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ZIMBABWE

POLITICAL ECONOMY REVIEW

Zimbabwe's March 26 By-Elections: Unpacking The Menu Of Electoral Manipulation



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Introduction

This paper unpacks the menu of electoral manipulation rolled attendant to the Zimbabwe's 26 March 2022 by-election. Zimbabwe prepares holds by-elections on 26 March 2022 to fill the 28 parliamentary and 105 council seats which fell vacant due to recalls and deaths.¹ In this milieu, ZEC has been placed at the epicenter of the electoral manipulation machinery through (i) creating uncertainty in voter registration, (ii) gerrymandering in voter registration centre allocation, (iii) manipulation of the voters roll and (iv) militarisation. As elaborated in this paper, these electoral manipulation practices are calculated to reduce prospective opposition votes. Political violence targeting the opposition has been used as an additional strategy to dissuade opposition mobilization. The paper critically illustrates how political violence has been deployed for this purpose. In addition, the paper interrogates the Mnangagwa regime's captured of four main zones of contestation and how they are manipulated to advantage the ruling ZANU-PF party. The zones of contestation examined are (i) the judiciary, (ii) media, (iii) executive and (iv) the electoral field. The paper argues that the electoral chicanery observed in the 26 March 2022 by-election's electoral environment is a microcosm of the 2023 harmonised election.

The paper also posits that the observed electoral chicanery and violence is taking place in the context of a securocratic state problem. This problem came as a result of the open interference of the security sector/military in the country's political affairs evident in role of the military in the 2000, 2002, 2008 as well as the 2018 elections. This intrusion of the security sector/military into the political and electoral affairs works to the advantage of ZANU-PF.

Conceptualisation

The role of ZEC in these by-elections *vis-av-is* the securocratic state problem in Zimbabwe should be understood in the auspices of the competitive authoritarian regimes conceptual framework associated with the studies of Levytsky and Way

(2002). In their publication titled *Elections without democracy: The rise of Competitive Authoritarian Regimes*, Levytsky and Way (2002) state that competitive authoritarian regimes are characterised by the existence of formal democratic institutions which are considered as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority. However, there are deliberate attempts to undermine these institutions to such an extent that the incumbent regime fails to satisfy conventional minimum democratic standards.

In democracies unlike in competitive authoritarian regimes, four main criteria are met and these are (i) election of executives and legislators via open, free and fair elections, (ii) possession of the right to vote by all adults, (iii) promotion and protection of political rights, civil liberties, freedom of association, speech and press and (iv) the prevalence of real authority to govern that is free from military and/or clerical interference.² This paper posits that in Zimbabwe, the violation of these democratic benchmarks is indisputable.

A Background History of Disputed elections in Zimbabwe

The 26 March 2022 by-election comes in the backdrop of years of disputed elections marred with a myriad of irregularities in Zimbabwe. In the 2000 parliamentary elections, the European Union election observer mission condemned the ruling ZANU-PF party for supporting a campaign of violence and intimidation against the opposition MDC in the pre-election period and thereby obstructing the election monitoring duties of various independent observers.³ The 2008 election was also characterised by wide-spread ZANU-PF/Military-perpetrated violence against the opposition after Morgan Tsvangirai had won the plebiscite.⁴ In the 2013 election, the outcome was disputed on the basis of deployment of soft election manipulation tactics. Moore (2013) cited in Masunungure (2013) highlighted that:

The results [of the 2013 election] carefully pre-contrived by the ruling party and Nikuv, its electoral

¹ In March 2021, Tendai Biti, a Harare East constituency MP, Willias Madzimore of Kambuzuma, Settlement Chikwinya (Mbizo), Kucaca Ivumile Phulu (Nkulumane), Sichelesile Mahlangu (Pumula) and Regai Tsunga (Mutasa South) were recalled from the Parliament.

²For more details, see Levitsky and Way (2002). *Elections without democracy: The rise of competitive authoritarian regimes*.

³See Hulec. (2019). *The Development of an Authoritarian Regime in Zimbabwe from 1980 to the present day*, pp 1

⁴For more details, read *Post Mugabe Zimbabwe will be someone else's fiefdom*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/11/21/post-mugabe-zimbabwe-will-be-someone-elses-fiefdom>

mercenaries from Israel ... with a myriad of tricks including a fantastical voters roll, and slanted in polling stations with such tricks as thousands of 'assisted voters' (instantly 'illiterate' voters being helped along by police officers, who in any case were overly-represented in the stations), will inevitably be proven fraudulent enough, but they will take months if not years to verify.

