

Democracy, Governance and Legitimacy in Zimbabwe since the November 2017 Military Coup

Democracia, governação e legitimidade no Zimbábue desde o golpe militar de novembro de 2017

Aaron Rwodzi

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Abstracts

[English](#) and [Português](#)

This article focuses on the democracy and legitimacy debates in Zimbabwe after the ouster of Robert Mugabe from power by his erstwhile ally, Emmerson Mnangagwa, in November 2017. President Mnangagwa popularized the terms “Second Republic” and “New Dispensation” to show that his regime differed from Mugabe’s in terms of governance style. The position of this article is that Mnangagwa’s regime could not abandon the system established under the reign of Mugabe. Instead, it argues that the Second Republic reflects continuities of the Mugabe era being transposed into a quasi-military edifice whose “commandist” approaches denigrate cries for democracy and transparency. This qualitative research draws on data from interviews with political elites in the opposition and ruling parties as well as secondary sources.

Index terms

Keywords:

[democracy](#), [governance](#), [resettlement](#), [legitimacy](#), [elections](#) [multiparty](#)

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Editor's notes

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Full text

1 The most dominant debate after the ouster of Robert Mugabe in November 2017 has been on the forms and content of “*democracy*” in Zimbabwe under the new government led by President Emmerson Mnangagwa. Zimbabwe constitutionally undertakes to respect the global standards of democracy (Sylvester, 1995, p. 405) whose core components include multipartyism, free, fair and open periodic elections to enable the populace to choose their leaders freely (Taylor & Williams, 2002, pp. 560-561). In any true democracy, the people, through their own chosen representatives, have the final say in matters of governance and in all issues to do with their livelihoods (Milimo, 1993, p. 37). This article evaluates the Second Republic in terms of (1) its (in)ability to move away from Mugabe’s authoritarianism and (2) its inclination to perpetuate Mugabe’s legacy, entrench its rule and defy the clarion call for democracy from the main opposition Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDC-A) under Nelson Chamisa.

Conceptual/theoretical framework

2 This article uses Rotberg’s (2004, p. 1) theory of governance. The theory holds that governance is the delivery of political goods to citizens and the better the quality of that delivery and the greater the quantity of political goods being delivered, the higher the level of governance, everywhere at jurisdictional level, not just in Africa (Rotberg, 2004, p. 1). Bratton and van de Walle (1997, p. 97) analyse democracy at two levels: in behavioural terms and at the structural level. In behavioural terms it relates to meaningful competition, participation and liberties. At structural level it means the electoral system, multiparty organs and an independent legislature and organs. However, they conclude that, in Africa, institutional pluralism is the recipe for intensified particularisms and therefore antithetical to any robust transition to democracy (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997, p. 97). Worse still, democracy is generally conceived in neo-colonial terms because it is prescriptive and based on Western standards. There is, quite unfortunately, too much premium of multiparty elections in Africa without making an appraisal of the past colonial state. Competing opposition parties seem not to have substantial alternatives in terms of policy, resulting in voters voting without choosing (Akinrinade, 2000). Museveni of Uganda introduced a “no party democracy” where all political elements were incorporated into the structures of the National Resistance Movement (Akinrinade, 2000). In this case, as almost elsewhere in Southern Africa, national consensus was prioritized in a bid to establish enduring democratic structures.

Statement of the problem

3 *Zimbabwe, at the time of writing, suffers from electoral illegitimacy and lawlessness. The Second Republic under Emmerson Mnangagwa appears to be increasingly focusing its energies towards consolidating power through any means necessary as opposed to constructing effective representative institutions that make economic development and improved standards of living in the country possible. Zimbabweans continue to suffer the effects of an economy that was subjected to 37 years of plunder by the governing elite under the former President Robert Mugabe’s tutelage. The coup leaders who arrogated to themselves the mandate to rule after the elections of July 2018 are earnestly perpetuating the Mugabe legacy and perfecting it to suit the corporate interests of the military-backed government with a substantial proportion of careerist who retired to assume the work of government. Military intervention is inherently undemocratic, yet Western countries, among them Britain as the former colonial power, were quick to legitimize a regime which was a direct product of a military takeover. The regime, through a popular election whose outcome remains disputed, was sanctified by the Constitutional Court*

that confirmed the position of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) that the incumbent Emmerson Mnangagwa had won the presidential race amidst numerous election irregularities and lack of transparency.

