

Opposition Politics in Independent Zimbabwe

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Abstract: Zimbabwe has implemented a multi-party system on a universal franchise for more than two decades. This era has witnessed consolidation of power into the hands of the ruling ZANU party and its leader Robert Mugabe, and a gradual evolution of political crises. All general elections have shown support for the opposition among the voters. However, the opposition has changed a lot. Between 1980 and 1987 there was a strong regional party, ZAPU, which transformed from a partner of the ruling party to repressed dissident. The second period after the unity between ZANU and ZAPU witnessed mobilisation in defence of multipartyism and against corruption, and the birth of a populist party ZUM. ZUM's disintegration was followed by massive electoral apathy in 1995. The third period started with civic organization for constitutional reform in 1997 and led to the emergence of the MDC, a wide coalition of interest groups united by their aim to seize ZANU from power. State responses to opposition politics help to clarify its unstable nature.

Introduction

Consolidation of the authoritarian power of Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in independent Zimbabwe has not proceeded through the withering away of dissent. All general elections have witnessed support for other parties. But the parties and their support base have changed radically. On the one hand this reflects the government's different strategies to silence its critics. On the other hand it tells about changes in Zimbabwean society itself.

During the 1980s, the focus of the government was on the establishment of a one-party state. Although the idea was abandoned in 1990 and the multiparty system was retained, it was not until the general elections of 2000 and presidential elections of 2002 that there emerged an opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), strong enough to challenge the position of the ruling party. Its base was largely the new generation of Zimbabweans whose opinion stemmed more from the experience of twenty years of ZANU rule than from the liberation war. Discontent with the policies of the ruling party was preceded by gradual evolution of economic crises. It was also expressed in mass mobilisation for a constitutional reform that brought various professional, civic and interest groups together.

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The aim of this paper is to examine opposition politics and the space available for it in independent Zimbabwe. For this end it is useful to distinguish between three periods. The first period, lasting from independence in 1980 to 1987, was characterised by the existence of a strong regional party, Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), whose position changed from that of a partner of ZANU to repressed dissident. The second period followed the merging of ZAPU into ZANU. Although *de facto* one-party system was created, this period also witnessed civil society mobilisation in defence of the multiparty system. A new populist opposition party, Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) emerged, but then disintegrated rapidly. Disillusionment and massive electoral apathy followed in 1995. The third and latest period started with civil society organization for constitutional reform in 1997 and led to the birth of the MDC. After an overview of the continuities and discontinuities of party politics during these periods, the prospects of opposition politics in Zimbabwe will be discussed.

1980-1987: REGIONAL DISSENT

Parties at Independence

ZANU and ZAPU had their origins in the liberation struggle against white minority rule in Rhodesia. The struggle was very much centred on the question of universal franchise and became radicalised through difficult confrontations with the Rhodesian restrictions on freedom of association and exclusionary constitutional policy. ZAPU was established under Nkomo's leadership in 1961 after its predecessor, the National Democratic Party, had been banned. After ZAPU was banned by the Rhodesian government in 1962, the movement split. A group of ZAPU executives established ZANU in 1963 as a protest against Nkomo's decision to set up a government in exile. The leader of ZANU was Ndabaningi Sithole and its secretary-general was Robert Mugabe.¹ As argued by Andre Astrow the purpose of these leaders was only to replace Nkomo. Thus there were no real political differences between the two organisations.²

In 1964 also ZANU was banned. The next year Rhodesia announced a Unilateral Declaration of Independence, which led to guerrilla war. In 1970, after denouncing violence in order to be released from detention, Sithole lost his position in ZANU to Mugabe and was left with his own faction of the movement. A year later a new moderate nationalist organisation, the United African National Council (UANC), was formed.

ZAPU and ZANU continued their armed struggle against the Rhodesian government. Throughout the struggle there were attempts to bring the two liberation parties together. In early 1978, ZANU detained tens of "dissidents" in its camps in Mozambique allegedly because of plotting to overthrow Mugabe. The dissidents had promoted a unity with ZAPU, which would have meant accepting Nkomo, the more senior nationalist figure, as the leader of the party.³ At the end of the liberation war ZANU and ZAPU were only loosely united under a coalition named the Patriotic Front (PF).

In 1978 the government tried to undercut the PF and started negotiations with the UANC's Bishop Abel Muzorewa and Sithole. This "internal settlement" introduced a new constitution for "Zimbabwe-Rhodesia". A complicated system of commissions ensured white control over important appointments in the administration, the judiciary, police and army. Thus Muzorewa,

who became the first African Prime Minister of the country, had only limited executive powers.
4

The war ended in 1979, but not as a military victory of the liberation armies. Instead a peace agreement was negotiated in London. It included the British proposal for a new constitution, which safeguarded settler privilege but also enfranchised the majority of the population in a meaningful way. The lower house of parliament had 100 seats, 20 of which were reserved for the whites for the first seven years. The constitution also stipulated that during the first ten years, amendments concerning the citizens' rights required a unanimous vote in parliament. It provided a multiparty system and the "willing-buyer and willing-seller" principle to protect the enormous land property of the settlers. This contradicted the socialist rhetoric of the PF. The PF had also advocated an executive presidency, but the British proposal of a ceremonial office was accepted. The PF probably expected that they could deal with unsuitable aspects of the constitution afterwards - as eventually happened.⁵

The peace agreement stipulated that the first government be appointed after general elections. Mugabe of ZANU, Nkomo of ZAPU and Muzorewa of the ruling UANC were all probably quite certain that they could win the elections. Sithole and his ZANU faction hoped to get enough support to be influential in a coalition, if none of the bigger parties gained an overall majority. The same can be said about James Chikerema's Zimbabwe Democratic Party (ZDP).⁶ Former Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith, contesting the white seats with his Rhodesian Front, perhaps expected that the common roll elections would bring an anti-Mugabe coalition to power. Instead of backing UANC, he urged black workers to vote for Nkomo's PF.

