THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA | Global Water Security Center

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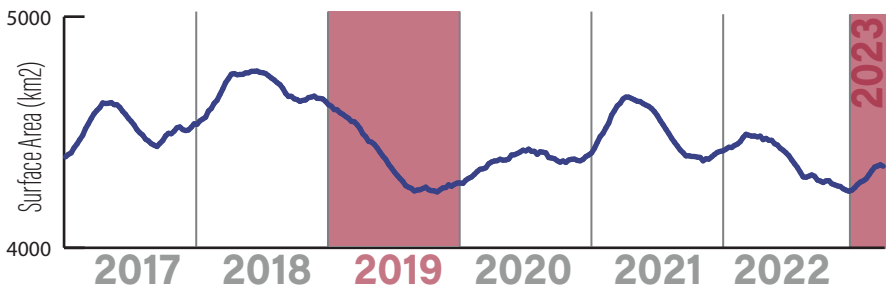
South Central Africa, 2023: Drought in Zambezi Basin Could Exacerbate Tensions in Zimbabwe Election

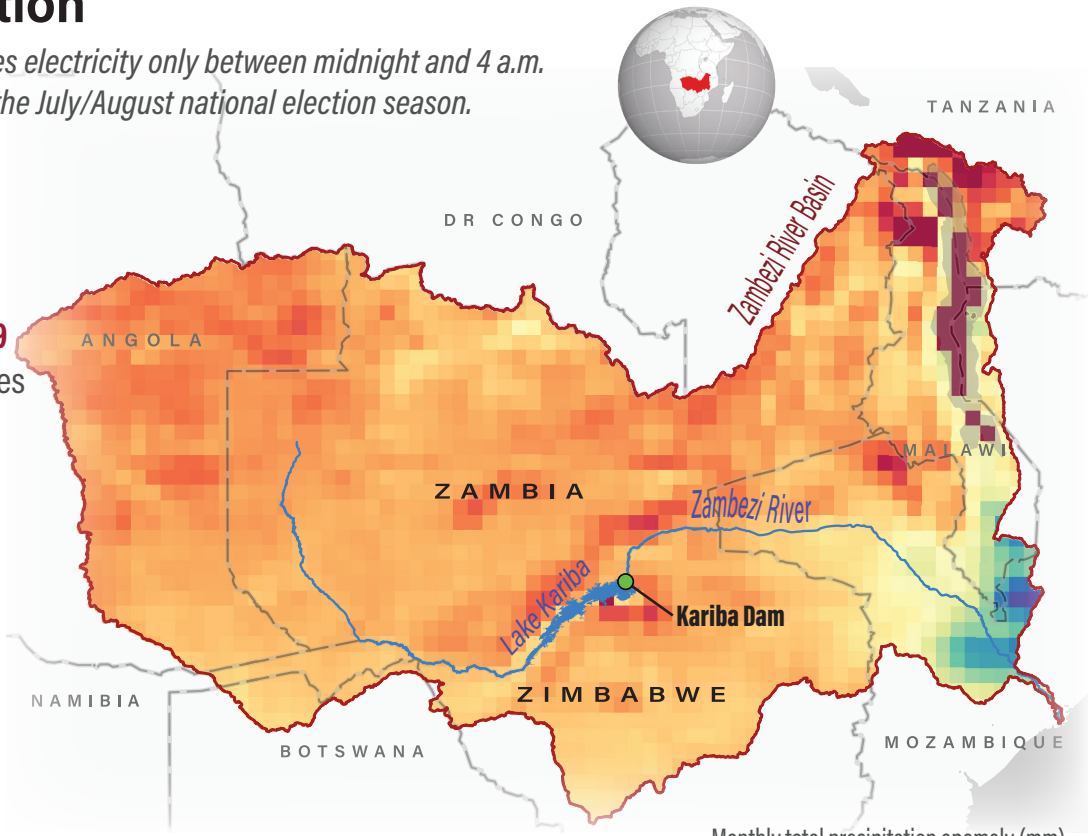
Drought is driving hydroelectricity shortages. Zimbabwe now generally provides electricity only between midnight and 4 a.m. Economic hardship resulting from the electricity crisis could spark protests in the July/August national election season.

Zimbabwe's hydroelectricity shortfall is ~**1000 MW**. A newly commissioned coal plant can only supply **300 MW**.

Post-election protests in 2018 and fuel protests in 2019 were deadly. Combined tensions from electricity shortages and the election could increase the intensity of protests.



Years-long drought has left the Kariba Reservoir at its lowest point since 2019, when deadly protests erupted over fuel. **A predicted hotter-than-normal dry season will further deplete the reservoir.**



The Kariba Dam is a vital source of hydropower located on the Zambezi River between Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Pathway to Impact

Mismanagement of existing coal plants has forced the country to rely more heavily on the shrinking Kariba Reservoir. Zimbabwe has already used most of its share of the water. In December 2022, the reservoir was so low the plant needed to be shut down.

The hydroelectricity shortages come at a time when runaway inflation, increasing fuel prices, and a drought-affected harvest are also increasing hardship.

Photo: Frank Chikowore

President Emmerson Mnangagwa campaigned on solving the country's energy crisis by promising to "light up the country with electricity", but electricity problems have gotten worse.

Data: ERA5, MOGWAI

Sources:

Map Data:
ECMWF ERA5. Generated using Copernicus Climate Change Service information [2022]

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Additional research and analysis provided by Spring Innovate

Basemap Source:
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