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ZIMBABWE POLITICAL ECONOMY REVIEW

**The ZEC/ZANU-PF Symbiotic Relationship, Military Factor and
Post July 30 2018 Election Violence**



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Introduction

In previous political economy analyses, ZDI has argued that there exists a symbiotic relationship between Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) and Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) which operate subservient to the whims of the military factor in political and electoral processes of Zimbabwe. This undesirable relationship has been brought to contestable scrutiny after the 30 July 2018 election and its attendant controversies and contradictions that this paper explores. Zimbabwe's transition to a democratic dispensation stood mainly on the possibility to obtain a free, fair, credible and peaceful election. This desirable democratic trajectory has been blocked by the grotesque interplay within the stated ZEC/ZANU-PF and the ambitious military factor in the political and electoral affairs of the state.

This paper argues that, it is a standing fact that among other factors leading to the post election violence that broke out in Harare on the 1st of August 2018 was nothing other than ZEC and its servitude to the ZANU-PF and military elites. Informed by Stedman's peace-building theory, this study posits that ZEC was the "spoiler" problem leading to the post-election conflict in Zimbabwe. This has negatively affected President Emerson Mnangagwa's agonizing efforts to lure investors from the West through his re-engagement policy typified by his theme "Zimbabwe is open for business."

Empirical evidence of the military interference in civilian and electoral affairs throughout Zimbabwe's electoral history dictates that addressing the military factor is a key determinant of the country's ability to transition into a democratic dispensation and

breaking bonds from the 37 years of former President Mugabe's misrule. The major problem of Zimbabwe remains militarization and capture of state institutions including ZANU-PF. As this paper reviews, such factors have contributed to the events of 1 August 2018 where the military gunned down seven unarmed civilians in Harare during protests over alleged electoral manipulation by ZEC. The incident casted bad light on the transition going forward.

Omnipotence of the Military Elite in Electoral Politics of Fragile African States

This study has found that, military elites are always the omnipotent factor in electoral politics of fragile states. Their interference with electoral affairs has often led to post-election violence, disputes and to some extent civil wars. To establish this pattern as a matter of fact, it is important to go through a case-by-case analysis.

In the Kenyan presidential election of 2007, the tallying process by the electoral body took longer than anticipated leading to grievances and speculations that the election was being tempered with. The electoral commission of Kenya later announced results behind closed doors with only state media that Kibaki was reelected president. The immediate result was violence as security forces, whose elite usually dominate electoral politics, clashed with protesters in the capital of Nairobi, Kisumu in Nyanza province, and on a large scale in Rift Valley (Dercon and Gutierrez-Romero, 2010; Burchard, 2015). It is estimated that approximately 1,200 Kenyans died in this post-election violence and an additional 650,000 were displaced (Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence, 2009). A similar situation occurred following the 2012 presidential elections in

Senegal that led to serious protests across the country with fears that Wade would stay in power by any means possible. These concerns were later witnessed in 2012 January by increasingly hostile interactions between Wade's security forces and protesters clashing on numerous occasions, causing death and injuries (Burchard, 2015).

A pattern similar to above ones was witnessed in Liberian 2011 election which was widely condemned and resisted by the as being marked by several irregularities. Sirleaf was accused of interfering in the election management as she held endless meetings with electoral officials before the vote. Manipulation of the electoral management body and massive use of state power to perpetrate electoral fraud led to protests against electoral rigging (Dargatz, 2011). During the first round of election, Sirleaf garnered 43.9% of the vote, falling short of the expected 50% to avoid a run-off, with Tubman coming in second with 32.7%. Tubman scoffed at the runoff and boycotted it as he claimed that the results of the first round had been fraudulent. As a result of the boycott, Sirleaf won the second round with 90.7% of the vote. There was no transition in Liberia in 2011, rather, Sirleaf was sworn in as the president in 2012.

