



# Zimbabwe Protest

2016 brought many economic struggles for the landlocked African country of Zimbabwe. Many focused their concerns on mismanagement by Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF party, which had been in power since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. The opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change, claimed that "the deteriorating situation demands nothing less than resignation of President Robert Mugabe" (Gutu, 2016, as cited in Welle, 2016). As stated by Evan Mawarire, the founder of the #ThisFlag movement, "no one is exempt from the corruption that has brought our country to its knees" (Mawarire, 2016, as cited in Welle, 2016). Many were clearly frustrated with Mugabe's government. One example of this was Mugabe's announcement that \$15 billion worth of diamonds had been stolen in February 2016 (Peter, 2016). Many were left confused by this announcement and frustrated that this valuable wealth, which could have been useful in revitalizing Zimbabwe's economy, simply disappeared.

Due to hyperinflation, Zimbabwe had been without its own currency for seven years as of 2016. At one point, a Zimbabwean one hundred trillion dollar note (\$100,000,000,000,000) barely paid for a loaf of bread; inflation had gone up 79.6 billion percent (Frisby, 2016). To prevent money from leaving the country, the government banned the importation of goods (BBC 2016), a decision that left many dissatisfied. Due to the country's economic struggles, many civil servants in Zimbabwe hadn't been paid on time (Welle, 2016). This left many without enough money to feed themselves and their families. Even if people had cash, they often were unable to withdraw it from the bank due to strict limits imposed (BBC, 2016). A state of disaster had already been declared in Zimbabwe due to a severe drought, which left more than 25% of the population with food shortages (France-Presse, 2016).

On top of this, unemployment rates had been very high. This combination of unfortunate events left many in a state of hunger and poverty throughout Zimbabwe.

Mugabe's mismanagement of the government had been the target of several protests throughout Zimbabwe. Many label this as the #ThisFlag movement, which was initiated by an online video posed by Evan Mawarire, who was frustrated by the government's actions (Allison, 2016). On July 6, 2016, many civil servants, primarily teachers and nurses who had still not been paid their June salaries, went on strike. This was the largest protest action since 2005 in Zimbabwe. Many citizens remained indoors during the shutdown action that demanded the government be held accountable for the economic issues facing Zimbabwe. Most banks and businesses in Zimbabwe's main cities of Harare and Bulawayo (Welle, 2016) were closed. The protest was organized through WhatsApp, which was shut down on the day of the protests (News24, 2016). Many blamed the government for this intervention, which added to overall tensions. While largely a peaceful, non-violent protest, some protesters resorted to methods such as burning tires and throwing rocks (Welle, 2016). Many arrests ensued as a result of these actions. According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (2016), the protesters had five demands: for civil servants to be paid on time, for the immediate firing of corrupt government officials, for the removal of the ban on imported goods, for the introduction of bond notes to come to a halt, and for roadblocks to be reduced while stopping officers from harassing people for cash.



While many of these demands remain unsolved, the government of Zimbabwe has taken steps to improve the financial crisis. Most notably, negotiations were initiated to receive loans from the World Bank, African Development Bank and International Monetary Fund to improve Zimbabwe's financial crisis. To this date, uncertainty remains over the state of government in Zimbabwe. Mugabe, at 92 years old, cannot live forever (Doran, 2016). After this death, a new chapter will begin for the people of Zimbabwe.

The 2016 protests undoubtedly helped these people feel more connected with the issues facing them. In the past, "Zimbabweans [had] not been able to speak out against almost anything because of fear", as "people have been beaten, jailed and some have even been abducted for taking certain stands" (Mawarire, 2016, as cited in Welle, 2016). While it is difficult to measure the impact of these protests on Mugabe's actions, they helped revitalize democracy in Zimbabwe and gave power back to its citizens. They gave people hope and positivity in a deteriorating economic situation.

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