

Political Culture and Democratic Governance in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The ideal of democracy has dominated political science as a subject area in the contemporary world of politics and is undoubtedly the most credible and valued principle of social organization. In the conscience of people it has come to mean the choice between constitutional and arbitrary authority, empowerment and marginalization, freedom and thralldom, voice and noiselessness. Thus as a global phenomenon, the general idea of democracy, both as theory and praxis has become inestimably seductive to practically all peoples and countries(Prah)¹. Social Scientist has placed less attention on the relationship between Political culture and Democratic governance in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. More emphasis has been placed on neo-colonialism, elections and electoral systems ignoring the importance of political culture in democratic consolidation. Every African country purport to be democratic but findings point out that, Africa`s political landscape is defines by a culture of impunity and that the ethos of good governance have been mutilated. As for Zimbabwe, democratic decay and violence has been the defining feature of the political environment. A culture of impunity characterized by electoral fraud has engulfed Zimbabwe`s political landscape and this has defined the political culture of the system of governance. Violence and political instability has negatively affected Zimbabwe`s political economy. Political culture is extremely vital and crucial for democratic practice and the ideal of democracy is highly dependent upon a particular political culture in a given country. Political violence, institutionalized intimidation, thugocracy, lawlessness, inability to accept defeat, and multivariate conflicts have marked Zimbabwe's political landscape ,promoted by resource distribution, ideological contestations, social differentiation along class, political party, gender and ethnic cleavage, clearly have an enormous impact on the prospects for nurturing and consolidation of democratic governance in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: culture, political culture, democracy, governance and good governance

¹KwesikwaPrah, Democracy, Education, Literacy and Development, CASAS;1

Introduction

Culture is undoubtedly a crucial determinant of the history, identity and destiny of an given society(K. Matlosa)². The dynamics of a social fabric of any society, therefore revolve principally around the culture of that society(Prah , as cited in K. Matlosa)³. Political culture is therefore the foundation and cornerstone of any political system that promote or undermine governance in any society.

Political culture has both direct and indirect bearing and permutations on political and economic governance process, and as such has influenced a considerable degree of instability or stability of a country's political system. Matlosa has conceived political culture as a concept that denotes a broad array of norms, values, beliefs, attitudes and traditions that shape systems, institutions and processes of governance. Political culture is one of the most powerful influences that shape a political system. It creates norms and beliefs about how people should behave and these norms influence social behavior⁴. Heywood corroborates the above observation by arguing that culture, which he also terms "politics of the mind" is crucial for democratic governance and stability given that it builds societal perceptions and expectation regarding the running of national affairs by governments⁵. He further argue that popular beliefs and symbols and values, structure both people's attitudes to the political process and crucially, their view of the regime in which they live , most particularly whether or not they regard their regime as rightful or legitimacy. Legitimacy is thus the key to political stability and it is nothing less than the source of the regime's survival and successes,⁶.

Surely political culture is heavily embedded in the process of political socialization which have been marred by propaganda and politics of patronage in the Zimbabwean political system.

²Matlosa, K. Political culture and Democratic governance in Southern Africa, SAPES;3

³Ibid, 3

⁴Matlosa, K. Political culture and Democratic Governance in Southern Africa, SAPES;98

⁵Heywood, A. Politics, Mcmilian;185

⁶A. Heywood, Politics, Mcmilian, 185

A dominant party has monopolized the agents of political socialization thus , the family, educational institution, religious institutions, mass media, political parties, civil society and the government,⁷.The paper grapples with the complex relationships and interface of instability and democratic governance in Zimbabwe.

Development of a Democratic Political Culture

Political culture as a perceived and formalized perception of politics that is shared among a particular group can be analysed, contextualized and historicized. Each and every political system has its unique historical framework that can be analysed and consequently be used in its categorization.It encompasses both the political ideals and the operating norms of a polity. Political culture is thus the manifestation in aggregate form of the psychological and subjective dimensions of politics. Pye submitted that a political culture is the product of both the collective history of a political system and the life histories of the members of that system, and thus it is rooted equally in public events and private experiences⁸.

As such, Tesler and Gao submitted that studies of democracy and democratic institutions place emphasis on the attitudes, values and behavior patterns of ordinary citizens. They further reacted that democratization as a process is inspired by the norms and behaviors that are conducive to democracy⁹.