The Egyptian 2014 scenario where the military backed President Abdel Fattah el Sisi is another case study to focus on in this study. Sisi who retired from the army to run for the office of presidency won the election with a landslide victory. Sisi's military background forced him to give the army unchecked powers and hence, his sole opponent Hamdeed Sabahi withdrew from the election alleging that his monitors were being assaulted by security forces. From the time Sisi became the Egyptian president, the

country has not yet changed leadership as he currently is at the helm of this office. There are no signs of transition to a democratic dispensation.

This was also the pattern in Lesotho where in 1998; the country was involved in the worst political violence of its history which almost caused a state of a civil war. Lesotho experienced the most profound conflict in its entire history during this moment where the ruling party and the opposition parties played a primary role in this violence. However, it should be noted that the monarch played a secondary role in the immediate aftermath violence of this general election. Main opposition political parties; the BNP, BCP and the Marematlou Freedom Party refused to accept the outcome of the election. They challenged the legitimacy of the Lesotho Congress for Democracy under Pakhalita Mosisili on the grounds of alleged electoral fraud. This was as a result of the military which had influenced and instituted a period of authoritarian rule in the early 1990s when it exercised strict control over recruitment into armed forces and it also considered its own power not only against external threats but most critically against the internal opposition (Mphanya, 2004:71). In fact Mothibe (1999:47) argues that "the action set in motion an authoritarian agenda characterized by brute force, naked oppression and de facto one party rule". Mothibe (1999) further argues that the military became highly politicized and acted as essential supporters of this civilian dictatorship in power.

The Zimbabwe 2008 run up to June presidential election run-off cannot be left out because it boldly testifies to the pattern of peace derogation following a symbiotic relationship between the ruling party, and the

electoral management body subservient to the military elite. For the first time in the history of the nation, the opposition won over the ruling party although it did not get a 50% +1 threshold as required by the constitution and as a result a rerun was to be held. It was in the run-up to the re-run that the security forces took up a key role in violently campaigning for the ruling party (ZANU PF) presidential candidate Robert Mugabe. Soldiers had successively been deployed across the country in order to secure a ZANU PF victory at all odds.

After conducting harmonized election on the 29th of March 2008, ZEC could not release the presidential result for more than a month, with results being announced on the 2nd of May 2008. The announced results did not offer an outright winner, thus necessitating a run-off. It is however, significant to note that the unnecessary delay by ZEC was a ploy to the advantage of the ruling ZANU PF party. ZEC, by doing so failed the electoral process and compromised its constitutional obligation.

Furthermore, ZEC announcement in the government gazette of 16 May 2008 stating that the run-off would be held on the 27th of June 2008. This date was illegal as the election was supposed to be conducted only three weeks after the announcement of the presidential election result. Tampering with dates was solely meant to give more time to ZANU PF/Military elite to unleash terror on innocent people of Zimbabwe in a bid to force them to vote for Robert Mugabe. Citing massive brutality, maiming, torture and rampant killings of his supporters, opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai withdrew from the election, resulting in a one-man election race by Robert Mugabe. Unfortunately, Zimbabwe

did not transition thereafter; Mugabe won the election with 85% of the total votes.

Thus, it can be deducted from the above case studies that the manner in which elections are handled in such fragile states by frequently involving the military to interfere with electoral processes, the end result is conflict and/or violence. This has in most cases either blocked transition to a democratic dispensation, economic prosperity and threatened peace and security.

It should be noted therefore that, following decolonization of many African states, the military problem and its interests in electoral politics emerged (Matlosa and Zounmnou, 2016). "The legitimacy of some ...governments moved from the will of the people to the barrel of a gun...the military became a power unto itself" Matlosa and Zounmnou, 2016: 95). This is the case in Zimbabwe; empirical evidence on the interference of the military in civilian affairs has shown without doubt that Zimbabwe has become a full-fledged military state "where elections without democracy are also conducted as a ritual to rubberstamp the ruling elite stay in power" (ZDI, 2018:15). Zimbabwe's politicized military leadership has for several years interfered in the nation's political and electoral affairs dating back to Gukurahundi, Operation Murambatsvina, 2002 election as well as 2008 election (ZDI, 2018).