For Nkomo, the fact that ZANU decided to contest the elections without ZAPU was a bitter disappointment. Two nationalist parties meant that there were also two nationalist leaders contesting their popularity in the elections. To emphasise the importance of unity, ZAPU went to the polls as the PF. Before the elections ZANU released its detainees. Most of them remained ZANU members. But the leading figures joined Sithole's party, the PF, and the UANC.⁷

The parties had been born of splits among the nationalist leadership. Ethnic or regional differences, however defined, do not explain these splits, but they became important in the mobilisation of supporters. Leaders who were able to rely on a regionally defined constituency had the best chances of survival. However, instead of adopting an overtly ethnic character, the parties also recruited representatives of other groups into their high ranks - and accused other parties of tribalism. Ideologically, the UANC was regarded as the most conservative and ZANU the most radical party. But their manifestos all agreed upon the need for free education, as well as improvements in health service and housing. Even differences on the role of private capital were more of degree than of principle: all the parties called for a mixed economy.

Much of the UANC election material attacked Mugabe and Nkomo. Muzorewa warned the electorate of the dangers posed to Zimbabwe's traditional values by Marxism and communism. His major disadvantage was that he had failed to end the war and gain international recognition for Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. Besides, the Rhodesian Security Forces seemed to support the UANC, thus people identified it with white rule. This was not helped by UANC's support for the presence of South African troops in the country and a promise to expand of economic ties between Zimbabwe and apartheid South Africa.⁸

With his image as ‘Father Zimbabwe,’ Nkomo was presented by ZAPU as able to unite all races and tribes. His long experience as a trade union and nationalist leader was emphasised as well as his role in initiating the armed struggle.⁹ The PF promised to end the war and to bring reconciliation, prosperity and democracy to the people with no social, economic, religious, racial or tribal discrimination.¹⁰ Its stronghold was Matabeleland, although some of the senior party officials stood in Mashonaland constituencies. Nkomo contested in the Midlands, where the population was more mixed.

ZANU’s manifesto referred to the party as “revolutionary.” Yet it noted the historical and social realities of Zimbabwe, promising that private enterprise could continue.¹¹ Otherwise the party centred its campaign on the liberation struggle. Mugabe warned that if his party were excluded from the government, there would be no peace in Zimbabwe.¹² During the war ZANU and ZAPU had gained control over most of the country. During the elections, their respective forces, Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and Zimbabwe African People’s Liberation Army (ZIPRA), were openly campaigning for their parties.¹³ Intimidation was most frequent in areas where both liberation parties had a presence, such as Victoria Province (Masvingo), parts of the Midlands, and parts of Manicaland.

In an election following a war, voters were probably particularly willing to support the winners. Yet ZANU’s overwhelming success surprised many. Its success reflected the party support base in Shona regions, the most populous in the country. Ethnicity proved to be even more important for voters’ mobilization than liberation army domination. The dividing line between ZANU and PF support followed almost exactly the division between the Shona and the Ndebele. In Matabeleland South, ZANLA had been successful during the last years of the war, but won no seats there (see table 1, Appendix I). The simple presence of military units after the war was not as important as ethnic loyalties in determining the voters’ choice.

ZAPU: From a Government to Oppressed Dissident

Mugabe formed the first independent government and invited ZAPU to join, but then allocated ZAPU only five of the total 36 cabinet seats. The most important was Nkomo’s appointment as minister of home affairs. But the following year he was transferred to minister without portfolio and ZANU’s Emmerson Mnangagwa became chairman of the Joint Command in charge of integrating the armed forces. Although Nkomo was finally allowed to oversee the integration, ZAPU’s position was weakened.¹⁴ The most remarkable reshuffle took place when arms were found on farms owned by Nkomo in February 1982. He was removed from the cabinet along with three other ZAPU ministers. Two days later the only remaining ZAPU minister resigned. In April, however, Mugabe appointed three ZAPU members to the cabinet.

Two ex-ZIPRA commanders, Dumiso Dabengwa and Lookout Masuku, were detained for conspiring to overthrow the government. This was followed by increased dissident activity in Matabeleland and Mugabe’s decision to send the notorious Fifth Brigade composed of ex-ZANLA personnel to the area. The Fifth Brigade committed serious atrocities against the civilian population.¹⁵ South African involvement in the conflict was significant – not least because the government could then regard ZAPU as an ally of South Africa that attempted to destabilise majority-ruled Zimbabwe. Nkomo left for Britain and soon the remaining ZAPU ministers were sacked. As argued by Christine Sylvester, “to] the government Nkomo was

simply a bad loser in the 1980 elections and was now stocking Shona-Ndebele animosities in order to get revenge.”¹⁶ The message sent to the Ndebele was that they should support ZANU if they wanted to be represented in the government.

