Bucking the Trends: Africa, Zimbabwe, Demand for Democracy, and Elections

A P Reeler, Governance Programme

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Across sub-Saharan Africa, formal institutional rules are coming to matter much more than they used to, and have displaced violence as the primary source of constraints on executive behavior. From decolonization in the early 1960s through the 1980s, most African rulers left office through a coup, assassination, or some other form of violent overthrow. Since 1990, however, the majority have left through institutionalized means— chiefly through voluntary resignation at the end of a constitutionally defined term or by losing an election. Elections are also becoming more important as a mechanism for selecting leaders in Africa, as reflected in the large increase in both their number and their competitiveness. The fact that incumbents still almost always win, however, underscores that the major challenge connected with the task of limiting presidential power in Africa today is not so much promoting elections as making certain that leaders adhere to constitutional limits on their continued eligibility to contest them.[1]

This observation by Posner and Young has great salience for Zimbabwe today, where the struggle for democracy requires both the need to limit the term of office of the President as well as the need to ensure that elections are genuinely competitive, and to begin the serious steps towards a people-serving democracy. From the first serious challenge to ZANU PF's hegemony in 2000 to the clear demonstration in 2008 that ZANU PF had actually lost the elections, the dual struggle to overcome the "Big Man" paradigm, and ensure legitimate elections, bedevils Zimbabwean politics. Is Zimbabwe wholly out of step with the trend in Africa towards democracy and genuine elections, or is it that Zimbabwe represents the most extreme form of "*dominant-power politics*" on the continent, another trend hidden beneath the veneer of a "*shallow*" democracy? This article examines the Zimbabwe crisis against the general trends towards democracy in Africa.

Africa, Democracy and Elections

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[1] Posner, D. N., & Young, D. J (2007), *The Institutionalization of Political Power in Africa,* Journal of Democracy, 18, 3, 126-140.

It is clear that the citizens of Africa increasingly resemble their cousins in other regions of the developing world in their demands for democracy. The voice of the citizens (as opposed to their governments) all over the world is increasingly similar, and the voices of Africans are now little different, even though their governments frequently seem to march to a different tune. Citizens' voices are theoretically critical to the democracy project, and, although frequently ignored in Africa, they have come to take on greater significance, if not for the rulers, but certainly for the commentators. The voices of African citizens, captured by the Afrobarometer surveys - now 25,000 voices from 18 countries - has provided compelling descriptions and interesting analyses of the views of ordinary African citizens, and should be crucial information for those that seek to govern. This research provides a short overview picture of some the views of Africa's citizens, and, as will be seen, Zimbabwean citizens rank very high in Africa in their aspirations for democracy and valid elections.

In a summary of the earliest Afrobarometer survey[2], Bratton (2002) pointed out that the demand for democracy in Africa was growing: 69% preferred democracy to any other form of governance, 77% could give a definition of democracy (implying that they knew what they were talking about), but a lesser percentage (58%) were satisfied with the democracy that they had in their country[3]. Zimbabwe in 1999 was already an anomaly, with 71% supporting democracy and only 18% being satisfied with the Zimbabwe variety, so the roots of the current problems in Zimbabwe were clearly deeper than the rejected constitution in 2000 or the dissatisfactions over land re-distribution. In fact, in 1999, only slightly more than 1% of Zimbabweans thought that land was an issue that required the intervention of the government: Zimbabweans in 1999 were far more preoccupied with unemployment and the economy than land.

It is worth pointing out that Bratton's analysis of the early survey – 1999 and 2000 - showed that Africans' views of democracy were "*tractable*", as he put it, that there were still substantial enclaves of non-democratic support, that support for democracy was not the necessary corollary to the rejection of autocracy, and that support for democracy was "*dispersed*". Africans' support for democracy was "*dispersed*" in the sense that the support was predicated on a wide range of factors, both economic and political, and was largely pragmatic. Simply, countries in which governments were perceived to have delivered both economic and political "goods" had citizens

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[2] Round 1 of the Afrobarometer was conducted between July 1999 and May 2001 and includes interviews with over 21,500 respondents across 12 countries: Ghana, Mali and Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

[3] Bratton, M (2002), *Wide but shallow: Popular Support for Democracy in Africa.* Afrobarometer Paper No.19. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

that supported democracy[4]. These findings led Bratton to characterize support for democracy in Africa as "*wide, but shallow*".