The 2018 election had its own irregularities which marred its fairness, freeness and credibility. The IRI/NDI Zimbabwe International Election Observation Mission noted that the "electoral playing field was severely imbalanced and the ruling ZANU-PF party relied heavily on the advantage of incumbency, campaigning with little differentiation between the state and the party."⁵ The situation was further worsened by the deployment of the military in the Harare CBD resulting in the killing of at least 6 people. During this period, the security forces embarked on a trail of harassment, intimidation and arrest of opposition members.⁶

Disenfranchisement of voters: An infringement on the right to vote

The disenfranchisement of voters in Zimbabwe manifests at two different levels. The first one concerns the suppression of eligible voters in the voter registration process. The country's election management body, ZEC, in 2021 abruptly postponed the mobile voter registration which was originally scheduled to commence on 6 December 2021. ZEC cited lack of national identity cards (IDs) among eligible voters which are required when one wants to register to vote. However, the country's Civil Registry department has always been accused of engaging in deliberate attempts of delaying the issuance of IDs. As such, the eligible voters have always found it difficult to access their IDs. This has therefore inhibited their exercise of the right to vote.⁷ Secondly, eligible voters are turned away from their polling stations on the

election day. This is mainly a result of ZEC clandestinely moving voters from one polling station to another. In the ongoing 2022 voters roll audit by Team Pachedu, it has been revealed that ZEC, among many other constituencies, moved voters from Glenview South to Glenview North⁸. The sum effect is to turn away prospective opposition voters in the forthcoming by-elections as was the case in the previous elections.

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Zesn worried over turned away voters in by-elections

By Newsday - February 27, 2019

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ZEC and Electoral Manipulation

In the context of the March 26 by-elections and the forthcoming 2023 harmonized elections, the voter registration exercise has indicated that ZEC is indeed captured by ZANU PF and plays a facilitatory role in its longer stay in power. To facilitate ZANU PF's power retention, ZEC has recently played four electoral manipulation strategies – (i) creating uncertainty in voter registration, (ii) gerrymandering in voter registration centre allocation, (iii) manipulation of the voters roll and (iv) militarisation. These four form ZEC's latest menu for electoral manipulation and is against the constitutional provision of the independence of the commission.⁹

Creating uncertainty in voter registration

There has been ambiguity over the voter registration process in Zimbabwe and ZEC has been at the centre of it. In August 2021, ZEC produced and disseminated a notice that it was going to begin the mobile Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) blitz in Victoria Falls on 6

⁵See the IRI/NDI Zimbabwe <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/11/21/post-mugabe-zimbabwe-will-be-someone-elses-fiefdom> International Election Observation Mission Final 2018 Election Report on: <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Zimbabwe%20ZIEOM%20FINAL%20REPORT%20Printer%20updated.pdf>

⁶See 5 above.

⁷A more detailed report is accessible at: <https://kubatana.net/2021/11/26/zesn-press-statement-on-ids-and-postponement-of-mobile-voter-registration/>

⁸For more details, see <https://twitter.com/PacheduZW/status/1498268857873702914>

⁹Chapter 12 of the Zimbabwean Constitution (Amendment No. 20) sets out the independent commissions including ZEC with the mandate of supporting and entrenching human rights and democracy

December 2021. The blitz was targeting eligible voters in Victoria Falls who face travelling challenges to Hwange for voter registration at Hwange ZEC district offices. However, on 6 December 2021 ZEC announced that it had rescheduled the registration exercise to another date without stating the reasons and the people had already turned up in their numbers for the voter registration process. This created uncertainty over the voter registration process.



Fig 1: Voter Registration at ZEC Gweru District office.

