

University of Zimbabwe (UZ) and the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN)

THE ROUTE TOWARDS 2023 HARMONISED ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE



Zimbabwe Election
Support Network
Promoting Democratic
Elections in Zimbabwe



UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE

Solomon Muqayi (Ed)

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Preface and Acknowledgement

In December 2021, the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN). This book project is part of the UZ-ZESN partnership programme. The strategic partnership is meant to establish and conduct joint research programmes between the two institutions. The UZ-ZESN partnership shall positively contribute towards the discourse on free, fair and credible elections in the country.

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) was formed in the year 2000 and is a coalition of 37 non-governmental organizations formed to co-ordinate activities pertaining to elections. The major focus of the Network is to promote democratic processes in general and free, fair and credible elections in particular. It seeks to achieve this through the establishment and upholding of a democratic electoral environment and processes.

This book project and the whole publication process would not have been conceivable without the substantial and unwavering support offered by ZESN and UZ. As the editor, I am unreservedly and wholeheartedly thankful for the UZ and ZESN's tremendous support. I would also like to thank all those authors who took their time contributing book chapters as well as taking their time correcting their chapters in line with the comments raised by the reviewers.

This book documents the preparations, challenges and experiences towards the country's fourth harmonised elections. It also promotes the attainment of the University of Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 pillars which are research, teaching, community outreach, industrialization and innovation. Soon after the publication of this book, the authors shall conduct some community outreach programmes via seminars, workshops and public awareness campaigns that shall be meant to enlighten the public about the importance of conducting democratic and credible elections in Zimbabwe, especially these upcoming 2023 harmonised elections. The authors have provided innovative models, strategies and mechanisms that shall improve the electoral process in Zimbabwe.

The book is going to create an ample room for producing outcome-based and professionalized research results on elections in Zimbabwe. It shall help to inform

the formulation and implementation of policies that will improve the processes of conducting upcoming elections in Zimbabwe. It is important to note that research contributes immensely to effective policy making. The knowledge it provides shall contribute positively to the existing literature and it will be added to the libraries in Zimbabwe and beyond. It will also create advanced knowledge which shall be very helpful to the academia and Government of Zimbabwe as well as civil society organisations, independent institutions and organisations that deal with elections such as the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP), Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Human Rights Association, and Zimbabwe Institute, among others.

The book is relevant and important towards the fulfilment of the philosophy mentioned in the University of Zimbabwe's 2019-2025 strategic plan of 'Kuziva neKugona' which outlines that Universities are defined by their capabilities to provide relevant solutions to the society. This book provides results that enhance deep understanding and consciousness about the challenges that are faced by various stakeholders with regards Zimbabwe's electoral processes. Through this book project, the University of Zimbabwe and ZESN have decided to go beyond the theory and the talking; and they have moved towards delivering the actions necessary for achieving democratic, credible, free and fair elections in Zimbabwe.

The University of Zimbabwe's strategic goal as mentioned in the UZ strategic plan 2019-2025 is to become an academic centre of excellence in research and innovation in Africa by 2025. It is important to note that the thorough research compounded by various authors who contributed book chapters have shed light and produced crucial information that shall be used academically to enrich communities in Zimbabwe as well as the whole of the African continent.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Elections and Democracy in Zimbabwe

Solomon Muqayi and Oripa Chimwara

Introduction

The Republic of Zimbabwe conducts harmonised elections every five years. The 2018 electoral environment was a momentous one in the country's electoral history. The interest in the election was marked by various descriptions such as "watershed elections", "elections in our lifetime", and "apocalyptic elections" (Njeru, 2018: 8). Stakeholders had varied expectations and fears for the process and outcome. A case in point was the populace's expectation of an election with a possibility of completing the transition from politics centred around personalities, patronage, and clientelism to an era of issue-based, competitive politics where democratic values are entrenched and the return to macroeconomic stabilization" (Zimbabwe Council of Churches, 2018: 12).

Several factors made the elections stand out in the country's political and electoral history. First, it marked the 12th time that elections have been conducted in the country when counting from the 1979 'internal settlement' elections. Zimbabwean electoral politics essentially began in 1979 with the enfranchisement of the majority of black Zimbabweans. Secondly, it marked the third time conducting Harmonised elections in Zimbabwe. This practice of concurrently holding general elections for local authorities, presidential and parliamentary began in 2008 and was subsequently constitutionalised in Section 158 (2) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe No. 20 Act, 2013, hence the name 'harmonised elections.' Thirdly, this was the first election without the candidature of the country's first Prime Minister and first executive president, Robert Mugabe. Subsequently, Emmerson Mnangagwa won the presidential elections thereby extending ZANU PF's dominance in the country's elections. The 'new' government led by the former is popularly known as the 'new dispensation.' Against this background, this book aims to discuss various electoral aspects ahead of the 2023 elections.

Zimbabwe's harmonised elections have been marred by challenges such as violence, disgruntlement, and voter apathy. It has become routine for the main opposition political parties to fail to accept the outcome of the elections (Magaisa, 2019). Despite the ruling presented by the constitutional court, the Movement for Democratic Change-Alliance (MDC-A) (a coalition of seven opposition political parties formed to contest during the 2018 elections) failed to accept the results of the 2018 harmonised elections. There have been so many concerns raised by the MDC-A such as legitimacy issues and the lack of independence of the electoral management body (Magaisa, 2019). Soon after the 2018 harmonised elections, the government of Zimbabwe created an institution called the Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD). POLAD is made up of various political parties that participated in the 2018 harmonised elections except for the MDC-A which was the biggest opposition political party. The major purpose of POLAD is to facilitate dialogue which is meant to promote political negotiations and work on a roadmap for the 2023 elections.

Zimbabwe's main opposition political party, once MDC later MDC-A, has experienced gruesome factionalism and fragmentation, leading to a major split after the 2018 harmonised elections. The Nelson Chamisa-led faction subsequently formed the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) in 2022 and the Mwonozora-led retained the name MDC-A. Earlier, tensions within the MDC-A resulted in massive recalls of the elected councillors and Members of Parliament (MPs) as well as senators. This led to the by-elections that were conducted to fill the vacant gaps in councils and parliament. Some of the bi-elections were alleged to be marred by violence and rigging. Several stakeholders including the opposition political parties, POLAD, civil society, and media, among others have indicated that there are very few reforms that have been implemented so far in Zimbabwe yet 2023 elections are fast approaching (Mavhunga 2023).

Electoral democracy is measured not only by the outcome of an election but through an assessment of the environment, institutions, and processes of managing elections. The Route towards 2023 Harmonised Elections in

Zimbabwe is a product of a memorandum of understanding between the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) and the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) signed as part of the fulfillment of the former's objectives on Education 5.0 whose pillars are; research, teaching, community outreach, industrialisation, and innovation. The latter acknowledges the importance of engaging the industry in fulfilling Education 5.0 pillars. Through empirical discussions on various themes on the electoral environment, Biometric Voter Registration, delimitation politics, digital platforms, the church's role in promoting voting, temporary special measures (TSM) such as quota systems and women participation, and electoral integrity, the book provides a timely analysis informed by the collaborative efforts of academics and industrialists on the key factors which are fundamental to the 2023 electoral process and environment. These themes were purposively selected because they provide a basis upon which the fairness and freeness of the election can be determined. The implications of TSM measures must be contextualised and assessed in terms of whether they serve the purpose of engendering the participation of women in elections and decision-making processes or not. Through the insightful contributions made by different authors, it is hoped that elections in Zimbabwe would reflect the will of the people whilst adhering to international standards on the conduct of democratic elections.

Defining Elections and Democracy

Over centuries, democracy has been the subject of countless discourses among scholars and developmental practitioners. This chapter does not seek to make a review of the different accounts and or theories of the concept that have characterised the debate. Rather the chapter seeks to use the term in a broad sense making a point of departure for this book and establishing indicators of a democratic system as a yardstick for understanding the preparations and experiences toward the 2023 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe.

From a pluralist perspective, democracy refers to the institutional method of arriving at political decisions in which the individuals acquire the power to decide using a competitive struggle for the people's vote through free

competition for a free vote (Schumpeter 1962). Elections, therefore, constitute the medium of transferring power from the people to politicians. Similarly, the representative theory of democracy underscores the obligation placed on the elites to articulate the interests of the people when making decisions. The former can only work however when there are accountability measures in place to ensure that power is not left unchecked. Diamond (2004: 10) identified four typical elements that characterises a democratic system as follows;

1. A system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections;
2. Active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life;
3. Protection of the human rights of all citizens; and
4. A rule of law in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.

When democracy is understood as a process, there must be governmental institutions that must be established to ensure the fulfillment of the democratic ethos. Yet again, an understanding of democracy must go beyond institutions and encompass values, attitudes, and practices that however take diverse forms and expressions within cultures and societies the world over. Democracies, therefore rely on key principles and not uniform practices. Such principles include majority rule, power residing in the people, and the protection of basic human rights. Such rights include the right to organise and participate in society, the right to equal protection under the law, and freedoms such as speech and religion. Any state that considers itself democratic should therefore fulfill the above principles or it blemishes its democratic garb.

While democracy requires the establishment of governmental institutions, it also has elections at its core, they are an indispensable element without which democracy cannot flourish. The importance of elections to the democratic project is that they are a “viable means of ensuring the orderly process of leadership succession and change and an instrument of political authority and legitimation” (Adejumobi, 2000: 59). However, it must quickly be stated that the relationship between democracy and elections is not straight forward. While democracy cannot exist without the conduct of free and fair elections,

the mere conduct of elections does not translate to democracy. The paradox of elections, therefore, is that they can be used to promote and undermine democratic governance, and this gives rise to a lot of questions about the value and meaning of elections in Africa (Matlosa et al. 2010: 2) and Zimbabwe in particular. Elections do not amount to democracy, yet democracy cannot exist without multiparty elections (Matlosa et al. 2010: 2). Therefore, the degree and depth of the democracy project in Africa should be judged not merely by the regularity of elections but the contributions (such as allowing for the peaceful transfer of power) and such elections make to democracy (Matlosa et al. 2010: 2).

With the impending 2023 Zimbabwean harmonised elections, it is high time that a SWOT analysis of the political environment be conducted with a view of allowing the elections to make a meaningful contribution towards the country's democratic project. This book does this by documenting the preparations, challenges, and experiences toward the country's fourth harmonised elections.

Structure of the Book

This book contains eight chapters that discuss various aspects relating to the conduct of elections in Zimbabwe. The point of departure for this book is informed by the preparations and experiences of the 2018 elections and the prospects for an improved electoral environment for the 2023 elections. These preparations are contextualised in a brief discussion on the democratic theory setting out the key parameters of conduct for the fulfillment of democratic governance.

In chapter two, Leon Poshai and Jonah Marawako describe digital platforms used for cyberspace election campaigning in Zimbabwe and the implications of using such in the 2023 harmonised elections. Using desk research, the research finds that with Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and Internet usage rising around the world, election campaigning strategies in Zimbabwe have been transformed. As the country gears for the 2023 harmonised elections, technology has become a pivotal instrument used by political parties and candidates to canvass votes. From the COVID-19

experiences, political parties are now depending more on cyberspace engagement with their supporters and this reflects through the dominant use of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp. What is perturbing in Zimbabwe, however, is that while digital platforms have made political contestants more visible to the electorate, cyberspace has proved to be a toxic battlefield as political party leaders and supporters trade insults. In addition, there are rising cases of dissemination of false messages online, which in some cases has incited violence amongst supporters. Cyberspace has become a weapon for violent electioneering. Polarisation is high as evidenced by a lack of political tolerance crams on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. This chapter recommends the enforcement of the Data Protection Act (Chapter 11:22) to protect citizens from the vicissitudes germane to cyberspace election campaigning.

In chapter three, Tawanda Zinyama discussed the role of electoral integrity and campaign messaging. Electoral integrity and election campaigns have been eventful in Zimbabwe. Election campaigns constitute an integral and valuable part of Zimbabwe's democratic system. Zimbabwe's 2023 elections require just two variables to determine its political trajectory and electoral integrity like what happened in Zambia in 2021. These variables are political leadership and strong institutions, especially ZEC, security services, and Zimbabwe Republic Police. The main argument is that electoral integrity can be achieved in 2023 elections through upright leadership, strong and professional institutions.

The adoption of TSM measures such as the quota system is in line with international conventions aimed at promoting women's participation in political leadership positions. In chapter four, Oripa Chimwara examines the efficacy of the quota system in Zimbabwe in facilitating the election of and participation of women in parliament. The extension of the quota system through the Constitutional of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 2) Act, 2021 set in motion questions over the efficacy of the system in engendering gender equality. Statistically, during the 2013 and 2018 Harmonized elections, the percentage of women in the National Parliament was 31 percent from 14

percent in 2008 yet beyond the rhetoric on numbers, several caveats have been missed over the efficacy of this system. On the surface, the percentages of women in the national parliament increased, however, qualitatively questions remain first on whether the quota system cures the stereotyping sentiments which are leveled against women politicians. Secondly, can quotas on their own be considered a panacea that can sustain women's empowerment? Lastly, what other structural and institutional conditions are needed for sustained women empowerment and participation in politics and elections in particular? The chapter concludes that the quota system in Zimbabwe is not effective in ensuring the sustained election of more women into political office. There remains a need for a holistic adoption of reforms in political structures, beliefs, and positive attitudes toward women leaders under the quota system. This is not an overnight exercise but a process that requires political will and commitment.

Delimitation can be used as a tool for weakening opposition influence. In chapter five, Tinotenda Chidhawu, explores the politics of delimitation in Zimbabwe, with rural district councils gravitating towards the cities to dilute oppositional influence. In 2000, the opposition party dominated the urban cities, and the trend has been the same ever since. Failure by ZANU PF to win in most urban centres forced it to turn to gerrymandering to checkmate the opposition. Whereas demographic growth dominated the study of urban expansion in Zimbabwe, the politics of delimitation may well have become the most important branch. The ruling party realised that they could use the land as a carrot that can be dangled, and they quickly sprang into action identifying strategic spaces. The governing party knows that as they gravitate towards town, the spaces become valuable for electioneering, revealing an intersection of politics and delimitation.

Biometric Voter Registration is important in promoting democratic and credible elections. In chapter six, Solomon Muqayi assesses the efficacy of the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) process BVR towards the democratic project in Zimbabwe. For many years, Zimbabwe's main political parties have

been fighting over the manual voters' register that was allegedly marred with challenges such as duplication of voters, high margin for error, irregularities, and manipulation by politicians, among other challenges. As a result, the manual voters' register was becoming highly unreliable and undependable thereby adversely affecting the credibility of the whole electoral process. For these reasons, there was continuous pressure pilling from stakeholders such as civil society organisations, opposition political parties, think tanks, and researchers to bring in some remarkable reforms such as abolishing the old voters' register and introducing the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) system. Subsequently, the Zimbabwean government introduced the BVR in 2016 in preparation for the 2018 harmonised elections. This chapter is premised on the following research question: How useful is the BVR in addressing electoral flaws in Zimbabwe? The need to add new knowledge to the existing literature on BVR is the main motive behind this study. The chapter observed that BVR has brought about positive contributions towards Zimbabwe's voter registration process such as reduction of duplicate registration, minimisation of errors and improved identification of voters. The major recommendation of the study is that the Zimbabwean government should adopt the biometric voting process to be adopted on the polling station and this may help to achieve democratic and credible elections in Zimbabwe.

Tinashe Gumbo in chapter seven tracks the work of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) in electoral processes in Zimbabwe with a particular focus on ZCC's *I Pray I Vote* campaign which was meant to influence the country's elections from 2018 to 2023. The chapter discusses the main pillars of the campaign and notes some strengths and potential opportunities to influence electoral processes in Zimbabwe. Church's strategic position allows it to bypass certain set electoral regulations. However, the chapter also notes some structural gaps which may undermine ZCC's effectiveness in election work. Through the lens of social capital theory, the chapter argues that the ZCC had the opportunity to influence electoral processes had it avoided some contradictions that resulted from the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations' Sabbath Call Proposal. The chapter is directly informed by

the author's "insider-outsider" perspective which is complemented by a review of some key ZCC documents on elections. It is recommended that the ZCC needs to revisit its electoral campaign and address the noted limitations to enhance its influence on the 2023 elections.

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CHAPTER TWO

Evaluating the Efficacy of Digital Platforms for Cyberspace Election Campaigning in Zimbabwe: Implications for the 2023 Plebiscite

Leon Poshai and Jonah Marawako

Introduction and Background

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate the efficacy of cyberspace campaigning platforms in Zimbabwe ahead of the 2023 harmonised elections. The fierce rivalry amongst political contestants during election campaigning in Zimbabwe informs an evaluation of the efficacy of election campaigning media. This chapter appraises how the use of cyberspace campaigning platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube has been on an upward trajectory in Zimbabwe. The upward trajectory in cyberspace campaigning is mainly because of efforts to embrace the features of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) which has informed the global advances in technology use in both public and private spheres. The 4IR has ignited a wave of euphoria amongst political players who now deploy digital platforms to engage with the electorate (Kim and Chen 2016). Globally, the internet and digital technologies play an important role in electoral processes by enabling engagement amongst actors such as political parties, candidates, voters and elections management institutions (Garnett and James 2020). The chapter also acknowledges how limited internet coverage in rural areas is one of the major dents to the effective use of cyberspace campaigning platforms.

In many African countries, enthusiasm about the usefulness of cyberspace digital platforms in election campaigning continues to rise as political candidates see cyberspace as a convenient and seamless opportunity for engaging with voters (Masuku 2021). For example, in the 2021 general elections in Zambia, cyberspace became a hunting ground for contesting political parties, particularly, the then-ruling party, the Patriotic Front and the then-main opposition political party, the United Party for National Development (Masuku 2021). The cyberspace contest to canvass for votes reached its climax

when internet restrictions were imposed by the Government of Zambia three days before the elections resulting in the blockage of access to social media platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. In the Kenyan 2022 elections also, digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp were used in election campaigning by different politicians in advancing their advance their political manifestoes to the voters (Goodman 2022; Maina 2022).

Cyberspace campaigning was also used by some politicians in the 2013 elections in Nigeria as Nigerians used social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to report on and monitor electoral situations through tagging relevant electoral bodies such as the Independence Electoral Commission of Nigeria and International Organisations such as the United Nations Security Council (Luckscheiter 2023). According to Ibrahim (2023), the Centre for Democracy and Development in Nigeria reported that ahead of the 2023 elections in Nigeria, social media users rose from 27 million in 2019 to 36 million by January 2023. The growth in social media use was spearheaded by online electoral campaigns by both the electorates and the candidates. For example, social media users in Nigeria Tweeted over 12.4 million tweets with election messages while 216 000 Facebook users interacted with content on popular public pages related to the elections (Ibrahim 2023).

In Zimbabwe, there are improvements in the usage of digital platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp for political campaigning because of the growth in internet penetration and its usage in some parts of the country, particularly in urban areas. The Zimbabwe Media Report (2019) revealed that from 2000–2019, internet penetration in Zimbabwe rose from 5.1% to 60.6% of the total population making cyberspace an important platform for political interactions, particularly in urban areas in the country. In particular, there is increased social media presence in urban areas which makes it easier for some politicians to connect with the electorate in cyberspace. However, the majority of the rural population in Zimbabwe still lags in terms of internet access as compared to their urban counterparts.

The use of digital platforms for political campaigning can usher in complex issues such as political innuendos, mudslinging and digital disinformation on cyberspaces and this vitiates the central principles of free and fair elections (Borah 2016). Bloggers can spew vitriol to their opponents which creates avenues for political violence. In Zimbabwe, the advent of digital platforms in election campaigning has been a double-edged sword. On one hand, it has availed some candidates and political parties in urban areas with wide strategies for campaigning. On the other, the same digital platforms have counter-intuitively exacerbated malicious and dishonest electioneering tendencies (Mathe 2020). This chapter evaluates the effectiveness of cyberspace campaigning platforms in Zimbabwe and the implications of online campaigning on the 2023 harmonised elections considering the unevenness in internet access between the rural and urban voters in Zimbabwe. The chapter also analyses the polarised use of mass media platforms such as national television, radio stations and newspapers.

Literature Review

Elections are one of the defining features of democracy as they formally guide the selection of an individual to hold a public political position. To assume public office, candidates and political parties must campaign or sell their message to the electorate (Brady et al. 2007). An election campaign is an organized effort which seeks to influence the decision-making process within a specific group. Election campaigns are important avenues for candidates and political parties to attract voters as well as consolidate their relationship with the electorate. The mode of the campaign is important in any election as effective and robust electoral campaigns consolidate the credibility of electoral outcomes (Schedler 2002). The choice of election campaigning strategies has implications on electoral outcomes and electoral integrity as it directly affects the choices made by the voter (Brierley and Kramon 2020). Electoral integrity refers to the degree of administrative efficacy, freeness and fairness of the electoral process (Norris 2013). The integrity of an election can hinge on the election campaigning strategies used by political parties and candidates

contesting for public office.

Depending on the context and location, digital campaigning platforms can enable political candidates and the electorate to communicate conveniently (Kim and Chen 2016). Digital campaigning techniques can create avenues of interaction between political candidates and the electorate, yet they can concomitantly disinform voters (Tan 2020). Since the turn of the Second Millennium, however, the imbroglio of contested election outcomes has resulted in evaluations of the typology of the campaigning strategies used by rival political groupings (Borah 2016). When candidates and political parties intentionally use digital platforms to disinform voters, the integrity of an election is undermined (Vandewalker 2020). Thus, where cyberspace campaigning platforms are used to disinform, this results in the erosion of public confidence to participate meaningfully in electoral processes (Judge and Korhani 2019). Other than the campaigning strategies, the integrity of elections is also assessed based on the country's electoral laws, the openness of electoral procedures, voter education, voter registration scales, media coverage of electoral processes, campaigning finance, legitimacy of the vote counting process, vote tabulation procedures as well as the transparency in the dissemination of elections results (Elklit and Reynolds 2005).

Hitherto the dominance of digital social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, the election campaigning in Zimbabwe was punctuated by the use of physical rallies and dependence on mass media (Mathe 2020). Political parties would conduct rallies in different constituencies and communicate their electoral messages using newspapers, Radio and Television platforms (Media Monitors 2018). However, these mass media platforms were and are still heavily skewed against the opposition political parties as they are considered to be state-censored and state-controlled leading to unbalanced reporting. For example, while proceedings at some of the ZANU-PF rallies such as the 23 June 2018 White City Stadium rally were broadcast on the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperation Television (ZBC-TV), other contesting political parties such as the MDC-Alliance, Coalition of

Democrats, Build Zimbabwe Alliance and National Constitutional Assembly party did not receive similar coverage on the same platforms. This unbalanced coverage affected the media's capacity to be fair and balanced as there was a lack of objectivity (Media Monitors 2018). This is against the claim that it is pertinent in democratic electoral processes that all candidates are provided equal access to the media (Rusike 1990).

For effective citizen participation in electoral processes, the media should be fair and objective in their coverage of all candidates in national elections (Willems 2012). The mainstream media should strive to consolidate electoral integrity by ensuring that there exists a minimal level playing field in media coverage for political campaigns (Chibuwe 2020a; Matingwina 2019). However, this is difficult to achieve due to a highly polarised political culture that characterises the political landscape in Zimbabwe. The asymmetrical media coverage in Zimbabwe has become the hallmark of electoral politics and this undermines democratic competition and also culminates in the failure to achieve electoral integrity. For example, the ZBC-TV often broadcast content that endorses ZANU PF while degrading some opposition political parties such as the Movement for Democratic Change and the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC). The contribution of this chapter to the extant literature on elections is to analyse the efficacy of cyberspace campaigning platforms drawing experiences from Zimbabwe.

Methodology

This chapter is based on an extensive review of the literature on the role of digital platforms in election campaigning in Zimbabwe. The document analysis method was used to collect data. Document analysis is the 'systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents' in both printed and electronic formats (Bowen 2009). The chapter, therefore, explored a diverse body of extant literature such as research papers, discussion papers and newspaper articles. These secondary sources of data were analysed to provide data on the use of cyberspace for election campaigning processes in Zimbabwe. Data were analysed systematically using content analysis. The researchers checked the

relevance of each source in explaining how digital social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have been used by political parties to campaign ahead of the 2023 harmonised elections. The researchers also verified the authenticity of some arguments raised in documentary sources by logging in to Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to check the nature and content disseminated on these platforms by campaigning candidates. For example, the researchers visited some YouTube channels such as Slymedia TV, ZBC News, Citizens Voice Network and the HStvLive zim to check the nature of the content shared by politicians on these social media platforms. The selection of these YouTube channels was based on their coverage of Zimbabwean political content and updates through weekly or monthly debate and discussion sessions, as the case with ZBC News and HStvLive zim.

The researchers addressed the possibility of biased selection of channels by filtering the content posted to ensure that it covers narratives from both the ruling party ZANU-PF and opposition political parties such as the CCC and the MDC-T. The researchers discovered that ZBC News streams content that is aligned to ZANU-PF while channels such as Citizens Voice Network cover content for the opposition. Some of the content covered by these channels include internal processes such as primary elections and messages from political rallies. The researchers also visited the Facebook pages of Zimbabwean political parties such as the CCC, ZANU-PF and the MDC-T for content verification. The pages visited included ZANU PF Party| Harare, Our MDC-T and Citizens Coalition for Change| Harare respectively. Facebook pages for these political parties were selected because they have representation in Parliament.

Discussion and Analysis of Findings

The internet has enabled some political parties in Zimbabwe to organise cyberspace election campaigns. Digital social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube are the common platforms used by political parties to interact with the voters, particularly in urban areas (Media Institute of Southern Africa, State of the Media Report 2021).

However, there is a disproportion in the use of digital platforms for political engagement in Zimbabwe as the rural voters are left out in the online interactive political processes due to limited internet connectivity and the digital divide that characterise the country. The rural population, still depend largely on traditional mass media platforms such as radio stations, television, newspapers and posters for political news. The next section is an evaluation of the main digital cyberspace platforms used for election campaigning in Zimbabwe and their implications for the 2023 harmonised elections.

The use of National Television and Radio stations for election campaigning in Zimbabwe

National Television and radio stations have been consistently used for election campaigning in Zimbabwe from the attainment of independence in 1980 through to the build-up to the 2023 elections. However, these two platforms have been consistently used to propagate ZANU-PF political messages whilst deriding opposition political parties. For example, in elections before the 1987 Unity Accord in Zimbabwe, the national television and radio stations were used to denigrate the then main opposition political party, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo (Mare 2020). Post 1990, attention shifted from the ZAPU to the then main opposition political party, the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) which was then led by Edgar Tekere. In the build-up to the 1990 elections, for example, there was an infamous advertisement on ZBC TV which stated that one way to die is through an accident, and the other one is to vote for ZUM (Matingwina 2018). The same advert encouraged viewers to vote for ZANU-PF for them to live because voting for ZUM was the same as committing suicide. When the Movement for Democratic Change was formed in 1999, it also became a target for negative coverage on ZBC and some national radio stations like Radio Zimbabwe as its leader at that time Morgan Tsvangirai was popularised as a puppet of Western Countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States of America (Mare 2020). Coverage of the MDC was mainly on demonstrating how it is 'used' by the Western to attain regime change and 'recolonise' Zimbabwe.

National radio stations such as National FM, Radio Zimbabwe as well as the national television channel, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) continue to be at the centre of propagating political messages through pro-government advertisement (Mare 2020). In the build-up to the 2018 elections, for example, campaigning messages for ZANU-PF and songs endorsing President Mnangagwa were also regularly broadcast on ZBC TV as was the case with the 'ED Pfee' song by Chief Shumba Hwenje which was regularly played on Radio Zimbabwe and ZBC TV in 2018. State-controlled mass media platforms in Zimbabwe have undermined democratic electoral campaigns in Zimbabwe (Chibuwe 2020b). Polarisation in the mass media among political lines has remained and this is a stumbling block to democracy in Zimbabwe (Matingwina 2019). For example, in the 2018 harmonised elections most of the content on the ZBC-TV was on ZANU-PF as the national television was polemical to the Citizens for Coalition Change (CCC) leader Nelson Chamisa and the opposition in general (Chibuwe 2020b). The ZBC TV has been unrestrained in its consistent coverage of a narrative that portrays positives about the ruling party ZANU-PF as it seemingly adheres to a 'no opposition coverage' policy. On one hand, the rallies and conferences for ZANU-PF are uninterruptedly broadcasted on ZBC TV, yet the activities of opposition political parties are seldom broadcasted on national television unless they do something wrong that 'requires' further ridicule and exposition on air.

