



**Realising effective and sustainable
democratic governance in Southern
Africa and beyond.**

Political Parties and Governance in Zimbabwe

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Introduction

No modern democratic state exists without political parties. If one takes a critical look at democratic governance in Africa, two factors become apparent on the political front. Firstly, in many parts of the continent, democracy is slowly becoming the only form of governance in places such as Botswana, Mali, Ghana, and South Africa. The citizens of these countries are experiencing political freedom, inter and intra party competition, press freedom, civil liberties, and the growth of civil society. Conversely, in other parts of the continent, where old established practices and the hard-won principle of democracy attained through a bitter armed struggle, are now being eroded. Zimbabwe, in the recent past, has been characterised by conflict, posing particular challenges of governance. A more nuanced perspective on the crisis of democratic governance in Zimbabwe suggests that the incumbent party, the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) as the ruling party, has exploited all the instruments of governance to deny the opposition – Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) any opportunity of winning power. The invariable outcome of this process has resulted in a crisis of legitimacy and general catastrophic governance systems that demonstrate an impasse for democratic consolidation. The rule of law has not been upheld by the supposedly independent but partisan judiciary. This situation has created a political polarisation within the society. A politics of ‘us’ and ‘them’ became the mode of political engagement and contestation. If political parties are to contribute to finding a lasting solution to the impasse in Zimbabwe, they will have to do it democratically.

Makumbe enumerated some of the ways in which democracy has been arrested in Zimbabwe after two decades of democratic gains:

Breakdown of the rule of law resulting in many cases of human rights abuse and denial of access to justice for the victims; promotion of the political culture of fear and the negation of the democratic ethic, which have in turn resulted in increased level of apathy on the part of the majority of the people; humanitarian disasters of various kinds, such as displacement of more than six thousand people from their rural home during the 2000 election campaign, and well over 70 000 during and after the presidential election in 2002; A collapse of social sector with health and education institutions failing to measure up to the expected standards of service delivery; a chronic shortage of foreign currency, fuel and many other imports that are necessary for the manufacturing industry, the mining industry, commerce and agriculture; capital flight, withdrawal of official development assistance and the dying up of foreign investment resulting in rapid shrinking of the economy; and soaring unemployment currently estimated to be higher than 70%, which contributes to an already unfortunate and unacceptable level of poverty with some 80% of the population living below the poverty datum line.¹

The factor responsible for the arrest of democracy in Africa according to Nicolas van de Walle (2000) is the extent to which neopatrimonial politics dominate African politics since the period of independence. The term neopatrimonialism refers to the co-existence of patrimonial practices with modern bureaucracy - "Outwardly the

state has all the trappings of a Weberian rational-legal system, with a clear distinction between the public and the private realm, with the written laws and a constitutional order...this official order is often subverted by a patrimonial logic, in which office holders almost systematically appropriate public resources for their own uses and political authority is largely based on clientelist practices, including patronage, various forms of rent-seeking and prebendalism."² At the centre of this crisis, is the government of Zimbabwe African Nation Party-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), which has been ruling the country since Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980. Any analysis of the Zimbabwe crisis will have to place at its centre, the critical role and extent to which political parties contribute to reversing the gains of democracy as political institutions with aggregative function of assembling and promoting policy platforms for voters through internal party practices. This paper argues that the democratisation process in Zimbabwe has been halted by the inability of ZANU-PF to transform itself from a liberation political movement to a functional, democratic political party. The adherence of ZANU-PF to socialist party organisational structures and management procedures stifled the development of credible and strong political opposition in the history of multi-partyism in Zimbabwe.

