

Testimony of Dr. Chipo Dendere  
Consortium for Faculty Diversity Fellow & Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science,  
Amherst College  
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Chipo Dendere is a Zimbabwean political scientist. Dr. Dendere is currently a Consortium for Faculty Diversity Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science at Amherst College. Dr. Dendere's research expertise is on democracy, elections, and, migration, with a regional focus on African politics. She writes about the impact of voter exit, migration and remittances on the survival of authoritarian regimes. Dr. Dendere's new research is on the role of technology and social media in new democracies.

Thank you, Chairman Christopher H. Smith, Ranking Member Karen Bass and other members of the Subcommittee, for the invitation to testify today on the future of Zimbabwe in a post-Robert Mugabe era. As a scholar of African politics, I can say that this is an outcome many of us would not have predicted. I believe I speak for most young Zimbabweans, my generation born after independence, when I say the idea of a post-Mugabe Zimbabwe is quite surreal.

Robert Mugabe was ousted from office in November 2017 in a series of military-led events that began as a guardian coup resulting in his resignation.

The United States and Zimbabwe have a long history of a mutually beneficial and productive relationship. In 1980, the United States was the first country to open an embassy in the newly independent Zimbabwe and extended a state visit invitation to then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe.<sup>1</sup> Over the last two decades as Zimbabwe faced severe economic and political crises, the relationship has been strained, but the United States has remained committed to providing support for democracy and alleviating poverty. The United States remains the biggest donor and has given nearly USD\$1 billion dollars in foreign assistance since 2001.<sup>2</sup> In 2001, the United States Congress passed the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA),<sup>3</sup> commonly referred to as *sanctions* in Zimbabwe. Mugabe and his government blamed many of the countries' economic woes on these sanctions. Debates on sanctions are complex, and there is a lot of academic evidence that suggests sanctions negatively affect the poorest and most vulnerable. At the same time, targeted sanctions also constrain the behavior of rogue politicians who would otherwise have free access to resources around the world while denying their own citizens the same opportunities.

It is my goal in this testimony to provide a broader political and economic context of Zimbabwe post-Mugabe and give some suggestions on future engagement that will bolster political stability and democratic consolidation. It is unlikely that the new ZANU PF government will usher in a democratic system that alleviates poverty and respects civil liberties. It is also unlikely following the death of key opposition figure Morgan Tsvangirai that the opposition will spur democratic growth. At the heart of Zimbabwe's democratic challenges in the post-Mugabe era is debilitating poverty. In the absence of rigorous efforts to address high unemployment rates, poor health care and violence, Zimbabwe's democratic future remains grim.

### **Background on Zimbabwe**

Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980 after almost two decades of protracted war between black nationalists and a white minority government. At independence, Robert Mugabe who was then Prime Minister made a public promise to uphold democracy. President Mugabe's 37-year tenure was complex: while his government made significant improvements in welfare provision and universal access to education, his authoritarian rule also resulted in much suffering, notably the 1983 genocide in Matabeleland and targeted violence against the opposition led by the recently deceased Mr. Tsvangirai. In the early 2000s, the economy went into rapid decline, in part because of failed

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Zimbabwe."

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Foreign Aid to Zimbabwe."

<sup>3</sup> William Bill Frist, Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA).

governance, a poorly executed land reform policy, sanctions and state sponsored violence on citizens and the opposition.

The declining economic and political conditions in Zimbabwe led to a massive exodus of an estimated 2-4 million Zimbabweans who sought refuge abroad. An estimated 80,000 Zimbabweans found refuge in the United States. The Zimbabwean immigrant population is highly skilled and makes significant contributions to the United States economy, many of them having been educated at top universities including The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Harvard and Yale. Zimbabwean-Americans have also made their mark in the arts, including, for example, the brilliant Black Panther actress Danai Gurira.