Political culture is developed through phased varied processes that entrenches a number of activities and sub processes for the institutionalization of that culture. Huntington in Tesler and Gao stressed that a democratic culture orientation is a pre condition for a democratic transition¹⁰. Rose , further submitted that democratic norms and behavior need not to proceed but rather can follow an elite led transition involving the reform of political institutions and procedures¹¹.

⁷ R. Jackson and D. Jackson, A Comparative Introduction to Political Science, Prentice Hall,20

⁸P. Mawhood, Decentralisation and the Third World in the 1980, Planning and Administration , 14

⁹Telser. M. and E. Gao, Comparative Democratic Development,

¹⁰Huntington, The clash of civilisation and the Remaking of the World Order,Simon and Schuster, 25

¹¹ Ibid,25

Zimbabwe presents an interesting dimension in the study of the development of political culture. Many scholars, notably Makumbe(2002), Kurebwa (2001), Tarugarira (2008), Mandaza(2005) have classified Zimbabwe as a country with an punitive culture of intolerance to democracy¹². In analyzing the roots of this impunitive and intolerance, Nkomoin The Story Of My Life, cited Zanu Pf as the major element behind politics of intolerance in the country. Nkomo classically noted that Zanu's strategies exposed it more as a political front than a military wing that coerced and indoctrinated people to involuntarily accept Zanu's communist political ideologies and make them part of their lives¹³. He further accuses Zanu and its president Mugabe for their repulsive approach to divergent political views that led to the party assassinating its political opponents both during and after the liberation struggle¹⁴. This view is also shared by Gumede who noted that, "many liberation and political movements that valiantly opposed authoritarian rule often behaves¹⁵."

Instability and Democratic Governance

Since the reinstatement of multiparty politics in Africa, political conflict between political parties has characterized electoral politics. There have been sporadic incidents of violence, hostilities and mutual distrust leading to increasing destabilization of the current political system in the continent. The countries of Africa, are a volatile mix of insecurity and conflict. The problem of conflict and insecurity is destabilizing the continent's peace process. It is right to argue that no continent that is bedeviled with the problem of peace and stability in its societal milieu will develop.

Thus, the dire need for peace in the African countries is a matter that calls for great and urgent concern. This submission is given credence by the views expressed by Solomon and Wart :2005: as cited in Sachikonye), on African Peace and Security :Territorial disputes, armed conflict, civil wars, violence and the collapse of governments and ultimately the state have come to represent the greatest challenges to peace, security and stability.

¹²Tarugarira.G, Of Heroes, Villains' and Valets: An Introspective Analysis of the Dynamism characterizing Traditional Chiefs and Central Government Relationship in Zimbabwe

¹³Mandaza.I.J.The story of my Life, SAPES Books; 4

¹⁴Ibid,5

¹⁵Makumbe. J, Zimbabwe's Hijacked Election;Journal Of Democracy

Observations points out that on the African continent, these threats have been much more pronounced and indeed have taken on a scale, intensity and frequency that have defied even the imagination of the greatest science fiction. Sachikonye (2010) suggest that in Zimbabwe violence has been a decisive instrument in the attainment of independence and for him violence has remained the cancer that corrodes the country's political culture and blocks Zimbabwe's democratic advances

Observations points that since independence Zimbabwe has been associated with violence and this cancer has spread down to the grassroots reaching uncontrollable levels. The political landscape is now defined by a culture of impunity and thuggery and this has militated negatively on political stability, democracy and governance.). Furthermore , the nationalist movements that lead to independence (ZAPU and ZANU PF) were not structured democratically(*authoritarian militarism was the chief and common feature of the liberation struggle... the movements paid scant attention to issues of freedoms... and both advocated an implacable internal unity.* The liberation struggle was fraught with intense intrigues, factionalism , divided rule, violent purges and assassinations... there was a lot of witch-hunting , intimidation and torture, enemies' being summarily dealt with' and this nurtured a culture of violence and instability in the Zimbabwean political landscape¹⁶. A plethora of literature perceives that instability is one of the challenges of democratic governance in Zimbabwe. Power struggles in Zimbabwe can be conceptualized using two approaches(Structuralism and Institutional Functionalism) to understand why political violence and instability has manifested themselves in the Zimbabwe's political system in particular.

Institutional –Functionalism

Huntington propounded an interesting thesis that in societies where political participation is high, yet the process of institutionalization is low and weak there is bound to be political instability or what he termed political decay¹⁷.