Source: ZEC

Gerrymandering in voter registration centre allocation

In areas where the opposition commands a huge following, there are few voter registration centres as revealed in ZEC's schedule of the first mobile voter registration process which kick-started on 1 February 2022. For example, Bulawayo, an opposition dominated province, has been allocated 152 voter registration centres while the ZANU-PF stronghold Midlands province was allocated 354 voter registration centres.¹⁰ It should be noted that the opposition got 11 parliamentary seats whilst ZANU-PF got 0 seats in Bulawayo in the 2018 election whereas, in Midlands ZANU PF got 22 seats whilst the opposition got 6 seats.¹¹ When ZEC increases voter registration in the latter and suppressed it in the former, there is no doubt that it deliberately aimed at enabling more voter ZANU-PF supporters to register whilst suppressing

registration of opposition supporters. The gerrymandering was also evident in polling stations allocated to each province vis-à-vis the voter population. Logically, a province with more voter population should be allocated more polling stations. However, ZEC in 2018 did the opposite as shown below:

Province	Voter Population	No. of Polling stations
Harare	900 728	1 175
Midlands	761 982	1 540

Source: ZDI 2022; Dataset – ZEC 2018 Election Report

As shown above, Harare province – an opposition stronghold – had a higher voter population than Midlands province – a ZANU-PF stronghold. However, there were less polling stations in Harare than Midlands. This was intentionally designed to inconvenience opposition supporters whilst easing the voting process for ZANU-PF supporters in Midlands. It is an open secret that citizens tend to get bored, give up the waiting when they are made to wait in long queues just to cast a vote.

Manipulation of the voters roll

The 2022 voters roll consists of a number of irregularities as exposed by Team Pachedu. The exposed irregularities so far include duplicate voters, mass movement of voters from one polling station to another. The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) has noted that allegations of the manipulation of the voters roll amounts to the violation of the law and further erodes public trust and confidence in the operation of ZEC.¹² Sections 22A (2), 33(4) and 35(2) of the Electoral law stipulate that ZEC should consult all interested parties when determining the location of polling stations and the areas that the polling stations serve; all removals from the voters' roll and the publishing in the Gazette of all alterations to the voter's roll that are made without the oral or written consent of a voter. However, ZEC has clandestinely moved voters from one polling station to another without

¹⁰See <https://allafrica.com/stories/202201310424.html> for more details

¹¹See, ZESN 2018 Election Final Report. Available at: <https://www.zesn.org.zw/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Final-ZESN-2018-Harmonised-Election-Report.pdf>

¹²See ZESN report. 2022. ZESN Statement on the Administration of the Voters Roll by ZEC. Available at: <https://kubatana.net/2022/02/26/zesn-statement-on-the-administration-of-the-votersroll-by-zec/>

consulting and/or engaging the affected voters. This is in clear violation of the law as provided under Section 22A (2), 33(4) and 35(2) of the Electoral Law.

Militarisation

The militarisation of ZEC comes in form of the recruitment and employment of former military men into the commission secretariat. The Chairperson of ZEC, Priscilla Chigumba in 2018 said 15% of the commission's staff is comprised of the military personnel.¹³ The appointment of Utoile Silaigwana as the Chief Elections officer confirms a disturbing trend employed by ZEC to have personnel with a military background as vital cogs of ZEC. The country's military is made up of the liberation war partisan military wings of ZANU-PF – the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA). It therefore suffices to say the military has always been affiliated to ZANU-PF – one of the contesting parties in the elections. Therefore, the employment of former military men in ZEC compromises and negates the independence and credibility of the commission.

Recently ZEC made an admission that there was nothing amiss with delegating some of its duties to the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), arguing that it was consistent with the dictates of the constitution.¹⁴ However, the CIO has always been identified by human rights defenders and organisations as the main perpetrator of state-sponsored violence in the 2000, 2002, 2008 and 2013 elections to the benefit of ZANU-PF as noted by the Human Rights Watch (HRW) in 2013.¹⁵ In the run-up to the 2008 rerun election for instance, the ZANU PF party unleashed a serious wave of country-wide violence which culminated into the death of more than 2 hundred opposition MDC party supporters, the displacement of more than 50 thousand people from their rural homes, and the burning of many homes by the ZANU PF militia working hand-in-glove with elements of the military (Zimbabwe

Human Rights NGO Forum, 2008). The Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2008: 3) highlighted that:

The violence is being orchestrated by the Joint Operations Command, which is headed by senior ZANU-PF officials and includes the heads of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces, police, prison services, and the Central Intelligence Organization. Human Rights Watch investigations indicate that the army is playing a major role in supporting the violence. It has provided known "war veterans" and ZANU-PF supporters with guns, transportation and bases from which serious human rights violations are carried out.

The presence of the CIO in ZEC erodes its independence and impartiality given its partisan role in supporting the ZANU-PF led government. The admission by ZEC that it works with the CIO has left ZEC tainted.