### **Current political climate**

Zimbabwe is headed towards elections in a few months. President Mnangagwa who succeeded Robert Mugabe is eager to move past elections and has hinted at an early election, likely in July. Zimbabwe is going through a delicate transition following the military-assisted removal of Robert Mugabe from office by then Vice President Mnangagwa in November 2017. Mugabe's ouster from office marked the first change in power since independence. Although Zimbabwe's process differed from traditional coups in Africa that were bloody and violent, it was not a wholesome democratic transition either, as President Mnangagwa did not become president via the ballot box.

Drawing on more than 30 extensive interviews conducted with elites and ordinary citizens during and after the coup I observed that while Zimbabweans celebrate and welcome the change in government, people remain concerned about the visible presence of the military in everyday politics. President Mnangagwa appears to have rewarded the military by appointing former generals to top government positions. Former Generals who played significant roles in the military takeover, Constantino Chiwenga and Sibusiso Moyo, were appointed Vice President and Minister of Foreign Affairs respectively. When I flew into the Harare International Airport in early December, soldiers asked me and everyone else arriving to show our IDs. This is new for Zimbabwe. The presence of the military stood in stark contrast to the eerie absence of the police. During Mugabe's tenure, Zimbabwe had become a heavily policed state, with police roadblocks every few meters and commonplace police demands for bribes poor motorists.

While a lot of challenges remain, I have also noticed that since November 2017, Zimbabweans are more hopeful. Following President Mnangagwa's inauguration, we saw the celebrated return of prominent exiles. Among these is the anticipated return of famous musician Thomas Mapfumo. In December we also saw the return of some white farmers who had sought exile abroad after the land reform process turned violent. An estimated 4,000 white farmers and their black farm workers were displaced in the early 2000s.<sup>4</sup> It is very unlikely that the "new" ZANU PF will reverse land reform, but President Mnangagwa has promised a more progressive and inclusive policy.

Generally, Zimbabweans are more confident to speak out, although many worry that the new government will restrict freedom of speech at the slightest hint that its hold on power is under threat. It is my expert opinion that once people have found their voice, it is a lot harder for governments to shut them down. This shift in citizen attitudes provides a unique opportunity for the United States and other friends of Zimbabwe to empower the average citizen.

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<sup>4</sup> "White Farmer Gets Land Back under Zimbabwe's New Leader."

### **Challenges and opportunities in a post-Mugabe society**

In my interviews, Zimbabweans expressed that they are tired of being a global agenda item for the wrong reasons. Zimbabweans are eager to get back to the business of rebuilding their country and bringing back dignity. Most feel that a post-Mugabe era will open doors for development. This sentiment is shared by a lot of investors and donor countries who have been quick to extend a helping hand to the new government.

While I share the hope of many Zimbabweans, it is my expert opinion that additional aid and investment will not solve Zimbabwe's problems in the absence of significant reforms to reduce poverty and strengthen institutions. If President Mnangagwa's government or the next government that wins in elections in 2018 does not address deeply entrenched corruption, violation of various human rights, including property rights and punitive economic policies the United States, other donors and investors will not see positive returns on their investments. Investment partners are likely to see better returns on their efforts if they shift from government-to-government partnerships and focus on engaging at the local level, supporting entrepreneurs, local businesses, independent media houses and civil society.

### **The political environment: is Zimbabwe ready for elections?**

On February 26, 2018, Zimbabwe's Election Commission chair announced that elections would be held between July and August 2018. At least 5.3 million out of the 7 million eligible voters have registered to vote. Among those registered, the majority, some 65%, are youth. There is no indication that the new government will put in place substantial electoral reforms to even out the playing field but that does not mean that the country is not ready for elections. In the last 18 years Zimbabwean politics has been very tumultuous. And yet, the opposition has made significant strides even winning the 2008 election.

