

#Zimbabwe2013: Elections are stolen months before the poll date

As the results of the Zimbabwe elections continue to make headlines, Sue Onslow explores the depths to which Zanu-PF is entrenched within the Zimbabwean state and society, an undeniable factor in their victory in the recent polls.

Theft? Opposition naivety? Enduring popularity for Mugabe and Zanu-PF as a political leader, and icon of a welfare benefit system? The Zimbabwe 2013 election story is complicated. Given the deeply divided Zimbabwean society, political cleavages, enduring socio-economic problems and massive income disparities between the wealthy few and overwhelmingly impoverished majority, last week I noted the best result coming out of the deeply flawed Zimbabwe poll on Wednesday 31 July would be a rebooted coalition (thanks to pressure from the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), behind the scenes, who want a resolution to the Zimbabwe “problem” just as much as the EU, US & UK.) The scale of the claims of an overwhelming Mugabe success in the presidential poll, and Zanu-PF’s stunning victory in the Parliamentary assembly seats indicate that the post-Mugabe Zanu-PF factions recognise this, and therefore have done their best to ward off such an eventuality by inflating the margin of victory. Last Wednesday’s hopes of regime change have given way to a sense of despair among MDC supporters. Under the new constitution, the Movement for Democratic Change leadership has until Saturday to lodge their case with the Election Courts, so the game is not yet played out. But it is not looking good for the opposition parties, and international supporters of the democratic process, who have roundly declared Wednesday’s poll to be a farce.



Now Zanu-PF has retained power, can it deliver on its promises?

Pressure: Overt and Covert

It was always going to be a tall order to rout Zanu-PF which has become embedded within the fabric of the Zimbabwean state. Indeed, this is now the “deep state”: the permeation of Zanu-PF officials, allied security sector members and affiliated youth militia through the structures of governance, local administration in the formal and informal sectors. Baba Jukwa, the Facebook page which now has 350,000 followers and which is purportedly written by a disaffected Zanu-PF official in the party hierarchy, had identified local Zanu-PF party disorganisation, and specific constituency vulnerability in June. Yet a process of militarisation and militia-sation has ensured Zanu-PF tentacles extend through the formal economy, dominating particularly diamond extraction in the important mining sector – the Zimbabwe exchequer has not seen any earnings for at least the last six months, and it is reputed that as much as US\$200m has been stolen. These exported funds have served as an important election war chest, enabling transport, advertising, and

electioneering gifts intended to impress the majority rural population. This is despite attempts at EU-targeted financial sanctions against a limited number of Zanu-PF officials and corporations, with its subtext to prevent such election funds. Zanu-PF influence similarly extends through the allocation of land in peri-urban areas – and threat of losing these awards.

Zanu-PF influence also permeates the informal economy (insistence on party membership for access to vendor licences, and youth militia protection rackets on mini-bus transport networks). With rural and urban underemployment running at an estimated 85%, it is understandable why enduring political support, calculations of personal benefit and strategies of survival, as well as explicit threats and overt pressure, would influence patterns of voting. Faced with choices of which party was more likely to deliver public services, instances of direction from rural chiefs and headmen, and fears over continued access to land, rural voters looked to their own interests. This is in addition to the blatantly flawed voters roll, which particularly boosted rural voting numbers (traditionally Zanu-PF), which was only given to opposition parties in paper form on the eve of the poll, despite their repeated calls for its public release. Furthermore, 99.7% of rural voters were registered compared to approximately 67% of urban voters..

A Youth vote?

Under the new constitution, considerable power remains vested in the executive office of the President. (This is the significance of the Zanu-PF 2/3rds parliamentary majority – it would now be possible for the party to amend the Constitution to delete the Presidential two-term limit.) Political commentators outside Zimbabwe may be baffled why Robert Mugabe remains popular, frankly disbelieving this claim. Yet the question of Robert Mugabe as the re-elected president needs to be disaggregated: between Mugabe the man, elderly (89), increasingly sick (no one believes the **cataracts tale**), isolated by Zanu-PF information gate keepers that surround him; then the image of Mugabe, the victor of the liberation struggle, father of the nation (this does have a resonance among sections of the Zimbabwe electorate, older and younger); champion of the Zimbabwean people against a rapacious international system, still shaped by the imperialists (this defiant nationalism also appeals to varying sections of the voting population) and consistent ideologue; but also Mugabe, the proven conciliator (from a position of victory) of the early 1980s; and in the Global Political Agreement coalition. This person/persona combination also intersects with the question of Mugabe as leader and unifier of the fractious party Zanu-PF, its organisation and attributes and benefits that come with membership: status, preferential access to work in the informal economy, land and housing.

