

Zimbabwe Elections: The Local and Regional Implications

Written by Thomas Otieno Juma

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THOMAS OTIENO JUMA, SEP 18 2018

Election Intersections of Zimbabwe in Africa

Elections' in Zimbabwe are by and large a reflection of elections in Africa. The election history in Africa describes what the recent changeovers/ continuity has been in Africa. African countries that have had elections recently such as; Uganda, 'Burundi', Sudan, Rwanda, Kenya, Congo Brazzaville, Togo, Mali, and Zambia have experienced continuity of incumbents; The other category of states like Tanzania, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, and South Africa have experienced changeovers; A third category which is similar to the first category to some extent have extended their regimes using elections. In this category we have Burundi, South Sudan, and DRC whose elections is now due in December; A unique circumstantial election/transition scenario emerging include Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, South Africa, and now Zimbabwe; Finally, there are only two cases recently where incumbents have been defeated as was witnessed in Ghana and Nigeria. With the dawn of democracy, many thought elections would revert the independent African strongman syndrome; it has worsened under the legitimization of available governmental institutions. Elections have not brought about changes, but the continuity of the unwanted through approvals at whatever cost. The history of elections strikes an attitude of fear of uncondemned elections as in DRC where, "The opposition Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) party has accused Kabila of "scheming" to stay in power (eNCA, 2018)."

A brief history of elections in Africa (over 50 years) replicates to the 30 years of those of Zimbabwe. The question to this would be; is it a mirage of an underdeveloped democracy or a missed conception of democracy? When democracy seemed to have infiltrated the globe through the Western states' Post-Cold War order, many thought it would usher in a new vital force to African politics. This has been a farfetched glimpse of the desired outcome than practice. Globally, to observe, the West are themselves tired of democracy except internal and much more with the new pop-up of shapeless interests in multipolarity politics of the 21st Century.

The transition in African politics from the colonial to strong henchmen of the 1960s for the next three decades, saw Africa go through the first phase of authoritarianism with a closed patterned link to the colonizers. The second phase of authoritarianism starts with the sustained West vs East, Left vs Right, Capitalism vs Communism, USA and allies vs USSR and allies on African politics. This created a loose international regime of 'without East, there is a West and vice versa', both sides of the hemispheres encouraged authoritarianism so that regime actions; whether elections or takeovers were sanctioned by global *leanage*. The third phase of authoritarianism shaped up with the triumph of free world politics (the USA supremacy) of the 1990s. Good governance was measured by democracy the American way. Sadly, *it is* a short-lived period because democracy has always moved hand in hand with people's rights which are a nose-dived practice at the altar of continuing (democratic) regimes.

Dorina Bekoe, (2010) in "Trends in Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, avers that Elections have facilitated the emergence of democratic governments in Benin, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mali, Senegal, and South Africa. Following autocratic regimes and protracted civil wars, more stable societies have emerged in Guinea, Liberia, Niger, and Sierra Leone".

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In some cases, however, elections have been manipulated to legitimate autocratic regimes or to ensure dynastic successions on the continent. Violence still plagues approximately 20% to 25% of the elections in Africa. In my observation, the new approach to handling democracy has in a way contributed to the election stalemate is one way to explain Africa's elections in this century. Secondly, the change of the concentration of the superpower to the economic front as opposed to the political front of fighting rivalry is another cause. The third reason is that each country is uniquely placed to be economically viable or potentially to be. New discoveries in resources illustrate this fact.

