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Beyond the referendum: Zimbabwe needs democracy without adjectives

Zimbabwe faces a referendum on 16 March 2013. Of importance is that this seems to indicate a defined pathway towards a possible election in 2013. It is however important to realise that there are still some key reforms demanded by civil society which are still outstanding. Adopting a new constitution does not automatically translate to addressing these key reforms. In fact the adoption of a new constitution sets another dimension of challenges; where a legislative framework has to be put in place and then implemented in order for the political environment to transform and therefore be conducive for a credible election. I discuss some of the key issues that still need to be addressed or considered in order to ensure that critical underlying reform areas are exposed; for possible redress before the eventual poll.

The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission has since missed its 3 January 2013 deadline to commence a mobile nationwide voter registration process. However, it has been noted that voter registration has been taking place in some urban centres without much publicity and information being provided to would-be voters. Political parties, especially ZANU-PF has taken advantage of this 'concealed' voter registration process to marshal its supporters to register. There are also reported incidents of persons from the mushrooming housing cooperatives (mainly around urban and peri-urban areas) who are being forced to register through ZANU-PF community leaders. Despite these activities, the lack of funding from treasury has delayed an open, nationwide and transparent voter registration process from being undertaken in earnest. Government has however approached the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) for electoral funding assistance and it is hoped that such funding will be provided in time to effect pre-election processes. However should the UNDP and other development partners provide such funding, it is hoped that they will follow through such provisions with insistence on early election observation by both local and regional mechanisms and bodies. Delayed voter registration will have adverse effects on democratisation as some potential voters may be excluded from participating in the polls while clandestine registration processes may aid possibilities for election rigging.

Although the political parties have been commended for reaching agreement/consensus in the constitution process, it is however important to note that this has potential to further exclude civil society and the citizenry from active participation in political processes. President Mugabe and Prime Minister Tsvangirai have agreed on pre and post-election processes and outputs. Although this will provide some political stability it may



People voting at a polling station in Budiriro Harare in 2008 March harmonised election

also be a bad precedence for democracy in Zimbabwe. Mugabe and Tsvangirai seem to have adopted an "exclusionary" approach to political processes in the country. They have bestowed upon themselves the powers to determine the political trajectory of the country without due consultation of civil society or the broader citizenry. Consensus in the constitution process; though progressive on one extent; also stands to promote the pre-eminence of political parties' pacts as a way of defeating popular democratic input of the people of the country. The consensus in the constitution process may also force the political parties in the GPA to rush towards elections even before addressing pre-election reforms. A rushed election and the exclusive political supremacy attained by the GPA parties all tend to work against the democratisation trajectory that civil society has aspired to promote.

The GPA provides for an annual periodic review of the agreement and relations within it. No such review has been undertaken since the signing of the agreement. The GPA further instructs that at the completion of the constitution process an overall review of the GPA must take place. The intention of this clause being to ensure that there is constant realignment of the agreement to the broader transitional framework. It is assumed that any democratic process always includes the broad spectrum of stakeholders for any evaluation of agreements and tenants that govern a nation-state. Failure by the GPA parties to institute periodic reviews have therefore led to the denial of citizens' democratic right to participate in such evaluation as well as to access information on the performance of the transitional governing mechanism imposed upon them through political party negotiations.

The GPA is also instructive on the need for economic restoration and

growth. Despite the initial gains in the productive sector realised just after the inception of the GPA; a steady decline has been realised thereafter. Mining and agricultural sectors seem to be growing in output but manufacturing continues to be depressed. Capacity utilisation has fallen from 57.2% to around 44.2% in 2012 compared to the previous year. The finance ministry has indicated a couple of issues that have negatively affected economic growth, these being: poor rainfall patterns; policy inconsistencies and uncertainties; lack of capacity sources; indiscipline in the finance sector; and general global economic performance. Political patronage continues to play a huge role in the economy with people aligned to ZANU-PF being the greatest beneficiaries. The diamond revenues continue to be contested and this has raised suspicion of both side-marketing as well as "looting" by politically connected individuals. The depressed economic recovery prospects as well as political patronage continue to stifle the citizen's democratic right to resource income. Social services continue to underperform thereby depriving citizens of basic social support. Some politicians have used patronage as a way to "buy" political support thereby alienating opportunities for citizenry free expression and participation in political processes.

State organs continue to be manipulated for political gain; against the GPA's emphasis on the need for them to be non-partisan. The minister of defence recently endorsed that military personnel can participate in political processes and even join political parties. This tends to deride the democratic practice of the political neutrality of state institutions. Military deployments have continued in many rural areas across the country with suspicion of being intended for intimidation ahead of the upcoming election. The South Africans have how-

ever warned their Zimbabwean counterparts on the need to maintain political neutrality. It is hoped that such intervention will translate to the region's intolerance of what the Zimbabwean security sector has been at for some time now.