The trend in Zimbabwe's ruling party, ZANU-PF has had a tight grip over Zimbabwe's government-controlled mass media platforms such as the Herald newspaper, the Chronicle newspaper, the ZBC and some radio stations such as the National FM and Radio Zimbabwe. These mass media platforms are used as tools to spread disinformation and quash dissent and satirise opposition political leaders (Mambondiyani 2022). For example, news hours on radio and television in Zimbabwe are inundated with praise narratives for ZANU-PF. On the other hand, private mass media platforms such as the Voice of America (VOA) and some private newspapers such as Newsday, The Standard, The Zimbabwe Independent and the Daily News seldom cover positive news on ZANU-PF as they are aligned with some opposition political parties such

as the CCC and the MDC-T. The mass media is therefore highly polarised in terms of its content coverage. The polarization of the media is linked to the failure of electoral integrity in the country as the efficacy of the mass media in promoting free, fair and credible elections in Zimbabwe continues to be questioned. With a single terrestrial television station, the ZBC TV being controlled by the government through the Ministry of Information and Publicity and Broadcasting Services, opposition political parties have supplemented their coverage in the aforementioned private media with the use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook for campaigning purposes as discussed hereunder.

Social Media Instruments for Elections Campaigning in Zimbabwe

Twitter Handles

Twitter is a widely used and ever-growing social networking platform that permits people to share data, in real-time information feeds via posting short comments, videos and pictures (Schmidt 2014). For example, by 1 April 2023, the total number of Twitter users in the world was pegged at 250 million which was a significant rise from the 112 million Twitter user base recorded in 2018 (Wise 2023). Globally, politicians use Twitter to communicate, debate as well as educate the electorate (Shannon 2011). The use of Twitter in Zimbabwe has broadened political communication spaces enabling not only politicians to mobilise voters but more so, allowing citizens to connect with political players on equal terms in various ways (Mungwari and Ndhlebe 2019). Twitter has allowed Hashtag (#) political activism which gives awareness to the citizens and makes them more involved in debating current political issues in Zimbabwe. The Hashtag tool was popularised by Pastor Evan Mawarire in 2016 through the #ThisFlag# which emphasised patriotism and encouraged people to defend the value system of Zimbabwe which was purportedly being deteriorated by the ZANU-PF government (Munoriyarwa and Chambwera 2020). The Movement for Democratic Change - Alliance (hereafter MDC – Alliance) followed suit as it also popularised the Hashtag #ZANU-PFmustGo# in its 2018 election campaigns.

Opposition political parties such as the CCC have also used this hashtag on the

basis that ZANU-PF has failed to manage the economy hence it must go to pave the way for other political parties to govern. The ZANU-PF party which attributes the country's economic woes to illegal sanctions imposed on the country by the United States of America, the United Kingdom, the European Union and other European countries uses its hashtag #SanctionsmustGo#. The CCC party also believes that the reason why the country continues to backslide is that most people do not vote in elections, hence its own hashtag #RegisterToVote# which is meant to encourage citizens to register and vote in elections. The CCC has also used the hashtag #Fakapressure# to encourage its supporters to remain vigilant and keep fighting for a democratic Zimbabwe. Hashtags #ChamisaForPresident# and #EDPfee# have also been used by CCC and ZANU-PF supporters to campaign for their party president for the 2023 elections. Other hashtags such as #MenBelieveED# and #GodIsInIt# are being used by political parties to market their political ideologies to the electorate.

During the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, political parties were barred from having physical rallies but opposition political parties such as the CCC made use of Twitter to interact with their supporters online (Tshuma et al. 2022). Twitter provides political parties with an alternative and modern platform for them to package their message online to engage people across the political divide when this is impossible (Mutsvairo and Muneri 2020). Twitter is also used to complement the dissemination of political messages and developments from physical gatherings. For example, in January 2023, the CCC party used platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to popularise the launch of its party name. The CCC party changed its name from the MDC-Alliance and the majority of the party leadership are former MDC-Alliance officials. The CCC has proceeded to use Twitter to call for electoral and media reforms through hashtags such as #PREPARE# which stands for Pre-election Pact on Electoral Reforms. The ZANU-PF party uses Twitter to facilitate civic engagement, in the process of campaigning to be voted back into office in the 2023 harmonised elections. This is done on its Twitter handles such as the @ZANUPF_Official while other Twitter accounts such as the @ZBCNewsOnline also provide updates on ZANU-PF activities.

Twitter has also been used to mobilise financial resources for political parties. Parties can raise financial donations from their supporters in different parts of the world through Twitter. The election terrain in Zimbabwe has been marred by underfunding of political parties and candidates in election campaigning and this culminated in an asymmetrical playing field in electoral politics. For example, in the 26 March 2022 by-elections, only candidates from the ZANU-PF party and the MDC Alliance received grants amounting to ZWL350 million and ZLW150 million from Treasury to fund their campaigns whilst all the other participating candidates and parties did not receive anything. These allocations were made on the basis that section 3 (3) of the Political Parties Finance Act (Chapter 2.11) provides that any political party whose candidates received at least 5% of the total number of votes cast in the most recent general election is eligible for Treasury funding. Thus, some political parties that are unable to self-fund have resorted to Twitter to mobilise funds through the crowdfunding method (Dendere 2021; Pindayi 2022). For example, following the Constitutional court case where the 2018 election results were challenged by the MDC-Alliance, the party turned to Twitter to raise money and donations to cover its legal expenses (Kataneksza 2018). The CCC also used Twitter to mobilise money for a bulletproof motor vehicle for their leader, Nelson Chamisa, after his previous motor vehicles were allegedly shot at by suspected ZANU-PF supporters on his way to a political rally.

The use of provocative Twitter handles such as Nerorists and Varakashi. These handles are developed from the cyber-political contestation between the aspiring presidential candidate for CCC, Nelson Chamisa's, followers nicknamed "Nerorists" and the followers of the incumbent President Emmerson Mnangagwa nicknamed "Varakashi." (Tshuma et al 2022). The ruling ZANU-PF party also market itself through its official Twitter handle @ZANUPF_Official as well as other various accounts of its affiliates such as @ZANU-PF patriots, TeachersforED and NursesforED. President Emmerson Mnangagwa also has his personal Twitter account @edmnangagwa which he uses to interact with the citizens. Opposition parties also have a vibrant presence on Twitter as evidenced by the presence of the Citizens Coalition

for Change Twitter account @CCCZimbabwe, as well as its leader's account @Nelsonchamisa. Other major and small political players are also present on Twitter, for example, the opposition Movement for Democratic Change @OurMDCT and the Transform Zimbabwe Party @TransformZim. Politicians from the different parties also use these Twitter handles to give updates to supporters as in the case when opposition political parties post campaigning rally schedules and proceedings on their Twitter accounts to keep their followers updated. Twitter also influences stories published in mainstream media such as newspapers and this can shape opinions through the Twitter effect (Shannon 2011).

However, it can be noted that Twitter is mostly used to facilitate candidate-voter interactions in urban areas, yet the rural population is often left out of such interactions. The impact of Twitter as a campaigning platform in rural areas in Zimbabwe is undermined by challenges such as limited internet connectivity by the rural population owing to underdeveloped Information Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure in rural Zimbabwe. As a result, political candidates in rural areas continue to primarily depend on traditional campaigning media such as posters because their constituencies have limited internet coverage. Twitter can also instigate cyberbullying through the dissemination of aggressive and violent messages. The cyber verbal violence among political groupings may not end online but can be taken offline, resulting in physical violence. It is therefore possible that Twitter can further incite political polarisation and widened the divide between people of different political persuasions.

Facebook Pages

Facebook is a social media platform that enables users to create an online database of friends and followers with whom they can communicate from time to time through posts (Borah 2016). Wise (2023) reports that by 1 April 2023, Facebook had a user base of 2.9 billion people. In many countries, Facebook has created the space for political deliberation between the candidates and the electorates, thereby promoting freedom of expression and association online

(Enli and Skogerbø 2013). In the 2018 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe, Facebook enabled political parties such as the MDC Alliance and independent political candidates such as Hon Themba Mliswa to be much closer to voters through election campaigning, brand marketing, vote mobilization and dialogue (Matingwina 2018). The Facebook platform allows political parties to encourage their supporters to register to vote and attend rallies and meetings through regular updates on their pages. For example, the ZANU-PF party uses its Facebook pages such as Operation Restore Legacy and EDhasmyhope to advance its political messages. These pages disseminate political messages on the development programmes and projects being pursued by ZANU-PF. For example, the rehabilitation of the Beitbridge–Masvingo–Harare–Chirundu highway and the construction works at Dinson Iron and Steel plant in Manhize located in Mvuma are some projects that have gained popular coverage on these ZANU-PF Facebook pages. The majority of Facebook users are youthful people who are eligible to vote, hence this platform has become a hunting ground for parties and candidates to reach out to first-time voters (Matingwina 2019). While many young people may not attend physical political rallies, they are usually active on Facebook and other online platforms where they follow the proceedings and processes of their preferred political parties and candidates. Realising this, political parties have created Facebook pages for the youth and trying to convince the younger generation to vote for them through the platform (Mambondiyani 2022).

Political parties have created pages on Facebook to boost their campaigns as they update their supporters through those pages. Some people do not attend political rallies because of personal reasons and some rallies are being done in faraway places they cannot conveniently reach hence they depend on live broadcasts on Facebook to get updates from their political party of interest (Mathe 2020). Much of the updates are done through pages of their leaders as to what they are about to do and achieve. Political parties also utilise Facebook to engage the Zimbabweans in the diaspora in the election season. On Facebook, people engage in debates about their political parties and some parties gain followers through those debates (Matingwina 2019). The use of

the Facebook platform as a campaigning platform by politicians has become popular in Zimbabwe as political parties are permanently campaigning on this platform even outside the election season (Mare 2020). Facebook has thus created a cyberspace platform for political parties to unleash new patterns of citizens' consciousness and civic engagement across the marginalised and this has the potential to generate a new and decisive political outcome in the 2023 harmonised elections.

Furthermore, there are Facebook pages created by supporters of several parties to support the agenda of their party. Some celebrities in Zimbabwe also use the Facebook platform to campaign for the majority to vote for a certain party as the case with socialite and 'prophet' Passion Java who campaign for ZANU-PF on Facebook as well as ZimDancehall chanter Ricky Fire and journalist Hopewell Chin'ono who camping for CCC on their Facebook pages. Members of Parliament such as Temba Mliswa also have pages on Facebook (Honourable Temba Mliswa – Norton Constituency) where he updates his supporters on what is going on in government. Some Facebook users also engage in political activism on this platform to boost votes for their party. This is common through the use of Hashtags (#) such as #ZANU-PFMUSTGO# and #EDhasmyvote# as used by followers of opposition political parties and supporters of the ruling party respectively. As the country gears for the harmonised elections in 2023, Facebook enabled election campaigns through dialogue as it enables candidates, particularly those in urban areas, an opportunity to interact with the electorate as well as get hold of feedback on political problems faster than traditional strategies.

However, some of the rural population and the elderly may not be on Facebook. Some people may also not have smartphones which makes it difficult for them to benefit from the political engagements happening on Facebook. Furthermore, ICT illiteracy may also be a challenge as some may not know how to navigate their party's Facebook pages. Overdependence on Facebook for political campaigning may create problems for political candidates as the reach out to the electorates is limited by the aforementioned challenges. Thus,

as the country gears for the 2023 harmonised elections, a major question to ponder is whether Facebook followers will translate into votes.

YouTube Channels

The use of YouTube videos is more appealing to the electorate in Zimbabwe as viewers can stream live political rallies and debates to stay updated. YouTube plays a very important role in electoral campaigns in Zimbabwe because it is the platform where people will visit to know their candidates (Boulianne, Koc-Michalska and Bimber 2020). What makes YouTube easier to use is that there is no need for one to create an account to view YouTube videos. One simply needs to subscribe to the YouTube channel of interest to get regular updates. In other countries, election results can be streamed live on YouTube as was the case in the 2022 United States of America 2020 elections (Bradder 2019; Brierley and Kramon 2020). Political campaigning in Zimbabwe has been visible on YouTube as political parties such as CCC are making use of YouTube for marketing their candidates and their party manifestoes. Political parties such as the Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) also stream their rallies live on YouTube to reach out to larger audiences as was the case in the 2022 by-elections campaigns. Thus, YouTube presents an opportunity for political players in Zimbabwe to engage with voters and receive feedback on political issues faster (Mare 2020). Nonetheless, it remains to be seen whether YouTube subscriptions and views can translate into votes in the 2023 elections.

Political parties in Zimbabwe have created YouTube channels for regular updates of videos about political programmes and press conferences and for streaming their political rallies. For example, the ruling ZANU-PF party has a YouTube channel called ZANU-PF Official while the CCC party has a channel called CCC TV. In addition to these, other stand-alone YouTube channels propagate political campaigning messages and the main channels Slymedia TV, Nehanda TV, Citizens Voice Network, TechMag TV, Magamba TV, Open parly zw and the HStvLive zim. Some of these channels also facilitate political debates and discussions amongst different political party candidates. In particular, the

HStvLive Zim, TechMag TV, Slymedia TV and Magamba TV conduct regular interviews with candidates ranging from presidential aspirants to aspiring Members of Parliament and ward councillors. Independent radio stations such as ZiFM Stereo also have a YouTube channel (ZiFM Stereo) where politicians are regularly invited to debate and deliberate on current political affairs on the programme known as 'Ask The MP'. Some of these YouTube channels are directly linked to specific political parties as the case with the cde Treasure Basopo channel which campaigns for the CCC as it often streams CCC rallies. Individuals such as Passion Java also campaign for the ruling ZANU-PF on its YouTube Channel Passion Java Records. For example, this was the case on 8 November 2022, this channel streamed a song titled Holy 100 – Ngeyi ft Maski with the background caption I LOVE MY PRESIDENT ED.

However, while YouTube has been used to reach out to the electorate, it appears that its usefulness is limited only to urban areas as rural voters are still left out due to limited internet coverage in rural Zimbabwe. More so, the low-income levels and even cases of no income amongst the rural population in Zimbabwe also make it difficult for them to regularly afford data bundles to stream videos on YouTube. As a result, political candidates in rural areas continue to primarily depend on traditional campaigning media such as posters and physical rallies because their constituencies have limited internet coverage. Even in the urban areas, streaming videos on YouTube could be beyond the reach of some voters because of high data tariffs in Zimbabwe. For example, a 10GB data bundle costs between USD10 to USD15 depending on the network one is using. It may, therefore, even be difficult for the urban population to use YouTube for political engagements with their candidates.

WhatsApp Groups

The demographic of the electorate is changing with the new shift towards new modes of information outreach centred on WhatsApp. The Zimbabwe Media Report (2019) revealed that the use of WhatsApp dominates online interactions in Zimbabwe because WhatsApp data bundles are cheaper in comparison to data bundles for other social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter and

Facebook. WhatsApp users in Zimbabwe account for 44% of people using the internet (Zambasa 2022). WhatsApp has rapidly grown in prominence as a platform for political participation in Zimbabwe (Mungwari and Ndhlebe 2019). This platform has unique features which include allowing the creation of groups of up to 1024 participants and generating large communities of close contacts. WhatsApp political messaging is reaching communities in Zimbabwe, including rural communities where the internet is being accessed primarily by smartphones and campaigners, using it to send photos, documents and messages for election campaigning (Mutsvairo and Muneri 2020).

Political parties like the CCC have created ward-based and Constituency based WhatsApp groups in a bid to establish the day-to-day update of their activities and purpose. For example, in the Warren Park Constituency in Harare, by 1 January 2023, the CCC had WhatsApp groups named CCC Warren Park 1-15. These groups can be joined using the link on the Warren Park Constituency Facebook page. In such political groups, people are informed of where and when conferences will take place and when party rallies will be held. This information is then spread through different social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Campaigners also send promotional messages to the public in WhatsApp groups to motivate people to vote for them (Mare 2020). Campaigners can communicate their manifestos, their vision as well as their party developments with the public via WhatsApp groups.

In 2018, the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) revealed that WhatsApp communications constitute nearly half of all internet traffic in Zimbabwe because of its relatively cheap data tariffs as compared to other internet platforms (POTRAZ Annual Report 2018). For this reason, this platform offers political parties a larger audience in comparison to other online platforms. There has been an increase in the usage of WhatsApp for political dialogue and campaigning in Zimbabwe because WhatsApp is an affordable, reliable, user-friendly and effective way for politicians and parties to engage with the electorate. WhatsApp is the most prominent messaging app with an estimation of two billion users globally (Nizah and Bakar 2021).

The ruling party, ZANU-PF uses WhatsApp for election campaigning through WhatsApp groups such as Young CouplesforED, VendorsforED, VapostoriforED and TeachersforED. The CCC also has WhatsApp groups such as the CCC Citizens Coalition for changes groups which give prompts and automated responses for voters who wish to join the party and also aim at mobilizing supporters to win the common issue and this, in turn, creates direct communication with politicians and the voters. Thus, WhatsApp allows different people to easily get messages and videos on election campaigning almost every day and even share them with friends, family and the community in other groups through message forwarding.

Political parties have created WhatsApp groups to communicate with their supporters in different parts of the country in a cheaper manner. These political parties create WhatsApp groups and share joining links to allow interested people to join and benefit from the messages shared by their leadership in these groups (Mutsvairo and Muneri 2020). On WhatsApp, a message can reach half a million people in one week as it is shared in groups and forwarded to other groups. Thus, regular WhatsApp messages bring political parties and candidates closer to voters. WhatsApp statuses have also been used by candidates and voters to disseminate political messages (Mare 2020). While these statuses disappear after 24 hours, they would have communicated very strong political messages before their lapse. In the 2018 harmonised elections and the 2022 by-elections, results collated at polling stations were shared in WhatsApp groups by polling agents before they were officially announced by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) (Mutsvairo and Ronning 2020). This, however, created controversies as some WhatsApp group results could not match the ones released by the ZEC. One wonders if WhatsApp can be trusted as a digital political communication tool.

However, just like other social media platforms, WhatsApp is not immune from challenges. The major loophole with this platform is that one never knows who and why some people join a WhatsApp group. As long as the link to join is available, then anyone who comes across that link can join the

WhatsApp group. People of different political persuasions can therefore be found in one WhatsApp group since it is difficult to screen group members. Thus, there is no relationship between membership in a WhatsApp group and political preferences. WhatsApp is also used to perpetuate falsehoods because the messages shared on this platform are not validated or linked to a reliable source. Anyone can share anything on WhatsApp. The major challenge of using WhatsApp in rural areas is that due to poor network coverage, it may be difficult for rural voters to download videos and audios shared on this platform. Also power shortages as most of the time the mobile phones may be off making it difficult for the rural electorates to follow political updates on WhatsApp. The next section focuses on the implications of cyberspace campaigning on the 2023 plebiscite in Zimbabwe.

Implications of Cyberspace Election Campaigning on the 2023 Plebiscite in Zimbabwe

Cyberspace campaigning platforms seem to have ignited euphoria among members of the opposition, in particular, those who support the CCC party in Zimbabwe. The assumption one may get is that voter turnout in 2023 may increase from the 2018 figures, because cyberspace platforms have ‘energised’ the urban electorate through regular engagement, particularly on social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. However, political scientists suggest that the popularity of a political party or candidate on social media should not be used to predict their future victory in elections (Saldivar et al 2022). Scholars have argued that persuasive political advertising or marketing of political candidates often has limits on the outcome of an election (Olaniran & Williams 2020). A concern to political parties depending primarily on online campaigning should be on limited internet coverage in rural areas given that the 2022 Census results indicate that the majority (67.5%) of the Zimbabwean population reside in rural areas while the remainder (32.5%) reside in urban centres (Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency 2022). The study findings imply that while cyberspace election campaigning dominates election campaigning ahead of the 2023 elections in Zimbabwe,

this does not in turn translate into votes come the election day because there is no guarantee that active participants on the different online platforms for political participation are registered voters. Also, there is no assurance that the active participants on cyberspace platforms are going to cast their votes on the day of the elections. For example, it is possible that some active participants on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook may be residing in the diaspora and may not be planning to come and vote in the 2023 harmonised elections. Thus, it could be a misjudgement for a political party to predict its success in the forthcoming elections based on followership, likes, views and subscriptions on social media. As such, there is no established relationship between social media following and gaining many votes in the election. The above trajectory seems to apply to the CCC party which seems to have gained more traction on social media leading some of its supporters to develop unsubstantiated victory predictions in the 2023 harmonised elections. One lesson drawn from the 2018 harmonised elections, for example, is that while the ZANU-PF party appeared to be unpopular on the social media platforms in the build-up to that year's elections, it managed to win the elections. This research therefore argues that cyberspace campaigning platforms promote electoral impressionism of winning the elections which can mislead candidates and political parties.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Some political parties and candidates in Zimbabwe have embraced ICTs and internet-based digital platforms to spearhead their electoral campaigns. The main digital platforms used for political campaigning are the national television, radio stations, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp. The use of technology and the Internet in election campaigning is, however, prevalent in urban areas where internet connection is relatively stable in comparison to rural areas. This has allowed some political candidates in urban areas to engage with the electorate, sharing updates and political messages. Political candidates in rural areas continue to primarily depend on traditional campaigning media such as posters because their constituencies have limited internet coverage.

Politicians using cyberspace campaigning strategies often target the youths who constitute the majority population in the country and the most active group on these social media platforms. However, there is no guarantee that these youths are registered voters or that they are resident in Zimbabwe. It is possible that some of the participants in cyberspace are in the diaspora and are not registered voters.

In light of these observations, this chapter makes the following two conclusions: First, despite the ability of digital platforms to enable active engagement between politicians and the urban electorate, these tools still lack the requisite ability to reach out to the larger proportion of the voters in rural areas due to issues such as the digital divide, high data tariffs, poor internet connectivity and general ICT illiteracy. Poor internet coverage in rural Zimbabwe makes it difficult for some political parties who depend primarily on cyberspace campaigning platforms to engage with the rural electorate online. The fact that rural voters have limitations in participating in cyberspace raises questions over the effectiveness of the use of cyberspace platforms to reach out to the majority of the population given that a larger percentage of the Zimbabwean population reside in rural areas. As such, political parties based on cyberspace campaigning may find it difficult to gain the rural vote in the 2023 plebiscite.

Second, the major challenge with the digital elections campaigning tools used by political actors in Zimbabwe has been the spread of fake news, exchange of insults, dominance of irrational debates and mudslinging by cyber ghosts and faceless characters in cyberspace – in what Kim, Park and Rho (2020) term toxic politics. Some political parties are abusing the digital election campaigning tools at their disposal through the defamation of their opponent's character to gain political mileage. Some supporters also abuse digital campaigning platforms by denigrating leaders of other political parties. For example, while Twitter has changed the political landscape in Zimbabwe by allowing equal and unrestricted access interaction between voters and their political representatives, cyber contestation on Twitter has become evident, particularly between Nerorists (CCC followers) and Varakashi (ZANU-

PF followers). The spreading of fake news and mud-sliding between these two rival political groupings has been a major downside to digital election campaigning.

Moreover, while the use of Facebook in election campaigning has brought candidates closer to the electorate, the major downside of using this platform has been the perpetuation of misinformation and propaganda through the use of ghost accounts. In addition, there are some marginalized rural areas with poor network coverage making it difficult to use the Facebook platform to lure voters. High data tariffs in the country also limit the capacity of Facebook users to fully engage with their constituencies. In addition, YouTube and WhatsApp have also been misused by politicians and their supporters to gain political mileage at the expense of other political opponents. For example, some of the videos posted on YouTube by the opposition political parties such as CCC are alleged to be choreographed and meant to tarnish the image of the ruling ZANU-PF as these two parties fiercely battle for votes. This was the case with the purported abduction of one of the CCC activists known as Madzibaba Veshanduko who posted videos of his torture by people purportedly sent by ZANU-PF in March 2022. Furthermore, WhatsApp is a prominent platform for both voters and candidates, but WhatsApp groups have been used by political opponents to de-campaign each other. For example, messages ridiculing political opponents have circulated on WhatsApp groups as strategies to discredit their rivals.

The paper has established that being active on digital media platforms does not guarantee votes for political candidates. As the 2022 by-elections have demonstrated, those who command a large following on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp may be shocked by not only the voter turnout in their constituencies but also the election results. It is therefore critical for political parties and candidates to introspect into why those who follow them on social media are not voting for them when elections are held. Perhaps, people are using social media platforms not to get election updates, but for entrainment purposes.

Given these conclusions, this chapter proffers the following recommendations:

- The development of the ICT infrastructure by the Government of Zimbabwe is critical as this would allow citizens from different parts of the country to be connected to the internet and exercise their right to political participation through cyberspace engagement with the political leadership. Moreover, the POTRAZ Act should be enforced to ensure that internet service providers are controlled from encroaching on the privacy of the citizens when participating in cyberspace.
- The leaders of political parties should be exemplary and show integrity in the manner in which they deploy online digital devices for election campaigning. This can be an important measure for reducing the dissemination of toxic messages by their followers. The Government of Zimbabwe should fairly enforce the Data Protection Act to enable citizens and political actors to use cyberspace election campaigning platforms such as Facebook and Twitter without fear of victimisation.

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CHAPTER THREE

The Role of Electoral Integrity and Campaign Messaging in the 2023 Elections

Tawanda Zinyama

Introduction: Background, Overview and Objectives

In discussing electoral integrity, the Global Commission on Elections, Democracy and Security (2012, p. ii) noted that,

At its root, electoral integrity is a political problem. It depends on public confidence in electoral and political processes. It is not enough to reform institutions; citizens need to be convinced that changes are real and deserve their confidence. Inclusiveness, transparency and accountability are all fundamental to developing that confidence.

Although elections are not the only ingredient of democracy, they are generally accepted as playing a crucial role in deepening and sustaining democratic governance. An election is one of the core variables of democratic rule (UNPD 2002). An election, simply defined, refers to a process whereby a people belonging to a particular country, who are at times referred to variously as either the electorate or voters, periodically choose their national leaders to form a government and manage the affairs of the state on their behalf (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network 2017). The internationally accepted mode of choosing political leaders is a voting system, usually based on the principles of universal suffrage and secret ballot. Voting takes place within well-defined rules, regulations and procedures provided for within national constitutions and electoral laws of individual countries. In Zimbabwe, the electoral process is governed by the national Constitution especially articles 56, 57 and 58. The general administration and supervision of elections is governed by the Electoral Act (as amended) and an autonomous statutory body, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC).

Chapter 2 of the Election Act stipulates clearly that the main functions of the ZEC include administering and managing national and local government elections; establishing and maintaining cooperation with political parties and

other interested civic groups, and enforcing a code of conduct; promoting voter education; preparing and maintaining voters' rolls; and managing election-related disputes. Zimbabwe has held 11 national elections to 2022; the first at independence in 1980 right through to the eleventh being the 2018 elections. The elections have always been competed by different political parties, for example in 1980 there were Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), Patriotic Front – Zimbabwe African People's Union (PF-ZAPU) and United African National Congress (UANC). Post- 2000, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in its various forms participated in the national elections. The 2018 elections had minimal post-voting challenges such as the MDC Alliance declared its candidate the winner which cumulated in a Constitutional court challenge over the presidential election results. Transparency, accountability, and integrity are the key pillars that give impetus for countries to hold elections based on universal values, standards and principles that underline political equality, impartial institutions, and transparent electoral cycle. Even democracies with centuries of practice are not immune from serious irregularities. In the United States, this issue is exemplified by the notorious hanging chads in Florida in 2000 and more recent accusations of voter suppression through overzealous identification requirements during the Obama-Romney contest.

Among the established democracies, however, the United States is far from alone in experiencing problems of maintaining electoral integrity; to the north, the 2006 Canadian general election saw official investigations of the “In and Out” election spending scandal, and the 2011 contests saw alleged misleading “robocalls” and dirty tricks.

In the United Kingdom, despite centuries of experience, reports have documented security vulnerabilities in mail ballots, poor design of ballot papers, occasional miscounts in local elections leading to the wrong declaration of the winner, sporadic fraud by local councilors, failure of electronic voting machines, and lost ballot boxes. Far from benefiting from new technologies and more professional administration, over the last fifty years more and more UK citizens are AWOL from the electoral register.

European countries face new problems pushing at the boundaries of electoral integrity, including contemporary debates about the most appropriate regulation of campaign finance and party funding, the rules governing political broadcasting on television and radio in the era of social media, and potential security flaws associated with the deployment of digital technologies for election administration and internet voting.

