

## **Mugabe Benefits From MDC Weaknesses**

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Tactical failings of Zimbabwean opposition have played into the hands of the regime.

While Zimbabwe's ruling ZANU-PF party is making it as hard as possible for the main opposition Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, to campaign, let alone win, the synchronised presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for next year, the MDC is just as complicit in its own downfall, political analysts say.

Draconian laws, such as the Public Order and Security Act, render it almost impossible for the MDC to address its supporters; intelligence service-run electoral institutions, like the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, tilt the ballot in favour of the ruling party; while the government's monopoly over the four radio stations and the sole TV channel ensure opposition voices are rarely heard.

Since the beginning of the year, the government has moved up a gear. It has become blatant in its attacks on pro-democracy movements, which it accuses of fostering what it calls "a regime change agenda" and stirring up civil unrest in the country. Since the arrest and brutal attack on opposition leaders and their supporters for trying to attend a banned rally on March 11, government pressure on the opposition has intensified.

Up to 600 MDC and civil society activists have been detained, assaulted and tortured since the abortive rally, dubbed "Black Sunday". They include ordinary people, journalists attempting to cover opposition activities and lawyers trying to secure their release. Police have routinely ignored court orders to allow those beaten access either to their lawyers or medical treatment.

"It is a state gone berserk. It is the ultimate break down of law and order," lamented a political analyst in Harare.

This followed the arrest and beating up of four senior Harare lawyers on May 9 for demonstrating against the detention by police of two of their colleagues who were seeking bail for detained opposition activists.

Southern African Development Community Lawyers' Association president Sternford Moyo, a veteran lawyer in Harare, said they would challenge the deliberate subversion of the law by the state. He deplored the attack on lawyers going about their duty to ensure every Zimbabwean had access to legal counsel.

Analysts, however, said these attacks could not go on forever, noting that violence of this kind had a limited impact. The analysts said there was enough resentment in the country against the ruling party over the collapsing economy, which the opposition could easily tap into if it was organised and able to change its strategies.

"Therein lies the biggest problem for the MDC," said another analyst in Harare. "Instead of organising its local structures, even without holding rallies (they are banned), the MDC is more visible when complaining against police brutality or in its messages delivered to foreign audiences."

The analyst said the MDC leadership put too much faith in the influence of the international community instead of local voters. "We all know [President Robert] Mugabe doesn't care what the West says. After all, he believes they want him out of power. But more than that, the MDC is addressing the wrong audience.

Who reads the Washington Post or the South African Sunday Times?" he asked, referring to foreign newspapers that carried recent speeches by MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai.

He said the MDC was failing to set up strong structures in rural areas to challenge ZANU-PF. Referring to the MDC 's performance in its first parliamentary election in July 2000, the analyst said the party had won several seats in rural areas despite the worst electoral violence ever witnessed in the country.

He also said the MDC apparently didn't have a coherent programme for rural areas. He said this made it hard for it to penetrate countryside communities, which have received land free from the ruling party. He said the MDC was also failing to counter claims by new ZANU-PF landlords that it planned to return land to white commercial farmers.

"While ZANU-PF is able to talk about the land," said the analyst, "the best the MDC can talk about are human rights and democracy. While all this is valid, it is a hard sell to ordinary people. They want seed, fertiliser, draught power and transport."

Another analyst said the MDC was also losing support in urban communities because of its "negativity". He said the party was focused on negative factors without offering a better vision and purpose to restore people's hopes.

"It is well to expose ZANU-PF's incompetence and corruption," he said. "But surely they must show us the way forward. There is too much negativity in their politics.

"When they tell their supporters that elections under the current constitution produce 'predetermined outcomes', this breeds apathy among voters. Why should people vote when you already know the result? It becomes very difficult to gauge their level of support and how far the outcome is a result of rigging."

Along with inducing voter apathy, the analyst said the MDC wasted too much time deciding whether to participate in elections, "This shows bad leadership. Indecision is a definite no-no in leadership. People don't owe any politician a living and want to vote and get on with their lives."

But when leaders threaten to boycott elections one day and the following day turn around to say to people "go and vote for us", they are not doing their party any good service. This has worked badly for the MDC in the past and ZANU-PF has probably won by default.

People are looking for new and positive strategies to beat ZANU-PF and those can only come from leaders - leadership cannot be subcontracted to the moral influence of foreign governments, he said.

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