While Snyder and Samuel (2006: 198) clearly state that "free and fair elections are a cornerstone of any democratic system of government", the country has a long history of running militarized elections; notions of freedom, fairness and justice cannot be expected in elections of a military state. For example, in 2008 the re-run presidential

election environment was characterized by unprecedented violence and gross human rights violations. The military had overtly taken over and had become the arbiter of Zimbabwe's fate. In an attempt by the military to reverse Mugabe's defeat by the late Movement for Democratic Change Leader Tsvagirai in the first round of the presidential poll, the military effectively unleashed violence and intimidation across the country.

In a report, the Human Rights NGO Forum (2009:2) recorded that, from January 2008 to December 2008 there were 6 politically-motivated rape cases, 107 murders, 137 abductions, 1 913 cases of assault, 19 cases of disappearances, 629 cases of displacement as well as 2 532 violations on freedoms of association and expressions. Investigations by an international Watchdog, Human Rights Watch (2009) reported that the military was involved in widespread post election violence where citizens mainly opposition supporters were harassed and abducted. The military takeover of ZANU-PF in this period meant an explosion in the level of violence in Zimbabwe.

Given all this background of the military interfering in electoral and civilian affairs, electoral violence in Africa and more specific Zimbabwe has proved to be more common and more intense than other types of politically motivated violence whenever the military is involved.

ZEC/ZANU-PF Symbiotic Relationship & its subservience to the Military Factor in 2018 Post-Election Violence in Zimbabwe

The major problem leading to the 1 August 2018 crisis in Zimbabwe can be identified as the state-party conflation working in servitude to the military elite. This has proved to have grave implications on of free,

fair and peaceful elections. It would be baseless to argue that ZEC is independent from ZANU PF. The paper employs recent empirical examples as well as lessons drawn from the past to show without doubt that the two are in a symbiotic relationship that is subservient to and/or rather in servitude to the military elite. This has caused post-election violence.

During the 2018 election period, there happened numerous incidents that demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between ZANU-PF and ZEC mounting suspicion within citizens that later broke out into post-election violence. This paper abridges these incidents supporting its main thesis into three clusters of evidence namely: (i) mutually beneficial defensive proclivities; (ii) sacrificial negation of constitutional obligations to donate victory to ZANU-PF and; (iii) employment and/or appointment of ZANU-PF supporters and military personnel to manage the election. These are discussed in turn below.

First is the *mutually beneficial defensive proclivity* in ZANU-PF and ZEC. These institutions demonstrated beyond doubt that they speak "in-one-voice" vis-à-vis the rest of the actors in the electoral politics. For instance, ZANU PF, through its leader who is an embodiment of the interests of the military elite, President Emerson Mnangagwa averred that:

ZEC is the creation of the constitution of Zimbabwe. ZEC did not come from ZANU PF. ZEC comes from the country's constitution. ZEC is chosen and created by parliament. In parliament, the parliamentary committee chooses ZEC. Chamisa was there and he is the chairperson of the commission that selected ZEC which he is complaining about now. There is no law that says there is a party that should tell ZEC what to do no. No ZEC is created by the Constitution of the Republic and its composition is created and composed through

a parliamentary committee and in that parliamentary committee Chamisa was one of the co-chairpersons that created and composed ZEC¹.

Knowing very well that he is defending a body whose independence has been heavily compromised, Mnangagwa's statement shows that he was defending selfish interests of ZANU-PF. ZEC was executing its duties in favor of ZANU-PF and this went well with President Mnangagwa. To further reveal this unholy marriage between ZANU PF and ZEC, when the opposition MDC Alliance filed a court application against the conduct of ZEC in and the presidential election result, ZANU was quick to counter this petition and quickly respondent to this court challenge, even more expeditiously than ZEC itself.² Another mutual defense was shown when: (i) ZANU-PF youths organized a solidarity march whose timing and context meant to support ZEC which almost coincided with a demonstration for electoral reforms organized by the opposition;³ (ii) ZEC was accused of giving access to phone numbers of registered voters to ZANU-PF for use in campaigns and refused to do the same for other parties. Till date, ZEC has failed to tell the nation how this happened.⁴

Secondly, there was a *sacrificial negation of constitutional obligations* of ensuring a level

