

2013 Zimbabwe's Harmonised Elections. A farce or a Reality?

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Abstract

The Zimbabwean election results have been met with mixed reactions ranging from ululation and jubilation for the victors ZANU PF to outright disbelief and disgust to the leadership and supporters of MDC T who had invested much time and energy in an attempt to secure a radical change to the status quo. This situation has brought about a stalemate between the biggest political rivals in Zimbabwe, were the MDC T alleges that its victory in the harmonised election was stolen by ZANU PF using an orchestra of rigging machines ranging from electoral fraud to strategic positioning of the officials running the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission. On the other hand some sections of the civic society, political commentators blame the MDC T for its defeat to serious levels of political naivety, political immaturity, and loss of political providence among other issues which will be discussed in this paper. It is however the purpose of this paper to analyse whether the 2013 harmonised elections were a reality or farce despite these divergent views from various sections of the society.

Keywords: MDC T, ZANU PF, ZEC, Election

Introduction

The Harmonised elections in Zimbabwe in which the ZANU PF party romped to a landslide victory has been received differently by different people in Zimbabwe, in the region as well as the international community in which some have blatantly condemned the election outcome arguing that it is not a true reflection of the will of the people of Zimbabwe.

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Morgan Tsvangirai (who said that the “sham” victory by Mugabe had thrown his party and the country at large into “national mourning”), *The Financial Gazette August 8-15 2013*, has rejected his arch-rival’s victory. Robert Mugabe who described the election as the “fight of our lives” garnered more than 2.1million votes(61%) whilst Tsvangirai got 1.1million votes (33%) of the 3.4million ballots cast. Mugabe was declared winner of the July 31st election sparking yet another debate regarding how the MDC T let the election slip through their fingers for the third consecutive time. Following the announcements of the results, the Australian foreign minister Bob Carr was heard to say that Australia will not lift its sanction regime against Zimbabwe and called for an election rerun, Britain has echoed the same sentiments .This has however led political analyst to argue that the refusal by Britain, USA, Australia and their allies (who were not invited to observe) to recognise the elections which were monitored, observed and endorsed by over 800 observers of the UN, AU, SADC, COMESSA and other independent observer groups from Africa, ceases to be Zimbabwe’s case.They argue it is now Africa versus Britain, the US and Australia. Adding that what is now on trial is Africa’s verdict over its own elections versus European interests.

Did the MDC T lose to ZANU PF?

As the results trickled, they showed that the tables were turning against the MDC T in favour of ZANU PF and it became apparent that ZANU PF was heading for a landslide victory .It was at this juncture that Morgan Tsvangirai dismissed the election as a “huge farce” and “null and void”. Addressing journalists Tsvangirai was heard to say “...from the evidence available, discounting all omissions and commissions, the MDC T actually won this election “he added “the fraudulent and stolen election has plunged Zimbabwe into a political, economic and constitutional crisis”. Despite having earlier said that he wished to thank the millions of the people who had come out to cast their votes.

MDC T leader Morgan Tsvangirai has dismissed the elections as “null and void”, he argue that the elections were severely compromised. According to Gerrie Swart the behaviour of the MDC T leader of refusing to concede election defeat is not surprising as it has happened in many African countries where the election outcomes have been hotly disputed by the vanquished were they argue that the elections were marred by gross injustice of electoral fraud perpetrated by the victor.

It is against this background that some questions have been asked whether electoral democracy has the ability to serve as the cure to all of the woes that plague many African countries.

Politics is a business, now if one was to take the two major political parties in Zimbabwe which are ZANU PF and MDC T as products on the market. One would be bound to say and believe that the two parties are core products for what puts them on the same level is that they are political parties in the same political environment. In business marketers spent sleepless nights working on their product differentiation so as to remain in business and to be able to push volumes of their products. When one chooses a product from a choice of two core products one looks at what augments the product to make it different from just being a mere core product.

It is against this brief commercial oriented synopsis that the two political parties entered the elections in. The loss of the MDC T in the recent election has been accounted to a medley of factors including corruption, indiscipline, complacency, naivety and ZANU P's bag of 'dirty' tricks. Dr Charity Manyeruke is of the view that when MDC T joined the coalition government, it completely neglected its constituencies 'she adds '...its leadership concentrated on trips while ZANU PF ...strategized on how to empower its people, *The Financial Gazette*, August 8-15 2013. She sums up that it was out of this mediocrity and relaxation that the MDC T was trounced in the election. Whilst the above maybe true but to conclude it in such a way would be not be an honest analysis, Munyaradzi Gwisai, argues that though there was 'intimidation', an uneven terrain and some manipulation....the massive scale of defeat points to other and deeper reasons he said.