¹⁶Masunungure, E. The Anatomy of Political Predation: Leaders, Elites and Coalitions in Zimbabwe; 7

¹⁷Huntington, S.P. The clash of civilisation and the Remaking of the World Order, Simon and Schuster; 29

For him political decay is in large part a product of rapid social change and rapid mobilization of new groups into politics coupled with the slow development of political institutions” as cited in Matlosa ,¹⁸. Furthermore Huntington perceives political institutionalization in a Weberian sense as a process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability through a political culture based not on politics of patronage, but on legal rational norm¹⁹.

Zimbabwe is seen as premised more on the culture of patronage politics which is less institutionalized. Zimbabwe is now 32 years old but institutions remain traditional and primitive and had not developed over years and the proliferation of a number of groups in the political playing field had led to a high state of confusion which breeds and promote instability. Patronage politics is rife and centered on the father figure of the liberator and this has given rise to unprecedented levels of corruption, unstable macro-economic policies and state decay Hartman,²⁰

Due to this disequilibrium between institutionalization and participation , instability and political violence is therefore a dominant feature in Zimbabwe's political system. According to the Huntingtonian thesis suggests that the current problem of political instability and violence in Southern Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular can better be explicated by low levels of institutionalization and marked in the main by rigidity, simplicity, subordination and fragmented state institution under conditions of highly political mobilization and participation of citizen.

Structuralism

According to the structuralism approach instability and violence is centered on the triangle of conflict comprising :

- Contestation of state power
- Struggle over distribution of resources
- Social stratification and diversity premised upon identity, gender and approach.

¹⁸K. Matlosa, Political culture and Democratic Governance in Southern Africa, SAPES;100

¹⁹Huntington, S. P. Political order in changing Societies, Yale University; 16

²⁰ Hartmann, F .H The Relations of Nations, MacMillian Company, 552

The approach recognises that Zimbabwe politics is centered principally around state power, hence fierce contestations over state power as an end in itself (Ake, , Lumumba-Kasongo,²¹ The capture of state power is perceived as an end in itself rather than a means to an end. Political power is seen as a guarantee or license for economic power through accumulation aimed not at sustainable national development but at self-aggrandizement by the elite". Observations point out that the combination of both political and economic power is surely meant to ensure the hegemony and self-reproduction of the ruling elite and dominant party in politics both within and outside the state sphere.

Zimbabwe is in a constant state of transition. The political system is marked by centralization through the adoption of a defacto one party state rule and authoritarian political culture by ZANUPF since independence.. Claude Ake , observes that " although political independence brought some changes to the compositions of the state managers , the character of the state remained much as it was in the colonial era²². It continued to be totalistic in scope , constituting a statist economy. It presented itself as an apparatus of violence, had a narrow social base and relied to compliance on coercion rather than authority²³.

Thus, in collaborating Ake, Huntington argues that , with a short period of independence, Zimbabwe included new states reverted back to authoritarian rule a process which Huntington termed " a reverse wave of democratisation"²⁴ Hartman further supports Ake , arguing that" the lack of sovereign experience, coupled with lack of state and developed nationalism, too soon produced in many of these states one-party rule under the father figure²⁴". According Lumumba-Kasongoaguesthat Zimbabwe in its current form is not an agent for

positive social change because the state is created to advance the interests of the ruling elite despite the goodwill of many social movements²⁵.

²¹Ake,C. Feasibility of democracy in Africa, CODESRIA Books, 14

²²Ake,C. Democracy and Development in Africa, The Brookings Institute, 2

²³ Ibid, 3

²⁴Huntington,S. P. Political order in changing Societies, Yale University Press: 13

²⁵Kasongo,L. T. Reconceptualising the State as a leading Agent of Development in the context of Globalisation in Africa, African Journal of Political Science: 80

The violent political tension and polarization in Zimbabwe since 1997 to date had more to do with the fierce contestation of state power between the two MDC formations and ZANUPF and the benefits that go with that for the political elite than with the simple outcome of elections of the same year. Political leaders who were defined by Robert Bates as "specialists in violence" –employed instruments of coercion to extract wealth from society²⁶. Thus the contestation over the largesse that come with the control over state power is bound to be both fierce and violent and this seems to apply to Zimbabwe because politicians seem to be possessed by a culture of violence. In other words, it not only fails to deliver development outcomes; it also kills, maims and terrorizes its citizens.