¹ See the Chronicle Newspaper, 21 July 2018. ZEC is Independent: President. Available online at <http://www.chronicle.co.zw/zec-is-independent-president>

² <http://www.africanews.com/2018/08/13/zimbabwe-mnangagwa-s-party-to-respond-to-chamisa-s-court-challenge-on-wednesday/>

³ See, Daily Maverick (7/06/2018). Failed Zanu-PF march exposes President Mnangagwa's weakness ahead of polls. (Online) available at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-06-07-failed-zanu-pf-march-exposes-president-mnangagwas-weakness-ahead-of-polls/>.

⁴ See Techzin (12/08/2018). ZEC Released Phone Numbers Database To Zanu-PF, Says MDC (Online) available at: <https://www.techzim.co.zw/Telecommunications>.

electoral playfield by ZEC as a form of manipulating the election to give ZANU-PF an upper-hand. For instance, the Electoral Act clearly states in section 3(c)(v) that every political party has the right to have reasonable access to all material and information for it to participate in every election but ZEC sacrificed impartiality by disclosing contact details of registered voters to ZANU PF for it to use such details in campaigning through sending SMS messages to registered voters and precluding other players the same.⁵

The African Broadcasting Charter, to which Zimbabwe is a signatory, spells out the duties of public broadcaster when it states that;

All State and government controlled broadcasters should be transformed into public service broadcasters, that are accountable to all strata of the people as represented by an independent board, and that serve the overall public interest, avoiding one-sided reporting and programming in regard to religion, political belief, culture, race and gender⁶.

However, the biasness of state owned media in the 2018 election phase was unquestionable as ZANU PF got unparalleled coverage. The media, both print and electronic overtly supported ZANU PF and its presidential candidate. The state broadcaster Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) and its sister radio stations, remain evidently in favor of ZANU PF. News content and the live broadcast of rallies and meetings remained heavily skewed towards the ruling ZANU PF party. The main broadcaster was blamed for propagating fake news and

⁵ <https://news.pindula.co.zw/2018/07/17/zec-defends-zanu-pf-on-text-messages/>

⁶ African Charter on Broadcasting adopted in May 2001

along partisan lines, compromising the right to access to information.⁷

The 2018 election, just like previous elections was riddled with irregularities as ZEC was accused of running it opaquely. For illegally putting Mnangagwa's name at the top of the presidential election ballot, ZEC proved that it can do anything in its powers to aid a Mnangagwa win. It therefore remains undisputable that ZEC failed to handle its constitutional duty in an impartial manner. The mutual relationship it shares with ZANU PF compromised the election result that was subsequently challenged in court by the opposition leader Nelson Chamisa.

Thirdly, there is a rising *trend in employment and/or appointment* of ZANU-PF supporters and military personnel into ZEC to manage the election on behalf of other contending parties. The appointment of Utoile Silaigwana as the acting Chief Elections officer in March 2018 confirms a disturbing trend employed by ZEC to have personnel with a military background as vital cogs of ZEC. Silaigwana, a former member of the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) was part of the ZEC secretariat that withheld the 2008 presidential election result amid allegations that they were tempering with it to give room for a run-off election that saved ZANU-PF.

Priscilla Chigumba, the ZEC Chairperson confirmed the militarization of ZEC which is toxic. Holding of government positions by former army personnel is also a cause for concern with regards to the free and fair conduct of an election. The now Vice President Chiwenga, former Commander of the Zimbabwe Defence forces and

Commander of the Zimbabwe National Army also savours the relationship that the army has with ZANU PF, thereby posing great challenges to a conduct of free and fair election.

Employment and re-deployment of military personnel to the Zimbabwe Election Commission is not only worrying but calls for action too. The Election Commission says that they employed 15% ex-service men⁸

The Chairperson of ZEC herself, Justice Priscilla Chigumba is a known ZANU-PF fan yet she was appointed to preside over the management of 2018 elections. The picture below shows ZEC chairperson (centre) wearing ZANU-PF campaign regalia.