However, Nkomo returned in August 1984. In the following elections in 1985, ZAPU nominated candidates to all constituencies to contest with ZANU.¹⁷ While Mugabe stated that his goal was to bring all Zimbabweans under ZANU, other parties advocated continuing the multiparty system. Mistrust towards the government characterised their campaign. In addition to Nkomo, who had spent a year out of the country, other leaders also felt they had been victimised by the government. Sithole had gone to the United States in 1983 and remained in self-imposed exile since the government alleged that he solicited arms abroad to overthrow the government. Muzorewa, then one of the UANC’s MPs in parliament, had spent nearly a year in detention, and was released only shortly before the elections.

ZAPU paid specific attention to security and human rights issues, referring indirectly to the conflict in Matabeleland. It advocated the abolishment of all security organs except the national army and the police. But it did not accuse the government of neglecting development programmes in Matabeleland, even though this was the popular perception.¹⁸ Perhaps the issue was too sensitive to be discussed and actually an asset to the ruling party. Issues of political economy did not raise very much attention. According to Sylvester, this showed that a one-party state would make no difference to the “pseudo-pluralism” of the party competition.¹⁹ ZAPU also suggested a political coalition with the opposition parties, but this did not lead any further than some UANC and ZAPU joint rallies.

ZANU youth and women conducted an aggressive home-to-home campaign asking for party cards. Just before the elections, the party condemned the violence and took its youth wing under control. However, violence erupted again after the election results were announced.²⁰ Although the level of intimidation cannot be measured in all its ramifications, the fact that there were several killings suggests that intimidation during these elections was no less important than during the 1980 elections.

Not surprisingly ZANU won the elections again. ZAPU’s support dropped, but people in Matabeleland did not abandon it in spite of state repression there. In fact, these elections polarised the political map of the country even further. Delimitation of constituencies was conducted for the first time before these elections and they were held on a majority system (in contrast to the 1980 provincial-level proportional system).²¹ This system was beneficial for ZANU(Sithole) which now got a seat in Sithole’s home area of Chipinge (Manicaland). Most of the constituencies, especially in the rural areas, were *de facto* one-party constituencies whether for ZANU, ZAPU or Sithole’s party. Only in cities was there pluralism in terms of more equal voter support between the winning and losing candidates.²²

One-party state in the making: Constitutional amendment and Unity Accord

After the 1985 elections Mugabe allotted no cabinet seats to ZAPU. The only option available for ZAPU leaders, if they wanted to become ministers, was to join the ruling party. The negotiations that later led to the Unity Accord between ZANU and ZAPU started shortly thereafter. They were facilitated by a release of ZAPU prisoners, including Dabengwa. But in mid-1987 the government banned all ZAPU meetings, raided ZAPU offices in Bulawayo and detained some ZAPU officials. In September ZAPU was banned altogether and the six district

councils it dominated by it were dissolved.²³ Meanwhile, the white seats in parliament were abolished as the provisions of the constitution on unanimous voting expired. The 20 vacant seats were filled by ZANU, which had a majority in parliament acting as an electoral college. Subsequently, ZANU occupied 85 seats out of 100. Parliament soon passed an amendment to the constitution creating an executive presidency. After that the Unity Accord between ZANU and ZAPU was concluded and the ruling party's majority rose to 99 out of 100 MPs. This was the parliament, which appointed Mugabe as the first executive president of Zimbabwe on 30 December 1987.

In the unity negotiations, there had never been a need to discuss political programmes. Symbolic issues, the logo and the name of the party were difficult to agree upon. To the disappointment of ZAPU, the final name remained ZANU(PF), the party's membership cards carried a portrait of Mugabe, and the new slogan was "Forward with unity, forward with President Mugabe". The 'new party' celebrated its 25th anniversary on August 6, 1988, the day when ZANU had split from ZAPU. However ZAPU leaders became members of the politburo and the central committee of the party as well as government ministers.²⁴ A completely new ministry was established for political affairs in order to facilitate the merger of the two parties. In practice, the distinction between the party and the state became unclear. For instance, the government soon demanded that all civil servants should become party members.

1988-1996: DEFENCE OF MULTIPARTYISM

New Space for Criticism and a New Opposition Party

The political implications of the Unity Accord were contradictory. The powers of the executive were increased. After the Senate was abolished, thirty non-constituency seats were introduced to parliament, whose membership increased to 150. These included 12 presidential appointees, 8 governors, and 10 chiefs, all of whom were supporters of the ruling party. But within the ruling party, ex-ZAPU cadres doubted the ideas of Marxism-Leninism and a one-party state.²⁵ Outside the party, civil society had more space due to the fact that the war and security problems in Matabeleland were over.

A new kind of criticism against the government emerged. In 1988, former secretary general of ZANU and minister in the first independence government, Edgar Tekere, condemned the one-party state by making references to the events in the Soviet Union and to the changed views of Tanzania's Julius Nyerere. He was expelled from the party. Simultaneously, news of the first corruption scandal, the so-called "Willowgate" involving senior party members, appeared in the government-controlled newspapers. Six cabinet ministers had to resign from office. In 1989, Tekere formed a new party ZUM, to contest the seats vacated by the 'Willowgate ministers.'²⁶ Facing the mobilising potential of ZUM's anti-corruption rhetoric, ZANU tried to get Tekere back into its ranks without success. There was even speculation that Eddison Zvobgo and Dabengwa, potential dissidents with a strong regional support in Masvingo and Matabeleland respectively, could join Tekere. Although the party did not disintegrate, the campaign period that preceded the 1990 parliamentary elections and the first presidential elections was "viciously contested."²⁷

ZANU nominated candidates for the parliamentary elections after primary elections, which were the first ones the party had ever held. Although apparently a step towards more transparent decision-making within the party, the primaries involved many irregularities and anomalies. Challenging leading ZANU figures was not allowed. If the party leadership was not happy with the selection, it simply declared the vote null.²⁸ As a result, a dozen ruling party members decided to contest the elections as independent candidates. Among these were some ex-ZAPU politicians, although most of the official ZANU candidates in Matabeleland were ex-ZAPU. Some ex-ZAPU members contested as ZUM candidates.