The GPA is also clear on the need to address security of persons and the prevention of violence. In the last couple of months, President Mugabe has been preaching peace and the need for violence free elections. However, as much as Mugabe has been on record declaring such good intentions; the behaviour of state institutions and some of his party stalwarts point towards some disturbing irony. Jabulani Sibanda has now moved from Masvingo and is terrorising villagers in Manicaland with threats of violence, should they vote ZANU-PF. He has been inflaming hate speech at the same time that President Mugabe has been proclaiming peace. The police have raided and arrested pro-democracy activists at: ZIMRIGHTS (including the chairperson of Crisis Coalition – Okay Machisa); National Youth Development Trust (NYDT) and of late at the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP). They have raided Bulawayo Dialogue, ZESN and have now barred these organisations from observing the referendum. In Mutare the US ambassador (Bruce Wharton) was ambushed by ZANU-PF supporters and no known arrests have been made, further urging the culture of impunity that has been sustained in Zimbabwe for long.

We conclude that Zimbabwe is heading toward a Flawed Transition, characterised by positive reforms but with the incumbent still determined to manipulate state institutions and electoral processes to gain an unfair advantage that allows it to retain state power. However, at this juncture the incumbent might be trying to gain political legitimacy through grand concessions such as on the constitution and election dates without ceding much on democratising state institutions which gives room for manipulation of the whole process. However, due to the fact that SADC, civil society and the media have kept on trekking the transition and exposing the anomalies it appears difficult for the incumbent to opt for a derailed transition. The incumbent would need the cooperation of protagonists which is an indicator toward a prolonged transition. Our preference is a democratic transition and we hope this early observation will lead to the intensification of advocacy activities that leverage the transition before the next election.

Written by Dr. P. Zamchiya

What Lessons Can Political Parties in Zimbabwe's GNU Draw from Kenya's Election Outcome?

Coming out of a SADC summit that sought to deal with reports of political violence and failure to abide by and fulfil the outstanding terms of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) President Jacob Zuma congratulated Uhuru Kenyatta on his election. Kenyatta, the son of Kenya's founding President Jomo Kenyatta, brought from the political wilderness by Daniel Arap Moi when he appointed him as his personally preferred successor was confirmed winner and Presidential nominee of Kenya. Uhuru Kenyatta beat Raila Odinga, son of former Vice President Oginga Odinga. These were the first elections to be held under a new constitution, electoral commission and judiciary following the violent plebiscite of 2008 which was largely believed to have been won by Raila Odinga. Odinga has stated that the current election outcome is fraudulent and he will follow due process to contest the results. Given the parallels in the recent experiences of the two countries, we ask whether the electoral outcome in Kenya could have any lessons for the MDCs in particular and the reform movement in general. Where does the same outcome put ZANU PF in terms of its internal dynamics?

While the Kenyan transition process, negotiations over the redrawing of new rules of the game and institutional reform were generally praised, the electoral results could not have come out as a shock. Pro-reform campaigners and democracy activists optimistically anticipated an Odinga victory, signifying change and a possible transition to democracy were astounded, possibly and correctly stung by Kenyatta's political rebound. Of course as naïve, fallacious and uncritical as the basis for this optimist view has been exposed to be, one can see that it is rooted in the view that there is natural infinite momentum for change hence Raila Odinga, would naturally win to the extent that he is the agent for change. Uhuru Kenyatta's victory is a bit of a shock more importantly because some analysts were already presenting Odinga's approach in dealing with President Mwai Kibaki as a fit all template that was transferable in addressing the challenges of engaging the authoritarian excesses of the Zimbabwean regime. Curiously MDC



A campaigning poster of the newly elected Kenyan president, Uhuru Kenyatta

President Morgan Tsvangirai was lambasted for lacking the political skills of Odinga who had seemingly managed to contain and neutralize his nemesis President Mwai Kibaki.

Obviously Kenya has a more complex narrative than the democrat versus autocrat line. The ethnicity factor pitting the Kikuyu, Luo and Kalenjin, the biggest ethnic groups politically fronted by Uhuru, Odinga and Isaac Ruto respectively and the fluidity of its politics complicate any objective analysis. Ruto a former ally of Odinga in 2008, minister of agriculture in the Inclusive Government post 2008, before he was expelled for alleged corruption, facing ICC prosecution for the violence of 2008 together with his now running mate. No doubt he retained the support of the massive 4,9 million Kalenjin constituency, the third largest ethnic group, thus giving Kenyatta a massive boost. Given the parallels between Kenya and Zimbabwe, what lessons can be drawn for political parties in Zimbabwe.