Literature review

4 The political system operative in Zimbabwe is quite difficult to characterize as either a democracy or an illiberal society in which elections are regularly held in accordance with the country's Constitution despite not being free and fair. Zimbabwe was led by the former president Robert Mugabe for 37 years, being compelled to involuntarily surrender power to his erstwhile comrade of the armed struggle, Emmerson Mnangagwa, thanks to a coup in November 2017 by the military. Institutions of democracy that serve as constitutional safeguards on the exercise of executive powers include the Auditor General, the Public Protector, Public Service Commission and the Human Rights Commission among many others. A strong civil society underpins democracy (Hugo et al., 1995, p. 115). It includes a strong and vigilant press, the labour movement, professionals, students and civil organisations and these ought not to be affiliated with any political party. Mugabe was constrained from declaring Zimbabwe a one-party state by the 1979 Lancaster House Constitution that entrenched multipartyism (Stoneman & Cliffe, 1989, p. 91).

5 In Zimbabwe, the military is an institution that people perceive as key to the sustenance of ZANU-PF hegemony since independence from Britain in 1980. In rare circumstances such as Ghana under Jerry Rawlings, democracy can be established through a coup as argued by Varol (2017, p. 106). The military is also viewed as an instrument of the suppression of democratic change and Zimbabwe is a fitting example. Western scholars are blinded by romantic mythology that contends democratic transitions are led by the people taking to the streets (Varol, 2017) as happened in Zimbabwe in November 2017. However, many Western countries as well as the United States of America (USA) referred to these November events as befitting a military coup. Hardly a week after President Mnangagwa's election victory as president, the USA renewed its Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA). This Act was passed in 2001 by the American Congress to compel Zimbabwean authorities to return to the rule of law and to respect human rights following the government's racialized land redistribution programme (African Arguments Forum, 8 November 2018). In most dictatorships, the military is often the only institution with the clout to challenge the ruler. They are apt to act in support of their corporate interests as measured in resources and influence and in good times, the military is a reliable pillar of the status quo (Varol, 2017, p. 108).

6 Western style democracy presupposes a consensus on the values that set limits to partisanship. The political process in many states is about domination, not alternation in office, which takes place by coups rather than constitutional procedures (Kissinger, 1994, p. 811). The sad truth is that holding elections has been exposed as reversible and tentative, and internationally sanctioned elections have installed into power the very elements they were intended to defeat (Varol, 2017, p. 114). The Nyalali Commission established by Julius Nyerere in Tanzania to debate the possibility of introducing multipartyism noted that true democracy rested on four essential pillars namely respect for the rule of law, respect for human rights, periodic free and fair elections for leadership and policies and freedom of information through free mass media (Tambila, 1995, p. 477). The decision to consider the multiparty option in Tanzania came after Nyerere's realization that the one-party system his government had pursued since independence in 1963 had not transformed Tanzania into a socialist egalitarian state. This background knowledge about Tanzanian socialism provides an appreciation of how

democracy can be exercised even within the one-party political strategy, and when, through Nyerere's initiative, politicians were encouraged to break away from Chama Cha Mapinduzi to form their own parties (Ngasongwa, 1992).

7 Lodge (2004) argues that consolidation of power in stable democracies depends on institutionalized party systems in which rules and regularities in how parties compete are wisely observed. He further intimates that this is also dependent on the existence of organisations with firm social followings, ideological predictability, good connections with interest groups and possessing their own corporate identity that is independent of the personalities at the helm (Lodge, 2004). It is suggested from his analysis of parties that strong parties should therefore be able to attract durable support so that they can survive their charismatic founders. One of the most interesting observations Lodge makes is that parties that remain in office for a long time subject themselves to factionalism as informal groupings are constituted within the party around certain leaders. These factional grouping result from an institutionalised system of patronage that controls appointments not only in the party, but also in government. Such an approach blurs state-party boundaries and in most cases, executive national decisions by governments originate from the party hierarchy, in which case the party is supreme all the way. Consequently, many African governments end up dominated by political careerists, a development predicated on the fact that parties are perceived as instruments to one's political advancement. Mohan, Pumpuni and Abdulai (2018, p. 274) in their analysis of party politics in Ghana, focus on the role that political ideas play in shaping resource governance with specific reference to oil.

8 Political parties are characterized as civil society organisations that summarise the interests of a particular group, articulate and represent them (Mexhuani & Rrahmani, 2017, p. 1). They also intimate that parties are established from the social elite that gather around them a group of influential supporters to defend their positions and from citizens who seek people's support of the same opinion in order to achieve political and social change (Mexhuani & Rrahmani, p. 1). There is one interesting dynamic in ZANU-PF as a political party. It is both a revolutionary and a political party. The former is premised on the party's guerrilla war history against imperialism and the latter relates to its reorganization and transformation in readiness for power to rule through constitutional means. This dynamic is also important because it facilitates our understanding of the party's behaviour and suspicions over the intentions of the whites whom they fought against for fifteen years.

