

## Global Journalist: Robert Mugabe's reelection faces opposition within his party

**Abstract:** This Mar. 13, 2008 episode with Stuart Loory highlights Zimbabwe's upcoming presidential elections, in which, according to the guests, President Robert Mugabe is likely to remain in power because his opposition is split: If only united, they could have a chance, the journalists say.

### Bios

[Stuart Loory](#) was a long-time reporter and editor for the Chicago Sun-Times and CNN. He was the inaugural Lee Hills Chair in Free Press Studies at the Missouri School of Journalism. He [died in 2015](#).

Gerry Jackson is a Zimbabwean award-winning journalist. She is the [founder](#) of Shortwave Radio Africa, an [independent radio station](#) she created in 2001 – transmitting daily from the UK to Zimbabwe – to denounce and face Robert Mugabe's regime. It was shut down in [August 2014](#).

[Andrew Meldrum](#) is an American journalist who worked as a correspondent for [The Guardian](#) and The Observer in southern Africa, reporting on Zimbabwe for 23 years, until he was [expelled](#).

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### Stuart Loory 00:02

Welcome to Global Journalist. I'm Stuart Loory, of the Missouri School of Journalism. Today we're going to talk about yet another election campaign, this one in Zimbabwe, in southern Africa. Robert Mugabe's five-year term as President of the country is expiring, and he's up for reelection on March 29. He's 84 years old. He is the only person to rule the country since it gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1980. His regime is repressive. The government doesn't work well. The inflation rate in Zimbabwe is 150,000% and that's the highest in the world. Iraq, incidentally, at 62,000% is the second highest. Mugabe is running with opposition: Two challengers are seeking his job. One is Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the Movement for Democratic Change, and the other is Simba Makoni, a former Finance Minister in the Mugabe government, he split with his former boss and is running as an independent.

Neither is given much of a chance of winning, but the campaign is shedding light on yet another problem in troubled Africa below the Sahara Desert these days. Army leaders loyal to Mugabe have already said that they would not support anyone but the current President, even if he is not elected. To explain what's going on in Zimbabwe today, our guests are Gerry Jackson, station manager of Shortwave Radio Africa, an independent outlet broadcasting from London because it's banned in Zimbabwe. And Andrew Meldrum, a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. Andrew is formerly a reporter for The Guardian and Observer of London, and he spent 23 years in Zimbabwe before being expelled in 2003. Let's start with Gerry Jackson. Gerry, can you bring us up to date on just what the situation is in Zimbabwe today and, and why the country is in such dire straits?

**Gerry Jackson** 02:21

The crisis in our country is caused directly by gross mismanagement and repression by the government, there's no debate on that. So, you have a population that's being oppressed by its own government. Mugabe is determined to hold on to power, and that's got even worse lately. So, we're going into yet another election that most people expect to be rigged once again, as Mugabe has done all along. The slight difference here is the complete and utter collapse of the economy -- as you mentioned, the inflation rate is the highest in the world, and it's an absolute nightmare for people. And no one's really sure how much longer people can continue as they are. So, there's a feeling that in these elections, even if it's rigged, this may be the beginning of some movement towards the end of the crisis.

**Stuart Loory** 03:18

Mugabe is 84 years old. Why is it that he, he doesn't simply say the time has come for a change and I will pass power to younger people?

**Gerry Jackson** 03:33

Well, if we knew that, then we would know that secret of despots all over the world. I, I guess it's this power corrupts. He's just determined, he ain't going anywhere.

**Stuart Loory** 03:43

Yeah. And Andrew, I imagine that even from Boston, you were following things in Zimbabwe pretty closely these days. What, what is your feeling about the opposition? Are either of these candidates likely to, to unseat the President?

**Andrew Meldrum** 04:04

Well, first Morgan Tsvangirai, with the Movement for Democratic Change, I here in Boston, could hear the groans of disappointment all the way from Zimbabwe when Mr. Tsvangirai refused or failed -- early this year -- to have a, a coalition with another side of his opposition, The Movement for Democratic Change split in two two years ago, and they tried to form a coalition so they would not be opposing each other in the elections, and they failed. So, that divided the opposition vote. And so then, after the MDC failed to do that, why then Simba Makoni, Mr. Mugabe's former Finance Minister, stepped forward, and frankly, that was, that was welcomed, because at least it was something different, and it looked like something new, and it may attract not only voters from the opposition, but Mr. Makoni might just attract voters from the ZANU-PF block, and he may split the party, and that's the first sign of positive change that we've seen for a while.