Political Parties and Democratic Governance

Democratic governance in Zimbabwe would be impossible in the absence of competitive political parties. However, the contribution of parties to democratic development remains somewhat unqualified in practice. In academic circles, political parties are generally perceived as: "weak links in the chain of elements that together make for a democratic state, or to even have helped undermine democracy through the

irresponsible and self-interested action of their leaders.”³ Van de Walle and Butler further argue, “African political parties are plagued by weak organisation, low levels of institutionalisation, and weak links to the society that they are supposed to represent.”⁴ Fomunyoh, in his overview of twenty Francophone countries found weak political parties’ as one of the chief hurdles holding back the process of democratic consolidation.⁵ Political parties defined as distinctive forms of organisations designed to acquire and exercise political power, to articulate and aggregate different views of interest, operate as a system for selecting cabinet members, and for organising individuals in relation to policy formulation and implementation of public policy, and serving as mediators between individuals and their government⁶. It is a widely accepted truism among political analysts that democratic consolidation will be impossible without a strong political party system.⁷

Party politics are alive in Zimbabwe. These, over the years, have included the following :

- Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), dominated mainly by the majority Shona ethnic group and led by Robert Mugabe
- Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU), led by Joshua Nkomo with strong followers from the Ndebele ethnic minority
- United Africa Council (UANC), led by Bishop Abel Muzorewa
- Rhodesia Front (RF), led by Ian Smith
- Zimbabwe Democratic Party (ZDP), led by James Chikerema
- National Front of Zimbabwe (NFZ), under the leadership of Mr. P.F. Mandaza
- National Democratic Union (NDU), led by Mr. H. Chiota
- United National Federal Party (UNFP), led by Chief K. Ndjweni

- United People’s Association of Matabeleland (UPAM), led by Dr F. Bertrand
- Zimbabwe Union of Democrats (ZUD), led by a woman – Margaret Dongo⁸
- Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZANU) – Ndonga, led by veteran nationalist, Ndabaningi Sithole
- Forum Party of Zimbabwe FPZ), formed in 1993 by a former Zimbabwe Supreme Court judge, Enoch Dumbutshena
- Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM)
- Zimbabwe Integrated Party (ZIP) founded in 1996 by a Mathematics Professor, Henri Dzinotyiwei
- Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), formed in 1999 under the leadership of Morgan Tsvangirai.

The political landscape is currently dominated mainly by the Zimbabwe African Nation Party-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The focus of the analysis in this paper is directed mainly to these two parties. Together, these two political parties represent the main political parties developing party leadership and governance in Zimbabwe through party ideology, policies and goals, programmes and manifesto; bridging the links between the people and government by advocating collectively for groups interest, needs, and views; and responsible for political socialisation and political recruitment of leadership through party structures – Women’s and Youth Wings. The two parties also represent the ruling party that takes on the governing role and the party that operates within ambit of government. The MDC emerged strongly as a party in active politics, and not merely as a party seemingly responsible for contesting the elections without any real interest in being part of or being the governing party.

Depending on the theory of democratic consolidation adopted in assessing the political process in Zimbabwe, it could be argued that democratic consolidation is on the right track because of its record of accomplishment in conducting regular multiparty elections since independence. One thing is certain: using this kind of indicator is problematic, especially if applied in isolation from other democratic governance indicators. The two election test is inadequate within the context of Zimbabwe's electoral contest. It does not take into account the repressive electoral laws, manipulation of the constitution, abuse of state resources during elections to favour incumbent political party, role of violence and intimidation by security forces and party supporters' and the nature of the party system under which these elections (1980, 1985, 1990, 2000, 2002) were conducted. It is a fact that we are yet to witness any transfer of power in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the 'longevity test' or 'generation test': 20 years of regular competitive elections as a sufficient requirement for evaluating a consolidated democracy, even if there is no change in ruling party, is incapable of assessing how a system will behave in the future. What we observed Zimbabwe, with over twenty years of ZANU-PF's rule, is that the longer the same party remains in power, the more indistinguishable it becomes from the state machinery on the one side and powerful economic interests on the other hand; and the more doubtful whether electoral competition and or participation takes place on a genuinely level playing field, or that electoral accountability remains the rule of the game.