9 Democracy is difficult to establish in ethnically diverse societies. Resource distribution poses serious challenges particularly where some regions are replete with resources whilst others are poor. The case example of the distributive concerns in Ghana can be universally applicable to Africa, given the fact that tendencies towards secession in most parts of the continent, for example, Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sudan, among others, are situated at the heart of resources that are not judiciously and even-handedly distributed. Modern democracy is erroneously only conceptualized in terms of political parties which, in Africa, are assumed to play an important role in making representative democracy work, at least in the African sense.

10 The Mandela Administration intervened twice, in Zambia and Malawi, to dissuade presidents from seeking a third term in office in the face of mobilized public opposition (Friedman, 2008, p. 34). It was during Thabo Mbeki's rule that South Africa offered sustained aid and comfort to the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe by sending a delegation which endorsed elections regarded by independent sources as fraudulent (Friedman, 2008, p. 34). At that time Zimbabwe had become

a pariah state, having been at odds with Western countries and the rest of Europe for the regime's human rights violations and the absence of the rule of law. The South African delegation was silent on human rights violations. This is why Prah (2003) argues that many African political parties are cliques and aggregations of personalities (p. 3). According to Prah, multiparty political systems are the most reliable systems for the cultivation, development and institutionalization of democracy because it allows a hundred flowers to blossom and a hundred schools of thought to contend. Prah also points out that the only elections known to have been free and fair without any vote rigging within multiparty systems were those ushered in by the first post-independence governments (Prah, 2003). This view suggests that the pressure exerted on African governments to toe the democracy path has contributed to the phenomenon whereby elections become an exercise in wasting time. Winners are predetermined by the electoral systems put in place by incumbent regimes in order to defeat electoral procedures and buttress their authoritarianism.

Methodology

11 This research is based on a qualitative paradigm. It was motivated by the need to interrogate the efficacy of a military takeover of the state at a time Zimbabweans were yearning for a return to good governance and democratic rule after many years of de facto one-party rule. The ideas discussed in this article are drawn from focus group discussions with individuals interested in the democracy debate in Zimbabwe. Secondly, two focus group discussions were held with members of the Zimbabwe History Association (ZHA) to complement the six interviews in Harare the researcher held with political activists from ZANU-PF and the MDC Alliance. Some of the questions from these interviews were raised during my Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) research on "Constraints on multiparty democracy in Zimbabwe". Of importance was the Skype interview with Senator David Coltart of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Secondary sources such as textbooks, journals, newspapers and ZANU-PF and MDC party manifestos were used to complement current arguments raised on the democracy debate.

12 The current political climate in Zimbabwe is not conducive to conducting interviews with politicians within ZANU-PF rankings. The democracy debate in the country is an area of serious contestation because the presidential election outcome of the 2018 elections is endlessly disputable, thus rendering any research on the issue of democracy dangerous. However, the results of this study remain useful despite the above highlighted shortcomings, in making an informed evaluation of Zimbabwe's democracy over years.

Discussion and analysis

The politics of accumulation

13 The seizure of white owned farms by the Zimbabwean government that started in earnest in 2000 was a culmination of a stand-off between Zimbabwe and Britain. Britain had back trekked on its earlier commitment to compensate white farmers whose land would have been availed to government for redistribution on a willing-seller willing-buyer principle. The constitutional provision in the Lancaster House Agreement constrained the Zimbabwe government from interfering with property right in line with modern democratic tenets that over-emphasize this proviso. Because some whites had come to settle permanently in the country, they resisted the government overtures, and this led to the unleashing of violence on those whites whose farms the government had designated to peasant resettlement. This era was popularized as the Third Chimurenga or *jambanja*, a word that denotes high levels of lawlessness as armed war veterans

undertook pioneering operations into white owned farms. As the ZANU-PF stalwart Nathan Shamuyarira noted, the area of violence is an area ZANU-PF has strong, long and successful history (*Financial Gazette*, 5-10 October 2000). Mugabe was at pains to assert that ZANU-PF has degrees in violence, and he threatened to go back to the trenches should he lose the 2002 presidential elections (Chaumba et al., 2003) that pitted him against Morgan Tsvangirai of the MDC. This confirmed the sentiments of the ZANU-PF stalwart and journalist, Nathan Shamuyarira, that the area of violence was an area where ZANU-PF has a very strong, long and successful history (*Financial Gazette*, 5-10 October 2000). As a result of all these pronouncements, ZANU-PF is viewed as a party that thrives on having enemies and when it there are none, it creates them to remain in existence (Ankomah, 2018).