Outside the militarisation of ZEC, Zimbabwe currently faces a risk of degenerating into a securocratic state as indicated by the recent events in the country's political landscape. In his address at a ZANU-PF gathering disguised as National Youth Day celebrations, President Mnangagwa openly declared Zimbabwe as a military state.

Although we come from different provinces, let us forever be mindful that we are a diverse people but one nation. There is no room for hate speech or divisive language. Zimbabwe is a military state. Those who dream of dividing this country ngavamuke vabike doro nekuti mudzimu yavarasha¹⁶

The above statement by President Mnangagwa as head of state and a former securocrat makes the electoral environment unfair and not free. This is because people starts reminiscing the Gukurahundi atrocities, the 2008 election violence and the 2018

¹³See the NewsDay. 2018. Soldiers make up 15% of Zec staff. Available: <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2018/02/soldiers-make-15-zec-staff/>

¹⁴ For more details, watch <https://twitter.com/zimlive/status/1494679622465859593> when ZEC Acting CEO Jane Chigidji says there is nothing wrong with employing CIO agents as the constitution allows it

¹⁵ For more details, see The Elephant in the Room Reforming Zimbabwe's Security Sector Ahead of Elections. Human Rights

Watch, 2013, www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/zimbabwe0613webcover_0.pdf

¹⁶See NewZimbabwe.com. 2022. Zimbabwe Is A Military State – Mnangagwa. Available at: <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/zimbabwe-is-a-military-state-mnangagwa/>

August 1 shootings. Therefore, this is another strategy used by the top leadership of a securocratic state to intimidate the opposition and prospective political opponents.

Capture of 4 main zones of contestation

The competitive authoritarian nature of the Zimbabwe's regime is evidenced by capture of the main four zones of contestation that are (i) judiciary, (ii) media, (iii) executive and (iv) the electoral field as shown below.

Judiciary contestation

The promulgation into law of the Constitutional Amendment Bill (No. 2) in May 2021 has a direct adverse impact on the independence of the judiciary. Following the signing into law of this Bill, the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 2) Act of 2021 now allows the president to directly appoint a judge either from the High Court, Labour Court, Administrative Court to a higher court without public interviews as was previously the norm under section 180 (2). With electoral disputes now spilling over into courts of law like the case of the 2018 election result challenge in the Constitutional Court, the independence of the judiciary in handling such court petitions is now at stake. Judges are more likely to protect the interests of the appointing authority.

Capture of the executive

The Constitutional Amendment Bill (No.2) signed into law in May 2021 has created an imperial presidency with unchecked powers. Under the amended constitution, the president can now appoint High and Supreme Court judges without subjecting them to public interviews, appointment of the Prosecutor General, appointment of up to 7 ministers outside Parliament, extension of tenures of judges of Constitutional court without the role of Judicial Service Commission as well as the abandonment of the Presidential running mate clause among others. These unchecked powers by the president override the parliamentary oversight role which is provided for under section 300 of the Constitution. For instance, the parliament now has a decreased role in terms of concluding agreements with foreign organisations and/or entities. The executive now has more powers to

determine the success of the much-needed electoral reforms for a free, fair and credible election.

Media contestation

The state-owned media operates in a way that resembles capture by the ruling ZANU-PF party. There is bias in reporting on electoral issues that favors ZANU-PF party and paint an oblique picture on the opposition. This is in contravention of Section 160 J (1) (a) of the Electoral Act which stipulates that "all political parties and candidates are treated equitably in their news media, in regard to the extent, timing and prominence of the coverage accorded to them." The state-controlled Herald, ZBC-TV and Sunday Mail have of late embarked on media-led blackmail of the opposition CCC. For instance, there was political violence at a CCC rally in Kwekwe on 27 February 2022 and ZANU-PF was fingered by the police to be the perpetrators¹⁷. However, the above state-owned media outlets are currently on a campaign of pushing the blame on CCC, the victim of the political violence.



¹⁷See NewsDay. 2022.CCC Kwekwe violence – Police figure ZANU-PF. Available at: <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2022/03/ccc-kwekwe-violence-police-finger-zanu-pf/>



The reporting by Herald, ZBCtv, the Sunday Mail and other state-controlled media contravenes the African Broadcasting Charter to which Zimbabwe is a signatory. The Charter highlights the duties of public broadcasters like as follows:

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 gender.¹⁸

The Constitution of Zimbabwe under Section 61 (4) (b) requires that all State-owned media of communication must be impartial. However, a Twitter post by ZBCtv on 4 March 2022 proved that the public broadcaster has turned into a ZANU-PF campaigning television station.