Factors that will have a major impact on the elections include access to free media, youth bulge, and violence:

#### *Media*

State media is heavily controlled by the ruling party but there are new opportunities for independent coverage via social media. Zimbabwe has one television channel that is state run. The main newspaper, the *Herald*, is also state-run and provides partisan coverage. Democracy cannot thrive when the media is stifled. There are also a number of independent media house in circulation including the daily news but they have limited resources. While the environment is certainly challenging, entrepreneurial youth have taken advantage of the growing access to social media to provide citizens with alternative sources for news. One example is the #openparly platform founded Youth African Leaders Initiative (YALI) alumni their social media platforms reach at least 200,000 citizens daily. Another independent media source is BusStopTV, a political satire group that has a reach of over half a million on their popular segments. The United States Embassy has already begun efforts to provide funding for these informal news outlets and should continue to do so.

Voice of America remains an important media platform. In the most recent survey conducted in 2015, VOA's past-week reach in Zimbabwe stood at 5.8%, an impressive figure in a market which limits access to international broadcasters. In a more recent qualitative study conducted in 2017, Zimbabweans reported that VOA delivers unique content because it broadcasts information that they are unable to get elsewhere. In addition, VOA's coverage of political news is not biased or

censored like the local news. As long as censorship continues in Zimbabwe, panelists feel that VOA's Studio 7 will remain a valuable source of information. VOA's audience reach is steadily increasing because of their efforts to use social media platforms. I regularly engage with listeners as a panelist of VOA shows and I am happy to report that we receive calls from very diverse and often remote areas of Zimbabwe. I would recommend that the United States continue providing funding for VOA.

### *Youth, Unemployment, Political Violence and Restriction of civil liberties*

While the President Mnangagwa has stated his commitment to a violent free election, the 2018 political climate may not be free and fair. Zimbabwe's high youth unemployment has created a readily available and cheap marketplace for young people who can be paid to harm others. Substance abuse that can be traced back to poverty and trauma caused by political instability is on the rise especially among recent graduates.

Between November and December 2017, the Counseling Services Unit, an NGO tasked with documenting incidents of political violence and providing care for the affected, reported 89 attacks on members of the opposition. The police continue to respond to public protests with excessive and needless violence. Intra and inter party violence is also a growing concern in Zimbabwe's "new dispensation."<sup>5</sup> Particularly troubling is violence targeting women. It is important to emphasize that the culture of violence is a result of years of authoritarianism and has been made worse by growing unemployment, citizen fatigue and a very harsh kind of poverty.

The challenge for ZANU PF and the opposition is that the perpetrators of violence-many of them youth- at the local level are unlikely to change their behavior and attitude toward political opponents unless there is direct commitment from all political actors to educate against political violence. Years of unstable governance have completely changed the political climate and social structures in Zimbabwe. In a country with a significant youth population serious efforts have to be made to manage political violence.

Zimbabwe has experienced a significant youth bulge. According to the 2013 census, the majority, 76%, of the population were under the age of 34. This presents both opportunities and challenges for Zimbabwe. On one hand, Zimbabwe's youth are also highly educated and on the other hand most of the youth are unemployed or underemployed. Every year at least 2,000 young people graduate with a diverse range of degrees in Engineering, Business, Law, Math and Science. As Zimbabwe transitions, if the government partnerships with big trade partners like the United States yield significant economic gains, then the youth bulge will prove advantageous for Zimbabwe. As the economy grows, Zimbabwe's dependency ratio – the proportion of non-working population to working population- will decline. The United States government has already implemented numerous community-based programs that have had a positive impact on the youth. For example, the work readiness program "Zimbabwe:works" has generated over \$31 million in revenue and created 6,000 jobs<sup>6</sup>. The Youth African Leaders Initiative (YALI) participants are some of the most active youth and leaders in job creation. Six of the youth "hub" or job centers were founded by Yali alumni; together they have created over 100 jobs in less than two years.

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<sup>5</sup> "Zimbabwe: ZLHR Condemns MDC-T Intra-Party Violence - allAfrica.com."

<sup>6</sup> "Zimbabwe."

