

The impact of democracy in Zimbabwe
Assessing political, social and economic
developments since
the dawn of democracy

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Research Report 119

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Centre for Policy Studies
Johannesburg
September 2009

This paper is funded by The Kellogg Foundation



W.K. KELLOGG
FOUNDATION

Accepted for publication, December 2008

Published
September 2009

The Centre for Policy Studies is an independent research institution,
incorporated as an association not for gain under Section 21 of the
Companies Act.

The Kellogg Foundation generously provided the funding for this research work. However,
the views expressed in this report are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the
views of the Kellogg Foundation.

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ISBN 978-1-920408-03-9

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	METHODOLOGY	3
3.	MAJOR FINDINGS	3
3.1	Socio-economic changes	3
3.2	Collapse of the social sector	5
3.3	Political developments and repression	9
4.	CONCLUSION	14
	References	15

1. INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Zimbabwe has an estimated population of 13 million people, with some three or more million of them residing in South Africa, Botswana, the United Kingdom and several other countries. The country is divided into eight administrative provinces, while the two major urban centres, Harare and Bulawayo, are also designated as provinces in their own right. Masvingo is the largest of the provinces in terms of the population, and is located in the southern region. This is where the world famous Great Zimbabwe is located. Also in the southern region are Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South, which share a border with Botswana to the west. Both of these provinces are sparsely populated since they are semi-arid areas. They are well known for cattle breeding activities. The Midlands is one of the richest provinces, since it contains numerous mines located on the Great Dyke. Agriculturally, the three Mashonaland provinces, ie Mashonaland East, Mashonaland Central and Mashonaland West, are the richest because they receive good rainfall during the rainy season. Located in the eastern part of the country is Manicaland, which is noted for its beautiful scenery, including several mountain ranges. This province also has several mines and the recently discovered Chiadzwa diamond fields.

Twenty years after the attainment of national independence, in the year 2000, Zimbabwe experienced what can only be termed a major setback in its transition to democracy. In March of that year, the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) organised and mobilised hundreds of thousands of war veterans, unemployed youths and landless peasants to invade white-owned commercial farms throughout the country. The ruling party had been shocked by the public rejection of a government-sponsored draft constitution in a national plebiscite in February 2000. With parliamentary elections scheduled for June 2000, and the emergence of a highly popular opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the ruling party quickly realised that it was headed for a humiliating defeat at the polls and consequent loss of political power.

The fact that the MDC had attracted the support of thousands of Zimbabweans, including white commercial farmers and businesspeople, made ZANU-PF realise that only drastic measures could rescue it from certain defeat at the June 2000 polls. The unresolved land issue was the only viable means by which the Mugabe regime could appeal to the electorate to support it in that crucial election. But given the limited time between the constitutional plebiscite and the parliamentary elections, the regime realised that only violent farm invasions could effectively garner it the political support that it desperately needed in order to stay in office. It is estimated that at least 150 people and 10 white commercial farmers lost their lives as a result of the violence perpetrated by the supporters of ZANU-PF during the farm invasions.

Eight years later, in March 2008, history repeated itself when Robert Mugabe and his ZANU-PF were beaten by the MDC in the so-called harmonised elections. However, presidential election results were delayed by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) for some six weeks, raising strong suspicions that they were being manipulated in order to save Mugabe from outright defeat by the MDC's Morgan Tsvangirai. Indeed, when the results were finally published, they showed that although Tsvangirai had received more votes than Mugabe, he had not attained the stipulated majority of 50 per cent plus one vote. A run-off election was therefore called for 27 June, 2008. In the run-up to the run-off, ZANU-PF unleashed a wave of countrywide violence, which resulted in the deaths of nearly 100 MDC supporters, the displacement of more than 50 000 people from their rural homes, and the burning of many homes by the ZANU-PF militia working in cahoots with elements of the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), the Zimbabwe Prison Service (ZPS), and the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) (www.zimonline.co.za). The electoral environment was grossly skewed in favour of ZANU-PF. Morgan Tsvangirai was given hardly any space to campaign for support. State-owned media would not accept his campaign adverts. He was arrested at least five times within the space of two weeks.

