

**Zimbabwe votes in support of new constitution**  
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Almost 95 percent of Zimbabweans have voted in favour of a new draft constitution which is supported by both President Robert Mugabe and his opponent Morgan Tsvangirai, which paves the way for new elections.

Tallies, released by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission after Tuesday's results, showed that an overwhelming 3,079,966 voters were in favour of the new constitution and 179,489 were against it.

"Since the majority of the votes were received in favour of the adoption of the draft constitution and, it is declared to have been adopted by the people of Zimbabwe," said Lovemore Sekeramayi, the official in charge of the vote tally.

An estimated six million citizens were eligible to vote.

Mugabe and Tsvangirai, the prime minister, backed the draft constitution that will usher in fresh polls to end the pair's tense unity government arrangement that were set up after the violent and disputed 2008 elections .

The new charter sets a maximum of two five-year terms in office for the president, boosts parliament's powers and abolishes the post of the prime minister.

Now that the referendum results are announced, it takes some 30 days of legislative technicalities before the draft is signed into law by Mugabe.

A constitution amendment bill has to be tabled, debated and approved. However, legislators have said that the debate must be ceremonial, as the text has already been given a green light.

#### Gains for Zimbabweans

The new constitution, which was hailed by the US and regional observers as peaceful and credible, protects Zimbabweans from all forms of violence and torture and guarantees freedom of expression.

Some observers have expressed their concern on whether there is enough time to synchronise the existing laws with the new constitution in time for elections.

McDonald Lewanika, an observer from the Crisis Coalition, said that it is "almost certain" that elections would be held this year, but said that it was unlikely that all the constitutional changes would be implemented in time for the elections.

However, Jonathan Moyo, a member of the supreme decision making body, the politburo, said it was possible for parliament to move quickly.

"Its adoption as bill is a formality... there is no basis for grandstanding or politicking to waste time. It can be done in a day," said Moyo.

He said law drafters were already working on the changes, and amending the electoral laws in line with the constitution could be finalised even within weeks.

"There is more than enough time to align the electoral laws with the constitution," he said