**Stuart Loory** 05:13

ZANU-PF being Mugabe's own party?

**Andrew Meldrum** 05:16

Correct. Yeah.

**Stuart Loory** 05:19

But he was expelled from the party, wasn't he? Because of his opposition to Mugabe? I think, is there a party rule that says you can't be in opposition to the leader of the party and still be in the party?

**Andrew Meldrum** 05:32

Yes, yes. In fact, there's a party rule that says you can't even stand in opposition to a... another, for parliamentary elections, for any election, if you go against the, you know, the party's official nomination, why then you're expelled from the party, and this has happened to several other people. But Miss, but Simba Makoni's defection is really the first major, you know, cabinet level defection from the party in, in a long time. And he is very popular in Zimbabwe, and it could be that he, he really encourages some other people who would ordinarily vote for ZANU-PF to instead vote for him.

**Gerry Jackson** 06:12

But sorry, Andy, what we're hearing is that he's, he is popular, but only among sort of intellectuals and in urban areas, and that he has very little support in the rural areas. They just don't know who he is or what he stands for, and he's not come out with anything really substantive. And we also did hear that the rallies he's been holding have been rather poorly attended, and that has stopped anyone else's on ZANU-FP who may have been his sort of clandestine backers in actually coming forward. They were kind of using him as a test. Has he got support? Are people turning up at the rallies? Gosh, they're not. So, maybe we're not behind him after all.

**Andrew Meldrum** 06:49

Well, you know, I, I agree. I, I never believed that he was going to win the election, but at least it's something new on the scene. And Gerry, I think you can agree that after the disappointment of the Movement for Democratic Change, you know, splitting up and then not being able, you know, squabbling and not being able to get together, at least Simba Makoni offers something different.

**Gerry Jackson** 07:10

Oh, absolutely. I think people are thrilled just to have someone else. It's border a real lift to these elections. But as you know that the trouble is with all opposition, it gets infiltrated. It's almost impossible to be an effective opposition, because you're, you're attacked from every side, and the government's going to do absolutely everything it can to make sure that you're not functioning.

**Stuart Loory** 07:32

Let me, let me ask a, a question for that reflects a lack of knowledge about Zimbabwe, but it seems to me that there is a modicum of a free expression in the country. The two candidates can go out and campaign, there can be some vocal opposition. This is unlike, say, the, the Congo or Rwanda, or even these days Kenya. Why is it that we are so excited about what is going on in Zimbabwe? Talk a little bit about the, the political character of the country and, and what is wrong with it.

**Andrew Meldrum** 08:28

Well, you know, you cannot characterize the elections as free and fair elections. And the, the extent of debate and rallies and stuff like that, is very strictly limited by Zimbabwe's draconian security laws. So, for instance, the police must approve any opposition rally, and they don't approve very many, and they often go in and break up rallies that they have already approved. So, and the opposition is under constant threat of, of beatings and harassment and arrest, as is the press. And really the, the extent to which Zimbabwe still looks like a it has some modicum of, of free and fair elections is because, I would say that civic organizations and brave Zimbabweans are pushing the government as far as they can.

**Stuart Loory** 09:27

Yeah.

**Gerry Jackson** 09:27

There's certainly no freedom of expression. We report on a daily basis on beatings and torture leading up to these elections, and indeed throughout the year. And last year, an old work colleague, Edward Chikombo was abducted from his home and brutally beaten to death for his involvement in the media, very, very little free expression.

**Stuart Loory** 09:46

Yeah. Gerry Jackson, you were saying before we went on the air, I that a, a huge number of people have left the country. There is the Zimbabwean diaspora. Tell us a little bit about that.