MDC supporters were harassed, beaten up, tortured, and even killed for supporting the MDC during the polls on 29 March. Tsvangirai finally announced that he was pulling out of the race in protest, much to the chagrin of Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party. Tsvangirai pointed out that ZANU-PF elements were seriously victimising his supporters, to the extent that what was supposed to be an election campaign had turned into a war. He indicated that he was not willing to get into State House by riding on the corpses of so many people (*The Zimbabwean* 26.06.08). The ZEC and government officials disputed Tsvangirai's withdrawal from the race, arguing that this had been done too late in the process (*Herald*, 25.06.08). Nevertheless, Tsvangirai's withdrawal seriously embarrassed Robert Mugabe, who was itching for a fight against his arch-rival. The MDC leader had also denied Mugabe the much-needed legitimacy that he had lost as far back as the 2002 presidential elections.

This paper briefly outlines some of the perceptions of Zimbabweans regarding the various changes that have occurred in the country in the past 10-15 years, particularly where the democratisation process is concerned. The paper seeks to ascertain whether the advent of democracy in Zimbabwe in 1980 has had a positive or a negative relationship with the processes of empowering the people socio-economically. It is generally agreed in Zimbabwe that the nation has moved several steps backwards since 2000 in terms of the democratisation process. This paper highlights some of the events that led to this situation, and relates these events to the current socio-economic situation in the country.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper is largely reflective in its approach, although reference will be made to various reports of surveys conducted in Zimbabwe by a variety of institutions. Data has been largely gathered by documentary search, and content analysis is utilised to facilitate the researcher's arrival at specific conclusions that may help to illustrate certain arguments. Several key informants were contacted for their informed views on controversial points and interpretations of selected events that occurred in Zimbabwe during the period under review. The Mass Public opinion Institute (MPOI) periodically carries out opinion surveys covering various issues of relevance to the present study. Some of the findings of these surveys follow.

3. MAJOR FINDINGS

3.1 Socio-economic changes

In the period between 2000 and 2007, the Zimbabwean economy declined sharply, to the extent that 80 per cent of the nation's manufacturing companies have witnessed declining output volumes. More than 15 per cent of them are operating at less than 30 per cent of their normal capacities. Another third of manufacturing companies are operating at between 30 per cent and 49 per cent of their capacities. Furthermore, more than 90 per cent of these companies are unable to produce enough to cover their costs, and are therefore operating at a loss. The output from the manufacturing sector has declined by 45.6 per cent since 1998. Studies indicate that manufacturing levels are at their lowest since 1971 (UNDP 2000). Obviously, per capita income has also shrunk considerably, although the cost of living has escalated phenomenally.

The mining sector has also suffered serious problems, resulting in a decline in production of nearly 50 per cent, according to recent surveys. The severe shortage of foreign currency that the nation is experiencing has exacerbated the situation, since enterprises are unable to acquire the spare parts and other inputs that they badly need in order to stay afloat. It is estimated that the nation is able to provide only 10 per cent of its foreign currency needs. Put another way, foreign currency earnings have fallen by a staggering 60 per cent in the past seven years. Tainted with ridiculous political preferences, economic policies have resulted in serious distortions that, in turn, have caused arbitrage and corrupt business practices (Bloch and Robertson 1996). The prices of most goods increase rapidly for no apparent reason, resulting in the widespread impoverishment of the majority of the people while a few get richer. This gloomy picture must be viewed in the light of severe fuel shortages that have been experienced for the past nine years at least.

The agricultural sector has all but collapsed, which has resulted in a chronic food crisis. The so called fast-track land reform process, which began in 2000, caused the eviction of

experienced and committed white commercial farmers from the land. Most of that land was allocated to inexperienced indigenous farmers, especially Robert Mugabe's political allies. The ultimate result has been a 50 per cent reduction in agricultural production. The implications for downstream industries and employment have been disastrous, if not catastrophic. For example, Zimbabwe's gross domestic product (GDP) shrank by a cumulative 40 per cent between 1998 and 2006. The southern African nation also has the world's largest budget deficit at 10 per cent.

Presenting his Mid-Term Fiscal Policy Review in July 2006, the Minister of Finance noted that the following are among our challenges:

- Corruption
- Rising inflation
- Declining savings and investment
- Inadequate foreign exchange - affecting import capacity
- Erratic fuel supplies
- Interruptions to electricity supply (Government of Zimbabwe [GoZ] 2006, p 1).