By Round 4 in 2008[5], Africans from 18 countries still retained a strong demand for democracy, with 70% stating that democracy was preferable to any other form of government, 73% disapproving of one-party states, 79% disapproving of one-man rule, and 75% disapproving of military rule. On the supply side, only 60% were satisfied with the state of democracy in their country, but a majority [65%] was satisfied with the last election that they had had. Most were in favour of "*regular, open, and honest*" elections, multi-party elections [66%], the supremacy of parliament in making law [64%], and in limiting the term of the president to two terms [68%]. There was, of course, wide variance in the countries, but the overall trend towards democracy seemed to have been maintained, if not strengthened, over the decade since 1999.

Zimbabwe was not included in the original Round Four in 2008 due to the unsettled situation produced by the two sets of elections. The Zimbabwean Round Four survey was finally conducted in 2010, after the Global Political Agreement (GPA) and the formation of the Inclusive Government (IG). These two latter events undoubtedly affected Zimbabwean citizens' perceptions of democracy: 72% still rejected one-party rule, 81% rejected military rule, 85% rejected one-man rule, and 83% preferred democracy to any other kind of government. Only 6% felt that Zimbabwe was a proper democracy.[6] Land was still not an important problem for Zimbabwean citizens: only 2% felt that land was an important problem to be dealt with by the IG.

Despite all these hopeful trends in Africa, there remain considerable problems nonetheless. One of the major problems for the democracy protagonists is the role of elections. They remain a problem, as Posner and Young point out, because, even though there is clear demand for the rules of the political game and elections to be transparent and fair, there still remains the problem of choice: simply, can you have a credible election if you cannot disqualify a candidate,

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[4] As John Gay also pointed out in a subsequent analysis (of Amrtya Sen's thesis about democracy), there are vicious and virtuous cycles in support for democracy: those who are benefitting from the delivery of economic and political goods tend to be supportive of democracy, while those that aren't (or who are excluded) tend not to be so supportive. See Gay, J (2003), *Development as Freedom: A Virtuous Circle?*. Afrobarometer Paper No.29. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

[5] Bratton, M., & Cho. W (2009), *The Quality of Democracy and Governance in Africa: New Results from Afrobarometer Round 4. A Compendium of Public Opinion Findings from 19 African Countries, 2008*. Working paper No. 60. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

[6] MPOI (2010), *ROUND 4.5 AFROBAROMETER SURVEY IN ZIMBABWE*. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

or, more simply still, when a candidate will not remove himself as should be required. And, in some cases, where one of the players understands the rules of the game so well that they can be manipulated in near-undetectable fashion, the electoral game itself may be seriously undermined[7].

There also remains the problem over whether, Big Men or not, elections deliver democracy or not in Africa. Carothers pointed out some time ago that, contrary to Huntingdon's thesis that democracy is consolidated by electoral alternation, too many states were learning how to minimally adhere to this standard whilst subverting substantially the main precepts of democracy – rule of law, basic freedoms, etc. – either by "*feckless pluralism*" or "*dominant-power politics*".[8]

Zimbabwe, in Carothers' terms, would fit the bill of "*dominant-power politics*". As Carothers describes this political pathology:

> *Unlike in countries beset with feckless pluralism, a key political problem in dominant-power countries is the blurring of the line between the state and the ruling party (or ruling political forces). The state's main asset - that is to say, the state as a source of money, jobs, public information (via state media), and police power - are gradually put in the direct service of the ruling party. Whereas in feckless pluralism judiciaries are often somewhat independent, the judiciary in dominant-power countries is typically cowed, as part of the one-sided grip on power. And while elections in feckless-pluralist countries are often quite free and fair, the typical pattern in dominant-power countries is one of dubious but not outright fraudulent elections in which the ruling group tries to put on a good-enough electoral show to gain the approval of the international community while quietly tilting the electoral playing field far enough in its own favor to ensure victory.*

So, elections become the manner by which leaders, in countries such as Zimbabwe, hold on to power, and where the minimal adherence to democratic standards – an election – suffices to keep the world at bay. This suggests that elections may be ineffective in fostering democracy, at least in some states, but there is considerable evidence from Africa that elections have become a crucial component of the movement in many countries towards "*deeper*" democracy. An interesting evidence for these views of African citizens can be seen in the Afrobarometer surveys. The general surveys of the original 10 (and now 20) African countries have generated a huge data base of over 25,000 ordinary Africans' views of democracy and governance that has enabled a number of very interesting analytical studies, testing many of the myths and

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[7] Here see Schedler, A, (2002), *The Menu of Manipulation,* Journal of Democracy, Volume 13, Number 2, pp. 36-50; Calingaert, D, (2006), *Election Rigging and How to Fight It* ,Journal of Democracy. Volume 17, Number 36. 38-151.

