

## Regime Survival Strategies in Zimbabwe after Independence

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### Abstract

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At her birth in 1980 Zimbabwe saw herself trapped by forces of regime change which threatened the existence of the newly born state. These forces of regime change used both external and internal drives to achieve their goals in Zimbabwe. It was however the desire to keep the regime the revolutionary spirit afloat that led ZANU PF to adopt policies or politics of regime survival which then gave birth to political tensions between ZANU PF and its political rivals. Such policies were marred by reports of violence, instability and abandonment of the rule of law, which poised serious challenges to modern developments on democracy and human rights. It is however from such a stand point that this paper seeks to analyse regime survival strategies in Zimbabwe after independence in 1980.

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**Keywords:**Zanu Pf, Mdc, Zipra, Zanla, Gukurahundi, Regime

### Introduction

Regime survival is the, primary concern of rulers, it follows that state formation depends on the compatibility of regime interests on the one hand, and state formation on the other (Boone, 2003; Doner, Richie and Slater, 2005; Migdal, 1988). By definition a regime is the centre of political authority and its relations with the broader society. Regime change occurs argues Fishman (2001:149) when there is a change or an abandonment of rules, norms, principles and decision making procedures that govern the nature of the regime.

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With regards to Zimbabwe the regime change agenda is a scheme hatched by domestic opposition forces and foreign actors to remove Robert Mugabe and the ZANU PF government from power. Regime change in Zimbabwe is an old phenomenon which can be traced back to the pre-colonial era and the colonial period. In the 21st Zimbabwe saw herself under attack from the West predominately because of her step to embark on the controversial land reform programme which saw the Zimbabwean government confiscating farms owned by White farmers for resettlement purposes, it is also worth noting that the land reform programme has been viewed differently by various scholars: some believe that it was used for political reasons in order to garner support for ZANU PF which was now growing under.

In this post-colonial period, Zimbabwe is currently involved in a struggle for survival from a regime change agenda. For a political regime to survive it requires various instruments to either mobilise its support from the masses, intellectual property or military power to suppress discontentment from the general populace from within its borders and beyond. Regime interests are best served by strengthening state institutions, political regimes which for whatever reason fail to do this eventually give way to new political orders. It should be noted that a regime is more permanent than a government but less permanent than the state. Governments succeed one another and regimes come and go but the state endures.

### **Independence, Regime Survival and Security**

Zimbabwe became independent in 1980, and her domestic and foreign policies were strongly influenced by the history of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) as a liberation movement. The party was brought to the government by Mugabe's victory in the Zimbabwe's first election, and the government established in 1980 privileged values such as nationalism, non-alignment, anti-colonialism, anti-racism, socialism and, like other African states, sovereignty and equality among nations, emphasizing the principles of self-determination and independence. The 1980 victory over Ian Smith's colonial regime made way for Prime Minister Robert Mugabe's ZANU PF after elections in which ZANU PF won 57 seats, its closest rival PF-ZAPU got 20 seats while South Africa and Britain's preferred candidate Abel Muzorewa of the United African National Congress (UANC) got 3 seats despite a well funded vigorous campaign. The twenty seats reserved for whites were swept by the Conservative Alliance of Zimbabwe, formerly the Rhodesia Front.

It was at this stage that in 1980 ZANU PF assumed dominance over the political affairs of the country Zimbabwe.

According to Chigora and Guzura (2008:2) ZANU PF won the 1980 election on the back of popular support. It found its way to the general mass through appealing to the problems that were faced by the black majority such as general segregation, discriminative policies and disenfranchisement which appealed to both the urbanites and rural population. Popularity and appeal aside, ZANU PF also won the elections on the back of a campaign of violence and intimidation in the countryside.

In the 1980 elections ZANU PF obtained 63 percent of the vote which can be explained as having been a result of support from the predominantly Shona people who voted for ZANU PF largely because it had recruited and operated from Shona speaking areas. Martin and Johnson (1981:259) point out that with the Shona forming the majority of the population in Zimbabwe it should not have surprised many that Mugabe emerged as victor against Nkomo who got his 20 seats in Ndebele speaking regions where ZANU PF did not even bother to campaign.