The rate of inflation was 1 184, 6 per cent at the time the minister made his presentation. That was the world's highest such rate at the time. Since then, the rate of inflation has soared to an embarrassing +11 000 000 per cent (July 2008). Subsequent to the Finance Minister's presentation, the governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe issued a Monetary Policy Review in which he re-based the worthless Zimbabwe currency by deleting three zeros, and announced that new bearer cheques would be issued. The overall impact on economic performance was minimal because the deleted zeros have since crawled back on, and Zimbabwe now holds the world record of having the highest denominated bank note of Zw\$50 billion. The Minister further pointed out that during the review period, Zimbabwe was experiencing several macro-economic 'challenges', including:

- Agriculture fell by 12.1 per cent due to delayed availability of inputs.
- The mining sector under-performed by 13.8 per cent, and was likely to decline by a further 10.8 per cent in the absence of capitalisation.
- There was a rise in public sector borrowing and considerable growth in money supply.
- Annual inflation had escalated to a record 1 193.5 per cent by May 2006.
- Tobacco production had fallen from 74 million kilograms to 50 million.
- There was a 31 per cent decline in tourism receipts in the first quarter of 2006 largely due to leakages and the "negative image of the country" (ibid pp 4-6).

This bleak economic outlook was exacerbated by a current account deficit in excess of US\$200 million and an external debt amounting to US\$3 968 million (ibid pp 6-7). As usual, the Minister decried the poor performance of most state-owned (or public) enterprises,

observing that these entities continue to make losses: “The debt stock for the major parastatals as at June 2006 stood at Z\$76.43 trillion (approximately US\$750 million). As a result, parastatals are failing to service their debts, often calling on Government to assume their obligations” (ibid p 14).

The majority of Zimbabweans feel that the various changes that have occurred in the Zimbabwe economy have seriously devastated their living standards. In a survey conducted by the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI) covering the years 2004 and 2005, more than nine in ten of the sampled population described Zimbabwe’s economic conditions as “bad”, with only 4 per cent describing it as “good” (Table 1). The MPOI report aptly notes:

Compared to 2004, the proportion of those who see the conditions as bad has nearly doubled. In short, almost all Zimbabweans are agreed that the country is in the midst of a deep economic crisis (MPOI, 2006, www.mpoi.org).

Further, the majority of the respondents expressed deep concern about their personal living conditions, with 88 per cent of them regarding their economic conditions as either “very bad” (68 per cent), or “fairly bad” (20 per cent) (ibid). Only 16 per cent of the respondents viewed their living conditions as having improved over the survey period.

Table 1: Current economic conditions (2004 and 2005)

In general, how would you describe...?	Bad		Good		Don't Know	
	2004	2005	2004	2005	2004	2005
Your own present living conditions	54	88	27	7	<1	-
The country's economic condition	48	94	31	4	2	<1

Source: MPOI 2006.

3.2 Collapse of the social sector

Prior to the year 2000, Zimbabwe boasted a vibrant and efficient social sector, with one of Africa’s most impressive educational systems. The literacy rate was above 85 per cent, the highest in Africa at that time (UNDP 2000). The health sector was also remarkable, with referral hospitals in practically all its administrative provinces, and both government and private clinics in virtually all the districts. The University of Zimbabwe’s Medical School has contributed tremendously to the training of reputable and highly skilled medical doctors over the years. Although the rural-urban divide also existed in Zimbabwe as in many other African

countries, poverty was more pronounced in rural than in urban areas. Indeed, most high-school leavers often migrated from rural areas to urban areas in search of employment. Poverty levels were as low as 27 per cent in the early 1980s, but have since soared to well above 90 per cent (ibid 2000) in the late 2000s. At the time of preparing this report, unemployment was estimated to be well over 80 per cent (Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions [ZCTU] 2008).

The National Social Security Authority (NSSA) purports to provide contributory pension benefits to all retired workers, but its level of efficiency leaves a lot to be desired. Given the highly inflationary economic environment prevailing in Zimbabwe, most retired workers very quickly become poor. Further, the provision made by the state for the disabled is extremely limited, to the extent that most people with disabilities are destitute and heavily dependent on humanitarian Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) for sustenance (ibid). The Zimbabwe government has made significant strides in developing policies that aim to enhance gender equality. Traditional practices, however, still go a long way towards denying women and children the status and benefits that are enjoyed by men. The Ministry of Employment Creation, Youth and Women's Affairs must, however, be commended for tirelessly urging both private and public authorities to mainstream issues of gender, particularly in relation to property ownership, inheritance and employment. In short, the advent of democracy in Zimbabwe significantly promoted the creation of a healthy and vibrant social sector during the first two decades of Zimbabwe's independence.