Article 21 in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that “the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures,” guaranteeing everyone “the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.”²¹ These principles have been elaborated and endorsed in a long series of subsequent international treaties and instruments, notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which entered into force

in 1976.²² Regional instruments recognizing electoral rights include Article 13 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights of 1981, Article 23 of the American Convention on Human Rights of 1969, and the 1991 Harare Commonwealth Declaration. The 2002 Venice Commission’s Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters supplements these documents.

Given the legitimacy that a credible electoral process can bring, it is the manner in which these elections are managed, more than the specific outcomes that will be significant for shaping Zimbabwe’s governance and security environment. The main argument of this chapter is that the basis for public trust is shaped by the broader political context in which elections take place, not just by the quality of the electoral process. This has both political and technical implications. It is not only the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) that plays a role in facilitating the acceptance of credible election results. How can Zimbabweans strengthen public confidence in an election and increase the likelihood that its outcomes are accepted? This question can be structured differently as

what characteristics of political institutions and processes can lead political actors to accept electoral losses? Zimbabwe needs political actors who have a propensity to win magnanimously or lose graciously. The campaign messaging is also central in an election. A good quality campaign is characterised by several dimensions including the calibre of the message content as well as the credibility and accessibility of the communication channels.

Methodology

This research included extensive documentary examinations of legislation, field reports and news material, as well as existing academic literature. Examples of sources consulted include European Union Election Observer Mission, ZESN Report on the 2018 Harmonised Election Observation, Commonwealth Observer Group: Zimbabwe Harmonised Elections 2018 and IRI/NDI Zimbabwe International Election Observation Mission Reports.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The Concept of Electoral Integrity

Electoral integrity takes various versions such as “electoral malpractice,” “flawed elections,” “misconduct,” “manipulated contests,” “rigged” or “stolen” elections, and the popular notion of “electoral fraud” (Norris, 2014, p. 7-8). A parallel range of positive terms commonly deployed in diplomatic language, election observer reports, and scholarly studies, where contests are described as competitive,” “credible,” “acceptable,” “genuine,” “clean,” “democratic,” reflecting the “will of the people” or the standard diplomatic rhetoric of “free and fair.”

In this study, the concept of electoral integrity understood in terms of international commitments and global norms, endorsed in a series of authoritative conventions, treaties, protocols, and guidelines. These universal standards apply to all countries worldwide throughout the electoral cycle, including during the pre-electoral period, the campaign, on polling day, and in its aftermath. The electoral cycle is understood as a sequential process broken down into eleven components, ranging from the election laws, electoral procedures, and boundary delimitation to the voting process, vote

count, and declaration of results (Norris, 2014, p. 8). Like complex links in a chain, violating international standards in any one of the sequential steps undermines principles of electoral integrity.

A widely acceptable definition is that posited by the Kofi Annan Foundation (2012, p. 2),

...any election that is based on the democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality as reflected in international standards and agreements, and is professional, impartial, and transparent in its preparation and administration throughout the electoral cycle.

This definition is consistent with general conduct of elections framework provided for in international, regional, and national conventions and legislations. For instance, Article 21(3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) provides that,

the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

This forms the basis upon which the regional and national frameworks governing the conduct of elections are founded.

In Africa, electoral processes are governed by the African Union Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa (2002) which outlines the following guiding

principles for democratic elections:

- Democratic elections are the basis of the authority of any representative government;
- Regular elections constitute a key element of the democratisation process and therefore, are essential ingredients for good governance, the rule of law, the maintenance and promotion of peace, security, stability and development;
- The holding of democratic elections is an important dimension in conflict prevention, management and resolution;

- Democratic elections should be conducted freely and fairly, under democratic constitutions and in compliance with supportive legal instruments, under a system of separation of powers that ensures in particular, the independence of the judiciary at regular intervals, as provided for in National Constitutions and by impartial, all-inclusive competent accountable electoral institutions staffed by well-trained personnel and equipped with adequate logistics.

At regional level, there are Southern African Development Community (SADC) Principles for Conducting Democratic Elections in the furtherance of democratic elections including:

- Encourage the full participation of all citizens in democratic and development processes;
- Ensure that all citizens enjoy fundamental freedoms and human rights,
- Including freedom of association, assembly and expression;
- Promote and respect the values of electoral justice which include integrity, impartiality, fairness; professionalism, efficiency and regularity of elections;
- Uphold and guarantee the impartiality and independence of the Judiciary, the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) and all other electoral institutions;
- Ensure the acceptance of the election results by all electoral stakeholders as proclaimed to have been free, fair, transparent, credible and peaceful by the competent and independent national electoral authorities in accordance with the respective laws of the land (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa 2015, p.9).

Implied in these continental and regional trends is that technical aspects of ZEC's sustainability, as well as its contribution to the legitimacy of democratic institutions and to the enhancement of the rule of law in a democratic state, whether on the part of the executive, legislative or judicial branch of government are critical. As an institution that applies the rules governing elections, ZEC has occupied the heart of discussion and practice on the critical question of effective citizen participation in the public affairs of the country. The management of building confidence in elections is more than ensuring compliance with legal

obligations or the effective performance of the electoral management body, or the absence of electoral malpractice. This means that both political and technical factors are critical for building confidence in the electoral process.

Elections are not an end in themselves (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2021; United Nations, 2013). Their purpose, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Section 3 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe is to ascertain the will of people regarding their government. They are processes to confer legitimacy to govern and to peacefully resolve political competition. The nexus between the technical quality of an election and the legitimacy of its outcomes is complex. This is because electoral outcomes can be accepted regardless their imperfections such as vote counting inaccuracies. For example, former President of United States of America, Donald Trump, is yet to accept that Joe Biden won fairly, yet that does not mean American elections were not free and fair. In other words, even where elections are free and fair, some entities will habitually cast aspersions only because it's not them at the elevated electoral podium. The good thing about Zimbabwe is that there is a constitutional provision for arbitration in constitutional court. Unfortunately, where citizens also do not have confidence in the court system, the judgement would invariably remain a contentious issue. Such is human nature.

Contestation of the Concept Free and Fair Elections

As a general concept, the criteria of “free and fair” imply freedom from coercion and fairness as the correlate of impartiality. An international consensus exists on a number of dimensions of these concepts: it serves as a guideline for both election observation (Elklit and Svensson, 1997) and the management of elections by electoral officials (IDEA, 1998).

Before polling day, the concept of “free” elections implies freedom of movement, speech, assembly and association; freedom from fear in connection with the election; unimpeded candidate registration; and equal as well as universal suffrage. The “fairness” concept includes a transparent electoral process; the absence of discrimination against political parties; no obstacles to voter registration; an independent and impartial election administration; impartial

treatment of candidates by the police, the army and the courts; equal opportunities for political parties and independent candidates; impartial voter-education programs; an orderly election campaign in which a code of conduct is observed; equal access to publicly controlled media; impartial allotment of public funds to political parties when this is relevant; and no misuse of government facilities for campaign purposes.

On polling day, the “free” standard implies the opportunity to vote. The “fair” standard implies access to all polling stations by representatives of the political parties, accredited local and international observers and the media; a secret ballot; no intimidation of voters; effective design of ballot papers; proper ballot boxes; impartial assistance to voters if necessary; proper counting procedures, treatment of void ballot papers and precautionary measures when transporting election materials; and impartial protection of polling stations.

After polling day, the “free” standard requires legal recourse for complaints, and the “fair” standard calls for the official and expeditious announcement of election results; impartial treatment of any election complaints; impartial reports on the election results by the media; and acceptance of the election results by everyone involved (Elklit and Svensson 1997:35).

Campaign Messaging

A campaign message is the overall image, narrative, and ideology that a political campaign is trying to communicate on behalf of a candidate. Campaign messaging is the tactical deployment of the candidate’s message through all means of communication available to the campaign. Types of messaging can include explicit or implicit arguments and contrasts; insights into the candidate’s values, story, and achievements; messages intended to motivate volunteer recruitment or persuade and mobilise voters; or background on the candidate’s positions on important issues. There are five elements of an effective campaign message.

Campaign narrative: The campaign’s narrative encompasses the candidate’s personal story, message, and argument; the arc is the strategic sequence by which the campaign directs attention to various elements.

Campaign argument: The argument of a campaign is the candidate's meta message for a specific contest in a specific political landscape. Elections are about choices, and the argument is the core reasoning presented by a candidate for why voters should choose them. The campaign argument acts as a filter through which all messaging and communications need to pass in order to ensure alignment and consistency with the campaign's central appeal to voters.

Campaign brand: The brand of a candidacy depends on the type of candidacy and campaign being run. Candidates for office generally fall into one of the following categories, based on their background, their positioning, and the nature of the race in which they compete.

Campaign slogan: A campaign slogan distills the candidate's message and/ or argument into a succinct phrase used in speeches, on advertisements, and might even become a chant at campaign events, like the "Yes We Can" slogan of the 2008 Obama campaign. Slogans for incumbent candidates, for example, tend to discourage voters from voting for change, as exemplified by versions of the idiom "don't change horses in midstream" used during Abraham Lincoln's 1864 reelection campaign, or "four more years of the full dinner pail," a slogan from the 1900 William McKinley reelection campaign. Cycling through too many slogans can indicate confusion within the campaign on its singular message and authentic argument. A good campaign slogan is a concise, catchy line that effectively communicates the central campaign message.

Political campaigns have a variety of tools at their disposal to communicate a campaign message in run up to Election Day. These are discussed below briefly.

Correspondence with supporters: Whether through direct mail, email, or text messages, effective communication with supporters is an integral part of communications. Political mail is useful for increasing a candidate's name ID and highlighting accolades and public service to voters who might not know much about them. Email and text messaging are used more often for voters who already support the candidate or their respective party.

Media stories: The media plays a huge part in crafting the public's view of political candidates. Engaging with the media through press releases, press conferences,

interviews or off-the-record conversations is an important part of campaign communication.

Campaign ads: Campaign ads are another tentpole of campaign messaging and come in a few different formats. Print ads are the oldest form of political ads but have waned in popularity in the twenty first century. Television and radio ads are still very popular as these mediums are incredibly popular amongst older demographics who make up a disproportionate percentage of voters. Internet advertising gives campaigns the ability to micro target their messaging to more specific pockets of the voting population. Internet advertising is particularly useful when trying to reach younger voters.

Data-driven personalisation is emerging as a central force in political communication. Political micro-targeting has the potential to enhance political engagement and to make it easier and more effective for political parties and movements to communicate with potential voters and supporters. This includes sending out tailored messages.

Micro-targeting, whether used as a marketing technique for products and services or in political campaigns, involves three steps: the collection of personal data, using the data for profiling and then sending out tailored messages.

Findings and Discussions

Election Management and the Zimbabwe Constitution

The electoral legal framework is composed of the constitutional provisions, legislation, rules, regulations and procedures that govern the electoral system design, the formation of electoral institutions and bodies, and the implementation of electoral activities. An inclusive, fair, concise and uncontested legal and institutional framework is an important foundation for successful and peaceful elections (Carothers and Feldman 2023).

These guiding principles are confirmed in section 155 (1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe which outlines the principles of electoral system,

Elections, which must be held regularly, and referendums, to which this

Constitution applies must be - peaceful, free and fair; conducted by secret ballot; based on universal adult suffrage and equality of votes; and free from violence and other electoral malpractices.

In this instance, section 155 of the Constitution as read with the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) emphasises the principles of electoral integrity. Elections are regarded as free when they are conducted in a manner that allows all those entitled to vote, to register and vote freely in expression of their choices. Furthermore, elections are considered to be fair when all registered political parties have equal rights to contest the elections, campaign for voter support and hold meetings and rallies. A question one may pose therefore, would be, to what extent do elections in Zimbabwe abide by the supreme law of the land in as far as promoting electoral integrity?

Issues Arising in the 2018 Harmonised General Elections

Central issues that characterised the 2018 General Elections campaign were job creation unemployment, the combatting of corruption, industrialisation among others. This particular election came at a time where Zimbabwe faced multiple challenges: a stagnant economy, increased corruption and a flagrant lack of accountability and a pressure to restore investor and international confidence in the future developmental trajectory of Zimbabwe. Zimbabweans were no longer interested in rhetoric, but wanted to see concrete socio-economic change for the better. There is no doubt that party loyalty will not necessarily remain the deciding factor in future elections as Zimbabweans have become more issue-based voters. Mothlante Commission (2018) Report noted that on the 1st August 2018, demonstrators took to the streets of Harare demanding the release of results in elections that had been held. The demonstration turned into a riot which was violently suppressed by the police and the army. Six people were killed by gunfire and 35 injured, and there was considerable damage to property. During the 2018 elections, the media and citizen groups who monitored the voting process reported problems experienced at the polls such as independence of Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), voter intimidation and threats of violence, especially in rural areas.

Youth and Elections

Effective participation of *youth in politics* is critical to democratic developments around the globe. In speeches at the opening of the Child Parliament in June 2019, President Mnangagwa reiterated his view on youth as ‘partners in development’ and made an appeal for their contribution (The Sunday Mail, 2019, p2). Voter apathy, a politically disengaged youth, and voter abstention proved an issue of great concern in the 2018 General Elections. Many reasons are proffered to explain the decline in voter participation in General and Local Government Elections. These range from disillusionment due to poor service delivery to a lack of trust in political parties, which has been declining over the two decades. These issues, coupled with an increasingly disengaged electorate, will influence the outcome of the 2023 General Elections.

The 2018 General Elections proved to be a turning point in the electoral history of opposition parties. There is a real possibility that they marked the beginning of the decline of the largest opposition party in the electoral playing field. However, this does not mean that the ruling party, ZANU-PF is able to capitalise on the declining support for the MDCA or CCC, instead of casting a vote for ruling party, voters abstain from participating in elections, particularly in urban areas. This could be related to the political messaging and campaign rhetoric that the opposition draws on in order to entice voters to cast a ballot for them. Yet, it would appear that campaign rhetoric and political messaging do not necessarily resonate with the political intentions or views of Zimbabwe’s electorate. Simply put, how effective are political parties in capturing a disillusioned voter?

Credibility of the Electoral Process

A study undertaken by Afrobarometer in 2018 revealed that more than 65% of the respondents generally think that Zimbabwe has no capacity to hold free and fair. Respondents pointed three main indicators of a free and fair election as the independence of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, absence of violence and the ability to campaign freely. Based on these, political parties and state institutions are urged to respect the law and guarantee the right

to campaign freely. The integrity and credibility of ZEC in the eyes of the electorate is fundamental in any functioning democracy. Key political actors about 65.5% do not trust ZEC as an election management body. Therefore, significant public confidence building measures should be undertaken by ZEC.

Independence of Zimbabwe Election Commission

The ZEC is a recognised constitutional body where everyone, except the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), voted for that Constitution in 2013, why then is the ZEC construed with so much suspicion by Zimbabwe's opposition parties? Why also thousands of civil society organisations always accuse the ZEC of being captured by the ruling party, ZANU-PF. In simpler language, the ZEC has, for the entirety of its existence, been fingered as being complicit and culpable in ZANU-PF manipulation of electoral results. It is not for this author to say whether this accusation is true or false. This is so because ZEC does not own Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services (ZPCSs) or the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). These institutions are state controlled. Therefore, according to the Zimbabwe Constitution, it is not correct to blame ZEC for the transgressions of ZRP, ZNA, ZPCSs or CIO where freeness and fairness of elections is disrupted.

In Section 156 of Zimbabwe's Constitution, ZEC must ensure that all elections are simple, accurate, verifiable, secure and transparent. However, what powers does ZEC have to apply to prevent ZANU-PF or MDCA or Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) supporters from assaulting other parties' supporters?

For the conduct of the campaigns, the ZEC has a responsibility to help create an atmosphere conducive to holding a peaceful, impartial and valid poll. In this connection, it is usually useful to develop a written "code of conduct" to which all parties contribute and subsequently subscribe in a formal undertaking to abide by its terms.

The ZEC has taken a number of steps in the past to open the electoral process, including establishment of Multi-Party Liaison Committees (MPLCs) at the

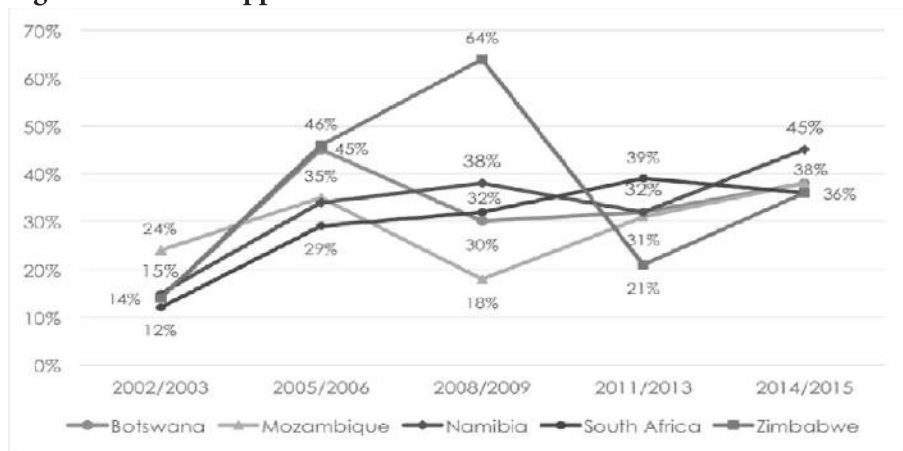
national and provincial levels, early outreach to civil society, and cooperatively facilitating the government's decision to accredit international election observers from beyond the region for the first time since 2002 in 2018.

In helping to develop a democratic culture, the ZEC should carry out or encourage the conduct of non-partisan voter education programmes. It should also strive continuously to improve the quality of the services it offers to the electorate and to promote public understanding of the democratic process.

The Trust Question of Opposition Parties

An Afrobarometer study undertaken in 36 African countries in 2014/2015 found that opposition parties had the lowest levels of popular trust among 12 types of institutions and leaders. While trust in ruling parties was 46%, it was only 35% for opposition parties.

Figure 1: Trust in opposition Political Parties



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Opposition political parties? (Percentage who say 'somewhat' or 'a lot') Afrobarometer.

In Namibia and Mozambique levels of trust in opposition parties were found to be at the highest levels ever. But in Zimbabwe trust in the political opposition declined sharply after 2008/2009. Similarly, the proportion of Zimbabweans who said they felt "close to" an opposition party dropped from 45% in 2009

to 19% in 2014¹. This could be attributable to degeneration of the largest opposition party, MDC through the loss of its moral stature, the erosion of its integrity and disillusionment with its performance as an opposition party during the 2013 and 2018 harmonised elections. Further tensions arose as party bosses sought to entrench control of MDCT to the detriment of free expression and debate on the political and policy trajectory of the political party.

This dramatic reversal of fortune provides an important lesson for opposition parties. Thus, infighting and increasing fractionalisation have shaped public opinion about MDCA or CCC viability as a party. But public dissatisfaction with government performance doesn't necessarily translate into perceptions that opposition parties could do a better job. This is particularly so in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Opposition parties might do better if they highlight their policy platforms and gain citizen confidence in their plans and capabilities.

Election Campaigns: Credibility and Impact on Party Support

A good quality campaign is characterised by several dimensions including the calibre of the message content as well as the credibility and accessibility of the communication channels. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to comprehensively assess all campaigns of political parties in Zimbabwe. The study was confined to ZANU-PF and MDC. Suffice to say is that campaign messages should be credible, compelling, internally congruent and consistent over time. While voters need competing information to make choices between parties, each party should:

- Keep their campaign messages short, simple and direct (Schnur, 1999);
- Ensure that messages are consistent, in other words, not at odds with each other (Weaver, 1996);
- Integrate their messages by means of a carefully devised campaign theme (Marquette, 1996).

¹The Conversation (2017), why opposition parties in Southern Africa struggle to win power. <https://theconversation.com/why-opposition-parties-in-southern-africa-struggle-to-win-power-72889>.

Clearly a political party can expect to perform well if it has high levels of credibility (trusted by voters) and the party weaves its campaign messages together into a well-blended and internally consistent theme. What campaign messaging did political parties in Zimbabwe present to voters since their formations? Furthermore, how did the messaging intersect with the political context as well as the behaviour and strategic choices of political parties? Is there any impact that can be inferred on party fortunes? These were some of the questions the study tried to answer.

Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF)

Since 1980 the ZANU-PF has won every national election with a clear majority except 2008. This was ZANU-PF's worst national performance by obtaining 43.24% at the national level, as shown in Table 1 below. In the parliamentary elections, ZANU-PF lost its majority in the House of Assembly for the first time since independence in 1980, as the two factions of the MDC won most of the seats.

Table 1: 29 March 2008 Zimbabwe Election Results

Candidate	Party	Votes	%votes
Tsvangirai, Morgan	Movement for Democratic Change – Tsvangirai	1 195 562	47.87
Mugabe, Robert Gabriel	Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front	1 079 730	43.24
Makoni, Herbert Stanley Simba	Independent	207 470	8.31
Towungana, Langton	Independent	14 503	0.58
Total		2 497 265	100.00

Source: ZESN 2008

However, ZANU-PF's messaging² has shown significant consistency since the 1980 founding elections. The ZANU-PF has proven to be a formidable campaigner built on a methodical and professional approach to campaigning.

²Ideology, committed revolutionaries, empower bank got US\$ 12 million capitalisation in 2018.

In its formal messaging the ZANU-PF has stuck to its script, irrespective of the political context and internal challenges. However, the ZANU-PF's messaging served it well in 1980, 1985, 1990 and 1995, from 2000 the messaging alone was unpersuasive to voters.

Since 1980 the main thrust of the ZANU-PF's campaign has been that it is the only legitimate party that had the competence to improve the lives of the people in Zimbabwe. A key message related to its partnership with the people in pursuing this goal. The campaign message exhibited the role of ZANU-PF in ending British colonialism. This is evident in its election manifesto and campaign slogans "Zimbabwe will never be a colony again". "The Land is the economy and the Economy is the Land". Since 1980, the ZANU-PF has run its campaign around the following key themes:

- Outlining the colonial past and the ZANU-PF's contribution to overcoming colonialism;
- The achievements of the ZANU-PF since coming into power, in particular emphasizing the fact that the achievements since the advent of democracy, delivered by the ZANU-PF should be celebrated;
- Acknowledging challenges and shortcomings in relation to its goals and providing reasons for them;
- Drawing attention to the ZANU-PF unique strength, experience and commitment to deal with the pressing socio-economic challenges facing Zimbabwe; and
- Setting out its future plans for dealing with their stated goals.

The 2018 General Elections saw a substantial change in the overall campaign theme of the ZANU-PF, whilst maintaining degrees of consistency with previous campaigns. Rather than emphasising thirty eighty years of democracy, the ZANU-PF campaigned under the promise of a "New Dawn", "New Dispensation" under Emmerson Mnangagwa. The 2018 manifesto was entitled "Unite, fight corruption, develop, re-engage, create jobs". Emmerson Mnangagwa emphasised that "The Voice of the People is the Voice of God". In the foreword to the 2018 ZANU-PF Manifesto, Emmerson Mnangagwa

promised the electorate that:

ZANU PF, where the focus and preoccupation of the new administration is opening the country for business, fighting corruption, creating jobs, modernising the public sector and promoting investment, economic empowerment re-aligning to an investor friendly trajectory leading to economic growth and employment creation (ZANU-PF, 2018).

The purpose was to galvanise and rejuvenate Zimbabweans. The 2018 manifesto proclaimed that:

ZANU PF's vision is to transform Zimbabwe into a middle-income economy by 2030. ZANU PF will focus aggressively on re-opening up the country for business with the global community so as to rebuild our industries, create more jobs, eradicate the scourge of poverty and uplift people's livelihoods.

It also proclaimed that "after a difficult time we are on the cusps of a new era of hope and renewal; - the New Dawn is upon us". Emmerson Mnangagwa acknowledged the ZANU-PF's wrongdoing and promised organisational renewal. The focus on a new dawn, renewal; and rebuilding that would eradicate corruption can be seen as an admission that the ZANU-PF's failed in governance as well as the negative effect of the Mugabe presidency. While a difficult and perhaps risky message to deliver to the electorate, it spoke to the reality that the ZANU-PF and the country faced.

Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)

The MDC started out as a major party known as the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) on 11 September 1999. Since 1999 the MDC maintained continuity in its campaigning messaging over time, particularly focusing on the electoral dominance of ZANU-PF. However, at times, its messaging has suffered from a lack of internal consistency. For example, an unconvincing, somewhat populist platform to campaign against black economic empowerment and the fast-track land reform programmes in favour of a largely unrestricted free market and more flexible labour laws amounted to contradictory messages. The MDC emphasised that the ZANU-PF lacked competence and integrity. The MDC has consistently emphasised the following key message to the electorate:

- Mugabe must go;
- The ZANU-PF's policies are weak, they had performed poorly since coming into power and failed Zimbabwe in a number of key areas;
- That the ZANU-PF lacked integrity as illustrated by high levels corruption;
- People must always remember that the CCC is a solution to the problem. We are not the problem. The problem is ZANU-PF and citizens must not allow to be distracted from that": This has become a common statement uttered by CCC leaders;
- I (Nelson Chamisa) will be a better leader than Emmerson Mnangagwa; and
- We have series of workable policies that would deal with Zimbabwe's problems.

The MDC, opted to attack the ZANU-PF on its record in respect of human rights and economic management. The MDC's manifesto states that industrialisation is the key to economic growth. The party recognises the inequality in land distribution but emphasises the need for transparency and adherence to the rule of law. The manifesto stresses the need to reduce the budget deficit and stabilise the Zimbabwe dollar by re-opening negotiations with the donor community and multilateral agencies and accelerating the privatisation of public enterprises. It advocates free health services and free education at primary levels. The MDC slogan 'Vote for Change' stressed the importance of replacing ZANU-PF with a party that could effectively manage the economy. To simply say "ZANU-PF must go and MDC has the economic solution" is inadequate to win the hearts and minds of the electorate.

In the 2013 General Elections, the MDC highlighted the fact that it was ready to take office and presented itself as an alternative government rather than just an opposition party. The MDC-T Election Manifesto 2013 had a slogan, "A New Zimbabwe-The Time is Now". For the 2018 General Elections, MDC-T transformed itself into MDC Alliance. The MDC Alliance is a coalition of seven political parties; the Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T), the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), People's Democratic Party

(PDP), Zimbabwe People First, Transform Zimbabwe, Multi-Racial Christian Democracy (MCD) and ZANU Ndonga. The 2018 election presented an opportunity for new leadership for MDC Alliance, Nelson Chamisa. Nelson Chamisa's campaign message was that:

Let us all build a NEW nation, a NEW narrative and a NEW Zimbabwe, built on pillars of forgiveness, peace, great ideas, alternative policies, freedom, tolerance and patriotism. We will make Zimbabwe the jewel of Africa and the world by 2023 (Nelson Chamisa, 2018).

The MDCA's 2018 election campaign Manifesto theme was "New Zimbabwe pledge for a Sustainable and Modernisation Agenda for Real Transformation". There are several problems that have hindered the MDCA's messaging. The slogan "Vote MDCA for real change" raised questions about whether the change from colonialism to democracy was artificial. These slogans were polarising. In 2018, rather than calibrating its messaging to align with the new political context, the MDCA continued its attack politics. Additionally, between 2005 and 2021 the MDCA struggled with major internal divisions and leadership issues which affected its credibility. Nelson Chamisa, who became leader of the CCC in 2021, faced immense challenges around the direction of the CCC. In 2021, the CCC saw a massive reversal of fortunes. The drop in CCC support can be explained by its ambivalence on key issues, its leadership challenges and its poor management of the party.

The MDCA's demise was finalised by internal organisational difficulties, outlandish inconsistencies in its campaign rhetoric, lack of congruence between its messages as well as its poor strategic choices. The party scored low on credibility, message consistency and congruence its messages, for instance, it paid dearly at the polls in 2013.

In summary, for a party to perform well it needs high levels of credibility, general consistency of messaging over time as well congruency of messages in an election campaign. A good campaign is only the starting point or rather it should be the end of a productive inter-campaign period. What happens between elections are also important to voters. Poor decisions and destructive

behaviour resulted in negative perceptions that had harmful repercussions for party performance at the polls. The ZANU-PF had consistent and internally coherent messaging but was affected by credibility issues after the 2002 presidential elections. The MDC struggled with credibility issues and CCC has serious organisational and leadership challenges. Voters are not fools; they are active agents consuming relevant political information.

