

---

## Will ZANU-PF survive after Mugabe?

*The combination of a nationalist guerrilla movement with the mechanisms of colonial administration has been a recipe for disaster, writes **Ibbo Mandaza**. But close ties to the military and security apparatus mean that only a reformed ZANU-PF can manage a peaceful transition to democracy.*

Zimbabwe's ruling party, ZANU-PF, has developed over a period of 44 years as part of the mainstream nationalist movement. Its antecedents were the African National Congress of Southern Rhodesia, the National Democratic Party (NDP), which succeeded it in 1959, and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) whose name was adopted in 1961 when the colonialists banned the NDP. ZANU was formed in 1963 as a breakaway from ZAPU.

A decade or so later, ZANU and ZAPU formed a broad-based guerrilla war coalition known as the Patriotic Front (PF), which in 1979 negotiated the terms of Zimbabwe's independence in constitutional talks at Lancaster House, London. But the two strands remained essentially separate in both leadership and operations. Their headquarters were in different countries, with PF-ZAPU based in Lusaka, Zambia, under the leadership of Joshua Nkomo, and ZANU-PF under Robert Mugabe in Maputo, Mozambique.

The Patriotic Front coalition became strained in the months following independence, after ZANU-PF won 57 of 100 parliamentary seats in the first general election of 1980. PF-ZAPU picked up only 18. The two parties were merged in 1987 under a Unity Accord, on terms which were less a reassertion of the former Patriotic Front coalition than a confirmation of the political dominance of Robert Mugabe and his ruling party. The name ZANU-PF was retained.

### **The foundations of hegemony**

The power and influence of ZANU-PF emerged from the state which it inherited in 1980. The combination of a guerrilla army with the colonial apparatus of the former Rhodesia created a spectre whose full political and economic significance can be understood only with hindsight. The process was underwritten by Britain, the former colonial power, in the form of technical assistance to the security forces and public service.

Popular support for Mugabe, as the hero of the independence struggle, gave ZANU-PF legitimacy and political leverage. The ruling party was able to crush any threat to its new dispensation of One-Party-One-State-One-Leader. Like most nationalist movements of the era, ZANU-PF was intellectually and ideologically vacuous. The conflation of party and state became a life-line, which continues to bring significant benefits for ZANU-PF, including:

- Key leaders straddling positions in both party and state.
- Access to state resources and organisation.
- Deeply ingrained militarism, reflected in the Zimbabwe National Army (ZANLA).
- A self-legitimizing and self-perpetuating political ideology.

This is the framework through which ZANU-PF has been able to maintain political hegemony, contest elections and replicate its systems of control and patronage. The role of the party in the independence struggle is linked, ideologically, to the birth of the state of Zimbabwe. But the Party itself lacks resources and structure, and remains essentially a shell, except at election times.

Since 2000, in particular, the Zimbabwean state has lost the capacity for democratic discourse. The situation is inimical to genuine multipartyism. Besieged by both internal and external opposition, the party-state is almost consumed by paranoia and a mentality of destructive self-defence.

Against this background, even at the height of the MDC's strength as a possible alternative to ZANU-PF in 2000, Morgan Tsvangirai had to concede that ZANU-PF was almost indispensable to Zimbabwean society. During an interview on national television in October 2000, I asked Tsvangirai what he would have done if the MDC had won the general election in June of the same year. Tsvangirai replied that he would have formed a coalition with ZANU-PF.

Tsvangirai explained that a coalition was necessary because of the control exercised by ZANU-PF over the army and security forces. The implication was that the MDC could not risk going it alone. Seven years later, the question must be asked whether the balance of forces has so altered as to render ZANU-PF more vulnerable.

### **The problem of succession**

The confusion of party and state has frustrated attempts to unseat Mugabe. The difficulties of succession owe less to the idiosyncrasies of an incumbent who would like to die in office, than to the organisational weakness of ZANU-PF compared to the state. This confusion provides a loose but convenient framework through which Mugabe has been able to retain control. The Cabinet, the ZANU-PF Politburo and the party's Central Committee have become instruments through which to pre-empt or manage dissent. Patronage keeps the state apparatus well greased.