Sadly, all this progress has begun to crumble in the face of a debilitating economic and political crisis. Economic hardships have resulted in many parents failing to raise school and college fees for their children. The school dropout rate, for example, has been increasing since 2000 and is currently estimated to be approaching 46 per cent (GoZ 2007). Many schoolteachers, nurses, doctors and other skilled people have migrated from Zimbabwe to countries such as Botswana, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, New Zealand, Canada and Australia. It is currently estimated that some five million Zimbabweans are living in the Diaspora. A report prepared by the Scientific and Industrial Research and Development Centre (SIRDC) observes:

From our investigation, the reasons why people are leaving Zimbabwe appear to be diverse, ranging from professional to economical. There are also pull and push factors. Some of the reasons for the departures stem from poor execution of capacity building and domestic policies, which result in imbalances between labour supply and demand. These imbalances are now being acutely accentuated by the impact of the brain drain (SIRDIC report, unpublished).

The SIRDC report deliberately omits to mention that some Zimbabweans have left the country because of the political crisis that began in earnest in 2000. Of special interest to this study are the following observations and recommendations made in the report:

- The study shows that most of the respondents held bachelor's degrees, followed by polytechnic graduates. About 20 per cent held master's degrees, while 5 per cent held doctoral degrees.
- The health and teaching professions are the most affected, while accountants constitute a significant proportion (16.9 per cent) of the total number of Zimbabweans in the Diaspora.
- More than half of the respondents emigrated because of work-related factors. About a quarter had emigrated because of the need to attend school in their new country of abode. A tenth gave marriage/relationship factors as the reason for emigrating, while 8 per cent mentioned political factors.

The most common work-related reasons for emigrating, given by 34.5 per cent of the respondents, were the low salaries in Zimbabwe, followed by the exchange rate, mentioned by 32.5 per cent, while 29 per cent gave better career advancement opportunities as a reason for emigrating (ibid).

As a government institution, the SIRDC would be cautious about attributing the brain drain to the serious political crisis that Zimbabwe is currently experiencing. In other words, the reasons given above give the impression that most people migrated for economic rather than social or political reasons. The truth of the matter, however, is that the negative socio-economic situation prevailing in Zimbabwe was primarily caused by the festering political crisis, which has resulted, inter alia, in the erosion of democracy and gross violations of human rights.

In the health sector, there are now serious shortages of medical drugs, a lack of both nurses and doctors, and malfunctioning medical equipment. Medical fees have also become prohibitive, to the extent that many poor people are now resorting to traditional medicines, such as herbs, for their treatment of most illnesses. All this is happening when the nation is facing a very high rate of HIV/AIDS infections. Indeed, as many as 3 000 people die of the disease every week. Zimbabweans who can afford to, often travel to such neighbouring countries as Botswana and South Africa for medical treatment. The Mugabe regime has lamely blamed the collapse of the social sector on Western democracies such as the UK, the USA, the EU, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. These are the countries that imposed targeted sanctions, essentially travel restrictions, on Mugabe and some of his cabinet ministers. The relevance of travel restrictions on either the economy or the social sector is clearly more imagined than real.

The MPOI survey referred to earlier also focused on aspects of the social sector in relation to public perceptions of the most important problems that Zimbabwe was facing in the years 2004 and 2005. Table 2 summarises some of the findings. Multiple-response questions were involved, so the columns in the table do not add up to 100 per cent. It is

interesting to note that food insecurity was the most critical and urgent problem indicated by respondents, with nearly two-thirds (69 per cent) of them making such an indication. It needs to be borne in mind that the farm invasions in the year 2000 had seriously and negatively affected food production, as the newly resettled farmers performed dismally in managing and utilising the commercial farms that had been allocated to them. Surprisingly, health, AIDS and education ranked lower in 2005 than they did in 2004. One possible explanation for this is that most people who can no longer afford the exorbitant medical fees are now resorting to traditional medicines. The HIV/AIDS scourge is probably becoming part and parcel of people's lives and may therefore be de-emphasised in such a survey. It is difficult, however, to make similar explanations for the education score. There is very little that parents can do to provide a meaningful alternative to education, especially in a country that still insists on paper qualifications for employment in the formal sector. Transportation and unemployment had, however, both become more serious problems in 2005 than they had been in the previous year.