Zimbabwe from Independence to Electoral Flashpoints

Zimbabwe joins the growing trend of democratization from infancy having been a late independent state. Like other African states, getting independence without defining the 'form state'. It joined a framework of a group of states agitating for the extreme centralization political tendencies in Africa. Onslow, Sue (2011) in his article *Zimbabwe and Political Transition* points an issue of infant political culture in post-independence which has continued to play out in domestic politics; the shared aspects; personality, ethnic and clan politics which shaped the liberation struggle face loggerheads with the important legacy of emphasis on solidarity and lack of internal debates. ZANU-PF is an example of how liberation leadership turns face to internal dissent and debate (earlier ideals) in addressing considerable difficulties of nation-state construction (Raftopoulos, 2010). The issue of infancy politics well defines Zimbabwe's electoral flashpoints. Describing infancy politics, Juma and Oluoch (2014, 5) assert, "to many African leaders at the time of independence, the attainment of independence itself meant "taking over". It had little to do with re-modeling the states. Easily leaders found themselves in the shoes of the colonialists except the non-governing elites who could exercise sobriety to new state of power by sensing danger and a few genuine patriots who hung to the complex desires of Africans to be free."

It is observed that by late 1990s the ZANU-PF was facing a profound challenge to the legitimacy of its victory (an electoral impasse), the year 2000s saw the struggle being 'a battle for the state' a continuity of same politics all over Africa through other means 'power-hang politics', however the departure from independence ideals from within the ZANU-PF ranks led to emergence of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), a familiar pattern experienced in Africa.

In its dominance, the ZANU-PF restructured the power matrix, manipulated the constitution, and the electoral process which led to the Government of National (GNU) in February 2009. This new design of governments became popular around Africa, as a stopgap measure to reflect on electoral justice as the West became aloof to the state of democracy in Africa. New changes in global polity, lead to new interests among the same players. The demise of the Cold war opened up the political globe to a search for '*New Political Order*' (crazy to say when many hailed and ushered New World Order). Some similar cases include; Kenya and Ivory Coast.

The one-party state single-minded narrative by many African countries in detaching themselves from colonial legacy has become the excruciating reality to governance and more so to elections as it bore unexpected life dictatorship which elections was now expected to endorse. Additionally and summarily the problem of elections in Zimbabwe and by far, Africa is; failure to define the 'form state', personality/ ethnic/ and clan matrices, mismatch of independence ideals, 'power-hang politics', manipulated constitutions, and skewed electoral processes.

Elections: Local Effects vs 'Regions' in Electoral Perspectives

The elections in Zimbabwe only accelerated an economy that was already reaping from 'economic-regime misrule'. In much sense, unstable elections are a precursor to sleeping economic sectors and idle productivity of the human capital. This extends to the low standards of living and acts of lawlessness. The crisis in Zimbabwe has been evident in the country's economic and socio-political life. It has had widespread negative regional repercussions, as the country's economic decline. Schools and hospitals are closing; patients cannot access health care, teachers, nurses and doctors not able to work. Erratic urban water supplies due to weakened infrastructure, power outages and a shortage of chemicals, reduced number of meals (UNICEF Zimbabwe, 2008). It has witnessed a large mass movement of people into South Africa.

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It would be very fair to elucidate from the onset, that Zimbabwe's economy did not collapse due to electoral malpractices. It is a product of governance – arrogance and insensitive regimes at the helm, who would rather die than save face of anything called state. They equate such to belittling self to inconsequential elements remote from power/ or who want power. As Southall (2017) writes, “the rot goes back to the early 2000's. The ZANU-PF profligacy had been fuelled by a continuous cycle of simply printing more money resulting in runaway inflation. Mega-inflation meant that ordinary people lost their pensions and whatever savings they had, as the Zimbabwe dollar lost its value and people resorted to barter or the use of other currencies. Ultimately, the government faced no choice but to accept the reality. In 2008 it scrapped the Zimbabwe dollar.