However no sooner than later did the regime that had won a decisive victory against white imperialism come under threat from beyond its borders and from within its borders. Its also important to note that the new regime was insecure from the beginning, Mugabe adopted a Marxist –Leninist stance and the decision to form a socialist state ruffled the capitalist and right wing interests. Apartheid South Africa felt most threatened by a powerful socialist state at its door. Having failed to get its preferred candidate, Muzorewa to power, South Africa's principle objective became one of keeping Zimbabwe weak and in a defensive position thus making it unstable and vulnerable to regime change.

South Africa began by disrupting Zimbabwe's economy by blocking trade routes and before long military activities were underway. In August of 1981 a huge armoury at Inkomo Barracks, near Harare was blown up by a white army engineer working for South Africans and in the same month Renamo forces under South African control began attacks on the railway, road and pipeline linking Zimbabwe to Mozambique's port of Beira.

On 26 December a massive bomb blast tore apart ZANU PF headquarters the government blamed South Africa as well as the Rhodesia Front (Smith, 2001:374)

After the bombing of the ZANU PF headquarters in Harare, ZANU PF headliners and sympathisers strongly thought and believed that either unrepented former Rhodesians or South Africans could have done it because the ZANU PF headquarters was considered to be the most closely guarded point in the capital since no white man was permitted entrance. In July of 1982 the South Africans struck again destroying 13 aircraft at Thornhill Airbase in Gweru (Meredith, 2002:52) after these events Mugabe's attitude towards the whites changed. Mugabe broadened his attacks and referred to them as unrepentant and ungrateful spies and saboteurs.

During this period the perceived peace and tranquility under the banner of reconciliation and national unity was now at stake, it is argued that the suspicion which was simmering within the ZIPRA forces who were owed their allegiance to Nkomo and ZAPU were disgruntled by the election results prompting ZANLA to suspect that they might attempt insurrection. This suspicion and tension between ZIPRA and ZANLA which dates back to the liberation struggle then found a lucrative crevice to express itself with violent clashes occurring at various assembly points in Chitungwiza, Connemara and Entumbane which had to be quelled by old Rhodesian army units after 300 casualties (Meredith, 2002:62). Nkomo was then accused of wanting to come to power through the barrel of the gun and Mugabe was head to say "if those who have suffered defeat adopt and reject the verdict of the people then reconciliation between victor and vanquished is impossible" (Meredith, 2002:63). Such mistrust and suspicion between the two liberation movements in Zimbabwe sparked protests against ZAPU leadership and meanwhile the Prime Minister Robert Mugabe ousted from government on the 16 of February 1982 on allegations of caching arms with the intention of countering the gains of the liberation struggle ; two ZIPRA army leaders Dumiso Dabengwa and General Lookout Masuku were arrested and tried for treason and illegal possession of weapons and subsequently acquitted but were kept in custody by the but Lookout Masuku died in detention. The former ZIPRA combatants who thought and felt they had been treated unfairly responded to the arrest of their leaders by deserting the army and took to the bush, they also pointed unfair treatment by former ZANLA superiors in the armed forces as a reason for deserting the army.

The south western parts of the country became haunted by armed men who terrorized the innocent civilians and came to be known to as dissidents.

At first the government sent some police units to quench the disturbances in the South Western parts of the country but with no avail then it dispatch an integrated battalion from the Zimbabwe National Army which mainly comprised of the ZANLA combatants to deal with the dissidents. Finally in search of a lasting solution for regime, the government finally unleashed the North Korean trained fifth brigade to decisively deal with the disturbances. The troops dealt with the dissent in a heavy handed manner resulting in the deaths of an estimated 30 000 people in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces. (Moyo, 1992:26).It should be however noted that the provision to come up with 5th Brigade tore the government apart with those who were former ZIPRA arguing that the 5th Brigade was more of a ZANU PF party military instrument since it was formed and not integrated in the Zimbabwe National Army.

Following the 1985 elections it became quite clear to ZANU PF that a confrontational approach against ZAPU would not work in the best in interest for ZANU PF to remove PF ZAPU as an obstacle political dominance, since Joshua Nkomo's PF-ZAPU swept all 20 seats in Matabeleland as it had done in the 1980 elections. And thus the stalemate between the two liberation movements was then resolved through negotiation which gave birth to the Unity Accord in 1987 between ZANU PF and PF ZAPU, where Nkomo ascended as the vice-presidency with Mugabe as president to merge the two parties to form a single united ZANU PF thus ending the conflict.

