

## ZAMBIA

### Research paper's abstract



There are no simple explanations for causes of election related violence in Zambia and the way they fuel the escalation. To understand the dynamics of interparty election violence a host of specific indicators need to be taken into account. These may include poverty and high unemployment, resource scarcity, disempowerment of the rural and urban poor and other groups in society as well as political and economic insecurity. A mix of these variables from time to time lead to election violence.

In Zambia violence and intimidation of ordinary citizens is a much wider and bigger problem that stretches way beyond the immediate election period, though it surfaces in a more pronounced way particularly after an election. This violence is related to the political party cadres and is not yet perceived and discussed in public or civil society fora (ZAP: 2015). The media carries reports about individual cases but without grasping and contextualizing it. The violence manifests itself as an extension of the political and economic patronage networks. Here, party cadres extract money from bus operators, marketers, or water collection points in the name of their party and threaten to unleash violence in case of resistance.<sup>1</sup> In Lusaka central bus station, operators are said to pay K5,000 per month as a 'qualifying fee'. Each bus pays an extra K100 for each trip. Similar fees are 'collected' on other public commercial places (ZAP: 2014). Traders that are perceived to lean towards the opposition are expelled from market places after elections, indicating that it can have severe negative repercussions if someone speaks his/her mind openly, thus making understandable the high rate of Zambians that practice self-censorship. This practice of pressing fees from small-scale business men and women goes a long way in Zambian history. It started in the one-party era, where everyone wanting a license to operate a business needed to be a UNIP member and show his/her party membership card. In the liberalized multiparty era the control of market places and bus stations was transformed from an instrument of repression to an income generating tool that according to Beardsworth became particularly aggressive and further spread under the PF government since 2011. The cadres are not as such loyal to PF. They are ready to go with any ruling party if the conditions are favourable. It seems both MMD before and PF now have vested those cadres with quite some leverage. A certain percentage of those fees collected go to the ruling party but through a hierarchical structure of the party cadres which uses it to run some of its operations. Party vigilantes have ever controlled informal power centres in Zambia from 1973 during the birth of

<sup>1</sup>This and the following information are based mostly on an interview with Nicole Beardsworth, who was so kind to share with us some of her not yet published PhD research findings on political parties in Zambia.

the one party system. The change to plural politics has merely transformed their modus operandi. This environment therefore sets the context in which some of the election violence is located and the preventative mechanisms that can be used to prevent conflict. Clearly this has a lot to do with the political culture and any preventive measures or interventions must take into account this culture.