The youth vote was important in the Zimbabwe election – hence the massive inflation of older voters on the electoral roll to off-set a potential key youth constituency upsetting Zanu-PF calculations. But it is also varied: influenced by locality, environment, access to information, family experience, and also varied in its activism. Steve Kibble has just written cogently on the militia-sation of the Zimbabwean informal economy and society: the role of young indoctrinated Zanu-PF cadres, for whom the use of violence is empowering, and who are threatening anyone who publicly identifies details of election rigging. So the interaction of Mugabe as person/authority of office and Zimbabwean youth was complex: to youthful detractors, “HE SHOULD JUST GO!” To his supporters, he offers the attractions and access to power, a touchstone for personal strategies of survival. It is impossible to tell how many young Zimbabwean voters just don’t care. But certainly, the rural vote was boosted, and the urban vote limited and manipulated. That Matabeleland should vote solidly Zanu-PF has been greeted with stunned disbelief, as the memory of the “Gukuruhundi” violence and mass killings in the 1980s is a lasting wound on that population’s psyche.

A divided Opposition?

Zanu-PF’s opponents were certainly **divided among themselves**, but even totting up the percentage of votes of Mugabe’s challengers would not have defeated the incumbent. So what else went wrong? Individual MDC ministers had been identified as corrupt; their track record in the GPA was limited by coalition infighting, allocation of portfolios but also – and importantly, some were perceived relatively incompetent, and concentrating on their own material advantage rather than the needs of their constituents. Furthermore, reports are coming in that Morgan Tsvangirai

was advised by SADC leaders at the Maputo summit in June not to participate in the election, as SADC was trying to ratchet up the pressure on Zanu-PF to implement security sector reform. Morgan Tsvangirai's team were confident that they could indeed win; polls conducted on the eve of the Wednesday poll suggested a lead of approximately 60%. Tsvangirai's team was also aware that the last time the MDC leader refused to take part in elections for the Zimbabwean Senate in 2005, it had split the party. Therefore, following SADC advice risked splitting the MDC-T again and alienating key constituencies.

A credible election? The Election Monitors

The appointment of the former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo as leader of the 70-member AU monitoring mission was thought very good news – an African elder who himself has overseen transition to democracy in Nigeria; and his credentials as a “good Commonwealth man” are 24K gold. The presence of SADC observers, in addition to the 7,000 Zimbabwe civil society election monitors, boosted hopes of minimising election fraud. However, the role of the AU and SADC was to observe, not to deliver a particular result. Obasanjo and the SADC team have been **careful in their use of words**: recognising the peaceful polling day, but noting the election process' flaws. The AU and SADC have yet to publish their final report, but Botswana in particular has registered its profound concern. However, the role of these election observers was not to deliver a particular result. The process and outcome has been messy, partial and imperfect.

Now what?

Zanu-PF is a coalition. Political economists and international investors may regard indigenisation legislation and rhetoric of empowerment as mad, bad and dangerous – but to those in Zanu-PF with an obstinate national focus on people's sovereignty and entitlement, it makes eminent sense in political terms. (We will just leave the question of political and personal opportunities of self-enrichment out of it.) It worked in the case of Botswana and De Beers over diamond rights in the 1970s. Unfortunately, in today's regional and globalised political economy, and for a country that desperately needs FDI, it is bonkers, as it requires a degree of sophistication and transparency of implementation. The precedent of land reform – just in principle, chaotic in practice – is ominous. The international investment community wants, and needs, a stable policy environment. But Zimbabwe needs more than FDI. Zanu-PF is now under pressure to deliver on its election promises, and to satisfy pressure for satisfy people's basic needs: jobs/jobs/jobs/affordable education/sanitation/clean water/housing/electricity/health care (the issue of HIV-Aids and access to ARVs). The inflated public employment sector, and civil service salaries places a huge burden on the limited finance of the state. There is a balance to be achieved between social rights and human rights, democracy and development.

As Tendai Biti said at Chatham House recently, Zimbabwe has a new constitution but needs constitutionalism – the practice of governance, and that means all sides agreeing to the explicit and implicit rules of the game. That has not happened: no change there. Biti has been re-elected to Parliament; Tsvangirai's bid for the Presidency has failed. The younger Biti (45) has a proven track record as a “safe pair of hands” as Minister of Finance – rather than the charismatic leadership of a very courageous trade union leader and political mobiliser, Tsvangirai (61), but whose track record of administration (and kitchen cabinet of advisers) has been indifferent. So could the 2013 Zimbabwe election game changer be a future contest between a new MDC leader and a reunited political opposition, against a post-Mugabe leadership? La luta continua.

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August 7th, 2013 | [International Affairs](#) | [1 Comment](#)

5