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Elections in Zimbabwe: The ZANU (PF) Hegemony and its Incipient Decline

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Abstract

This contribution seeks to explain the ruling ZANU (PF) party's electoral hegemony by outlining and analysing Zimbabwe's five general elections since 1979 and the two presidential elections since 1990. In this regard, the paper argues that the ruling party is experiencing a gradual decline in elite cohesion which is manifested in the electoral challenge of independent candidates coming from the ruling party itself. This phenomenon of independent candidates could have far-reaching consequences in overcoming the present state of weak political opposition in Zimbabwe. The paper therefore suggests a scenario in which a viable opposition could come from a splinter group inside the ruling ZANU (PF) itself, not unlike the major ZAPU/ZANU split of 1963.

Introduction

Observers of the Zimbabwe political scene are likely to assume that Zimbabwe was, until the 1990s, a one-party state. This is because for the better part of the 1980s Zimbabwe's political leadership and the ruling party aggressively advocated a one-party system. The socialist ideology which the leadership proclaimed during this period also reinforces this view. The fact, however, is that Zimbabwe has never been a one-party state, before or after independence in 1980. It is true that Zimbabwe has been, for all practical purposes, a *de facto* one-party state. But this tendency has always been there both during the colonial period and after independence.¹ After independence there was a strong drive towards *de jure* one-party government; but this never materialised. Consequently, general and presidential elections have been held at regular intervals. The problem, however, is that even

though Zimbabwe has never foreclosed multi-party electoral opportunities, the power structure has limited such opportunities by maintaining and perpetuating a one-party psychology for the first eleven years of independence. This, as we shall discuss, was abandoned in 1991.

To date, including the 1979 “internal settlement” elections, Zimbabwe has had five general elections, the first in 1979; the second in 1980; the third in 1985; the fourth in 1990; and the fifth in 1995. The two presidential elections were held in 1990 and 1996. Although these elections have always been contested by different parties, the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union — Patriotic Front [ZANU (PF)] party has held electoral hegemony since the independence elections of 1980. While voter turn out was very high in the elections of the 1980s, there was a sharp decline in voter turn out in the 1990s. This decline has not been only in parliamentary and presidential elections, but has also been reflected in local government elections. Since the incorporation of Patriotic Front — Zimbabwe African People’s Union [PF-ZAPU] party into the ruling ZANU (PF) party, the remaining opposition parties have been very weak. Under these circumstances, it is only independent candidates who have emerged to challenge the electoral hegemony of ZANU (PF).

In this essay, we seek to explain the ruling ZANU (PF) party’s electoral hegemony by analysing Zimbabwe’s five general elections since 1979 and the two presidential elections since 1990. We argue that the ruling party is experiencing a gradual decline in elite cohesion which has resulted in electoral challenges by independent candidates from the ruling party itself, and that this independent candidates phenomenon could have far reaching consequences in overcoming the weakness of organised opposition to ZANU (PF).

The concept of *elite cohesion* as used in this essay refers to the strong sense of unity or ‘sticking together’ of the core leadership group in an organisation — in this case, the ZANU (PF). The core leadership group inside the ZANU (PF) includes members of the politburo, central committee, and (after the 1980 elections) its parliamentary caucus. Membership of these three top party structures invariably overlaps; therefore its core leadership is relatively small, involving about a hundred men and women. Many factors explain elite cohesion within the ZANU (PF) immediately before and after the 1980 independence election. The most obvious of this was the need to win the historic election of that year. But perhaps, a more important factor during this period was the fact that the party’s leadership did not trust the intentions of the country’s white-only political elite, that was concentrated in the Rhodesian Front party, and their African allies of the “internal settlement”. Nor did they trust the elites of the PF-ZAPU who were their chief rival for power in independent Zimbabwe. The distrust, particularly of PF-ZAPU, worsened soon after the independence elections leading to the conflict in Matebeleland. The dissident activities in Matebeleland and parts of the Midlands were viewed by the ZANU (PF) as a challenge to and a test of the party’s *will* and

capacity to rule. This challenge reinforced the need for elite cohesion up to the merger of these two leading nationalist parties in 1987. After this period dissent and opposition were transferred into the party itself; and the party became increasingly pre-occupied with such internal dissent, criticism and opposition. The increase in such contradictions within the ZANU (PF) itself and the party's apparent inability to resolve them satisfactorily has weakened elite cohesion resulting in the phenomenon of independent candidates. Therefore, it could be argued that elite cohesion is a function of external threats to the survival of an organisation. As such threats are minimised, sustaining elite unity becomes problematic.