The deterioration of Zimbabwe economically is not how poor the regional states are in diplomatic summit diplomacy, however, how slow they respond to regional decays in regional states. Many examples exist; Liberia and Sierra Leone in West Africa, South Sudan in Northern Africa, Somalia in East Africa/Horn of Africa, DRC in Central Africa, Zimbabwe in South Africa, and currently Burundi and Cameroon are decaying states in East and Central Africa respectively but a go slow motion in regional involvement will take toll until they ground. One may want to draw a contrast between the two countries faced by racism and compare Zimbabwe and its neighbour South Africa as startling contrasts in how racial relations are managed after colonial subjugation. In the case of South Africa, there was more of healing led by Nelson Mandela. Zimbabwe and her President Robert Mugabe to South Africa and Mandela are an exact opposite in post-independence policy on race yet both leaders Mugabe and Mandela spent many years in prison. Though Zimbabwe seemed to be neglected to the behest of strongman Mugabe, the potential productivity is immeasurable both regionally as to SADC as well as to Africa. A small number of African states are slowly slipping into the Zimbabwe of Mugabe state; will a change in international order to reshape them?

While discussing the reality of reflections on elections, it is important to visualize also the aspirations of the people of the great Zimbabwe on the matter. A picture is painted that, on 30 July 2018 (Pigou, 2018) Zimbabweans will go to the polls. The elections are an unprecedented opportunity for Zimbabweans to choose who they believe can deliver economic recovery after decades of violent, predatory and authoritarian rule by former President Robert Mugabe and the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). This will be the first vote since a Very Peculiar Coup in November 2017 ousted Mugabe and made way for President Emmerson Mnangagwa, a 75-year-old ZANU-PF stalwart. Mnangagwa is contesting the election on pledges of reform and economic recovery. He vows that, in a break from the past, these polls will be free and fair. Very important to note is that economic mainstay has a closer connection to peace within a country and regionally. Election management issues are indeed matters of regional peace hence mismanagement should be a global concern. Global melting points begins from inconsequential state affairs and builds to regional alliances, and without notice it is global. The affirmation here is that post-election dispensation ought to produce a stable political environment for the survival of the state regionally and globally.

After many years of being in economic limbo, Zimbabwe premised on the 2018 elections will chart a level of stability to warrant economic life. Bulawayo (2018) reported that the Zimbabwean factory manager Sifelani Jabangwe is a survivor of the Mugabe years. Overseeing a company that stayed in business through hyperinflation, the national currency being abandoned and an exodus of investors. Now he hoped that the elections would mark a turning point and will bring in a legitimate government that can relaunch the shattered economy after Robert Mugabe was ousted in the previous year. “The normalisation of relations with the rest of the world is the key takeaway in these elections so that we are not seen as a pariah state anymore,” Jabangwe, who is also president of the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries, told AFP on a tour of his factory. “We have lost too much time with the politics. It's now time to develop the economy. “When the rest of the economy is functioning and everyone has money to buy what they want, we also benefit.” Further to this he reports other voices observe, “We have been reeling under self-inflicted economic pain by and large,” said Shingi Munyeza, a hotel investor who also owns one Mugg and Bean cafe in Harare after the second premises closed. The political establishment was more focused on retaining power at the expense of the economy and the rights of its citizens.

The elections in Zimbabwe (in SADC) just like in Kenya (in EAC) have had real challenges (Juma, 2018) not only internal to states but also externally in a regionally connected group of states. The effects of a conflictual post-election order under normal circumstances extend to breed regional security complex. In other words, how elections are managed traditionally affects national security. Stivachtis (1999) comments that the subject of national security is

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composite in nature. There are five sectors to which the concept of national security applies: military, political, economic, societal and environmental. IR scholars would pose; does national security exclude a state from the international system? (Not at all!). A mirror on Zimbabwe elections recently portray the yearnings of the citizenry to move away from the November 2017 military intervention and a departure from the 37 years of misrule that resulted into political and economic disorder thus hampering national security.

Current patterns of conflict across the borders and within African regions resulting from elections best fit the picture of Regional Security Complex (RSC) so that new thoughts of securitization must suffice. This ties social and economic effects to political practice. In current dimensions, state issues transcend their boundaries and regional complications are security complexes.

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