As Ake convincingly contends, the critical aspect of true democracy is not multiparty elections but the assurance of "popular" (mass) participation within African political systems.⁹ The critical issue here is can we separate democratic consolidation from the quality of democracy being

consolidated and how do political parties' behave in this process? Thus, the critical role of political parties cannot be salient in comprehending the necessary ingredient necessary for the consolidation of democracy in Zimbabwe. It will be argued in this paper that the democratic process that began when Zimbabwe obtained independence in 1980, has been reversed. The evidence on the political, social and economic front in Zimbabwe suggests this conclusion. Political parties, especially ZANU-PF, have failed to adapt themselves to the new rules of the game. After twenty-three years of independence from Britain, Zimbabwe has witnessed five general elections, which makes it one of the oldest multiparty electoral democracies in Southern Africa. These elections were fiercely contested by numerous political parties. Despite the strong presence of political parties in Zimbabwe, parties have not enjoyed the space to develop as democratically run organisations. They have always been reactive and are not able to develop because the environment is not conducive for the growth of parties. Political parties have limited understanding in appreciating their role within a democracy.

ZANU-PF Political Dominance

ZAPU was formed after the banning of the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress (ANC) and the National Democratic Party (NDP) in 1961 by the then White minority imperialist government. Joshua Nkomo assumed the leadership and the responsibility for exposing and advancing the course of African people's liberation in Zimbabwe. Ndabaningi Sithole, a nationalist, led the splinter group which later became the Zimbabwe Africa National Union (ZANU). The two factions (ZANU & ZAPU) were born out of disagreement on strategies and tactics for the liberation struggle. These two parties remained the dominant parties responsible for

negotiating the independence of Zimbabwe and until the signing of the Lancaster House Constitution in 1979, which paved the way for the first multiparty elections in Zimbabwe, launched offensive attacks on the Rhodesians government. As the contest for political power intensified, the tension between the two parties, driven by internal power struggle and factions, also became exacerbated. According to Nkiwane commenting on the national liberation and opposition politics, “ZAPU internal discord was associated with the number of political figures, including James Chikerema, and lasted from 1968 until 1972. While the ZAPU was emerging from its internal conflicts which, in the 1970s, claimed the lives, through assassinations, of Jason Moyo and Nikita Mangena, ZANU plunged into factional in-fighting. This led to the ousting of Ndabaningi Sithole from the movement’s helm in 1975 and his replacement by Robert Mugabe.”¹⁰ This inter and intra-party factionalism, which characterised the liberation movements she argued, “was also symptomatic of a political culture of violence which, to this day, still pervades Zimbabwe politics.”¹¹

For political parties to contribute to the process of democratic governance, Kiondo, (2001)¹² argues that political parties must function along three main areas: set a vision for leadership and governance of the country; act as bridges and links between people and government; and act as schools for politics and leadership. It is interesting to note that when ZANU won the liberation struggle against the Rhodesian government together with ZAPU, they were not political parties in the classical connotation of parties, but liberation movements. Both ZANU and ZAPU were spontaneous peaceful associations of people with a common goal, united in the eradicating the domination of the British colonial rule. When ZANU won

independence, it took on the character of commandist and regimentalist rather than democratic in its operations and management style. ZANU-PF’s various party structures failed to engage and encourage participation and active involvement of party members in decision-making processes.

The first multiparty election was conducted in 1980, under the Lancaster House constitutional arrangement, which stipulated that elections were to be strictly supervised by the British, with an element of proportional representation system to ensure the representation of Whites in the national Parliament. Out of the 100 seats in Parliament, 20 seats were reserved for the Whites. The 1980 election was contested by nine political parties, but only ZANU-PF and ZAPU-PF emerged as the strongest parties. ZANU-PF emerged as the overwhelming winner, capturing 1 668 992 (62.99%) of the total national votes. This translated into 57 of the 80 seats allocated to the black Zimbabweans according to the Lancaster Constitution. The election result across the provinces clearly illustrated voting patterns along ethnic cleavages. In the Mashonaland East, Central, and West, Victoria, and Manicaland, which is predominately dominated by the Shona saw 78% of the votes cast in these regions going to ZANU. ZAPU only managed to capture 638 879 (24.11%) of the votes and won 20 seats in Parliament with most support from the Matabeleland (Ndebele’s).¹³ It was only Muzorewa’s UANC, among other parties that contested the founding elections that managed to secure three seats in Parliament.