Table 2: Most important problems (2004-2005)

	2004	2005
	N=1096	N=1048
Food shortages/famine	27	69
Management of the economy	40	45
Transportation	13	39
Unemployment	31	35
Poverty/destitution	19	16
Wages, incomes and salaries	11	9
Drought	-	9
Health	25	8
AIDS	7	8
Education	22	8

Source: MPOI 2006

In relation to the government's policy performance, other data provided by the MPOI report indicate that "keeping prices down" received the highest approval rating (97 per cent), followed by "creating jobs" (96 per cent), "narrowing income gaps" (95 per cent) and "managing the economy" (93 per cent) (MPOI 2006, www.mpoi.org). In short, the collapse of the social sector is clearly considered by the majority of Zimbabweans to be the most telling factor in the government's policy failure.

3.3 Political developments and repression

The Constitution of Zimbabwe provides for a constitutional democracy, with an executive president who is not a member of the legislature (GoZ 1980). The president, however, appoints all the cabinet ministers who have to be legislators. In other words, there appears to be both a separation of powers - as in a presidential system - as well as a diffusion of powers as in the parliamentary system. The electoral system is the first-past-the-post or majoritarian system. This is the 'winner-take-all' system, which entitles an electoral candidate with the highest number of votes to win an election. Elections are held every five years, and recent amendments to the constitution make provision for so-called harmonised elections (GoZ 2008). This simply means that elections at local government and national levels are all held at the same time, including presidential elections. The ruling ZANU-PF has been 'winning' virtually all elections since independence. The formation of the MDC in September 1999, however, changed this situation dramatically. For example, in the year 2000, the MDC came very close to defeating ZANU-PF at the parliamentary polls, when it won 57 of the 120 contestable seats in parliament. Before it was recently amended, the Constitution of Zimbabwe made provision for the appointment of 20 legislators, including 10 provincial governors, by the president. In addition, provision was made for 10 traditional chiefs to sit in parliament. This often gave the ruling party a 30-seat head-start at every election time. The recent changes have now restricted presidential appointments to the upper house, the senate; he is entitled to appoint only five senators and 10 provincial governors. Some 18 traditional chiefs also sit in the senate.

Voter turnout at the polls has generally been low. Here again, the formation of the MDC generated such tremendous interest in electoral politics that the turnout for the 2000 parliamentary elections was more than 70 per cent (Makumbe 2002). The rural turnout has many times been manipulated by Mugabe's party to give the impression that this party was strongly supported by the rural electorate (*ibid*). The urban turnout for the 2008 elections was so high that it literally overwhelmed the rural vote. The MDC won the majority of seats in the lower chamber of the legislature, the House of Assembly. At the senate level there was a 'hung house' as both ZANU-PF and the MDC won an equal number of seats, ie 30 each. Apart from the two major political parties, there are a few small parties such as the Zimbabwe People's Party (ZPP), and the recently launched Mavambo Party, led by Simba Makoni, who defected from ZANU-PF on the eve of the 2008 harmonised elections. These small political parties are not represented in the legislature as they failed to win any seats in the 2008 elections.

Confronted with the inevitable prospect of losing political power, since early 2000 the ZANU-PF regime has transformed Zimbabwe into a fascist state where the rule of law is not only selectively applied, but new and effectively draconian legislation is generated and used as a tool of repression. The late Claude Ake writes that in most post-colonial states, the emergent political elites inherit the repressive colonial laws and use them against the very

people they once fought to liberate (Ake 1981). The majority of Zimbabweans are fully aware that the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) of 2002 is far more repressive today than the Law and Order Maintenance Act (LOMA) of 1971 was under the Ian Smith regime of the colonial era. Both POSA and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) of 2002 are clearly products of fear of the people's power.

The majority of Zimbabweans generally agree that the current crisis that the nation is experiencing is essentially one of leadership. It is generally felt that President Mugabe and his Cabinet colleagues have been in office for far too long to govern in a transparent and accountable manner. They seem to have run out of ideas on how to resolve the many economic, social and political problems that confront Zimbabwe. They therefore should make way for younger Zimbabweans who comprehend the basic workings of a modern state in a globalising world. The socio-economic constraints that the southern African country is experiencing are a function of problems at the political level. The government's reluctance to liberalise the political system by adopting a democratic constitution has effectively forced a confrontational approach onto the people. The emergence of a credible opposition political party, the MDC, which has support from the Zambezi River to the Limpopo, and from Plumtree to Mutare, has set the stage for the organised ousting of Mugabe's ZANU-PF from office through the ballot box.

