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Voting For Change The 29 March Harmonized Elections Eldred V. Masunungure

Introduction

The first half of 2008 was a momentous period in Zimbabwe's political history. Between March and June of that year, two critical but sharply contrasting elections were held and their outcome has determined Zimbabwe's trajectory, triggering a political transition in which the country is locked at the time of writing. The 29 March elections are commonly referred to as the 'harmonized elections', a reference to their consolidating all national and local government elections; the second election, held on 27 June, was consequent upon the inconclusive 29 March presidential election and is commonly referred to as the 'run-off' election. The March elections were the most peaceful (and even enjoyable) since the genesis of Zimbabwe's mega-crisis in 2000 while the June elections will go down in history as the bloodiest since independence. This chapter dissects the two sets of elections in terms of the roles played (or not played) by the pivotal domestic political and security actors during the watershed elections, particularly in the inter-election period.

The 29 March harmonized elections

The synchronized elections of 29 March were for: (1) the office of executive president; (2) the 210 House of Assembly seats; (3) the 60 elective seats in the 93-member Senate; and (4) the 1,958 local council seats. The institutional and electoral frameworks in which these elections were held are discussed elsewhere in this book. The newly enacted Constitutional Amendment No. 18 provided for the harmonized elections and offered the

first occasion that Zimbabwe held all four elections simultaneously. The elections were all held on one day rather than over two or three days as had been the electoral tradition, and they were conducted against the backdrop of the SADC-mediated political negotiations between the then ruling ZANU(PF) party and the two opposition formations of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The latter point speaks to the fact that Zimbabwe was already in the process of negotiating its political transition from authoritarianism to a more tolerant and democratic political dispensation.

Following the sitting of nomination courts on 15 February 2008 in the country's ten provinces, a total of 4,406 candidates successfully filed their papers to contest the elections as follows: Presidential candidates 4, House of Assembly candidates 774, Senatorial candidates 197 and local authority-candidates, 3,431. A total of 413 candidates filed their papers unopposed: 411 for local authority elections, one for the House of Assembly and one for the Senate. Elections were suspended in three House of Assembly constituencies following the deaths of the candidates after nomination.¹ As a consequence, 206 House of Assembly seats, 59 Senatorial seats and 1,541 wards were contested. More than a dozen political parties and several independent candidates contested in the polls.

Contestants: political parties

The March 29 elections attracted substantial interest among Zimbabwe political parties and independents with seventeen of them contesting the parliamentary elections, mostly for the lower house, the House of Assembly (Table 1, see over).

A total of 773 candidates – including a record 104 independents – contested the 210 House of Assembly seats and 196, including 20 independents, the 93 Senate seats.² Though the electoral arena appeared crowded, more than two-thirds of the parties were essentially fly-by-night political entities that only emerge at election times and quickly wither away soon after. Essentially, the parliamentary contest was between the three best-known parties, ZANU(PF), MDC-T and MDC.³ Even the results of the elections reflect this triangular distribution of power. At the close of nomination courts, ZANU(PF) had won two constituencies when its House of Assembly and Senate candidates were nominated unopposed in Mashonaland Central and had also won 392 council wards unopposed in various parts of the country.

- ¹ The vacancies were later filled through by-elections held concurrently with the controversial Presidential run-off election on 27 June.
- ² Most of the independent candidates were aligned to Makoni's Mavambo political project.
- ³ These were also the only three parties engaged in political dialogue under the auspices of the SADC-appointed mediator, former South Africa president Thabo Mbeki.

Table 1

Party	Party Leader	No. of Candidates Fielded	
MDC-T	Morgan Tsvangirai	204	61
MDC	Arthur Mutumbara	151	36
ZANU(PF)	Robert Mugabe	219	61
UPP	Daniel Shumba	49	11
PAFA	Abel Ndlovu	6	
ZANU-Ndonga	Wilson Kumbula	2	1
FDU	Paul Siwela	7	1
ZPPDP	Tafrenyika Mudavanhu	8	
ZDP	Kisinoi Mukwazhe	9	2
PUMA	Leornard Nkala	7	7
CDP	William Gwata	2	
ZAPU-PF	Sikhumbuzo Dube	1	1
ZURD	Madechiwe Collias	1	
VOP	Moreprecision Muzadzi	1	
ZiYA	Moses Mutyasira	1	
UPC			
Independents		104	20
TOTAL		773	196

Key: MDC-T: Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T); MDC: Movement for Democratic Change (MDC);⁴ ZANU(PF): Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front; UPP: United People's Parties; ZPPDP: Zimbabwe Progressive People's Democratic Party; PUMA: Patriotic Union of Matabeleland; FDU: Federal Democratic Union; ZANU-Ndonga: Zimbabwe African National Union-Ndonga; ZDP: Zimbabwe Democratic Party; CDP: Christian Democratic Party; ZiYA: Zimbabwe Youth Alliance; PAFA: Peace Action is Freedom for All; ZURD; ZAPU-FP: Zimbabwe African Peoples Union; VOP: Voice of the People; and UPC: United People's Congress.

- ⁴ The Movement for Democratic Change was formed in September 1999 but split into two factions in October 2005 mainly over the virtues of participating in elections for the newly recreated upper chamber, the Senate, which had been abolished in 1987. The larger body of the opposition party remained with founding President Morgan Tsvangirai while the splinter faction was led by Professor Arthur Mutambara. For avoidance of voter confusion, the former faction became known as MDC-T while Mutambara's formation contested as the MDC though it is now commonly referred to as 'MDC-M'.