Although the subsequent election, which took place in 1985 did not reveal any change in voting pattern along the two major ethnic groups – Shona and Ndebele, ZANU however, was successful in increasing its share of seats in Parliament and consolidation in power and dominance

over politics. This dominance was possible through changes in the electoral law. The electoral system was changed from the proportional representation system to first-past-the-post system (FPTP) under a single member district (SMD). The FPTP system is notorious for promoting under-representation and votes waste. ZANU was able to secure 64 of the 80 seats reserved for Black Zimbabweans in Parliament, compared to ZAPU with only 15 seats; ZANU-Ndonga only won 1 seat. This meant that ZANU was able to increase its seats in Parliament by seven more seats in comparison to the 1980 election results.

In order to entrench the dominance of ZANU, Robert Mugabe signed a 'Unity Accord' with Joshua Nkomo on 22 December 1987. This resulted in the merger of ZANU and ZAPU into a mega party called ZANU-PF. This merger destroyed any hope of effective opposition politics in Zimbabwe and this is partly responsible for the reverse democratic progress in Zimbabwe. The move was described by many political commentators in Zimbabwe as a strategy employed by President Robert Mugabe to consolidate power and facilitate the formation of the one-party state. The 1990 and 1995 election results, in many ways, lend credence to this assertion. ZANU-PF, won 1 690 071 (80.55%) of the votes cast in 1990, that translate into 117 of the 120 seats elected seats in Parliament. Before 1990 election, the provision for 20 reserved seats was removed from the constitution and the parliamentary seats were extended to 120 without any special provision for race groupings. The election campaign was rallied around the need to ensure national unity and warnings of new and old reactionary, racist and divisive force inform of the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) and Forum Party of Zimbabwe (FPZ), led by former Zimbabwe Supreme Court judge, Enoch Dumbutshena. FPZ call for fundamental changes to the office of the President and a

return to a bi-cameral Parliament. The ZUM was formed in April 1989 by a group of disgruntled student movements and workers from the urban areas. With all the unsavory political environment against ZUM (i.e. limited resources, and lack of publicity) as a newly formed political party contesting in the election for the first time, it secured two parliamentary seats in the Manicaland North and Mutare Central constituencies. ZANU-Ndonga won 1 seat in Chipinge South. In 1995, with ZANU-PF winning 1 140 000 (81.63%) of the votes and 118 seats in Parliament and solely controlling the 30 nominated and reserved seats, it gave ZANU-PF a total control of all seats in Parliament – 148 of the 150 seats. The coming of the MDC into the political market place completely changed the nature of party competition as well as destroyed the hegemony of ZANU-PF in Zimbabwean politics.

ZANU-PF until the establishment of MDC into the political contestation equation, commanded the overwhelming majority to an extent that Zimbabwe effectively became a *de facto* one party state. This allowed other parties to exist as long as they did not pose any serious challenge to the domination and rule of ZANU-PF. Nevertheless, the MDC managed to gather considerable political strength through its wide spread support from the trade union movements, disgruntled intelligentsia community, student movement and civil society. The voting pattern in the last 2000 and 2002 general elections is a clearly illustrates the end of ZANU-PF's domination of political competition. Contrary to what was suggested by some commentators¹⁴ that any possibility of political opposition in Zimbabwe politics would be through a split within the ZANU-PF, the emergence of MDC in Zimbabwe shifted the focus away from possible opposition from within ZANU-PF, to the alliance of civil society organisations,. This led to the formation of

the MDC as the first ever formidable national opposition party.¹⁵

The level of popular support enjoyed by the MDC, which was based on a common goal of forming a credible opposition to offset the ruling ZANU-PF, clearly upset the dominant position of ZAPU-PF. Series of political manoeuvres were introduced to suppress any successful electioneering by the MDC. These included, among other violations mentioned in the beginning of this paper, a careful manipulation of the electoral law and election process. These included amendments to the Electoral Act of 1990, promulgation of the draconian laws such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) of 2000, a sharp cut in the number of urban polling places, and physical assaults or intimidation of voters suspected of MDC sympathies¹⁶. The Public Order Security Act was regarded by many commentators as having been more repressive than the notorious colonial era Law and Order Maintenance Act. It was reported that POSA was used to stop no less than seven MDC election campaign rallies in one week, as well as voter education meetings organised by civil society groups in Harare, Bulawayo, and Mutare¹⁷. Despite all the attempts by the ruling party to frustrate the efforts of the opposition parties, MDC's electoral performance during the 2001 presidential election was a clear signal of the end to the political domination and control of ZANU-PF.