Organisation of the Opposition Parties

Generally, all organisations need a structure for effective management. A structure must manifest in *elected leadership, constitution and processes*. There are many glaring weaknesses in the way CCC is structured and it is true that the opposition has a long way to go in terms of ideology, plan, structures and many aspects of leadership. Meanwhile, CCC is a collection of friends without positions of power and proper administration of party affairs. One analyst argued that CCC needs a congress to legitimise the leadership. The modern political discourse does not only require impression and images. It also requires content. This has prompted, even the western community, particularly the Americans to doubt the capability of Nelson Chamisa to emerge in the 2023 harmonised elections due to his indecisiveness and failure to assert himself as a vibrant leader. As a result, one political scientist has already concluded that “CCC’s defeat in the 2023 harmonised elections is a foregone conclusion” (Mavedzenge, 2022).

Less than eight months towards the 2023 election, Nelson Chamisa is still running the CCC without any formal structures and without a constitution. The party is financially broke and does not have an organisationally driven fundraising strategy. He operates and runs the movement through unelected secret structures. There are no internal procedures for decision making. He holds meetings with his lieutenants only when he wants. For any organisation to be effective, competent people must be appointed into various positions of responsibility. Running an organisation in this manner creates and promotes internal fissures, disgruntlement and demobilisation as other leaders, at both the national and community levels feel that the party has become Chamisa’s

personal fiefdom. One political commentator argues that the opposition needs to prove it is a better alternative than the current government.

It is not always the case that the opposition should be making noise. The opposition should actually proffer alternative policies that are sound. But as for the MDC Alliance we have not seen them, we have just seen some rhetoric, some tweets and press statements masquerading as policy positions.

He continues: “The portfolios of the MDC Alliance are actually in rupture; they are bereft of policy ideas and prescriptions. What is CCC’s policy on economic management rather than just accusing ZANU-PF? What is CCC’s policy in terms of health provision? What are the alternative policy prescriptions of the CCC to deal with poverty, unemployment and inequality?” “Silence in the midst of a pool of multi-pronged crises is never a strategy. Instead, it exposes dearth of strategy”.

Acceptance of Electoral Outcome

When contestants in an election accept its outcome, they pass a vote of confidence in the electoral system while, at the same time, according the verdict of the electorate the necessary respect. This is an issue Zimbabwe needs to address as it prepares for 2023 general harmonised elections. A leaf can be taken from Zambia’s 2021 presidential elections. A delightful but African rarity was the spectacle of then outgoing President Edgar Lungu who conceded defeat “with astonishing grace and dignity and further by graciously handing over the reins of power. However, there were some blemishes in the Zambian elections though they faded into pardonable insignificance when compared to the tragic case of Kenya. There were anxious and impatient moments after the voting resulting in short outburst of violence protesting the delays in relaying and announcing the results. However, these strains were minor and virtually all observers declared the voting process “credible, free and fair”. What really accounted for this? Two major variables can determine a country’s political trajectory. Firstly, the agency in the form of leadership, specifically political leadership. Secondly, the structure including history and the institutional framework. For a sustainably positive trajectory, often the two must go hand

in glove, complementing each other. Conversely, where the two are perverted, for example, predatory leadership and defective or weak institutions, the combination produces a toxic and unstable and often combustible outcome. The cardinal lesson from Zambia is that a combination of upright leadership and strong, professional institutions is the antidote to what Andreas Schedler has called the “menu of manipulation; such a combination of agency and structure is a developmental but rare one, at least in Africa. Whether the Zambian contagion will or will not infect Zimbabwe in 2023 will depend largely on the outcome of the agency and structure combination.

Foreign Interests and Interference in Elections

The United Kingdom Parliament has shown incessant interest in Zimbabwe’s ensuing 2023 General Elections. For instance, one of the UK Lords was quoted saying:

My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Oates, deserves all our warm congratulations, not just on this debate but on keeping Zimbabwe on our agenda, considering its past and continuing connections with this country. Nevertheless, despite the relative success of the Opposition, the provisions of the 2013 constitution were serially violated throughout the elections, raising grave concerns about the conduct of next year’s general election. State media outlets were brazenly used to denigrate opposition candidates in contravention of Section 61 of the Zimbabwe constitution requiring such outlets to “be impartial” and to “afford fair opportunity for the presentation of divergent views and dissenting opinions.” (UK Parliament, 2022).

Furthermore, the UK Parliament (2022) alleged that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission has failed in its duty to provide for the “proper custody and maintenance of voters’ rolls” or to ensure that elections were conducted “efficiently, freely, fairly and transparently and in accordance with the law”, as required by Section 239 of the constitution. All these statements clearly indicate unwarranted political interferences in the domestic affairs of Zimbabwe. This may cause other political players to take hard stance regarding creating a level political playing field. The issue of the diaspora vote was also discussed in the UK Parliament. For instance:

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking, if any, in response to the petition highlighting the disenfranchisement of around five million Zimbabweans in the diaspora, which was presented at 10 Downing Street by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Organisation on 2 December 2021 (UK Parliament, 2022).

The United Kingdom has pledged to engage South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa to lead other African leaders to push President Emmerson Mnangagwa to ensure that Zimbabwe holds free, fair and credible elections in 2023. (Pindula.com, 2022). However, ZANU-PF spokesperson Tafadzwa Mugwadi informed this study that ZANU-PF as a party is very popular with the electorate and does not need the help of ZEC. He further argued that,

The fake agenda about reforms is being fronted by the CCC and its puppet masters in EU and US who want to find a smokescreen to justify continued illegal sanctions on Zimbabwe beyond 2023.

Gleaned from these UK Parliament debates is that Britain's position on 2023 General Elections is that Zimbabwean will not be able to hold free and fair elections. This position is well covered by NewZimbabwe.com (2022). The use of propaganda and misinformation to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries is not new, but events since 2016 have heightened awareness across the globe of how changes in social media platforms, political norms, and campaign financing rules have enabled foreign actors to influence elections on an unprecedented scale. What do voters think when outside powers become de facto participants in a country's election?

What are the Instrumental Consequences of Electoral Integrity?

If contests continue to be seriously flawed, or even failed, important problems are suspected to follow for the legitimacy of elected authorities. Despite the ubiquity of this common assumption, the systematic evidence supporting this claim has not been clearly investigated across a range of countries, let alone established. In long-standing democracies such as the United States, Britain, and Canada, it is commonly believed that malpractices and irregularities are likely to corrode citizens' trust in the electoral process and confidence in

democracy, depress voter turnout and civic engagement, and thereby distort political representation. These claims have reinforced calls for institutional reforms and better performance standards to strengthen democratic legitimacy. Elections can be problematic even in established democracies with centuries of experience. Elsewhere around the world, however, elections are now attempted under highly challenging circumstances, as exemplified by contests in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Myanmar. Elections occur in fragile states where regimes lack deep reservoirs of popular legitimacy, as a routine part of the peacebuilding process restoring states in many war-torn nations, in poor, ethnically diverse and illiterate societies with weak state capacity, and in countries with little or even no collective memories of democratic elections. In these sorts of challenging contexts, flaws – or even failures in elections – are widely believed to have a serious impact, potentially fueling social instability, riots, and violence, undermining fragile gains in democratization, and triggering popular uprisings seeking regime change.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The field of election administration is a technically and politically demanding enterprise, requiring sound management and specialised skills. The outcome of an election can literally become a life-or-death issue. There are many instances where lives have been lost in the outcry that follows a contested electoral process when candidates or parties refuse to accept the election results. The classic example is Zimbabwe's 29 March 2008 general harmonised elections. Thus, ZEC must ensure that elections are not only technically sound but also politically acceptable and legitimate. As a result, there must be little room for errors that may call into question the integrity of the electoral process. A further challenge for ZEC is that a negative public perception of elections often leads to a rise in voter apathy, which impacts ZEC's ability to deliver a credible and transparent election. This responsibility of ZEC is huge, and the pressure is compounded by the fact that there are few resources that election managers can access to improve their performance and ensure that elections meet the high expectations. Therefore, there is need for both state

and non-state stakeholders to continuously review current policies, laws and institutional frameworks that pertain to elections as well as for the development of collective actions that promote electoral transparency and integrity.

The future of voting is one in which a clear tension must be managed. Zimbabwe must prevent bad actors from corrupting the electoral process while delivering the means to provide suffrage to an electorate that is growing in size and complexity. Whether an election and its outcomes enjoy credibility in the eyes of all stakeholders will depend on the extent to which the democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality as well as other international obligations are respected, and on the extent to which the election is professional, impartial, accurate and transparent in all stages of its administration.

Political parties can achieve a highly detailed understanding of the behaviour, opinions and feelings of voters, allowing parties to cluster voters in complex groups. Such clusters can subsequently be targeted with online political advertisements that speak to their concerns and that are in line with their opinions. These online messages can only be seen by those voters in the targeted clusters.

In 2023, it is projected that 75% of voters will be youths, compared to 2013 when 64% of voters were young people. There will be two million teens who have turned or will be turning 18 by election time in 2023. There is no better time to embrace bulk SMS campaign than now to reach those that do not have access to smartphone devices with social media platforms.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Beyond the Quota System and Prospects for Meaningful Participation of Women in the Zimbabwean 2023 Harmonised Elections

Oripha Chimwara

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to examine the efficacy of the quota system as a measure to engender gender equality ahead of the 2023 Harmonised elections. However, it begins with a discussion on women's participation in politics followed by a cursory view of the international and national contexts in which the discourse and conventions on women's participation have been formulated and implemented.

Historically, the participation of women in politics has been weak compared to their male counterparts. This is both in terms of voting and candidature in elections (Commonwealth 2018: 8). That contradicts the demographic reality where women constitute half of the world's population, comprising 50 percent of the labor force and at the same time constituting one billion of the human beings living in poverty (International Republic Institute (IRI) 2016: 4; Ballington 2002: 1). Such practice is not in tandem with the democratic ethos on the participation of all eligible citizenry including women and can be critiqued at two main levels, that is the representation and efficacy view. Firstly, the representation view is premised on the notion that fair representation in key decision-making bodies and political offices is a central tenet of democracy. In this case, 'fairness' is understood as the extent to which political office holders reflect the communities they represent (Commonwealth 2018: 8). Consequently, since women constitute a larger share of the electorate, they should equally be represented in similar numbers in political positions. Similarly, the significance of democracy as a system of governance will only assume its dynamic significance when policies and national legislation are made by men and women with equitable regard for the interests and aptitudes of both halves of the population (Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) 1994).

Secondly, the efficacy view recognises that women are a heterogeneous social group whose interests, priorities, and issues are different from men, consequently, women are better placed to advance policies that would benefit them and society at large (Commonwealth 2018: 8). As such, a “feminist agenda will only happen when more women acquire political power,” (Hughes and Paxton 2007: 10). Women leaders better represent the interests of women citizens, introduce women’s perspectives into policy-making thus help increase women’s opportunities in society at large (Htun 1998: 327). Similarly, women political leaders tend to influence decisions affecting their family’s lives and the political economy of their communities, nations, and the structure of international relations. Thus political participation and representation are key for the advancement of these ends (Ballington 2002: 1).

Due to the incessant calls for increased participation of women in politics, international and regional instruments were adopted to advance the cause. Many countries across the globe including Zimbabwe are members or signatories to these conventions which set global norms and standards for increasing and opening up space for women in the political arena. These global and regional norms filter down and become in-country commitments to increase women’s participation.

At the global level, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979) is one important instrument spelling out global norms on the rights of women. It affirms women’s equality, calling for states to actively work toward the removal of all forms of discrimination against women in public and political life. CEDAW is considered an international bill of rights for women and a legally binding instrument meant to promote gender equality (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) 2017: 8). All African countries except Sudan and Somalia have ratified the convention. General Recommendation No. 23 to the Convention was adopted in 1997 and it makes a stronger case for ‘temporary measures’ like gender quotas to achieve gender equality. In particular, it seeks the formal removal of barriers to women’s participation in politics and aims for the establishment of temporary

special measures to encourage the equal participation of both men and women in their societies (CEDAW General Recommendation No. 23). The adoption of quota systems as a mechanism to engender representation of should be situated in this convention.

Other international efforts and instruments that support CEDAW and the General Recommendations that were added to the instrument include the United Nations' Fourth World Conference held in Beijing in 1995 and the Beijing Platform for Action was unanimously signed by all UN members. Women in Power and Decision Making is one of the Beijing Platform for Action's twelve strategic objectives. It seeks the inclusion of women in decision-making positions where they can influence the advancement of their needs through policymaking. In addition, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security adopted in 2000 encourages member states to take necessary measures for the increased representation of women in decision-making at all levels including the national, regional, and international institutions and the adoption of mechanisms to prevent and manage conflicts (Nduwimana 2000).

At the continental level, the presence of various instruments aimed at promoting women's political rights and participation reveals the commitment of regional organisations to this issue. In Africa, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa also known as the Maputo Protocol (2003) spells out important principles on gender equality. Article 9 titled "Right to Participation in the Political and Decision-Making Process, again places an obligation on member states to take specific positive action to ensure the participation of women in the political life of their countries through enabling legislation aimed at ensuring that women are not discriminated against and are represented equally at all levels with men in all electoral processes. The AU Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance which was adopted in 2007 lists the need to promote gender equality and balance among its objectives.

Another important regional instrument is the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Gender and Development signed in 2008. Article

12 of the Protocol on “Representation” encourages state parties to ensure that at least fifty percent of decision-making positions in the public and private sectors are held by women by 2015. This can also be achieved through the use of affirmative action measures such as quotas.

Zimbabwe is a signatory to various international and regional conventions and instruments that promote women’s rights and encourages state protection for women and targeted at promoting gender equality and balance in political life. Such instruments include; CEDAW, Maputo Protocol, and the SADC Protocol as identified above. Accordingly, the government of Zimbabwe’s legal framework on women’s rights is informed by these international conventions. Women’s rights in the country are enshrined in the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013. Sections 17 and 80 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe are important in promoting women’s rights. In particular, the latter Section on the Rights of Women provides that “Every woman has full and equal dignity of the person with men and this includes equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities,” (Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013). The former Section obliges the state to take legislative to ensure equal representation of all genders.

Recognising international obligations, the Constitution of Zimbabwe provides for the implementation of a quota system. Section 124 (1) (b) of the Constitution provides for a proportional representation quota system of 60 members to the National Assembly. In this regard, the constitution has been considered to be progressive as compared to the Lancaster House one which did not provide for a quota system. While set to expire in 2023, the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.2) Act, 2021 Section 124 on the Composition of National Assembly was amended and effectively extended the quota by another two Parliaments (Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 2) Act). Thus instead of expiring in 2023, the quota system will expire in 2033.

At the normative level, Zimbabwe is a progressive country whose commitments under international conventions compel it to promote gender equality. The constitutionalization of the quota system is an important step that the country took towards the gender equality path yet the continued stereotyping and

prejudices against women mar the spirit of such measures meant to engender the participation of women in politics in general and decision-making positions in particular. Women's experiences in the electoral field and decision-making bodies reveal that, while the country has been progressive legally in the implementation of the quota system, the attitudes and beliefs still lag in terms of accepting women as political actors. Empirical evidence and social media platforms are replete with stereotyping messages against women candidates and politicians. The chapter, therefore, provides a contextualised analysis of the question of the extent to which the gender quota in Zimbabwe has been transformative in promoting gender equality and meaningful participation of women in politics. As the country heads for the 2023 Harmonised elections, this chapter is useful as a means of ensuring responsible political engagement that does not seek to denigrate women candidates, particularly quota candidates.

Conceptual Framework

Meaningful Political Participation and Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights

Conventionally defined, participation is understood as the legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and or the actions they take (Verba et al., 1978: 46). Political participation is a multidimensional concept which involves activities that go beyond voting in elections to include election campaigning, collective action around policy issues, contacting political representatives, and direct action like protests and demonstrations (Resnick & Thurlow, 2011: 2).

This chapter adopts a normative approach to the understanding of participation. It takes Cammarerts et al. (2016: 4) definition of political participation which is critically related to the perceptions of being part of a political community and therefore fundamentally related to notions such as representation and efficacy. I decide to term that meaningful political participation. In the case of women's participation in politics in Zimbabwe, this implies activities that go beyond voting, dancing, and ululation during campaign periods. Women are equally capable political actors who can assume different political offices

such as being councilors, members of parliament, cabinet ministers, and or members of the Presidium. Where women are represented in key decision-making positions, efficacy can be measured in terms of the extent to which women's contributions are valued, appreciated, and taken into consideration in the policy formulation process.

The notion of meaningful participation underscored in this chapter entails the active and free participation of women in decision-making bodies not for tokenistic appeals. Women should actively participate in the electoral process beyond the ballot box. Yet still, beyond the ballot, women's dignity and being should be respected. There must not be cases of questioning marital status, sexuality, age, and other social categories that are not used on their male counterparts. Such an approach towards meaningful participation is closely related to the concept of transformative leadership for women's rights (TLWR). The latter approach is concerned with promoting women's rights agenda. More importantly, it does not only focus on the number of women in leadership positions but focuses on strengthening the quality and intention of that leadership (Oxfam 2017: 7). Meaningful participation of women in decision-making bodies and the TLWR approach thus are instrumental concepts focused on the practice of power with the ultimate goal of rethinking leadership in the hitherto male-dominated systems.

As Zimbabwe is en route the 2023 Harmonised elections, the extension of the quota system by another two terms paves the way for engendering women's participation in parliament. Consequently, there is a need for a holistic and humanistic approach to the incoming women parliamentarians both directly elected and those from the quota listing. Their voices and contributions are what matters not their sexuality, social relations, and marital status.

Methodology

The chapter is based on qualitative methodology as it sought to understand the research question on the meanings attached to the proportional representation quota system as a tool to facilitate equality and women empowerment. Qualitative research aims to explain 'how' and 'why' a

particular social phenomenon operates as it does in a particular context. In this case, it is instrumental in giving explanations on how and why the quota system operates in Zimbabwe. Meaningful participation in the chapter is measured through the intolerant critiques and sexist and harmful language that women parliamentarians are exposed to. Such tendencies serve to show the mismatch between legal measures meant to engender gender equality and the unchanged patriarchal and misogynist tendencies towards women. Meaningful participation of women in politics is, therefore, an ideal scenario that can be achieved when legal measures are accompanied by socialisation measures that transform negative thinking towards women. The research relied on a review of the literature. Journalistic articles, research reports by civic and women's rights organizations, and international conventions and national laws were reviewed to contextualize the study.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Traditionally and globally, women have been side-lined from the structures of governance (IPU 2008: 6) because politics is generally considered a male domain (International IDEA 2007: 6). Women were generally considered second-class citizens evident where they were not allowed to vote. Even now that women equally enjoy some political rights as their male counterparts there has been a perpetuation of stereotyping, and religious and cultural practices that hinder women's empowerment. Patriarchy is at the core of the perpetuation of this stereotyping. Patriarchy can be understood as the systematic institutionalisation of male dominance over women starting from the family and extending to society in general (Sultana 2010: 2). Patriarchy manifests in different forms. In the political and electoral field, it is visible through the closed spaces for women's participation, violence, name-calling, and tokenistic measures of empowerment. It can also come in the form of a preference for male candidates over female ones. Similarly, the exclusion of women in politics is a result of multiple factors including religion, socio-cultural and economic factors. These factors affect women's meaningful participation in decision-making, constitutional development, and political

processes (International IDEA 2012: 1). It is therefore not surprising that global statistics reveal that women constitute about 26.1 of women in parliament by 2021 (IPU 2022).

The fast-track measure for the reversal of the under-representation of women in decision-making positions has been the adoption of Temporary Special Measures (TSM) including electoral gender quotas. CEDAW Article 4 describes TSM as a means of “accelerating the defacto equality between men and women.” There are three main types of quotas which include legislated candidate quotas, voluntary candidate quotas, and reserved seats (Bush 2011). The main difference between these types of quotas is that the former ones, that is, candidate quotas do not assure the election of a specific share of women. In contrast, the latter one, guarantees the election of a specific number of women (Dahlerup 2021: 12). Usually, reserved quotas are legislated through a constitutional provision. In this way, they are more effective in ensuring the election of women candidates.

The global scenario on the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions is also relatable to the Zimbabwean context. Yet, despite the constricted political space that women have the relative changes that have been recorded should be acknowledged and appreciated as pathways for continued improvements. From a continental level, several examples can be drawn. The most notable example is Ellen Johnson Sirleaf’s election as the first female head of state in Africa and her subsequent re-election in 2011. In the Southern African region, the appointment of Joyce Banda, formerly the vice president to become president in Malawi following the death of her predecessor is another notable example. In Zimbabwe, a historic moment was the appointment of Joyce Mujuru as the first female vice president in the country in 2014 amid deadly succession debates within the ruling party led by the late President Robert Mugabe. Arguably, the case for the participation of women in decision-making positions can be regarded as a work in progress.

Apart from the presidium, similar changes have been recorded at the parliamentary level in different countries across the world. By September 2021, four countries that exceeded 50 percent of women in parliament include

Rwanda, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Mexico (Dahlerup 2021: 11). In Southern Africa, four other states which passed the 40 percent mark are South Africa (46.58 %), Namibia (43.27 %), Senegal (43.03 %) and Mozambique (41. 2 %) (Sadie 2020: 67). Additionally, seven other African states which are (Ethiopia (38.76%), Tanzania (36.9%), Burundi (36.36%), Uganda (34.86%), Cameroon (33.89), Zimbabwe (31.85%) and Angola (30%)) reached the 30 percent threshold by 2020 (IPU 2022). This increased number of female parliamentarians can be explained as an outcome of the adoption and implementation of temporary special measures such as the quota system.

The main advantage of gender electoral quotas is the increased number of women in political office. This is commonly known as “descriptive participation”. Descriptive participation is concerned with the enhanced visibility of women in leadership positions. The quota system is therefore one of the progressive measures which most countries are using in their efforts to consciously enhance women’s participation in decision-making.

Zimbabwe is also among the countries using TSM to engender gender equality. The three relevant sections concerning women’s rights are Sections 17, 80, and 124. Section 80 (1) on the Rights of Women recognises equality between men and women in political, economic, and social activities. On the other hand, Section 17 obliges the state to promote women’s participation in all spheres including the political one, and to take all measures to ensure gender equality. In fulfillment of the obligation placed upon it through the above-stated sections of the constitution and in line with international conventions and regional protocols, Section 124 of the Constitution on the National Assembly paragraph 1 (b) provides for 60 seats reserved for women under a proportional representation quota system based on a party list. The quota was initially set to be operational for the first two Parliaments, hence it would have expired in 2023. However, it was extended under the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 2) Act, 2021 by an addition of two other parliaments. Therefore, constitutionally, the quota system in Zimbabwe will expire in 2033. Numerically, the quota in Zimbabwe enhanced the ‘descriptive participation of women in the National Assembly (lower house of parliament). Statistics reveal

that as a result of the quota system, the number of women's representations increased to 31.48% in the National Assembly during the eighth and ninth parliament respectively (statistics for the 2013 and 2018 Harmonised elections) (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) 2019). Based on these statistics, it appears that quota systems are a panacea that has the potential to cure the malady of women's underrepresentation. The table below shows statistics on the level of women's participation in parliament.

Table 1: Composition of the National Assembly (1980-2018)

Elections and Appointments	Seats	Men	Women	% of women
1980-84	100	91	9	9
1985-1990	100	92	8	8
1990	150	133	17	11.3
1995	150	129	21	14
2000	150	136	14	9.3
2005	150	126	24	16
*2008	210	180	30	14
*2013	270	184	86	31.8
*2018	270	185	85	31.48

*Source: Parliament of Zimbabwe; Maphosa et al (2015: 137). *Updated by the author from Shaba (2011) UN Women (2013) and Parliament of Zimbabwe (2023).*

The table above shows that the eighth (formed after the 2013 elections) and ninth (formed after the 2018 elections) Parliaments of Zimbabwe benefited from the use of the quota system. This is evident from the increased percentage share of women parliamentarians from 14 percent to 31 percent in 2013 and 2018 respectively. The Zimbabwean context thus conforms to global trends where the use of gender quotas is enhancing the visibility and participation of women in decision-making.

Research on the practical application of gender quotas also reveals the importance of electoral systems in aiding quotas for increased women's representation in parliaments (Haider 2011; International IDEA 2012). The average representation of women in some 22 African countries using plurality

electoral systems stands at 15.5 percent compared to 27 percent in 12 countries using proportional representation (Ballington 2011). Subsequently, the remedy for countries using plurality electoral systems is not to switch to a proportional representation one but to consider the option being used in Zimbabwe. The approach entails the use of a legislated quota being distributed among political parties on a proportional representation basis.

While the foregoing discussion revealed the significance of the TSM in particular gender quotas as a means of enhancing women's visibility, what remains understudied are the effects of the quota on the substantive participation of women. Questions remain on whether quotas are transformative in ensuring the participation of women in decision-making or whether they result in casual or on-the-surface changes, with structures and attitudes that affect women remaining intact. Notwithstanding the human rights approach used by most states using quotas, such an act is more of an 'add and stir approach', blindly believing that women's inclusion and participation in structures of both international and national society leads to changes in attitudes and the result of this would be that inequalities between men and women will disappear, (Barnes et al. 2012). Yet, empirical evidence on the implementation of quota systems as the panacea to women's under-representation should be accompanied by questions on the very structures into which women are being added and stirred around', (Barnes et al. 2012) to ensure their meaningful or substantive participation in political decision-making processes.

Discussion of Findings

This section provides a contextualised analysis of the experiences of women parliamentarians under the quota system as a call for meaningful participation of women in parliament in Zimbabwe. Meaningful participation of women in political processes focuses on exogenous factors such as the nature of the playing field, the relationship between women and other actors including men, and the dignity of women. Meaningful participation is therefore dependent upon a free and non-toxic environment that in no way affects the dignity of women candidates and leaders. These are some of the fundamental factors

to use when measuring the extent to which quota systems enhance gender equality.

Beyond the rhetoric on numbers, the efficacy of the quota system has been found wanting for meaningful participation of women in decision-making. It has been argued that an obsession with numbers obscures some of the caveats of the quota system. In this regard, African Centre for Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) (2018) argues that while there was a relative increase in the number of women in the national assembly as a result of the quota system, what many missed is that the number of women directly elected decreased. In particular, it highlights that the number of women directly elected to parliament in Zimbabwe decreased from 34 in 2008 to 26 in 2013. Similarly, during the 2018 elections, the number also decreased to 25. This decrease was caused by some of the structural challenges associated with the quota system. It was reported that "... both ZANU PF and MDC Alliance used the quota to prevent or block women from directly contesting public office because their seats were guaranteed," (ACCORD 2018). Therefore, these two parties were limiting fielding women candidates due to the quota provision. More so, women parliamentarians from reserved seats lack an organisational base. First, this may underpin a continued dependence of women on the quota provisions (Tinker 2004), ignoring and circumventing their agency to contest for elected seats. Secondly, the quota can create a glass ceiling and prevent women from being elected beyond the quota-reserved seats. For instance, in Zimbabwe, instead of increasing, the number of women directly elected into office during the eighth and ninth parliament decreased from a high of 30 in 2008 to 26 and 25 in 2013 and 2018 respectively. Descriptive statistics show a drop of 1.7 percent and 3 percent in 2013 and 2018. Research conducted by the Southern African Parliamentary Support Trust (SAPST) and Women's Academy for Leadership and Political Excellence (WALPE) (2021) on the challenges and opportunities of the reserved seat system in Zimbabwe confirms the relegation of women candidates to the quota as opposed to elected positions. The report revealed that space was closed out for women to participate in the contested constituencies, rather political parties pushed women to opt for proportional

representation. This creates a gendered perception that quota seats are for women while constituency ones are for men. Women thus are seen as not fit and qualified to contest in elections as politics is a men's game.

The immediate effect of the relegation of women candidates to reserved seats is an implication of tokenistic versus real power and participation. This again emanates from the absence of an organisational base. The lack of jurisdiction or constituency where the PR member of parliament can engage with the electorate serves as a double-edged sword on the participation and prospects of coming back to parliament. First, this defies the notion of representative democracy in the case where these PR MPs do not have a constituency to represent. Secondly, when debating issues in parliament, they may be stereotyped as irrelevant when constituency-based issues are being discussed. In this regard, women in reserved seats lack real power; they just constitute a "Voice that whispers" (Sadie 2020), included only to learn the hard way that there are "No Shortcuts to Power" (Goetz and Hassim 2003).

