanu-PF, was led by former Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa. The leader was known as 'the crocodile' for his political shrewdness, which earned his party faction the nickname 'Lacoste'. Lacoste ran a platform that emphasized job creation and improved healthcare, which aims to tackle the country's life expectancy crisis. The average age of death in Zimbabwe is 61, where Avert reports 1.3 million adults still live with HIV.

The opposition MDC Alliance was led by Nelson Chamisa. The former pastor is a confident speaker, and championed human rights, infrastructure remodelling, and above all, the presence of God in his party's campaign. The MDC Alliance were fighting an uphill battle, with the media still controlled by the ruling Zanu-PF. The country's largest newspaper, *The Herald* announced the party's plan for Zimbabwe with a simple headline: 'Analysts Dismiss MDC Manifesto'.

The election on the 30th July gave Chamisa 44.3% of the vote to Mnangagwa 50.8%: just enough of a

majority to avoid a second run-off election. A preliminary report by EU observers called the race 'competitive', but demanded more transparency in future polls. The MDC went further, alleging election fraud, and supporters took to the streets in protest, where police opened fire, killing six. Chamisa has been accused by some of utilising chaos on the streets to further political mayhem. Zimbabwe does, officially, have a process for challenging fraudulent election results, and the MDC only just met the deadline to begin legal proceedings in the last couple of days. Following their arrest some opposition leaders such as Tendai Biti have since been released

It seems, even following the election, Zimbabwe is no closer to its dream of accountable democracy. The decision of the court, and its validity and acceptance by the political parties will determine whether Zimbabwe is really ready. It is possible modernisation of its economy will do more for the country than an alteration in the way in which it chooses its leaders.



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