From the above analysis, it follows that the development of political parties is interrelated with the struggle for independence. ZANU-PF emerged as a liberation movement that mobilised citizens for independence. With time, the ZANU-PF has become a source of power and accumulation of wealth in the face of poverty and human starvation. The nature of party systems that developed during the phase of liberation struggle demonstrates the prevalent tendency among political

parties in Africa to solicit support around a dominant party for the sole purpose of defeating the colonial power and not necessarily for carrying out the task of governance. ZANU-PF uses its dominant and prominent role in polity to eliminate political competition and consolidate power after achieving independence. This behaviour cumulated in the evolution of *pseudo one party* rule. Single party dominance did not emerge as a result of consensus between parties during the struggle for independence. The monopolisation of power by ZANU-PF happened after independence. ZANU-PF was voted in power through competitive elections but once in power, the party destroyed any form of effective political opposition. The *pseudo one party* state failed to fulfil its expected role: representing the needs and aspiration of all citizens, providing a stable government and above all, reconciling the differences between the Shona and Ndebele political rivalry groupings. This has resulted in creating weak institutionalised party systems, where the distinctiveness of party organisations in Zimbabwe is characterised by ethnicity, clientalism, patronage, highly centralised political power structures, control and abuse of state resources by the ruling party, high volatility of election competition and weak opposition party systems. ZANU-PF emerged as a dominant party because it abused the privilege of incumbency by systematically manipulating the electoral laws and/or constitution in order to weaken every attempt by opposition parties to gain equitable and proportional access to political power. Hence, the interplay between structural and regulatory conditions under which opposition parties operate remains one of the major deficits for opposition parties in the process of democratic consolidation. But it is difficult, if not too early, to assess the extent to which MDC has shifted party politics away from old patterns of party allegiance. MDC was successful in

providing an alternative political expression of politicised cleavages in society. These cleavages facilitated the development of a network of civil association collectively mobilising supporters on each side of the cleavage. The success of the MDC is mainly attributed to the nature of the coalition that brought about its formation and continues to work within the party structure. The close relationship between the MDC and civil society groups has heightened the risk of politicisation of civil society along party political lines. If MDC is to become the real alternative to the ruling party, it would have to operate differently from the ruling party. Of critical importance is finding an effective mechanism within the party to deal with internal conflict.

Intra Party Politics within ZANU-PF and MDC

Opponents of intra-party democracy have repeatedly argued about the importance of representative linkages within parties. McKenzie¹⁸ argues that the internally democratic parties are 'incompatible with the workings of democratic government'. He maintains that control of the legislature and executive by extra-parliamentary party organs is a distinguishing feature of a totalitarian political system. It follows that 'oligarchical control by party leaders of their party organisation is indispensable for the well-being of a democratic polity'. Duverger postulates that the democratic process of decision-making is inefficient and would weaken a political party's ability to compete with its opponents: "democratic principles demand that leadership at all levels be elective, that it be frequently renewed, collective in character, weak in authority. Organised in this fashion, a party is not well armed for the struggle of politics¹⁹." This line of argument follows what political theorists call 'Rational-Efficient Party Model'.²⁰ In this model, the workings and operations of a party is compared to competitive

corporations, which operate on profit bases. It follows that parties must compete for voters in the same manner that business companies compete for buyers of their product. Of critical concern for the supporters of this view is the supposed importance of party cohesion for competitiveness within the parties'.