[8] See Carothers, T. (2000), *An End to the Transition Paradigm,* Journal of Democracy 13, 1: 5-21; see also Diamond, L. (2008),Foreign Affairs, *The Democratic Rollback : The Resurgence of the Predatory State.* 82, 2, 36-48

misperceptions about African citizens as voters and adherents of democracy, in whatever that may mean to them.

Firstly, who votes in Africa? In a study of the data from the earliest Afrobarometer research in 10 of the 12 African countries surveyed, the strongest factor associated with voting was affiliation with a political party, but having political interest (essentially, *are you interested in politics and government*), media exposure, and older age were also strongly related to voting[9]. This last factor was amplified in a subsequent study, which demonstrated that, although both young and old had high demand for democracy, the young were less likely to vote and had lower trust in political institutions[10]. In the light of the recent developments in North Africa, the shift by the youth away from voting and having less trust in political institutions is clearly interesting.

A second (later) study, on data from the Afrobarometer survey of 18 African countries, amplified these findings, showing that citizens' approval of the quality of their elections led both to satisfaction with their democracy, as well as trust in the political institutions of their countries – the president, the parliament, the electoral authority, and the police[11].

Of course, elections have winners and losers, and this can have an effect on both the demand for democracy and in the faith that citizens have in elections as the basis for establishing democracy. It matters considerably if "*losers*" accept the result of an election, and subsequently assent to the decisions of the "*winners*" government: this was unhappily demonstrated in the recent elections in Cote d-Ivoire. Democracy generally requires that elections do not produce disgruntled "*losers*", but that they accept the result, and happily engage with the role of opposition and oversight over the governing party. Does Africa produce such happy "*losers*"?

In a study based on the data from African countries surveyed in Round 1 of the Afrobarometer, Moehler (2005) found that *institutional trust* – the confidence that citizens have in the electoral commission, courts of law, the army, and the police – was significantly lower in "*losers*" than in

[9] Kuenzi, M., & Lambright, G (2005), *Who Votes in Africa? An Examination of Electoral Turnout in 10 African Countries*. Working Paper No. 51. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

[10] Chikwanha, A., & Musunungure, E (2007),*Young and Old In Sub-Saharan Africa: Who are the Real Democrats?* Working Paper No. 87. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

[11] Alemika, E.E (2007), *Quality of Elections, Satisfaction with Democracy and Political Trust in Africa*. Working Paper no. 84. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

"*winners*"[12]. Most citizens in the 12 countries were willing to "*consent to government decisions*", but the trend to consent was significantly stronger in "*winners*". The "*winner-loser*" effect was less for "*external efficacy*" - the belief that voting could lead to a government that would improve one's life – with "*winners*" in Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, and Uganda believing more strongly than the "*losers*" that they could improve their lot by electing responsive governments. This effect was not found in Namibia, Nigeria, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Most interesting, though, was the finding that "*losers*" were significantly more likely to claim that their most recent elections were unfair. In 1999, Zimbabwean "*losers*" – those that reported being close to an opposition political party - were the least likely to express trust in the institutions of state, and were significantly more likely to express willingness to defend democracy. However, it was also interesting that Zimbabwean "*winners*" did not give the past election a strong positive rating: ZANU PF won all but one of the seats in the 1995 Parliamentary election – many unopposed – and Robert Mugabe won the 1996 Presidential poll unopposed after Sithole and Muzarewa withdrew in protest, but with a very low turnout.

These two findings - lack of trust in the institutions of state, and willingness to defend democracy - are very interesting in the wake of all the developments in Zimbabwe since 2000: despite everything that has happened, the ruling party, ZANU PF, has been unable to prevent the sustained loss in consent to its rule. This has not, however, translated into alternation, even when the MDC-T has won a clear majority, as it did in March 2008.

