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Zimbabwe: U.S. Should Expand Sanctions If Elections Are Flawed

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Zimbabweans will head to the polls on July 31 for national elections pitting long-time President Robert Mugabe against Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai. Past elections have been marred by serious irregularities and violence orchestrated by Mugabe and his Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) supporters. The lead-up to this election has also been fraught with irregularities.

In the unlikely event that the election proves free and fair, the U.S. should be prepared to work with the new government to improve good governance and economic growth. However, in the coming days, the U.S. should warn Mugabe that a flawed election will lead the U.S. to expand current sanctions and work with international partners to ensure the broad application of sanctions until credible elections are held.

Squandering a Rich Legacy. Mugabe, one of the leaders of the Zimbabwean independence effort, has been the country's sole leader since independence in 1980. When assuming power, Mugabe inherited well-developed manufacturing and mining sectors, a competitive agricultural sector, a profitable tourist

industry, and sound infrastructure. The country has rich mineral deposits, including diamonds, gold, and platinum. Zimbabwe was also the breadbasket of southern Africa, annually profiting from crops produced on modern commercial farms.

But by the mid-1990s, economic problems and growing political repression led to discontent, protests, and the formation of Zimbabwe's first major opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The MDC achieved major victories in defeating a constitutional amendment in 1999 and winning nearly half the seats of parliament in the 2000 election.

In response, Mugabe targeted his opponents with physical abuse, legal harassment, and economic punishment. Election violence in 2008 forced MDC candidate Morgan Tsvangirai to withdraw from a run-off election. Mugabe also abused his authority to reward allies and secure support from the police, the military, and other key groups.¹

These policies resulted in corruption, gross misgovernance, erosion of the rule of law, and precipitous economic decline. Crippling hyper-inflation was arrested in 2008 through the adoption of a multi-currency system led by the U.S. dollar.² However, the agricultural sector remains a shadow of what it was prior to Mugabe's politically driven "land reform" policy and Zimbabwe imports most of its food. Unemployment remains alarmingly high at 85 percent. According to the World Bank, gross domestic product (GDP) measured in constant 2005 dollars was 25 percent less in 2012 than in 2002 and per capita GDP was over 30 percent lower. Illegal diamond revenues, reportedly amounting to millions of dollars, corruptly bankroll the ZANU-PF political elite.³

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Another Stolen Election on the Horizon. The 2008 Global Political Agreement (GPA), which established a unity government between the ZANU-PF and the MDC, outlined reforms to depoliticize the security apparatus and state-owned media. These reforms must be implemented prior to elections, but Mugabe has refused to act on them.

The ZANU-PF and the Zimbabwean military have never been separated from one another. Top-ranking generals in Zimbabwe are known ZANU-PF supporters. Leaders within the security apparatus, which were accused of being the primary instigators of violence during the 2008 election,⁴ have publicly announced their support for Mugabe.⁵ A war veterans' leader has said Mugabe's supporters will "fight to ensure ZANU-PF wins at all costs."⁶ Mugabe has publicly refused to enact a military service charter that would forbid political allegiances for army generals.⁷

Along with the unimplemented GPA reforms, other prominent concerns are the decision to bar Western election observers, the competence and independence of the electoral commission, insufficient and uneven funding for electoral operations and ballot printing, manipulation of voter rolls, and limited time to properly register voters—particularly Zimbabweans with foreign parents and young voters, most of whom are Tsvangirai and MDC supporters.⁸

Despite these concerns—or perhaps to take advantage of them—Mugabe illegally pushed for and unilaterally proclaimed early elections for July 31. The Southern African Development Community (SADC), the arbiter of the GPA, criticized the election date as illegitimate. The SADC unsuccessfully urged Zimbabwean officials to appeal to the Zimbabwean Constitutional Court for the election to be postponed to allow implementation of political and security reforms that are necessary for a legitimate and peaceful electoral process.

Concerns over the early election date are well-founded. Early voting scheduled for police on July 14–15 was a fiasco: Many voting locations did not even have ballots and were plagued by irregularities with voter rolls.⁹ Without electoral reforms, which are impossible to implement under the current time frame, next week's election will be a repetition of past fraudulent elections.

International Pressure Should Increase. The African Union and the SADC are providing most election observers. But the number of observers remains alarmingly low: The SADC recently increased its observers to 600, even though there will be over 9,670 polling stations.¹⁰ Moreover, Mugabe can be expected to place observers in areas where discrepancies and irregularities are less likely to occur.