The Electoral System

The majority of black Zimbabweans were enfranchised by the Zimbabwe-Rhodesia "internal settlement" Constitution which produced the short-lived Muzorewa government of 1979. Thus, for the black majority, electoral politics essentially began in 1979. The electoral system used for this election was proportional representation (PR) based on the party list system according to which seats in the National Assembly were allocated in proportion to the number of votes that each contesting party won in each of the country's eight provinces. This is the first time in the electoral history of this country the PR system was used. A threshold of 5% was used for allocating seats in each province. This PR system was again used in the 1980 independence general elections, but was abandoned in the 1985 elections and replaced with the single member district (SMD) or first-past-the-post, winner-takes-all system used during the colonial era. This has been the electoral system used in all subsequent elections.

Several reasons were given for introducing the PR system for both the "internal settlement" and the independence elections. The major reason was the security situation prevailing in the country at the time. It should be recalled that by 1979, most parts of the country was contested territory between Rhodesian security forces and nationalist fighters. This made the delimitation of constituencies entailed in single member district electoral systems very difficult and hazardous. As the end of the war approached constituency delimitation was considered to be time-consuming for a people impatient to exercise the vote for which they had waited and fought for many years. Another reason given for PR, advanced especially by white Rhodesian politicians, was that PR is more conducive to democratic representation. They conveniently argued that in a plural society such as Zimbabwe, the PR system prevented one group from having a monopoly of power either in the national legislature or in the cabinet.²

Many political engineers, particularly for Africa in the 1990s, have argued that the PR system is not only more democratic than SMD, but that it is also an effective mechanism for managing and accommodating ethnic and other cleavages in plural societies. (Horowitz, 1991; 1993 : 18-38; Lijphart, 1990 : 2-13; 1993 : 146-158;

Nohlen, 1996 : 103-121). For Zimbabwe, in particular, Jonathan Moyo (1992 : 156-162) has strongly argued in favour of the PR system for the simple reason that it is most suitable for societies which are in the process of developing a democratic culture.³

However, mainstream nationalists were sceptical of PR; they saw it as a play being used by white politicians to prevent a clear electoral victory by African nationalists; so that whites would form a coalition government with moderate and pliable African personalities and parties.⁴ By and large, in accepting PR the nationalists (particularly of the Patriotic Front led by Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo) did so only as a temporary and emergency measure. Their preference for the first-past-the-post electoral system was made known during the 1979 Lancaster Conference and that they intended rewriting the *Electoral Act* with the view of introducing the constituency based SMD system if they won the independence elections.⁵

Elections

The temptation in any discussion of elections in Zimbabwe is to start from the 1980 independence election; but we are convinced that electoral politics for the vast majority of Zimbabweans started with the so-called “internal settlement” election of 1979. This is when the franchise was extended to the majority of the African people. Moreover, many major patterns and characteristics of Zimbabwe electoral politics are traceable from this election. For instance, besides universal adult suffrage, such institutions and mechanisms as bicameral parliament, reserved seats for whites only, the election supervisory commission, election directorate, the practice of inviting international election monitors, voter education, polling procedures, the use of “indelible” ink, etc., which have become a prominent feature of subsequent elections were all introduced in the 1979 election.

The 1979 Election

Five political parties contested the elections of 1979 under the PR party list system using the threshold of 5% in the eight provinces. The total common roll poll was 1,852,772 out of an estimated voting population of 2.9 million. Thus, 64.45% of potential voters cast their vote. Bishop Abel Muzorewa’s United African National Council [UANC] won a clear majority capturing 51 of the 72 common roll seats; Zimbabwe African National Union [ZANU] (Sithole) came second with 12 seats, and Chief Kaisa Ndiweni came third with 9 seats, mainly in the two Matebeleland provinces, his home area. The total electoral strength of each party taking part in the 1979 elections is shown in Table 1. Robert Mugabe’s ZANU (PF) and Joshua Nkomo’s PF-ZAPU (together representing the mainstream nationalist movement) then based in and fighting a guerrilla war from exile, did not take part in these elections. This boycott cast a huge shadow of doubt as to the legitimacy of the

Table 1: Zimbabwe-Rhodesia: Results of the 1979 Election

Party	Valid Votes	% of Valid Votes	Seats Won
UANC (Muzorewa)	1,212,639	67	51
ZANU (Sithole)	262,928	15	12
UNFP (Ndiweni)	194,446	11	9
ZUPO (Chirau)	114,570	6	—
NDU (Chiota)	1,870	1	—
Total	1,786,453	100.00	72

Estimated voting population: 2,900,000.

