

Zimbabwean tailors cash in on party apparel demand as vote nears

The whirring sound of a sewing machine can be heard a few paces from Judah Zunze's workshop in Harare's Warren Park township, as he stitches up political party regalia for a customer ahead of elections this month.



Judah Zunze's workshop is located in Harare's Warren Park township. Source: Reuters.

Business booms

Business is booming for Zunze making colourful clothing printed with smiling faces of politicians seeking office in the presidential and parliamentary elections due on 23 August.

A dozen candidates are vying to be the country's next president but the main contest is between incumbent Emmerson Mnangagwa, who is seeking a second term and leads the ruling Zanu-PF party, and Nelson Chamisa, of the new Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC).

"Business is picking up as we draw closer to the elections. Orders for regalia have doubled in recent weeks," Zunze, a former foreman in a textile company, said as he handed over red and black tunics to a Zanu-PF supporter.

Ahead of the vote, the informal clothing industry that includes tailors like Zunze is cashing in on demand from party supporters wanting to wear their party colours on their sleeves.

Zunze, whose signature apparel is a tunic emblazoned with Mnangagwa's face, charges between \$10 and \$20 if a customer provides their own material.

"Since the campaign season started, I get up to \$500 per month in profit," the father of three said.

Uplifting spirits

The colourful fabrics made into tunics, bags and headscarves brighten the mood at political rallies amid the economic gloom in a country with a plummeting currency, high inflation and rising unemployment.

"Zimbabwe has many problems and our elections have been associated with all the bad things, so this is our way of lifting spirits," Shame Maupa, a CCC supporter sporting the party's signature yellow regalia, said at a rally in Gweru, 300 km from the capital Harare.

For others, like Zanu-PF youth leader Lameck Chimankire, the colourful outfits are not just about making a fashion statement. They are a tool to attract youth votes.

Chimankire's red, long flowing robe fashioned in the manner of garments worn by African apostolic church members has become a spectacle at Zanu-PF rallies.

"My appearance is inspiring youths to vote. Since I grew up in the apostolic church, I thought of adapting the garment to tell a political message," Chimankire said.

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