Available online at: <https://zwnews.com/chigumba-wears-ed-mnangagwas-scarf/>.

The Military Factor Vis-à-vis Constitutional Supremacy and Prospects for International Re-engagement

The events of 1 August 2018, the involvement of the army by ZEC/ZANU PF in electoral

⁷ The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) on July 19 held its 8th 2018 Elections Dialogue Series "Making Elections Make Sense"

⁸ Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition 2018 Elections Factsheet, 2018

affairs clearly shows that the two institutions have been yoked by the military elite to fulfill its interests. Where military elites are involved, unorthodox politics have been practiced. More importantly, blatant human rights violations and electoral violence becomes the common practice in the electoral process. The use of live ammunition on unarmed citizens that led to the death of at least six people and over ten wounded should not be a surprise in military regimes like what Zimbabwe degenerated into in November 2017. As illustrated above, cases of militarised elections in Africa make it clear that the culture of force, impunity and violence is common and the most understood in the barracks. It becomes problematic when soldiers join the public sphere because they will not be expected to trust any other mechanism of getting power outside the barrack-model. Zimbabwe on the 1st of August witnessed a few highlights of military leadership culture and more in-depth showcases could possibly and arguably be expected in the future.

The brute was highly disproportionate and unnecessary given the fact that the majority of the victims were shot at the back, indicating that the victims did not pose any imminent threat. A “denialist” statement by president Mnangagwa admitting that the army was deployed but did not know by whom is an unfortunate and disappointing showcase of Machiavellian gamesmanship associated with military dictators.

The constitution of Zimbabwe clearly states in section 213(1) that only the president as commander in chief has the power to authorize the deployment of the army. President Mnangagwa is the only person capable of deploying the army and/or knowing who deployed it. An additional

statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Lt General (Retired) Dr. Sibusiso Moyo dismissing reports of the deployment of the army and ongoing harassment and abductions targeting opposition supporters as “fake news” saying they are “rogue elements masquerading as soldiers” was a further embarrassment. This is part of the attempt by military elites cum ZANU-PF leadership to distance themselves from the extra-judicial killings. Zimbabwe is in a context of military elites who know they have no other option to ensure transition other than seeking international re-acceptance as repented human rights violators.

The extra-legal military activities did not end at killing “unarmed civilians who were shot at the back” and beating journalists. It was followed by abductions and harassment of civilians. For instance, several cases of beatings and assault in Harare’s high-density suburbs including Chitungwiza, Dzivarasekwa, Glen Norah, Glen View, Kuwadzana as well as Highfields by soldiers operating in groups of 4 to 10 to also beat up people in bars and restaurants⁹.

This was not the first time where ZEC has collaborated with ZANU PF in electoral affairs to help achieve and secure interests of the military elite. Lessons can be drawn from the past showing the symbiotic relationship between the two. For example, in 2013 elections, the voter registration exercise which closed on the 9th of July left many people unregistered and in terms of discrimination between rural and urban vote, the government working with ZEC strategically deployed more registration centers in rural areas than urban. The

⁹ <https://bulawayo24.com/news/national/142308>

Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) analysis of the 2013 voters roll identified a significant disparity with registration in urban areas at 67.94% and rural area at 99.97%. This was a deliberate act by ZEC to suppress the urban vote considering it as opposition stronghold. This servitude of the ZEC and ZANU PF to the military elite has blocked the transition of Zimbabwe into a democratic dispensation.

The events are a clear violation of Section 212 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe which states that the function of the Defense forces is 'to protect Zimbabwe, its people, its national security and interest and its territorial integrity'. The events are also a clear reversal of Section 206 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe which states that

National security objectives of Zimbabwe must reflect the resolve of Zimbabweans to live as equals in liberty, peace, harmony, free from fear and in prosperity.

This was a clear indication that not even the constitution of Zimbabwe which is the supreme law of the land could hinder military interests.

International observers have since released statements following these tragic events. Their perspectives are noteworthy because they serve as an indicator of the possible success in ZANU-PF's quest for re-engaging with the West. It should also be noted that this has been the missing link in Zimbabwe's foreign affairs since early 2000s. The United States and the European Union and the Commonwealth are the key actors that "dis-engaged" Zimbabwe and it not an over-statement that ZANU-PF's "open for business" mantra targeted these actors.