Capture of the electoral field

The capture of the electoral field speaks to the militarisation of the election management body ZEC which compromises and negates its independence and credibility as highlighted elsewhere in this paper. The involvement of the military affairs has led to blatant human rights and electoral violence as was the case on 1 August 2018 in a post-election violence against the opposition.

Zimbabwe's securocratic state problem: Authoritarian consolidation

Slater and Fenner (2011)'s conceptualization of four regime capability infrastructures for authoritarian consolidation best describes Zimbabwe's electoral environment ahead of the 26 March 2022 by-elections. These are (i) infrastructure for coercion of rivals, (ii) infrastructure for the extraction of revenues, (iii) infrastructure for the registration of citizens and (iv) infrastructure for the cultivation of dependence.

Infrastructure for coercion of rivals

As part of the infrastructure for coercion of rivals, there is currently a wave of political violence that is aimed at opposition particularly the CCC party led by Nelson Chamisa. The arrest of CCC party members and supporters has since been intensified as the March 22 by-elections draw nearer. On 23 January 2022, heavily armed anti-riot police disrupted a CCC party candidate confirmation exercise in Kuwadzana East Constituency ahead of the by-elections. The anti-riot police also disrupted a campaign rally by the CCC party in Gweru on 6 February 2022 and 12 party

¹⁸The African Charter on Broadcasting adopted in May 2001

supporters were arrested.¹⁹ The arrest and harassment of the opposition party leadership was also evident on 14 February 2022 when the CCC party Vice President Tendai Biti was arrested by 3 armed police officers in Greendale and detained at Harare Central and Rhodeseville police stations before he was later released without charges preferred against him.

The 20 February 2022 CCC by-election campaign rally in Highfields, Harare faced a myriad of challenges from the police which sought to induce inconveniences to the event. Roadblocks were mounted across the city of Harare and were meant to stop the movement of CCC supporters to the rally venue. During the rally, internet accessibility was restricted and it was a deliberate attempt aimed at limiting the visibility of the ZANU-PF political opponent CCC. The internet restriction on 20 February was confirmed by NetBlocks which indicated that:

Metrics indicate that internet service is degraded for many users in #Zimbabwe; the incident is likely to limit live streaming and access to online content as #YellowSunday opposition rallies are held at Highfields, Harare.²⁰

The conditions set by the police prior to the CCC rally exposed the selective application of the law by the Zimbabwe's security apparatus. On 12 February 2022, the ZANU-PF party had its by-election star rally in Epworth and hundreds of thousands of party supporters were bused from different areas outside Harare. However, on a similar star rally by the CCC party on 20 February 2022, the police prohibited the party to bus people from outside Highfields. Apart from this evidence of selective application of the law by the country's law enforcement agents, it lays bare the impartiality of state security agents that works to the advantage of the ZANU-PF party.

State sponsored violence against the opposition CCC party has been escalated as parties embark on a campaign trail ahead of the March 26 by-elections. The use of violence-inciting language amounting to hate speech by Vice President Chiwenga on 26 February 2022 at a rally in Kwekwe resulted in an orgy of violence at a CCC party rally in Kwekwe on 27

February 2022. The Vice President vowed to "crush the opposition like lice" and indeed state sponsored violence ensued against CCC supporters who were at a rally in Kwekwe on 27 February 2022. This violence resulted in the death of 1 people and hospitalization of 22 people who were badly injured.²¹

Chiwenga threatens to 'crush' CCC

Vice-President Constantine Chiwenga (pictured) yesterday issued a chilling threat against the opposition Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) saying the ruling party was ready to "crush the party like lice" to prevent its leader Nelson Chamisa from winning elections.

As if in kind evidence to Chiwenga's threats, opposition CCC supporters were being tear-gassed by police in Gweru to prevent Chamisa from holding a campaign rally in Gweru centre.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa was in Kwekwe at Mbatia stadium addressing a campaign rally where Chiwenga warned that the ruling party was unflinching in its resolve to "crush" the CCC "like lice".

"I have heard others here saying down with triple C, let me assure you that there is no triple C," Chiwenga said.

Mnangagwa spoke out against violence after Chiwenga's threats.

"It is undemocratic to be violent against democracy," Mnangagwa warned.

