



By: TA | AP Brief

China and the US are closely following the presidential election in Zambia



Zambians began casting their votes Thursday in a presidential election that will test whether President Hakainde Hichilema's economic reforms were enough to overcome widespread frustration over the cost of living.

Around 8 million people in the southern African country of 22 million are registered to vote in the **one-day election**.

Voters will also choose members of Parliament and local government councilors. Results are expected on Monday, according to the electoral commission.

Before dawn, voters bundled in thick jackets against the morning chill began forming long lines outside polling stations across Lusaka.

Some huddled around small makeshift fires to keep warm while election officials arranged ballot boxes, checked voter lists and prepared polling stations.

European Union election observers watched the proceedings at one polling station in the capital.

Hichilema faces 13 other candidates in the presidential vote, though Brian Mundubile of an opposition alliance is expected to be his strongest challenger.

The election is widely seen as a referendum on Hichilema's handling of the economy.

He came into power in 2021 and is seeking a second term. He argues that he inherited an economy in crisis and has overseen the restructuring of Zambia's massive foreign debt, presided over economic growth, and helped to court investors.

Many Zambians say they don't feel the benefits as unemployment, food prices and an unstable electricity supply continue to strain household budgets.

Hichilema says he needs another five years to create jobs, improve infrastructure and expand public services.

Major copper producer

The election is also being closely watched abroad because Zambia is a major copper producer seeking to sharply increase production of the metal, which is critical to electric vehicles, renewable energy and power grids.

China is Zambia's **largest foreign investor** and has extensive mining interests in the country, while the United States has sought a greater role as Washington looks to diversify supplies of critical minerals and reduce its reliance on China.

Hichilema has courted investment from both China and Western partners, including the U.S., as he seeks to increase annual copper production to 3 million metric tons by 2031.

Security and political tensions rose in the final days of the campaign. Police deployed additional officers and warned against violence, disruptions at polling stations and the circulation of false results.

Zambia has long been regarded as one of southern Africa's more stable democracies

Opposition parties have accused Hichilema's government of using state institutions to target political rivals, allegations the government rejects.

The Tonse Alliance said a law enforcement raid on its offices days before the election was politically motivated.

Hichilema himself spent four months in jail on treason charges while an opposition leader under former President Edgar Lungu, whom he defeated in 2021.

Lungu remained an influential political figure until his death in South Africa last year.

A prolonged **dispute** between his family and the government over his funeral and burial added to tensions ahead of the election.

A presidential candidate must win more than 50% of the vote to avoid a runoff.

Zambia has long been regarded as one of southern Africa's more stable democracies, with a history of largely peaceful transfers of power.

Hichilema's victory in 2021 marked the country's third transfer of power to an opposition candidate since multiparty democracy was restored in 1991.