The Unity Accord between ZANU PF and PFZAPU was received differently by various sections of the population; some thought that the Accord had brought in an end to political rivalry which had inhibited virtually all democratic expressions about national problems. But however to some, it appeared that the Unity Accord afforded the government the opportunity to curtail peoples' freedoms and expressions. However, the Unity Accord of 1987 revived the grand coalition established at independence. The Unity Accord aimed to do what the Gukurahundi had failed to do, that is, conquer the last frontier of resistance to ZANU-PF hegemony by delivering the Ndebele-speaking region to the Shona-dominated party.

With the unity accord ZANU PF's political hegemony was now undisputed and regime survival and security was assured, with dissidents and South African regime change schemes having been overthrown and PF-ZAPU swallowed.

### **Consolidation of State Power and Administrative Institutions**

Guided by Kwame Nkrumah's injunction to "seek ye first the political kingdom," the ZANU-PF government of Prime Minister Robert Mugabe instead gave priority to the consolidation of political power, especially by strengthening the coercive organs of the state. The first key task was to ensure party control over key institutions by appointing party loyalists from the nationalist struggle to top positions in Cabinet and the state security apparatus. The latter included Emerson Mnangagwa and Rex Nhongo (the late Solomon Mujuru) who took up leadership posts in the intelligence service and armed forces respectively. Because other senior leaders from the front lines of the liberation struggle – Leopold Takawira, Herbert Chitepo, Josiah Tongogara, and J.Z. Moyo – had died or been killed during the liberation struggle, the composition of the Cabinet tilted towards younger intellectuals like Dzingai Mutumbuka, who drew the Education portfolio, and Herbert Ushewokunze, appointed Minister of Health. And provincial barons like the late Dr Edison Zvogbo (from Masvingo) and Kumbirai Kangai (from Manicaland) were all brought on board, not only for their professional expertise but also for regional balance. Initially, Mugabe even sought to bring nationalist rivals into the fold: as well as appointing four Cabinet Ministers from the Patriotic Front-Zimbabwe African People's Union (PF-ZAPU), he offered Joshua Nkomo the ceremonial position of President of Zimbabwe, who turned it down in favour of a ministerial post as the minister of Home Affairs.

Thus the leadership of ZANU-PF at independence was a coalition of nationalists made up of the liberation struggle old-guard, young radicals, battle-hardened guerrilla commanders, and professionals who had returned from exile. Unlike Nkomo, who bestrode the pinnacle of his party in the typical dominant style of an African "big man," Mugabe at first occupied a less secure position. Historically, ZANU had always been split by roiling internal divisions between generations of political activists (some free and some in prison), among armed factions within the guerrilla armies, and between the fighting forces on the frontlines and the political leaders involved in international negotiations

On the military front, a Joint High Command was set up to merge three rival forces – ZANLA, ZIPRA, and elements of the Rhodesian Army – into a integrated Zimbabwe National Army. At this time the Zimbabwe Republic Police, was Africanized, but not politicized. From the outset, Mugabe drew defence affairs into the Office of the Prime Minister, adding intelligence and provincial administration to his portfolio by 1985. The promotion of ex-ZANLA commanders as heads of the security forces and the creation of an exclusively Shona Fifth Brigade ensured the loyalty of the army, both to the party and to the top leader personally. The coherence of the security forces was tested in the early 1980s by sporadic insurgent activities by ex-ZIPRA “dissidents,” which gave Mugabe an excuse to dismiss Nkomo and other PF-ZAPU ministers from the Cabinet in 1982 and unleash a violent pogrom against the rural population of Matabeleland, whom he accused of aiding and abetting South African interests.

Thus, the elite coalition between the two leading nationalist parties –ZANU (PF) and (PF) ZAPU – effectively unraveled within a couple of years of independence. Former allies were castigated as “enemies of the state,” fit only for destruction.

