Zambia: Incumbent president wins tainted election | Credendo

Event

On 13 August, Zambia held presidential and parliamentary elections, marked by allegations of irregularities and a raid on opposition-linked figures. Official election results showed a clear victory for incumbent President Hakainde Hichilema, who secured about 60% of the vote while his UPND party retained a parliamentary majority. The opposition is currently attempting to challenge the result through legal channels.

Impact

During his first term, President Hichilema was internationally praised for lifting the country out of a deep financial crisis by securing debt restructuring, lowering inflation and strengthening liquidity levels, while securing substantial investments in the booming copper sector. Following the death of leading opposition figure and former President Edgar Lungu in June 2025, Brian Mundubile emerged as an opposition candidate only a few months before the election. Therefore, an easy win for the incumbent was widely expected in the run-up to the elections.

Despite Zambia's improved macroeconomic indicators, civil discontent over the limited impact of rising copper wealth on the population kept growing, especially among mining communities. As a result, the opposition leader secured about 38% of the vote, a much higher score than expected.

An election dispute quickly erupted over irregularities and suspension of vote counting when independent observers reported indications of Hichilema's vote count being inflated, but not to the extent that it would have pivoted the outcome of the vote. Without any evidence, Brian Mundubile claimed victory and tensions further escalated. Several opposition figures were arrested for alleged armed insurrection, and a former cabinet minister was killed by state security forces during a raid on the house of Mundubile. According to the opposition, the raid was an act of intimidation intended to discourage any legal proceedings to challenge the election result.

Despite the dispute, these elections are expected to result in policy continuity and preserve investor confidence, while the UPND's legislative majority should support the implementation of a new IMF programme and maintain fiscal consolidation efforts. However, the recent events indicate higher risks for political tensions and protests during Hichilema's second five-year presidency. Zambia's classification for short-term political risk is in category 4/7 and in category 6/7 for medium- to long-term political risk, with no changes currently in the pipeline.

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