Total poll: 1,852,772 (64% of voting population).

Spoilt papers: 66,319 (4% of votes cast).

Source: Masipula Sithole, "The General Elections, 1979-1985," in Ibbo Mandaza (ed.), *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition 1980-1985*. (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1986), p. 79.

elections thereby necessitating the "all-party" Lancaster House Constitutional Conference towards the end of 1979 at which a Constitution for an independent Zimbabwe was agreed.

The 1980 Independence Election

Similarly, the independence elections of 1980 were conducted under the proportional representation system for reasons of security and expediency. Again, a 5% threshold was used in allocating seats in the eight provinces. A total of nine parties contested these elections held over a period of three exciting days, 27-29 March 1980. However, only three parties, Mugabe's ZANU (PF), Nkomo's PF-ZAPU, and Muzorewa's UANC won seats. ZANU (PF), which won 57 of the 80 common roll seats, emerged the clear winner, capturing 63% of the popular vote. Nkomo's PF-ZAPU with 24% of the popular vote came second, winning 20 seats. Muzorewa's UANC came third with 8% of the popular vote, capturing the remaining 3 seats. The other six parties together polled 5% of the popular vote. The total valid votes were 2,649,529. No party boycotted the election this time. Table 2 shows the results of the 1980 independence election.

The 1985 Elections

The first post-independence elections were held in 1985. These elections were now held on single-member-district (SMD) constituency basis or "winner take all" following the anticipated amendment to the Electoral Act. A total of six political

Table 2: Zimbabwe: Results of the 1980 Election

Party	Valid Votes	% of Valid Votes	Seats Won
ZANU (PF) (Mugabe)	1,668,992	63	57
PF - ZAPU (Nkomo)	638,879	24	20
UANC (Muzorewa)	219,307	8	3
ZANU (Sithole)	53,343	2	—
ZDP (Chikerema)	28,181	1	—
NFZ (Mandaza)	18,794	1	—
NDU (Chiota)	15,056	1	—
UNFP (Ndiweni)	5,796	0	—
UPAM	1,181	0	—
TOTAL	2,649,529	100%	80

Estimated voting population: 3,000,000.

Total Poll: 2,702,275 (94% voter turnout).

Spoilt Papers: 52,746 (2% of votes cast).

Source: Masipula Sithole, "The General Elections, 1979-1985," in Ibbo Mandaza (ed.), *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition 1980-1985*. (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1986), p. 83.

parties contested in these elections. The same pattern as in the 1980 elections was repeated, except that Muzorewa now lost his three seats to Mugabe's party, which won 64 seats, but in turn lost one seat to Sithole's party in the eastern Chipinge district, the home of the latter's ethnic Nda. Nkomo's PF-ZAPU won every single constituency in Matebeleland where the Delimitation Commission had allocated 15 seats. PF-ZAPU lost the 5 seats it had won in the 1980 party-list poll mainly in the Midlands province where the Shona-Ndebele mix is substantial, and where, in turn, the 1985 constituencies had presumably been gerrymandered.⁶

Out of a total of 2,893,285 valid votes cast, 77% went to Mugabe's ZANU (PF), 19% to Nkomo's PF-ZAPU, while 1% went to Sithole's ZANU faction. However, Muzorewa's UANC polled 2.238% (almost double what Sithole's party won) but did not secure a single seat. Sithole's party was the beneficiary of the SMD electoral system. (We shall comment on this later). Table 3 shows the results of the 1985 parliamentary elections. Again, no party boycotted this election, although Sithole had gone into voluntary exile leaving a surrogate candidate.⁷

The 1990 Election

The 1990 general election took place after the unity accord between ZANU (PF) and PF-ZAPU, traditionally the main opposition parties in Zimbabwean politics. Five political parties contested, but a new opposition party, the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) led by Edgar Tekere was the main opposition. It was formed in

Table 3: Zimbabwe: Results for the 1985 Election

Party	Valid Votes	% of Valid Votes	Seats Won
ZANU (PF) (Mugabe)	2,233,320	77	64
PF ZAPU (Nkomo)	558,771	19	15
ZANU (Sithole)	36,054	1	1
UANC (Muzorewa)	64,764	2	—
NDU (Chiota)	295	0	—
NFZ (Mandaza)	81	0	—
TOTAL	2,893,285	100%	80

Registered voters: 3,500,000.

Total Poll: 2,972,146 (84% voter turnout).

Spoilt papers: 78,861 (3% of votes cast).