However, debate over the succession within ZANU-PF has simmered under the surface since at least 1987, when Mugabe became the executive president. Veteran nationalists Eddison Zvobgo, Emmerson Mnangagwa, Sydney Sekeramai and John Nkomo were mentioned, variously, as possible contenders in the vain expectation that Mugabe would retire by the turn of the 1990s.

Every ZANU-PF Congress since 1994 has held out the possibility of discussion, or even decision, on a plan for succession. This has never materialised, although most members of the party hierarchy have never been reconciled to the idea of a president-for-life. Many were understandably lukewarm in their response to Mugabe's presidential bid in 2002.

Eddison Zvobgo, speaking at a colleague's funeral shortly before the elections of 2002, likened the president's refusal to hand over power to "the mentality of a madman who, when given a baton in a race, flees with it into the mountains instead of passing it on." Interviewed in December 2003, Zvobgo told me that Mugabe had no concept of succession but would, if necessary, "raze the entire country to the ground in order to stay in power". Sadly, Mugabe has almost done just that.

### **The Tsholotsho succession bid**

The issue of succession came to a head in the months leading to the ZANU-PF Congress of December 2004. Two expectations developed, unstated, within the party. First, that Mugabe would retire at the end of his term in March 2008. Second, that whoever was elected by Congress to the vacant post of party vice-president would be Mugabe's successor.

The contest for vice-president was between Emmerson Mnangagwa and Joice Mujuru. According to party insiders, by August 2004 Mnangagwa had secured support from seven of Zimbabwe's ten provinces. Joice Mujuru was a surprise candidate supported by the Women's Congress, on the strength of a resolution passed in 1999 requiring one of the two vice-presidents to be a woman.

In the face of this belated challenge, Mnangagwa's supporters, led by Jonathan Moyo and other party heavyweights, organised a meeting at Tsholotsho in western Zimbabwe. Their plan, which became known as the "Tsholotsho succession bid", was to oust vice-president Joseph Msika and national chairman John Nkomo in order to prevent the election of Joice Mujuru as second vice-president. The vice-presidential positions were to be contested by Emmerson Mnangagwa and Thenjiwe Lesabe, with Patrick Chinamasa standing for national chairman and Jonathan Moyo running for the position of secretary for administration (in effect, secretary-general).

***"The president's refusal to hand over power has been likened to the mentality of a madman who, when given a baton in a race, flees with it into the mountains instead of passing it on."***

Mugabe found himself caught between the "Tsholotsho gang" on the one hand and, on the other, Joice and Solomon Mujuru, various political allies across the ten provinces, and their loyalists in the military and security. Most of the "Tsholotsho gang" were exposed by December 2004, and their plan did not succeed. Joseph Msika and John Nkomo retained their posts. Joice Mujuru emerged as vice president in both party and state. In his closing remarks at the Congress, Mugabe inferred that Joice Mujuru had become his successor. Amid applause, he told her to look beyond being just a vice-president.

### **A balance of forces**

The key question raised by the 2004 Congress is to what extent did the outcome of the party elections represent a long-term victory for the ZANLA power bloc within

ZANU-PF, represented by Solomon and Joice Mujuru? Did the victory of this army faction upset whatever game-plan Mugabe himself had in mind, including the objective of extending his term of office beyond 2008?

The two-year period between Congress in 2004 and ZANU-PF's annual conference of December 2006 demonstrated that Mugabe had not yet decided to step down, either as party leader or as head of state. Joice Mujuru's prospects of moving into State House were anything but a *fait accompli*.

At the December 2006 annual Conference, in Goromonzi, party members were surprised when Mugabe tabled a motion to extend his term of office from 2008 to 2010. However, the same elements which had defeated the "Tsholotsho" agenda resisted the 2010 plan. Within the party, calls grew louder for Mugabe to quit at the end of his current term. Mugabe himself had intimated in various interviews, albeit outside the country, that he was preparing to leave office. Veteran nationalists Enos Nkala and Edgar Tekere added their weight to demands that Mugabe concede to a peaceful succession.

