

# BACK TO CRISIS: ON THE FRESH UNREST IN ZIMBABWE

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Africa, African Union (AU) and India

The bloody [unrest in Zimbabwe](#) suggests that President Emmerson Mnangagwa's political honeymoon is over. The veteran of the struggle for freedom was the beneficiary of the overthrow of strongman Robert Mugabe in November 2017. Mr. Mnangagwa raised hopes in the run-up to the July general election, promising free and fair polls and inspections by international observers. But his victory proved controversial as allegations of vote-rigging by the ruling ZANU-PF machinery in the rural areas began to bear echoes of the Mugabe era. In six months since his election, the ex-security chief's pledge to distance himself from his military legacy and open the economy for foreign investment has been put to severe test. A case in point is Mr. Mnangagwa's handling of the fallout of the recent steep fuel price hike in which over 10 protesters are said to have been killed. Zimbabwe's defence forces have come under severe condemnation for the general crackdown, involving arbitrary detentions, torture and a country-wide Internet blackout. Harare's main opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change, has faced attacks on its main office, while trade unions behind the nation-wide strike appear resolute in their bid for redress. The crisis forced President Mnangagwa to call off his trip to the World Economic Forum in Davos. But his attempt to put the blame both on the security forces and the protesters may merely point to his own political vulnerability. The official response to the mass opposition against fuel price hikes were directed by his deputy, Constantino Chiwenga, when the President was away. Mr. Chiwenga was the mastermind behind the 2017 coup, and the man he installed must assert his authority to ensure accountability and respect for the rule of law.

The sudden doubling of fuel prices has amplified Zimbabwe's chronic shortage of U.S. dollars to sustain the import of basic goods. Following the hyper-inflation of the previous decade, the country abandoned its own currency. The electronic alternative, "bond notes" that were introduced without physical backing, unleashed a vicious cycle of hoarding and price inflation. The decline in the value of the surrogate currency against hard money has caused distress among public servants. Many businesses have folded up for want of adequate foreign currency. Mr. Mnangagwa's government has moved to reduce the issue of electronic debt, and to curtail the ballooning fiscal deficit. While these may be steps in the right direction, they are too small as incentives to entice a deeply sceptical investor community that was once turned away. Mr. Mnangagwa has his task cut out: to shore up his own base in the ZANU-PF establishment and to restore calm across the country. Equally, he cannot abandon the difficult path of reform, which is the only guarantee of stability in the long term.

The Meghalaya government must urgently ensure that all illegal mines are shut down

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