14 During the *jambanja* era, the landscape was visibly politicized, and it was characterized by a proliferation of signposts that proclaimed “no go area: war vets inside”. Zimbabwean flags were planted on anthills and hung from trees with posters labelled “Land is the economy and the economy is the land. Zimbabwe will never be a colony again” (Chaumba et al., 2003, p. 543). Tekere argued that too many farms were already owned by too few chiefs (top government officials) (Sachikonye, 1989, p. 122). Tekere appealed to Joshua Nkomo, the vice president then, to make appeals to Cabinet and to party leadership at their meetings to begin reversing the trend set in motion in 1980 before he could go to white commercial farmers and dispossess them of their farms (*Financial Gazette*, 21 July 1989). The new crop of black bourgeoisie that replaced white capital now has vested interests in the existing status quo in land ownership and it has become the major beneficiary of the foiled land redistribution programme. This new black elite has become the landowning class and has no intention of giving up that ownership nor of supporting a significant redistribution amongst the peasants (Sachikonye, 1989, p. 123). Yet democracy is not limited to elections alone but encapsulates everything people should share and enjoy together on equal terms. This means that the land issue upon which the armed struggle for decolonization and independence was premised, regarded fair land redistribution as an ingrained aspect of democracy.

15 Powers-that-be that managed to acquire several farms from the MDC side settled on that land in terms of the 2008 Global Political Agreement (GPA). The Agreement categorically stated that there was no reversal of the land reform (GPA, 2008) and the MDC absentee land beneficiaries too, were unwilling to return the fertile land to the former white landowners (Shubin, 2013, p. 58). The list of absentee landlords in Zimbabwe was similar to the list of British noblemen and therefore, the British government was paying compensation to themselves or to their kith and kin (Shubin, 2013, p. 44). Although the GPA affirmed the irreversibility of land acquisition and redistribution, the parties to this GPA differed on the methodology of acquisition and redistribution. They were agreed that colonial racial land ownership patterns established during the colonial era and largely maintained in the post-independence period were unsustainable and against the national interest, equity and justice (Shubin, 2013, p. 52).

The politics of plots and the “new dispensation”

16 The 2017 coup leaders sounded South Africa, the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) before they seized power from Mugabe. Many people after the 2017 November coup felt that the swearing in of the coup President Emmerson Mnangagwa, even before elections were held, heralded a return to democracy, yet he too, had a tainted past. For example, Mnangagwa ran Mugabe’s military and spy apparatus for much of his political career, including the Matabeleland massacre. He also commanded the military in the 1998 DRC war in which his generals handsomely benefited from clandestine and pirate mining operations that saw the

plundering of copper and diamond in large quantities (Venage, 2017, p. 15). Most military generals used the proceeds from these mining deals in building hotel-sized mansions in the country. Mnangagwa was popular for his ruthlessness in the Gukurahundi fiasco and in ZANU-PF's habitual election violence that made him the most feared politician in Zimbabwe (Meredith, 2018, p. 136).

17 In 2017, the military intervened ostensibly to arbitrate and fix the instability within the ruling ZANU-PF party and this fact was glossed over by the international media. It also missed the fact that the real struggle that gave credence to a coup in November 2017 was predicated on the unhappiness of the military that the counter-revolutionary faction within ZANU-PF, the G40 around Mugabe, had hijacked state and party power (Ankomah, 2018, p. 18). In response to the alleged counter-revolutionary force, the military postulated:

What is obtaining within the revolutionary party is a direct result of the machinations of counterrevolutionaries who have infiltrated the party and whose agenda is to destroy it from within [...] We must remind those who are behind the current shenanigans that when it comes to matters of protecting our revolution, the military will not hesitate to step in. (Ankomah, 2018, p. 18)

18 Each successful coup increases the odds of a further coup. This suggests that each military government carries with it the seeds of its own removal (Londregan & Poole, 1990). The view among many African scholars interested in the study of democracy is that Britain is the paragon of liberal democracy that places heavy emphasis on people's freedoms, individual rights and the supremacy of the Constitution. In the case of Zimbabwe, the decolonization process was a failure as evidenced by fifteen years of fighting between the recalcitrant regime of Ian Smith and the nationalist parties such as ZAPU and ZANU. One of the unresolved matters at the Lancaster House Agreement that ended the war in Rhodesia was the issue of land. The British during the negotiation process sought to preserve the rights of whites to property including land, and inserted a clause in the liberal Constitution that would allow the black government to re-gain land for redistribution on a willing-seller-willing-buyer basis and that the British government would fund the process of land acquisition by the Zimbabwe government based on that principle.