Source: Masipula Sithole, "The General Elections, 1979-1985," in Ibbo Mandaza (ed.), *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition 1980-1985*. (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1986), p. 90.

1989 amidst speculation that Zimbabwe would be declared a one-party state after the 1990 elections. ZUM enjoyed widespread national appeal, the first opposition party to do so after independence. Although it was thoroughly defeated (winning 2 seats against the ZANU (PF)'s 117 of the 120 contested seats) in an election, which was once more held under the winner-takes-all SMD system. ZUM won 18% of the popular vote. This would have meant at least 20 seats for ZUM, had the elections been held on a national party-list or proportional representation system.⁸

The results of the 1990 elections (held after the 1987 ZANU (PF) and PF-ZAPU merger), still reflected a tendency towards ethnic voting in the sense that the united party had the common sense not to put up Shona candidates in Ndebele constituencies, and vice versa. Moreover, notwithstanding ZUM's national appeal, its two seats were won in Manicaland, home province of its leader Edgar Tekere, where it naturally polled the highest number of votes. Again, the Chipinge constituency retained its loyalty to Sithole's party, though its leader was still in exile.

Table 4: Zimbabwe: Results of the 1990 Elections (Parliamentary)

Party	Valid Votes	% of Valid Votes	Seats Won
ZANU (PF) (Mugabe)	1,690,071	81	117
ZUM (Tekere)	369,031	18	2
ZANU-Ndonga (Sithole)	19,448	1	1
UANC (Muzorewa)	9,667	1	—
NDU	498	0	—
Independents (7)	9,478	5	—
Total	2,098,193	100%	120

Registered Voters: 4,800,000.

Total Poll: 2,237,524 (54% voter turnout).

Spoilt Votes: 134,336 (6% of votes cast).

Source: Computed from data in Jonathan Moyo, *Voting for Democracy: Electoral Politics in Zimbabwe*. (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1992), pp. 166-181.

Also important to note about the 1990 election is the decline in voter turnout. From 84% in the 1985 election, the turnout had dropped to 54% in 1990, a significant drop of 30%. This phenomenon would be repeated in subsequent elections, both parliamentary and presidential, as well as in local government elections, particularly in urban areas.⁹ Equally significant about the 1990 elections is the rather high percentage of spoilt votes — 6% of the total poll. In the 1979 election, the spoilt vote was 4%; in 1980, it was 2%; and in 1985, it was 3%. The 6% spoilt votes recorded in the 1990 election represents a 200% increase of spoilt votes from the 1980 election. The number of spoilt votes rose from 6% in 1990 to an all time high of 8% in the 1995 election. (See Table 5).

The 1995 Election

The 1995 general election was the first election to be boycotted since the independence election of 1980. However, a total of six political parties took part, with only two parties and one independent candidate winning seats. ZANU (PF) again won overwhelmingly. It captured 117 seats and 76% of the valid votes cast in a national poll of 1,482,660. This represented a voter turnout of 57% of total registered voters which was estimated at 2,600,000 in a population of nearly 5 million potential voters. This means that almost half of the voting population did not vote.¹⁰

Sithole's ZANU (Ndonga) won 2 seats, capturing 93,546 or 6% of the total valid poll. Although Dumbutshena's FPZ polled 88,223 or 6% of the valid votes, it did not win any seat. ZANU (Ndonga) was the beneficiary of a constituency based SMD electoral system. Moreover, the two constituencies (Chipinga North and Chipinga South) had the largest concentration of Sithole's ethnic Ndaou who constitute about 330,000 or 3% of the country's nearly 11 million people. Dumbutshena, like Mugabe, is a Zezuru; invariably his party must share the ethnic Zezuru vote with ZANU (PF) in regions where there is a large concentration of Zezurus. The Zezuru constitute about 18% of the African population. Although the national capital Harare is multi-ethnic, it is largely Zezuru.¹¹ Dumbutshena contested Florence Chitauro of ZANU (PF) in the Harare Central constituency and won 3,858 or 29% of the vote to Chitauro's 9,417 or 71%. Sithole on the other hand, won 15,400 or 76% to ZANU (PF)'s Edgar Musikavanhu who polled 4,722 or 24% in the Chipinga South constituency.