The presidential contestants

On paper, the presidential election was a four-cornered contest but in fact it was a triangular fight between Robert Mugabe of ZANU(PF), Morgan Tsvangirai of the MDC-T and Mugabe's erstwhile finance minister and fellow politburo member, Simba Makoni, who stood as an independent. The real battle was between incumbent president Mugabe and his long-term political rival Tsvangirai; virtually all Zimbabweans and other observers regarded these two as the real combatants.

Robert Mugabe: Mugabe is the only leader Zimbabwe has known since its independence in 1980 when he assumed the post of Prime Minister. When this office was abolished and fused with that of Head of State in 1987 to create the executive presidency, Mugabe became the first, and so far the only, occupant of the post. He contested and in each case controversially won successive presidential elections in 1990, 1996, 2002 and was in 2008 seeking a fourth presidential term of office.

Mugabe launched his re-election campaign on 29 February and presented his party's election manifesto. ZANU(PF)'s theme was: 'Defending our Land and National Sovereignty: Building Prosperity through Empowerment'. Its campaign style and message centred on the party's leadership of the 1970s liberation struggle, its deliverance of social services in the 1980s, and of land since 2000, and promises to deliver economic empowerment and indigenization of the economy by capturing majority shares in mining and other foreign-owned companies after the elections. The party manifesto identified twelve key areas, notably land and sovereignty; busting sanctions; completing and consolidating land reforms; rehabilitating, upgrading and expanding infrastructure; resolving the energy crisis; economic prosperity through indigenization; small to medium enterprises development; science and technology; youth and women empowerment; and building alliances with progressive partners in the world.

Mugabe was trumpeted as someone 'tried and tested' and the party vowed to win the elections 'resoundingly so that the British can feel the heat'.⁵ Despite its official call for a 'peaceful, democratic, sovereign Zimbabwe,' ZANU(PF)'s violent streak was not far from the surface. Mugabe's campaign slogan was 'vote for the fist', and his portraits had him wearing an olive-green military-type shirt and holding a clenched fist, all of which symbolized the party's militancy to which the MDC responded with a newspaper advert asserting that: 'The war is over. We cannot feed people with clenched fists.'⁶

⁵ *Zimbabwe Independent*, 14 March 2008.

⁶ Cris Chinaka, *Mail and Guardian*, 'Mugabe's iron fist: War veterans and green bombers', 20 March, 2008. Chinaka also noted that for some of Mugabe's loyalists, the image of their

Mugabe urged delegates gathered at the launch to ‘go fighting’ to ensure victory for ZANU(PF): ‘Go fighting, not physically, but through word and deed,’ he said. He was very confident of triumphing on 29 March:

Victory is certain, but the size of the victory is what we are aiming at. We are not aiming at victory because we have won already. All we want now is the enhancement of that victory. We want a big, big, big victory, a thunderous one.⁷

As if to publicly demonstrate the abuse of state media, the occasion was broadcast live on the state-controlled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) TV and radio, in stark contrast to that of Tsvangirai’s faction of the MDC, which took place at Sakubva stadium in Mutare.

Mugabe also warned against Kenya-style violence, in reference to the post-election political violence that engulfed Kenya in early 2008, saying the security forces stood ready to crush such protests. ‘If Tsvangirai and his [MDC] group have such plans, they must stand warned... That will never happen here, never, never. We will never allow it. We have enough security forces to handle that.’⁸

Mugabe routinely disparaged his presidential challengers as stooges of the West. Makoni was dismissed as worse than ‘a political prostitute’, and a frog with ‘an inflated ego’. ‘He is like a frog trying to inflate itself up to the size of an ox. It will burst.’⁹ Tsvangirai was referred to as a puppet of Western imperialism led by Britain who ‘will never rule this country.’¹⁰ Such hate-filled and intemperate language was to be the hallmark of Mugabe’s campaign.

Morgan Tsvangirai: Since the formation of the MDC in September 1999, Tsvangirai has been Mugabe’s mortal enemy. His party was the key partner in a coalition of forces that delivered ZANU(PF)’s first electoral defeat in the February 2000 constitutional referendum. A former trade union leader, Tsvangirai has come closest to ousting Mugabe in previous elections¹¹ and on 11 February he announced that he would stand as presidential candidate for his MDC faction.

On 23 February he launched his campaign and presented his party’s

6 (cntd) leader’s clenched fist is still a call to war and that members of the youth brigades – known as ‘green bombers’ because of the military-style clothes they wear – who act as security guards at ZANU(PF)’s rallies are seen in the rural areas as ‘the party’s eyes, ears and fists.’

7 *The Herald*, ‘ZANU(PF) Launches Manifesto’ 1 March 2008.

8 Reuters, ‘Mugabe warns over Kenya-style violence’ 21 March 2008.

9 Cris Chinaka, ‘Mugabe belittles opponents as frog and puppet’ Reuters, 23 February 2008.

10 Chinaka, ‘Mugabe’s iron fist’. See also Ofeiba Quist-Arcton’s ‘Mugabe Faces Strong Challenge in Zimbabwe Vote’ 27 March 2008, <http://www.npr.org>. On Mugabe’s campaign strategy, Norma Kriger commented: ‘Mugabe campaigns as if Britain is his electoral opponent because, he insists, it seeks to re-colonise Zimbabwe’ in ‘Understanding Zimbabwe’s Election’ *Africa Policy Forum*, 24 March 2008.