19 The British reneged on the promise to fund the process of land resettlement and Tony Blair, the British prime minister, clearly intimated that the British government that he then led was not obligated to honour the arrangement. The development compelled Mugabe to push through parliament an Act to compulsorily acquire land from white landowners without compensation. In a hurry to stop the land reform as envisaged under the Compulsory Land Acquisition Act, Britain is alleged to have released \$12 million to the Nigerians who deployed themselves in various provincial capitals for ease communication throughout the country (Godobori, 2011). The British were therefore complicit in the 2002 failed coup attempt (Godobori, 2011). Coups are responsible for about 75 per cent of democratic failures, making them the single largest danger to democracy (Spivak, 2017). Another alleged coup attempt in 2007 involved Life Mleya (aide-de-camp to Mugabe), and one of his accomplices, Fakazi Mleya – who headed the signal corps responsible for the army's national communications –, was given a lethal injection and then sent to Heroes Acre (*The Zimbabwean*, 16 August 2007) in Harare for burial as a national hero. Ncube, Rugeje and Moyo were under house arrest by June 2017 (from 2007 when they were alleged have organized a coup) (*The Zimbabwean*, 16 August 2007). The Western countries were consulted about it and indicated that they publicly condemned it, but secretly supported it only if it would restore democracy in Zimbabwe.

20 Zimbabwe's military, in all intents and purposes, is an integral part of ZANU-PF architecture although it is not seen on the party's organogram. The two entities developed from the same nucleus during the armed struggle. The military that executed the so-called bloodless coup in November 2017 denied that it was a coup, but rather, a military arbitration in a party in which the military are stakeholders (Ankomah, 2018, p. 18). Sibusiso Moyo, one of the generals who made a televised speech to the nation on the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBCTV) announced: "The Zimbabwe Defense Forces (ZDF) remain the major stakeholder in respect of the gains of the liberation struggle and when these are threatened, we are obliged to take corrective measures" (Ankomah, 2018).

21 Due to factional fights within the ruling ZANU-PF party between the old guards as remnants or survivors of the armed struggle and the Young Turks popularly known as Generation 40, there was an internal party clash between the old and the new. The possibility of a coup was played down although Grace Mugabe of the G40 faction raised it first when she stated that Mnangagwa and his team were plotting to seize power and that action had to be swiftly taken to prevent that from happening. The military point of view was that the history of the revolution could not be re-written by those who did not participate in it and that the military remained committed to protecting the revolutionary legacy against those who were bent on hijacking (Ankomah, 2018, p. 19). This was after Oppah Muchinguri, a woman freedom fighter, had amidst factional skirmishes within the party, been replaced by Grace Mugabe as chairperson of the party's Women's League. Patrick Chinamasa, of the *Lacoste* faction, lamented that Grace could not come to the party and then fire a person like Oppah with all her liberation credentials. Chinamasa had been given an obscure Ministry of Cyber Security after his demotion from the Minister of Finance in a Cabinet reshuffle in October 2017 (*DailyNews*, 10 October 2017). On the other hand, Muchinguri intimated that all was well in the party before Mugabe invited his wife into politics and that Mugabe's downfall was Grace's responsibility for she destroyed the personality of the president singlehandedly (Ankomah, 2018, p. 19).

22 The military argued that the November events were not a coup, but a re-arrangement of power within ZANU-PF. They also argued that had they not intervened, there would have been an outbreak of violence following the sacking of Vice President Mnangagwa (*New African*, 2017, p. 59). The sacking of Mnangagwa had cleared the path for Grace to be able to contest the vice president position during the Congress set for December 2017 and the only process that could avert this development was a military intervention or a party rebellion. This was to be done swiftly before Mnangagwa lost relevance in the power struggle in the party. After the sacking of Mnangagwa, there were threats that Mnangagwa's allies would also be purged at the above Extraordinary Congress in December. The Congress was extraordinary in order to deal precisely and decidedly with the Mnangagwa faction.

