

Zimbabwe enters a new era, but struggles to escape its past

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Image copyright Getty Images Image caption Supporters of Zanu-PF have reason to celebrate, but challenges lie ahead

The deadly violence that followed Zimbabwe's first election since Robert Mugabe was ousted has created tension in a country that was hoping to put its past behind it, says BBC Africa editor Fergal Keane.

The political drama in this country has oscillated between euphoria, tragedy and farce - from a remarkably peaceful election day, to the shooting down of unarmed protesters, to the extraordinary sight of a **president disowning the actions of his own police.**

Each day has produced the unexpected and created a febrile atmosphere in which questions about who really controls this country have deepened.

Is it Emmerson Mnangagwa, who took over as president after the military takeover in November and won Monday's disputed presidential vote, or hardliners steeped in the brutal practices of the Mugabe era?

Signals of hope

Events since the vote have not inspired much faith.

Soldiers beat civilians in several opposition strongholds of the capital, Harare.

I met a young man whose body was covered in bruises after being thrashed by the army when they attacked a bar.



Copyright AFP: Six people died after the security forces opened fire on the streets of Harare on Wednesday

Outside our hotel in central Harare colleagues witnessed policemen beating two men for no apparent reason.

This was the behaviour of armed men who believed they could act with impunity.

Far from the land of hope President Mnangagwa wishes to project, division appears to be the defining dynamic.

Yet there were some hopeful signals too on Friday, such as the appearance of a government minister instructing riot police to allow a press conference to go ahead and opposition leader Nelson Chamisa's explicit disavowal of violent behaviour by his MDC Alliance supporters.

These point to the influence of more moderate voices on both sides.

'Learn lessons'

The MDC Alliance challenge to the election result will take the focus away from the streets and within that party there is already a process of self-questioning.

Senior figures have spoken to me of the need to "learn lessons from this defeat".



Copyright Reuters Image caption Riot police initially tried to stop Nelson Chamisa addressing the press on Friday

How many votes were lost because of party divisions?

The party's dalliance with Mr Mugabe, 94, in the closing days of the campaign placed politics above democratic ideals and probably cost rather than gained votes.

In the days after the vote Mr Chamisa pre-emptively declared victory and began claiming a massive fraud.

Who is the president-elect?



- Emmerson Mnangagwa is known as "the crocodile" because of his political shrewdness - his Zanu-PF party faction is known as "Lacoste"
- Accused of masterminding attacks on opposition supporters after the 2008 election
- Thought to be 75 years old, he promises to deliver jobs and is seen as open to economic reforms
- Survived several alleged assassination attempts, blamed on supporters of ex-President Mugabe.

His own statements and those of his colleague, Tendai Biti - who claimed he had evidence the pair were to be killed by a senior government minister - certainly raised the temperature among party supporters.

The ruling Zanu-PF party has won a two-thirds majority in parliament but it too struggles with factional problems.

Elected to his own position with only the slenderest of majorities the president will need more than his legendary cunning to navigate the days ahead.

He has enemies within Zanu-PF and among elements of the old regime.

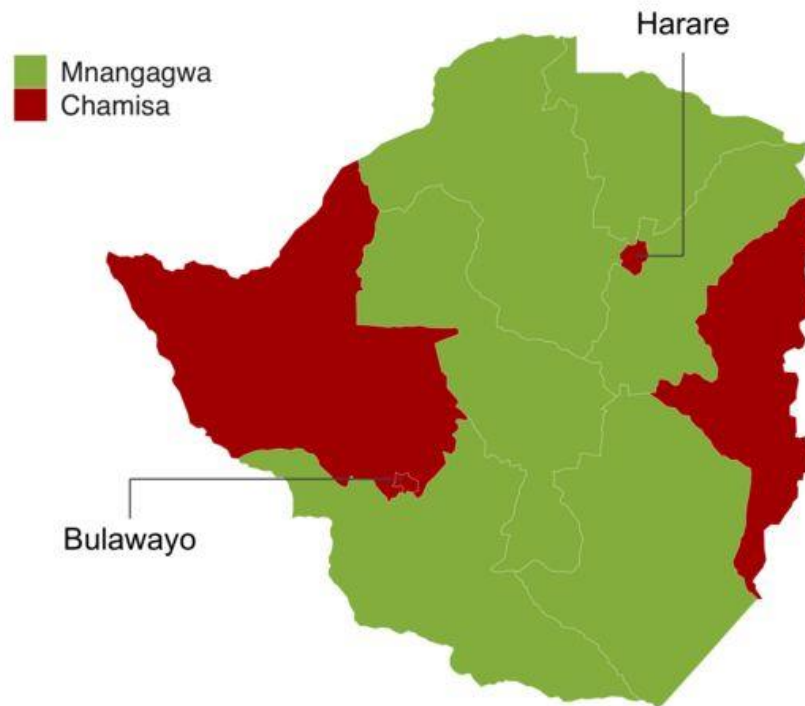
Remember it is just weeks since he survived an assassination attempt on the campaign trail.

Mr Mnangagwa needs to show that he is in charge of his security establishment and that he is willing to punish those who have abused civilians.

That will be a test of his democratic credentials but also of his relationship with the generals.

If he does not the conviction will deepen - at home and abroad - that nothing has changed.

Winning candidate in each province



Source: Zimbabwe Electoral Commission

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