11 Tsvangirai narrowly lost the 2002 presidential election that was widely condemned, nationally and internationally, as rigged.

election manifesto, promising total transformation rather than partial change. The MDC marketed its leader as not only a change agent but also a ‘man of the people, man for the people, man of peace’. The party’s manifesto revolved around five key issues:

1. *people-centred governance* meaning a new ‘people-driven’ constitution, respect for human rights, democracy and rule of law;
2. *people-centred land and agrarian reforms* with attention to transparency, sustainability, productive land use, food security and job creation;
3. *people-centred economy* ‘that guarantees growth, food security, investment and job creation’;
4. *people-centred social agenda* with emphasis on ‘affordable and quality health care and education for all’; and
5. *national integration and reconciliation*.

Tsvangirai dismissed Mugabe as ‘one of the greatest tyrants of the 21st century’¹². He also dismissed Makoni as ‘old wine in a new bottle’, because of his long association with Mugabe and ZANU(PF) and because he merely wanted to ‘reform an institutionalised dictatorship’.¹³ Like Makoni, he accused Mugabe of ruining Zimbabwe’s once vibrant economy and transforming the country from a breadbasket into a basket case. Tsvangirai promised hope and change.

Simba Makoni: Makoni’s presidential candidature was a product of serious and long-simmering fissures inside ZANU(PF), centring on leadership succession. These divisions burst into the open over the party’s Central Committee decision in March 2007 to again field Mugabe as its candidate in the 2008 elections. This announcement widened and deepened succession and leadership struggles within the party, which was compelled to convene an Extraordinary Congress in December 2007, presumably to settle the leadership and candidature question ‘once and for all’. It was later announced by the party’s chairman, John Nkomo, that Mugabe had been selected to be the party’s 2008 presidential candidate by acclamation and that the party Congress had ‘fully and unreservedly’ backed the decision.

On 5 February 2008, this façade of unity within ZANU(PF) was removed when, less than a week before the presidential nomination date, Makoni announced his presidential candidature:

Let me confirm that I share the agony and anguish of all citizens over the extreme hardships that we all have endured for nearly 10 years now. I also share the widely held view that these hardships are a result of failure of national leadership and that change at that level is a prerequisite for change at other levels of national endeavour.¹⁴

12 Chinaka, ‘Mugabe belittles opponents as frog and puppet.’

13 ‘Tsvangirai rules out pact with Makoni’ AFP, 11 February 2008.

14 Fanuel Jongwe, ‘Ex-minister takes on Mugabe’ *The Times* (South Africa), 5 February 2008.

He was immediately dismissed from the party¹⁵ and was also threatened by war veterans.¹⁶ To his discredit, he continued to insist on being ZANU(PF), and certainly that he was not anti-ZANU(PF). It was clear then that Makoni and his supporters wanted to see leadership renewal within the party. Though he had held several high-profile positions in Government, in ZANU(PF) and was Executive Secretary of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) for ten years, he had never held an elected position.

Makoni launched his campaign on 13 February 2008 and also presented 'elements' of his election manifesto which centred on a '10 Point Plan for Quick Turnaround': 'we promise to deliver to the people of Zimbabwe a quick economic turnaround through national political dialogue and healing; the strengthening of our economic sectors; and harnessing international goodwill.' His campaign slogan was: 'Let's Get Zimbabwe Working Again!' Makoni derided Mugabe's campaign symbol of a fist by saying 'the fist has become a hammer smashing the country.'¹⁷ Makoni's entry into the presidential race energised many Zimbabweans who had previously made up their minds not to vote; most of his supporters were urban and educated classes.¹⁸

On 15 February 2008, four candidates registered for the presidential race: Mugabe, Tsvangirai, Makoni and little known Langton Towungana; Arthur Mutambara, leader of the splinter faction of the MDC, announced that he would not stand but would instead support Makoni.¹⁹ There had been speculation that the opposition would field one candidate in order to enhance their chances of defeating Mugabe but talks to reunite the two MDC factions had collapsed in early February. Although Mutambara pledged his support for Makoni, Makoni stressed that he was running alone and was 'not in an alliance with anyone. I am an independent candidate and I am standing alone.'²⁰

15 The party's legal secretary said Makoni had automatically 'self-expelled himself.' On 1 March, former Interior Minister and politburo member Dumiso Dabengwa and former Speaker of Parliament Cyril Ndebele defected to join Makoni.

16 Joseph Chinotimba, deputy leader of the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association chillingly warned: 'Traitors should know ZANU(PF) has a history of dealing harshly with their kind' (Quoted in BBC 'Zimbabwe war vets threaten Makoni', 7 February 2008).

17 Chinaka, 'Mugabe's iron fist'.

18 After the founding independence election in 1980, there was a growing tendency towards electoral apathy, a process that was somewhat reversed in the 2000 and 2002 parliamentary and presidential elections respectively. However, the failure of both elections to deliver a decisive victory leading to a transfer of power led to a recidivism in political apathy that was also reflected in people's reluctance to register to vote. Most people felt that the outcome of the March 2008 elections was predetermined and decided not to vote. The entry of a new and respectable political player changed the scenario, leading to a surge in voter registration.