ZANU ran aggressive television commercials saying that to vote for ZANU was to choose life but to vote for the opposition was equal to death. ZUM was presented as a divisive and reactionary force supported by “Rhodesians” and South Africa. ZANU Youth and Women’s Leagues again conducted infamous door-to-door campaigns to harass suspected ZUM supporters. Threats of another war were common. Sylvester quotes farm workers: “If we vote for ZUM there will be war.... Even though we’re poor and the Government is corrupt, it’s better to be oppressed than to have another war.”²⁹ The government also made it clear that voting for ZUM would result in the discontinuation of food relief.³⁰

Still, the issue of establishing a one-party state was not openly put forward in the campaign. This probably was to please the ex-ZAPU critics of the one-party state.³¹ Development achievements were not emphasised as they had been in the previous elections, apparently because the post-independence economic boom was over. The party was advocating a socialist society and controlled prices, even though this contradicted the new principles of structural adjustment. It responded to the debate on corruption by presenting a leadership code that prohibited leaders from accepting or offering bribes.

In contrast to the previous elections, ZANU also had to respond to substantial criticism coming from outside the political parties. According to Patrick Quantin, the very fact that there was a new opposition party encouraged many interest groups to present their claims openly. In a peculiar sense, ZUM’s existence provided an opportunity for many (among them the white-dominated Commercial Farmers’ Union and the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries) to express their loyalty to the government, which, although apparently strengthening the position of the ruling party, also meant a new kind pressure for accountability.³² In this sense, political economy was starting to play a significant role in party politics.

Important developments took place in labour unions. After independence, the government had wanted to support one umbrella body of trade unions, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), although at that time there were also other organisations with greater membership.³³ The ZCTU soon became the strongest organisation, partly due to expanding public sector employment. It was very close to ZANU and was expected to be loyal to the government.³⁴ Under the leadership of Morgan Tsvangirai, however, the ZCTU increased its autonomy at the end of the 1980’s. According to Tsvangirai, the turning point was his detention in 1989 after criticising the closure of the University of Zimbabwe and his eventual release after international pressure and a court order.³⁵ Although committed to socialism, the ZCTU supported the multiparty system.³⁶ Not surprisingly, Tsvangirai was warned by members of ZANU not to become “another Frederick Chiluba.”³⁷ In 1990, the ZCTU wanted to be as independent as possible from political parties.

ZUM suffered from last minute withdrawals and did not manage to register enough candidates to contest all constituencies. It contested 102 seats. The UANC contested 14 and Sithole's ZANU(Ndonga) 9 seats.³⁸ As many as 14 seats were unopposed and thus went to the ruling party without elections. In comparison with the earlier elections, the independents and the uncontested seats were new phenomena.³⁹

Much of ZUM's campaign was about Tekere's attacks against Mugabe. ZUM's election manifesto focused on the powers of the president, the deteriorating economy, and corruption. According to ZUM, the executive presidency was a threat to the independence of the judiciary, and even parliament had become accountable only to the president.⁴⁰

ZUM suffered from harassment, limited financial resources, and unequal access to the government-controlled media. Its attempts to hold public rallies were almost systematically rejected. Only in Manicaland, Tekere's home area, was ZUM able to conduct an overt campaign. Criticism against Zimbabwe's expensive involvement in the war in Mozambique was an important theme there.⁴¹ Gweru witnessed a vigorous ZUM campaign by Patrick Kombayi, the first black mayor and a businessman, who was also the most notable ex-ZANU political figure in the party after Tekere. ZANU Youths, joined by police and Central Intelligence Organization officers, intimidated Kombayi and his supporters. In the most serious incident, CIO officers shot and wounded Kombayi. Most of intimidation incidents victimised ZUM, but there was also intimidation of ZANU(Ndonga) supporters in Chipinge.

Given these circumstances, ZUM's 18 percent support in the parliamentary elections and Tekere's 17 percent support in the presidential elections were impressive (see tables 3 and 4, Appendix II). The majority first-past-the-post electoral system, apparent gerrymandering in the delimitation, and over-registration in safe ZANU areas proved unfair to ZUM. Since the first delimitation for the 1985 elections, the government had learned how to manipulate the electoral results through those means. Although ZUM's support was close to 50 percent in many urban constituencies, it was not able to win a single seat there. Its support in the two Manicaland constituencies where it won seats had a very regional basis.

