Civil society and peacebuilding in Zimbabwe's 2018 elections

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Abstract

Zimbabwe's 30 July 2018 elections took place after 'a military assisted transition' that ousted Robert Mugabe and installed Emmerson Mnangagwa as president in November 2017. Initially, the new government projected a reformist image and gave civil society hope for a democratic dispensation. Using the 'local approach' frame of analysis, this article examines the role played by civil society organisations (CSOs) in peacebuilding in the 2018 elections. Arguably, civil society's activities defused some tensions; and promoted cohesion, harmony, dialogue, engagement and peace among political actors in the pre-election period. However, CSOs' lack of autonomy and partisanship dented their credibility and legitimacy in peacebuilding. Civil society's polarised response to post-election violence shattered hopes for a common peacebuilding strategy.

Key words: Civil society, peacebuilding, elections, violence, authoritarianism, Zimbabwe.

Introduction and positionality

Zimbabwe's 30 July 2018 presidential, parliamentary and local government elections took place after a 'military assisted' transition from the rule of strongman President Robert Mugabe to that of President Emmerson Mnangagwa in November 2017. On 20 November 2017, as Mugabe's removal from office was gathering momentum, 46 civil society organisations (CSOs) released a joint statement calling for a conducive political environment ahead of the 2018 elections.[1] CSOs demanded a pre-and post-election political environment devoid of violence, intimidation, patronage and hate speech.[2] CSOs demanded that in the impending 2018 elections; citizens, political parties, traditional leaders, media, churches, the security sector and civil society; must abide by electoral laws.[3] CSOs also called for effective electoral dispute resolution before, during, and after the 2018 elections.[4] Thus, CSOs' central demand was peaceful elections. This article examines the role of civil society in peacebuilding in

Zimbabwe's 2018 elections. Civil society refers associational life between the state and the family, filled with organisations autonomous from the state and voluntarily formed and joined by members of society to protect their values and interests.[5] Civil society organisations (CSOs) include non-governmental organisations (NGOs), trade unions, professional associations, faith-based organisations (FBOs) and foundations.[6] Antje Daniel and Dieter Neubert argue that one of the requirements for organisations to qualify as civil society is civility.[7] This means CSOs should consider all citizens to have the same rights and obligations and deserving to be treated with dignity.[8] According to Daniel and Neubert African civil society is more diverse and complicated than Western civil society.[9] They argue that there are a number of associations that do not fit in the Western concept of civil society because of their values, interests, activities and tendency to use violence.[10] They assert that CSOs that engage in violence are 'uncivil society' or 'bad civil society'.[11] Thus, civil society is not homogenous and some CSOs can cause tensions and conflicts in society.

Despite debates over its definition and conceptions, civil society is now widely viewed as one of the major facilitators of citizen participation in elections and democracy[12] and is crucial in dissipating social divisions, factionalism and violence within societies.[13] Thania Paffenholz has summed up the role played by civil society groups at various stages of conflict as 'protection, monitoring, advocacy, socialisation, social cohesion, facilitation and service delivery'.[14] Making reference to the work of Robert Putnam[15] and Ashutosh Varshney[16], Timothy J White avers that civil society creates social capital which provides goodwill and peace in communities.[17] White argues that civil society makes it possible for different groups of people to share common values, trust each other and prevent violence outside the formal political structures.[18] Christine Cubitt asserts that civil society promotes reciprocity and tolerance, and fosters democracy.[19] These perspectives concur that civil society can play a crucial role in peace processes at local and national level.

Scholars have explored the role of civil society in the democratisation process in Zimbabwe. Sara Rich Dorman examined the contribution of church NGOs to democratisation in post-colonial Zimbabwe even though their operating space was limited.[20] Michael Aeby's work examined the role of CSOs in democratisation and peacebuilding during the power sharing government era between 2009 and 2013. Aeby argues that CSOs were largely excluded and sidelined by their Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) partners and their space to contribute to democratisation and peacebuilding was reduced.[21] Cornelias Ncube's work looked into the role played by a coalition of CSOs called the Church and Civil Society Forum

in peacebuilding through advancing democratisation and socialisation during the power sharing government era between 2009 and 2013.[22] Ncube argues that the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) side of the inclusive government was skeptical of CSOs and often denied them clearance to carry out peacebuilding activities in some of its rural strongholds.[23] The above literature offers perspectives on and insights into the significance of civil society in democracy and peacebuilding in Zimbabwe. What has not received systematic exploration in Zimbabwe is the role of civil society in peacebuilding during elections. This article attempts to cover this lacuna by exploring the role of various CSOs in peacebuilding in Zimbabwe's 2018 elections. This article attempts to answer the following questions: How do CSOs contribute to peacebuilding during elections? How effective are civil society peacebuilding measures? How sincere are CSOs in their explanations of the causes of violence? By attempting to answer these questions, this study contributes to the existing body of literature on violence preventive measures and peacebuilding in Africa.

