

ZIMBABWE

Research paper's abstract



Electoral violence in Zimbabwe is grounded in an ideological view, which justifies the perpetration of violence on anyone viewed as opposed to 'the revolutionary party, which ushered in independence' and 'democratisation'. Elections in Africa are seen as contestation for power, which provides access to resources (Hafner-Burton et al 2012:13). Power translates to creating wealth-creating opportunities for those who make it to the top. According to Merilainen (2012) in a Master's Thesis, *Electoral Violence as a side product of democratization in Africa: The cases of Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe*, electoral violence is but one of the many illicit tactics available for both incumbent and opposition politicians in order to influence the election outcome. Kristine Hoglund (2010) reaffirms this argument as she states that political leaders are seen as architects of electoral violence as they frame incentives of supporters and rivals in bi-polar terms 'us' vs 'them'. In Zimbabwe opposition and ruling parties have come up with slogans, which are not only violent but set rivals apart. Opposition leaders have been seen as enemies of the state and people who do not have a mind of their own but are alleged to work in cahoots with former colonial masters. Research at hand has shown that electoral violence in Africa has increased by 50% between 1990 and 2006. Zimbabwe's electoral system of the winner takes all or first past the post which has since the 2013 election been teamed up with proportional representation, is seen as a potent driver of electoral violence. Lindberg argues in support of this standpoint, 'majoritarian systems are more prone to election related violence than proportional representation systems because the latter provide incentives for cooperation between parties and peaceful co-existence in the longer run.' However, there is a heated debate going on about this point of view as no electoral system is immune to electoral violence. Zimbabwe adopted executive powers for the president in 1987 and such powers are viewed as fostering fierce competition for power whilst putting off dialogue and cooperation amongst members of different political parties. Another driver of electoral violence is the fact that perpetrators of violence are not made to account for their actions. Zimbabwe has witnessed presidential amnesties that have exonerated known perpetrators of electoral violence and this in turn oils drivers of violence. Incumbent leaders usually shield perpetrators of violence after an election and at the next election the same perpetrators' footprints are noted (ZPP Monthly Monitoring reports) An electoral court set up to deal with electoral petitions most of the time lack the means and autonomy to settle cases in good time. While the report and investigations into the complaints lodged by one of the contestants in a by-election in Hurungwe West recently produced by the ZHRC have been applauded the down side is that the election went ahead on June 10 and since

then the winner has been sworn in. It has been two months since the election when the report was issued. At the end of the day rather than address electoral conflict and violence the report might just end up an academic piece.

This paper focuses and tries to understand the drivers of electoral violence in Zimbabwe and how the problem that spans many years in Zimbabwe's history can be mitigated. Electoral violence is a problem whose mitigation demands the full involvement and participation of all stakeholders. Considering that elections are as the only other process facilitating the participation of citizens in democratization there is need for electoral violence to be stemmed as it distorts election results.

The paper zooms in on electoral violence in the post independence era. Elections since Zimbabwe's independence have been violent and it seems the violence in the three past decades has taken a different form in each decade. Electoral violence in the first decade of independence was driven by an ethnic and/ or language conflict while the conflict in the next decade was as a result of differing party politics. The decade that followed saw a lot of electoral violence being driven by racial issues as well as party politics and ideologies. Zimbabwe has come from a premise where the existence of electoral violence and other violence was denied to a position where violence has been acknowledged and institutions provided for in the constitution to deal with polarization and intolerance.