The almost instant and widespread support that the MDC was able to attract in a very short time so frightened Mugabe and his political party that they realised that the land issue, racism, violence and intimidation were the only effective weapons that could be used against political rivals who Mugabe referred to once as "enemies of the state". The public display of red cards by MDC supporters and elements within civil society so infuriated ZANU-PF and Mugabe himself that an individual or group of individuals can now be arrested for such an action.

The rejection of the government-sponsored and manipulated draft constitution in February 2000 angered Mugabe and his loyal subordinates. This victory by the people against a beleaguered regime was a belated wake-up call for the incumbent regime. The majority "No" vote also gave the ordinary people of Zimbabwe tremendous hope that the untenable political socio-economic situation could be changed. For the first time since 1980, the people had rejected the ZANU-PF proposals and exercised their democratic choices at the ballot box. That victory further signalled to Mugabe and his party that unless drastic measures were taken to arrest the situation, their stranglehold on political power would end in an embarrassing manner, hence the resort to violence, racism and public intimidation. The land issue was the perfect way to use all three, since for two decades after Independence the government had done precious little to solve the land problem, a cardinal grievance for the majority of black Zimbabweans.

The liberation war veterans were identified as the perfect agents to spearhead the fight against opposition political parties, civil society and the white landowners and later company chiefs. In 1998 the war veterans had successfully coerced the Mugabe regime to grant them monthly pensions and a Zw\$50 000 compensation for each of them. It was made clear to them that an MDC government could terminate these privileges. The rule of law was effectively suspended in order to enable the war veterans to harass, beat up, rape and even murder people who were perceived to be supporting opposition political parties, or resisting forcible land redistribution. The consequences of these actions are what the nation is experiencing today and will continue to do for the foreseeable future.

The role of civil society in all these developments needs to be highlighted if we are to paint a complete picture of the crisis in Zimbabwe. There are several civil society organisations (CSOs) or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in the democracy and governance arena in Zimbabwe. Some 40 of them came together in 1997 and formed the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA). The NCA was instrumental in pressurising the Mugabe regime to agree to institute the abortive constitutional reform process that resulted in the draft constitution so resoundingly rejected by the people in February 2000. The NCA itself declined to participate in the government-appointed constitutional reform process. The reason was that, in typical authoritarian fashion, the Mugabe regime had sought to deceive the people by carefully manipulating the composition and workings of the Chidyausiku Constitutional Commission. That Commission was dominated by ZANU-PF elements. It drew up a shoddy draft constitution that amounted to a travesty of justice and an insult to the intelligence of the people of Zimbabwe. For example, whereas the current Constitution makes provision for presidential immunity from prosecution during the incumbent's term of office only, the draft constitution extended the immunity beyond this period. This was totally unacceptable to the majority of Zimbabweans, as the referendum results indicated.

Regrettably, civil society effectively 'went back home' after the June 2000 parliamentary elections, thereby giving the war veterans an opportunity to grab back a lot of the political space that civil society had previously reclaimed from ZANU-PF. Farm invasions, public harassment, murders, rapes and general lawlessness continued unabated after the June 2000 parliamentary elections. Sadly, the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) has become a discredited law-enforcement agency, as it has failed to uphold the rule of law in this country since February 2000. Indeed, the ZRP has been politically pressured into ignoring cases of blatant lawlessness by ZANU-PF elements and it has duly complied with that pressure. This development has effectively eroded the public's confidence in the police force - a sad development in any society that claims to be democratic. Nevertheless, the role of civil society in raising public awareness on issues of democracy, human rights and good governance has been commendable. There is, obviously, plenty of room for improvement.

Notwithstanding these comments, Zimbabwean civil society is dynamic and vibrant in the political arena. Policy advocacy is one of the various ways in which public participation in matters of national governance is undertaken by civil society organisations. Government usually strenuously resists efforts by civic groups to change some policies, which often results in confrontation by way of street demonstrations, rallies and job boycotts. Numerous civic leaders have had running battles with the state coercive apparatus, but the state has not always had its own way. Most civic groups receive generous funding from donors or ‘partners’ from Western democracies such as Europe and North America. Because they focus mainly on democracy issues, governance and human rights, these organisations are generally viewed by the Mugabe regime as serving the interests of so-called Western imperialism. Naturally, civic groups deny these accusations and claim to represent the people’s interests against a regime that has long since stopped governing and has embarked on ruling with an iron fist while negating, if not reversing, the democratic development of Zimbabwe.

