




INTRODUCTION - Zimbabwe's 2023 Elections: Linking Elections, Democracy and Inclusive Development

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Elections, the formal process of selecting a person for public office, make a fundamental contribution to the entrenchment of democratic governance and development because of the ways in which they give citizens an opportunity to have a say in their governance and development (Gibbins et. al., 2020). In cases where electoral processes are organised in a transparent, accountable, inclusive and competitive way, elections give every citizen an opportunity to select leaders of their choice and to hold them accountable for their performance in office.

Zimbabwe, alongside Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, South Sudan, Somaliland and Malagasy, is preparing to hold elections in 2023. Nigeria and Zimbabwe's elections have particularly gripped regional and global attention. These two nations have attracted attention, not simply because they are among important political and economic powerhouses in their respective regions. Nigeria is the biggest powerhouse in West Africa, while Zimbabwe is the third biggest economic, political and military powerhouse in Southern Africa after South Africa and Angola. The two countries have also attracted global attention mainly because their previous elections, particularly in the case of Zimbabwe's elections since 2000, they have been controversial (Muzondidya, 2022; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012; Onapajo & Balola, 2020).

Zimbabwe's 2023 elections are being held at a time when the world is beginning to ask more and more questions about the diminishing quality of elections and their significance in delivering change and creating opportunities for all citizens to participate in governance and development processes in an inclusive manner (Olukoshi, 2022; Fumunyoh, 2020; Luhrmann & Lindberg, 2019). The growing scepticism around elections across the world is emanating from the

fact that despite all the hype that surrounds and accompanies elections, the capacity of elected governments to respond to the aspirations of their citizens by way of improved delivery of high quality social and economic services has not been evident (Golooba-Mutebi, 2002). Most governments that have emerged from these elections have struggled to fulfil or respond to the needs of the ordinary citizens which include the need to address challenges of growing unemployment, poverty and inequality, inadequate access to land, markets, healthcare, education, incomes, financing and the continued marginalisation of vulnerable communities, such as the poor, women, youth, people with disability and children, in political and economic development spaces and processes.

The failure by elected governments to address socio-economic and governance challenges, coupled with the unending scandals of corruption and abuse of public offices by elected officials, have led to a decline in citizen trust in politicians and governments. Across the world, there has been a persistent decline in the number of citizens who participate in elections mainly because of the growing decline in citizen trust in elections and elected leaders. Evidence from two studies published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance in 2016 and 2019 revealed how voter turnout has been declining in Europe since the early 1980s (Beley, 2019) and across the globe since the beginning of 1990s (Solijonov, 2016). Against the backdrop of a continued decline in living standards across the West and the failure of most Western governments to adequately respond to increased demands for redistribution stemming from increasing inequality (Polacko, 2021), Europe has continued to experience low voter turnout in the 2020s with voter turnout for the

region averaging 65 percent (Nishizawa, 2022). The situation has been worse in the United States which has persistently recorded lower voter turnouts over the last few decades, with presidential elections consistently bringing out between 50 and 65 percent (Nishizawa, 2022).

Africa has not been spared by this global 'diminishing voters syndrome'. A recent study on voter turnout trends in Africa that was conducted using data from 317 presidential elections in 40 African countries over the period from 1960 to 2016 concluded that the economic downturn and regression in political accountability experienced in many African countries over the last couple of decades has resulted in declining voter turnout (Lynge & Coma 2022). The declining voter turnout, as aptly described by Yves Leterme "signals the deep problems democracies are facing today" and that "lower turnout suggests that fewer citizens consider elections the main instrument for legitimizing political parties' control over political decision-making" (Leterme, 2016). As Olukoshi has weighed in, "the consequence has been that even governments that claim legitimacy on the grounds of being popularly elected are actually propelled into office by a minority of citizens who bother to vote from among the minority who bother to register to vote" (Olukoshi, 2022).

Popular disaffection with the brutal ongoing energy and economic crises, establishment politics and economics has resulted in growing demands for political alternatives and the ousting of several incumbent leaders in Europe. Examples of leaders recently ousted because of popular discontentment include Boris Johnson who exited office in the United Kingdom in July 2022 and Mario Draghi who was replaced by the far right Giorgia Meloni as Prime Minister of

Italy in October 2022. From Portugal to Sweden, European countries are becoming harder to govern, and economic reforms more difficult to implement, as citizens continue to protest against their governments' failures to deal with a prolonged financial crisis (Taylor, 20 October 2015).