The recent political crises in Zimbabwe is linked primarily to control over state power. The violence that engulfed Zimbabwe from 1999-2008 which led to killing and displacements of MDC and ZANU PF supports. MDC claims that about 300 of its supports were killed by ZANUPF militia and 100000 were displaced in both rural and urban areas after it dislodging ZANUPF dominance in Zimbabwe's political landscape. Observations points out that all this was certainly more about state power and a subterranean culture that bullets are more important than ballots in solving political differences. Also the accumulation of resources by elites in Zimbabwe is also a source of political, social and economic decay and this has lead to violent resource based conflicts.

Elections and the electoral system in Zimbabwe

Elections constitute one of the most important ingredients of democratic governance. Elections assure political participation of the citizens in the political system and the determination of national leadership. Ideally, therefore, elections are supposed to ensure the deepening and consolidation of democratic governance and political stability. Although elections are crucial to democratic governance, they, on their own, are not tantamount to or synonymous with democracy. Since the transition from authoritarian rule to democratic governance "the holding of elections is becoming common practice and a major indicator of political participation by citizens and political organizations²⁷".

²⁶Bates, R. *"When things Fell apart: State failure in late-century Africa"*, Cambridge University Press: 6

²⁷UNDP/SAPES/SADC Report :84

Elections are important for a democratic governance process in many ways:

- They help establish a representative government
- Bestow legitimacy and credibility on the government
- They assist the process of institutionalizing orderly succession of governments
- They compel elected representatives to be accountable to voters

Observations point out that although, Zimbabwe has done relatively well in the conduct of regular general elections, questions have been raised on the quality of elections (*whose environment has been defined by institutionalized intimidation, fear, violence, lawlessness/selfishness, patronage, manipulated state institutions, thugocracy, rigging, selective application of law and the inability to accept/ concede defeat of polls*) and the electoral systems it uses (First-Past –the- Post). Generally the outcome of elections and the extent they add value to democratic governance and political instability are extricable intertwined with the type of electoral system each country has adopted.

Elections refers to a process of choosing national leaders, a method that each country uses for elections is referred to as an electoral system. There are many electoral systems throughout the world and there is little consensus as to which is the best with regard to representation, broader participation, democratic governance, stability and legitimacy of rule²⁸ Jackson and Jackson .

Zimbabwe prefer First-Past –the- Post and on the contrary rocked by violent election related conflicts. The FPTP is more exclusionary and entrenches the hegemony of either one or two dominant parties while marginalizing smaller parties and this has affected constructive management of electoral conflicts in the disputed 2008 elections that lead to the formation of a coalition government in Zimbabwe between ZANUPF and the two MDC factions.

Kadima argues that Proportional Representation is the most suitable system of representation as far as fair representation of minorities is concerned.

²⁸Jackson,R. and Jackson,D." A comparative Introduction in Political Science,8

In addition, when well-designed, PR, can be effective in nation building efforts, as it tends to encourage political parties to seek votes and membership across communities²⁹. This limits the attractiveness of mono- ethnic, racial or religious and prevent political instability that would result from the defacto exclusion of some communities from parliament or government³⁰. PR has been found to be more inclusive, representative and participative system. Defacto exclusion imposed by FPTP leads to bitterness and dissatisfaction on the party of the losing parties. The system tends to exaggerate the electoral dominance of the dominant party effectively leading to one-party parliament. Zimbabwe's election in the past have been problematic, demanding a peculiar type of transitional solution designated as, Government of National Unity to restore economic stability and growth, promote equality, cohesion and unity, free political activity and the legitimacy crisis in a bid to curb violence and political instability.

Conclusion

Although there are positive developments for enhancing political participation, democratic governance and political stability, controversy still surrounds the relevance, form and context of the democratic model that Zimbabwe should adopt. For democracy to be adopted and consolidated in Zimbabwe there is need for the ruling elite to re-examine the social order and the political system in place so as to adopt a democratic culture that is imbedded in the Zimbabwe's cultural context. According to Prah democracy is best indigenized. It succeeds best when it wears and acknowledges the specific historical and cultural realities of the society in question. It is itself a development process. Democracy has best chance of institutionalized success when it is home grown and enjoys the active participation in its development by the society as a whole³¹. The only conclusion is that Zimbabwe is responsible for political problems due to the kind of the political culture it has chosen to adopt since independence.

²⁹Kadima, D. " Choosing an Electoral System. Alternatives for the Post-War Democratic Republic of Congo, *Journal of African Elections* 2(1)

³⁰Ibid, 43

³¹KwesiKwaPrah, Democracy, Education, Literacy and Development, CASAS, 5

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