The Commonwealth Observer Group in its preliminary statement released on 2 August

2018 expressed profound sadness on the outbreak of violence,

We categorically denounced the excessive use of force by the security forces against unarmed civilians and wish to urge all parties to exercise restraint.¹⁰

This statement is a serious reflection of displeasure with the commitment of the current government to a new democratic dispensation and a doom prophecy for possible readmission of Zimbabwe back into the Commonwealth.

The European Union Delegation, the Heads of Mission of EU member states in Harare and the Heads of Mission of Australia, Canada and the US released also gave a damning joint response on the 7th of August expressing grave concerns on the eruption of violence and occurrence of serious human rights violations.¹¹ Of more importance, the delegation noted MDC Alliance official who is also the former Finance Minister Mr Tendai Biti that he was in custody of the Zimbabwean authorities following criminal charges that were laid against him urgently calling for the government of Zimbabwe to guarantee his physical safety and integrity and ensure respect of his constitutional and human.

The military elite interests have also proven to be above judicial independence and other regional legal norms. The denial of asylum to Biti by Zambian officials in a veiled support to the ZANU-PF regime attests to this.¹² The Zambian foreign minister, Joseph Malanji said

¹⁰ See Bulawayo 24. Full Text: Commonwealth Observer Group Preliminary Statement on Zim Elections 2 August 2018.

¹¹ <https://zw.usembassy.gov/joint-local-statement-on-post-elections-human-rights-situation-in-zimbabwe/>.

¹² See France 24 news, 08 August 2018. Zimbabwe opposition figure Biti denied asylum, may face arrest at home. <http://www.france24.com/en/20180808-zimbabwe-opposition-mnangagwa-arrested-flee-mdc-zambia-tendai-biti-border>

reasons that Biti gave for seeking political asylum “did not have merit, so he is being held in safe custody and we are trying to take him back to Zimbabwe.” In addition, President Mnangagwa’s assertion that Biti was released following his intervention points out to how the judiciary which is supposed to be an independent body has been captured by military elites. The events stated above are indications that the military remains a major stumbling block of Zimbabwe’s possible transition to democratic rule.

Standman’s Spoiler Problem: Unpacking the Role of ZEC in Post-election Violence

Standman (1996:369) defines spoilers as

Leaders and parties who believe the emerging peace threatens their power, world view and interests and who use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it.

The argument is that, ZEC, in its servitude role to the military elite, was the main spoiler of peace and ‘most’ responsible for post-election violence that erupted on 1 August 2018 in the streets of Harare. Deriving from Stedman’s spoiler theory, ZEC played the role of an inside spoiler by undermining electoral peace and security mainly on three counts: *(i)* breach of impartiality and transparency ethics; *(ii)* its arrogant refusal to expel military personnel from among its human resources and; *(iii)* indulging in apparent manufacture of electoral irregularities resulting in post-election violence. This paper tackles these three grounds upon which ZEC emerged as a spoiler.

Firstly, ZEC was so apparent in its misconduct during the electoral period to the extent that, interested parties were continuously pushed to frustration and thus the resultant aggression. While it is clearly stated in the

constitution of Zimbabwe chapter 12, section 235 that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission is an independent body and is not subject to the direction or control of anyone, this has not been the reality on the ground. The commission has elaborated its partiality and biasness towards ZANU PF. ZEC’s delays in announcing the presidential results made tempers very high across Harare. It is said that history is the best teacher, given weeks of delayed announcement of election results in 2008 where it came to be known that ZANU-PF had lost, people had a justified reason to suspect that manipulation of the election outcome was the cause of delay in 2018 too.