Even when electoral evaluations are controlled for, "*losers*" in Africa are still significantly more pessimistic about the legitimacy of their government. This pessimism is removed when elections lead to alternations in political power:

> *Citizens who feel close to ruling parties on average put a lot more trust in their institutions; think that government can be held accountable; consent to government authority; support their constitution; and are satisfied with their existing (more or less democratic) political system than citizens who are aligned with the losing side. Yet, these extreme winner-loser gaps in legitimacy are significantly reduced by alternations in power as both sides move towards a shared common middle ground.[13]*

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[12] Moehler, D.C (2005), *Free and Fair, or Fraudulent and Forged: Elections and Legitimacy in Africa.* Working Paper No. 55. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

[13] Moehler, D.C., & Lindberg, S. I (2007), *Narrowing the Legitimacy Gap: The Role of Turnovers in Africa's Emerging Democracies.* Working Paper No. 88. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

Extending this finding, Logan and Cho (2009)[14] examined the effect of alternation (or not) on the durability of democracy. This was an explicit test of Samuel Huntington's "**two turn-over**" test – the idea that democracy is consolidated once a country has held at least two elections in which the winners have changed – which is not a universally accepted test, nor well-supported by many cases. Countries such as South Africa can hold completely valid elections, which all participating parties agree was valid and the losers happily accept the result, but there is no turn-over: few would disagree that democracy has not been consolidated in South Africa. Botswana has had not a single alternation since Independence, but few would argue that Botswana is not one of the most democratic countries in Africa. But there are also countries like Zimbabwe, where there is no alternation since 1980, and few are happy with the results of the elections, not even external bodies such as SADC or the AU (after 2008).

Logan and Cho show that, of the 18 countries reviewed, in six countries – Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Zambia – less than half the respondents are optimistic that democracy will survive, and that the mean score of all countries surveyed, for optimism in the survival of democracy, is merely 56%. This is hardly rousing optimism about democracy in Africa. During the period 1989 to 2005, only three of the 18 countries had had more than one alternation of power – Benin, Cape Verde, and Madagascar – and six (five, if one agreed with the authors that the 1994 elections in South Africa were an alternation) had had no such alternation. There was an average of three elections during the same period, with some countries having had as many as 8 (Botswana), but others had as few as two (Nigeria and Uganda). When the data was statistically modeled, it was evident that individuals in countries that had turnovers saw democracy as more durable than those that have not, but the number of multi-party elections did not increase faith in the durability of democracy. "*Losers*" were again more pessimistic about the durability of democracy.

However, in the many African countries where alternation has not taken place, and bearing in mind the effects of "*dominant-power politics*", what is the probability that any such alternation might take place? Here there are some interesting observations from another study based on the Afrobarometer data. Carolyn Logan (2008) examined the effect of a lack of alternation on opposition parties[15]. In the 18 countries (including Zimbabwe) included in Round Three of the

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[14] Logan. C., & Cho, W. (2009), *Looking toward the Future: Alternations in Power and Popular Perspectives on Democratic Durability in Africa*. Working Paper No. 110. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

[15] Logan, C (2008), *Rejecting the Disloyal Opposition? The Trust Gap in mass Attitudes toward Ruling and Opposition Parties in Africa*. Working Paper No. 94. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

Afrobarometer survey, the public trust gap between ruling and opposition parties was on average 20 percentage points, and, in general, it would seem that alternations do not take place when the gap is 20 points or larger: Madagascar, Mali, and South Africa (which may not be typical) are exceptions. Zimbabwe, too, is an exception where the trust gap is less than 20 points since 2000, with the gap in 2005-2006 being, exceptionally in Africa, 16 points in **favour** of the opposition party, the MDC-T. However, in Zimbabwe, no alternation has taken place, but this has less to do with mass attitudes than perhaps the manner of running elections.

However, the interesting finding from Logan's analysis is the role of "*deference*" to long-standing leaders. As she explains:

> *We find stronger evidence to support the claim that oppositions are weak because Africans place especially high social value on respect for their "father-leaders." Deference, measured either as presidential performance ratings, or as the margin between these ratings and government performance ratings in key sectors, consistently proves to be the most powerful explanatory factor in our models of the trust gap. All told, we find that the combined effects of anti-competitive and deferential attitudes add up to a sizeable disadvantage for opposition parties. In fact, they have much more power to explain this gap than far more commonly cited national-level system characteristics. This analysis thus offers strong evidence that popular attitudes toward competition play an important role in determining the prospects for the evolution of an effective, competitive opposition that can truly challenge the dominance of ruling parties.*

Logan thus argues that the optimism about alternations maybe misplaced in Africa, and that "*deference*" to the "Big Men" is one reason why the much-expected "Third Wave" has been subverted in Africa.

