Of Ordinances and votes;

moving towards 2023 Elections

Zimbabwe Democracy Institute

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Introduction

The current regime under President Mnangagwa brands itself as the 'new dispensation' and the will of the people being the will of God.' However these tittle-tattles have not been practical. From the military coup of November 2017 against former president Mugabe and the rise into power of President Emmerson Mnangagwa, there has been evidence of the use of state apparatus for authoritarian regime consolidation.

This newsletter analyses Zimbabwe's political and economic reform efforts as we approach the 26 March by-elections. It projects the country's likely trajectory in the lead up to 2023 elections and recommendations for various stakeholders to help Zimbabwe recover from decades of misrule. This paper draws on a variety of primary and secondary sources, interviews and desktop research as methods of data collection. The series of newsletters recast the transitional debate in the citizen's court and reminds policy makers of the centrality of the sovereign will of the people.

Zimbabwe transition as we approach 2023 elections 2023

Zimbabwe is characterised by a high degree of uncertainty and contradictory co-existence of both democratic and authoritarian practices. There seems to be an agreement that Zimbabwe's transition has stagnated following the 2017 military takeover that ushered in team 'Lacoste'[1]government into power[2].

The outlook is showing signs of democratic reversals and economic roll back. This is shown by disregard of the constitution, continued human rights abuses, lack of electoral reforms, a slow pace in aligning laws to the 2013 constitution and militarisation of state institutions.

One interviewee residing in Masvingo says the electoral playing field is not level as the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) lacks independence, the media remain partisan toward ZANU-PF and the new voter's roll show signs of manipulation and the security forces are intimidating citizens[3]. This is

[2] Lacoste, also known as Team Lacoste, is the name of a political faction within ZANU-PF, the ruling party of Zimbabwe. It is allied to President Emmerson Dambuzo Mnangagwa, who was sworn in on 24 November 2017, following the 2017 Zimbabwe coup d'état

[3] Interviews in Masvingo, January, 2022

evidence that citizens lack trust in the military and ZEC.

From the 2018 elections, the first election after the 2017 military coup, subsequent developments expose abuse of human rights shown by the deployment of state security agents against innocent citizens. Security forces have cracked down on citizens several times since Mnangagwa came to power, with more than 25 people killed and more than 1,000 arrested[4]. Despite calls to hold perpetrators to account, the government has not prosecuted security forces and has blocked any real discussion of security sector reform.

Although the military has always played a prominent role in Zimbabwe's political economy, its influence has increased under Mnangagwa. The military remains heavily involved in the economy and in politics. Militarisation of politics in Zimbabwe has been cited as one of the most pertinent authoritarian regime consolidation strategies (Masunungure, 2011; ZDI, 2017; ZDI, 2018; Ruhanya, 2020; Ndawana, 2020). Ruhanya (2020) argues that militarisation is the 'elephant' in the room standing in the way of a democratic transition in Zimbabwe.

In an interview in Mutare, one respondent said the military is involved in politics as shown by members of the security sector campaigning for ZANU-PF candidates in primary and by-elections. The respondent noted that there was intensive rigging in ZANU PF primary elections in Dangamvura but the police and the military protected the candidate[5].

Another respondent from Kwekwe added that the military rules Zimbabwe as the current government was ushered in by the military. He added that the military has authority, seen by continuous abuse of human rights on ZANU-PF ticket.[6]

The situation under President Mnangagwa marks a qualitative variance with the military under Mugabe's rule. Currently, the military is ubiquitous in politics and is arguably the determinant of any political transition that may be forthcoming in Zimbabwe. However, if it deems it necessary, the military accommodates civilian politicians into politics in order to 'sanitise' the political scenery in its own interests[7]. This suggests the importance of separating military and civilian issues and highlights the dangers of militarising politics.