A significant development in the 1995 parliamentary election is the number of independent candidates. There were no independent candidates in the three preceding elections; but there were twelve in the 1990 elections. In the 1995 elections the number of independent candidates rose to twenty-nine, one of them winning against a ZANU (PF) candidate against the wrath of both the party and Mugabe.¹² The phenomenon of independent candidates also pervades municipal elections where some of such candidates won in city council and mayoral elections defeating the ruling ZANU (PF) candidates.¹³

Voter turnout continued to decline and the percentage of spoilt votes rose from

Table 5: Zimbabwe: Results of the 1995 Elections (Parliamentary)

Party	Valid Votes	% of Valid Votes	Seats Won
ZANU (PF) (Mugabe)	1,126,822	76	117
ZANU-Ndonga (Sithole)	93,546	6	2
FPZ (Dumbutshena)	88,223	6	—
Zimbabwe Aristocrats	147	0	—
Independents	(29)	62,085	4 1
Total	1,370,676	120	

Registered Voters: 2,600,000

Total Poll: 1,482,660

Spoilt Votes: 111,984 (8% of votes cast).

Source: Computed from election results published in *The Herald*, 11 April 1995.

6% recorded in the 1990 elections to 8% in 1995. One would have expected that, at least by 1990, the Zimbabwe electorate would have learned from their experience of previous elections the civic culture of casting the ballot paper properly. But it is as if to say, the more the electorate vote the less they know how to cast a valid vote. It is plausible that spoiled votes are indeed a protest vote.¹⁴

The 1990 Presidential Elections

In 1987, Zimbabwe amended its constitution and introduced an executive presidency that would be elected directly by the people every six years starting from 1990. Previously, Zimbabwe had a titular president who was elected by an electoral college comprising the Senate (scrapped in 1987) and Parliament (expanded in 1990). The office of prime minister, which previously had executive power, was abolished. Accordingly, Zimbabwe held its first presidential election ever in 1990. There were two candidates in this election, ZANU (PF)'s Robert Mugabe and ZUM's Edgar Tekere. As in the 1990 parliamentary election (held simultaneously with the presidential election) 54% registered voters cast their vote. ZANU (PF) and Mugabe won yet another crushing victory with Mugabe winning 83% of the valid votes compared to Tekere's 17%. Table 6 shows the results of the 1990 presidential election.

Table 6: Zimbabwe: Results of the 1990 Elections (Presidential)

Candidate	Party	Valid Votes	% Valid Votes
R.G. Mugabe	ZANU (PF)	2,026,976	83
E.Z. Tekere	ZUM	413,840	17
Total	2,440,816	100%	—

Registered Voters: 4,800,000.

Total Poll: 2,587,204 (54% voter turnout).

Spoilt Votes: 146,388 (6% of votes cast).

Source: Computed from data in Jonathan Moyo, *Voting for Democracy: Electoral Politics in Zimbabwe*. (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1992), p. 182.

The 1996 Presidential Election

Although there were now over a dozen political parties on the Zimbabwe political landscape, only two put up candidates to challenge ZANU (PF)'s Robert Mugabe. Most of the other opposition parties boycotted the elections which they claimed were being held on an uneven playing field. Even those which registered

their participation [(Muzorewa of the newly formed United Parties (UP) and Sithole of ZANU (Ndonga)] later withdrew from the contest for similar reasons. The boycott notwithstanding the election still went ahead as scheduled with both Muzorewa and Sithole on the ballot.¹⁵ Mugabe was returned to power with 1,404,501 or 93% valid votes in a poor voter turnout of 32% of an estimated voting population of 5 million. Muzorewa attracted 72,600 votes or 5%, while Sithole came third with 36,960 or 2%.

It is clear from the analysis and tables above that ZANU (PF) has clearly dominated the Zimbabwean electoral landscape since the 1980 independence elections (whether contesting them alone, as in 1980 and 1985, or after the unity with PF-ZAPU, as in 1990 and 1995). The question is: What explains this ZANU (PF) electoral hegemony and weak opposition parties?

ZANU (PF) Hegemony: Towards An Explanation

Many authoritative accounts have been written on the fate of the opposition in Zimbabwe's one-party dominant regime. These accounts have been critical of the ruling ZANU (PF) regime's attitude and behaviour towards opposition parties since independence. The use of state institutions, especially the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO), police, army, and the media (daily newspapers, radio and television) have been cited. But equally, if not more, important is the fact that up to mid-1992, the ruling party was financed from public funds through the now nominally defunct Ministry of Political Affairs which received approximately Z\$50 million every year and operated from a multi-storey, multi-million dollar headquarters in Harare, the nation's capital. No other party had access to these funds. Under increasing criticism, this Ministry was abolished, but the financing of the ruling party continued under the *Political Parties (Finance) Act* of 1994 under which a party that has at least 15 seats in Parliament is entitled to public funds. Currently, only 3 seats in Parliament belong to the opposition, undoubtedly a very weak opposition.