In an earlier study, Bratton and Logan had examined the demand in African countries for accountability from their governments[16]. The data from the 2005-2006 Afrobarometer surveys indicated that Africans (Zimbabweans included) had strong demand for both vertical [the executive] and horizontal [parliament and the courts] accountability, but were pessimistic that the courts and parliament could constrain presidents. As to the role of elections, Africans recognized the importance of these as being one of the very few options for removing undesirable leaders, but less than half thought that elections are successful in removing unpopular leaders and political parties. At the level of the individual, the findings show that social and attitudinal characteristics contribute very little to the demand for accountability; rather a number of political contextual factors seem to explain more effectively the gap between

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[16] Bratton, M., & Logan , c (2006), *Voters but not yet Citizens: The Weak Demand for Political Accountability in Africa's Unclaimed Democracies*. Working Paper No. 63. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

citizen's strong faith in elections and their weak demand for accountability from their elected leaders. Bratton and Logan found that 5 sets of factors explain this weak demand, three of which seem particularly salient to Zimbabwe.

Firstly, it seems that the longer the time since a country independence, the greater will be the demand for accountability. Secondly, that Liberation movements based in armed struggle - Angola, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Namibia in Southern Africa - tend to replicate themselves as governments based on revolutionary discipline and democratic centralism[17]. Thirdly, "*Africans who were socialized under the rule of strong presidents in the past have limited experience with representative democracy and are likely to default to a delegative form of democracy today*"[18]. Overall, Bratton and Logan conclude that "*citizens have not yet learned – either because insufficient time has passed, or because representatives are so far doing a good enough job – that, in the long run, leaders are rarely effective at holding themselves to account*".

It thus appears that "*deference*" may be the explanatory factor behind the longevity of some leaders in power, but probably allied to the authoritarian systems set in place by the leaders of Liberation Movements post-Independence. But liberation movements are not the only authoritarian structure in Africa: modern day Africa still exists with an uneasy relationship between the modern state and traditional structures, and, whether one accepts Mamdani's arguments about traditional leaders being a colonial invention or not, it seems evident that traditional authorities in Africa are still generally male-dominated, chauvinistic, and authoritarian, but surprisingly, as Carolyn Logan has demonstrated, still seen as less of a threat to democratic governance than one-party states, military rule, or presidential dictatorships[19]. Furthermore, support for traditional leaders is slightly stronger in older, female, rural citizens, and correspondingly weaker in the young, urban and better educated. However, the respondents in the 14 countries in Round One of the Afrobarometer did not see the roles of chiefs as anti-

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[17] A recent analysis of the "Arab Spring" made a related point. Comparing the North African revolutions with post-1990 Eastern Europe, Lucian Way argues that the dictatorships that are most likely to survive are those forged in revolutionary struggle, but, equally, of these the ones that survive are likely to have a recent revolutionary struggle – China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam outlasted the Cold War. See Way, L. (2011), *Comparing the Arab Revolts,* Journal of Democracy, Vol. 22, No.4, 17-27.
[18] Bratton. M., & Logan, C (2006), *op cit.* p13.
[19] Logan. C (2008), *Traditional Leaders in Modern Africa: Can Democracy and the Chief co-exist?* Working Paper No. 93. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

democratic, and this was still the case for Round Four, nearly a decade later[20]. As Logan puts this later finding:

> *There is no association between support for the role of chiefs and either support for or satisfaction with democracy. In other words, the resilience of traditional forms of authority does not arise out of either a rejection of or a perceived failure of democracy....to the extent that we move beyond a purely procedural understanding of democracy to a more broadly cast reflection that encompasses other democratic qualities as well, it becomes less surprising that Africans can find space for their chiefs even in the midst of a democratizing polity. The fact that both elections and other characteristics of democratic leadership are considered important thus helps to explain the resilience of traditional leaders in the midst of strong popular support for elections and democracy. The unelected but nonetheless potentially democratic qualities of the chieftaincy, combined with their critical role in conflict management, and their intrinsic values as symbols of community identity and solidarity, all add up to an enduring value in the eyes of a sizeable majority of Africans from across the social and economic spectrum.[21].*

The question here is whether traditional leaders contribute to the pattern of "*deference*" to the Big Men, or represent an entirely separate form of deference.

