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Zimbabwe in 2015:

**An Analysis of the Recent Political Developments in Zimbabwe and Prospects For the
Year Ahead**

Introduction

Although it is virtually impossible to precisely predict the future developments which may occur in the area of politics and sociology, with enough information, one can at the very least forecast the possibilities. Keeping in mind that absolute certainty in the matters forecasted in this report is unattainable, an attempt will be made to explore what could likely result from Zimbabwe's political situation this upcoming year. A focus on the possible impacts on human rights will be maintained throughout the report. The forecasts here generally supported by trends, and trends are interrupted from time to time by black swans; that is, trends are subject to radical change.

The 2014 political year in Zimbabwe was tumultuous to say the least. It was not an election year, but it had all of the drama that one would expect from an election period; campaigns, power shifts, constitutional amendments and a highly divided society. By late December, 2014, the political landscape looked nothing like it did in January. The removal of Vice President Joice Mujuru from office and the firing of several key ministers was certainly one of the most significant changes in the Zimbabwean political arena. All evidence points to that in 2015 more major changes are on the horizon. Below, the reader will find some of the possible changes which may come to Zimbabwe in 2015. 2015 is not a scheduled election year, but like 2014, it too promises to have all of the hallmarks of one. Below, two very real possibilities will be examined in detail: the death or deposal of Robert Mugabe and the possibility of by-elections.

The Death or Deposal of Robert Mugabe

Ruling the country since 1980 with an iron fist, Robert Mugabe is one of the longest serving rulers in all of Africa. In his own dystopian fashion, he is a pillar of stability in the psyche of the 13 million inhabitants of Zimbabwe. A key player in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, the 90 year

old who was once a beacon for positive change is now a stale symbol of stagnant repression whose quasi-poetic rhetoric remains full of scorn for all things not Zanu PF. During the Zanu PF's December party congress, he declared his wish to run for office again in 2018 when he will have reached the age of 94; either Mugabe wants to die in office or he believes that he is immortal. This poses three serious problems for Zimbabwe which could utterly destabilize the country upon his death.

- 1) **There is no clear successor should Mugabe die.** This is easily the most significant potential problem. One of the expectations from the Zanu PF's December congress was that a successor would be named or a contingency successor would at least be tabled. None of this happened. In fact, the only result of the party congress regarding appointments was Mugabe's renewed grip on power and his controversial wife's appointment to the top post of the Women's League, a Zanu PF support mechanism. This could very well indicate that Mugabe's intention is to keep power in the family. His wife Grace exploded onto the political stage in late 2014 on a campaign (which officially was not a campaign) to ascend to the post of head of the Women's League. Grace's campaign included rallies across the country in what was called her *Meet the People Tour*. These rallies were comprised of violent rhetoric directed particularly against Vice President Joice Mujuru and the critical independent newspaper, *The Daily News*. Given her violent rhetoric and history of assault (she once physically attacked a reporter), it is safe to say that Zimbabwe would be facing a dismal future should Grace Mugabe somehow attain the presidency. State sanctioned violence could be expected to become the norm (to a level significantly above where it is today) and Zimbabwe would become an utterly failed state.

That Grace should ever become president however, is far from certain. As the MIGS Media Monitoring Report for Zimbabwe analysis from 24 September – 1 October, 2014 forecasted, the power struggle for the presidency has devolved into a tripartite within the Zanu PF. As a December 24 [article](#) in the *Zimbabwe Independent* pointed out, current Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa is under attack from a faction within the Zanu PF which supports the ascendancy of Grace Mugabe. There are also up to 100 MPs in parliament who are still loyal to Joice Mujuru. Although she has lost her post to

Mnangagwa, she still garners a significant amount of support. Hence there is one faction supporting the deposed Mujuru, one supporting current Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa and one supporting Grace Mugabe. Since Robert Mugabe and the Zanu PF have utterly failed to resolve intra-party factionalism, should Mugabe die in 2015, the country would come to a standstill, and the likelihood of violence, considering past trends, is great, but not entirely unavoidable. What sets this scenario apart from past eras of extreme political violence is that it will occur within the Zanu PF as opposed to say, between the Zanu PF and the MDC or the Zanu PF and Zapu. Human rights abuses can be minimized if Grace Mugabe is marginalized in the power struggle. Should she gain a full third of the available support upon Mugabe's death (should it occur this year), violence on a large scale is inevitable. That is not to rule out the possibility of violence if the Mujuru and Mnangagwa factions go head-to-head, but the possibility for *extreme levels* of violence is significantly lessened in a Mujuru versus Mnangagwa scenario. Grace Mugabe's rhetoric is a clear indicator of her capacity to use violence if she does not get her way.

- 2) **As Mugabe ages, he is less apt a ruler.** Mugabe has been more camera-shy than ever since September 2014. For the entire duration of Grace Mugabe's *Meet the People Tour*, Mugabe remained completely silent. Grace was rallying against Robert's vice president and Mugabe had no comments, no fiery speeches to compliment those of his wife and only began to speak out when popular demand for his commentary reached boiling point. What emerged from all of this was the popular opinion expressed in the independent media that Grace was in fact the puppet master of her feeble husband. This opinion was all but confirmed as fact at the December party congress when Grace passed him a note while he was on stage delivering a speech. He clumsily read the note aloud. It indicated that he had been speaking too long and it was evident that Grace now wanted to address the crowd. Grace despised Mujuru and liked Mnangagwa. She had Mujuru fired and Mnangagwa elevated to the vice presidency. She despised *The Daily News* and their offices were [raided](#). Evidently, Grace holds a spectacular degree of influence over Robert Mugabe. In addition, he has been reported as napping through committee sessions and other political events. At 90, Mugabe can only contribute to the woes of Zimbabwe by maintaining a culture of nepotism, abuse and incompetence. Should Mugabe die in office,

the very best that can be expected of a Zanu PF successor is corruption and incompetence perfected under the glazed vision of an aging Mugabe who is controlled by a wife whose name is synonymous with greed in many circles in Zimbabwe.