**Gerry Jackson** 10:03

Yeah, that's a huge tragedy. I've heard it described as the biggest mass migration of a people in, in peacetime. It's at least a quarter of percent of the quarter of the population. And that works out, I believe, to about 70% of productive adults. You've got at least 3 million Zimbabweans in South Africa, which is on the border with Zimbabwe. And so this is causing a huge problem in the entire region and creating a lot of xenophobia. There's an estimate of 600,000 Zimbabweans in Britain. There's people scattered everywhere, and they're sending money back home to keep their families alive. And if they weren't doing that, they would truly be a total economic collapse in Zimbabwe.

**Stuart Loory** 10:46

And Andrew, tell us a little bit about journalism in Zimbabwe. You were expelled, you were taken from your home and put on a plane, as I recall, in 2003 in the middle of the night. Is, is there any, I, I work being done by foreign correspondents of the country now?

**Andrew Meldrum** 11:11

Well, I, I was the last resident foreign correspondent in Zimbabwe. But there are several Zimbabwean journalists who write for the foreign media, and so they are, but they are operating under terrible constraints all the time. They are not accredited by the state, and which means that they will not be invited to any state, state press conference. But also they are, are, are threatened, they are, are sometimes beaten, and they're just operating at a tremendous disadvantage. The state controls all the daily newspapers, they close down the independent Daily News. The State controls all broadcasts, radio and television, and they won't allow an independent or privately-owned broadcasting network or broadcasting station to operate in Zimbabwe, and that's why, actually, Gerry Jackson is speaking to you from London and not from Zimbabwe. But there are a, a handful, two, I would say, independent newspapers, privately-owned newspapers. They're, they're weekly newspapers, the Zimbabwe Independent and the Zimbabwe Standard, and they do a, a really great and brave job of reporting the news within Zimbabwe. And each week they don't know, you know, if, if this one story is going to cause their reporters to be arrested. But really, Gerry would be the best one to speak about the really fascinating and innovative ways that journalists are working from outside Zimbabwe to, to get the news back into Zimbabweans.

**Stuart Loory** 12:48

And Gerry, tell us a little bit about how that news does get back into the country?

**Gerry Jackson** 12:56

What can I just point out a, a sort of another level of the oppression there. I challenged the government's broadcasting monopoly in the Supreme Court in Zimbabwe and won the right to set up the first independent radio station, and Mugabe used his presidential powers to have it shut down at gunpoint after six days. So, he's pretty serious. He does not want independent broadcasts. So, we set up offshore, and we were broadcasting okay until the government started jamming us about three years down the line, using, we believe, Chinese equipment and expertise to block our signals. We know on multiple frequencies, which is difficult because you've got to get lots of extra funding, and we're donor funded, but we're managing to get through on one clean frequency at the moment, and obviously we also have a website so, the

few Zimbabweans who do have access to the internet can listen online, and the many Zimbabweans in the diaspora have access to the website. And then last year, we started sending our news headlines back into Zimbabwe via mobile phone, phone, SMS, text messages, and that's been hugely popular. We're currently sending to about 13,000 people, and it's growing at the rate of 200 a day. And with all these things, it's that problem of how to keep it funded. And what I've clearly understood is that you can fight oppression as long as you got the money.

**Stuart Loory** 14:18

And, and with the, the technology that is so rapidly growing these days. We have to take a break. I, I have to say to our listeners that this is Global Journalist, I'm Stuart Loory. Our guests today are Andrew Meldrum, a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University and formerly a reporter for The Guardian and the Observer in London. He worked in Zimbabwe for 23 years until 2003. And Gerry Jackson a desk at, the director of Southwest, excuse me, let me, let me say, Shortwave Africa Radio. Gerry Jackson is in exile in London. You can listen to this program again ask questions or make comments by going to [www.globaljournalist.org](http://www.globaljournalist.org). Let's talk a little bit about Robert Mugabe, 84 years old, a, a repressive leader of the country running for reelection. How does he operate? Is he a very visible person? Does he work behind the scenes? Is he popular with the, with the people, and if so, what kind of people in Zimbabwe? Gerry, can you deal with it?