Growing public opposition to mass immigration, cultural liberalization, and the perceived surrender of national sovereignty to distant international bodies has resulted in the strengthening of populist parties and governments as more and more voters seem to be particularly attracted to the political rhetoric of the extreme right, which often blame minorities or foreigners for the current socio-economic crises (Galston, 8 March 2018). The arrival of the largest wave of refugees since the aftermath of World War Two in a context of sluggish recovery from the euro zone debt crisis and a new energy and food crisis sparked by the Russian-Ukrainian war, has accentuated the situation in Europe.

More and more people across the world, including those living in the global South, have been protesting against the widespread failure of elected leaders and governments to deliver on citizen expectations. For instance, financial instability, economic instability and growing inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean has sparked mass social protests plunging the region into political uncertainty and reflecting citizens' growing discomfort with the implementation of rightist neoliberal policies and public discomfort with the deficient role of governments, elites, and political groups to address citizens' social needs and promote redistribution (Penaherrera & Olalla, 2020). In Brazil, a raging economic crisis since 2014 that was exacerbated by the COVID 19 pandemic and resulted in soaring unemployment

and poverty, sparked mass anti-government protests which culminated in the defeat of the incumbent far right president, Jair Bolsonaro by the leftist former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in national elections held at the end of October 2022 (Ramani, 31 October 2022).

The African continent has not been left out of the anti-establishment wave that is sweeping across the world due to growing public discontent with politicians' failure to deliver on electoral promises. The patterns and outcomes of elections that have been held across the continent in the last few years, including South Africa's national and local government elections of May 2019 and 2021, respectively, Tunisia's elections of 2019, Zambia's elections of August 2021, Kenya's elections of March 2022 and Lesotho's elections of October 2022, all reflect the growing public frustration with elections and demands for improved service delivery and redressing social inequities (Bhoukars, 2019; EISA, 2019; Westhuizen, 2021; Shilaho 2022). The public turnout in these elections has generally been low, a possible indication of public disenchantment with elections and mainstream politics, while those citizens who have turned out to vote are opting for political outsiders rather than mainstream parties and their leaders who have proved unable to deliver improved economic and social prospects for the majority through their orthodox approaches to political and economic governance.

Furthermore, the plethora of disputes over electoral results held across the continent in the more recent past, including the elections held in Kenya and Angola in August 2022, the Gambian parliamentary elections held in April 2022, the Senegalese parliamentary elections of July 2022 and the Ugandan elections of 2021,

have all raised important questions about the politics of elections and their significance in building inclusive democratic societies that create opportunities for all citizens to effectively participate in governance and policy making. In recent years, elections have been marred by political violence and disputation of the results. According to evidence from an election violence database that was released by a team of conflict analysts in 2021, while the median annual incidents of election violence going back to 1975 has been 30 percent, 54 percent of national elections that took place in 2020 had some form of political violence (Besaw, 18 February 2021).

A pattern that has become increasingly familiar in Africa when countries go into elections is the outbreak of violence among supporters of the different political groupings before, during and after elections. There has also been a resurgence of coups and rise of armed groups, using Islamism to mobilise popular discontent against the failure by elected governments to deliver basic social and economic services to the masses. Mozambique, Mali, Chad and Guinea have all battled Islamist insurgents gaining popular support by each day in the past few years, while Burkina Faso has experienced two coups within a space of a year. Electoral contests have often created or exacerbated divisions within most countries, undermining social cohesion in Africa's fragile nations. Critics of African elections have further noted that these contests have failed to produce accountable leaders and governments because they "are almost never driven by considerations of what a particular political grouping stands for or what it offers the voters in terms of plans for country and society." (Golooba-Mutebi, 2002).

As Zimbabweans go for another crucial election in 2023, the main question being asked

by many is how this election will help to resolve the country's critical challenges of political and economic instability, deepening polarisation, growing impoverishment of citizens and increased marginalisation of various social groups from national development. Evidence from recent research reveals how more and more people are becoming disillusioned by the country's political, economic and social direction, with most citizens expressing that their needs are being neglected by the elected leaders and governments (Afrobarometer, 2021; International Republican Institute, 2021). Public disengagement from governance and development processes and diminished collective action by citizens has become part of citizens' response to their feelings of marginalisation and neglect of needs (International Republican Institute, 2021).

A growing number of Zimbabweans are losing confidence in elections as a mechanism for bringing leadership change at both national and local levels. This is partly because of the growing trust deficit in representative leadership that is strongly linked to increased corruption and irresponsible leadership among parliamentary and local government officials. The strong allegations of electoral fraud and growing list of disputed election results since 2000 (Brickhill, 2018) are also fuelling public disillusionment in elections. The disillusionment is fuelling voter apathy, and most citizens feel that it is pointless to vote because it won't change anything politically or socio-economically (Muzondidya & Mushonga, 2022).