19 Three other candidates had their candidatures rejected for varying reasons. Mutambara stood for a parliamentary seat in Chitungwiza but lost heavily.

20 'Zimbabwe presidential candidates confirmed', AFP, 16 February 2008.

The pre-poll arena

The pre-29 March environment is described and analysed in many of the contributions to this volume, particularly the constitutional, legal and institutional framework governing the elections and some of the changes – albeit modest and even cosmetic – instituted by the Constitutional Amendment No. 18 that received bi-partisan support. The impaired integrity of electoral institutions (especially the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), but also the Electoral Court) and the asymmetrical media terrain are also discussed elsewhere. This chapter highlights other developments that cumulatively vitiated the democratic credentials of the harmonized elections.

Later sections of this chapter outline some of the unsavoury pronouncements made by senior security chiefs to the effect that they would not recognize the election of anyone other than their preferred candidate, Robert Mugabe. These statements, which had an uncanny resemblance to those made just before the 2002 presidential election, had the intended effect of intimidating prospective voters and were clearly in violation of both the spirit and letter of the law.

A constant in ZANU(PF)'s election strategy is the use of state-financed patronage. There were widespread reports of abuse of state resources in the ruling party's election campaign. Most disturbing was the politically motivated distribution of food aid to starving voters, especially in the rural areas. Traditional and community leaders were also mobilized to deliver the rural vote in exchange for perks such as vehicles, electrification of their homes, and, most critically, the privilege to allocate scarce and highly valued food aid, farm inputs and equipment. There were also salary hikes to uniformed forces and civil servants and pension increases for ZANU(PF)'s storm-troopers, the war veterans. For the elite loyalists, promises of shares under the indigenization and empowerment legislation were meant to glue them to the party. Other sectors and professionals also benefited: vehicles for doctors, promises of houses for health institutions and buses for rural districts, were all designed to induce the beneficiaries to vote in a favourable manner.²¹

Equally disturbing were the selective invitations to foreign observers and foreign media. The government refused to invite 'unfriendly' foreign observers or to accredit foreign journalists, preferring instead to invite 'friendly' countries, organizations and media houses. The United States, the European Union, and even some SADC and African Union organizations and media were barred, including the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA), e-TV, and the SADC Parliamentary Forum.

²¹ The central bank (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe) was heavily involved in the financing, procurement and distribution of these patronage goods.

Also noteworthy was the disenfranchisement of voters in the diaspora. Zimbabwe allows for postal votes but restricts this to those serving in diplomatic missions and those on state duty outside their voting districts and these mostly comprise police, soldiers and civil servants. For the March harmonized elections, it was alleged – and not denied – that ZEC had printed some 600,000 postal ballots when only 30,000 had been applied for. This generated considerable tension and suspicions that the extra ballots were going to be used to rig the elections. There were also allegations that ZEC had ordered the printing of nine million ballot papers when the total number of registered voters was less than six million.

It was also a matter for deep concern that the ZEC did not acquit itself in the critical area of voter education. The 29 March elections were a new experience for virtually all Zimbabweans and more so for first-time voters; they were also complex elections. And yet many voters were not adequately advised about voter education, inspection of the voters roll, location of polling stations, time of voting, and more critically, that voting for all four elections would take place on the same day. Many voters thought the four elections would be held on four separate days. There were also entirely new electoral constituencies and boundaries but many voters were not apprised of this. Shockingly, despite not having the capacity to mount an effective civic and voter education campaign, ZEC proceeded to ban civic education organizations – Zimbabwe Elections Support Network (ZESN), Civic Network (CIVNET) and others – from carrying out this important function.

There were also deep concerns about the state of the voters register, a perennial issue in Zimbabwe's elections. There were credible reports that the register was inflated with ghost voters and fictitious names. According to ZEC, there were more than five and a half million voters registered as at 15 February 2008 (Table 2, right), a figure that is difficult to accept given the massive out-migration since 2000. The statistic suggested that virtually every adult out of about twelve million Zimbabweans had registered to vote, an outcome that is clearly unfathomable given the levels of apathy among the population and the scale of emigration.

The biggest source of worry was pronouncements made by some senior military officials that clearly vitiated the democratic character of elections as arenas of choice. One of the defining features of constitutional democracies, and a hallmark of democratic politics, is the non-partisanship of the military and security organs of the state. This does not necessarily mean soldiers and those who command them are political eunuchs; it does mean that soldiers are not partisan political animals. They serve the state, and not political actors, whether these are individuals or parties. In Zimbabwe's case, a bit of background is necessary.

In Zimbabwe's complex political scenario, and because of the history of the protracted liberation struggle of the 1970s, there is symbiosis between the military elite and the political elite that is mediated by ZANU(PF), the

Table 2: Voter's Register, House of Assembly Constituencies & Polling Stations

Province	No. of registered voters	No. of constituencies	No. of polling stations
Bulawayo	313,459	12	207
Harare	766,478	29	379
Manicaland	709,664	263	79
Mash. Central	448,477	18	1,150
Mash. East	624,630	23	774
Mash West	582,989	22	1,100
Masvingo	699,199	26	1,202
Mat. North	345,264	13	545
Mat. South	342,280	13	528
Midlands	739,510	28	1,289
TOTAL	5,571,950	210	9,132

political vehicle that drove the armed struggle. When ZANU(PF) captured the state in 1980, it deliberated proceeded to construct the state in the image of the party by fusing the two. In this endeavour, the liberation war fighters became the new soldiers in a new state; their commanders became part of Zimbabwe's military elite. Those who were part of the political wing of the liberation struggle became the new political elite. What unified the political and the military elites is the ZANU(PF) party.