23 Vice President Mpoko issued a statement in October 2017 attacking Mnangagwa of peddling lies for political purposes. Mnangagwa was accused of attempting to undermine the authority of President Mugabe and destabilize the country by peddling lies to fan ethnic tensions for political purposes (*The Zimbabwe Independent*, 6 October 2017). In response Mnangagwa confirmed: "I have an impeccable history of unflinching loyalty to the party and His Excellency, Mugabe, and have never acted in a manner that undermines his authority or the stability of Zimbabwe" (Ankomah, 2018). The paradox of it all is that Mnangagwa, in less than two weeks after these allegations and his outright denial, assumed the leadership of the state in a dramatic turn of events in favour of the Crocodile (*Lacoste*) faction that he led.

Role of the military in regime sustenance

24 There is reliance on the legitimacy of the gun in ZANU-PF politics. The military leaders derive their power from the barrel of the gun. The reason for this is that the transformation of liberation movements into modern political parties is frequently complex and incomplete (RAU, 2018). As Way commented:

revolutionary struggles frequently create strong ties between the political leaders and the security forces. Having emerged out of the revolutionary struggle, the leadership of the Zimbabwean security forces is often deeply committed to the survival of the regime and bathed with the philosophy of the ruling party. (Way, 2011, p. 20)

25 Way (2011) opines that a violent revolutionary struggle (such as the one fought in Zimbabwe) tends to produce a generation of leaders with the stomach for violent repression. Mandaza (1991) and Bratton and van de Walle (1997) discuss the propensity for military-party conflation and the resort to violence. From the above, it can be argued that liberation parties disposed more towards violence than towards peaceful resolution mechanisms because they aver that they are still at war with forces of counter-revolution and sabotage. As a result, they do not transform themselves into modern political parties because they, according to Moyo (1992), have still not taken off their uniforms and laid down their guns. To them, life is characterized by continuous strife.

26 The civil-military theory postulates that in modern democratic states, the military has to subordinate itself to civilian choices of leadership (Maringira & Masiya, 2017, p. 400). Morris Janowitz refers the military as a “constabulary force” in the sense that it is mandated to provide protection to civilians from any threat, not to protect the regime in power (Maringira & Masiya, 2017, p. 400). Yet in most cases, the military’s sole client is the state, and this makes the military political. For example, army generals in the Middle East have always maintained that politics is too important to be left to civilians (Maringira & Masiya, 2017, p. 402). Major General Chedondo in Zimbabwe postulated:

As soldiers we will never be apologetic for supporting ZANU-PF because it is the only party. A National Defence Force the world over is there to protect national politics, national integrity, the Executive and other systems that form part of the Government. By virtue of this, defence forces automatically become a political animal. (*The Zimbabwe Daily*, 9 May 2012)

27 This reasoning is not unique to the Zimbabwe military alone but could be the position in most African states. Due to the lack of legitimacy resulting from elections that are not transparently coordinated at various levels of the electoral process, the security institutions in Zimbabwe have always played a very significant role in keeping losers at the helm of power by deciding on who should rule in exchange for inflated military budgets designed to satisfy them almost immediately before they have time to cause trouble. The military, through the Joint Operations Command (JOC) was integral to Mugabe’s electoral comeback in the June 2008 presidential re-run. It is alleged that it managed the elections by controlling the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) which then announced the election results (Barclays, 2010, p. 93).

28 Vice President Joice Mujuru lost the vice presidency to Mnangagwa in 2014 because the army supported him. In one of the popular ZANU-PF youth jingles *Zvikaramba toita zvenharo* (If it fails we use force) it is purported that the military belongs to ZANU-PF and that if, at any given time, ZANU-PF loses the presidential seat to the opposition, they would rather use the army to retain power than surrender it to the opposition (Maringira & Masiya, 2017, p. 406). The military that took over in 2017 promised to serve as a guardian of democratic progress and as a

representative of the people. The prospect for free and fair elections became far-fetched. The military played a prominent role in Zimbabwean politics since independence in 1980 from Britain. They kept Mugabe and ZANU-PF in power in 2008 when the MDC Tsvangirai backed out of the presidential run-off (Sguazzin & Latham, 2019).

29 Any negotiations must reckon with the military factor because the army plays a key role in the country's politics. The army serves as a guarantor of ZANU-PF's power. In return, the military is venerated by the ideology of the ruling party and its comrades given lucrative landownership and positions within the state parastatals. The military personnel are deployed to strategic positions in the various state institutions responsible for governance such as Grain Marketing Board (GMB), National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) and the National Oil Company of Zimbabwe (NOCZIM). In the 2002 presidential elections, the army chief Vitalis Zvinavashe declared that his forces would only recognize a government headed by a veteran of the armed struggle (Masunungure, 2008).

- 1 The video was viewed on the WhatsApp social media by everyone with a smart phone. One soldier wa (...)