The SADC's verdict on whether the elections are credible will be the measure by which the rest of the

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1. For a detailed account, see Brett D. Schaefer, "The Crisis in Zimbabwe: How the U.S. Should Respond," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 1407, March 23, 2007, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2007/03/the-crisis-in-zimbabwe-how-the-us-should-respond>.
 2. *The Wall Street Journal*, "How Zimbabwe and the Dollar Beat Inflation," March 29, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704050204576218690273479676.html> (accessed July 24, 2013).
 3. For more information see Partnership Africa Canada, "Reap What You Sow: Greed and Corruption in Zimbabwe's Marange Diamond Fields," November 2012, http://www.pacweb.org/images/PUBLICATIONS/Conflict_Diamonds_and_KP/Reap_What_You_Sow-eng-Nov2012.pdf (accessed July 24, 2013).
 4. Zimbabwe Democracy Institute Research Desk, "Security Sector Factor in Zimbabwe's Political and Electoral Affairs," Zimbabwe Democracy Institute, April 23, 2013, <http://zimdem.com/2013/04/23/security-sector-factor-in-zimbabwes-political-and-electoral-affairs/> (accessed July 11, 2013).
 5. Nicollete Zulu, "Zim's Mugabe Sends War Vets into Vote Battle," Free and Fair Zimbabwe Election, July 7, 2013, <http://zimbabweelection.com/2013/07/11/ffze-zims-mugabe-sends-war-vets-into-vote-battle/> (accessed July 20, 2013).
 6. *Ibid.*
 7. Farai Shoko, "Zim Army Needs Change," *Mail and Guardian*, May 3, 2013, <http://mg.co.za/print/2013-05-03-00-zim-army-needs-change> (accessed July 16, 2013).
 8. See Michelle Chifamba, "Complicated Registration 'Designed' to Prevent Zimbabweans from Voting," Inter Press Service, July 6, 2013, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/07/complicated-registration-designed-to-prevent-zimbabweans-from-voting/> (accessed July 24, 2013).
 9. See MacDonald Dzirute, "Zimbabwe's Mugabe Lashes Out at 'Insane' Washington," Reuters, July 18, 2013, <http://news.yahoo.com/zimbabwes-mugabe-lashes-insane-washington-163049827.html> (accessed July 20, 2013).
 10. Bridget Mananavire, "EU Observer Mission Barred—Mumbengegwi," *Daily News*, July 17, 2013, <http://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2013/07/17/eu-observer-mission-barred-mumbengegwi> (accessed July 21, 2013).

world judges the elections. Therefore, recent SADC statements that elections in Zimbabwe will be “credible enough” are concerning. As the guarantor of the GPA, the SADC is required to support and ensure a peaceful and credible electoral process. These statements remove pressure for Mugabe to abide by international electoral standards and discourage Zimbabweans from fully participating in the election.

The U.S. Should Stand Firm. The U.S. policy toward Zimbabwe since 2001 has been clear: Sanctions were put in place “to provide for a transition to democracy and to promote economic recovery in Zimbabwe.”¹¹ Only after the rule of law is restored, widely accepted free and fair elections are held, a commitment to equitable land reform is demonstrated, and security forces answer to the elected civilian government will the U.S. remove sanctions. As Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton made clear last August that the U.S. will not consider normalizing relations or removing sanctions until Zimbabwe holds “a free and fair election monitored by the international community.”¹² Specifically, the U.S. should:

- Support the SADC’s efforts, particularly those of South African President Jacob Zuma, to obtain guarantees from Mugabe and Zimbabwe’s military leadership that they will uphold a peaceful transition of power if ZANU-PF loses in the election;
- Set a high bar for what constitutes a peaceful, free, and fair election and, if it falls short, denounce the election and demand a new one;
- Urge the SADC and the African Union to strongly condemn Zimbabwe—including suspending

Zimbabwe’s membership—if the election is not free and fair;

- Strengthen current sanctions if the electoral process is not deemed credible or if Zimbabwean security forces do not allow for the peaceful transition of power; and
- Seek to engender complementary sanctions from the SADC and other countries, particularly in Europe, which prematurely removed sanctions on 35 Zimbabweans and resumed direct bilateral aid.

Free and Fair Elections a Priority. Zimbabwe’s poor economic situation and ongoing political repression highlight how badly the country needs transparent and democratic leadership that is accountable to its citizens. The priority for the U.S. should be to encourage and facilitate free and fair elections in Zimbabwe and, if that occurs, work with the government to help bolster long-term economic growth and development.

If the upcoming elections prove to be fraudulent or characterized by violence, the U.S. should denounce the results, strengthen current sanctions, call for a new election, and seek to engender support from the SADC and the international community.

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11. Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act of 2001, S. 494, 107th Cong., 1st Sess., January 3, 2001, <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/107/s494/text> (accessed July 24, 2013).

12. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, “The United States-South Africa Partnership: Going Global,” address at the University of Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa, August 8, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2012/08/196184.htm> (accessed July 24, 2013).