In this new party-state, many who constitute the military and security elite have found it difficult to dissociate themselves from the party. This is particularly so because their erstwhile commander-in-chief during guerilla days is also their commander-in-chief in post-liberation Zimbabwe. In this complex scheme of things, when the party is in trouble, it is incumbent on the soldier class to come to the party's aid. Political forces that threaten the party's hold on power *ipso facto* threaten the state. It has been difficult, if not impossible, for the military to insulate itself from ZANU(PF)'s partisan politics. This is the context in which the role of the military and security organs should be understood in Zimbabwe's electoral politics. Some incidents of such partisan involvement are highlighted below. They illustrate that the involvement of the military was more covert than explicit but nonetheless an abrogation of its proper role in a democracy.

Six months before the harmonized elections a senior army officer, Brigadier-General David Sigauke, was quoted as allegedly threatening any government not led by Mugabe and ZANU(PF):

As soldiers, we have the privilege to defend this task (of guaranteeing Mugabe and ZANU(PF) rule) on two fronts: the first being through the ballot box, and

second being the use of the barrel of the gun should the worse come to the worst. I may therefore urge you as citizens of Zimbabwe to exercise your electoral right wisely in the forthcoming election in 2008, remembering that ‘Zimbabwe shall never be a colony again’.²²

Little imagination was needed to interpret the message. After all, ‘Zimbabwe shall never be a colony again’ was a ZANU(PF) slogan.

Three weeks before the poll, the Commander of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF), General Constantine Chiwenga, warned that he would not tolerate Mugabe losing to ‘sell-outs and agents of the West.’ Speaking to *The Standard* newspaper, he was more than emphatic:

Elections are coming and the army will not support or salute sell-outs and agents of the West before, during, and after the presidential elections. We will not support anyone other than President Mugabe who has sacrificed a lot for this country.²³

Few harboured any doubts about the allegiance of the ZDF and how it would behave should an ‘undesirable’ outcome occur.

As for the police, the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum summarized their partisanship in a report just before the 29 March elections:

A highly politicised police force has been employed [by ZANU(PF)] as one of its instruments of repression, backed up by the intelligence service [the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO)] and the army. The police force has largely abrogated the right of freedom of assembly for opponents of government. It has freely allowed meetings and demonstrations by ruling party supporters, but has frequently disallowed and brutally broken up meetings and demonstrations by the opposition and by organisations that are critical of the Mugabe administration. The police have arrested on spurious charges large numbers of opposition supporters and critics of the government and, in many instances, have subjected them to torture.²⁴

On the eve of the synchronised elections, the Police Commissioner General, perhaps expressing his personal rather than institutional opinion, warned the police force and people of Zimbabwe against voting for what he referred to as ‘stooges of the British’:²⁵ ‘We will not allow any puppets to take charge.’²⁶ However, the institutional position of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) was for ‘Zero Tolerance’ and a ‘Violence-Free Election’. To this extent, it actually held anti-political violence marches in Harare suburbs on the eve of the elections.

The Zimbabwe Prison Services (ZPS) was not immune to the partisan

22 *The Herald*, ‘Army urged to defend Zim’s sovereignty,’ 25 September 2007.

23 *The Standard*, 9 March 2008.

24 Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, ‘Can the elections in Zimbabwe be free and fair in the current environment?’, Harare, 18 March 2008, pp. 4-5. The Forum’s answer to the question was that ‘it is not possible to hold free and fair elections under the prevailing conditions.’

25 ZANU(PF) deliberately and routinely dismisses the MDC as a western front for ‘regime change’. It has labeled the MDC ‘a puppet of the British and Americans.’

virus. A month before the elections, the Commissioner of Prisons, retired Major-General Zimondi, said he would not salute opposition presidential candidates Makoni and Tsvangirai should either of them happen to win the presidential election: 'If the opposition wins the election, I will be the first one to resign from my job and go back to defend my piece of land. I will not let it go.' Zimondi was addressing a passing-out parade of prison officers whom he then ordered to vote for Mugabe: 'We are going to the elections and you should vote for President Mugabe. I am giving you an order to vote for the President.' For the avoidance of any doubt, he added: 'I will only support the leadership of President Mugabe. I will not salute them [Makoni and Tsvangirai]'.²⁷ The message to voters and the opposition presidential candidates was unambiguous.

The CIO is also headed by a retired ZDF senior officer, retired Major-General Happyton Bonyongwe. The intelligence service steered clear of any public statement of support to Mugabe. However, Bonyongwe was forced to refute media allegations that he was linked to Makoni's presidential bid. He defended himself and the CIO as non-partisan:

In my case and as far as the service is concerned, we are a professional service. I was appointed by H.E. President Mugabe. I am serving the President and through him my country.