30 Events in November 2017 were described as “military assisted transition”, “not a coup coup” or “a coup that wasn’t a coup”. It was endorsed by the street mobs in Harare, the High Court, Southern Africa Development Conference (SADC) and the African Union (AU). The army took extreme measures which included a speech of return to normalcy as if they represented institutional interests and as a show of democracy in order for Zimbabwe to qualify for international support and aid (*News Stateman*, 2017). JOC developed strategies to influence election outcomes in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013 and 2018. Mugabe wanted to concede defeat in 2008 but the securocrats, the JOC and beneficiaries of Mugabe's patronage system refused to allow this to happen (Thomas-Greenfield & Wharton, 2019, p. 9). It was a de facto coup. This makes the military deeply entrenched in the economy making their economic interests just as powerful as their fears for accountability for human rights. This was evidenced by the report by Valerio Sibanda to the Kgalema Montlanthe Commission that President set up to investigate the 1 August shooting in Harare when six civilians were killed. In his testimony, the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) commander denied military responsibility (*News24*, 13 November 2018) despite audios showing the army firing live ammunition into panicking crowds of demonstrators¹.

The Mugabe legacy: change and continuity and the fate of democracy

31 Commenting on a multiparty system in Zimbabwe after the inception of the MDC in 1999, Mugabe in an address to the ZANU-PF Politburo remarked:

The party in opposition vows never to be in agreement with the party in government because to be seen to be in agreement with the party in government on fundamental issues is to show oneness with that party and therefore creates no basis for the existence of a separate party [...] the opposition party is there to oppose the government whether the government is right or wrong [...] that is a waste of the taxpayer's money. (Hugo et al., 1995)

32 The army moved away from Mugabe because of his inclination towards a personalist regime that would cut the generals from power. He sacked Mnangagwa in a bid to position his wife Grace to succeed him and usher in dynastic politics (*News Statesman*, 2017). Mugabe's impeachment was based on Mugabe's allowing his wife to usurp constitutional power (Thomas-Greenfield & Wharton, 2019). Mnangagwa was sworn in as president on 24 November 2017 even

if elections had not been conducted. In his inauguration speech, Mnangagwa praised Mugabe as a father, a mentor, a comrade-in-arms and my leader (Meredith, 2018, p. 138). He proceeded to build a government that was wholly exclusive of the opposition MDC that had assisted ZANU-PF to impeach Mugabe and force him to tender his resignation under duress. An alternative arrangement, for the sake of national unity and political stability in the country, could have been the establishment of a transitional arrangement involving the major political players from the political divide together with other civic organisations pending elections in 2018.

33 Mugabe exhibited his attachment to brute force in 1976 when he set out his views about electoral democracy if he won the elections: He postulated: “Our votes must go together with the guns [...] the gun which produces the vote should remain its security guarantor. The people’s vote and the people’s guns are always inseparable twins” (Meredith, 2018, p. 129). Those who opposed Mugabe such as Josiah Magama Tongogara and Solomon Mujuru, whose *Chimurenga* (war of liberation) name was Rex Nhongo, found themselves demoted or victims of suspicious accidents. Mugabe based his regime on a system of patronage in which he controlled all appointments to senior posts in the civil service, defence, police, and parastatals. His new elite was allowed to engage in a scramble for resources, property, farms and business contracts. For example, Phillip Chiyangwa boasted that he was rich because he belonged to ZANU-PF and he encouraged those who wanted to get rich to join ZANU-PF (Meredith, 2018, p. 134). Under these arrangements, Mugabe warned that the MDC would never be able to form a government in his lifetime even after he died. This was after the 2000 referendum in which 55% voted against the proposed Constitution (Slaughter & Nolan, 2000) that was set to give enormous powers to the president. The 2008 re-run saw Mugabe make a vow to go to war to prevent an MDC victory: “We are not going to give up our country because of a mere X. How can a ballpoint pen fight with a gun?” (American Enterprise Institute, 19 June 2008). That mantra is still very relevant in ZANU-PF.

Capture of state institutions and dispute resolution mechanisms vis-à-vis democracy

34 The 2017 coup in Zimbabwe was sanctified when the High Court ruled that the military actions were constitutionally permissible and lawful. The High Court was therefore captured to legitimize a coup. To Magaisa, the coup amounted to effectively legalizing military intervention in the affairs of government (Thomas-Greenfield & Wharton, 2019). Deputy Finance Minister Terence Mukupe said: “How can we say the soldiers took the country from Mugabe to come and hand it over to the opposition leader Nelson Chamisa? MDC will never rule Zimbabwe” (Thomas-Greenfield & Wharton, 2019). Mnangagwa’s regime is known for grossly disproportionate use of police and the military to stop protesters and looting. Mugabe had an insatiable lust for power. In 2008 he stated: “If you lose an election and are rejected by the people, it’s time to leave politics” (Winter, 2017). He did not do it after losing to Tsvangirai.