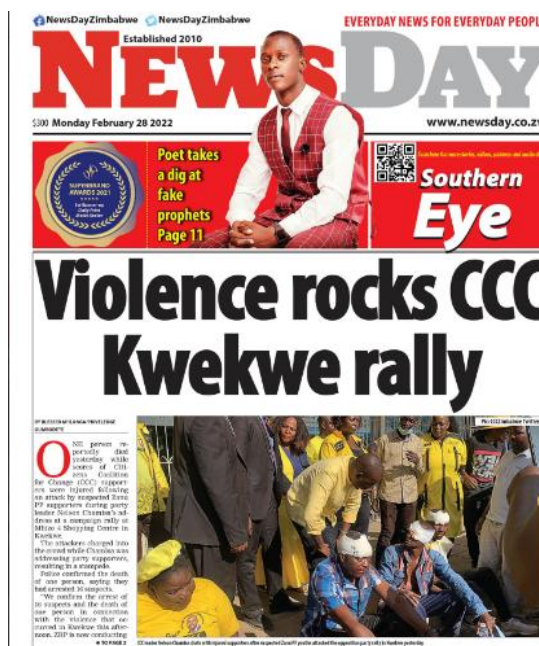
"The country is built by its owners. It is, therefore, important for you in the coming by-elections to vote for the Zanu PF candidates because these are the owners of the country.

"If you vote for the opposition they won't be able to develop this country because they are not the owners."

As has become tradition, Zanu PF commandeer Zupco buses to ferry thousands of party supporters to welcome Mnangagwa in his home province where youths were treated to live music by hand artists.

Mbatia Stadium was filled to capacity and each person was given a flag.

26 February 2022



27 February 2022

Another tool for the infrastructure for coercion of rivals is the enactment of the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Bill which seeks to interfere with

¹⁹For more details, read NewZimbabwe.com: Armed Police Disrupt CCC Road Show In Gweru, Arrest 12. Available at: <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/armed-police-disrupt-ccc-road-show-in-gweru-arrest-12/>

²⁰For more details, see Netblocks statement on <https://twitter.com/netblocks/status/1495378165962846215>

²¹For more details, see: <https://twitter.com/advocatamahere/status/1498000357842108420>

work of NGOs, CBOs and other humanitarian organisations. The Bill, if passed into law, will stifle constitutionally enshrined rights such as freedom of association, the right to privacy and civil and political rights. The PVO Bill is a deliberate attempt by the ZANU-PF government to descend on CSOs ahead of the 2023 elections. ZANU-PF has for a very long time accused CSOs of being anti-government and this was echoed by the then party Political Commissar Patrick Chinamasa when the said CSOs are working hand-in-glove with the Western powers to effect regime change (Fair Planet, 2021).

Cognizance of the fundamental role played by CSOs in electoral processes such as voter education and registration, they are the prime target of the state as ZANU-PF thrives on voter apathy. Conducting voter education in Mbare on 8 February 2022, 10 members of the local election watchdog, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) were arrested on charges that they were not cleared by the Police Internal Security Intelligence (PISI) Unit to conduct voter education. This action against CSOs by the state ahead of the March 26 by-elections mirrors a big picture of what is going to happen between now and the 2023 harmonised elections. It is against this background that the PVO Bill is part of ZANU-PF machinations that are aimed at restricting the fundamental role of CSOs in levelling the electoral playing field.

Infrastructure for the extraction of revenues

The authoritarian consolidation by President Mnangagwa can also be seen in the lenses of the infrastructure for the extraction of revenues. The ZANU-PF party is linked to a number of cartels that have effectively taken over control of mines, public firms and the energy sector as revealed by the Maverick Citizen report in February 2021. The operation of these cartels has led to state capture which is described by Hellman *et al* (2000c: 4) as “the propensity of firms to shape the underlying rules of the game by —purchasing decrees, legislation, and influence, or efforts of firms to shape and influence the underlying rules of the game (i.e. legislation, laws, rules, and decrees) through private payments to public officials.” The Maverick Citizen (2021) report cited President Mnangagwa as the boss of one of the cartels and his patronage and protection keeps cartels operating. One of the impact of these cartels is directly linked to ZANU PF’s authoritarian consolidation project

and it concerns entrenching its patrons’ grip on power, blocking democratic transition via elections, retarding service delivery for citizens and creating an uncompetitive business climate thereby leaving Zimbabweans poorer, more severely under-served by their government and disempowered to hold the state to account (NewZimbabwe.com 2021). As noted by Mungwari (2019), state capture in Zimbabwe under Emmerson Mnangagwa’s presidency is characterized by a web of military and business kingpins and the presidium.