Secondly, ZEC ignored calls by the opposition, civic society and academics to reshuffle its human resource team and eliminate content from the security sector which undermines its trustworthiness in the eyes of the citizens. For instance, recently the ZEC chairperson Priscilla Chigumba, admitted that ex-soldiers constituted 15% of the electoral management body’s staff when she appeared before the parliamentary portfolio committee on Justice, legal Parliamentary affairs.¹³ The 15% military personnel that constitute the commission’s human resource clearly points out the extent to which state institutions like the ZEC are captured in competitive authoritarian regimes (ZDI, 2018). History has also shown that militarizing the electoral field is a culture adopted by ZEC. For instance, in September 2004, President Robert Mugabe appointed a four-member Delimitation Commission overseen by former Judge Advocate in charge for military tribunals in the Zimbabwe National Army

¹³ See, Newsday Newspaper, 27 February 2018. *Soldiers make up 15% of ZEC staff.* Available at: <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2018/02/soldiers-make-15-zec-staff/>.

(ZNA) and High Court Judge, Justice George Chiweshe. In 2008 Mugabe appointed the same Justice Chiweshe to chair the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission that presided over the violent and most disputed 2008 polls (ZDI, 2017).

The military elite has a culture of publicly announcing that they cannot salute anyone without liberation credentials after elections which shows the extent to which the military is a dominant player in electoral and political affairs of the country. For instance, Brigadier-General Douglas Nyikayaramba told traditional chiefs, soldiers and the police at 3-3 infantry battalion in Mutare on October 23, 2010, that no person without revolutionary credentials would rule Zimbabwe. Nyikayaramba, a serving senior military official, publicly proclaimed his support for ZANU-PF saying, "I am where I am today because of the party. Some of us actively participated in the struggle and we cannot stand up and say we do not belong to that party."¹⁴

Lastly, ZEC added salt on the sore by manufacturing electoral irregularities, inconsistencies and erroneous confusions in the electoral process that would have brewed anger to the most patient of all opposition supporters in Zimbabwe. For instance, the commission notified the waiting public that it will start announcing parliamentary results on the 1st of August 2018 starting at 12.30 pm but delayed with almost 2 hours. On top of such a frustrating delay, the commission only announced 7 seats out of the 210 parliamentary seats and left presidential results.¹⁵ It is stated in the constitution of

Zimbabwe in section 239(a) that the electoral commission is to ensure that elections and referendums are conducted freely, fairly, transparent and in accordance with the law. However, this is only stated on paper and has not been practical.

It is morally upright and acceptable for ZEC to provide information to all political parties, candidates and observers on where and by whom the ballot paper is being printed and avert elements of suspicion in the conduct of the elections by this body. The European Union Election Observation Mission has since released a statement on the 1st of August 2018 where it noted the commission's lack of transparency in preparations for elections. In that statement, Mr. Brok said "For Zimbabwe to embrace democracy and move on from the past, such practices must stop".¹⁶ It also noted an unlevel playing field as well as lack of trust in the process. The opposition led series of demonstrations demanding electoral reforms to address such issues. It is however sad to note that ZEC was the central problem as it failed to take up any action in ensuring that there is transparency on the ballot paper raising and mounting suspicion which later sparked violence on the 1st of August.

Conclusion

Faced with dreams and longings for a post-election transition to a democratic dispensation, it is clear from the above that in Zimbabwe, which still survives under a competitive authoritarian regime, these dreams remain arguably distant possibilities.

<http://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/zimbabwe-electoral-commission-releases-preliminary-results/>

¹⁶ See, European Union Election Observation Mission Zimbabwe (01/08/2018). *Improved political climate, but un-level playing field and lack of trust in the process*. Accessible online at: https://eeas.europa.eu/election-observation-missions/eom-zimbabwe-2018/49029/improved-political-climate-un-level-playing-field-and-lack-trust-process_en .

¹⁴ Great Indaba, Wednesday 03 November 2010, Tsvangirai will not rule; army general

¹⁵ See SABC news, 1 August 2018. ZEC releases preliminary election result. Available online at

The tragic events of 1st August 2018 stand in sharp contrast with the high hopes and expectations of a new Zimbabwe. The militarization of key state institutions and state/party conflation have contributed to post election violence that broke out on the 1st of August 2018 and continue to pose an ongoing threat to possible democratic rule in Zimbabwe.

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