Though a lot can be said and questions asked on how the MDC T lost the elections, there are various reasons as alluded before to explain why MDC T would have lost in these elections.

This date back to Government on National Unity negotiations, were the MDC T was made to administer the various ministries which had to deal with direct reporting and auditing from the general populace. These ministries ranged from the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Constitutional Affairs among others which in terms of politics they constitute issues of Low politics.

It is from these ministries that the day to day running of the country is based on and hence out of these ministries the MDC T was kept busy .Whilst their ZANU PF counterparts were strategizing how to win the next election, as they were occupying the strategic key ministries such the Ministry of Defence ,Ministry of State Security, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education ,Ministry of Local Governance among others which constituted the issues of High politics. It was out of this arrangement that the MDC T come into the elections were assured to lose to ZANU PF, as the arrangement made MDC T busy in issues of service delivery were the general population would audit them in their day to day business whilst ZANU PF ministers were busy mappingtheir comeback strategy come the next elections; as they had less work to report to the general public.

Given such a burden to report to the general, the MDC forgot its founding principles. It is public knowledge that the MDC was built on a *regime change* agenda ,but 2009 the MDC ended with no change,rather they formed a coalition with ZANU PFwhich was describe as an unholy union. It was in this GNU that the MDC T got cultured into ZANU PF programmes and policies in the name of the GNU. According to Dr Miles Tendi he argues that Tsvangirai's party lost sight of the need for rapid and comprehensive institutional reforms in the early years of power-sharing. It expended most of its energies in fighting inconsequential appointments battles to the ministry of agriculture, attorney general, the central bank governor and provincial governors. By the time it refocused on institutional reforms, the period to elections had shortened significantly. There was little time, energy and external goodwill left for the MDC-T to pursue what should have been its main pursuits from the beginning and this actually worked against them. While in government Tsvangirai turned his attention to fighting Mugabe for more power, whilst ignoring his constituencies. According to Denford Magora he said "he (Tsvangirai) fought to be seen as equal with Mugabe and fruitlessly went on and on about how Mugabe could not do anything without getting his approval.

This was a deliberate tactic on Mugabe's part: keeping Tsvangirai busy with little inconsequential fights in government while Mugabe and ZANU PF kept their eye firmly on the next election".Bratton also said ZANU PF leaders spent their energy electioneering and were more effective at mobilising their supporters .This was especially true in rural areas, where two thirds of the population live, and where the election will be decided" *The Financial Gazette 8-15 August 2013*

It also important to realise that the MDC T members slept on the job and got too much concerned on selfish power searching agendas ,and they forgot that they had been elected to serve the electorate. In local authorities, where MDC T councils were voted into power, residents were billed with exorbitant rates which accumulated during the Zim dollar era.Pleas for write offs were ignored and reports of poor residents being subjected to crude debt collectors were equally dismissed .The MDC T did not come to the rescue of its voters .Many councillors turned looters and residents watched in despair as those they had voted to ameliorate their suffering worsened their plight once in power. In government, MDC T ministers joined the gravy train –as election drew closer, they changed cars while exasperated civil servants' pleas for salary increases received discourteous rebuke.

To many Zimbabweans, the perception had always been that ZANU PF politicians were pitiless .But when the pain came from those they thought better about, the anger should have seethed more.

The MDC T as a party was also marred by some in house fighting were Morgan Tsvangirai was alleged to have becoming more dictatorial surrounding himself with a 'kitchen cabinet' that hardly said no to him. In one way or the other the MDC T had been Zanunised by Tsvangirai when he manipulated the party's constitution to allow him to stand for a third term. This seriously divided the MDC-T; promoting friends and relatives, to replace professional advisors and hard-working party loyalists like Elias Mudzuri who made MDC T win 100 parliamentary seats. What happened to him? What else could we expect? As if that was not enough the elections leading to 2011 MDC Congress in Bulawayo, were marred by a lot of irregularities and violence. It was also through this that the party was assured of a downward slope since It joined the GNUvisa a vi the 2013 elections.

Apart from the above the MDC T in their camp were also filled with a lot of complacency. Instead of taking advantage of the party's role in improving the economy and canvassing countryside support Tsvangirai spent most of the time outside the country, whilst those close to him were either cementing their positions or accumulating wealth telling him that all was fine. Those who said contrary were considered as enemies of the party.

It has been argued that the MDC T went into the election ill prepared, without even a slogan. Whilst ZANU PF slogan was '*Bhora musedhi*' the MDC T were going the opposite '*bhora musango*' this basically showed that they were not prepared. They even failed to maintain consistence with their well-known slogan 'chinja maitiro, maitiro chinja; gukula izenzo, izenzo gukula'. All this alienated them from their electorate as people do not want to be identified without consistence.