While no simple single factor can explain the outcome of the Kenyan elections, we can sure draw lessons from the experience for our domestic actors. Pro-reform state actors have to deal with both theoretical as well as empirical challenges that relate to liberal democracy as we understand it and problems

of political practice in addressing domestic problems of transition through ways that give prominence to stability over democracy.

While Inclusive Governments for both countries fostered political stability post the violence of 2008, they created a new challenging dynamic for the pro-reform movement. The need to demonstrate political leadership and answer sceptics for new comers into government office, albeit with very limited power and impact, saw a political shift towards running government over political mobilization.

Theoretical liberal democracy presents a serious political contradiction for political parties in Inclusive Governments like Kenya and Zimbabwe. The tendency to view political leadership through their ability to insulate institutions from external (mass) pressures is problematic for political parties in temporal Inclusive Governments. Within the shortest period since the formation of the Inclusive Government, the MDC formations have alienated themselves from ZINASU, the fragmented ZCTU, some CSO formations and a good share of their former supporters. While such political parties should continue to build their social base, sustaining their constituencies, extending their national reach and organizational capacities, they trap of incumbency

has thrown them into demobilized mode, as they thrust their attention on government business to convince citizens and international actors that they are capable of governing.

Political parties cannot afford to get trapped in a fallacious mode of thinking and operation in that they are already in government and therefore they should govern. In taking such an executive approach they get slowly, sometimes deliberately detached from their key constituencies. One could say that in taking such thinking and mode of operation the MDCs like Odinga have become oblivious to the fact that the Inclusive Government can only alienate them from their constituencies. Inclusive Governments should therefore be seen as part of a broad full proof political strategy, where every detail of negotiation, concessions won or grunted are well thought out and possibly tested. President Mugabe's promises of non-violence, his minimal cooperation and compliance should be treated with guarded caution while every bit of effort should be sought to hold him responsible and responsible. Already there is too much doubts on whether political rules and institutions can be adequately reformed before any new elections are held in Zimbabwe. Most people believe PM Tsvangirai has blinked on many occasions allowing Mugabe to rail through his wishes.

The GPA has not been fully implemented, while political violence and repression of CSOs is spreading. The national constitution may not be the real deal or game changer. The key remains the institutions that ZANU PF controls, the military, ZEC, Media commissions and the fragmented and fluid circles of political violence. It is these institutions that are likely to be in the forefront of fiddling any election and engineering an election victory that ZANU PF desperately needs. The big challenge for the MDC parties is to deal with despondence which might trigger a spiral of voter apathy within the reform camp. Above all political mobilization and mass engagement should be sustained beyond rallies by way of dynamic approaches that seek to sustain political momentum, consensus and broad unity.

There is much credence to the

claim that pro-reform political parties take it for granted that citizens owe them support, that collectively or individually the ZCTU, ZINASU, CSOs and all the citizens should passively align and support them as they are agents of democracy. Political elites fail to realize that the masses critically watch and quietly complain, if their voices are not seriously embraced, their reaction in the ballot could be unpredictable.

Our politicians have resorted to putting too much time in the impossible and futile task of impressing on their record in government. Any serious politician or policy analyst would know that there are serious limits to anything substantial in a fundamental way coming out of temporal inclusive government arrangements either in Africa or from anywhere in the world. The contestation over the good, bad, benefits and any downside

of any Inclusive Government, however good the communication strategy renders serious limits to any electoral campaign based on “our” achievements in government. In short there are just too many costs at no value at all in attempting to push such a campaign as ordinary citizens have their lived experiences to attest the limits of such arrangements. Ultimately there is need to complement all the positives with a campaign based on unity, shared socio-economic development, growth and inclusive democracy that strives to be accountable to citizens.

The clearest lesson of the Kenyan elections results is that elections outcomes can be extremely unpredictable. Consequently, political parties in any transition should strive to stick with their constituencies. For the MDCs therefore, their strength should be in identifying the strategic psychological points that ZANU

PF cannot draw its electoral latitude and legitimacy from. This should be areas where the opponents cannot equally stake their claim by making a substantial argument over its advancement.

There is no better bat than a coalition of forces among the parties that reaches to its traditional coalition of forces. Such a coalition may not necessarily have to be in the same form and shape as in 2000. Indeed our politics, points of convergence as are points of divergence have radically shifted. Also the capacities of many such organizations as were in the coalition of forces that drove opposition politics in 2000 have been going through serious challenges, in some cases transformation. However all such formations remain critical mobilization platforms that can drive the reform agenda under the banner of collective issues of interest? Political parties should seriously and honestly engage with stu-

dents, labour, academics, churches, communities and all kinds of organizations that will horizontally and vertically expand their electoral latitude and mobilization capacities.