Turnouts varied significantly. Matabeleland recorded very low participation and the number of spoilt ballot papers was exceptionally high, suggesting that former ZAPU supporters were not satisfied with the Unity Accord. One of the lowest turnouts was recorded in Lobengula, Nkomo's constituency. In Gweru, where ZUM's Kombayi was hospitalised after the shooting incident, the turnout was exceptionally low, reflecting a deep frustration. Some other urban constituencies, however, recorded the highest turnouts and narrowest margins for the ZANU winners. As much as the urban population voted for ZUM, they probably also voted against ZANU, or deliberately did not vote at all. When compared to the 1985 elections, urban apathy was a new and striking phenomenon. While the urban population did not support ZUM unambiguously, the party had been able to establish at least some structures to mobilise urban voters in a short time. But the lack of organisational infrastructure and access to media constrained its ability to penetrate the rural areas, except in Tekere's home region.⁴²

Jonathan Moyo, at that time a vocal critic of the government's repression of political liberties, gave the name "Voting for Democracy" to his book on the 1990 elections. According to him, the message of the 1990 elections was that Zimbabwean voters opposed the one-party state.⁴³ Tensions inside the government and between government and civil society had also

surfaced. Leaders with a strong regional following were probably more confident of their position in the party than ever before. In August, a dual vice-presidency was introduced and Nkomo was sworn in as vice-president to accompany vice-president Simon Muzenda from Masvingo. From the point of view of civil society, the Unity Accord and ZUM opened up some space for political pluralism and criticism. In this sense, the Zimbabwe joined the post Cold War 'wave of democratisation'.

Weakening of the Opposition and Factionalism Inside ZANU

The ZANU politburo abandoned the idea of one-party state in 1990. Only three years later, President Mugabe argued that opposition parties were "a stabilising factor" in political systems in Africa.⁴⁴ The deteriorating economy eroded the popularity of the ruling party in Zimbabwe, but instead of strengthening the opposition parties, it was civil society that provided channels for criticism. These included advocacy groups (e.g. the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, CCJP), interest groups, the business community, and the ZCTU. The unions, even those of the civil servants, became confident enough to organise strikes. But they saw the opposition parties as merely opportunists trying to get support of the labour movement without any deeper interest in workers' problems. Tsvangirai's opinion in 1995 was that most workers did not even bother to vote.⁴⁵

Indeed, the opposition was so weak by 1995 that parliamentary seats were not contested in 55 constituencies. Given that the 30 non-constituency MPs were secured ZANU seats, this meant that the ruling party was certain to get 85 out of 150 seats even before the polling started. ZUM had disintegrated soon after the 1990 elections largely due to Tekere's party leadership style. His decision to suspend some members after they had held elections for ZUM officials led to the formation of the Democratic Party (DP). Later Tekere merged ZUM with UANC and formed the United Parties (UP). This unity, however, survived only ten months.

ZANU(Ndonga) was also suffering from internal disputes after Sithole returned from the United States in 1992. The government accused him of having supported South Africa's attempt to destabilise Zimbabwe. He irritated the government further by praising RENAMO and UNITA for fighting for multiparty democracy. In 1993, the government decided to use the compulsory purchase powers under the new Land Acquisition Act to seize Sithole's farm near Harare and 4,000 families were brutally evicted.⁴⁶

In 1993, the Forum Party of Zimbabwe was created. Its leader was Enoch Dumbutshena, the first African Chief Justice of Zimbabwe. The party was labelled 'white and liberal', although it attracted also African middle class supporters, especially in Harare. But it failed to penetrate the rural areas and did not contest rural seats. In its election manifesto, the party demanded a ceremonial president and it was one of the first organisations calling for the convening of an all-party constitutional conference. Forum and ZANU(Ndonga) were the best organised opposition parties.⁴⁷ ZUM and UP (representing the old UANC) were the most vocal in the 1995 election boycott. They demanded a possibility to challenge the ruling party on a more equal basis and castigated ZANU(Ndonga) and the Forum for betraying them. After a few withdrawals in the beginning of April, Forum contested only 28 constituencies – still hoping to be able to form a formidable opposition with other parties. Kombayi was contesting this time as a Forum candidate, as was another veteran politician, James Chikerema.

Inside the ruling party, the primaries for the 1995 elections were hotly contested. Allegations of irregularities, vote-buying, and rigging were rampant. Only 62 of the nominated candidates were sitting MPs. Faction cleavages within the party, especially in Manicaland and Masvingo, became very open and reflected an intense struggle. As a consequence, the most significant (although not united) 'opposition' electoral group was that of 29 independents. The independents got significant support in Masvingo (see table 5, Appendix III), where the party was divided between supporters of Zvobgo and Muzenda.

The most noteworthy independent candidate, however, was Margaret Dongo, an ex-combatant and outspoken MP from Harare. Violent confrontations erupted in the Sunningdale suburb between her supporters and ZANU Youths supporting the official party candidate. According to the official election results, Dongo lost the elections. After irregularities had been found, the court ordered a re-election, which Dongo won. She was then expelled from ZANU and formed a new party, the Zimbabwe Union of Democrats.

The second presidential elections were held in 1996. The requirement that the candidate be at least forty years old prevented Dongo from contesting. As the most notable opposition figure in the country, she was only able to urge people to boycott the whole exercise. Sithole, whose party in 1995 had won two seats in Chipinge, was detained in the autumn 1995 and accused of an assassination attempt against Mugabe. However, he still decided to contest the elections. Another candidate challenging Mugabe again was Muzorewa. Thus both opponents were leaders of the past, and hardly able to mobilise even protest votes, which Tekere had done six years earlier. If the 1995 parliamentary elections were a non-event, the 1996 presidential elections were even more so (see table 6, appendix III). It was embarrassing for the government that the official turnout in the whole country was below 32 percent. While many rural areas saw turnouts of close to 60 percent, apathy was rampant in the cities. In Dongo's Harare South constituency, the turnout was only 9 percent.