I serve one master and the master is the President. The fact is no faction which can claim ownership of me means I am doing my job impartially. ... We are professional and principled and we will not abandon our task to protect the security of Zimbabwe, national interest and our leader, the President. Basically that is the CIO.²⁸

On Friday, 28 March, a day before the elections, the security service chiefs held a joint press conference. They called – commendably – for the upholding of peace and tranquillity as the nation voted. However, in a thinly-veiled warning to the MDC-T, the security chiefs said:

May we remind everyone that those who think and do evil must fear, for the defence and security forces are up to the task in thwarting all threats to national security. Also those who may have been breathing fire about Kenya-style violence should be warned that violence is a poor substitute for intelligence and that it is a monster that can devour its creator as it is blind and not selective in nature. Such misguided elements should stop this dangerous dreaming where they start to commend themselves, measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves forgetting the Constitution and our existence. Doing so is not wise.²⁹

²⁶ Zimbabwejournalists.com 14 March 2008

²⁷ *The Herald*, 'I'll not salute Tsvangirai, Makoni – Defence chief', 29 February 2008.

²⁸ 'Zimbabwe: I've No Ties With Makoni – CIO Boss', *The Herald* 15 March 2008.

²⁹ See *The Sunday Mail*, 30 March - 5 April, p.7. While it may have been necessary, in full memory of the Kenyan scenario, to make such a joint statement, some quarters interpreted the statement as having been tailor-made to pre-empt any possible reaction by the opposition MDC-T to potentially flawed elections.

From the above, it is clear that the security organs – at least their bosses – shared pro-regime political preferences and were generally hostile to an MDC-T victory. However, there was no evidence of an institutionalised insistence on who to support. If anything, there were reports that the rank and file of the military and police were sympathetic to the opposition MDC-T and that many voted for it. There is no doubt, though, that the top military and security commanders openly displayed their sympathies for ZANU(PF).

The political campaign itself pleasantly surprised many by being peaceful and relatively free.³⁰ Political parties and candidates were able to carry out their business almost unhindered and their supporters tolerated each other amazingly well. There was a remarkable reduction in inter-party violence, intimidation and harassment and supporters moved freely to and from rallies, freely wore their party regalia and even mingled among themselves.³¹ Formerly ‘no-go’ areas like Mashonaland Central and East were accessible to opposition parties and candidates. The police also conducted themselves professionally – unlike in previous elections when they were justifiably accused of being a partisan arm of ZANU(PF) – and adopted a ‘zero-tolerance’ approach to political violence and publicised this stance. Even the MDC acknowledged the professional conduct of the police during the campaign.

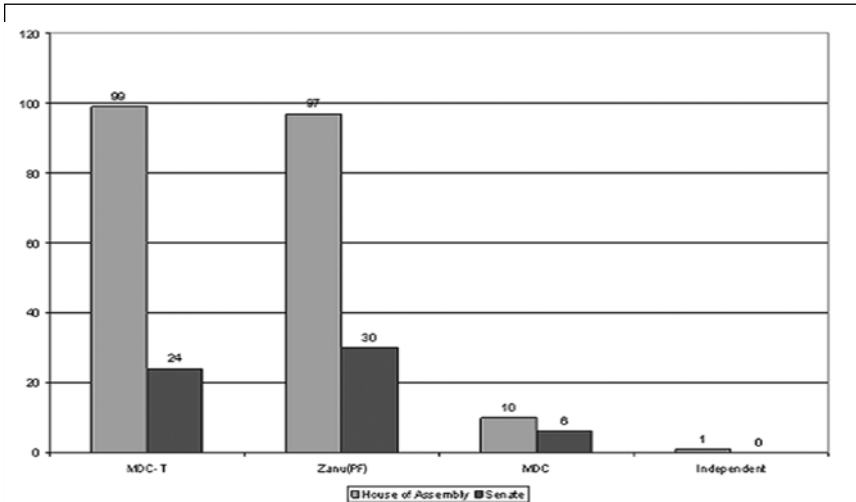
There were some events that spoiled the above positive picture and these were a relic of the past. For instance, some politicians, especially from ZANU(PF), continued to use inflammatory language at rallies and in the state-controlled media. Some traditional leaders – perhaps as a mark of gratitude for the state-provided vehicles, scotch carts, ploughs, and wheelbarrows – openly campaigned for ZANU(PF) and threatened their subjects with eviction, beatings and denial of food. Until the last two weeks of the campaign, the state media certainly did not acquit themselves in a manner that complied with the SADC Principles and Guidelines. However, in the last two weeks preceding the elections, there was a significant if not dramatic improvement in the state media’s conduct.

On balance, it is fair to say the pre-election environment was relatively peaceful and sufficiently conducive to the free expression of the people’s will in the ballot box. It is also fair to say that, with a few exceptions,

³⁰ Given that ‘Zimbabwe’s politics are profoundly shaped by violence,’ (Alexander and Tendi, 2008, p. 5), many observers and analysts (including this writer) were justifiably puzzled by this ‘anomaly’ and wondered whether it was not a case of calm before the storm.

³¹ EISA, one of the SADC election monitoring organizations that was not accredited to observe the elections but nonetheless sneaked in and managed to do so also rendered a positive assessment. It commended ‘an atmosphere of calm and tranquillity in which candidates, parties and people from diverse political backgrounds were able to operate’ and that ‘unlike in previous elections, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of movement and freedom of speech could be generally exercised without undue hindrance’ (EISA Interim Statement on the Zimbabwe Election 2008). Most observer groups made similar findings and conclusions.