Another practical challenge associated with the quota system emanates from the temporary nature of the system. Article 4 of CEDAW designates quotas as a temporary special measure. Critical questions are raised on how to determine the duration of this measure. Should it end upon such a period determined by the Constitution or when gender equality has been reached? In practice, some countries including Zimbabwe specified a period upon which the quota will end. Initially, it was operational for the first two parliaments from 2013 when the new constitution came into effect. Amendment number 2, Act, 2012, extended it to 2033. The question that remains is whether will Zimbabwe by 2033 have sustainably fulfilled the ethos of the measure; ensure gender equality in parliament. The question is not about having had the quota and increased number of women in parliament for a particular period but of having reached the international threshold of having 50 percent of women in parliament. What matters is the functionality goal of the quota.

Implementation of a quota system in a largely violent-prone, misogynistic, and sexist environment is just but a setback in itself. Political culture is also another important factor that can either facilitate or hinder the participation of

women in politics and elections in particular. Sachikonye (1990: 96) observed that Zimbabwean political culture is characterised by political violence. Political violence deters women's participation in politics. Reporting on the electoral environment characterising the 2018 Harmonised elections, Women Empowerment for Leadership (WE4L) (2021: 36) reported that,

The participation of women as candidates in the National Assembly was not without obstacles. Women faced barriers to their candidature as primary elections were marred by vote buying, violence, and lack of intra-party democracy as candidates were imposed by men with influence.

Closely related to the above also are challenges of disinformation evident in such acts as name-calling and negative comments on social media platforms that are targeted against women to dissuade them from participating in politics. Usually, women candidates are subjected to online violence where they are questioned about their marital status as if single women do not have the potential to compete for political office. For instance, Fadzayi Mahere, spokesperson of the Citizen's Coalition for Change (CCC) was subjected to incessant attacks on Twitter where her marital status was being questioned. Again she was a victim of disinformation where allegations were being made that she was involved in an illicit affair with a married man and that she was wrecking someone's marriage. Whether true or not, one could discern the aim of destroying Fadzayi's political career. The persistence of such misogynistic and derogatory practices towards women reveals that, unless the deep-rooted stereotyping practices are replaced with tolerance then the spirit of the quota system as a mechanism for promoting women's participation in decision-making bodies will remain wanting.

While the plethora of international and regional instruments on women oblige states to pursue legislative and administrative measures to promote women's political participation, they do so ignoring the subjective and psychological elements such as attitudes and beliefs that shape participation in various political contexts. A TLWR approach that recognises the socio-economic and political dynamism within which women's political participation takes place is therefore essential for the transformation of practices, attitudes, structures,

and power relationships to ensure the meaningful participation of women in politics.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The use of temporary special measures including the electoral gender quotas is a progressive step towards democratization mainly effective for ensuring 'descriptive participation' of women. However, the system has not ensured the transformation of power relations and structures through the creation of an enabling environment for women's leadership capabilities. Political parties among the structures for power relegated women to quota seats where they would serve as 'constituency-less' members of parliament. This gives them surreal power. Additionally, the temporary nature of quotas in general and Zimbabwe, in particular, should be structured in such a way that it fulfills the functionality goal of ensuring gender equality and not a backslide to engendered participation of women. Making use of electoral quotas in a toxic political environment characterised by a political culture of violence, stereotyping, and name calling among other derogatory practices, hinder the meaningful participation of women. In light of this, this chapter concludes that the quota system on its own is not a panacea for opening up space in politics and leadership for women. It is just but one element among a coterie of other structural and subjective elements which must exist for meaning participation to take place. Some of the recommendations for improved and genuine participation of women under the quota system in Zimbabwe are that first, the Constitution should spell out the functional purpose of the quota. This is meant to ensure that concern will not be placed on implementing the quota for the first four elections just for the sake of it, but should only be stopped when an environment that ensures gender equality has been established. Secondly, there must be a reorientation of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors to promote tolerance towards women candidates and leaders. Hate speech and political violence must be shunned.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Gerrymandering and the Creation of ‘Loyal Constituencies’ in and around Harare.

Tinotenda Chidhawu

Introduction and Background

Delimitation in the context of elections in Zimbabwe is the process of dividing and fixing electoral boundaries into constituencies and wards for the purposes of electing persons as constituency members of the National Assembly and as councillors of local authorities (S.I. 14 of 2023, Election Watch, 2022). The process is meant to acknowledge demographic changes such as birth, death, population migration as well as immigration (Wu and Combs, 2019). Also, due to population dynamics and changes in land use since the last 2007/8 delimitation exercise, there has been growing need for constituencies and wards to be redrawn to respond to these changes (S.I. 14 of 2023). By law, and like in the United States, a census is done every ten years to update demographic information about the population and to justify government's duty and right to re-drawing the voting districts (Wu and Combs, 2019). Delimitation, also termed by Wu and Combs (2019) as political re-districting, is essential to facilitate democratic voting when there are changes in the demographics of the voting population. Nevertheless, the instrumentalisation and weaponisation of the process, in other words, gerrymandering, becomes a way for politicians in power exercising their rights to deeply entrench themselves with political advantage. It therefore becomes a difficult legal issue on how to contest a re-districting map as gerrymandering, since it is provided for in the constitution. Delimitation is provided for under Sections 160 and 161 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and Section 37A of the Electoral Act. According to the Constitution, delimitation must be conducted every 10 years or as soon as possible after a population census. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission is the constitutional body responsible for this mandate. The Constitutional Amendment No. 18 of September 2017 Section 161(5) provided for the basis

to be taken into cognisance concerning constituency delimitation, namely the physical features; the means of communication within the area; the geographical distribution of registered voters; any community of interest as between registered voters; and existing electoral boundaries, in the event of any delimitation after the first delimitation consequent upon an alteration in the number of House of Assembly constituencies. The last delimitation exercise was conducted in 2008 and at that time, there were complaints by opposition parties, Western governments, local and international human rights groups and other less dominant coalitions and factions to the governing party, that constituency boundaries had been manipulated and not transparent enough, skewed in favour of the ruling party and contrary to the legal requirement of it being a consultative process, and also contravening Section 51 of the Electoral Act requiring information about polling stations to be provided at least 21 days before the polling date (Pan-African Parliament, 2008:14; Newsday; 23/09/22; Newsday; 29/09/22; Newsday, 14/10/22; ZESN, 2019; ZLHR, 2015). The government has been accused of gerrymandering after the delimitation commission came up with more constituencies in the ruling party's sparsely populated rural strongholds and fewer constituencies in the opposition supporting cities and towns (Sebatha, 2008). However, it is practically legal for the political party in power to gain political advantage by gerrymandering (cf. Wu and Combs, 2019).

The governing party was, and is still more dominant in rural areas. On the other hand, peri-urban areas present an opportunity for the ruling party to dilute oppositional influence in the urban areas. Peri-urban areas are like low-hanging fruits that can lubricate the governing party's comeback bid into the cities. Delimitation is therefore a political opportunity presenting itself as strategic calculus to boost the ruling party's comeback into the cities. Politics of land for housing have thrown further complications into the mix. Because of the dominance of opposition parties in urban areas, the governing party will be like in 'foreign' political territory and this is not unique to Zimbabwe, but also prevalent in most African states. To shake off the 'ruralised' status, which is creating insecurity for the ruling regime, the ruling party in

Zimbabwe had to 're-urbanise' and get rid of its emerging identity as the rural political party and regain a foothold in the major cities (Kamete, 2006). This is emblematic in the ruling party dominating in rural areas whilst the opposition parties control most part of the cities. In a likely abuse of the power of incumbency by the ruling party ZANU PF, this is being done through the use of voter information, identifying the location of the voters, as well as their voting inclination (cf. *Newsday*, 04/04/23; *Newsday*, 10/07/18). How the information is used in re-districting may expose the intention to gain political advantage through gerrymandering. Legislature may therefore require the appropriate justification for re-districting to indicate that it preserves or promotes democracy as well as upholding the principle of equality of voting strength (S.I. 14 of 2023). The exact details of such regulation however can become very tricky to articulate, particularly when we may also note the often significant co-relation between other demographic factors such as poverty and wealth, education level, racial and ethnic origin with voting inclination. The regulations will inevitably involve the geographical and analytical issues of population data (Wu and Combs, 2019).

The chapter argues that peri-urban settlements are not only creations of natural demographic growth but political-induced forces that are more capable of evading the shield of city planning. The political dynamics through the creation of 'political settlements' create a fertile ground for the manipulation of boundaries by the Electoral Management Body (EMB), that is, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), in violation of the legal principles that should guide the process, with a clear intention to disadvantage or advantage a particular political player.. This entails the sensitive intersecting of politics and housing needs, with political players using housing for a considerable political advantage. Land for housing moves or vibrates with the political cycle. Withal, it is centripetal to note that the politics of urban housing and development is an activity for politicians and not the EMB, albeit such activities may ultimately be manipulated to inform the delimitation exercise. The delimitation process is prone to political manipulation for electioneering purposes, which can result in the emergence of 'loyal constituencies.' These can also be termed as

political settlements, with vertical and horizontal relationships of power and the different incentives emanating from dominant and competitive-clientelist arrangements (Khan, 2010). This is useful in understanding the emergence of loyal constituencies in different political contexts, revealing the complexity of politics of scale in which politicians engage in bestowing benefits to consolidate and sustain a settlement (Bebbington et al, 2017). The focus and attention is on relationships of vertical power between elites and bases within a dominant coalition, and horizontal power between elites of a dominant coalition and excluded factions who are not party to the coalition. Bebbington et al (2017) complement this by arguing that elites within a dominant coalition manage these relationships and approach development depending on whether the broader political system is characterised by competition among leaders and parties or the dominance of a particular leader or party. Politicians would recruit 'clients' in the form of home-seekers into the settlements as a means of holding on to power, and would tend therefore to operate with shorter-term time horizons oriented towards recruitment of clients ahead of electoral cycles (Ibid). Politicians use land for housing as a political resource for longer-term political.

Although more research, including a large-scale study, is needed, this chapter probes the delimitation exercise in urban Harare, with comparative reference to other cities, conducting empirical research on the deleterious impact of political manipulation of boundaries. This is because manipulation is more in Harare where residents overwhelmingly rejected the ruling party in 2000 after winning most of the parliamentary seats, especially in urban areas (Kamete, 2006), resulting in the political contestation in Zimbabwe moving from the countryside to the city (Ibid), with dramatic potential for further politicisation. Peri-urban development is an opportunity for ZANU PF to reinstate, restore and contain cities and to govern growing oppositional influence. This chapter intersects with how urban development has shaped and been shaped by the dynamics of controlling urban spaces (cf. Kamete, 2006). The politics of peri-urban land is set to be a dynamic issue in Zimbabwe and the dynamics further informs the politics of delimitation exercise.

Research Methodology

Research Paradigm/Approach

The chapter adopted qualitative research methods, comprising 20 key informant interviews, seven Focus Group Discussions, and scrutiny of academic historical literature and records. Interviews and documentary searches were used as data collection techniques to collect qualitative data. Site visits to housing projects were also conducted. An interdisciplinary and multifaceted research framework informed by the history of delimitation with specific reference to the Constitutional Amendment No. 18 of September 2017 Section 161(5) that provides for the factors that guide constituency delimitation, namely the physical features; the means of communication within the area; the geographical distribution of registered voters; any community of interest as between registered voters etc. allowed the researcher to dwell on how ZEC has violated the legislation and policy that guide delimitation as well as examining and exploring the challenges faced during the delimitation exercise.

Philosophical Approach

The research took a phenomenological, and a constructionist approach ontologically and paradigmatically. Epistemologically, interpretivism guided site visits. ‘Loyal constituencies’ out there are knowable; they arise out of processes of socio-economic and political interactions. Meanings are shaped by self-reflection (cf. Rodgers, 2002). The chapter researched how the settlements in question interpret and understand their lived experiences. Boundaries are always in a continuous state of revision, and most have failed to stand the test of time. The chapter took a hermeneutic approach to the study of ‘loyal settlements’, with a need to understand how residents interpret their world.

Research Design

Unstructured interviews were conducted. Site visits to constituencies like Harare South were conducted. This is because Harare South appeared to be a scheme and deliberate ploy that was carefully organised and created during the 2005 election as a counter and in response to the governing party’s loss in 2000 and the opposition as a result lost Harare South. The idea was to carry

out a pilot study and probe how the peri-urban areas are evolving, ascertaining whether their development was as a mere result of population ageing or the creation of 'political settlements' for gerrymandering purposes to divide the City of Harare so as to give a particular party a fair advantage of voting districts. The field trips were a trial run to test the research instruments and interview guides, thereby sharpening research questions and contributing to the research methodology. The pre-study proved to be the researchers' quality control mechanism that acted as a guiding standard for the actual fieldwork.

The researcher was involved in the communities, visiting settlements to fully understand the aetiologies of 'loyal systems.' Together with issues of gender, ethnicity, and political affiliation, the research interrogated the life histories of settlements and tried to understand where people have come from; what pressures have driven them into the settlements. The chapter aims at understanding 'loyal settlements' through the perspectives, experiences, and constraints that residents are facing, and also to underscore the impact of circumstances such as inequality, poverty, and unemployment. Also, the settlements produce their politics, threatening politicians in times of elections. To add inferential leverage, this was through causal inference, process tracing of the causal-effect relationship, and giving attention to the causal sequence of key drivers of 'loyal constituencies.' Process tracing strengthens analysis and methodology by helping to establish root causes influencing the emergency of 'loyal constituencies' and linking them with how the unprecedented changes in peri-urban areas have come about.

The approach is designed in a way to streamline constituency developments into a small handful of questions and to let the researcher burn through as many potential areas of interest as possible with the idea that the more darts the researcher throws, the more the chances the researcher have to hit a bulls-eye. However, the researcher ended up with so many wondering darts. Therefore, the research narrows a search area down to Harare, although with some references to other cities in Zimbabwe and other countries for comparative analysis. That includes some areas already searched and others that were never

looked at during the initial research. With a difficult broader terrain, it is possible to miss salient issues. When researching a large area, the researcher gets one chance, one pass at each point. With a small area, the researcher can have several passes from different angles.

Sampling and Methods of Data Collection

A purposive sampling procedure was used to select respondents. To fully comprehend the issues around delimitation exercise, and on the issue of the exclusion and inclusion criteria, a group of 20 key informants like Members of Parliament in the 2023 Parliamentary Ad Hoc Committee on Delimitation, senior officials of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and career politicians who were also part of the 2004-2005 Delimitation Commission were selected using purposive sampling. The group constituted key informants and served as key informants, giving inside information, and discussing topics on the research agenda. Members of the ZEC, participated to have an in-depth understanding of the encumbrances faced in the delimitation exercise.

A Review of Literature

There is, of course, well-established literature on delimitation in Southern Africa, but Zimbabwe's case is as yet under-studied. This case will contribute importantly to the understanding of the dynamics of power politics, while also capturing issues such as the expansion of cities, and the exploitation of spaces in and around Harare. These spaces are monopolised by the politicians to protect their interests (Matamanda, 2020). Politicians thus manipulate communities using urban spaces such as emerging urban human or 'political' settlements to boost influence against opposition dominated cities. Instead of politicians considering the welfare of the people by providing basic services, political inclusion, and protection of human rights, they view the development as an opportunity to advance their political agendas (Matamanda, 2020). Zimbabwe's land politics has been marred and scared with controversies since the 2000 Land Reform Programme. The politics of delimitation is extremely topical, yet also analytically insightful. The pressures on urban land in Zimbabwe reflect the intersection of post-2000 elections and the need for ZANU-PF to regain

control in the urban areas (McGregor and Chatiza, 2020). The growth of cities encroaching into rural district councils is a plus for ZANU PF. Chavunduka (2018) termed this methods of managing urban spatial through selective incorporation of rural land. Most of the rural areas have been solidly ZANU PF-supporting constituencies. The ruling party's quest for dominance over the past two decades is gaining momentum in the created 'political settlements' like Harare South. The creation of 'political settlements' is a strategy that has characterised ZANU PF's quest to dominate Harare, focusing on the politics of urban spaces where there was some success, namely new settlements on the city periphery (McGregor and Chatiza, 2020). The emergence of ruling party dominated city-edge settlements needs to be situated in the broader politics of delimitation. The results of elections around these new settlements like Harare South which is now under ZANU PF validates the assumption that the growth of cities is benefitting ZANU PF. Changing boundaries—or leaving them unchanged—is more a political issue than a response to urgent urban management issues (Mbiba 2017). In many urban settlements, contending political parties have based their decisions about boundary changes on electoral advantages that may accrue (Chavunduka, 2018). The dominance of the opposition in Zimbabwe's urban areas parallels what is prevalent in other countries like Kampala, Uganda; Lusaka, Zambia; Cape Town, South Africa, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, but in Zimbabwe, it is coupled with the manipulation of boundaries for electioneering purposes (cf. McGregor and Chatiza, 2020). For instance, the 2008 delimitation process tended to distort the constituency boundaries, merging some urban constituencies with peri-urban and rural ones in a process that amounts to gerrymandering³ (EISA 2008, 4). This combustive set of pressures provides insights into the dynamics of urban politics, the multiple and reinforcing political stress points, and broader questions of changing urban landscape.

Since 2000 in Zimbabwe, there have been wild swings in policy, and struggles involving access to controlling urban spaces (Chirisa et al., 2016). This resulted

³Gerrymandering is the practice of manipulating voting district boundaries to gain political advantage in democratic voting (Wu and Combs, 2019).

in the emergency of small towns in and around Harare. Contemporary works however often say little about gerrymandering in peri-urban areas (Nkomo, 2020). Housing is one of the country's most in-demand political resources used by politicians to advance their interests where space is at a premium. The study in question investigated the role of politics in the delimitation exercise with a focus on Harare. The results of the chapter confirm the hijacking of spaces by politicians in an endeavour to create 'loyal constituencies' (McGregor and Chatiza, 2020). Although the research acknowledged causality, that is to control urban spaces, the interpretation remains open to discussion as the relationship between politics and delimitation is complex and inconclusive. Mounting evidence has however found a strong association between the two. Politicians are turning a blind eye to informality in and around Harare, with the populace's quest for housing being manipulated and eventually getting entangled in high politics, and uncertainty, therefore becoming 'slaves to political interests' (Matamanda1 and Thulisile, 2022; Newsday, 29/08/22). Harare, just like other major cities in Zimbabwe, is susceptible to manipulation and zoning in view of the 2023 harmonized elections. The delimitation exercise over the years has been ensnared, and actively abused by politicians for electioneering (Maverick Citizen, 2021). In view of the 2023 harmonized elections Demand triggers the sprouting of informal settlements, not without the involvement of politicians though, by creating opportunities for electioneering in suburban spaces (cf. Gillespie, 2015). The land sector becomes a vehicle for electioneering and survival in deeply polarised countries like Zimbabwe. Subsequently, urban spaces become susceptible to manipulation for electioneering purposes with 'politicisation of informality'. This chapter interrogates the relationship between the expansion of cities and the politics of delimitation. The legalisation of informal property is not simply a regularisation programme but rather a complex political process (Roy, 2005:150). This explains why demolitions are usually marred by selective inclusivity; there are subjective interpretations and selective application of the law, culminating in the crucial analytical (and political) questions of why some townships are designated as illegal and worthy of demolition while other

suburbs are protected and formalised? Why some forms of informality are criminalised and thus rendered illegal while others enjoy state sanction or are even practices of the state? Who authorises the misuse of the law concerning planning? Who authorises misuse of the law in such ways as to declare property ownership, zones of exception, and enclaves of value? Who determines what is informal and what is not? Developments in the peri-urban areas; some without the ‘world-class’ look, despite violating zoning of building by-laws, are granted amnesty and heralded as monuments of modernity (cf. Ghertner, 2008: 66). Such differentiation between the informal and the formal (rather than between the legal and the paralegal) is a fundamental axis of analysis.

The research explores the politics of delimitation, testing the limits of what urban researchers once thought were the key drivers of urban expansion, and recognising the deep complexities of electioneering as a significant contributor to settlements riddled and gripped with the fragility of politics, leaving lingering property rights crisis haunting residents and creating a free ridership of informal peri-urban settlements. The research interrogates unprecedented unofficial political actors, and their roles overriding formal, now defunct city-systems of urban governance. The research delivers a political diagnostic approach to peri-urban areas as complex political systems. The chapter argues that the emergency of constituencies proximity to Harare can best be explained as a result of demographic growth that was hijacked for electioneering purposes. Politicians trade on land for political benefits, emblematic in the governing party’s laxity about ‘loyal’ informal settlements. Overall, it is a game of boundaries. Like the game theory, it is a group struggle, and in light of the nature of the game which is about the governing party seeking to dilute oppositional influence in cities, the players involved which is the opposition and the governing party, and more importantly the incentives that motivate the players to act, in the case of Zimbabwe, the need for the governing party to retain dominance in view of the 2023 harmonized elections. Politicians may be motivated by the need to win the next election therefore the delimitation exercise is contaminated by politics and for political expediency. Ordinarily, factors that guide constituency delimitation, namely the physical

features; the means of communication within the area; the geographical distribution of registered voters; any community of interest as between registered voters etc. should drive the delimitation of election boundaries not the other way round. However, political systems matters – delimitation occur in a political system. The foregoing factors can be underplayed by candidates seeking election, by political leaders seeking to enhance their reputation and prospects for re-election and by political parties seeking to define their principles of create favourable popular images of themselves. Delimitation is just but about political power. Instead of boundary changes to incorporate rural villages into urban areas, boundaries in Zimbabwe have remained static while urban sprawl and urban populations in rural jurisdictions have expanded (Mbiba 2017). Boundary rigidity has led to urban populations of many small settlements and undesignated urban areas being counted and reported as rural, even though the populations of these settlements were above the 2,500 threshold, and for Harare, the population counted as rural like Caledonia Farm which is politically represented as part of rural Goromonzi District (Ward 25), is in the magnitude of hundreds of thousands (Mbiba 2017). Other areas include Crowhill, Sally Mugabe, Glenforest, Solomio now under Goromonzi Rural District Council (RDC); Whitecliff now under Zvimba RDC; Mount Pleasant Heights now under Mazowe RDC; and Nyatsime, Seke, Dunotar, Cardor now under Manyame RDC (S.I. 14 of 2023). The extent of this evidence is an indication that the community of interest factor has been ignored to allow gerrymandering. Against this backdrop, the ZEC was/is guilty of misapplying the community of interest factor as one of the guiding standards of constituency delimitation.

Findings and Analysis

There is an inexplicable link between delimitation and the politics of urban housing development. This is emblematic in the ‘boundaries game’ with the governing party competing to dilute oppositional influence in Harare through creating new ‘political settlements’ in view of the 2023 harmonized elections. Politics loomed large in the 2023 delimitation process, with

politicians motivated by the need to win the next election. Resultantly, the completion of process, and gazetting of the delimitation report is marred by incidences of gerrymandering in its salient highlights, revealing how ZEC has violated the Constitutional Amendment No. 18 of September 2017 Section 161(5) that provides for the factors that guide constituency delimitation, namely the physical features; the means of communication within the area; the geographical distribution of registered voters; any community of interest as between registered voters etc. Most, if not all of these factors have been ignored, demonstrating that ZEC was/is guilty of gerrymandering. It is important to note that delimitation that is meant to take into account new demographic realities, even if caused by illegal activities by politicians who cause illegal housing developments around cities is not illegal. This explains why, from the inception it was mentioned that gerrymandering is a way for politicians in power exercising their rights to deeply entrench themselves with political advantage, thus, it becomes a herculean legal issue on how to contest delimitation as gerrymandering, since it is provided for in the constitution. The following findings are based on the premise that the illegal activities in urban housing politics and development, a deliberate long-term ploy spearheaded by the ruling party, created a fertile ground for gerrymandering during the 2023 delimitation process ahead of the harmonised elections. Gerrymandering implies a boost in the imminent elections for the ruling party in Harare.

Counter-urbanisation in Harare

Like all the cities and rural district councils in Zimbabwe, the Harare City Council (HCC) has not been able to delimit or move boundaries to incorporate peri-urban areas because of the current constitution that says delimitation can only be undertaken in 2023. The delimitation exercise was hurried, with inadequate time, mainly characterised by rubber stamps, and significantly limiting the electoral stakeholders' input. Although the delimitation help relieves pressure in existing urban centres, the exercise has been hijacked for political expedience. The governing party is coming up with a comeback strategy of dormitory type of settlements through what they are calling 'a need

for new cities' to decongest Harare, through Harare South and Mt Hampden. The planning aspect is now coming in to try and sanitise some settlements adjacent to municipal farms with Rural District Councils also gravitating towards Harare to dilute oppositional influence. The governing party's bid to re-districting (Wu and Combs, 2019) and 're-urbanise' comprised of retaining or regaining lost ground by leapfrogging some rural districts close to towns, and this is not necessarily implemented coherently and systematically (cf. Kamete, 2006). This is emblematic in Caledonia which is part of Harare but through the enabling legislation, like Ruwa, it is now in Goromonzi. Epworth is just closer and adjacent to Harare but not part of Harare, it is a standalone and local authority on its own, the same as Ruwa.

The geographical distribution in Harare through the creation of three constituencies from Harare South constituency, unbundling the constituency that is aligned to the ruling party, namely Churu, Harare South and Hunyani (S.I. 14 of 2023) is compelling evidence showing the extent to which geographical distribution as a factor guiding delimitation has been ignored. An additional constituency was created in Epworth resulting in Epworth North and Epworth South Constituencies, and Harare North was reconfigured and renamed to Hatcliffe constituency (S.I. 14 of 2023). Furthermore, the number of voters in the constituencies and wards vary by more than the 20 per cent limit prescribed in section 161 (3) (4) (6) of the current Constitution. The variations are so great and so numerous that the delimitation itself is invalid and many of the constituencies delimited by ZEC fall outside the permissible limits (Election Watch, 2023). For example, in Harare Metropolitan Province, the constituencies of Churu (33 001 voters) and Harare East (33 103) are well above the maximum. Most of the Harare constituencies are above it (Election Watch, 2023), further demonstrating that ZEC was/is guilty of gerrymandering by ignoring the factor of geographical distribution of registered voters in undergirding delimitation ZEC mis-constructed section 161 of the Constitution to validate gerrymandering, with the proposed electoral boundaries set out in the preliminary delimitation report contravening section 161(6), therefore flawed, null and unconstitutional. ZEC deliberately applies 2007/8 total seats

per province as its basis in coming up with the 2023 framework for allocating constituencies and sticks to its erroneous application of section 161(6) with no justifiable reason for adopting this framework other than the desire to avoid loss of constituencies from ZANU PF stronghold provinces needed to secure a two-thirds majority in Parliament (Ntali, 2023).

In further disregard to the factors that guide constituency delimitation, ZEC ignored adult population dynamics per province presented in the 2022 census when it allocated constituencies per province. If it was used, 7 seats were going to be transferred from ZANU PF stronghold provinces to the opposition stronghold provinces. ZEC disregarded registered voter proportions per province in the total national voter population in coming up with its constituency allocation framework. If they were used as basis for allocating constituencies per province, 3 constituencies were going to be transferred from ZANU PF stronghold provinces to opposition stronghold provinces. The ZEC delimitation report defeats and violates constitutional demands of adhering to the census population dynamics in trying to secure ZANU PF's two-thirds majority disguised as maintaining stability of previous electoral boundaries. It violates the constitutional demands for adherence to the census population dynamics and national values of equal representation in conducting boundary delimitation. The framework used to allocate constituencies per province contradicts the constitution and its net outcome gives ZANU PF stronghold provinces over representation in Parliament whilst under representing opposition stronghold provinces (Ntali, 2023). This is compelling evidence further showing the extent to which factors that guide delimitation have been ignored, demonstrating that ZEC was/is guilty of gerrymandering.

Urban expansion has always been a phenomenon characterising every city (Herald, 28/07/22; World Cities Report, 2020). Villages and farmlands are being edged (Home, 2001), and quickly becoming constituencies. Most cities are surrounded by farms, and when those farms are due for urban development, the Ministry of Local Government can request local authorities to identify land which can be annexed for urban development, thus integrating some parts of rural into the city. The process is now being hijacked to create 'loyal

constituencies'. In areas like Melfort, Domboshava, Seke, and Mayambara, the governing party is converting land earmarked for agriculture into urban development and subsequently creating small towns, depopulating cities through sub-urbanisation of the countryside and population deconcentration into peripheral areas (cf. Vining Jr and Kontuly, 1978). In line with the deconcentration theory (Vining Jr and Strauss, 1977), this can be described as a 'new' spatial political economy (Fielding, 1982). It is the process of outward movement from cities to the surrounding countryside, 'urban decentralisation – the idea of disurbanism or decentralised development – sprawling rural hinterland with self-sufficient settlements', 'regeneration', 'dispersal' and 'core-periphery migrations' (Lewis, 1998). This is replacing urbanisation (Ambrose, 1974), accelerated within the context of increasing political influence, yet this sub-urbanisation of the countryside is not entirely uniform or universal from place to place in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Zimbabwe, there is a strong and positive relationship between politics and peri-urban development. Politicians, therefore, invest in those areas with chiefs and headmen complicit in the dynamics. Peri-urban, rural and urban communities were combined in a constituency during the delimitation of wards, with areas like Crowhill, Sally Mugabe, Glenforest among others, being converted from commercial farms to peri-urban areas (S.I. 14 of 2023).