After the elections, the relationship between trade unions and the government became very tense. Harare was rocked by workers' demonstrations and property was damaged or looted by rioters. A doctors' and nurses' dispute over the implementation of an agreed salary increase led to long-lasting strikes that the government dealt with by mass dismissals and the banning of demonstrations.⁴⁸ Radicalisation of the labour movement extended even to the commercial farms. In 1997, farm workers went collectively on strike for the first time in the history of Zimbabwe.⁴⁹

1997-2002: CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS AND THE CHALLENGE OF MDC

Pressure to Reform the Constitution

In 1997, the pressure to check the powers of the president culminated in the formation of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) by a group of NGOs, including the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), the Legal Resources Foundation, ZimRights, and the ZCTU. Also, the war veterans mobilised outside the party structures. In autumn 1997, Mugabe personally promised compensation to the veterans. He was able to buy the loyalty of the veterans, but his relation to the trade union became even more antagonistic than before. The confrontation between the workers and the government

intensified during the ZCTU mass demonstrations of December 9, 1997. Tsvangirai was even beaten, probably by representatives of the War Veterans' Association. In January 1998, he became the first chair of the NCA.

Mugabe soon declared that his government regarded the ZCTU as an opposition political party. News stories about the government planning to de-register and ban the ZCTU began to appear.⁵⁰ The ZCTU started to organise provincial labour rallies, where the leadership of the organisation spoke to thousands of workers about its policy – a completely new thing in the history of the ZCTU. Strikingly, the rallies were organised in the same towns and very close to the timing of ZANU rallies. This led people to conclude that the two organisations had engaged in a contest about the size of their audiences to compare their popularity.⁵¹

The government did not want to co-operate with the NCA, but it could not ignore this new organization. Already in December 1997, the ZANU party conference called for constitutional reform.⁵² Finally, the government formed its own commission to draft a new constitution to be put to a public referendum. The NCA boycotted the government commission on the grounds that it was dependent on the president, who had the power to amend its proposal. Soon civic groups came to the conclusion that there was no other alternative than to contest elections for political offices in order to democratise the constitution. In September 1999, a new labour-based party, the MDC, was formed under the leadership of Tsvangirai.

When the government presented the proposed constitution for referendum in February 2000, the NCA and MDC stated to the public that more radical changes were needed to check the power of the president. To the surprise of the government, only 44 percent of the voters supported its proposal. For the first time, the government lost at the polling booths. The urban protest was hardly surprising, but rural reluctance to support the government reflected a very different pattern from past elections.

After this result, the MDC seemed to pose a real threat for the ruling party in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. Even the white minority, which until then had largely supported ZANU or had not participated in party politics at all, openly supported the MDC. Also significant was also the international attention to the government's intolerance of the MDC.⁵³ MDC was a party emergent in an era when the donor community wanted to be seen as committed to the issues of good governance, human rights and democracy.

Elections in 2000 and 2002

Shortly after the referendum, a violent campaign led by the War Veterans' Association against the MDC supporters white farmers among them, was launched. Most of the intimidation took place in rural Mashonaland provinces, traditionally strong ruling party areas which the party could not afford to lose. By the same token, the land question became the most important electoral issue for the ZANU.

MDC also promised to promote "people driven land reform." In its manifesto the party promised to stand for democracy, political pluralism, accountable governance, equitable development policies and economic growth.⁵⁴ However, it is likely that a large part of the political mobilisation behind the MDC was simply anti-ZANU rather than for any specific political programme presented by the MDC.

In the 2000 parliamentary elections, ZANU won 62 seats against the MDC's 57. ZANU(Ndonga) won its traditional seat in Chipinge (see table 7, appendix IV). ZANU's performance was best in Mashonaland. Participation in the elections was strong in the urban areas, while intimidation probably reduced participation in some rural areas. The most striking feature of the voting pattern was not overwhelming support for MDC in the cities, but the fact that ZANU got only two seats in Matabeleland provinces. Furthermore, the MDC won seven seats against ZANU's six in Manicaland. Matabeleland and Manicaland, which have occasionally been the strongholds of opposition parties, voted for the same opposition party for the first time. This must have been alarming to ZANU with its rhetoric of unity and the regional balancing of power among its leadership.

In contrast to the optimistic views of the international observers, violence continued and even intensified after elections.⁵⁵ Due to the extensive powers of the executive, the presidential elections in 2002 would mark the real battle over governmental power. Harassment organized by the War Veterans extended to the urban areas and industry. After a violent campaign period that again raised many concerns abroad, elections were arranged in March. A large number of voters in Harare were disenfranchised by the reduction of polling stations and Mugabe won the elections with safe margins (See table 8, appendix IV). Big cities and urban centres voted for Tsvangirai, but most rural constituencies voted overwhelmingly for Mugabe. However, in Matabeleland and Manicaland provinces the MDC again recorded strong support.

As had become a routine in Zimbabwe, the opposition attempted to challenge the result through the courts due to violence and irregularities in the voters' rolls. Also, ZCTU tried to protest the way the elections were arranged with a stay away campaign, but it failed to ensure workers' participation. Insecurity had made mass action increasingly difficult. As in early 1990s, the government again argued that civil servants should be loyal to the ruling party.