Given its roots as a national liberation movement, ZANU-PF also moved quickly to penetrate the state apparatus in the peasant farming areas, for example by appointing party loyalists as District Administrators and replacing the old system of native administration with representative District Councils. The party leadership worked hard to get its candidates elected to these local government bodies and to a hierarchy of provincial and district planning boards and ward and village development committees, successfully so in all areas but Matabeleland. Because District Councils were responsible for the delivery of an expanded range of social services after independence, ZANU-PF used this presence in the locality to claim political legitimacy for itself. At the same time, the party made the most of the patronage opportunities presented by a District Development Fund disbursed to councils by the powerful Ministry of Local Government, Urban and Rural Development. Reflecting the dualistic nature of the inherited state, however, the white-controlled Rural Councils governed the commercial agricultural areas. Only commercial farmers were eligible to vote for these bodies and they used this power to protect their favourable tax base and to resist amalgamation with neighbouring District Councils, which were black controlled.

Thus ZANU-PF was much less successful in capturing institutions controlled by white agricultural elites. And, because black farm workers – many of whose families hailed from Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique – were ineligible to vote in Rural Council elections before 1998, the party also failed to build alliances with this constituency.

To assert political control over the strong settler state at the centre, ZANU-PF elite moved quickly to Africanize the civil service. On one hand, the Cabinet constituted a thin veneer atop a largely untransformed state apparatus still manned by unsympathetic white personnel who could not be relied upon to implement reform policies. At the outset, a politically neutral and professional Public Service Commission protected the principle of merit recruitment. On the other hand, Africanization was facilitated by a doubling of the size of the civil service, the promotion of blacks long held back from advancement, and an influx of skilled returnees from the overseas diaspora. These institutional developments strengthened the state bureaucracy in relation to the regime and the ruling party; and helped to maintain commitments to legal and technocratic standards in public management. As a signal of reassurance to the West, Prime Minister Mugabe appointed Bernard Chidzero, a former senior United Nations official noted for his orthodox approach to economic policy, as Minister for Economic Planning and Development. By contrast, EnosNkala, a hard-liner and party loyalist, was soon moved out of his position as the first Minister of Finance. Over the course of the next few years, Benard Chidzero gradually expanded his influence by taking over the finance portfolio, moving economic decisions from party to Cabinet, and emerging as the chief architect of the country's economic strategy.

## **Gukurahundi**

In post colonial Zimbabwe soon after independence in 1980 the ZANU PF regime which had won the majority in the 1980 general elections against the Ian Smith's colonial regime and made way for Robert Mugabe to become the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, in the elections ZANU PF won 57 seats, its closest rival PF-ZAPU got 20 seats while South Africa and Britain's preferred candidate Muzorewa of the United African National Congress (UANC) got 3 seats despite a well funded vigorous campaign.



The twenty seats reserved for whites were swept by the Conservative Alliance of Zimbabwe, formerly the Rhodesia Front. In 1980, ZANU PF assumed dominance over the political affairs of the country.

It was however under this pretext that ZANU PF saw PF ZAPU as a potential threat to its political dominance and thus started accusing PF ZAPU and Nkomo of wanting to derail the gains of the hard won independence. Nkomo was accused of holding back ZIPRA forces during the war of liberation to fight in a final struggle to overthrow a ZANU PF government if it came to power. They further argued and accused Joshua Nkomo that him having failed to come to power through the ballot was now trying to compensate through the bullet. Mugabe commented "if those who have suffered defeat adopt and reject the verdict of the people then reconciliation between the victor and vanquished is impossible" (Meredith, 2002:63).

On 17 February 1982 Joshua Nkomo and Josiah Chinamano who were PF-ZAPU leaders were expelled from government on allegations of caching arms with the intention of counter revolution. PF-ZAPU was now recognized as an enemy of the government. The party's farms and businesses were seized by the state; two ZIPRA army leaders Dumiso Dabengwa and General Lookout Masuku were arrested and tried for treason and illegal possession of weapons and subsequently acquitted but the state kept them in prison where Masuku died.

Former ZIPRA combatants responded to the arrest of their leaders by deserting from the army and took to the bush. They also cited persecution by former ZANLA superiors in the armed forces as a reason for deserting. The south western parts of the country came to be roamed by armed men who terrorized the population and came to be referred to as dissidents.