Given the above, the main issue of concern is that the 2023 election may be another event to waste public resources as most citizens decide not to vote. Without greater focus on policy discourse, political parties and candidates might

also take the occasion to issue grand rhetoric statements and unrealistic electoral promises isolated from the current realities. The special issue on Zimbabwe tries to make the 2023 election much more meaningful by promoting greater debate about the link between elections and inclusive democracy and development. Political, social and economic inclusion in development, governance and decision making has become one of the key hallmarks of democratic governance over the last few decades. The special issue problematizes the issues of inclusivity in Zimbabwe's political and socio-economic governance processes. The issue specifically looks at the political, social, economic pillars of inclusion, and discusses both shortcomings and opportunities for improving inclusivity in Zimbabwe's governance and policy making processes. It also proposes what an inclusive society should look like in order to enhance the country's democracy and development.

Indeed, there is currently no consensus on what an inclusive society looks like or even agreement on the need to work towards one. The intellectual tradition has so far relegated itself to focusing on what has been and rarely postulates on what could be. The special issue seeks to combine the 'what has been' with a 'what could be' approach. What cannot be debated is that democracy and development cannot be sustainable if it excludes large groups of citizens on the basis of population profile issues such as location, class, age, sex, race and ethnicity. Inclusivity is also judged by the extent to which different categories of people contribute to democratic and development processes, as well as the extent of their equal access in benefiting from the fruits of democracy and development (Raharja, 2019, p. 6). Social inclusion is the guarantee of social and political participation for

all citizens, part of the living democratic culture and respectively the basis of a functioning democracy (Raharja, 2019, p. 6).

The wide range of articles in the special issue discuss the subject of inclusivity in the various spheres of Zimbabwe's political and economic governance. The specific areas analysed by the issue include the political cultures and practices, the local governance practices, the rural governance and land tenure systems, the financial services and the economic development funding models of the country. The general theme running through these articles is that Zimbabwe's governance and development policies, cultures and practices are largely exclusionary, and rarely and do not promote active citizen participation in governance and policy making processes. In cases where government and other key political players attempt to be inclusive in their governance and development processes or to engage citizens in decision-making, the initiatives rarely consider the diverse interests of the country's different population whose needs and interests are always mediated by differences of class, gender, age, geographic location, occupation, (dis)ability, race and ethnicity.

Eldred Masunungure and Zvoushe's analysis of the existing forms of governance and policy making politics in the country argues that Zimbabwe is characterised by the vertical modality of rule where policies are crafted unilaterally at the apex of the party-state with little or no input from affected stakeholders – including ordinary citizens – and then fed to citizens who are therefore treated as dispensable policy implementers or consumers. Their contention is that the exclusionary forms of politics and policymaking in Zimbabwe's governance culture

is a legacy of the country's development history: the inherited colonial governance system which was hierarchical and largely excluded blacks from participation in governance and policy making on the basis of race and the liberation war governance and decision-making practices which were based on military authoritarian control. Inheriting governance cultures from these legacies, the duo further argues, the postcolonial government of Zimbabwe has relied on centralised governance approaches where the central government and the ruling party unilaterally make governance decisions and formulate policy without consulting citizens and other key stakeholders, such as business and civil society. They propose the adoption of a 'distributed problem-solving model' approach to inclusivity which acknowledges and prioritises the unique needs and interests of different groups of the public in governance and policy making.

Analysing the institutional frameworks in Zimbabwe's local governance laws, policies, structures and processes, Delta Sivalo's paper argues that although Zimbabwe has constitutionalized citizen inclusion in local government decision making processes, citizens face multiple barriers that curtail their effective participation in local governance processes and outcomes. The discussion draws its theoretical insights from the rich body of recent literature on inclusion by development researchers and practitioners (Kontos, 2017; Ursin & Lotherington 2018; Virendrakumar et al., 2018) who have deployed the concepts of "political inclusion" and "relational citizenship", understood as the centrality of social group belonging in shaping individuals' relationship to citizenship rights and the larger structures of rule and belonging, to interrogate current approaches to public