Since the election's aftermath, the MDC has been in difficult position. As a minority in the parliament, it has not been able to block new laws and regulations further constraining freedom of expression. On the other hand by maintaining their seats in the parliament, they have at least been able to raise some voice against government policy. Because MDC regards itself as the real winner of the 2000 and 2002 elections, any attempts of the leaders of the neighbouring countries or the Commonwealth to facilitate negotiations between the parties have been in vain.⁵⁶ For the MDC, participating in such negotiations would mean the same as recognising the victory of ZANU. Indeed, the history of ZANU has been about strategies to co-opt potential opposition rather than any attempts to share power.

Conclusions

Since 1980, the government has used almost all possible legal and illegal means to keep itself in power within the multiparty electoral system that was imposed upon it in the peace negotiations. Only one opposition party has survived: Sithole's small faction of the liberation movement has maintained one or two seats in Manicaland. Otherwise, opposition politics has shown few continuities in Zimbabwe. Four different parties have held the position of the second biggest party.

Regional differences in the support of the opposition over time are remarkable. ZAPU, perhaps more accurately a repressed junior party in the government than an opposition party,

was popular in Matabeleland in the first two elections. In 1990, a significant section of voters in Manicaland voted for ZUM, which had popularity in urban areas as well. In 1995, Masvingo proved to be the province of most intensive intra-ZANU cleavages, while Dongo was able to challenge the ruling party in Harare. In 2000 and 2002, the MDC received overwhelming support in the cities and Matabeleland, with very strong support in Manicaland. Throughout the independence period, the opposition has been almost negligible in rural Mashonaland. Yet even there, the elections in 2000 and 2002 showed support for the opposition. Rural one-partyism and urban pluralism have characterised the whole country in all elections, but it has also been a dynamic phenomenon, especially if voter apathy is regarded as opposition towards the ruling party.

Most important for the defence of multipartyism has been the evolving role of civil society. During the early 1990s, civil groups found the opening up of political space useful for bargaining with the government and ruling party. Towards the end of the decade, the deepening economic crisis mobilised these groups to criticise the government and attempt to transform the structures of power in the state.

A constitution providing checks and balances to the use of state power is the foundation on which a sustainable role for opposition politics can be built in Zimbabwe. In Africa, as elsewhere in the world, it is popular trust and support for constitutional order that can make democracies work, not discontent with the incumbents. In this sense, the challenge of resolving the crisis in Zimbabwe goes far beyond electoral competition between the parties, important as it is.

The MDC's focus beyond economic problems and ZANU mismanagement, on the legal and constitutional context of abuse of state power, is important. The organizational base of the MDC was not merely one of popular discontent with the executive, but an explicit agenda to democratise the state through a peaceful transition. Simultaneously, the MDC represents such a wide coalition of interests, including trade union, civic groups, white farmers and business community, that it is not easy to see its political profile after a possible transition.

Notes:

1. Bowman, Larry W. (1973) *Politics in Rhodesia: White Power in an African State*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
2. Astrow, Andre (1983) *Zimbabwe: A Revolution That Lost Its Way?* London: Zed Press.
3. Ibid
4. Hatchard, John (1993) *Individual Freedoms & State Security in the African Context: The Case of Zimbabwe*, Harare: Baobab Books.
5. Sylvester, Christine (1991) *Zimbabwe: The Terrain of Contradictory Development*, London: Dartmouth.
6. Chikerema had left the UANC and formed the Zimbabwe Democratic Party (ZDP) after Muzorewa had refused to appoint him to the cabinet of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia (Astrow 1983, 114). The National Front of Zimbabwe (NFZ) and the National Democratic Union (NDU) were minor parties contesting, nevertheless, in all provinces. The United National Federal Party (UNFP) fought only in five provinces and United People's

- Association of Matabeleland (UPAM), which was contesting also the white elections, had candidates only in Matabeleland.
7. Rich, Tony (1982) "Legacies of the Past? The Results of the 1980 Election in Midlands Province" *Africa*, 52(3): 42–55.
 8. Gregory, Martyn (1980) "From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe: An Analysis of the 1980 Elections and an Assessment of the Prospects," *Occasional Paper*. (May, 1980), The South African Institute of International Affairs.
 9. Ibid
 10. PF (1980) *The Patriotic Front in Government: Election Manifesto 1980*, Lusaka: Patriotic Front (ZAPU).
 11. Rich 1982
 12. Gregory 1980
 13. These were gathered to the special Assembly Points in accordance with the peace agreement. See Freedom House (1980) "Report of the Freedom House Mission to observe the Common Roll Election in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) February 1980," New York: Freedom House.
 14. Astrow, 1983
 15. CCJP (1997) *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: A Report of the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands 1980 to 1988*, Harare: CCJP, The Legal Resource Foundation.
 16. Sylvester, 1991, p. 76
 17. The other parties contesting the elections were the UANC, Sithole's ZANU, National Democratic Union (NDU) and the National Front of Zimbabwe (NFZ). See ZIANA (1985) *Election Handbook, A Guide to the General Election of July 1985*. Harare: ZIANA.
 18. Lemon, Anthony (1988) "The Zimbabwe General Election of 1985," *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 26(1): 3–21.
 19. Sylvester, Christine (1986) "Zimbabwe's 1985 Elections: A Search For National Mythology," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 24(2): 229–255.
 20. Ncube, Welshman (1991) "Constitutionalism, Democracy and Political Practice in Zimbabwe", in Mandaza, Ibbo & Sachikonye, Lloyd M. (eds.) *The One-Party State and Democracy*. Harare: SAPES Books.: 155–177.
 21. In 1980 the need to arrange the elections very quickly to end the war, had prevented the time-consuming voters' registration and delimitation exercise stipulated by the electoral law.
 22. Laakso, Liisa (2002a) "When elections are just a formality: Rural-urban dynamics in Zimbabwean dominant party elections" in Michael Cowen & L. Laakso (ed.) *Multiparty Elections in Africa*, James Currey, London, Palgrave, New York, 2001, 325 - 345.
 23. CCJP 1997
 24. Chiwewe, Willard A. (1989) "Unity Negotiations" in Banana," in Canaan S., (ed.) *Turmoil and Tenacity: Zimbabwe 1890–1990*. Harare: The College Press: 242–287.
 25. Sithole, Masipula (1997) "Zimbabwe's Eroding Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy*, 8(1): 127–141.