**Gerry Jackson** 15:46

Oh, Mugabe, it's a complicated story. He came to power in 1980 having fought for the liberation of his country so, hugely popular, but just three years down the line, the what's called in Zimbabwe the Gukurahundi, was started where an estimated 20,000 people were killed and thrown down mine shafts, in one part of the country, a different tribal part of the country. It was kind of glossed over, weirdly, it was very much ignored by the international community and the liberation war in Zimbabwe have been so hard and grueling for everybody, would appear that in Zimbabwe, kind of people wanted to also gloss over what happened. And so, Mugabe had huge support in the rural areas for his creation of an independent Zimbabwe. People often say to me, what's happened to him lately, that he's, he's gone so weird. And if you look back at what he's said throughout his time in power, he hasn't really changed that much. He's just used different rhetoric, and he clearly has always been quite a suspicious and gee Andy, help me here, the, the catch of Mugabe, it's a really tough one.

**Andrew Meldrum** 17:09

Well, let's say he's 84 years old, but he's a very fit and spry 84. And he doesn't drink, he doesn't smoke, he eats very carefully, he exercises daily, and he loves what he's doing. And you know, he has always been after power, and you know he had to fight a, a violent struggle to get majority rule in Zimbabwe. And I think ultimately we come back to Ian Smith, the old, bad old Rhodesian days, because Ian Smith set up a system where only the most ruthless and violent leader would be able to overthrow him, and that was Robert Mugabe. And we found, we have found that really, Robert Mugabe was not so dedicated to democracy and majority rule, as he was to his own power. But he's not just operating alone. If you look across southern Africa, all the different liberation movements that brought the end to colonial rule across southern Africa 30 years ago, they all still are in power today, operating very much as one party states. So, we can look in Tanzania, in Mozambique, in South Africa, in Namibia, in Angola, they're all ruled by the same parties that have very little opposition against them. So, you, you see that Robert Mugabe is not just an aberration. He's really the worst example of a, a, a difficulty in liberation movements becoming fully democratic parties and governments.

**Stuart Loory** 18:53

Yeah, one of the things that Mugabe wants to do, as I understand it, is to confiscate land owned by white farmers in Zimbabwe and give it to Zimbabweans, to, to ethnic Zimbabweans. And has that worked out? Has it come to a halt? What is the situation with it? Gerry?

**Gerry Jackson** 19:25

Well, it's, it's an ongoing program. There were an estimated four and a half thousand white commercial farmers, don't forget they are Zimbabwean, even though they're white on the land, and they were very good food producers. So, they, they guaranteed food security for the country. There's only about 300 left on the land. The rest have all been kicked off, and those 300 are constantly under threat. And what that has done, and that's the reason it's destroyed the, the economy of Zimbabwe, because the entire economy was agriculturally base. So, once you've destroyed that, then you have no economy left. So, there's no food, half the population is, is being fed with, with donor funded food programs, and it's a catastrophe for the people of the country.

**Stuart Loory** 20:16

And is, is this, Andrew, you were talking about how a Zimbabwe is just indicative of what is going on throughout southern Africa. Is this situation also a, a matter of controversy and a, a problem in other countries in southern Africa?

**Andrew Meldrum** 20:40

Land is definitely a, a problem across southern Africa, but most especially in South Africa and in Namibia. And, and they are watching what's going on Namibia tried to launch land grabs, very similar to Zimbabwe, the previous, the first President, Sam Nujoma, tried it, but it just didn't work. So, it is a danger, particularly in South Africa, because it still is a burning issue. But, you know, Zimbabwe is indicative, it, it's the worst example. But there are, you know, there are other countries that have similar problems, although let's hope that they don't go the same way as Zimbabwe.

**Stuart Loory** 21:18

You. Yeah, you keep talking about South Africa. The, I think the, the general impression about South, of South Africa in the United States and, and the, the democratic countries of, of the North is that South Africa is functioning pretty well. Is that not the case Andrew?

**Andrew Meldrum** 21:45

Well, it's it has started off well. But in fact, you know it is, it is facing the same problems of, of really not addressing the aspirations of the Black majority. That, that is the same problems that led to Zimbabwe's trouble. And remember, South Africa is just 12 years into its independence, not 27 years into its independence, but the same problems, in other words, the political system of apartheid, it has ended, but the economic situation of apartheid has, has not ended. And that the Black majority in South Africa are still leading lives that are very, very much confined to the townships and, and to poverty and, and with violent crime. And you know, in many ways, Zimbabwe addressed the, the, the situation better in the early years of independence, where people could say their lives have improved, that their education is better, that their health was better, that their housing was better, and South Africa doesn't have that. So, there is a, a kind of well of anger building up, and I, I fear that South Africa will have a kind of post-apartheid reckoning that may turn out similar to Zimbabwe.