All these studies of the voices of ordinary African citizens contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which democracy is being both consolidated and subverted in Africa, but, in the final analysis, it is always elections that determine whether alternation takes place or not. Here it is apparent that, in many countries, and especially those in which "*dominant-power politics*" is the major force, ruling parties and their incumbents have learned to play the election and nomination games so that no alternation is possible. Here, Zimbabwe would appear to one of the most glaring examples: there is massive demand for democracy, rejection of all the alternatives to democracy, greater trust in the opposition than in the ruling party, all culminating in an election rejected by everyone (including the AU and SADC), but the incumbent remains, as does his party. How is this possible? And how do ordinary Zimbabweans see this paradox?

Zimbabwe, Democracy and Elections

Zimbabwe was included in Round One of the Afrobarometer surveys, conducted in September-October 1999, before the deepening of the crisis, and the data received was illuminating.

Firstly, Zimbabweans, as was pointed out earlier, had high demand for democracy, but were the most pessimistic respondents from the countries surveyed about obtaining the same: the

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[20] Logan. C (2011), *The Roots of Resilience: Exploring Popular Support for African Traditional Authorities.* Working Paper No. 128. AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

[21] Logan, C. (2011), *op cit.,* p22.

percentage gap was 53 percentage points. This was 29 years after Independence in 1980, with ZANU PF being in power for all of those 29 years, and Robert Mugabe having been the incumbent executive (as Prime Minister and then President) for the same period. In 1999, the Zimbabwean citizenry had low trust in most political institutions, widespread perceptions of corruption, and dissatisfaction with the performance of the ZANU PF government. Zimbabweans' major concerns were economic, and hardly any were concerned with land and land reform.

Of the Southern African nations surveyed - Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe – Zimbabweans were, paradoxically, the most active in areas of associational life, but the most pessimistic about being able to influence the political system or improve things through voting. From 2000 onwards, these last views seem wholly justified. The history of the past 12 years in Zimbabwe has been comprehensively documented, and what follows will concentrate on the responses of Zimbabweans to the rapidly changing political and economic conditions, but also to the enigma that is Zimbabwe, with an incumbent able to hang onto political power with a skill rarely seen in Africa.

In Round Two (2004), Zimbabweans appeared to be losing faith in democracy, with the numbers expressing a desire for democracy down from two-thirds to under a half, and more expressing the view that a one-party state was desirable, but nonetheless overwhelmingly rejecting political violence, which had been such a common feature of both the 2000 and 2002 elections, as well as being present at other times[22]. Less than half said that they trusted Robert Mugabe, but this was an increase on Round One, and significantly very large numbers were unwilling to state their political affiliation, with more than 80% stating that they had to be careful about expressing political opinions. As to the apparent rise in the popularity of Robert Mugabe (but not his government), the authors concluded, on analysis, that the single biggest factor was "propaganda", the control that ZANU PF exerted over the media. As the authors expressed this:

> *In a setting where the mass media have been strangled and the diet of public information is tightly controlled, many Zimbabweans have apparently succumbed to ZANU-PF's view of a country beset by internal and external enemies. This message has been so unrelenting that it has even induced many Zimbabweans to overlook their objective economic deprivation and to acquiesce in the consolidation of non-democratic rule by a dominant political party.*

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[22] Chikwanha, A., Sithole, T., & Bratton, M (2004), *The Power of Propaganda: Public Opinion in Zimbabwe, 2004*. Working Paper No. 42, AFROBAROMETER WORKING PAPERS.

However, propaganda has not been sufficient in maintaining support for Robert Mugabe and ZANU PF. Whilst ZANU PF seemed to have capitalized on this growing support, winning the 2005 Parliamentary elections with an increased (two-thirds) majority, it did seem improbable that propaganda alone could explain this. It is unusual that, even in African politics since 1990, a long-serving government that has presided over economic collapse, disputed elections, and international opprobrium would be returned by the voters with an increased majority; this did not happen in Kenya, for example. In Zimbabwe, the enigma is not that ZANU PF held onto power in 2005; it was the increased majority that was curious, but, as mentioned previously, this may have had little to do with the voters and more to do with the election process itself.

However, this popularity was short-lived. The effects of *Operation Murambatsvina,* near-total collapse of the Zimbabwean economy, the extreme hyperinflation between 2006 and 2008, and the continued political violence saw a sustained diminution in the affections of the citizenry, and eventually by the voters affections for Robert Mugabe and ZANU PF. By Round Four in 2010, and after the 2008 elections and the formation of the Inclusive Government, twice as many respondents (36%) would vote for MDC-T as ZANU PF (18%), but still a large percentage (40%) would not vote or refused to give an opinion[23]. Morgan Tsvangirai was more trusted – *somewhat or a lot* by 67% - than Robert Mugabe (44%). A very large percentage (81%) felt that competition between political parties led to violence. 70% felt that presidential terms of office should be limited to two terms, and that the president's powers should be constrained by law and the courts (84%). Moreover, a majority (86%) still had faith in voting, and believed in having many political parties in order to have real choices for the government (69%).