Intersection of 'Political Planning' and Peri-urban development: Dynamics in Harare South

There is a dual structure in Zimbabwe where the ruling party has established extra-legal parallel structures that are not reliant on official council procedures. When city residents vote into council a political party other than the ruling party, the central government appears to be harrying the opposition-controlled council, and problems inevitably arise (Kamete, 2006). The defeat of the governing party in urban constituencies does not in any way translate into its expulsion from local government but brings about a change in the methods of control, not a general loss of control (Ibid). The ruling party in the case of Zimbabwe, ZANU-PF, is always at loggerheads with the opposition,

and planning is highly centralised with little devolution. The MDC in 2000 became a dominant party in all urban councils, confining ZANU-PF to the rural authorities. That is when the political issues related to peri-urban development started to manifest. The search for an ideal panacea by the ruling party to influence urban spaces turned from an orderly approach into a toxic political row (Newsday, 23/08/22). The spill over events are the legitimisation of informal peri-urban settlements and creation of 'loyal constituencies', and controlling those spaces is a site of struggle between the opposition and ZANU-PF.

Farmlands in and around Harare have been converted into small towns, with cooperatives as shadow pockets of the ruling party (cf. McGregor, 2013; TIZ, 2021 S.I. 14 of 2023). On presiding over those small towns, there is weaponisation for political expedience. For instance, the informalisation of land sales shows the extent of institutional 'grey-ness' that has persisted in parts of Epworth (Chatiza, 2016). Delimitation is following politics, against the norm of delimitation going ahead of politics. Politicians come in to sanitise the political mess or 'political planning'. Politicians ride on the urbanisation of poverty which exposes the urban poor to manipulation and forces them to go and live in the city edges (Chavunduka and Chaonwa-Gaza, 2021), and through political considerations, peri-urban areas start as an invasion, then constituencies, sanctioned though, and baptised by the political parties, in this case, the ruling party, ZANU PF. They then come in trying to regularise; first, they are political complaints then the solution is regularisation which is through planning (cf. Kinfu and Cochrane, 2022). The planning aspect has not been fully functional in Zimbabwe. They use regularisation to seek legitimacy and normalisation. That has been the trend in Harare South and Caledonia. In this regard, there is an interesting dimension in Harare South, as explained in the following paragraphs. In politics, nothing is assured, and politicians in most cases do things for individual interest. These urban strategies for political settlement maintenance and change is similar to what is happening in Lusaka, Zambia, with political parties manipulating the urban poor's vulnerability. These dynamics can be contextualised vis-à-vis Zimbabwe's broader political

landscape, demonstrating how political settlements have become strategies for advancing support bases and political advantage and why governing elites target particular groups for co-optive or coercive interventions (cf. Hinfelaar et al, 2020).

MDC was formed in 1999, and the first election was held in 2000. MDC won all the seats in urban areas, and that included Harare. This came as a great shock to ZANU PF, and they responded in 2005 which was the next election with a scheme they had thought of which was to take some of the old farmland which was now nationalised, and sell it to urban homeless on condition that they voted ZANU PF (Zimbabwe Standard, 30/10/16). The Ushewokunze cooperative in Harare South with 9000 stands was the result. They sold the stands and it was carefully organised, with home seekers signing a form of agreement with a receipt and requirement that they had to vote for ZANU PF, holding home seekers to ransom. These narratives, as a result of the beauty of qualitative approaches, were revealed by the residents. ZANU PF then established a voting station in the middle of the housing cooperative, acknowledging the existence of illegal settlements and the right to vote and later on failing to acknowledge the right of a resident by pulling the settlements down as illegal structures after elections; it is a paradox. Politicians manipulate squatters when it suites their purpose. MDC lost Harare South during the 2005 election and the reason why it lost is that probably 9000 families voted as a block for ZANU PF (cf. Matamanda, 2020).

Land barons in Harare South, Hopley area, recruit and allocate land on condition that the recipients maintain allegiance to the ruling party and in particular, to assure that, come election time, they not only cast their vote for ZANU PF party but mobilize for it as well (Mbiba, 2022). Based on that, ZANU PF then launched a nationwide programme throughout the country and took on peri-urban land which had not been incorporated into the city into local authority. They allocated these areas to land barons, some of them leaders in ZANU PF (Herald, 02/08/22). Land barons are usually politically connected, powerful, self-proclaimed illegal state land authorities who illegally sell state land in and around urban areas without accounting for the proceeds

(Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Matter of Sale of State land in and Around Urban Areas since 2005, 2019).

When the time came to demarcate constituency boundaries for the 2005 parliamentary elections, the Delimitation Commission, appointed by the president, predictably redrew Harare's boundaries in a way that generated controversy and fuelled suspicions that the commission was ZANU-PF's foot soldier (Kamete, 2006). Harare lost three constituencies, effectively reducing the number of MPs for Harare by that number. One constituency, Harare South, was the party's sole parliamentary seat in the 2005 elections. The dynamics showed an ominous relationship between politics and peri-urban land governance with rampant abuse of political power (TIZ, 2021). Harare South is a result of a politically driven process of maintaining control over how land is used, developed, or redistributed. The processes of expropriation and privatisation of rural land are similarly occurring in Ethiopia (Kinfu and Cochrane, 2022). In Harare South, politicians instructed people to invade farms, unleashing and sponsoring illegal actions in Southlea Park, and selling housing stands without owning title deeds (Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Matter of Sale of State land in and Around Urban Areas since 2005, 2019; Herald, 27/07/15; Chatiza, 2016), negating city planning, trumping private property rights and all that goes with the security of tenure (Newsday, 25/11/11). This is a situation where the governing party, in a position to stem the tide, opts, instead, seems to be unable or unwilling if not arms folded to control illegality or accelerate mitigation actions against unregulated settlements (Newsday, 23/08/22).

The government appears to be not understanding the urgency of the matter, only worrying about self-interest and tightening its grip on power. They do not see delimitation as long-term to grow the economy for future generations as their destination, rather, their position is that of a hub dependent on passenger transit. Politicians are preoccupied with factionalising delimitation with the exercise serving no purpose but just a scheme for regime survival. When there are factional dynamics and intra-party conflict, the home seekers are always mistreated, regularly finding themselves in conflicts that they never

started or want to be in. Land barons are not discouraged by crocodile tears, with organised syndicates mobilising in the face of state inaction.

Peri-urban squatter settlements can be manipulated for electoral purposes and political convenience. In Harare South, there were changes concerning boundaries and this can be interpreted as a way of disenfranchising Harare to weaken the opposition. There were also multiple cooperatives in Ushewokunze with attempts to temper around boundaries. Presidential leadership is elected by the province so there is little to nothing that can be done to the problems of delimitation. In the provinces, they have urban areas and those urban structures vote in the province; when there is a rural area like Ruwa being incorporated into the City of Harare which is a province, where at the moment Ruwa vote in the Mashonaland East. After 2022 or 2023, it will be part of Harare. By then, ZANU PF expects to be able to control these urban areas.

Politics Around Constituency Delimitation and the New Cities' Concept

A 17 000 hectares new city is being planned in Mt Hampden with many farms involved. Plans for new cities are there to take advantage of the delimitation exercise and some of the wards that may be deemed to be opposition controlling the wards in Harare will be deemed to be falling under Harare South city, encroaching Lochinvar.⁴ There are plans to have Harare South City, the current Harare then another New City in Mt Hampden. Recognising these realities on the ground, politicians saw an opportunity to take into consideration these three, harmonise and shift boundaries so that no one will be able to control this current Harare. It will be diluted; another portion will be given to Harare South and another portion will be given to the New City in Mt Hampden. This is from a political point of view, then it has to be sanitised by the planning processes. That is the whole idea behind turning peri-urban farms into residential areas. The envisioned smart city in Mt Hampden meant to decongest Harare is going to draw land from Zvimba Rural District Council, Mazowe Rural District Council, and Harare and will be administered by these three municipalities (Newsday, 19/07/22). There is

⁴Interview with the former Principal Housing Officer, Harare, 19/03/23.

a suburb called Haydon mushrooming in Mt Hampden and the patterns of allocations are being motivated by the closeness to the governing party.

In the recent ZANU PF provincial elections, Ruwa, which is close to Harare, dominated the provincial leadership for Mashonaland East. Peri-urban areas are being used in provincial elections and in urban and it is like a weapon. Levy and Walton (2013) called this politics of service delivery. During a census under Mugabe, Chitungwiza was said to have a population of 376 000 people, Bulawayo 500 000 but Harare was nothing compared to what it is.⁵ Today, Harare is a city of 6 million people. 50% of the Zimbabwean population is in Harare but only 30% of the seats in parliament are urban. That is the politics of delimitation. When they were delimitating urban seats, which they knew were going to be opposition dominated, they would put seats into farms like Ushewokunze and make that a constituency, same in Ruwa. During the 2022 census in Zimbabwe, some areas were marked as Harare rural (Herald, 28/07/22). Peri-urban areas are being used for urban and rural politics. There is a provincial fight for leadership, and ZANU PF is full of factions, similar to African politics. Comparatively, this is why the opposition lost Kadoma central in 2013 after winning it in 2000, 2005, and 2008. Not people in Kadoma central were voting, it was people in the farms. Although they were not incorporated in the city, they were registered in the city. Therefore, peri-urban areas are being developed for political purposes, with some ulterior motives to grow the economy through giving title.

Harare, like Masvingo, and Kadoma, and unlike Bulawayo, has big informal settlement areas outside the city limits. The reason why they did not want to incorporate these areas into cities was that they did not want to inflate the influence of the urban areas' electorate. In the 2012 census, for example, Chitungwiza was recorded as having 367 000 residents but it is known that Chitungwiza has more than 2 million.⁶ It is bigger than Bulawayo. Like Ruwa, all those vast urban areas out there are not incorporated into the cities. The strategy was to win back the urban areas by these means and it was successful.

⁵ Interview with former Secretary for Local Government in the opposition, Harare, 14/01/23.

⁶ Interview with former Secretary for Local Government in the opposition, Harare, 14/01/23.

Peri-urban development is a way to re-establish ZANU PF control over the cities and to reduce opposition's influence.

In a particular vein, Zvimba is a local authority and is a rural district council controlled by Zanu PF. This means that spaces under Zvimba rural constituency but proximity to the urban councils controlled by the opposition are low-hanging fruits in terms of availing land to the masses to harvest votes, thus, Zvimba authorities are gravitating towards Harare knowing that no one is going to remove them, even the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Lands because they are the ones at the bosom of politics, they will just ignore things happening because they know that they have got the power later to regularise. After the ruling party realised that they could use the land as a carrot that can be dangled, they quickly sprang into action, ordering and directing local authorities to identify the land. However, as a result, informal settlements will be manipulated (Matai and Chirisa, 2022).

About 400 000 hectares were identified around the country for urban residential development (Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Matter of Sale of State land in and Around Urban Areas since 2005, 2019). However, those are the peri-urban farms where there is chaos (Herald, 22/06/22), and conflicts provoked by inter-party conflicts between the ruling party at the national level and the opposition largely presiding over local authorities (Mpofu, 2012) as well as intra-party disputes within the ruling party, which can be interpreted as disputes over different forms of clientelist statecraft (McGregor and Chatiza, 2019) in areas like Epworth, Caledonia, Hopley, Saturday Retreat, Cowdray Park in Harare, Fairview and Gimboki, in Mutare, Manicaland, and Victoria Range in Masvingo. Unlike in Ethiopia where resistance to regularisation process was driven by the desire to maintain rural rights (Kinfu and Cochrane, 2022), chaos is emanating from the regularisation process as there is some resistance from the parties that are likely to be affected, to say if they are going to be a price, who is going to pay the price to those that have already settled (Herald, 25/03/20). Regularisation is about following standards thus everyone feels a little bit uncomfortable in some way. However, to get protection, they strategically align with the ruling party, forming pressure groups with politics

as the main agenda, and political commissars masquerading as activists. This explains why citizens hoping to access housing see it fit or are better off switching allegiances to the governing party as lots of home seekers access housing with some help from politically-connected individuals.

Political Planning Strategies-Constituency Delimitation Nexus

Mayors and councillors convert underutilised space and farmland in and around Harare into some meaningful land which is then parcelled out in council terms. Those circumstances are a site of struggle, with ministerial interventionism. An example is the Caledonia peri-urban land where there is now Gazebo and East-View. ZANU-PF wants to checkmate the opposition in terms of the domination and parliamentary elections support it has in urban local authorities. It is complicit in fielding the cooperatives to checkmate and dilute the support. Hopley was deliberately created for that as a whole constituency called Harare South. ZANU-PF in trying to encroach on the support is fielding cooperatives presided over by land barons who held from or are linked to or belong to the ruling party. This gives them muscle and power to access and claim certain lying idle peri-urban land. The whole idea is that land is a strategic political resource (Muchadenyika and Williams, 2016; Muchadenyika, 2015). In the current political realities, land is a perfect political weapon.

The Ministry of National Housing and Social Amenities is trying to impose certain planning standards in peri-urban informal settlements, but now the question is: How do they intend to follow/suit standards codified in law taking into cognisance the likely minimum damage to be exercised to those that have already settled? However, the idea of minimising the damage is a question of putting pressure on people to be 'politically correct' to avoid being targeted. Everyone feels threatened by thinking that this damage will come their way. To get protection, the whole idea is to be politically aligned so that the damage will be externalised. That is why there are a lot of political associations, sought of resident associations but with political culture and political dimension, going to the minister to seek protection or MP, like currently, the MP of Harare South

is Tongai Mnangagwa (TIZ, 2021). Him being from the first family, everyone would want to be aligned with him so that they would seek protection to avoid the minimum damage. That is the dimension that development planning and delimitation is taking. Overall, people in peri-urban areas have realised that there are no longer those dire consequences like the Murambatsvina era if politically aligned. Most people are now aligning with politicians so that when they are in peri-urban areas, they will not face any consequences. Because of the looming elections, politicians just look for a punch line political party line for campaigning, and ahead of the 2023 elections, to manipulate delimitation exercise.

Constituency Delimitation: A Democratic-Driven Process or Political Instrumentalism or Both?

Reaching a position on whether delimitation is driven by citizen dispersion or politics can be complex but the observation by McGregor and Chatiza (2019) that ‘the apolitical approach is inadequate in understanding the highly politicised city-edges’ is probably not too much of an exaggeration considering the overwhelming influence by ZANU PF. Although urban expansion is usually fueled by demographic factors (Weber and Mendelsohn, 2017), the development trajectory in the countryside of Harare is characterised by counter-urbanisation and rural turnaround increasingly appears to be shaped by politics, and not merely an ‘innate reflex’ or ‘just what happens’. Resultantly, delimitation is politically conditioned, driven by the politics around its context and further manipulation of socio-economic disadvantage.

Delimitation by nature has socio-economic and political implications and politically, it defines geographical areas for electors and those elected and, therefore, allocates political power (Newsday, 27/09/22). To say that the situation in Zimbabwe’s city edges is merely demand-driven or more of an outcome of urban spill over is not only a grave understatement but a partial appreciation of the dire political state of affairs confronting the politically troubled peri-urban areas. Although significant population growth in areas beyond the metropolis continues to be regarded as the principal driving force

and cause of peri-urban development and expansions of the metropolitan regions (Lewis, 1998), there is a need to emphasise the significance of a wider and peculiar socio-economic and political circumstance within the process. There are often misconceptions that only buoyant rates of growth drive peri-urban informality but growing evidence suggests that political manipulation also affects peri-urban development too. This evidence is rarely talked about whilst arguably something to be aware of in the understanding of peri-urban development and delimitation thereof. Compelling evidence paints a picture that points to politics at the centre of urban problems, presenting a challenge to ideal approaches of delimitation. It is a well-established truism that politics is a major determinant of the delimitation exercise in which political players and the state are major actors.

Delimitation in Zimbabwe goes beyond the legalistic and bureaucratic explanations, and politics is centripetal, with the exercise directly or indirectly entangled in the ruling party-state politics (Mbiba, 2022), and reigniting the traumatic feelings particularly experienced by the victims of Operation Murambatsvina of 2005, which was also a strategy of 're-urbanising' by 'ruralising' the urbanites (Kamete, 2006). Political absurdities are causing a spill over effect on urban expansion. The noble idea of delimitation was hijacked in similar circumstances to the hijacking of the land reform (cf. *Newsday*, 23/08/22). The genuine need for delimitation is there, undeniable against the realities of the expansion of the urban population, but this can simply be hijacked. With growth points and satellite cities around/adjacent to Harare, politicians have developed a tendency of allocating towards cities, the nuclear of towns where they know that as one gravitates towards town, oppositional influence will be diluted.

Originally, ZANU-PF never had an idea of manipulating urban borders until the opposition broke Mugabe's political virginity in 2000 after winning most of the parliamentary seats, especially in urban areas. It is when urban areas turned into a political issue and proxy political battlegrounds. The ruling party's main cases for re-election in the urban evaporated and this fundamentally changed the whole political matrix. ZANU-PF then mounted a spirited

comeback bid (cf. Kamete, 2006). To counter the opposition, the governing party is strategically dividing urban constituencies and voting districts to their advantage, manipulating boundaries with rural areas like Nyabira, Mazowe, Seke, Zvimba, Murehwa, Domboshava, Mhondoro, and Chihota, a breakaway from the traditional framework exemplified by the rural to urban dichotomy (cf. Lewis and Maund, 1976). Wu and Combs (2019) described this as cracking and de-districting, an approach to dilute the votes of the opposing party to suppress them from winning in any voting district. For example, in December 2004, the Delimitation Commission recommended a reduction of the number of constituencies by one each in Harare, Bulawayo, and Matabeleland South, and an increase by one each in Mashonaland East and Manicaland, with a possibility of gerrymandering, justified by the fact that the decrease in the number of constituencies affected mostly urban areas which had been known for their support to the opposition, and Harare Metropolitan was cited as an example despite an increase in its voting population (Booyesen and Toulou, 2009). Wu and Combs (2019) described this as packing, an approach to concentrate the votes of the opposing party in one or few districts to reduce their votes in other districts. For example, there are now areas with more than a 20% variance of registered voters from the mid-figure of 27 000. These areas include Harare South with 76 278 (+280%), Goromonzi South, 73 031 (+269%), Epworth, 71 835 (265%), and Dangamvura with 60 651 (+224%) (Newsday, 01/09/22). On the other hand, the areas which enjoyed an increase in the number of constituencies coincided with the rural areas, which have traditionally supported the ruling ZANU-PF (Ibid). Areas with low variance are Insiza South with 14 694 (-54,2%), Chikomba East, 14 513 (-53,6%), Hwedza South 14 295 (-53%) and Gutu North with 14 165 (-52%) (Newsday, 01/09/22).

Against this backdrop, Section 161(5) of the Constitution is not the only precondition to ascertaining delimitation, it is a process through political players. For instance, in Caledonia, Harare South, Hatcliffe extension, all are affiliated with the ruling party, and hence, gullible and continue holding on to politicians. Resultantly, the process of delimitation will be steered

by politicians. Although delimitation is a democratic response to urban expansion, the governing party sometimes uses means other than voting freely, to influence voters, like in rural areas, by giving free agricultural inputs and food on a partisan basis. In urban areas, those things are not possible. There is partly a political process where the political players, for instance in Harare South, allocate land taking advantage of the appetite for land in urban areas. The land belongs to the state, therefore, is under political control, resulting in the law of unintended consequences.

The conversion of customary lands into political commodity

Peri-urban spaces are handy when it comes to influencing the political processes and farmlands have to be tradable politically. Farmlands proximity to Harare demonstrated reliability over other political paybacks. For the past two decades, land has been the lifeblood of ZANU PF, other political rewards are marked by wild swings in the usefulness and value of the political resource. This is also because other political rewards are now in short supply. This explains ZANU PF's stranglehold and over-reliance on the land as a political resource, politically manipulating city borders to their advantage. Politics is a game of numbers, so they settle people, and that can be a source of support. Because of the proximity of some customary lands to Harare, political players realised they can still ride on the opportunity of numerical advantage, taking advantage of few regulations and provisions in the Constitution and electoral laws. For ZANU PF, they are not worried much when urbanites migrate to peri-urban rural areas because to them it is a plus. When one comes to a ZANU PF stronghold, it is a plus in terms of the vote, they will hardly vote otherwise, and they will always have this sense of indebtedness, and become strong enthusiastic advocates of the ruling party to protect the land. Chiefs are at the centre of peri-urban land allocation and in rural areas in Zimbabwe but ZANU PF is not worried because politically, it is an advantage.

Delimitation Pressure and the Electoral Cycle

Politicians cannibalise every opportunity for them to win votes so the timing for delimitation is a quite strategic opportunity. This results in the creation

and abuse of boundaries by politicians as a way of mobilising political support (Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Matter of Sale of State land in and Around Urban Areas since 2005, 2019). The sensitive delimitation can be manipulated to favour particular groups, and techniques can be used to discount the votes of particular groups or geographical areas (Newsday, 10/09/22). Boundaries can be tampered with, by design or unintentionally, to distort representation and political control in an area (Newsday; 27/09/22). For example, in 2002 during the mayoral and council elections, surrounding farms, now inhabited by beneficiaries of the government's controversial farm seizures, were incorporated into Ward 1, which became the ruling party's sole councillor (Kamete, 2006). Delimitation was used as an electoral strategy to maximise the ruling party's gains in the presidential poll while minimising its losses in the mayoral and council elections. It is political and everything happens in the political environment. They always do that since 1980. Even the white settler themselves also did the same when they created reserves, creating incentives for people to go there. Before independence, the cities of Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru, and Mutare were the cradle of African nationalism and, therefore, sites of dissent, resentment, and instability (Kamete, 2006). More so, people in Epworth have been for a long time clamouring for the process of security of tenure, looking at the history of Epworth that it used to be a Methodist Farm. When ZANU PF see that there is a modicum of urbanity, but it is not an urban area, they regularise and gazette it as a town or urban council or a local board then it becomes an area or 'loyal constituency'. So, the issue of delimitation on its own is a trump card and an instrument of politics. Regularisation of settlements on farms with disputed ownership is thus political. This is the same with Whitecliffe, Stoneridge, Saturday Retreat, and Ordar Farms. Gargantuan promises of regulation are losing relevance so politicians have to go with something implementable in practice, and delimitation presented itself at the right time. Epworth is not government land where they can claim to give title deeds. It has got its complexities. For ZANU-PF, processes like delimitation are low-hanging fruits, a penalty that it can score if it wants to survive. Issues of delimitation do not come with any issue of

big budget to it, it is just shifting of borders, and that can assist the ruling party in desperate bid of regaining control in the urban, checkmating the opposition in terms of power games and influence. Manipulating borders is good politics for them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The ruling party, over the years, has been spearheading illegal urban housing activities and creating ‘political settlements’ on the borderlands of Harare City Council and various rural district councils, as a long-term and deliberate ploy to shape and influence the 2023 delimitation exercise. The 2023 delimitation in Harare was thus about harmonisation and shifting of boundaries to control the capital. However, the principle of planning must precede delimitation and the process must adhere to the guiding constitutional and legal instruments to genuinely establish democratic borders.

The Electoral Act is outdated and has to be aligned with the Constitution and revised with the input of ZEC and other stakeholders to incorporate the supreme charter. It must emphatically address the process of voter registration with clear selection criteria for personnel used by ZEC and how they will be accountable. There is need to ensure the decentralisation of voter registration from the district and provincial offices to strategic places where large numbers of people gather, compilation of and access to the voters’ roll with clear provisions on access and timelines, preferably provisions to make the voters’ roll available electronically on the website, with protection of the identification and residence details of voters. The voters roll must be made public for inspection ahead of the delimitation exercise so that the process passes a litmus test of credibility and legitimacy. There must be voter education with a review of provisions limiting other stakeholders that can complement the work of ZEC – with a clear distinction and clarification of what constitutes ‘voter education’ and ‘civic education’. This must dovetail with civic awareness, particularly focusing on delimitation. ZEC and other electoral stakeholders must embark on intensive voter education programmes, transparent and inclusive engagements, and consultations to ensure all-stakeholders’ input.

More civic education must be done to conscientise the electorate to allay fears of mistrust and gerrymandering. Delimitation process should be based on clear logical procedures that mirror voter registration and census statistics and enables equality of vote, accountability, and traceability of the delimited boundaries. A non-partisan commission can help to facilitate a democratic delimitation process. To avoid politicians in power exploiting the opportunity of re-districting and delimitation through gerrymandering, there is need to have a non-partisan commission in charge of re-districting so that there would be no intention to gain political advantage for either side. The political hot potato becomes: who should be in that commission? The political problem is only re-casted in a different venue.

Technicalities are used to discount votes of particular groups or geographical areas. Tampering with boundaries can, by design or unintentionally, distort representation and political control in an area. Delimitation by nature has socio-economic and political implications. Politically, delimitation defines geographical areas for electors and those elected and allocates political power. Thus, in provinces like Harare and Bulawayo, they must not be exclusively urban to avoid borderlands between rural and urban being sites of contestations and boundary manipulation to favour particular groups. Zimbabwe must ferret lessons from Zambia where Lusaka province is not merely urban, but also embody rural areas in the peri-urban, farmlands, and villages.

Alive to the reality that it is herculean to eliminate politics in electoral governance, there should be a model to help navigate the associated conflicting realities so that at least the damage of manipulation can be minimised, because politics will remain a permanent feature of electoral governance. The government must put in place mechanisms to strengthen the independence of ZEC as a technical authority that advises government on issues of delimitation. This delimitation process should have comprehensive terms of references that go beyond demarcations because ZEC itself has degenerated into an operator instead of being an authority that deals with regulation, of a more regulatory nature, competing with stakeholders that it is supposed to regulate. It is supposed to be strengthened so that it has the technical people

who can give independent recommendations and knowledge to government. It is operational instead of it being a policy regulator, it should have few policy people to direct policy. Against this backdrop, there is need for delineating the roles of the Executive and then strengthening ZEC so that they do their work. The Executive role should be recalibrated, the same as that of ZEC, so that they do not become operators and competitors with civic society. Manipulation will automatically be addressed by the structural aspects of the Executive, ZEC, and Civic Society. The structural aspect should be recalibrated and made right then everything will fall into place.

There was inadequate time for the delimitation exercise, a process whose different phases offer ZEC and other stakeholders varying access points to influence how electoral processes are run to attain desired outcomes. There must be enough time to effectively implement the process.

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CHAPTER SIX

The Relevance of the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) System in Promoting Democratic and Credible Elections in Zimbabwe

Solomon Muqayi

Introduction

The central focus of this chapter is to evaluate the relevance of the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) in promoting democratic elections in Zimbabwe. For many years, Zimbabwe's main political parties have been fighting over the manual voters' register that was allegedly marred with challenges such as duplication of voters, high margin of error, irregularities and manipulation by politicians, among other challenges (Zimbabwe Democracy Institute, 2018). As a result of these highlighted challenges, the manual voters' register was becoming highly unreliable and undependable thereby adversely affecting the credibility of the whole electoral processes. There was continuous pressure pilling from stakeholders such as the civil society organisations, opposition political parties, think tanks and researchers for reforms such as introducing the BVR system. The BVR was subsequently introduced in 2017 ahead of the 2018 elections. Biometrics in elections are meant to "fix" defective vital statistics and reliable data collection, duplication of voters' rolls and accusations of electoral fraud on balloting days as a result of voters' roll deficiencies. For the first time, the BVR was employed by the Zimbabwean government in the run up to the 2018 harmonised elections yet it remains blur of what relevance introduction is towards promoting democratic and credible elections in Zimbabwe. Therefore, this study unearths the usefulness of the BVR in addressing electoral flaws in Zimbabwe.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by liberalism, a school whose major proponents are Bentham and Locke (Wells, 2014). What underlines the liberal school of thought is the argument that even though the government has a vital role of safeguarding the rights of citizens, the government poses a threat to the

enjoyment of the same freedoms (Kandiyali, 2013). The government therefore should have a limited role in the affairs of the citizens. The citizens according to the liberal theory have a freedom to participate in regular free, fair and credible elections (Kelly, 2004.). It is however the responsibility of the state to ensure that this right together with other rights or freedoms are upheld. It is within this theory that ZEC which is an 'independent' Electoral Management Board was tasked through statutory instrument 84 with the responsibility to utilize the BVR system to register eligible voters as part of the larger process of creating a new voter's roll. Liberalism charges the state to ensure that the electoral process is undertaken in a manner that is both democratic and credible so that the citizen gets to enjoy his freedoms without hindrance (Wells, 2014). The introduction of the BVR is one of the measures taken by the Zimbabwean government to ensure that elections in Zimbabwe are both democratic and credible. The BVR was introduced so that there are no duplications, multi-voting, errors in the election process. However, this study sought to investigate of what relevance or usefulness was the BVR in promoting or enhancing democratic and credible elections in Zimbabwe.