participation in decision making. Using these nuanced theoretical insights, the paper argues that while the Zimbabwe's local governance system and processes have made efforts to promote the participation of marginalised groups, such as women, youth, and people with disabilities (PWDs), in local governance and development processes, the emphasis on participation rather than active engagement of these marginalised groups in both civil society and state centric inclusion initiatives has limited their participation to tokenism. Sivalo further argues that political polarisation and the structure of local and national politics in Zimbabwe further creates a disabling environment for (political) inclusion to be fully achieved. His discussion contends that in highly polarised political environments such as Zimbabwe, those who exist outside partisan politics, alongside vulnerable groups like women, youth, PWDs, Lesbian, Gays, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) groups and the poor, are largely marginalised from electoral contests, local authority planning and policy making. Arguing that the starting point for inclusivity should be the nuancing of the diverse ways in which citizenship, marginality and inclusion manifest themselves in different political contexts, Sivalo recommends the mainstreaming of diversity in the overall framework and practice of local governance and decision making.

The following article, by Tendai Murisa, looks at the political and economic governance framework in Zimbabwe's rural areas, specifically the communal/customary land tenure system, and how it affects citizens' freedom to make choices and capacity to effectively participate in democratic governance processes. He argues that Zimbabweans living in customary land tenure jurisdictions, who happen to constitute the

majority of the national population, not only live under the autocratic rule of traditional leaders but are also economically disempowered to effectively participate in democratic governance. His detailed analysis of the Customary Tenure and Traditional Authority systems reveals how these systems have continue to conspire to deny Zimbabweans who dwell in customary tenure areas direct relationships with the modern justice system, i.e. civil courts, citizenship rights enshrined in the national Constitution and economic independence. His analysis reveals how Traditional Authorities have abused customary tenure to entrench personal power in their jurisdictions and how customary tenure has stifled prospects for democratisation in rural areas. Murisa argues that the ways in which land is held in customary tenure areas and the existing subsidy regimes have played a critical role in restricting rural residents' autonomy to make autonomous political choices. He further argues that the autonomy to choose is mostly compromised in contexts where access to productive resources such as land, markets, mechanical, financial, and physical capital are negotiated through subservience to traditional authorities who are politically affiliated. His main recommendation is that the tenuous relationship between land tenure and democracy in rural areas is perhaps the most compelling for reforms to promote inclusivity.

The last two articles of this special issue focus on the critical issues of the policy choices made by a country in its economic development funding model and the provision of financial services to its citizens in its attempt to promote inclusive development. The first article on this thematic focus area, jointly written by Tendai Chikweche, Belinda Chaora and Rebekah Cross, looks at the issue of Zimbabwe's financial inclusion

policies and practices. The article draws its analytical arguments largely from a study on the financial inclusion of micro-small and medium enterprises in Zimbabwe that was conducted by SIVIO Institute in 2021. The three authors argue that while there has been some notable progress in improving the enabling environment for financial inclusion in Zimbabwe, notably in such key areas as improving the policy environment, improving women's access to financial services and integrating digital technologies to enhance financial inclusion, there are still multiple barriers to inclusion. The wide range of barriers include the limited commitment by political stakeholders to articulate deliberate policies and programmes that support citizen-centred financial inclusion, lack of flexible and affordable financing, harsh compliance laws and the general lack of information on the part of citizens, particularly marginalised groups of women and youth, on the sourcing and effective use of financial products and services. The trio paper proposes a framework for a new form of thinking about financial inclusion, which involves a deliberate process of engagement of citizens in co-designing and co-creating intervention and impact measurement strategies that are responsive to the lived circumstances of the citizens and enterprise.

Drawing on both empirical evidence of the growth of local philanthropy in developing countries and findings of recent

assessments on the effectiveness of foreign aid in promoting inclusive growth and socio-economic development in recipient countries, Eddah Jowah and Bhekinkosi Moyo argue that Zimbabwe's economic resilience in the last two decades of economic isolation from bilateral and international multilateral funding institutions and limited inflows of foreign aid, provides empirical evidence of the critical role that local philanthropy can play in promoting inclusive socio-economic development in developing countries. Their paper provides evidence about the phenomenal growth of associations and informal networks of Zimbabweans, both local and in the diaspora, that have emerged to provide socio-economic support and services to communities in the last two decades of economic crisis and declining capacity of the state to provide essential services, such as health, education, transport, to communities. They show how financial remittances from Zimbabweans have not only increased in the last few years, with recorded inflows running into slightly above USD1 billion between 2020 and 2022, but how these remittances have kept both families and the country going. The duo maintain that the resilience and solidarity displayed by Zimbabwean citizens over the last two decades, including the last two years of the COVID 19 pandemic, serves to highlight the potential that citizens have in spearheading inclusive growth and development for their countries and communities.

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