However, these efforts are not enough. At least 90% of Zimbabwe's youth are unemployed and this is a big challenge for democracy and peace. Youth are used by political parties to mobilize voters and to also terrorize voters. In my interviews, voters have expressed fear of party-affiliated youth who are easily lured by promises of small payments and access to drugs.

The United States can continue working with and within the civil society on youth targeted educational programs that promote peace and democracy. In 2017, the United States spent an estimated \$158 million on health programs focused on HIV/AIDS, malaria, malnutrition, TB, maternal/child health, family planning, and water sanitation. These programs are critical and must continue. A healthier Zimbabwe creates important trade opportunities for the United States.

### **Corruption**

At the heart of Zimbabwe's problems is endemic corruption. Zimbabwe loses between USD\$1-2 billion from corruption each year.<sup>7</sup> To put that in perspective, Zimbabwe's annual budget hovers just above \$4 billion. Zimbabwe is ranked in the top 30 most corrupt countries in the world.<sup>8</sup> In public opinion surveys conducted by Michigan University's Afrobarometer, at least 72% of Zimbabweans believe the majority of government officials to be corrupt., Perceived and real corruption scares serious investors away from Zimbabwe, creating opportunities for rogue businessmen who cause more harm from their business practices.

President Mnangagwa has promised zero tolerance of corruption. However, to date corruption investigations have targeted those affiliated with the G-40 faction of ZANU PF.<sup>9</sup> President Mnangagwa gave officials a February deadline to return any stolen funds and to declare assets. The President has said some officials have returned funds, but he has not shared any specifics about those returns. In his own administration, President Mnangagwa's has appointed individuals accused of corruption. Five of his cabinet members have been implicated in corruption worth billions of dollars<sup>10</sup>.

In 2016, President Mugabe announced that Zimbabwe had lost USD\$15 billion in diamond revenue to corruption. These numbers have not been verified but during a recent hearing on diamond revenues, the commission on diamonds revealed that they had expected at least USD\$2 billion from diamonds sold since 2009. To date only \$189 million had been tendered to the government between 2009-2016. A plurality (40%) of Zimbabweans believe that government officials in all sectors are corrupt.

As long as poverty is not addressed, corruption will continue to be an epidemic. Troubling incidents of dehumanization of vulnerable persons have been reported by the UNCHR, the over 19,000 refugees in Zimbabwe's camps are often forced to pay bribes to corrupt government officials in exchange for access to basic commodities. For this reason, it is important for the United States to engage the new government very strongly and firmly on corruption. The United States, must continue engaging in local level programs that can be insulated from government corruption. While

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<sup>7</sup> "Zimbabwe Losing \$1 Billion a Year to Corruption."

<sup>8</sup> "Transparency International - Zimbabwe."

<sup>9</sup> "Former Zimbabwe Ministers Loyal to Mugabe Charged with Corruption."

<sup>10</sup> "5 Ministers in Mnangagwa's cabinet that have been implicated in corruption scandals"

low level everyday citizen corruption exists, the cost of that type of corruption is minimal when compared to the value of money lost via government channels.

### **Economic Development**

Robert Mugabe often blamed Zimbabwe's stunted economic growth on economic sanctions in particular the United States' Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA). Confusion on both the Zimbabwe and U.S. investor side on the requirements of ZIDERA has negatively impacted investment in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwean businesses have been denied loans by American banks who are not clear on the policy requirements under ZIDERA.

For most investors perception is reality. The fact that Zimbabwe is identified as a country under sanctions has scared away potential investors. I have recommended that the United States provide clarity on the types of business to business engagements acceptable within the confines of ZIDERA. I would also recommend that the United States support efforts by Zimbabweans asking for debt relief from international funding agencies including the World Bank and IMF. Such efforts will bring much needed relief to millions of Zimbabweans, especially farmers, who could increase food production if they have access to credit. Extending credit to startups can allow business owners like Simbarashe Mhuriro, 32, founder and Managing Director a renewable energy development company to employ more people thereby providing sustainable solutions to poverty. Addressing poverty will have a direct and positive impact on democratic growth in Zimbabwe.