Literature Review

The BVR has been defined by quite a number of authorities in more or less the same way. ZESN (2017) defines the BVR as a technology or system which captures a voter's finger prints, facial photograph and personal information such as name, surname, sex and address. Ndlovu (2017) postulates that the BVR is a unique computerized system that is particularly oriented in identification and authentication of voter's information using biometric processes. Likewise, Chindaro (2017) postulates that BVR is a registration process, whereby in addition to details such as a person's name and address being taken, finger prints and a picture are also captured and stored on a computer. Both Ndlovu (2017) and Chindaro (2017) highlight that the BVR uses BVR kits (camera, laptop, finger print scanner) which captures fingerprints, facial biometrics together with other information such as name, surname, sex, age, ward, county amongst others. The system operates in the presence of what is known as BVR

kit which is the computerized unit that captures the voter's data. It comprises of a computer (laptop) finger scanner and a camera. BVR employs biometric technology of the times in addition to demographics of the voter for polling registration and authentication. BVR technology uses physical features, which are unique to every individual for purposes of identification. Since any two individuals do not identically share these features, the BVR system helps to create a more accurate system of identification and eliminates the problem of duplications, which has blighted previous voters' rolls and elections (ZESN 2018a).

The use of biometric technology is not new phenomenon. The first fingerprint catalogues of known criminals were established in the second half of the 19th century for the use of police investigators and criminal courts (National Institute of Justice 2011). In recent years, the use of BVR technologies has increased speedily in various disciplines such as elections, border security, citizen registration, access controls, passports and identification cards (Das, 2016). There has been a continuous increase of the number of states adopting the BVR to over 50 (Wolf, 2022). About 95% of the European countries apply biometric technology for voter registration and identification (IDEA, 2022). Unlike Biometric Voting (BV), BVR is only concerned with the registration of voters and compilation of the voters' roll (ZESN, 2018b). This indicates that the BVR in the 2018 harmonised election only canvassed only one aspect of a long and complex electoral process, the registration process. This is divergent to the misleading understanding many held prior to the election that Zimbabwe was going to use BV rather than BVR. Clearly it was a misunderstanding on the part of the public and the lack of clarity from ZEC with its stakeholders. The telos of the BVR is to prevent de-duplication, multiple registration and the existence of ghost voters. It aims to enhance the fairness and credibility of an election in an open and democratic election (Ndlovu, 2017). The idea is to prevent malpractices such as multi registration, directed at proving a true and fair result. The software used helps to eliminate duplicates or multiple registration due to malpractice, fraud or human error. The aim is also to improve identification

of the voter so that he or she votes only once. The BVR guarantees fair results that reflect the will of the people hence promoting democratic and credible elections in a country. It ensures smooth and efficient operation of the electoral registration process. The system introduces technological advancements into the electoral process which ought to make the process more accurate, efficient, robust and transparent (Saunders and Siachiwena, 2021). In Zimbabwe, the introduction was hailed by stakeholders as a giant improvement because before the system was introduced, data was captured in the manual voter registration which was subject to manipulation and susceptible to high margin error.

The BVR process was inaugurated amidst a highly dynamic political environment characterized by intense political competition around the succession question in the ruling party ZANU-PF, and massive contestations in the opposition around the need for an opposition alliance (Ndlovu, 2017). These internal political party dynamics were in addition to uncertainties around when precisely the 2018 election would occur, the legal and procedural regime under which the poll would be conducted, and whom the key players in that election would be. The BVR exercise also marked a new voter registration dispensation with the ZEC taking over full control of voter registration from the Registrar General's office, for the first time since independence, and introducing Biometrics. This article investigates the utility of the BVR in promoting democratic and credible elections in Zimbabwe. ZESN (2018a) notes that an inclusive and comprehensive voter registration is the backbone of any successful election. Regular democratic and credible elections form the cornerstone of any democratic society. Sachikonye (1995) postulates that one of the central features of a democratic society are regular, free and fair elections which are democratic, credible and legitimate elections. However, there is more to a free and fair election than just holding a ballot.

One of the founding fathers of the American democracy, Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as government by the people of the people by the people, for the people. Sachikonye (1991: 1) notes that the concept of democracy

has been associated with a political system in which multi-partyism exists, periodic free and fair elections based on universal suffrage are conducted and the press freedom, human rights and rule of law guaranteed. Periodic free and fair elections are an important component of a democratic society as the process in ideal situation guarantees that it is the will of people not the politicians that prevails (Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 2018). Elections are however rather just a ritual if their credibility is not guaranteed. In Africa in general, achieving the credibility of elections has been difficult as political parties have remained at each other's throats over unending allegations of rigging through various strategies. Zimbabwe has not been spared from this familiar feature of African politics as for many years, main political parties have been fighting over a flawed electoral system in dire need for reforms. In particular Zimbabwe's main political parties have been fighting over the manual voters' register that was allegedly marred with challenges such as duplication of voters, high margin for error, irregularities and manipulation by politicians, among other challenges. Main stakeholders such as opposition parties and the general citizenry ended up lacking trust and confidence in the electoral system leading to voter apathy.

Methodology

This study utilised qualitative research methods. It employed qualitative techniques such as interviews, documentary search and observations to gather data. Officials from government ministries and organizations like ZEC, ZANU-PF, MDC-A, ZESN were interviewed. The organisations and government department were chosen on the basis of their participation in Zimbabwe's electoral processes. The study employed non probability sampling methods such as purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was employed to select research participants with relevant information with regards to Zimbabwe's BVR process. The study applied content analysis for analysing data. The researcher adhered to ethical principles such as confidentiality, informed consent and gave assurances to participants that they were not to be subjected to harm.

Historical Background and the Development of the BVR in Zimbabwe

The BVR emerged out of continuous calls from various stakeholders such as the civil society organisations, opposition political parties, think tanks and researchers to bring in some remarkable reforms such as abolishing the old voters' register and introduce the BVR system. Such reforms would be meant to make Zimbabwe's elections more credible and democratic. Electoral disputes in Zimbabwe are as old as the process itself (Magaisa. 2017). Zimbabwe's switch from manual voter registration to BVR was a product of necessity based on challenges associated with the voters roll from previous elections. Voter registration, the resultant voters' roll, access to it, and its integrity have been at the centre of many election petitions and disputes in Zimbabwe since the 1990s (ZESN, 2018a). From the 1990s, seminal cases like that of Margaret Dongo and Fidelis Mhashu revealed irregularities and defects with the voters roll and highlighted the deficiencies of the manual voter registration processes.

In an interview with one of the respondents, he indicated that:

For many years, the main political parties have been fighting over the old voters' roll, allegedly marred with challenges such as duplication of voters, high margin for error, irregularities and manipulation by politicians, among other challenges. It has been alleged that elections have been rigged by the incumbent party since 1980. Over the years, voter apathy has been growing as a result of mistrust between the main political parties. The situation attracted international condemnation from international organizations whose position has been that Zimbabwe's electoral process has over the years deteriorated. Civil Society Organizations, main opposition political parties have also been on the forefront in condemning Zimbabwe's electoral process, alleging that they are undemocratic and not credible. Pressure from Civil Society Organizations, the international community, political parties and other interested parties forced the Zimbabwean government to introduce the BVR.

To address the voter registration or voter's roll problem, the Zimbabwean government decided to follow other African countries that have already made a path for fellow African countries yet to adopt the BVR in their electoral processes. The BVR's inauguration and inception took place in September 2017. President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, on the 8th of September 2017, ordered

a new registration of voters in all wards and constituencies in the country. The order, made through Proclamation 6 of 2017, acting under section 36A (1) of the Electoral Act, designated the period between September 14, 2017, and January 15, 2018, as the period in which the new voter registration exercise would take place. Following the proclamation, the ZEC complied with the order by starting a BVR process on 18 September 2017 in 63 district Centres and later instituted a BVR Blitz which began on 10 October 2017 and stretched to 19 December 2017. In January 2018, ZEC extended the BVR Blitz through a mop-up exercise from 10 January 2018 to 8 February 2018 on account of requests for an extension from ZESN and other organizations. This following a landmark high court ruling that allowed Zimbabweans of foreign descent, formally referred to as aliens to register as voters. This new voter registration was a precursor to 2018 harmonized elections (ZESN, 2018b).

Zimbabwe featured on the list of African countries to use the BVR joining Somaliland, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Gambia to mention a few. Zimbabwe used the BVR in the run up to the 2018 elections. This was however without headwinds as there was an aura of challenges surrounding the procurement of the BVR kits and the timely availing of the voter's roll to the public. One of the interview respondents noted that:

The location of the server where the data would be stored was also an area of concern. The ZEC was accused of not fully involving its stakeholders every step of the way which took away trust from the whole process. Time was also an area of concern as there was not adequate time to pilot the procured BVR kits to see if there were no areas that needed attention. Issues of power supply especially in rural areas or remote areas was also a source of concern as there were cases of power failure in some areas which generated frustration and delays in the registration process.

Zimbabwe is not the only African country to adopt the BVR to deal with electoral disputes emanating from issues surrounding voter registration. ZESN (2018a) notes that according to the International IDEA ICTs for Elections database, over 46% of countries in Africa use biometric identification.

Zimbabwe's constitution and democratic elections

Zimbabwe is a constitutional democracy and the BVR was introduced under the 2013 constitution. The legal framework applicable to the 2018 harmonised elections generally provides adequate conditions for competitive elections, if implemented in good faith [European Union Election Observer Mission (EU EOM), 2018].

The Electoral Act now provides for the set-up of the national Multi Party Liaison Committee (MPLC) before the close of nominations and at any time after the beginning of the six-month period before the end of the Parliament's five-year term, and the establishment of the Electoral Court as a division of the High Court to align with S183 of the Constitution, while a significant amendment was the criminalisation of intimidating statements by people that they can discover how a voter has casted his/her ballot. ZESN (2018a) postulates that according to schedule four of the Constitution a person can register as a voter if they are 18 years or over and a Zimbabwean citizen. The Constitution allows for additional requirements to be added by the Electoral law but these must be consistent with section 67 of the Constitution which guarantees every citizen's right to participate in electoral processes. Therefore, in accordance with schedule four, the electoral voter registration regulations provided for additional regulations. Section 4 of the regulations states: *"For the purposes of registering as a voter any one of the following documents which legibly show that the claimant is a citizen of Zimbabwe of or over the age of eighteen years shall constitute proof of identity and citizenship- (a) a national identity document, that is to say, an identity document in terms of section 7(2) of the National Registration Act [Chapter 10:17]; or (b) a waiting pass"*, that is to say, a notice in writing in terms of section 7(1) of the National Registration Act [Chapter 10:17], which includes a photograph of the bearer. Over and above the electoral mechanisms and framework was not adequate enough for a democratic and credible election to take place. There is need to align the Electoral Act to the 2013 constitution.

The concept of democracy has been associated with a political system in which multi-partyism exists, periodic free and fair elections based on universal

suffrage are conducted and the press freedom, human rights and rule of law guaranteed (Sachikonye 1991: 1). In Zimbabwe the constitution is the supreme law of the land and Zimbabwe is a constitutional democracy and the constitution is the supreme law of the land. Zimbabwe has a new constitution, known as the 2013 amendment No. 20 constitution. This constitution appears to be one of the best constitutions so far in Zimbabwe's constitutional history. The problem however is that many acts of parliament in Zimbabwe such as the Electoral Act of parliament require alignment and the Zimbabwean government has been alleged to be reluctant to do so.

BVR versus manual voters' register

The findings reveal that the BVR is a giant step from the manual voter's register because unlike the manual voter's register the BVR is a computerised system or technology that uses biometrics or human features such as finger prints and a facial photo to register eligible voters. This reduces the risk of duplication of voters. One of the interview respondents indicated that:

The old manual voters' register was alleged to be subject to manipulation and to have contained dead voters. One could vote on the polling day more than once without being traced due to poor identification methods. The old voters' roll was becoming highly unreliable and undependable thereby adversely affecting the credibility of the whole electoral process.

In addition, Magaisa (2017) notes that one of BVR's major strengths is the ability to deter duplicate voter registration and its creation on a new and clean voter's roll.

For Zimbabwe's 2013 harmonised elections, there were 5 874 115 registered voters whereas there was a slight decrease of the registered voters for the 2018 harmonised elections and the number was at 5 524 118 (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2023). The decline in number of registered voters was as a result of starting a fresh registration system while abolishing the old voters register. International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2023) notes that about 6 147 517 people have successfully registered for the 2023 harmonised elections.

BVR, ZEC and the democratisation process

The ZEC is the central pillar of the BVR process based on its constitutional mandate to register voters and to compile the voters' rolls, as provided for in the 2013 Constitution. This section specifically gives ZEC exclusive powers to register voters and to compile and maintain the voters' rolls. Section 239 of the Constitution, provides ZEC with the mandate *"to register voters; to compile voters rolls and registers; and to ensure the proper custody and maintenance of voters rolls and registers"*. It is important to note that it is pertinent for ZEC to conduct itself in manner that is independent, transparent yet inclusive. This is vital in establishing trust between itself main stakeholders such as political parties. Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (2018) highlights that in light of the 31st of July 2018 harmonized election, ZEC is hailed for coming up with a new and clean voter's role which is reckoned the major strength of the BVR.

Not that ZEC is to blame but ZEC commenced the BVR process behind schedule. ZESN (2018a) has it on record that ZEC conducted the BVR exercise within a constrained timeframe which adversely affected its performance. ZESN (2018a) further highlights that although ZEC acquitted itself well and was up to the task of leading the BVR process, the time constraints showed up throughout the process in various ways. ZEC training process for its BVR teams took place within a short window between receipt of kits and onset of the BVR process. As the BVR process was not being conducted in an electoral vacuum, the absence of an enunciated comprehensive electoral roadmap, and timeous availing of crucial electoral information, impeded the seamless operation of both ZEC and other electoral stakeholders such as political parties. For ZEC, the constrained time frame meant that it had less than three weeks to train its people from receipt of BVR equipment at the beginning of September 2017 to the onset of the BVR exercise on the 20th of September 2018. One of the interview respondents highlighted that:

There was less evidence of adequate training. While there was evidence of sound basic training on the BVR process for ZEC Officers, there was also evidence of gaps in the training process regarding BVR Officials extant (1.) Skills, (2.) knowledge of other stakeholder's roles in the process, (3.) understanding of the

BVR in context, and (4.) citizens with the right to register. These issues negatively impacted on the transparency of the BVR process, and infringed the suffrage rights of certain classes of citizens, as explained below.

In addition, Magaisa (2018) notes that the absence of a proper feasibility study or a piloting process ahead of BVR implementation further adversely affected the performance of ZEC. Power failure and kit malfunction cases were reported in some areas which clearly demonstrate how needful pilot testing was before the kits were deployed. ZEC failed to speedily avail the voter's role to major stakeholders (ZESN, 2018). ZEC failure to dispel some fears through piloting through engagement with key electoral stakeholders furthered marred the BVR process.

ZEC was however able to comprehensively deploy BVR officials and equipment to all registration centres throughout the BVR blitz process. During the BVR process, ZEC's engagement with stakeholders took various forms with varied stakeholders and amongst the critical stakeholders in Zimbabwe's electoral process are political parties, civil society organizations, government, members of the public, local and international technical assistance groups, and vendors of different products and services key to the electoral process.

BVR, political parties and the democratisation process

Political parties play a pivotal role in the democratisation process in Zimbabwe. Besides providing candidates for political office, interest aggregation and articulation they also mobilise mass actions towards reforms. In Zimbabwe, their role has been paramount in expanding the democratic space through various actions such as legal and mass actions (Sachikonye, 2005). To a greater extent, the introduction of the BVR can be attributed to their actions. One of the interview respondents indicated that:

The opposition parties in particular have been on the forefront of piling pressure on the incumbent government to adopt the BVR and implement an array of other electoral reforms. The National Electoral Reform Agenda (NERA), a coalition of opposition parties for instance was vocal and influential in the introduction of the BVR, kits procurements and the location of the BVR servers. NERA pushed for a clean biometric voters' register (BVR), managed by ZEC which

could be provided upon request in machine-readable format as a precondition for a legitimate election. NERA approached the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) as part of efforts to force the government to reform the electoral system to level the playing field and ensure free and fair elections. In the development of the BVR NERA demanded for ZEC to guarantee the security of the BVR gathered data during voter registration exercises. ZEC was requested to release names of companies that were going to supply servers to store the information collected from voters during registration. It also demanded that Rita Makarau seize to hold two crucial roles which seemingly happen to be of conflicting roles.

Under the NERA banner opposition political parties expressed that for obvious reasons they preferred a situation where the servers were procured through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), even though ZEC went ahead to set this proposition aside. They feared memory sticks were going to be tempered with or exchanged between the field and the server. They also demanded for political parties to be able to audit the data once at district and national level to check for any omitted data or any additions. Political parties were concerned that members of the security service, youth officers and traditional leaders would play a critical role for instance acting the role of registration officers. This would obviously affect the credibility of the registration process since these are not to be trusted to be fair. In the BVR the political parties recorded some success on some of their demands for instance they partly won the battle on the procurement aspect. ZEC for instance ended up changing the initial procurement arrangements. Therefore, even though political parties were involved in the BVR process some of their contributions were set aside last minute.

BVR, Civil Society and the democratisation process

Like political parties, the civil society has been vital in regard to the BVR and the democratisation process. The civil society through civil society organizations such as ZESN and ZimRights have been piling pressure on the Zimbabwean government to introduce the much-needed electoral reforms so as to promote democratic and credible elections in Zimbabwe. These

civil society organizations have been employing various methods to get the government carry out reforms. Through petitions, demonstrations or protests the government has been forced to bend the knee on some aspects. ZESN for instance was influential in the introduction of the BVR as it piled pressure on the government to introduce the BVR so as to deal with the electoral disputes that emanated from the registration process. They launched an aggressive campaign to have the greater number of Zimbabweans register despite the difficulties in registering for the BVR exercise which was hit by apathy. This campaign was led by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) which assumed the leading role to the effect. They carried out voter mobilisation and education.

The civil society however fell short in ensuring that besides the introduction of BVR other necessary reforms were implemented to provide support to the BVR, bearing in mind that the electoral disputes in Zimbabwe have been generated by a plethora of flaws that are yet to be addressed. The civil society failed to do much towards pushing ZEC to do all necessary to promote transparency and trust between itself and other key stakeholders like political parties. Despite its effort some other political parties remained suspicious of ZEC and its relationship with the incumbent government. Despite all its shortfalls the civic society played central role not only in the amalgamation of the BVR but also in the entire democratisation process in Zimbabwe. The poor performance by the civic society in Zimbabwe can be attributed to the shrinking donor funding and sometimes the hostile posture by the incumbent government towards it. The BVR and democracy in Zimbabwe remains an area of concern in Zimbabwe because the incumbent government has remained adamant in adopting reforms that the civil society and other stakeholders like the political parties' demand. Even though the BVR was hailed as a major breakthrough, more remains to be done to enhance democratic and credible elections in Zimbabwe. For instance, the media coverage must not be skewed in favour of the incumbent government and government resources like vehicles must not be used to advance the interests of the incumbent party. All this goes a long way in ensuring a levelled field

for all political parties. More remains to be done towards dealing with the abuse of traditional leadership and voter intimidation. Towards all these the civil society retains the sacred duty of ensuring they are delivered towards promoting more democratic and credible elections. Biometrics technology must be used on the voting day to confirm identity

The BVR contribute to free and fair elections through making the registration process of voters computerised. The voter's biometric features such as fingerprints and facial picture were captured for registration to ensure absence of multiple voters. This guards against multiple voting, the existence of ghost voters hence making the process more democratic and credible. The BVR was applied for the 2018 harmonised elections though it only canvassed only one aspect, neglecting other aspect such as the counting and announcement of electoral results. This is evident in the 2018 harmonised elections which are alleged despite being generally peaceful, to have been rigged in favour of the incumbent party. BVR is not akin to electronic voting. Electronic voting is not yet so popular in Africa with the exception of Namibia which was the first African country to try electronic voting (Dingani 2017).

Conclusion

This study concludes that albeit the introduction of the BVR system was a significant step towards promoting democratic and credible elections in Zimbabwe, it is important to note that the BVR system is not a silver bullet or panacea to this effect. Though useful and a milestone, BVR has to be complemented by the biometric voting process which should be implemented on the polling stations on the day of voting and this will effectively promote democratic and credible elections in Zimbabwe. In light of the 2023 harmonised elections, the relevance and usefulness of the BVR system lies in the fact that it is a break away from the old voter's roll which was a major source of electoral disputes in the past. One of the BVR's major strengths is the ability to deter duplicate voter registration. The BVR system was conceived out of an unending pressure that emanated from civil society organizations and political parties over the need to improve voter

registration. The register was marred with a plethora of duplications, high error margins and was subject to manipulation especially by the incumbent party.

The chapter concludes that the BVR system in the 2018 harmonised elections gave hope to the electorate with regards to the improvement in fairness of the voter registration process. As for 2023 elections, there were some improvements that were effected to the voter registration process as we have seen an increase in the number of registered voters. Registration was done afresh and the registration process was done through the capturing unique biometrics such as finger prints and the photo of those registering. The electorate were issued with slips which they were to keep till the day of the election. However, the BVR system only addresses only one aspect of a long, complex and complicated electoral process, which is the registration aspect and the verification aspect on the day of the election. However, there are still challenges such as clashes over the procurement of the biometric kits, the server's location and its security. There BVR kits or system were not piloted which increased the risk of unpreparedness in case of malfunction.

Recommendations for future elections

- ***Strategies to improve the democratisation and election processes***

The ZEC must ensure that it takes necessary steps to ensure that there is trust and confidence between stakeholders and itself in the electoral process. The independence of ZEC and transparency is therefore important in promoting democratic and credible elections. The interferences from the incumbent party in its processes should not be tolerated or accepted under what circumstances.

ZEC should commence the BVR process as early as possible to give itself ample time to pilot the process so as to trace areas that need attention. The training process of the technical team should also be done early and backups should be availed in terms of power and failure and technical malfunctions that may be encountered. If ZEC commences early its BVR process it will be in a position to carry out voter education and officials training effectively to

avoid cases of unpreparedness.

ZEC should procure their kits in a transparent manner and from a trusted vendor. This will go a long way in ensuring that there is trust between itself and its stakeholders. Genuine and consistent stakeholder engagement becomes critical to this effect.

ZEC should not delay the announcement of results as this led to an outbreak of violent protests that led to the intervention of the army which opened live ammunition against unarmed protesters. The live ammunition led to six people being killed by soldiers and marred the whole electoral process. There is need to amend the Electoral Act to ensure that the results are announced as soon as the result are verified. Further delay is not in tandem with international standards of a democratic and credible election.

The Electoral Act should be aligned with the 2013 Constitution, in particular those provisions related to the constitutional right to vote (including postal voting for homebound voters and those in hospitals and penitential institutions), reinforcement of the independence of ZEC in relation to responsibility for its own regulations, voter registration, and accreditation of observers, as well as the required approval of regulations.

The BVR should be backed up by regulations supported by a sound legal framework. There is need for an inclusive and comprehensive Voter Education to demystify some of the questions around the introduction of the new technology. If the BVR is not implemented in accordance with internationally accepted principles and standards it will not be effective in achieving its objectives. BVR is not a panacea to Zimbabwe's Electoral problems. It must be complemented with other reforms to the administrative, legislative and political environment in which electoral processes are implemented. BVR should not be seen as driven by vendor or external interests, introduced for reasons of national ego or as a distraction from other key electoral tasks. BVR should not be introduced at the last minute (11th hour). If BVR is to succeed, there is need for a conducive political environment that is free from intimidation and violence.

- ***Strategies by the Zimbabwean government***

The Zimbabwean government must amend the legal framework to make the provision of clear timelines on all electoral processes and these are clearly spelt out in the legal framework and administrative regulations, something that Zimbabwe can take a leaf from. Zimbabwe which incorporated technology in elections should make sure that they do not purchase outdated and expensive as well as difficult to maintain equipment. Zimbabwe should in future take a cue from these current debates globally about using integrated approaches to ensure sustainability and cost-effective use of ICTs in elections. The Zimbabwean government should by all necessary means ensure that the Electoral Act is aligned to the 2013 constitution. This will go a long way in ensuring that the electoral process is both democratic and credible. Now that the BVR has been adopted, there is a host of other reforms that the Zimbabwean government should introduce for instance to dispel fears of ZEC conniving with the ruling Party.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

I Pray I Vote Campaign: The Role of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches in the Electoral Process

Tinashe Gumbo

Introduction and Background

This chapter tracks the role of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC)⁷ in the electoral process with a particular focus on its 2018 campaign, *I Pray I Vote*. The ZCC's role in nation-building, in general, goes back to 1964 when it was constituted as the Christian Council of Rhodesia (CCR) then. After independence in 1980, the ZCC continued on that path with its influence being felt in electoral processes. The current chapter focuses on the organization's work on elections.

The ZCC was one of the first non-state actors to formally participate in the monitoring of national elections in Zimbabwe (Mtata, 2019). The Church's active and informed participation in nation-building processes in general and elections, in particular, has been motivated by the fact that Zimbabwe continued to produce contested election outcomes (Mvundura, 2020). The elections have also been characterized by politically motivated violence leading to the death of people and the destruction of property (Macheka, 2022). The legitimacy of the successive leadership produced by the national elections, particularly since 2000 after the formation of a new vibrant opposition political party, the Movement for Change (MDC) the previous year, remained the much-discussed issue in Zimbabwe (Mvundura, 2020). This provoked the Church's interest as it is one of the first respondents to victims of political violence and contested election outcomes. The Church responded through the issuance of periodic statements denouncing violence as well as becoming active participants in electoral processes as discussed in this chapter. While

⁷ZCC is an ecumenical body that is made up of the mainline churches in Zimbabwe. It was founded in 1964 in the context of the liberation struggle. Since then, it has remained an active participant in nation-building processes including election observation, political dialogue and peacebuilding. At the time of writing this chapter, ZCC is made up of thirty-one-member churches.

the ZCC had been involved in election work since independence, this chapter focuses on the period from 2018 onwards. In 2018, the organization came up with an election campaign that would run from that year to the next elections in 2023, which is the focus of this chapter.

The main objective of this chapter is to unpack the *I Pray I Vote* campaign in light of the upcoming 2023 elections. An analysis of the campaign leads to specific recommendations directed to the Church and key stakeholders for their effective participation in the 2023 elections. The chapter is directly informed by the author's "insider-outsider" perspective which is complimented by some literature review of the ZCC's key election documents. The ZCC electoral work is discussed within the social capital theory. This is explained by the fact that the ZCC is an ecumenical organization that benefits from the bonding and bridging dynamics emanating from its membership, networks, and affiliates nationally, regionally, and globally.

The ZCC is a fellowship of mainline churches born out of the struggle against the injustices of colonialism and racial oppression in the 1960s (ZCC Strategic Plan, 2021-2023). Inspired by its commitment to justice and equality, ZCC leaders morally and theologically accompanied the liberation struggle together with other Christian bodies as the organization directly engaged in the political processes that led to the country's independence. Additionally, leaders from the ZCC (then President as well as the General Secretary) attended the Lancaster House negotiations in 1979 to provide counsel and accompaniment. The first President of Zimbabwe, the late Reverend Canaan Ba-nana, a Methodist leader, sought the support of the churches worldwide for the reconstruction phase after the liberation. He contacted the World Council of Churches (WCC) and other international ecumenical bodies for material and moral support to Zimbabwe (ZCC 2018 Election Report). The role played by some clergymen in the liberation struggle such as the late Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole and Bishop Abel Muzorewa among others who were associated with the ZCC, further shows the significance of the Church's input into the governance system of the country prior to and after independence. The two Church leaders were directly involved in

the liberation struggle through the leadership of their respective political parties.