Moreover, the ruling ZANU (PF) has consistently remained to the left of Zimbabwe's political spectrum before and after independence. It has skilfully articulated populist policies on land, employment, indigenization of the economy, and on any and everything, particularly on the eve of each election year. No other party has portrayed a more nationalist position than ZANU (PF). It above all has a shrewd and articulate spokesman in the person of its leader, President Robert Mugabe through whom the party has remained ingrained in the minds of the masses of the people.¹⁶

The Gukurahundi Policy¹⁷

To some extent, the reasons outlined above in their combination explain ZANU (PF) hegemony and weak opposition in Zimbabwe. But, in our view, what accounts

Table 7: Zimbabwe: Results of the 1996 Elections (Presidential)

Candidate	Party	Valid Votes	% Valid Votes
R.G. Mugabe	ZANU (PF)	1,404,501	93
E.T. Muzorewa	UP	72,600	5
N. Sithole	ZANU (Ndonga)	36,960	2
Total	1,514,061	100%	—

Registered Voters: 4,900,000.

Total Poll: 1,557,558 (32% voter turnout).

Spoilt Votes: 43,491 (3% of votes cast).

Source: Computed from election results published in *The Herald*, 20 March 1996. The results from four provinces were not published, therefore not included in the computation. Numerous efforts to get this data from the Registrar General's Office were to no avail. Moreover, the voters rolls for this election were reported to be in "shambles." See also note 9.

for ZANU (PF) dominance and a weak opposition is largely the ruling party's *Gukurahundi* policy adopted during the latter part of the liberation war — in 1979, to be precise — and was continued until the early 1990s. This was an undisguised, intolerant, commandist, and deliberately violent policy towards the opposition. By this policy the opposition was rendered impotent.

Gukurahundi is a colloquial expression, which in Shona means "the storm that destroys everything". The peasants, from whom the expression or concept comes, use it with awe because *gukurahundi* is an early storm that "destroys everything", crops and weeds, huts and forests, the good and the bad, including people and beasts. After *gukurahundi*, usually nature ushers in a new ecological order. Such were the intended consequences of ZANU (PF)'s revolutionary policy as it evolved in the 1970s (ironically) from the countryside.

Based in neighbouring Mozambique (1975-79), ZANU (PF) "officially" adopted Marxism-Leninism as its ideology in 1977. It declared the year 1979 "*Gore reGukurahundi*" (**The Year of the Storm**) — the revolutionary storm that would finally destroy the white settler regime; the "internal settlement puppets"; and finally, the capitalist system. A new socio-economic and political order guided by Marxist-Leninist principles was to replace the "old order". *Gukurahundi* was a policy of annihilation; annihilating the opposition (black and white). Accordingly, an "enemies list" was published in mid-1979 in which ranking personalities of the "internal settlement" parties were singled out for liquidation.

The momentum of *gukurahundi* swept Mugabe and his party to power in the independence election of 1980. The instrument which ZANU (PF) used during the build-up to the election was the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), its military wing. Subsequently, it used its youth and women's league for political mobilization during and between the successive general elections that have occurred every five years since the 1980 election. Both of these outfits have had a "commandist" political culture that is perpetuated by their paramilitary style of organization. Moreover, the youth wing is mostly led by former ZANLA combatants. But, by and large, the party lost many of its cadres into the army where, under British instructors, they were groomed into a "professional" rather than "political" army. Hence, when faced with a PF-ZAPU opposition in Matebeleland (1982-87), the ZANU (PF) government created the notorious **Fifth Brigade** trained by North Koreans instead of relying solely on the newly created national army. Significantly, the **Fifth Brigade** was commonly referred to as *gukurahundi* with pride by its sponsors, and with resentment and fear by the objects of the evil storm in Matebeleland.

Most leading personalities of PF-ZAPU and the former ZIPRA were sacked from government and from the national army, while others were detained. In 1984, Joshua Nkomo, the PF-ZAPU leader, fled into temporary exile in England in the wake of discoveries of arms caches in farms owned by PF-ZAPU. These farms and other properties were confiscated by the ZANU (PF) government in a triumphant march into Matebeleland. Following that, the general elections of 1985 were arranged and held in an atmosphere of the civil strife in Matebeleland. The excesses of that civil war were so gruesome that the findings of a presidential commission of inquiry into the conduct of this conflict were not published.¹⁸ It was under these circumstances that Nkomo, on 22 December 1987, signed a unity accord in which his party merged with ZANU (PF).