Saved by the Global Political Agreement in 2008 and the setting up of the Inclusive Government in 2009, Robert Mugabe and ZANU PF seemed to have bought a breathing space. However, the politics of incumbency have been slow to disappear, with the former ruling party being wholly reluctant to cede any real power, insisting on the paramount status of the President, and demanding more vociferously that another term in office for the incumbent is non-negotiable. Thus, despite the Global Political Agreement, "*dominant power politics*" is still the name of the game, and, improbable as this might seem in modern Africa (where even Wade has had to cede power in Senegal) democracy in Zimbabwe seems to be once again hostage to the "Big Man" scenario.

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[23] MPOI (2010), *Summary of Results. Round 4.5 Afrobarometer Survey in Zimbabwe.* AFROBAROMETER.

Bucking the Trend

Posner and Young, in their analysis of the power of "Big Men" to survive or not, point out that the trend since 1990 for incumbents to lose power has increased from a modest 6% prior to 1990 to 14% subsequently. However, it is still the case that incumbents in 85% of cases are likely to retain power. This occurs against the demonstration that incumbents nowadays are forced to remain in power by "*legal*" means, and mostly by changing the constitution to allow them further terms; essentially third terms. Robert Mugabe arguably has had five terms of office as the senior executive, and currently is pushing for yet another term in office[24], despite the massive dispute over the last two elections in 2008, his clear loss in the March 2008 poll, and the unacceptable (to all) of his win in the June 2008 re-run.

Zimbabwe apart, Posner and Young argue that a number of factors determine whether an incumbent will push for a third term or not.

Firstly, if an incumbent believes that public opinion is on his or her side, an attempt may be made to change the provisions of the constitution to allow for a third term: this some have done successfully, whilst others have abandoned the attempt. The difference seems to be how secure the incumbent feels his lead is. Posner and Young point out that those who decided for a third terms usually had a median lead of 42% over their rivals in the second-term election, whilst those that decided against this had only a median lead of 18%. For Zimbabwe, we have the paradox of Mugabe actually losing in the first round, in March 2008, to then go on and win an unopposed victory in the second round of 86% of the vote as opposed to the 9% of Morgan Tsvangirai – who had withdrawn due to the violence[25]. However, the point still stands: Robert Mugabe lost the first round in March 2008 – narrowly, but he still lost and did not have a massive lead over Morgan Tsvangirai. On the Posner/Young theory, that should have been enough to persuade Mugabe not to try for another term.

A second factor relates to the age of incumbent. There seems to a trend for younger incumbents – median age of 60 years – to try for a third term as opposed to the older incumbents – median

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[24] Mugabe was elected as the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Zimbabwe in 1980, and returned to office in 1985. Following the change of Constitution in 1987, he assumed the office of President, and was re-elected in 1990, 1996, 2002, and 2008.

[25] The result of the first round in March 2008 is unclear since the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) did not publish the detailed results of the Presidential poll, giving Provincial figures only, and overall figures that are remarkably close to the PVT carried findings of the PVT carried out by the Zimbabwe Election Support Network. Here see SITO (2008), ZIMBABWE ELECTIONS 2008. *Examining The Popular and Presidential Choice - Hiding or Run Off?* IDASA: PRETORIA.

age of 66 years – not to do so. The third factor is related to the relative costs of trying to change a constitution in order to stay in power, and here it seems that dependency on foreign aid (and the possibility of alienating crucial economic support) may be important. As Posner and Young point out, those incumbents that desisted from trying for a third term were leaders of countries in which aid was 12% of GDP as opposed to those countries in which aid was only 7% of GDP.

Whilst these hypotheses are based on the very small sample of only 18 countries, they are interesting when applied to Zimbabwe. Robert Mugabe is clearly bucking a trend: he arguably is only supported by a minority of voters (if we exclude the farce of the June 2008 re-run), is obviously one of the oldest incumbents on the continent, leads a country that is desperately dependent on foreign humanitarian support, and, moreover, is in dispute even with other African countries, let alone the providers of crucial economic support. So what factors can conceivably lead Mugabe to push for yet another term, and ZANU PF to believe that they can win another election?