While these few points present learning points, we hope that reformers are serious taking all critical cases including Kenya as critical learning experiences. The MDCs cannot afford to lose the next elections and continue to be taken seriously by Zimbabweans and the world.

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Zimbabwe's transitional election: qualify voter apathy

Zimbabwe currently governed by a government of national unity is to hold elections in a few months to come. There is frenzy in media on the possibility of a blood election; civil society has already pressed the alarm for a blood bath of an election basing on the unwarranted arrests and raids on civics. There are other forces within Zimbabwe who are foreseeing voter apathy. Whether all these things or a peaceful transition were a new government will be ushered without political violence and vote rigging, truthfully no one knows. Academics, journalists and analysts have also joined the guessing game on the likelihood of the Zimbabwe election. I want to argue that a peaceful transition is possible in Zimbabwe despite so many different arguments.

Interestingly the majority of analysts, academics and journalists who usually formulate theories on variant Zimbabwe issues do not live in the day reality of their subject. I for one do not. Experience in my thinking is the best education one can boast of. It is not very sound to base on social sites, civil society meetings attendance and newspapers views that Zimbabwe will have voter apathy. Anyone who understands the electoral history of Zimbabwe will know that those who make the most noise [civil society, journalists, and academics] are numerically few. It has been the traditional rural and semi-urban vote that has been

deciding mostly the future of Zimbabwe. These same rural and semi urban people have little access to social sites. Their source of information is mainly their political parties.

Statistics from the 2008 harmonised election provided by a Zimbabwe Election Support Network report shows that not only do rural and semi-urban areas outnumber the urbanites, they also vote in bigger numbers. The highest turnout per constituency for the entire Bulawayo metropolitan province is 37% by Nketa constituency. Harare had the highest as 48, 10% in Mbare constituency. Majority of the urban constituencies even outside the metropolitan had paltry voter turnout. As a comparison Musikavanhu Constituency in Manicaland had a 59,16% voter turnout. It is also in rural areas were candidates with highest number of votes per constituency nationwide is found. Joyce Mujuru amassed 13 236 votes in Mt Darwin West, her contender Gora Madzudzo from MDC-T had 3756 votes. In Harare metropolitan Mt Pleasant Constituency Timba Jameson Zvidzai from MDC-T won with only 3875 votes and his contenders had ZANU PF-1738 votes and MDC-N 1426 votes. The disparity between the urban vote and rural vote clearly shows that rural people are more eager to vote than urban people. This is not to downplay the role of electoral coercion and voter rigging.

Basing on above statistics it is clear that one should never raise alarm on voter apathy because some group of Zimbabwe urbanites and diasporans have tweeted so. To understand if Zimbabwe is going to have vote apathy one has to visit the rural areas also. As noted above in rural areas the source of information on critical national issues are political parties. An interesting quote from a friend's Facebook wall read-

Speaking at the same meeting, a Lupane female villager said the draft had not been publicized. "You are aware minister that women in Zimbabwe are not educated," she said. "The time given to go through the contents is too little. However, we will just vote 'Yes' as we are being told to do so."

The words were said at a COPAC meeting urging people to go and vote and vote YES to the referendum. What is clear from the quote is that the rural woman is noting her ignorance about the content of the constitution draft but because of her political affiliation she will vote for the draft. As dangerous and maybe undemocratic it is majority of the Zimbabwe rural electorate and some urban listens to what their political leaders say no matter how bad. To try and deny this by propounding theories or anything is running away from the truth. The only change or prediction for a Zimbabwe election one can do is by first recognising how to reach the rural people. Facebook, tweeting,

emails if possible can be extended to the rural areas.

Elections do not occur in a social vacuum. They take place within specific historical and political contexts. Unfolding historical and political developments directly and indirectly influence the electoral processes of the country. In fact, they constitute the macro environmental contexts within which elections are conducted. Political and historical contexts define the play field, determine the rules and the play of the game as well as the policy issues that inform and underpin election campaigns. Electoral processes and practices at a given time, mirror political scenarios aground. Where the political climate is tense, agitated, and polarized, election campaigns have generally been marred with violence. Understanding of the politics and history of the country is therefore critical in unravelling the political behaviour of election contenders. Countries learn from their experiences as the Kenya election proved people can allow peace. If Zimbabwe can learn from the past dark history I believe a peaceful election can be a reality in Zimbabwe.

By Tafadzwa Maguchu