

Voter aged 141 casts shadow on Zimbabwe polls

Written by Administrator

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Jane Flanagan – 13th July 2018

The inclusion of voters aged 141 and 134 on Zimbabwe's electoral roll has prompted concerns that the country's first vote of the post-Mugabe era may be as crooked as any held during his time in power.

The main opposition party has cited "ghost voters" as a clear sign that the credibility of the election on July 30 is in doubt. The list, which was made public after a court order, also has more than 100 voters sharing a single identity number and registered at one address.

This month's election will be a crucial test of President Mnangagwa, 75, who masterminded Mr Mugabe's ousting last November. He is anxious to win his own mandate and unlock foreign investment and diplomatic support.

His invitation to international journalists and European observers to witness voting for the first time in 16 years has been welcomed as a positive departure from the violent campaigns of the past.

As Mr Mugabe's enforcer for 37 years, Mr Mnangagwa has had a direct hand in much of the election rigging and violence that has delivered uninterrupted power for the ruling Zanu (PF) party since Zimbabwe won independence in 1980. Foreign governments have made a peaceful and credible election a condition for lifting sanctions and providing financial support.

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Political observers and opposition parties have already identified tactics suggesting that the ruling party's campaign is shady. Thousands of voters received unsolicited, personalised text messages last week in the language of the area where they are registered. Since political parties can access the phone numbers only of registered supporters, collusion with the electoral authorities or mobile phone companies seems likely.

"Zanu (PF) has been caught with its hands in the cookie jar," Nelson Chamisa, leader of Movement for Democratic Change, the main opposition, said. "There is no legal way for any political party to access voter phone numbers."

A leaked government letter has revealed that members of the police and the army will get an unscheduled pay rise of up to 20 per cent this month.

Despite Zanu (PF)'s ruinous policies, which have brought economic and political chaos, polls have put Mr Mnangagwa ahead. Forty-two per cent of those interviewed said they backed him, compared with 31 per cent for Mr Chamisa, 40. However, nearly a quarter said they were still undecided.

Although Zimbabwe's streets have been largely devoid of the army and "green bombers" — Zanu (PF)'s youth wing, which has been violent in previous elections — there have been reports of intimidation. Human Rights Watch said last month that it had interviewed voters who had been threatened with the loss of food aid if they failed to vote for the president.

Although Mr Mugabe remains confined to his mansion in Harare "the regime remains," Munyaradzi Gwisai, a political analyst at the University of Zimbabwe, said. "If anything, it is the hard men and hard women of that regime who have taken power."