Figure 1: Parliamentary results*



* Three constituencies were not contested because the duly nominated candidates died before the election; by-elections to fill the seats were held on 27 June 2008, simultaneously with the presidential run-off.

activities on polling day were conducted in an efficient, orderly and professional manner and, most importantly, to the satisfaction of all contestants. However, and as a consequence of poor and inadequate voter education, a significant number of people were turned away, either for not being on the voters roll, being aliens, being in the wrong ward or not having the national identity card – which was the only acceptable form of voter identity, unlike past elections when a driver’s licence was also deemed acceptable.

Vote counting and declaration of polling station results were also above board, with ZEC being commended for doing a professional job. Unlike in previous elections, votes were counted at polling stations and results posted outside the polling station for everyone to view. Constituency results were also publicly posted by Constituency Elections Officers and that very act constituted the declaration of the results at that level. This was the case for all elections, but the declaration of the presidential result was the only one for which the Chief Elections Officer had the prerogative of announcing after collating and verifying all results from all constituencies; this was done at the National Command Centre in Harare.

The vote count showed that out of an estimated (but most likely inflated) 5,571,950 registered voters, 2,537,240 (43 per cent) turned out to vote. There were nearly 40,000 spoilt ballots (1.6 per cent). The House of Assembly and Senatorial results are shown in Figure 1.

Even before the official parliamentary results had been released, many observer groups had made public their interim findings and almost all were uniformly positive. For instance, the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) was impressed by the independence and transparency of ZEC and concluded: 'On the overall, the basic conditions of credible free and fair elections as contained in the OAU/AU Declaration on Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa (2002) were reflected in the Zimbabwe Harmonised Election, thus far.'³² The SADC Elections Observer Mission (SEOM) also concluded that 'the elections held in Zimbabwe on 29 March 2008 have been a peaceful and credible expression of the will of the people of Zimbabwe.'³³ The uninvited Electoral Institute for Southern Africa rendered a more restrained verdict, finding that 'the 2008 Harmonised Elections in Zimbabwe were partly free' but that the electoral process was 'severely wanting in respect of fairness'.³⁴

The accolades showered on ZEC for organizing a comparatively credible poll quickly gave way to deep anxiety and scepticism at the manner in which it publicized the parliamentary results. Despite the fact that the results were posted at polling and constituency centres throughout the country, it took ZEC 36 hours to start announcing them. The body seems to have abandoned the simple and straightforward procedure which it had advertised before the elections; instead, it took five days to announce the House of Assembly and Senate results and it did so in a suspicious manner. From that point onwards, the credibility, autonomy and professionalism of the ZEC was seriously interrogated and whatever confidence and faith people had invested in it was eroded.

After announcing the parliamentary results, ZEC went into hibernation and froze the results of the presidential election for 32 days before announcing them on 2 May 2008 (Table 3). The MDC appealed to the courts on several occasions to have the results released; SADC convened an extraordinary summit on 12 September calling for the 'expeditious' release of the results, but to no avail; the United Nations Security Council made similar futile efforts, as did the G8, which called for 'speedy, credible and genuinely democratic resolution of this situation.'³⁵ In the meantime ZEC was lackadaisically re-counting, re-collating and re-verifying the votes.

Although according to the contested official results Tsvangirai garnered the most votes in the presidential election, he did not achieve the required legal threshold to capture the presidency and this necessitated a run-off election. The legal technicalities involved are discussed by Greg Linington (Chapter 6).

³² *The Herald*, 1 April 2008.

³³ *The Herald*, 31 March 2008.

³⁴ EISA Interim Statement.

³⁵ G8 Foreign Ministers' Statement on Zimbabwe, 17 April 2008.

Table 3: Presidential Poll Results – 29 March 2008 Harmonized Elections

Candidate	Number of votes	Actual percentage
Makoni, Herbert Stanley Simba	207,470	8.3%
Mugabe, Robert Gabriel	1,079,730	43.2%
Towungana, Langton	14,503	0.6%
Tsvangirai, Morgan	1,195,562	47.9%
Spoiled ballots	39,975	
Total votes cast	2,537,240	
Percentage poll		42.7%

Source: Zimbabwe Election Support Network [ZESN], report on the Zimbabwe 29 March harmonized election and 27 June 2008 presidential run-off, August 2008.

Analysis of the 29 March election results

The first salutary lesson from the 29 March elections was that ZANU(PF) was a fractured party, and its traditional rural stronghold weakened. A provincial breakdown of the results clearly demonstrated that the party had lost significant support even in its heartland provinces of Mashonaland West, East and Central. Most poignantly, the historical divide between the rural and the urban electorates was closing. ZESN put it thus:

Clearly evident from these election results is that while the opposition urban support base is relatively secure, this is no longer the case for the ruling party in its traditional strongholds. The opposition challenge which in the past was largely confined to the urban areas and had given the impression that rural areas were the unchallenged political enclaves of the ruling party has since been busted. The contestation that was initially confined to urban areas has since shifted to rural areas.³⁶

The MDC-T won seats in all ten provinces, had a clean sweep in Bulawayo and won all but one of the 26 House of Assembly seats in Harare.