Infrastructure for the cultivation of dependence

Prior to the 2018 harmonized elections, ZANU-PF promised residential stands to residents of Epworth and this was an attempt to lure votes from this constituency.



The same modus operandi has been applied ahead of the 26 March 2022 by-elections when President Mnangagwa and ZANU PF chose to hold their by-election star rally in Epworth on 12 February 2022 and promised the residents title deeds. The use of peri-urban land for purposes of election promises by the ZANU-PF party falls under the auspices of the infrastructure for extraction of resources and it is aimed at consolidating President Mnangagwa’s grip on power. Holding the star rally in Epworth by ZANU-PF was not a random decision but a strategic one given that Epworth consists of thousands of people affiliated to ZANU-PF who, in every election period, are promised land and title deeds in return vote for the party.

The authoritarian consolidation capability infrastructures discussed for the balancing pillars of the authoritarian regime’s staying power and immunity from internal and external threats. As noted by Seeberg (2014), the authoritarian regimes that build ‘high levels of infrastructure capacity’ have better chance to win elections and retain power while those

with weaker infrastructures face a possibility of electoral defeat and transition.

Maneuvering out of Authoritarianism

The capture of 4 key democratic institutions in Zimbabwe, that is, the legislature, electoral system, media and the judiciary speak volume about the country being a competitive authoritarian regime. It is against this background that there should be strategies aimed at navigating through this system in a bid to achieve a democratic transition that come via the elections. Under the Agency Theory of transition, the vertical transition agency can be valuable in the Zimbabwean context. The entry point for democratic forces and/or the opposition has been dependent on the amenability to disruption of the 'procedural uncertainty' and 'substantive certainty' of elections maintained by electoral autocracies. The mobilization of large numbers of voters or large masses to protest against electoral manipulation has been the two key strategies used by opposition to create 'substantive uncertainty' or 'procedural certainty' of elections respectively (Schedler; 2010; Levitsky and Way 2002, 2010). However, this type of transition agency is often not effective in absolute and/or closed authoritarian regimes as mass mobilization is quashed with force.

State of the economy

The continued loss of value of the Zimbabwean currency (ZWL\$) against the United States dollar (US\$) has triggered a rise in inflation. The Trading Economics notes that the country's annual consumer price inflation surged for the sixth straight month to 66.1% in February of 2022, from 60.6% in January the same year.²² By 1 March 2022, the country's currency was trading at US\$ - ZWL\$127.4²³ at the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) administered weekly foreign currency auction. This continued loss of ground of the ZWL\$ against the US\$ has further eroded the value of civil servants' salaries. The opening of schools' first term in February 2022 was met by teachers' industrial action in which incapacitation was cited to be the major

drive of the strikes.²⁴ The financial crisis has equally affected university lecturers and nurses across the country. The incapacitation of workers comes from the fact that the lowest paid employee at the university earns a net wage of ZW\$21 000²⁵ against the Total Consumption Poverty Line of ZW\$8,496.00 per person per month based on the cheapest food.²⁶

Conclusion

The exposed irregularities in the voters roll exposes a deliberate attempt by the electoral by ZEC to establish an uneven electoral playing field. The revelation of manipulation of the voters roll by ZEC and the state sponsored violence against the opposition show the covert and overt manipulation of the electoral processes. This is a sign post revealing the nature and context within which the 2023 electoral processes will be conducted.

²²See Trading Economics, available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/zimbabwe/inflation-cpi>

²³ See Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) Foreign Exchange Results 1 March 2022. Available at: <https://twitter.com/ReserveBankZIM/status/1498664054461800456>

²⁴For a more detailed report on this, read Education International. 2022. Zimbabwe Strike Action by Teachers as government leaves them in financial crisis. Available at: <https://www.ei->

[ie.org/en/item/26294:zimbabwe-strike-action-by-teachers-as-government-leaves-them-in-a-financial-crisis](https://www.ei-)

²⁵Statement by the Association of University Teachers (AUT-UZ), University Teachers Association (UTA-UZ) and University Technicians Association (UTA –UZ)

²⁶See, ZimStat. 2021 Poverty Datum Lines – January 2022. Available at: https://www.zimstat.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/publications/Income/Prices/2021/PDL/PDL_01_2022.pdf

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