According to Chitiyo and Rupiya (2005), the ideology that political power comes from the securocrats and that the gun is secondary to the former is a view that has since been shifted to the present governmental authority without central re-orientation. This nationalist thinking was well articulated by Robert Mugabe long ago in 1976 when he tried to define the role of the military in line with electoral democracy. Maroleng (2005; 50) notes that Mugabe once said;

> … votes go together with our guns; after all, any vote shall have been the product of the gun. The gun, which produces the votes, should remain its security officer, its guarantor. The people's vote and the people's guns are always inseparable twins.[8]

All this does not sound well for a professional independent military and has extensive implications on democracy. By associating guns and votes, the

[4]Report by Human Rights Watch, 2022. Available at: hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/Zimbabwe/
[5] Interviews in Mutare, January 2022
[6] Interviews in Masvingo, February 2022
[7] Maringira, G.2021. The military post Mugabe. Available online at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0021909620986586
[8] See, Maroleng, C. 2005. Zimbabwe: Increased securitisation of the state. Available online at: https://media.africaportal.org/documents/050907ZIM.pdf

ruling government portrayed a brutal overthrow of electoral democracy.

ZEC symbiotic relationship with the securocrats

On the 18th of February 2022, ZEC confirmed it has a right to work with the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), and other state entities in running local and national elections[9]. The then ZEC acting Chief Elections Officer, Jane Pamhidzirayi Chigiji was quoted 'we are allowed by the law to work with state entities including councils, ZESA (Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority, ZINWA (Zimbabwe National Water Authority), security agents and others[10].'



Picture: From VOA News; ZEC confirms relationship with state security agents

In previous analyses, ZDI has argued that there exists a symbiotic relationship between ZEC and ZANU-PF which operate compliant to the dictates of the military factor in political and electoral processes of Zimbabwe. ZEC's behaviour was brought to scrutiny after the 30 July 2018 election which was characterised by lack of electoral reforms, ZEC dependence on ZANU-PF and the military, and voter irregularities.

ZEC's lack of credibility and independence have been exposed by a pressure group, Team Pachedu. Zimbabweans and the international community have challenged ZEC to address the rigging concerns, however, ZEC has failed to refute the evidence of the 'fraudulent' voters' roll. Team Pachedu exposed ZEC of immense anomalies including the supposed registration of voters without known addresses and movement of over 170 000 registered voters from constituencies without their consent. For example, two members of the same family residing at one place would find themselves registered in different constituencies[11].

Following the above, on the 3rd of March, ZEC threatened to sue activists and other pressure groups for exposing irregularities on the voter's roll, with the electoral management body saying public disclosures containing people's personal details are a security risk.

The ZEC Chief Elections Officer, Retired Major Utoile Silaigwana said public disclosure of the inconsistencies on the voter's roll was illegal and exposed voters to physical attacks[12]. On the 8th of March, ZEC directed everyone requesting a voter's roll to apply to the CEO. This stance by ZEC makes it clear that the electoral body fears exposure of its electoral manipulation practices.

ZEC and the government have resisted to act on electoral reforms. Members of the opposition and the

[9] See; VOA News, 18 February 2022. ZEC says security agents, ZESA part of its electoral team. Available online at: https://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/6447785.html

[10] ZEC Chief Elections Officer, Jane Pamhidzirayi Chigiji quoted by VOA News

[11] Team Pachedu on Twitter

[12] In a meeting on the 3rd of March with Misheck Mataranyika-chaired Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Justice. Link to the meeting available on Nehanda Radio on nehandaradio.com/2022/03/04/zec-goes-after-whistleblowers-after-being-exposed-by-team-pachedu/

general public have scaled efforts in bid to make the ruling government and the electoral body heed calls for electoral and political reforms.

Road to March 26 By- elections: Of Fear and Violence

President Mnangagwa proclaimed March 26 as the date for by-elections through Statutory Instrument 2 of 2022, setting the stage for parties to contest for about 133 vacancies in Parliament and local authorities. The nomination court set on January 26 to register candidates, according to the proclamation dated December 24, 2021. The 26 March by-elections have been received with great eagerness by various political parties as evidenced by pressure in holding by elections campaigns. The prominent political parties such as ZANU-PF, MDC, ZAPU and the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) have started by-elections rallies in various cities across Zimbabwe.



Source: NewZimbabwe.com

The pre-electoral period in Zimbabwe is usually characterised by political violence, fear and abuse of human rights. On the 26th of February 2022, the Vice President, Constantino Chiwenga sent a warning to the Citizen Coalition for Change, saying the ruling ZANU-PF party would 'crush the party like lice[13].' The Vice President's statement was followed by a series of political violence episodes.

On the 19th of February 2022, the police were deployed along Simon Mazorodze Road and Willowvale road in a bid to frustrate CCC supporters from attending the scheduled CCC Star rally in Highfields.