35 Dispute resolution mechanisms in Zimbabwe have not been tested or have a history of partisanship. In 2011, SADC accepted an election replete with violations of its own guidelines in the DRC. Mugabe threatened to leave SADC “if it made silly decisions” (International Crisis Group, 2013, p. 2). This was on the eve of the July 2013 harmonised elections. These elections went ahead despite SADC facilitated negotiations failure for six years to implement security sector reforms (realignment), media reforms and accessibility to all, cancelation of POSA. ZANU-PF continued to have influence over important elements of the judiciary. To Mugabe, the 2013 electioneering was a do-or-die contest for ZANU-PF in defence of its revolution (International Crisis Group, 2013, p. 6).

36 Single party state was adopted in Zambia in 1973. The argument was that it was the best antidote for divisive tribalism (Milimo, 1993, p. 35). Separation of executive, judiciary and legislative powers into clearly identifiable and separate units of government in both legal terminology and in practice takes place in liberal democracies. Whereas in single party states, the party, rather than the people through their elected representatives, has the final say in matters of governance. Irregularities that cast doubts on the freeness and fairness of elections include restricted opposition campaigning facilities, bias in media coverage, misappropriation of public transport to aid the ruling party, intimidation and arrest of opponents by the police force, violence against the opposition, abuse of secret ballot, misappropriation of campaign funds, high voter absenteeism (Baynham, 1992).

37 *Rigging in Zimbabwe is practiced not only in controlling the work of election officials and law enforcement agents, but also in manipulating a defective electoral roll system with millions of ghost voters.* Elections are a critical aspect of democracy as they enable the citizens to exercise their democratic right to choose who shall rule them. Elections in Zimbabwe have become a mere concession to prepare to democratise, a gross form of lip service to democracy characterized by the ZANU-PF's regime's use of authoritarian tactics such as violence and intimidation to coerce the electorate to vote for it (SW Radio Africa, 3 June 2011).

Conclusion and recommendations

38 Zimbabwe became politically polarized after the 2017 coup and soon after the subsequent 2018 harmonized election whose presidential results were, and still remain, contentious. After many years of de-industrialisation under Mugabe's presidency, his ouster brought hopes of a return to democratic rule and economic development. However, a military government cannot be trusted to govern democratically. The intimates that prospects for political reconstruction depend on the willingness of the political establishment to acknowledge the indispensability of opposition formations and to genuinely open up political space for credible elections. It concludes that there is need for a paradigm shift in the government's *modus operandi* from the culture of violence and impunity to the politics of tolerance, reconciliation and accountable governance as *sine qua non* for economic progress and political stability to exist. Democracy in Africa is still threatened by the military, ethnic conflicts and secessionism.

39 If levels of economic development are high, Africa can be able to create sustainable democratic systems. This is because it is difficult for governments to implement democracy when people struggle with poverty and when there are extreme inequalities that make societal cohesion inconceivable. The quality of African leadership matters a great deal and Africa has had a fair share of tyrannical, corrupt and incompetent politicians who have dealt the continental democracy project a death blow. In any case, many African governments are primarily pre-occupied with the challenge of establishing order and stability and secondarily with the problem of establishing democracy in a bid to manage ethnicity. Governance, legitimacy and democracy issues remain central to Zimbabwean politics and unless the electoral laws are revised to allow for equal participation by competing political parties, ZEC is freed from political interference by ZANU-PF and the Judiciary is politically independent. The revolutionary mentality within ZANU-PF is a stumbling block in the national drive towards democracy because the military repeatedly affirms its decision not to have as president someone with no liberation credentials. The 2023 elections are likely to produce yet disputed presidential outcome because no substantial bureaucratic changes in media control, ZEC, Electoral Laws and security institutions have been made, except for those that were intended to

buttress the incumbent regime and to consolidate its hold on power ahead of the next elections.

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Notes

1 The video was viewed on the WhatsApp social media by everyone with a smart phone. One soldier was in a kneeling position resting his gun on his shoulder and firing before another one came to stop him from doing so.

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About the author

[Aaron Rwodzi](#)

- Catholic University of Zimbabwe
- 18443 Cranborne Ave
- Harare, Zimbabwe
- arwodzi@cuz.ac.zw

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