The Constitution, which was used to curb civic rights and intensify its control over the public, has been amended some 18 times since its inauguration in 1980. By and large, it can safely be argued that state institutions are generally fairly well insulated from both public scrutiny and influence. This has effectively eroded democratisation, with negative implications for the socio-economic well-being of the nation as a whole.

An MPOI survey on the political situation in Zimbabwe generated a number of very interesting results. For example, respondents were asked, “Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Zimbabwe?” Table 3 shows the responses.

Table 3: Supply of democracy - satisfaction with democracy in Zimbabwe (2005)

	Percentage
Zimbabwe is not a democracy	8
Not at all satisfied	29
Not very satisfied	22
Fairly satisfied	11
Very satisfied	3
Don’t know	27

Source: MPOI 2006

On the basis of earlier surveys by MPOI, the opinions of adult Zimbabweans on the supply of democracy was at its most disparaging; 17 per cent of the respondents dismissed the polity as “not a democracy”, while a further 58 per cent indicated their dissatisfaction with the manner in which democracy works in the country. Yet from 2000 to the end of 2004, according to MPOI:

...the political situation in Zimbabwe was nasty and brutish and yet Zimbabweans gave their rosiest judgement of how democracy works, with only 2% declaring the country “not a democracy (MPOI 2005).

The only credible explanation is that, whereas the period before September 1999 was characterised by a virtual one-party state, the formation of the MDC in late 1999 and its subsequent success in capturing some 57 out of the 120 contested parliamentary seats in 2000 motivated most of the respondents to become positive about democracy in Zimbabwe.

With regard to electoral politics, a number of respondents to another of MPOI’s surveys reveal that most people in Zimbabwe were reluctant to participate in elections prior to the formation of the MDC for a variety of reasons. These include lack of interest, not registered, failure of political parties to honour promises, results were predictable, fear of victimisation, and distances to polling stations (MPOI 2008 www.mpoi.org). Table 4 summarises some of the reasons given by respondents as motivating factors for voting. The question was simply stated, “What motivates you to vote?” The results indicate that three times as many supporters of Morgan Tsvangirai’s MDC desire change than is the case with supporters of Mugabe’s ZANU-PF. Obviously the change meant here is from the style and leadership of Mugabe and his party to a new style of leadership and a new party in power, but it could also be interpreted to mean a change from the debilitating economic quagmire that the country is currently wallowing in. ZANU-PF has often called upon Zimbabweans to be patriotic during elections, and this may account for this result. Another response category, “My citizen obligation”, was found to be much weaker for the other political parties than for ZANU-PF. A possible explanation might be that the ZanuPF propaganda machine was effective in influencing some people. It may also be that the majority of the respondents may have been ZANU-PF supporters, an aspect the survey did not seek to establish.

Table 4: Voting motivators by partisanship

Motivators	ZANU-PF	MDC Tsvangirai	MDC Mutambara
Desire for change	20	60	43
My citizen obligation	31	13	14
Promises of a better life	16	17	21
Candidate’s party	23	3	-
Candidate’s credentials	7	4	7
Other	3	2	14

Source: MPOI 2008.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has amply demonstrated that, unlike many other African countries that have been moving towards meaningful democratisation during the last decade, Zimbabwe has, at least in the past 15 years, been moving further away from democracy towards authoritarianism, if not dictatorship. The commercial farm invasions of 2000 have had serious ramifications for both social and economic development in the southern African country. There is, however, clear evidence that the majority of Zimbabwean citizens are actively demanding democracy and rejecting authoritarianism if events over the past eight years are considered. As noted earlier, the recent debacle with regard to the 2008 harmonised elections seems to have placed the country between a rock and a hard place in relation to both its economic and political development. The consequences for social development can safely be regarded as grim. There is, however, hope that the recently concluded agreement on the formation of an inclusive government for Zimbabwe may enable the country to revive its economic and social sectors in the not-so-distant future. This will heavily depend on whether or not the agreement will be honoured and adhered to by the signatories to that arrangement, both now and in the future. Positive democratic development has, indeed, been given a second chance in Zimbabwe.

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