ZANU-PF is likened to a case of 'democratic centralism'²¹ (Mair and Sithole 2002) in which the Politburo ultimately decides on who becomes the party's representative for any elected office. Although the People's Congress is supposed to be the highest decision making body within ZANU-PF, it is rather the First Secretary (who is also the President of the Party), Politburo and the Central Committee who makes all important decisions within the party through the Secretary for Administration. This body is the link between the party and government/president. This arrangement centrally locates all the powers within the party in the hand of one person – President Robert. Mugabe. Despite this long established tradition of party primary elections, there is still a lack of appreciation among party membership on how the mechanism works. Primary elections always end in creating anger, bitterness, non-acceptance of election results, factions and growth of independent candidates.

Democratisation of party selection is not a universal trend within parties (ZANU-PF and MDC) in Zimbabwe. The degree to which parties open up their selection process across parties varies. The MDC party structure looks different from ZANU-PF, but it is not very different in operation. The highest decision making body within MDC is the National Congress, which like the ZANU-PF, also meets every five years to elect members of the National Executive Committee (NEC). The NEC, a much smaller party structure but an extremely powerful one, meets

annually and implements all policy decisions made by the Congress. Unlike the ZANU-PF, the MDC Secretary General of the party is not the President of the party but the NEC in a similar fashion to ZANU-PF also controls the nomination process within the party.

The effect of democratising candidate selection varies because the different selection mechanisms and/or selection bodies within parties often produce different kinds of parliamentary candidates, as well as different types of party leadership. For example, women are always casualties of primary election in both parties. Women, in general, struggle to be nominated during primary elections. Women lost elections during this phase because there was no adequate political education within parties. Women are often placed in traditional societies where there are deeply entrenched gender biases. Parties need to carry out a re-orientation civic education programme long before the elections. The expectation that people will change their socially conditioned responses in a society perpetuated by traditional values and systems, where people vote on gut feelings during election time is an unrealistic expectation. This constitutes a major deficiency among parties in Zimbabwe.

Women and Party and Politics

The UN Human Development Report of 1995 which analysed gender and development in 174 countries, found that: 'while it is true that no definite relationship has been established between the extent of women's participation in political institutions and their contribution to the advancement of women, a 30 percent membership in political institutions is considered the critical mass that enables women to exert meaningful influence on politics'. The SADC member-states in an effort to address the gender inequality in politics and other state related

agencies, adopted *The Gender and Development Declaration* in Blantyre, Malawi in 1997. In this declaration, they recognise that while gender equality is a fundamental human right, individually and collectively, SADC member-states committed themselves to equal gender representation in all key organs of the state and to at least reach a target of 30% women representation in key political and decision-making structures by 2005. The progress made so far in Zimbabwe toward reaching the 30% minimum target of women in key organs of the state, especially Parliament is still minimal. It is unfortunate that neither the ZANU-PF nor the MDC has sufficiently promoted women participation and representation in politics. The representation of women in decision-making structures within both parties and in Parliament continues to remain unimpressive. Both ZANU-PF and MDC have very few women in Parliament as indicated in the following table:

Table 1: Number of Women in Zimbabwe Parliament from 2000–2004 by Political Party

Election	No. of Seats in Parliament	No. of Women in Parliament by Party		Type of Electoral System
		ZANU-PF	MDC	
2000	150	9	7	FPTP

Source: Own Compilation (Olaleye, W. 2003)

The imbalanced nature of women representation is a matter of serious concern and despite many parties both recognising and acknowledging the imbalances in party manifestos, little progress had been in this regard. Zimbabwe's 25 member cabinet is dominated mainly by men. Only four of the executives are women. Furthermore, many of the local councils are also dominated by men, e.g. the Harare City Council, which comprises 46 councilors, has only 6 women members.

Other factors that have been identified explaining the under-representation of

women in politics include: lack of economic empowerment, lack of confidence to participate in politics beyond voting, social constraints, and political party frameworks that do not support women. Although cultural factors entrenched in the socialisation process and the prevailing hostile political environment has mostly been cited as to reasons why women feature poorly in Zimbabwe politics, however, research indicates that political structures (i.e. electoral system) rather than purely socio-cultural issues act as major deterring factors for the under-representation of women in politics. In Zimbabwe, the few women representative in Parliament are generally secured through reserving a fixed number of seats for women within parties'. An examination of Table 1 clearly illustrates what multipartyism means for women in Zimbabwe. In Parliament today, both ZANU-PF and MDC have very few women representatives.

