

Nelson Chamisa, former pastor, continues to contest election of Zimbabwe president Emmerson Mnangagwa

## Religious leaders have called for peace. Some wish they were calling for a new vote.

by [Doreen Ajiambo](#) and [Christian Century staff](#)

This article appears in the [December 19, 2018](#) issue.



Nelson Chamisa (left), photo by [A89kriew](#) via [Creative Commons license](#). Emmerson Mnangagwa (right), photo by Vice President's Secretariat ([GODL-India](#)).

Zimbabwe's opposition leader Nelson Chamisa, a lawyer and Pentecostal pastor who has a degree in theology from a Harare seminary, has continued to refuse to accept the results of the country's disputed presidential election in July, and has mobilized nationwide rallies.

Chamisa, 40, wrote on social media after a thank-you rally in November: "The support in the country is humbling and inspiring. People voted. They cheated. We resist the cheating!"

President Emmerson Mnangagwa, 75, was declared winner, garnering more than 50 percent of the vote to avoid a runoff election against Chamisa, who reportedly won 44.3 percent of the vote. A subsequent court ruling upheld Mnangagwa's win. Scores

of people were killed or injured in a crackdown following the election.

Chamisa took over as head of the Movement for Democratic Change in February after longtime leader Morgan Tsvangirai died of cancer.

Mnangagwa, of the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front, or ZANU-PF, took power a year ago after the military forced Robert Mugabe to step down after 35 years of rule.

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches previously condemned Chamisa as championing violence. It has called on both leaders to urge their supporters to be tolerant, emphasizing on its Facebook page, “The church is not for any party. It is for the poor and oppressed.”

Kenneth Mtata, secretary general of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, said, “We urge all political leaders to speak against violence and preach peace.”

Mtata said in late October that religious leaders had met with the opposition party and hoped Chamisa would stand down. ZANU-PF was willing to talk but wanted to ensure that protests would not continue, he said.

At a recent World Council of Churches event, Mtata spoke about the fragmentation that has resulted from the losses people have endured in the violence. He called for society to “take account of the hurts that come from the past.”

Blessing Makwara, pastor of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, said that the church was ready to send ministers around the country to preach peace so that citizens would unite around the results of the election.

“We are preaching peace and all church leaders should speak peace,” he said. “We should not condone violence because that goes against the Bible teachings.”

Sheikh Ishmael Duwa of the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs in Zimbabwe said peace was needed to save the country from collapsing.

“It’s time that as religious communities we should come together and preach peace despite our political party’s affiliation,” he said.

John Makoni, 35, who owns a restaurant in the eastern city of Mutare, sees calls for peace as backing President Mnangagwa.

“I don’t go to church nowadays,” he said. “Preachers are urging people to accept the outcome of the vote and move on instead of fighting for justice. They should be asking why the elections were rigged and stop supporting one political party.”

Makoni, a father of five, wishes more religious leaders were at the forefront of the call for another election, this time free and fair.

“They should be telling the president to resign because he never won the elections,” he said. “Nothing is going to change with the current leadership we have.”

*A version of this article, which was edited December 11, appears in the print edition under the title “People: Nelson Chamisa and Emmerson Mnangagwa.”*