It can be said, therefore, that the fate of the opposition was decided during the war of liberation in the 1970s. With a philosophy of annihilation, complimented with the monopoly of state power at independence, it became impossible for the opposition to function as a viable political entity. But by the end of the 1980s, ZANU (PF) had begun to experience cracks in "elite cohesion", thus opening up space for the opposition in the 1990s.

Fractured "Elite Cohesion" and the Future¹⁹

The hitherto mammoth and monolithic party began to show cracks in the latter part of the 1980s. Edgar Tekere, the then outspoken Secretary General of ZANU (PF), was the first leader to be expelled from the party in 1987 when he became increasingly vocal in his criticism of the party. He founded his Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) in 1989, the first party to be formed in nine years of independence, and the first party to pose a real challenge to ZANU (PF) after PF-ZAPU

merged with ZANU (PF). ZUM contested both the general and presidential elections of 1990, an election in which the ZANU (PF) leadership had hoped to run unchallenged and establish a one-party state. The violence perpetrated against the opposition during the 1990 election was the worst in an election year since independence, culminating in the shooting of Patrick Kombayi who dared challenge Vice-President, Simon Muzenda in the Midlands city of Gweru.

The decline in party "elite cohesion" continued to grow, as criticism and challenge of the party from within persisted. Margaret Dongo, ZANU (PF) member in the 1990-1995 parliament, defied the party after the politburo refused to nominate her for the 1995 parliamentary elections. She ran as an independent candidate and lost, but cried foul. She petitioned the courts and won. A by-election was called and she won in the mainly working class Harare South constituency in the nation's capital by a 3 to 1 margin. Similarly, Lawrence Mudehwe defied the politburo, contested the executive mayoral race in the important eastern border city of Mutare and won against the favoured party candidate. Following these court and election victories, successful petitions were lodged at the courts for the nullification of more city council and executive mayoral election results on grounds that there had been "irregularities" in the elections. The important cities of Chitungwiza, Harare and Masvingo are good examples.²⁰

Perhaps the most interesting (if not most important) manifestation of a rupture in "elite cohesion" is that epitomised by the charismatic politburo member, Dr. Eddison Zvobgo, from Masvingo, a province traditionally crucial to ZANU (PF) politics. In a widely read and debated speech delivered at an international conference in Harare in November 1995, Zvobgo called for the re-democratization of the Zimbabwe Constitution, particularly the aspects pertaining to the powers of the Executive President, which he had ironically drafted in 1987 when he was Minister for Legal and Parliamentary Affairs.²¹ In 1996, Zvobgo sustained serious leg injuries in a car accident, and was dropped from the post of Minister of Mines to Minister-Without-Portfolio in a cabinet reshuffle in May following the April 1996 presidential election. The ostensible reason was that he was in London receiving medical attention. On his return, however, Zvobgo told the press that he was "fit for a cabinet post" but there was no response from the President's office; at least not publicly.

The ruling elite's response to such tendencies has been to expel critics and opponents from the party: Tekere in 1989; Dongo in 1995; Mudehwe in 1996. While Tekere formed his own party, ZUM, Dongo has not, at least not for now. But she is emerging as the rallying point for the "second independence movement" — a kind of "liberation" from the ruling party. Whether Zvobgo awaits the fate of Tekere and Dongo (being expelled from the party) remains to be seen. But some would argue that he might miss his moment the longer he waits, if he has not missed it already. Whether it is around Dongo, Zvobgo, or someone else, or a combination

and permutation thereof, it is likely that the ZANU (PF) electoral hegemony will be broken from within. The independent candidates phenomenon is but an early manifestation of this scenario.

Finally, the greatest asset ZANU (PF) has had, thus far, is its leader, President Mugabe himself. He is disciplined, articulate, learned, and a very shrewd politician. But he is now 75. Therefore, the choice of his successor and the manner in which this is done is likely to determine who will be able to galvanize the independents and the weak opposition groups into a strong political party outside ZANU (PF). In this scenario, a viable opposition is likely to emerge from a splinter group inside the ruling ZANU (PF) itself, not unlike the major ZAPU/ZANU split of 1963.