Here the Afrobarometer is of little help. Citizens' voices are irrelevant in the Zimbabwe crisis: not even when they vote conclusively (as they did in March 2008) will this apparently force the removal of the incumbent. There was a chance that this could have happened in the wake of the March poll, but there seemed little serious demand from MDC-T that the result be honoured, nor was Africa – SADC and the AU - of a mind to push the matter, and force Mugabe and ZANU PF to cede the reins of power[26].

The answer lies partly in the sucess of ZANU PF in capturing all the essential organs of the state. Zimbabwe may be a massively weakened state, but it is not a weak state, or for that matter a weakened regime. Zimbabwe has been (and still is) governed by a regime that owes its continued existence to its ownership of all the key institutions of the state, and has extended its own regime into every corner of civilian life. It controls all the machinery for running elections, from the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission through to delimitation and the voters' roll. It controls the security forces, the organs of local government, and has determining influence over traditional leadership. It supplements these with an enormous array of proxy forces: the so-called "*war veterans*", youth militia groups, and party supporters, all fostered by the economics of

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[26] For an analysis of the potential options available to SADC in March 2008, see Kwinjeh. G (2008), *Staring a gift horse in the mouth. Death Spiral in Zimbabwe: Mediation, Violence and the GNU*. 18 June 2008.

considerable patronage. This highly sophisticated inter-play and synergy between regime and the institutions of the state allow Robert Mugabe an unparalleled (in Africa) capacity for maintaining political power[27]. It seems evident that, unless the structures and powers of the state are made to conform to their legally required status, this repressive power will continue to hold the citizens in thrall.

It is complimented by an exceptionally effective propaganda machine, obviously aimed at inducing compliance in the local citizenry, but also has played an extremely efficient role in immobilizing international opinion. Land, sanctions, regime change by the West, and now indigenization have been successfully used in a series of over-lapping, rhetorical ploys to divide Africa from the West[28]. Each issue has built upon the other to convey the perspective of a small independent country fighting off the depredations of imperialist power. The "*land issue*" evoked great support, even from those who might have thought more clearly about this: land stolen by the colonial settlers and returned to the landless is difficult to gainsay, especially when delivered in a highly over-simplified fashion to a less than critical African audience[29]. Hence, Zimbabwe does not conform to the Posner/Young thesis, not because all the factors are not present, but because the capture of the state by the ZANU PF regime allows them to overcome the handicaps of unpopularity, economic dependence, and the age of the incumbent.

Conclusion

Thus, as Zimbabwe faces an increasingly uncertain immediate future, and one that is wholly dominated by the issue of the succession of the most able of Africa's "Big Men", how will the voice of its citizens be reflected? The demand for democracy and faith in the ballot has waxed and waned, but has been re-vitalised to some extent by the outcome of the March 2008 elections. But equally the outcome of the March 2008 election may be interpreted as yet another demonstration that voting matters little where "*dominant power politics*" prevails.

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[27] For a detailed analysis of the effects of the capture of state institutions see the *Anatomy of Terror. [Available at http://www.sokwanele. com/node/2334]; see also Matyszak, D.A (2010), Formal Structures of Power in Rural Zimbabwe.* November 2010. HARARE: RESEARCH & ADVOCACY UNIT; Matyszak, D (2011), *Zimbabwe's Security Sector – Who calls the shots?* July 2011. RESEARCH & ADVOCACY UNIT.

[28] See RAU (2011), *Land, Sanctions, Regime Change, and Sovereignty.* 10 May 2011. HARARE: RESEARCH & ADVOCACY UNIT.

[29] The same might be said of the "indigenization" ploy, which has remarkable similarities in its strategy to the "*land reform*" process. Here see Matyszak, D (2011), *"RACKETEERING BY REGULATION."* May 2011. HARARE: RESEARCH & ADVOCACY UNIT.

However, the most recent Afrobarometer (2010) suggests that Zimbabweans have not lost faith in the potential power of the ballot, and also that they are in favour of limiting the term and power of the Presidency. If Posner and Young are correct, then the combination of popular opinion, the age of the incumbent, and Zimbabwe's dependency on the international community for economic survival should presage an alternation in political power in the next election. But, if they are wrong, and there is no solution to the contextual factors outlined immediately above, then Zimbabwe will continue to provide political scientists with yet more food for thought.