On the 26th of February, the police used tear gas to disperse CCC supporters who were gathered for the CCC rally in Gokwe. This incident in Gokwe was parallel to the ZANU-PF rally in Kwekwe in which the state security was in full support. This followed the Kwekwe rally in which ZANU-PF card holders exerted pressure and violence on CCC supporters killing 1 person, Mbongeni Ncube, while many were left injured.



Scenes from Kwekwe CCC rally

It is reported that the gang's efforts to prevent people from attending the rally in Kwekwe turned violent. Mboneni Ncube, a 30-year-old man and supporter of the CCC, died after being stabbed, while more than 20 other CCC supporters were seriously injured.

[13] Vice President, Constantino Chiwenga comment on opposition. Zimbabwe: We will crush Chamisa like Lice-Chiwenga. 27 February, 2022. Available on: allafrica.com/stories/2022/02280110.html

Speaking to most of the Kwekwe residents, they mentioned that the gang used not only machetes but also beer bottles, iron bars, spears and bricks to attack supporters while Nelson Chamisa, the leader of the CCC, was giving a speech at the rally[14]. One respondent added that the Al-Shabaab group under the leadership of the former Minister of State for National Security is a well-known ZANU-PF terrorist group meant to crash dissent while keeping the ruling ZANU-PF in power[15].

Concurrently, leaders of the opposition particularly from the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) have been receiving threats from the alleged ZANU-PF terrorist group, Al-Shabaab, named after the notorious Somalian terrorist group. On the 2nd of March 2022, Tendai Biti, the Vice President of CCC had his guards tortured and left with serious injuries by a group of men, identified as the Al-Shabaab group, the same group responsible for the death of one CCC supporter in Kwekwe, Mbongeni Ncube.

Recommendations

- There is need for separation of powers. The security sector and the judiciary should be independent.
- There is need for a people serving security sector for effective respect of human rights.
- Human rights and democracy defenders should endeavour to internationalise the transition problem in Zimbabwe by lobbying regional and international bodies to raise the cost of continued militarisation in Zimbabwe.
- Concerted efforts should be targeted at bursting the role of the military in key transition enabling processes such as the electoral environment, the protests, the media, the farms and the judiciary. Advocacy and lobby and national and international level should seek to address the militarisation and exposure of brutality in these transition pressure points. This will create an enabling environment for democratic transition to occur.
- Security sector reform should be adopted as the main agenda by pro-democratic transition agents to enable the military to re-assert its non-partisan and patriotic duty to the nation.
- Military leaders must be made to proclaim under oath on national television and radio stations renouncing their affiliation to any political party, condemning such affiliations and proclaiming their readiness to support any winning candidate in elections.
- Military leadership must be seen condemning ad publicly opposing all acts of electoral manipulation and violence that threaten the longevity of peace in the country without taking sides. This will rebuild the lost trust by citizens.

Conclusion

Zimbabwe currently witnesses intricate and volatile dual transition in both the economy and political. It is important to note that this has affected citizen's everyday forms of living in a number of ways. Citizen's coping mechanisms under the current scenario are becoming exceedingly difficult to adopt as their socio-economic and political rights are continually violated. This paper affirms that a new Zimbabwe should not be built without the popular support and full participation of the people, nor should the economic and political crisis be resolved without effective contribution, creativity and popular

[14] Interviews in Kwekwe, February 2022

[15] Interviews in Kwekwe, February 2022

enthusiasm of the vast majority of citizens. Citizens aspire to be part of any form of change.

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About Zimbabwe Democracy Institute

The Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI) is a politically independent and not for profit public policy think-tank based in Zimbabwe. Founded and registered as a trust in terms of the laws of Zimbabwe in November 2012, ZDI serves to generate and disseminate innovative ideas, cutting-edge research and policy analysis to advance democracy, development, good governance and human rights in Zimbabwe. The institute also aims to promote open, informed and evidence-based debate by bringing together pro-democracy experts to platforms for debate. The idea is to offer new ideas to policy makers with the view to entrenching democratic practices in Zimbabwe. The ZDI researches, publishes and conducts national policy debates and conferences in democratization, good governance, public policy, human rights and transitional justice, media and democracy relations, electoral politics and international affairs.

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