The position is advanced in this paper is that the issue of women representation within parties cannot be addressed in a vacuum. Raising the profile of women within parties should be part of a strategy that seeks to address issues of national socio-economic development. It is equally important to stress that other short to medium term measures could possibly be adopted to correct the women under-representation that characterises parties in Zimbabwe. Parties should consider adopting and applying quotas and reserved seats system for women more vigorously. This should be applied at the party nomination phase. The quota system must ensure that women constitute a certain number or percentage (30%) of the members of a body, be it on the candidate list, Parliament, or the cabinet (party informal quota system). The other approach that could be used in fast tracking the representation of women within party structures and politics is to have a statutory quota system as opposed to reliance on the mercy of party elites for nomination. It

must form part of a deliberate strategy and have strong support from the political leadership.

This system places the responsibility on those in control of the nomination/recruitment process within the party. It makes provision for the expected target of women in decision-making structures to be written in the party and or national constitution. For the system to be effective women candidates must be suitably prepared and adequate linkages established between women in parties, Parliament, institutions, and/or agencies that empower women for leadership.

On a national level, the number of women in Zimbabwe Parliament accounts for 9% of the total number available of seats. One of the important reasons for this low figure lies in the nature of the electoral system employed in translating votes cast into parliamentary seats. The First-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system, which is used in Zimbabwe, is based on constituency representation,. This has the tendency of making it difficult for women to overcome the conventionally attributed stereotypes roles of women in society. Evidence elsewhere in the SADC region suggests that countries with proportional representation systems (i.e. Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia) allow politically progressive elites to break through the patriarchal bias and fast track women in decision making. Changing the electoral system is a better option and much easier mechanism to implement in changing deeply entrenched social and cultural perceptions of the role of women.

Conclusion

The issue of whether political parties are a basic prerequisite of a democratic system is a foregone conclusion, at least in Zimbabwe. The issue that confronts party system in Zimbabwe is that of finding appropriate political mechanisms and

institutions to transform the highly centralised political institutions into those that promote viable and pluralist democratic procedures within political parties, as well as fostering the culture of political pluralism that symbolises the democratic aspiration of many Zimbabweans. It is important within the political context of Zimbabwe that parties develop an enabling environment that can help mainstream internal democratic practices within parties as the role of political parties in democratic governance is highly critical. Although Zimbabwe is a multiparty democracy, the political outlook is that of a one-party state, in which ZANU-PF is extremely bureaucratic, oppressive and indistinguishable from the state apparatus. The idea of a separation between the three tiers of government is a complete illusion.

Both the legislature and judiciary are subjected to the powers of the executive embodied in the presidency. Even though Members of Parliament are elected, when it comes to exercising legislative oversight, these members are merely rubber stamping agents to the decisions taken by the party and the president. The latter is also the party chairperson. The failure of the legislature to maintain an overseeing function over the government is a reflection of the nature of the internal democratic culture evident within the party. Until the emergence of the MDC, the whole Parliament was an extension of the ZANU-PF committee. However as the MDC now forms a visible opposition in Parliament, it cannot be reduced to a mere extension of party affairs.

Notes

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⁸ Is the only women candidate ever to contest for the Presidential seat

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¹¹ Ibid.

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¹⁴ See Nkiwane, T.C. 1998. On opposition politics in Zimbabwe

¹⁵ The National Constitutional Assembly (founded in 1997), a formation of more than 40 civic organisations and opposition parties dedicated to promoting constitutional reforms provided the support base within the labour movement, especially the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) under the former secretary general, now the president of MDC – Morgan Tsvangirai, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, Human Rights Advocacy Groups such as ZimRights, Women's Coalition, and the Zimbabwe National Student Union

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¹⁸ McKenzie, R. Quoted in *A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, Robert Michels. 1999, London: Transaction Publishers

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