- 3) **Under (and after) Mugabe, the economy can only stagnate.** Although Zimbabwe has developed a five-year plan to deal with its economic woes, it is, and will continue to be, largely ineffective. The official economy of Zimbabwe is one of the bleakest on the planet, regardless of the vast endowment of natural resources within its borders; the real unemployment rate is thought to be somewhere around 90 percent. Years of mismanagement under Mugabe has left Zimbabwe with an obliterated, once-thriving agricultural sector and a diamond industry of ill-repute. Zimbabwe has seen recent investment from Russia and China, however the investors seem to be exploiting the political situation and are using questionable practices on the ground. MDC Senator David Coltart recently published a [report](#) indicating that Chinese investors had ostensibly engaged in slash and burn farming methods that were destroying forests and unlikely to produce crops of quality. The Zimbabwean economy has incredible potential, but so long as the political landscape is ruled by Mugabe and his minions, it does not stand a chance at success. Further, assuming that Mugabe does die in 2015, the economy will need several years of work to recover from a 34-year decline. A responsible government could achieve such a feat, but in the best case scenario, a recovery will not begin in 2015. If Mugabe lives through the year, the economy will decline; if he dies, his Zanu PF successor, coming from a culture of corruption and nepotism will continue to lead the economy into decline.

The fact that there is no clear successor to Mugabe should he die leaves an incredible level of uncertainty in Zimbabwe. The other possible (albeit less likely) scenario this year is that Mugabe could be forced to retire by the Zanu PF and that the succession of Mugabe could be carried out in a democratic and peaceful manner. From a human rights perspective, this would be the best course of action for those who have the ability to execute such a move. The possibility has been floated in the independent media, and the influence of media on Zimbabwean political wills and perceptions appears to be quite significant. Should the concept be put into practice at some point

during 2015, the disastrous scenario of three-way factionalism in a power struggle resulting from a power vacuum after the death of Mugabe could be avoided.

It should also be noted that it may be that none of these scenarios will take place in 2015 and things will remain relatively unchanged regarding Mugabe's grip on power. He has showed amazing resilience and tenacity throughout his life and may be able to continue to do so for the next few years.

Possibility of Elections

The possibility of elections exists in 2015. Members of the MDC are publicly expressing their wish for general elections to take place, but this is not particularly likely. It appears to be their intention to impeach Robert Mugabe using their minority numbers in Parliament along with the support of Zanu PF MPs loyal to Mujuru. Achieving this is extremely unlikely. Domestic analysts believe that Mugabe will begin to fire small numbers of MPs loyal to Mujuru in batches, depleting the capacity of the MDC to go ahead with their impeachment plans. The result of this could mean over 100 by-elections throughout 2015, averting a general election. Potential for human rights violations definitely exist in such a scenario as the MDC will be competing for ground that it lost in the 2013 election. There is always the possibility that (particularly in a time of such high tensions within the Zanu PF) there will be a return to the violent repression of the MDC and the pro-MDC electorate as was seen in 2008. Such elections could also deepen the cleavages between the various factions of the Zanu PF resulting in limited violence on that front. What is more likely than not and is supported by past trends is that elections will be chaotic and defined by vote rigging. As things stand in Zimbabwe, the MDC is unlikely to make any significant gains. The Zanu PF is expected to stay in power (barring the possibility of descent into complete anarchy) this year, however the incoherence and incompetence of the party is expected to rise significantly, mostly attributed to factionalism and nepotism.

Conclusion

Although relatively short, this analysis has touched on the potentially significant events which are expected to take place in Zimbabwe in 2015. The possibility of human rights abuses will be

ever-present throughout the year as political chaos is expected in at least some degree. Various plots against the regime are now being continuously concocted at the cost of livelihoods and well-being. Because he has not chosen a successor, should Mugabe die in 2015, the global community should unfortunately expect a violent power vacuum, particularly if Grace Mugabe gains a significant amount of support in a drive for the presidency. Should the 90 year old survive the year, several dozens of by-elections throughout the year resulting in vote-rigging at best and widespread violence towards the MDC at worst should also be expected. The economy will almost certainly remain in a horrible state, if not, it will decline further. An economic recovery can only be expected when Mugabe and the Zanu PF are permanently absent from the government. The way forward for Zimbabwe at this point, appears to be Zimbabwe without Mugabe and a Zimbabwe without the Zanu PF. The day when that happens will most likely not come (very) soon. However, if Mugabe dies in 2015, it will be an opportunity for the country to move forward. It will be a time followed quite possibly by violence (violence that can be limited if Grace Mugabe is marginalized), but it will also be an opportunity for the political opposition to eventually gain legitimate power and move the country forward economically, politically and socially. Zimbabwe *can* prosper but in order to do so, a democratic government must be at the country's helm.

~Mike Taylor, MIGS Desk Officer for Zimbabwe