The ZCC has continued to pursue a nation-building approach emphasizing the potential for electoral processes to give Zimbabweans a meaningful opportunity to listen to each other, deeply reflect, and select leaders of their own choice without violence or coercion (ZCC Election Strategy 2021). The organization consistently spoke to the sacredness and sanctity of electoral processes and the significance of voting in the country's democratic life as exemplified by its continued participation in elections as an observer (See the campaign under discussion in this chapter). This enabled the ZCC to cut through polarising and highly politicized electoral narratives whose winner takes all mentality often ran counter to the prospects of nation-building and democratic co-existence (ZCC Election Strategy, 2022). The ZCC election approach has been meant to shift the national focus towards a more uniting and inclusive electoral discourse which is critical to address deep-rooted apathy and cynicism amongst the citizens (ZCC Election Strategy, 2022). Strong biblical precedence and scriptural references to the principles of justice and peace remained at the centre of the *I Pray I Vote* campaign as indicated later in this chapter. The campaign itself is hinged on theology, from its title to its main pillars such as "Ecumenical Election Covenant" which are biblical concepts.

In one of its pastoral statements after the 2021 national elections in Zambia, the Council of Churches in Zimbabwe (CCZ) (2021), also confirms the significance of the Church's input into national elections. It indicates that,

Church leaders especially have a God-given mandate to be custodians of peace and unity and to be the voice of the voiceless and promoters of accountable governance. It also requires them to speak truth to power and not offer blind loyalty.

Thus, the *I Pray I Vote* campaign of the ZCC was born out of the Church's quest for peaceful and credible elections in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe's elections have been violent over the years when the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) was facing challenges

from its political opponent, mainly the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) led by the late nationalist, Edgar Tekere and others. However, more violent elections were witnessed in 2000 when the MDC led by the late Morgan Tsvangirai was formed and continued to participate in all subsequent national elections as shown earlier in this chapter. The first defeat of the ZANU PF in the national referendum for the new constitution in 2000, marked the beginning of unsustainable politically motivated violence (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2008).

All the successive elections from 2000, 2002, 2008, 2013, and 2018 were violent (Mvundura, 2020). The 2013 elections were relatively peaceful but still produced contested results (Raftopoulos, 2013). The post-2018 elections violence spoiled the earlier peaceful situation that had been witnessed during the campaign period (Motlanthe Commission Report, 2018). The ZCC, alone or collectively with other ecumenical bodies under the banner of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) responded to the ugly political developments through pastoral letters and engagement of the key stakeholders. The ZHOCD is a platform that brings together the ZCC, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), and the Union of the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA). The ZCC has been the Secretariat of the ZHOCD for the past five years hence its work also reflects the broader intervention by the Church in Zimbabwe because of that role.

In 2021, the ZHOCD produced a comprehensive election document dubbed *“The Election We Want: Choosing Leadership as A Theological Imperative”* (ZHOCD, 2021). The document highlights the theological foundation of elections and the biblical principles of the same. This was informed by the nation-building role of the Church in a nation whose elections have always been marred by violence or produced contested outcomes. The ZCC election campaign can be understood from a similar background to the collective Church in Zimbabwe.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The chapter is informed by the social capital theory. Social capital fits well in the study as the case study of the ZCC is hinged on collective efforts, relationship building, sharing of resources, and an ecumenical approach to Zimbabwe's electoral processes. Ecumenical efforts discourage individualism among the churches in Zimbabwe. The ZCC's approach to elections is based on engagement at various levels of society, making the social capital theory relevant as a tool to appreciate the Ecumenical Church's role in electoral processes. The author acknowledges the possible limitations associated with the theory but he largely holds that it helps to understand the ZCC's work which is pushed from an ecumenical perspective more than individual efforts. Waters (2022) defines social capital as the "capital or resources we gain from existing within a social network". The concept was derived from social science and is centered on humanity's ability to leverage social connections in order to solve problems, improve well-being, pursue shared objectives, and take collective action. Bourdieu (1986) emphasizes that social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. Membership in a group provides each member with the support gained from collective belonging. Bourdieu further holds that the relationships in a group may exist only in the practical state, materially or through the symbolic exchange of ideas. Robert Putman has become the modern face of the social capital theory through his work "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital.

Social capital is based on social relationships and is characterized by social networks, civic engagement, norms of reciprocity, and generalized trust (Bhandari and Yasunobu). As indicated above, social capital is a collective asset manifesting through shared norms, values, beliefs, trust, networks, social relations, and institutions that facilitate cooperation and collective action for mutual benefits. Some of the types of social capital are structure and cognitive, bonding, bridging, and linking, strong and weak; and horizontal and vertical. Gannon and Roberts (2018), highlight some of the controversies associated

with the social capital theory and they hold that it remains a challenging concept such that its utility as an analytical tool has been questioned. However, the current chapter does not directly engage those noted controversies surrounding the theory.

Putnam (2000) elaborates on the two types of social capital (bridging and bonding). Networks with bridging social capital are said to be better for linkages of external assets and for information dissemination. Such networks are outward-oriented hence their individual composition can be more heterogeneous (Zmerli, 2002). The important aspect of such networks is that they can influence broader identities and reciprocity of which the ZCC stands as a good example. On the other hand, bonding social capital enhances specific reciprocity, solidarity, and in group loyalty (Zmerli, 2002). Bonding social capital further promotes group identities and reinforces homogeneous groups.

The *I Pray I Vote* campaign's implementation modalities benefit from the bonding and bridging of social capital at various levels, ranging from the ZCC membership to its networks in civil society, business, and other sectors of society. Putnam (2000) concludes that an ecumenical body such as the ZCC can enjoy or utilize both bridging and bonding social capital. As will be noted later in this chapter, the ZCC bonds with its membership along religious lines and bridges across social classes with other networks on elections and other processes.

A lot has been written about the ZCC's role in nation-building in general but there is no work noted that unpacks the *I Pray I Vote* campaign. No literature was accessed on the academic explanation of the campaign. Thus, this chapter seeks to fill that gap by providing mainly an "insider-outsider" perspective on the campaign within the social capital framework.

Methodology

This chapter is directly informed by the author's "insider-outsider" perspective. The author had been part of the ZCC team that produced and implemented the *I Pray I Vote* Campaign until his departure from the ZCC in mid-2022.

Objectivity has been applied in the analysis of the campaign despite the background of the author. One had to suspend all potential biases emanating from his role in the development and implementation of the campaign. Direct interaction with the ZCC membership and broader ecumenical movement under the ZHOCD allowed the author to have a full appreciation of the role of the Church in electoral processes in Zimbabwe. The ZCC's work with regional and international ecumenical partners such as the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa (FOCCISA), All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), and the WCC presents the Church as an active electoral stakeholder. Further interaction with the ZCC's technical partners such as the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) also informed the chapter while the author's association with the African Union Election Observer Missions allowed the author to learn from Church election work from other jurisdictions. The "insider-outsider" perspective was complemented by the review of ZCC's key materials on elections including its Election Strategy Document, pastoral letters, and unpublished program reports. Grey and academic resources were also reviewed for the production of this chapter. The secondary sources of data allowed the author to have an appreciation of how the work of the Church on elections was reported and interpreted. The ZCC materials specifically informed the author in terms of the Church's historical and contemporary interventions.

Political Context of the *I Pray I Vote* Campaign

For the first time in almost two decades, the 2018 Harmonised Elections in Zimbabwe were held without the direct participation of political heavyweights, deposed and now late, President Robert Gabriel Mugabe and former MDC-T leader Tsvangirai who passed away in February 2018. Despite the absence of these towering figures, the entrenched political polarisation between ZANU PF and MDC supporters persisted (ZCC 2018 Election Report). The ZANU PF consolidated its structures under the leadership of Emmerson Mnangagwa following the November 2017 military-assisted transition. The MDC participated in that election under a coalition that was

made up of seven political parties with Advocate Nelson Chamisa of the MDC-T as the flagbearer (ZCC, 2018 Elections Report).

Through its election observation reports (2018), the ZCC realized that eligible voters had become so disinterested in participating in national elections. The study further noted that apathy had been a result of the political violence that always characterized the national elections. Yet, the successive elections had also produced contested elections. It became clear for the ZCC, that “elections alone are not the solution in Zimbabwe” (Mtata, 2018). The ZCC would further hold that while elections were a necessary and constitutional process, they needed to be complemented by “National Dialogue”. As a result, the ZCC came up with a “comprehensive” campaign that contributed to the fulfillment of constitutional processes but one which would also lead the country to a lasting solution. This saw the birth of the *I Pray I Vote* campaign in 2018.

***I Pray I Vote* Campaign Unpacked**

In the context of the 2018 Harmonised elections, the ZCC implemented the *I Pray I Vote* campaign aimed at mobilizing the Christian community to fully and effectively participate in the electoral processes and promotion of peace (ZCC Election Report, 2018). The campaign’s core premise was to identify elections as both a patriotic duty and an important ritual with biblical precedence that all Christians have a duty to participate (Ngirande, 2018). *I Pray I Vote* campaign primarily targeted Christians particularly First Time Voters in a bid to increase electoral awareness, registration, and peaceful participation in elections. The campaign was directly guided by Biblical references to God’s design for nation-building processes such as elections to be done in a just and peaceful manner (ZHOCD, Election We Want, 2021).

The main appeal of the campaign was to present ‘Zimbabwe as the common denominator for All’ (ZCC Election Strategy, 2021). This, therefore, meant that “it is the responsibility of all Zimbabweans to use the opportunity of elections to build rather than destroy; listen rather than repress; engage rather than fight” (ZCC Election Strategy, 2022). Specific hashtags such as the

#iprayivote and #ConversationsOfHope were pushed out during particular key moments such as voter registration; delimitation and campaign period among others. The campaign was hinged on four specific pillars: awareness raising; agenda setting; election observation and post-election envisioning process.

Awareness Raising

Under the first pillar, the ZCC sought to ensure that there was informed and peaceful citizen participation in the 2018 and 2023 electoral processes. The study noted that through this pillar, the ZCC member churches were expected to mainstream electoral interventions into their day-to-day messaging and ecumenical processes. The move would address “rampant fear, mistrust, and misinformation around electoral processes” (ZCC Election Strategy, 2021). Thus, regular updates would be contributed through the election structures and the social and mainstream media. Electoral information resources and feedback on the same were disseminated by ZCC structures. The uniqueness of the ZCC messaging was its reflection of shared Christian values, scriptural references, and commitments to ecumenical approaches as a way to indicate the seamless relationship between the Christian walk and civic electoral responsibilities (ZCC Election Strategy, 2021). Partnership with the print and electronic media allowed the ZCC to reach out to many citizens with key electoral messages from 2018 to 2022 when the organization participated in various by-elections.

For the citizens, elections are an exercise of their right, the opportunity to directly influence how the future of the country will be shaped and on deciding whom to bestow with that mandate to make decisions on one’s behalf. The capacity to participate is mediated by a variety of factors that include access to information, freedom of association, protection from intimidation, manipulation, threats, and violence, as well as confidence in the electoral system (ZCC Election Strategy, 2021). Such issues build up the political environment in which the citizen participates freely and become well-equipped in political processes (ZCC 2018 Election Report). Thus, the I

Pray I Vote campaign contributed to sharing of credible and timely electoral information, argued ZCC members on various platforms. The strength of the ZCC approach was that its messaging did not require to be approved by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) since it was infused into the daily Church routines. While other civic actors may be required by law to have their messages approved for voter education, the *I Pray I Vote* campaign provided the Church with an opportunity to push out its electoral message without any notable challenges with regard to compliance with the set regulations.

Agenda Setting

The most striking pillar of the *I Pray I Vote* campaign is agenda setting. The reflection sessions that were fulfilled in early 2018 by the ZCC Local Ecumenical Fellowships (LEFs⁸), recommended that the Church needed to set the electoral agenda for the politicians and other key election stakeholders. It had been noted that previously, the ZCC had been participating in election processes whose agendas they had not contributed to. Thus, from 2018 until the next general elections in 2023, the ZCC committed through its election campaign to set the agenda through what became known as the Ecumenical Election Covenants (EECs)⁹.

Between March and April 2018, the ZCC invited leaders and laity from its member congregations to discuss their hopes, aspirations, and expectations for the 2018 Harmonised Elections (ZCC, 2018) and the subsequent elections that would be held in Zimbabwe. What transpired were “honest, objective and at times painful discussions around a subject that has done more to divide than unite the people of Zimbabwe” (Mtata Speech, 2018).

⁸The LEFs are a basic organizing unit/structure of ZCC member churches operating at local, sub-national and national levels. They essentially represent the manner in which member churches are mobilized and organized to execute ecumenical initiatives and programmatic work specifically under the ZCC. The LEFs encompass all the four wings of the Church; Ministers of Religion, Youths, Women and Men. They were responsible for the production of the EECs discussed later as well as the general implementation of the *I pray I vote* campaign. They infused the campaign into their daily Church routine especially the electoral messages.

⁹The EECs were documents developed by the local congregants in different district, spelling out their aspirations with regards the 2018 elections and the subsequent elections that would follow. In these documents, the congregants defined the qualities of the leaders they wanted from the elections. They further defined the policies that the various elected leaders should fulfill. The covenants were launched in the presence of the key election stakeholders reminiscent of the Biblical agreements. Using their social capital, the LEFs would mobilise other stakeholders for the launch and endorsement of the EECs.

Nevertheless, Christians everywhere dared to hope and elected to contribute to the possibility of a blessed election period, one without political violence and beneficial to the progress of the nation (Mtata). They,

see and some still need convincing that in the national dialogue and debate that is occasioned, elections lie an important opportunity for Zimbabwe to find better ways to pursue a more just, equitable, and just future. This, as the Psalmist dares us to believe for Zimbabwe, ‘You have turned my mourning into dancing for me; You have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy’ (ZCC National EEC Launch Service, 2018).

During the launch of the National EEC, the ZCC LEF representatives collectively reiterated that:

We are inspired by a pleasant precedent of the positive role of elections done in the right spirit from the book of Acts 6v3: ‘Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men (and by inference women too) of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.’ With this in mind, we have not spared any effort to educate, mobilize and encourage Christians everywhere to be the salt and the light, making their voices heard, promoting peace, and asking important questions. For so we pray. For so we vote (ZCC National EEC Launch Service, 2018).

The outcomes of the local dialogues were captured in the form of EECs to demonstrate not only the Christian community’s unity of purpose but a willingness to proactively and constructively influence the 2018 Harmonised elections (ZCC National EEC Launch Service 2018). The future of the nation depends on how:

We choose to carry out the 2018 Harmonised elections, what we are willing to tolerate, and what we shall be able to stand up against. Thus, the Covenants from 33 different locations universally condemn electoral violence, promote electoral reforms, desire issue-based electoral politics based on substantive dialogue, prefer a more open media, and most importantly emphasize the need for urgent attention to address poor service delivery, unemployment, water, roads, healthcare, and housing (ZCC, National EEC Launch Service, 2018).

The EECs were documents that captured the aspirations of the local congregants. The congregants would define the leader that they expected from the elections in terms of his or her qualities and policies to pursue. The

various EECs defined respective areas' local Councillor, Parliamentarian, Senator, and also the President. They offered a template that was supposed to be followed by the political parties during their primary elections and also for the public when they finally voted on election day. To link the 2018 elections and the subsequent elections, the EECs also defined what the people expected from the successful candidates once they occupy different public offices. Failure to fulfill what the Church would have prescribed to them would mean removal from the position in the next elections. The ZCC's campaign was expected to influence the 2023 processes in Zimbabwe through the 2018 elections.

The National EEC, informed by the local ones was launched on 3 May 2018 in Harare by the ZCC before the same was done in the various provinces and districts. During the launch services, the ZCC leadership in those areas would formally hand over the EECs to the stakeholders including police, political parties, ZEC, and all those who had direct roles to play during the election period. Furthermore, the Church leaders prayerfully committed the elections to the Lord and asked Him to guide and protect all the men and women tasked to supervise and coordinate this important work (Mtata, 2018).

As part of the agenda-setting processes, the ZCC commissioned the pre and post-2018 election surveys. These directly informed the subsequent engagement processes that the ZCC leadership embarked on. Basically, the pre-election survey confirmed that the people of Zimbabwe were still living in fear during election times, that they did not trust the key public institutions that run elections, and that indeed, the Church remained a trusted and neutral space for electoral processes (ZCC Pre-Election Survey Report, 2018). The report was shared publicly and formally with key stakeholders including the ZEC, civil society, political parties, and others. The post-election survey could not be shared publicly but directly informed the subsequent ZCC leadership of the National Dialogue processes. The survey noted that the majority of the people had not accepted the election

result, were emotionally not sure of their future, and aspired for peace in Zimbabwe (ZCC Post-Election Survey Report, 2018). Therefore, the agenda-setting pillar of the campaign motivated the public to define their leaders and what they should do once elected into office.

Election Observation

The ZCC has remained a key and active member of the ZESN, its technical partner on election observation. This background informed the third pillar of the *I Pray I Vote* campaign. The ZCC committed itself to observing all local and national elections from 2018 to 2023. This involved training long- and short-term election observers at the local level. Thus, the ZCC election structures were responsible for monitoring all political, economic, and social developments in their areas which had the potential to, directly and indirectly, influence the outcome of the various elections to be conducted. They would give regular updates through an agreed template and online system. The updates continued to inform the ZCC engagement processes on elections as well as public communications such as pastoral letters. The ZCC observers would be responsible for observing all the key relevant processes such as the delimitation, voter registration, activities of political parties including their internal elections as well as all the by-elections to be held before 2023.

In 2018, the ZCC seconded seven hundred and twenty-one short-term observers to its technical partner, ZESN (ZCC Election Report, 2018). The author of this chapter directly led the process of long- and short-term election observation. Fifty international observers from the FOCCISA, AACC, and WCC were also hosted in fulfillment of the *I Pray I Vote* campaign. This study further noted that the ZCC continued to deploy observers for all the subsequent by-elections that were held between 2019 and 2022. These include Lupane, Zaka East, and Glen View by-elections which were held in 2019 before the by-elections that were fulfilled in 2022 (ZCC By-Elections Reports, 2019, 2022).

The observation reports were meant to inform the ZCC's leadership, hence the pastoral letters issued between 2018 and 2022 were a result of that effort by the

LEFs on the ground. On 29th July 2018, the ZCC issued a statement appealing for the public to be calm as they went into an election on 31st July 2018. Based on what had emerged from the public's opinion as captured in the observation reports, the ZCC emphasized the need for the people to be realistic in their expectations from the leaders to be chosen:

We are not choosing from amongst angels but from amongst fellow human beings with strengths and weaknesses. We will therefore need to pray for whoever comes out the winner as they will need God's help and our support to mitigate their weaknesses (ZCC, 29 July 2018).

Therefore, election observation reports continued to be key in the work of the ZCC under the *I Pray I Vote* campaign.

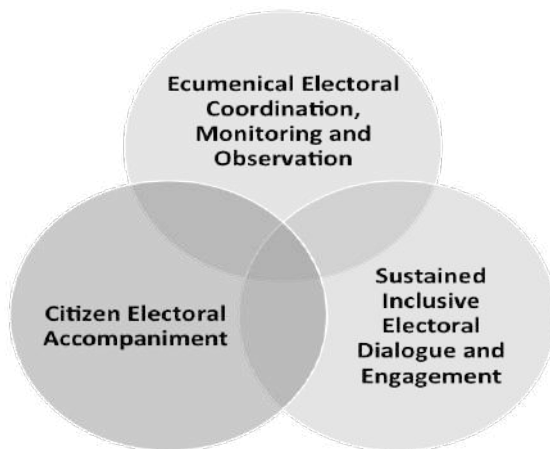
Post-Elections Envisioning Process

To confirm that the ZCC's campaign was not restricted to the election period proper, the *I Pray I Vote* campaign's fourth pillar had a long-term lens. The ZCC believed that the long-term aim for Zimbabwe should be National Dialogue to which elections contribute a portion. Elections are constitutional and the Church also believed that the process of choosing leaders is rooted in theology hence it needs to be fulfilled. However, it was noted through this study that the ZCC has always been concerned about the divisions that emanate from elections hence the need to prepare for the post-election envisioning process.

Based on its agenda-setting processes that included pre-election surveys, the ZCC committed itself to take the lead in reconciling the nation at different levels after the 2018 elections towards the 2023 plebiscite. There was a need to "prepare the nation for a more comprehensive, inclusive and broad-based National Dialogue" (Mtata, 2019). Thus, plans were put in place through the *I Pray I Vote* campaign to ensure that immediately after the 2018 elections, the nation needed to be mobilized for the national envisioning process. Indeed, this became the foundational work for the ZCC and its partners within the ZHOCD. The ZCC post-election survey further confirmed the need for National Dialogue.

The ZCC believed that there was a need to facilitate spaces for sustained electoral dialogue toward the 2023 harmonized elections.¹⁰ Thus, the ZCC initiated dialogue platforms at different levels in a bid to build consensus among all parties/stakeholders on the importance of free, fair, and credible elections. Figure 1 below is the conceptualization of the *I Pray I Vote* from the ZCC’s perspective. It captures all the campaign’s pillars and how they are linked to each other. The post-2018 election engagement processes initiated by the ZCC were meant to fulfill the campaign’s pillar number four. These included engagement with political parties, civil society, business, and others as an envisioning process.

Figure 1: Adapted from ZCC Election Strategy, 2022



Sabbath Call Proposal and Contradictions with the *I Pray I Vote* Campaign

The ZHOCD convened the Episcopal Conference from the 8th to the 9th of May 2019 at Large City Hall in Bulawayo (ZHOCD Episcopal Conference Report 2019). The Church leaders came up with a signature idea they called the Sabbath Call Proposal (ZHOCD Episcopal Conference Outcome Statement, 2019). This was going to be part of the National Dialogue package for the Church. The Church leaders proposed suspension of all political contestations for “seven years” during which the country would have to address all the noted

¹⁰ <https://www.zesn.org.zw/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ZESN-Conference-Presentation-ZCC.pdf>

challenges including perennial election outcome contestations. They argued later that the “seven” years were symbolic and theologically informed as these could be lesser or more depending on what the public would say through a suggested referendum (Mtata, 2019).

Between May and 7th October, the ZHOCD members continued to reflect on the proposal on different platforms. The proposal was subsequently formally publicized on the 7th of October 2019 at Synod House in Harare by the ZHOCD leadership. Thereafter it was also shared with all the key stakeholders including President Mnangagwa and Advocate Chamisa of the MDC-A. While the proposal was met with mixed feelings from individuals, politicians, lawyers, and other stakeholders, it became the rallying point that led to the formation of the National Convergence Platform (NCP) later that year (NCP, Draft Constitution, 2020). The ZCC became the Secretariat of the NCP to coordinate the work of the platform. President Mnangagwa openly rejected the ZHOCD proposal in his letter of 19th October 2019 (Mnangagwa, 2019). On his part, Advocate Chamisa diplomatically rejected the same proposal in his 28th October 2019 letter to the ZHOCD but was not as harsh as President Mnangagwa (Chamisa, 2019). However, the NCP became a platform for the Church and civil society to advocate for National Dialogue.

This study noted that while the author was “inside” then (working for the ZCC), the Sabbath Call Proposal (2019), manifested some inconsistencies in the Church’s strategy, especially the ZHOCD Secretariat (ZCC). In the proposal, the ZHOCD proposes a period of “sabbath” from election processes as the country addresses the key social, economic, humanitarian, and political challenges. This almost presented the Church as an institution that did not respect the constitution of the land. Yet, the same Church had pushed for the same constitution through Zimbabwe We Want Discussion Document (ZHOCD, 2006). Thus, the ZHOCD approach manifested some contradictions in it. The ZCC LEFs were also confused when the Sabbath Call was issued, as noted by this author when he was still part of the ZCC. They were no longer sure if the *I Pray I Vote* campaign was still valid or not. Thus, the Sabbath Call Proposal almost threatened the life of the campaign in a great way.

Ecumenism, Social Capital, and Elections

The Church is compelled to model unity, tolerance, and peaceful co-existence mindful of the potentially fractious electoral period for an already politically polarised and highly fragmented society such as Zimbabwe (ZCC Election Strategy, 2021). Thus, within the context of the *I Pray I Vote* campaign, the ZCC facilitated the formation of diverse and inclusive Election Coordination structures drawn from its LEFs. These were and remain seized with the responsibility to implement the campaign by coordinating the ZCC electoral interventions at multiple levels. The structures also supported the democratic processes to collectively contribute to shared messaging on electoral issues directed at the Christian audience whilst at the same time providing an objective counterweight to false and misleading electoral information (ZCC Election Strategy, 2022). The ZCC argues that the greater reach and impact of its electoral work results in better coordination and strengthened electoral information sharing. This would then enhance the Church's ability to accompany Zimbabwean citizens' ongoing monitoring and observation of the electoral processes. This approach is enhanced by the social capital that is resident in different components of the Church in Zimbabwe.

The ZCC LEF structures that drove the *I Pray I Vote* campaign came from different member churches and were also affiliated with some civic organizations that worked on elections and civic education in general. This further strengthened the ZCC election work as resources, information, and solidarity was guaranteed. This explains why the ZCC LEF leaders were also key members of the ZESN election structures (taskforces) in the provinces but still pursuing the aspirations of the *I Pray I Vote* campaign at that level.

The study noted that other ZHOCD members notably the EFZ and Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) also ran almost similar campaigns as the *I Pray I Vote* from 2018. The messaging was almost the same as that of the ZCC version of the campaign. This confirmed the disjointedness of the Church's approach to election work in Zimbabwe. One further noted that during the 2018 elections and the subsequent elections, the different Church

organizations within and outside the ZHOCD exhibited some competition among themselves with regard to the chaining of electoral messages. Thus, the Church's election work remains weak with such approaches. Yet, a strong ecumenical approach to elections could have increased the social capital that can amplify the electoral work of the Church. Thus, the Church in Zimbabwe failed to maximize its social capital resident in the ecumenical sector. As the Secretariat of the ZHOCD at the time of writing this chapter, the ZCC should have coordinated the election work of the Church for a single and strong election campaign that has the potential to influence electoral processes in Zimbabwe.

The social capital theory was relevant in explaining the ZCC's election work. The theory fitted well in the discussion where the ZCC works closely with its membership as well as networks. The bonding and bridging of relations ensure that the Church executes its roles in a more effective way. The capacity that it receives from technical networks is critical since elections are a technical process. The challenge is for the Church to nurture and grow the social capital it enjoys.

Conclusion and Recommendations

One can conclude that the Church remains a key player in elections in Zimbabwe. Its role is theologically supported by its background. The ZCC has remained active in electoral discussions. The *I Pray I Vote* campaign adopted by the ZCC in 2018 has continued to inform its election work. However, it has been noted that the campaign was threatened by the ZHOCD's Sabbath Call Proposal of 2019 which called for the suspension of electoral processes for seven years during which the country can address the long-term election challenges. The chapter further noted the lack of coordination among the main ecumenical bodies in their approach to election work. However, the ZCC's connectedness to the other civic organizations gives it an opportunity to influence the election messages through its routine Church processes.

Recommendations

- The Church should maximize the social capital that exists within its membership and networks in order to push for major immediate electoral reforms as technically guided by various civic and academic institutions before the next general elections. The Church should deliberately combine efforts with technical organizations, media, and other stakeholders for the amplification of its efforts for the credibility of its voice in elections. The Church should remain apolitical but prophetic during the upcoming and all future election seasons. <https://www.zesn.org.zw/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ZESN-Conference-Presentation-ZCC.pdf>
- Church organizations should run coordinated electoral campaigns to strengthen their voices instead of disjointed approaches. There is a need for a single ZHOCD election campaign for a stronger voice. The ZHOCD members should collapse all their current separate campaigns into one strong voice toward the 2023 elections. Most importantly, the Church needs to be careful not to contradict itself with regard to electoral approaches as was noted in this chapter.
- The ZCC's EECs should be reviewed to reflect the current context as the country gears up for the 2023 elections. They need to be utilized as a reference point for localized dialogue engagements which should accommodate all key stakeholders to influence peaceful election campaigns.
- Political parties should consider the Church as a partner in peacebuilding during election time. They should not abuse Church spaces by turning them into political rallies.
- Civil Society needs to utilize the social capital within the Church structures. Civil society should reach out to the Church for proper coordination with that institution. Sharing of polling stations for observation in order to produce a single voice on outcome should be the target of such coordination starting with the 2023 elections. The sector (civil society) should continue to build and strengthen the technical capacity of the Church on election observation.

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