Notes

- * Masipula Sithole is Associate Professor in the Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Zimbabwe; John Makumbe lecturers at the same institution.
- 1. For instance, Sir Godfrey Huggins (later Lord Malvern) ruled Southern Rhodesia for 20 years before taking on federal politics as Prime Minister of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1953. Ian Smith and his Rhodesia Front (RF) party ruled Rhodesia for 16 years until the eve of majority rule in 1979. Robert Mugabe and his ZANU (PF) party have ruled Zimbabwe since independence (for 17 years so far).
- 2. This notwithstanding the fact is that from its inception in 1890 as Southern Rhodesia, the country has been a plural society. White politicians conveniently came to this realization only 90 years latter! See also footnote 3 below.
- 3. Moyo accepts the argument that PR might incapacitate decision-making through hung parliaments. However, he argues that this "does not apply to countries which are in transition to democracy and which are generally characterized by a weak civil society." (Moyo, 1992 : 61). Moreover, experience has shown that developed countries (United States and Britain) are not immune to hung parliaments, notwithstanding the SMD electoral system.
- 4. Every other party seemed to gang up against the "militant" ZANU (PF). Some, especially local white and foreign governments, even speculated on a factional arithmetic designed to deprive ZANU (PF) of victory. See Gregory (1981 : 68).
- 5. One participant in the Lancaster House negotiations said: "Most of us didn't bitch about this one because we knew we were going to change it the moment we got into power. Moreover, we were in a hurry to get that power. We didn't want to lose momentum through the long process of drawing up constituencies, counting the number of adults and registering them."
- 6. In the 1980 election under proportional representation PF-ZAPU got four

seats in the Midlands and one in the adjacent Mashonaland West. In the 1985 election, many areas known to have large concentrations of Ndebele were split to include them in largely Shona dominated areas.

7. In 1984, Sithole went into voluntary exile after an attempt on his life. Goodson Sithole was the surrogate candidate in the 1985 election.
8. See Moyo, 1992 : 156-163.
9. In a study of the 1990 election, Makumbe (1992 : 179-188) argued that while the decade of the 1980s in Zimbabwe's political development was marked by "politicization" and "participation," the 1990s and beyond would be marked by "de-politicization" and "de-participation."
10. The reliability of figures for the 1995 parliamentary and 1996 presidential elections is questionable since the voters rolls were reported to be in "shambles", even by the Election Supervisory Commission. See *The Herald*, March 14, 1995, and also *Report of Election Supervisory Commission on the 1995 General Elections*.
11. Ethnicity is salient in six sub-ethnic groups in Zimbabwe politics: the Karanga (22%), Zezuru (18), Manyika (13%), Korekore (12%), Rozwi (9%), and Ndau (3%). The Ndebele are 19%. For an analysis of the Zimbabwe ethnic milieu and politics, see Sithole in Glickman (1995 : 122-160).
12. For an analysis of this and related elections, see Sithole (1996 : 2-6).
13. For example, the executive mayoral election in the city of Mutare was won by an independent against the ruling party's candidate, and recently, in a Council by-election in Mbare in the city of Harare, another independent candidate defeated the ruling party's candidate.
14. For instance, reports from reliable sources say that several spoilt ballot papers were inscribed with: "This is not an election," "The election is already rigged," "The results are already known," "There is no democracy in Zimbabwe," etc.
15. The Electoral Act requires that a candidate must lodge notice of his intention to withdraw at least 21 days before the election. Muzorewa and Sithole announced their withdrawal only a few days before election day.
16. For instance, the nationalist position, defined as "struggle against domination by whites and foreigners" still motivates the African people politically. Mugabe has periodically taunted whites and foreigners, particularly on the land issue and indigenization of the economy as a whole.
17. See also Sithole (1993 : 1997). For the difficulties and dynamics of transforming ZANU (PF) from a liberation movement to the custodian of democratic values, see Makumbe (1996 : 33-42).
18. This Report was to await when its publication would not open up wounds that were in the process of healing as a result of the 1987 unity between ZANU (PF) and PF-ZAPU.

19. While we agree that the ZANU (PF) regime has been authoritarian, Makumbe's work stresses more on the continuing authoritarian character of the regime; Sithole's work stresses more the signs and symptoms of the erosion of this authoritarianism. See Makumbe's forthcoming work, *One Step Forward and Two Steps Backward* (to be published in Harare by University of Zimbabwe Publications) and Sithole (1997 : 127-41).
20. The strategy of using the courts in the fight for democracy in Zimbabwe has produced a new political concept, "Democratization by litigation." See Makumbe's concluding Chapter in his *One Step Forward and Two Steps Backward: The Zimbabwe 1995-1996 Elections*.
21. See Eddison J.M. Zvobgo, "An Agenda for Democracy, Peace and Sustainable Development in the SADC Region" (address delivered to parliamentarians at the CPA/IPU Joint Dinner, at Miekles Hotel, Harare, 14 November 1995).

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