The results reflected a seismic movement, a silent revolution depicted in the massive swing of political support from the 45-year old ZANU(PF) to the nine-year old opposition movement. The results were testimony to a dramatic drop in ZANU(PF) support in just three years:³⁷ In the March 2005 parliamentary elections, the party won 78 (65 per cent) of the 120 contested seats and 59.6 per cent of the vote, compared to the MDC's 41 seats (34 per cent) and 39.5 per cent of the vote. In the March 2008 elections, ZANU(PF)'s share of the House of Assembly vote dropped to 46 per

³⁶ ZESN, August 2008, p. 42.

³⁷ The result was also testimony to the vastly improved political atmosphere – especially in relation to politically-motivated violence and intimidation – compared to previous elections.

cent and its 99 seats translated to 47 per cent of the 210 seats. On the other hand, the combined MDC formations captured 51 per cent of the House of Assembly vote and 52 per cent of the seats, a remarkable recovery indeed.

Of major significance is that in 2005, ZANU(PF) could count on 30 indirectly elected members of the then 150-member single-chamber Parliament and, with a combined total of 108 seats, the party exceeded the two-thirds majority required to amend the Constitution. In the 2008 elections, ZANU(PF) lost not only this two-thirds majority; it also lost even the simple majority needed to drive legislation through parliament. In short, and for the first time in post-independence Zimbabwe, ZANU(PF) lost its political hegemony in parliament and the electorate; it became a minority party. This was an electoral *chimurenga* (uprising) of sorts, a silent and non-violent uprising based on the ballot box rather than the gun.

A second cardinal lesson from 29 March is that the revolutionary shift in political allegiances was a consequence of the disconnect between ZANU(PF) and its social base, especially the peasant class. This disconnect was rooted in the real world of economics, the material world of human existence. The protracted and deep economic crisis and the poor policy responses had taken their toll.³⁸ For the first time since 2000, Zimbabwe witnessed the convergence of economic well-being and political allegiance. Economic discontent translated into political discontent via the medium of the ballot box, marking the intersection of electoral politics and economics.

Another lesson from 29 March is that the ZANU(PF) message had lost its salience and no longer resonated with the masses as it used to. The message of liberation war, of sovereignty, of 'the land is the economy and the economy is land,' of ZANU(PF) being the only custodian of the revolution, and of 'the fist', failed to connect with the masses – rural and urban. Or the message was not as effectively communicated as in the past. It could also be that the opposition's message was more effective, a view suggested by Jocelyn Alexander and Blessing Miles Tendi:

On the campaign trail, Tsvangirai drew huge crowds. His party's slick and positive advertising campaign, with its emphasis on political change, economic recovery, and promises of compensation and truth-telling about past state atrocities, held a wide appeal. It stood in stark contrast to ZANU(PF)'s name-calling and threats and the ubiquitous pictures of a fist-waving Mugabe. ZANU(PF) promised – as it had for years – that 'Zimbabwe will never be a colony again.' ZANU(PF) would 'punish and forever silence puppet sanctions-mongers.'³⁹

The elections were testimony to the political polarization of the Zimbabwe

³⁸ The most devastating policy failure, and one which had spectacularly perverse consequences, was the ill-advised and poorly executed Operation Reduce Prices of mid-2007. It can be contended that this single policy thrust drastically eroded ZANU(PF)'s support base and bridged the rural-urban political polarization.

³⁹ Alexander and Tendi, 'A Tale of Two Elections: Zimbabwe at the Polls in 2009' *Concerned Africa Scholars, Bulletin* No. 80, Winter 2008, p. 5.

population. In the House of Assembly election ZANU(PF) got 46 per cent of the vote to the combined MDC's 51 per cent, a difference of only five percentage points. In the Senate elections, ZANU(PF) again received 46 per cent of the vote and the MDC factions 50 per cent. The presidential election results reflected the same trend. It was thus evident that Zimbabwe is a politically divided society.

Perhaps the last lesson was that both political patronage and propaganda have their limits. As noted above, the ZANU(PF) government – with the aid of the Reserve Bank – dispensed patronage on a massive scale. The propaganda of the state-controlled electronic and print media seemed to have lost its potency, having reached saturation point. Certainly the nationalist discourse and liberation war narratives were losing their vibrancy. The law of diminishing efficacy seems to be at work in respect of both patronage politics (and attendant economics) and political propaganda.

It is not clear how far the above lessons were understood by ZANU(PF) and whether or not there was any political learning. If there was, it appears that ZANU(PF)'s interpretation of the results was that they were a result of one missing ingredient in the party's electoral repertoire: violence.⁴⁰ It is this lesson – that violence pays – that was deployed in the run-up to the 27 June presidential election.

Conclusion

The 29 March 2008 harmonized elections were the closest to 'normal' that Zimbabwe has held in a decade. It was as if they were directed at discrediting Alexander and Tendi's characterization of Zimbabwe politics as 'profoundly shaped by violence.'⁴¹ They were elections with a choice. For the first time since 2000, Zimbabweans were accorded a real opportunity to speak to power and make their voice heard via the ballot box. 29 March was a moment of hope and jubilation. Regrettably, the moment of jubilation was soon turned into a Hobbesian state of nature as ZANU(PF) fought back to regain lost ground and did so with all the coercive resources it could muster. Chapter 5 addresses the Hobbesian state of nature that unfolded between 29 March and the 27 June second round elections, a run-off that proved to be an election without a choice.

⁴⁰ Alexander and Tendi assert that: 'It is not too much of an oversimplification to argue that violence has been an essential glue for ZANU(PF), necessary to both the maintenance of party discipline and electoral success ...' *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.