With regards to individuals and government institutions under the targeted sanctions list, the post-Mugabe era provides new opportunities for engagement between Zimbabwe and the United States. I recommend that the United States reconsider sanctions on state owned businesses. I recognize that the United States has long been concerned with the link between ZANU PF and state enterprises. Indeed, much of the corruption I discussed earlier has occurred in state owned businesses. However, it is my expert opinion that in the post-Mugabe era parliament has been bolstered in their independence and are better equipped hold government officials account. I would like to draw attention to those parastatals engaged in agriculture and mining industries. Most small holder farmers depend heavily on funding from the state funded agriculture bank which in turn depends on support from big financial institutions.

State owned and other enterprises under targeted sanctions include:

AGRIBANK

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION OF ZIMBABWE LTD INFRASTRUCTURE

DEVELOPMENT BANK OF ZIMBABWE MINERALS MARKETING CORPORATION OF ZIMBABWE

ZB FINANCIAL HOLDINGS LIMITED

INTERMARKET HOLDINGS LIMITED

SCOTFIN LIMITED

ZIMBABWE IRON AND STEEL COMPANY

ZIMBABWE MINING DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

ZIMRE HOLDINGS LIMITED

OSLEG (PVT) LTD

ORYX DIAMONDS (PTY) LTD

ZIMBABWE DEFENCE INDUSTRIES (PVT) LTD

Regarding individual sanctions; the onus is on those listed to prove their commitment to democracy. Many on the list have allegedly committed horrible crimes against humanity. It would be a greater injustice to uplift these sanctions before a thorough investigation has been conducted. Zimbabwe

cannot have economic growth divorced from addressing human rights abuses. Robert Mugabe's exit from politics is not enough to absolve individual crimes.

President Mnangagwa's motto is "Zimbabwe is open for business". The truth is that Zimbabwe has long been open for business but poor governance bottlenecked efforts by investors. President Mnangagwa has said all the right things necessary for a conducive business environment in Zimbabwe. The real test will be whether he follows through on his promises. Since coming into power he has made few adjustments to unpopular policies including the 2016 Indigenization and Empowerment Act<sup>11</sup>. This amendment should increase investor confidence and woo American investors who had moved away from investing in Zimbabwe. While the United States faces tough competition from China and Russia in sourcing Zimbabwe's natural resources, average Zimbabweans I have spoken to over the last three months have a preference for American businesses. Little known is the extensive collaboration between American and Zimbabwean farmers. Increased investment in agriculture will provide much needed food security for both countries as the world faces troubling weather changes. Zimbabwe's high literacy rates also create important opportunities for American businesses seeking to expand their market and manufacturing basis. Such partnerships can bolster employment in both countries in exciting and mutually beneficial ways.

## **Conclusion**

While Zimbabwe faces a long and hard road to economic and political recovery the current government and the government that wins the 2018 elections have the opportunity to change the narrative. The new government must implement reforms to open up political space and policies that will increase the ease of doing business and addressing corruption. A post-Mugabe Zimbabwe will not thrive if the government only focuses on the economy while ignoring the need for political reforms.

The United States also has an opportunity to revise some of the conditions of the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA). It is beneficial to the United States to provide clarity for American businesses working with Zimbabweans and to also support efforts by Zimbabweans seeking debt relief for their country. The Zimbabwean government should engage in extensive investigations on human rights abuses before individuals on the targeted list of sanctions have been removed.

The quality of the 2018 elections will determine the "new" ZANU PF's commitment to democracy. It is also clear that the average Zimbabwean is more hopeful than they have ever been and support for civil society organizations will bolster this support for democracy among regular citizens.

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<sup>11</sup> "Govt Amends Indigenisation Law | The Herald."