26. Moyo, Jonathan (1992) *Voting for Democracy: A Study of Electoral Politics in Zimbabwe*, Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications. pp. 32 & 35
27. Makumbe, John (1991) "Zimbabwe Elections 1990: An Overview", University of Zimbabwe, Department of Political and Administrative Studies, Election Studies Project, Occasional Paper Series, 1(3), p. 1
28. Quantin, Patrick (1992) "The 1990 General Elections in Zimbabwe: Step Towards a One-Party State?" in Baynham, Simon ed. (1992) *Zimbabwe in Transition*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell: 24–44.
29. Sylvester, C. (1990) "Unities and Disunities in Zimbabwe's 1990 elections," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 28(3): 375-400.
30. Sachikonye, Lloyd (1990) "The 1990 Zimbabwe Elections: A Post-Mortem," *Review of African Political Economy*, (48): 92 - 99.
31. Chan, Stephen with the assistance of Chanda L.J. Chingambo (1992) "Democracy in Southern Africa: The 1990 Elections in Zimbabwe and 1991 Elections in Zambia," *The Round Table* 322: 183–201.
32. Quantin 1992
33. Sachikonye, Lloyd (1995) "State and Social Movements in Zimbabwe" in Sachikonye (ed.) *Democracy, Civil Society and the State: Social Movements in Southern Africa*, Harare: SAPES Books: 129–161.
34. Already in 1982 Mugabe argued that "workers should stop strikes which were retarding development. You are now independent, so who are you striking for?" (*The Herald*, January 25, 1982).
35. Pillay, Devan (1991) "The ZCTU's 1990 Congress: exposing the capitalist reality beneath Zimbabwe's 'socialist' rhetoric," *SALB*, 15(5): 75–79.
36. Musarurwa, Albert (1991) "The Labour Movement and the One-Party State Debate" in Mandaza, Ibbo and Lloyd M. Sachikonye. (eds) *The One Party State and Democracy: The Zimbabwe Debate*, Harare: SAPES Trust: 143–154.
37. President Chiluba of Zambia was a trade union leader before he successfully challenged Kenneth Kaunda in 1991. See Deve T. & Goncalves, F. (1994) "Whither the Opposition in Zimbabwe," *Southern Africa Political & Economic Monthly*, 7(8): 9–11.
38. NDU contested three seats. There was also Zimbabwe Active People's Unity Party, which was established by some former members of ZAPU. It failed to propose any candidate. The party's abbreviation, ZAPU, was banned and the founder of the party was arrested (CCJP 1992, 220).
39. Quantin 1992
40. ZUM (1989) *The Manifesto (Towards a democratic Zimbabwe)*, Gweru: ZUM.
41. Masendeke, Anthony F.; Mafico, Muriel U. & Chitopo, Patson T. (1991) "Report on the 1990 General and Presidential Elections: Masvingo and Manicaland Provinces", University of Zimbabwe, Department of Political and Administrative Studies, Election Studies Project, Occasional Paper Series, 1(3).
42. Sachikonye 1990
43. Moyo 1992
44. *The Sunday Mail*, May 9, 1993

45. Laakso, Liisa (1996) "Relationship Between the State and Civil Society in the Zimbabwean Elections 1995", *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 36(3): 218–234.
46. Auret, Michael (1994) *Churu Farm – A Chronicle of Despair*, Harare: CCJP.
47. Other parties contesting the election were the Zimbabwe Federal Party (ZFP), Zimbabwe Aristocrats and Zimbabwe Congress Party (ZCP).
48. *Horizon*, December 1996
49. *The Herald*, January 1, 1998
50. *Zimbabwe Independent*, March 13–19, 1998
51. *The Financial Gazette*, April 2, 1998; April 9, 1998
52. There were very critical views inside the party. In a debate on the constitution in parliament, the ZANU Masvingo province chairman said that Mugabe "must go". The party suspended him for two years.
53. Laakso, Liisa (2002b) "The Politics of International Election Observation: The Case of Zimbabwe in 2000," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 40(3): 437-464.
54. MDC (2002) Manifesto <http://www.mdczimbabwe.com/aboutmdc.htm>.
55. Laakso 2002b
56. Tsvangirai, Morgan (2002) "President Morgan Tsvangirai addresses MDC parliamentarians", December 18, 2002, <<http://www.mdczimbabwe.com/currstmts.htm>>.

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GOZ=Government of Zimbabwe (2000) *Election Results*

<http://www.gta.gov.zw/Headlines/Election%20Results.htm>].

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