The integrated Zimbabwe National Army with a 60% ZANLA majority had to deal with dissent in the south-western parts of the country where bandits formerly with ZIPRA and supported by apartheid South Africa terrorized the population and sabotaged government development projects. In search of regime security the government responded by unleashing the North Korean trained fifth brigade to quell the disturbances. The troops dealt with the dissent in a heavy handed manner resulting in the deaths of an estimated 30 000 people in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces. (Moyo 1992:26).

## **Moves to One-Party Regime**

When the Lancaster House agreement expired in April 1990, the ruling coalition in Zimbabwe was freed from a restrictive political constraint: the last legal obstacle was removed to the creation of a de jure one-party state in Zimbabwe. Constitutional Amendment No 7 of 1987 abolished the position of prime minister creating an executive president. The President now wielded immense power which practically could allow him to run the country with little interference from the judiciary or parliament thus virtually making Zimbabwe a de facto one-party state.

Basically the whole idea to come up with a one party state was the needed by the ZANU PF regime to make sure that there would be no political rivalry from other political parties. To ZANU PF, creating a one party state was important because in its opinion multi-power politics led to contestation and divisions which are undevelopmental.

Leaders had already ensured the passage of a resolution favouring the one-party idea at ZANU-PF's National Congress of December 1989 and incorporated a clause to this effect in the Unity Accord. They made the same well-worn arguments as their predecessors in other African countries: that single-party rule was consistent with African traditions, suitable for a "unified" and "classless" African society, a necessary alternative to imported multi-party models, internally democratic, and a prerequisite for coherent development planning. Mugabe was especially effusive on the theme that Britain had no right to teach democracy to Zimbabweans.

Mounting internal and societal opposition ensured that the position articulated by former President Canaan Banana carried the day, since ZANU-PF had already attained a de facto one-party state via popular acclaim at the ballot box, there was no need to legally entrench the arrangement in the constitution. In any event, such a move would have been anachronistic since, at the time, other countries – notably neighbouring Zambia, Kenya, and Mozambique – were in the process of abandoning one-party rule and opening up to multiparty competition.

Regardless of the formal rules of the political game, the ruling elite in Zimbabwe had long demonstrated an inability to tolerate the expression of political dissent. In 1990, ZANU-PF marshaled all its efforts, legal and otherwise, to frustrate an emerging opposition movement. Edgar Tekere, a firebrand populist who was once ZANU-PF's Secretary-General and a cabinet minister had been dismissed from the party in 1988 for blowing the whistle on what he called "vampire class" of corrupt leaders. Mugabe's grand plan of establishing a one party state was torpedoed by Edgar Tekere, a senior ZANU PF member. He was opposed to the idea of a one –party state "I fear we are heading towards the creation of a dictatorship....democracy in Zimbabwe is in the intensive care..." he said. In 1989 Tekere formed the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) on a platform that promised employment, housing and market reforms, as well as opposition to a one-party state.

In a move guaranteed to infuriate the incumbent leadership, Zimbabwe Unity Movement formed an electoral coalition with the white-led Conservative Alliance of Zimbabwe. Although Edgar Tekere made national appeals and ran strongly in Harare and Bulawayo in the 1990 elections, he enjoyed his largest popular base in Manicaland, his home province. ZANU-PF had reason to fear a political challenge from a region where people were still asking awkward questions about the mysterious death of a favourite son Herbert Chitepo in 1975 – was he a victim of intra-party fratricide? – and where pockets of supporters of Abel Muzorewa (UANC) and Ndabaningi Sithole (ZANU-Ndonga) who continued to resist ruling party hegemony.

## **Conclusion**

From the events highlighted above it is quite clear that the regime in Zimbabwe was at the mercy of regime change from foreign forces which used domestic agents to achieve their goal in the country since its birth in 1980. And the desire to keep the regime afloat led ZANU PF to adopt policies or politics of regime survival which then gave birth to the political tension between ZANU PF and its political rivals. This then led to economic and political meltdown in Zimbabwe. As the tensions grew the internal and external political tension also grew finally leading Zimbabwe being slapped by sanctions by the West and /or West controlled institutions.

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