As has been alluded to before, that politics is business and that there is need to push volumes, the ZANU PF presidential candidate understanding the elementary principles of commerce, that there is need to push volumes. He went and attended an Apostolic Church Service in Marange where hundreds of thousands of the Vapostori were camping for a Passover feast. The MDC T responded to this by mocking the both the Vapostori cartooning Mugabe as one who is now looking for divine intervention ahead of the coming polls. It is now common knowledge in Zimbabwean politics that most of the Vapostori are now aligned to ZANU PF since the days of Border Gezi. It is basically out of the idea that ZANU PF gives respect to these independent African churches that has earned them their votes.

Political analysts have argued that since the 2008 elections ZANU PF through its strategic ministries in the GNU never stopped communicating with the people from the grassroots through its programmes and policies. It was during this time that ZANU PF did their homework and studied the voting trends so as to target areas where their vote was low and how they would boost it in the forthcoming elections.

Also to contribute ZANU PF victory was the great sense of unity, purpose and discipline during its campaign and the period after their primary election. 29 members of the MDC-T who were disgruntled with the manner the party's primaries were conducted defied the leadership and ran as independents.

Whilst only three disaffected ZANU PF candidates did likewise. MDC-T divisions were particularly stark in Manicaland province, where imposition of parliamentary candidates by the MDC T leader, Tsvangirai resulted in a serious rift between him, the party and the provincial executive. And Manicaland – unlike in 2008 — voted for ZANU-PF this time. Also the picking of Djs to represent the party in the elections, people with a zero political experience against a seasoned party like ZANU PF was surely an insult to themselves.

Especially in constituencies like Mbare where ZANU PF's Tendai Savanhu and ZANU PF Harare chairperson Amos Midzi were always hovering campaigning really a political immaturity of the deepest dye.

African political history has it that it is difficult to unseat a sitting president. This phenomenon in African politics called the preponderance of incumbency. Simply put, it maintains that it is difficult to defeat an incumbent president in an election because they control the state institutions, which they can use to retain power. Consequently, only in Zambia, where presidents Kenneth Kaunda and Rupiah Banda lost in the 1991 and 2011 respectively, is there an established record of incumbents losing to an opposition challenger.

And many analysts have blamed this for ZANU PF and Robert Mugabe's victory in Zimbabwe's 2013 harmonised elections .Tsvangirai maintains that his crushing election defeat was the result of rigging by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and the registrar general's office, which manages the voters' roll. Tsvangirai and his MDC-T party went into a power-sharing government in 2009 hoping to reform various institutional reforms so as to nullify this preponderance of incumbency in Zimbabwe. Mugabe's party certainly obstructed and subverted the implementation of such reforms – anything other than this would have been political suicide.

Though Zimbabwe is largely calm and peaceful in the aftermath of the election, debates about the result is continuing behind closed doors. A clear fissure in the Zimbabwean society has emerged between those who maintain that Mugabe's election win is entirely down to the preponderance of incumbency, electoral fraud, rigging and those who argue that this does not tell the whole story. Taking a closer look one would realise that a multiplicity of factors converged to ensure Mugabe's election victory.

What remains is the challenge to the MDC T to prove beyond doubt that indeed their election victory was stolen by ZANU PF, to convince SADC and the AU to withdraw their previous statement that the elections in Zimbabwe were free, fair and credible which is very unlikely.

As has been alluded to, the lack of political unity in the MDC-T, even up to now there is no consensus in their ranks that their victory was stolen. Some of its senior party officials have quietly sent messages to ZANU PF conceding defeat. Some of the leadership of the smaller MDC party, which broke away from Tsvangirai group in 2005, have even broken ranks. Paul Temba Nyathi, for example, states: "I got a feeling that Gwanda North [my constituency] was unwinnable. People who used to come to our rallies and support us suddenly could not look me in the eye. They started vacillating. We had a free and fair contest, everyone was free to canvass and the vote was peaceful in Gwanda North. Hand on heart; I think ZANU PF beat us fair and square. There is something that made people to fall in love with ZANUPF again."

Conclusion

As has been alluded above it is quite clear that both Tsvangirai and the MDC T faction he leads were too far from winning the harmonised elections. They failed to deliver the promises they had made to their electorate who in this case were mainly comprised of the urbanites, whom they failed to cushion from the harsh economic environment in the cities. These economic woes were further worsened by the rampant corruption in the City Councils which were dominated by them.

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