In a broadcast interview on February 20th 2007, Mugabe accused his detractors inside and outside the Party of unbridled ambition and impatience. He said that he was not going to be "pushed out" prematurely, and expectations that Joice Mujuru would soon succeed him were mistaken. "If I want to lengthen my term I can stand next year [2008] – what prevents me from standing and beating?" Mugabe concluded, "I can stand and then have another six years for that matter..."

Mugabe is fully aware that a significant section – perhaps even a majority – of the party leadership, senior military and the security hierarchy want him to retire at the end of his term in 2008. These are, after all, the same elements within the party which forced him to drop his bid to extend his current term of office from 2008 to 2010. Those campaigning for Mugabe's retirement argue that:

- Mugabe has overstayed his usefulness as leader of party and state.
- He lacks the skills to tackle the political and economic malaise.
- Zimbabwe's fortunes can be revived under a new chief executive.
- A change in leadership will save ZANU-PF from almost certain doom if he stays.
- His retirement would inspire the entire nation, heralding a new era in Zimbabwe.

Notwithstanding these arguments, opinion in ZANU-PF is divided ahead of the Extraordinary Congress in December 2007. A campaign to endorse Mugabe is gathering momentum, led by junior members of the Politburo. Elliot Manyika and Nicholas Goche, respectively of the Party Commissariat and Security structures, are said to have forged an alliance with Emmerson Mnangagwa and others from the “Tsholotsho gang”.

Press reports have suggested that this pro-Mugabe campaign has the support of key figures in the public service. George Charamba, permanent secretary in the department of information and publicity, and a member of the “Tsholotsho gang”, has promoted a pro-Mugabe campaign in the state media. These efforts coincide with speculation that the pro-Mugabe lobby favours a “Third Way”, under which the president will help one of their own – possibly Emmerson Mnangagwa – to emerge as his successor. This scenario is made more likely by Constitutional Amendment 18, passed by parliament in September 2007, which allows parliament to approve a successor should Mugabe choose to retire.

Ultimately, the outcome of the December 2007 Congress will depend on Mugabe himself. He can decide to stand down before or during the Congress to allow a pro-Mugabe lobby to nominate his successor. But he is equally likely to put pressure on Congress to endorse him, knowing that most of his opponents will defer a challenge for fear of openly dividing and destroying the party. Whether or not Congress succumbs to this pressure, the attempt to secure another nomination for Mugabe would cause serious division. With or without Mugabe as candidate, such a rift would negatively affect ZANU-PF’s prospects at elections in 2008 and threaten its survival thereafter.

### **A way forward**

The existence of ZANU-PF as a party is closely tied to its control of the state. Therefore, it is doubtful the party can continue to exist in the event that it loses power. Amendment 18 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe goes a long way towards guaranteeing ZANU-PF’s hold on power, even after Mugabe has gone.

The future of both Mugabe and ZANU-PF will be determined at the Extraordinary Congress to be held in December 2007. This will be a watershed in the history of ZANU-PF. Mugabe’s survival as leader, and indeed all that is being done now to

secure his victory at the next election, is also a contest for the preservation and survival of ZANU-PF. But all depends on whether ZANU-PF can win the crucial next election in 2008.

An orderly and peaceful succession will almost guarantee that ZANU-PF wins the elections in 2008 and thereby retains control of the state. But Zimbabwe is on the threshold of great changes. The transition from Robert Mugabe and the era of the founding nationalists to a new generation of leaders is already underway.

Zimbabwe will reach a turning point, possibly in 2008. The opportunity exists for a period of national healing during which recrimination between parties and antagonism between state and civil society will begin to recede, facilitated by a unity government.

In this scenario, ZANU-PF will work with the opposition during a transitional period leading to the next general election. A new leadership, fully aware of the political and economic problems of the past, will break away from the current trajectory. A substantive infusion of technocratic skills, particularly in the economic departments of government, will facilitate planning of a recovery programme. The return of 3.8 million Zimbabweans now in the diaspora, will bring both skills and resources to invest in the economy, firmly supported by the international community.

*Dr Ibbo Mandaza is chairman of the Southern African Political and Economic Studies Trust in Harare and a former minister in the government in Zimbabwe.*