**Gerry Jackson** 22:58

I agree these situations South Africa is not looking too encouraging at the moment. They've had a huge downturn in the economy with because of the lack of forward planning for electricity supply, and they've had huge power outages, and mining alone is down 10.7% in South Africa. It's quite a rapid downturn, and the indications are quite worrying.

**Stuart Loory** 23:20

Yeah, is there anything that the Western world can do to help in Zimbabwe and in other countries in southern Africa? Gerry?

**Gerry Jackson** 23:36

The problem is that Zimbabwe was Rhodesia, it was a colonial power was controlled by Britain. There's a lot of suspicion about Western powers, and Mugabe has racialized the issue quite intensely. So, really, it is up to the African countries, the regional countries, to deal with their neighbor, and they have been so remiss in this. And it's a huge disappointment to Zimbabweans that the regional countries in the rest of Africa have not really stood up against this blatant abuse of human rights.

**Stuart Loory** 24:12

I think that it, it has been the other way around, that Zimbabwe is one of the countries that sent troops into the Congo, isn't it? To, to help quell uprisings there.

**Andrew Meldrum** 24:26

Well, you know, the, the Zimbabwe troops into Congo, it was really not a very democratic thing. They were sending troops in the Congo to support the Kabila regime, that was really not very democratic. And in fact, the Zimbabwean army then kind of colonized an area, a mining area, and we, you know, made it possible for top members of the Zimbabwean army to loot, really, I think there's no other word for it, to loot the mineral resources of the Congo. So, it was hardly seen as, as something that was supporting democracy in Africa.

**Gerry Jackson** 25:05

The movement of those troops into the DRC in 1997 was the beginning of the serious downturn of our economy. And then we set up direct air links controlled by the Air Force between Kinshasa and the DRC and Harare in Zimbabwe to facilitate trade. And if you think it was trade, then I think pretty naive.

**Stuart Loory** 25:25

So, I, I think what both of you are saying is that when there is help, quote, help from one country to another, it is help by the authoritarians just to maintain control in their various countries. There is no good feeling about really doing things for the people. Is that the idea?

**Andrew Meldrum** 25:52

It was one regime, one undemocratic regime, propping up another undemocratic regime, and it was the people and the taxpayers of Zimbabwe and the Congo who suffered.

**Gerry Jackson** 26:03

Sadly, there's no altruism in the Zimbabwe government. It's intent on plunder, and those people in ZANU-PF who are now unhappy with Mugabe are only unhappy because their business interests are suffering, not because they care about the people of Zimbabwe. And that's the real tragedy.

**Stuart Loory** 26:20

Talk a little bit about the, the people in Zimbabwe, the, the, the common people. Andrew, you talked about how education was so good there in the beginning. What is the, the situation with schooling, with health, with I, just a matter of feeding all the people?

**Andrew Meldrum** 26:47

Well, you know, you're seeing a, a situation in Zimbabwe where just about everything has collapsed. The schools are, are operating only in, in a few areas. A lot of school teachers have left the country. They haven't been able to feed their families on what they're earning as teachers. Families cannot afford to send their kids to school. They don't have enough money to, to pay for food. There are children who pass out in schools for because of hunger. The health system is breaking down. Just yesterday, I was speaking to a doctor who's working in Zimbabwe, and he said, well, the hospitals can't do any surgery because they don't have the, they don't have any, any drugs for to (unintelligible) the time people, they don't have simple needles and threads for sutures...

**Stuart Loory** 27:42

Andrew, I, I'm sorry I, I do have to cut you off. But on that bleak note, I we do have to end the program. Our guests today have been Andrew Meldrum, a Neiman fellow at Harvard University, and Gerry Jackson, the manager of Shortwave Africa Radio in London. Our producers are Jared Gassen (ph), Wang Hui (ph), Eunjung Kim (ph) and Kathryn Wolf (ph). For all, I'm Stuart Loory. Global Journalist will be back next week. I'm sorry that I...