'New dispensation' and the 2018 elections

The fall of Mugabe and the ascendancy of Mnangagwa to the presidency in November 2017 was a result of an internal power struggle within the governing ZANU-PF party. Initially, the transition from Mugabe to Mnangagwa's rule was welcomed by most CSOs,[24] which had high expectations of the new government. Mnangagwa and his government attempted to gain domestic and international legitimacy by leading the nation into credible elections.[25] For the first time since 2002, the United States (US), European Union (EU) and the Commonwealth were invited to observe the elections. The main opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change-Alliance (MDC-A) led by Nelson Chamisa,[26] was allowed to hold demonstrations in the central business district (CBD) of the capital city, Harare. Although these rights are enshrined in the country's constitution, they were often denied to opposition political parties and citizens under Mugabe. As compared to previous elections, there were more public commitments to peace by political leaders.[27] These are some of the conditions which led to the euphoria over the new dispensation.

However, since taking power in November 2017, the Mnangagwa government did not undertake significant democratic reforms.[28] For example, sections of securocrats in the army, military intelligence, civilian intelligence, police, airforce and prison services interfered with political processes in the country.[29] The National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO) noted that after the November 2017 coup, there was a notable

deployment of military personnel to government and ZANU-PF.[30] Even more worrying was the deployment of former military personnel to the electoral body, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC). NGOs, including the Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI), were concerned that about 15% of ZEC's top commissioners were former members of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces.[31] Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC) – a coalition of 107 CSOs – demanded, without success, that ZEC publicise the names and professional background of its secretariat, particularly the names of individuals in its elections logistics committee.[32] Within this political context, this article explores CSOs' interactions with various state institutions, political parties, and ordinary people in the advancement of peace.

Civil society and peacebuilding: A frame of analysis

Cedric de Coning posits that peacebuilding is concerned with securing and consolidating peace, preventing the emergence of violent conflicts and addressing primary causes of conflicts.[33] Edward Newman, Roland Paris and Oliver P. Richmond advance that peacebuilding also involves upholding human rights, reconciliation, truth telling and transitional justice.[34] During the Cold War, the peacebuilding debate mainly focused on external actors.[35] External peacebuilding activities were criticized for being 'top-bottom', interventionist and for excluding local populations, and for ignoring local political structures.[36]

In the post-Cold War world, the international community, including the United Nations, appeared to be ill prepared to deal with intrastate conflicts.[37] Interventionist approaches, such as diplomacy, peace-making and peacekeeping, proved inadequate.[38] Thus, in the 1990s, the peacebuilding debate increasingly focused on the role of internal actors and how external actors can support them.[39] International actors in peacebuilding began to look at local actors as legitimate partners to achieve their objectives.[40] This marked the beginning of what has been widely referred to in peacebuilding discourse as the 'local turn' which emphasises 'the local approach'. Initially known as 'peace from below'[41] in the mid-1990s, the 'local turn' emphasises the role played by actors such as civil society, local communities and agencies in conflict resolution and transformation, and peacebuilding.[42] In peacebuilding, 'the local' also refers to 'the local context, local agency and dealing with local partners'.[43] CSOs' closeness to grassroots communities and capabilities makes their role in peacebuilding an interesting subject of enquiry. This article examines the role played by civil society in peacebuilding in Zimbabwe's 2018 elections using the 'local approach' conceptual framework outlined above.

Henning Haugerudbraaten emphasises that civil society play a crucial role in understanding the root cause of a conflict and providing solutions that can provide lasting peace.[44] CSOs disseminate information on conflict situation, report on human rights and contribute to the early warning system.[45] CSOs also hold governments accountable and make recommendations to decision makers.[46] However, not all CSOs contribute to peacebuilding. Christine Cubitt asserts that civil society, which focuses more on getting funds from external players and which strives to be accountable to them rather than the peacebuilding values and interests of local people, can be regarded as 'uncivil society'.[47] Daniel and Neubert also stated that in Africa, there are co-opted and partisan CSOs that take over state duties and cease being critical of the state.[48] This study critiques some CSOs on issues such as questionable external ties, lack of objectivity, capture by the state and the tendency to churn out of propaganda.

Civil society that contributed to debates on the causes of violence or undertook active peacebuilding work in the 2018 elections falls into three categories. The first category consists of faith-based organisations (FBOs). This group has CSOs such as Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ), Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) and Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ). The second category comprises a multiplicity of CSOs, usually with overlapping roles, which focus on liberal values such as democracy, human rights and good governance. Judging by their peacebuilding activities, some of the most notable are: Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP), CiZC, Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (ZHR NGO Forum), National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO), Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), Heal Zimbabwe Trust (HZT) and Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI).

The third category consists of CSOs aligned or with strong links to the ZANU-PF government. They include workers' unions loyal to the state such as the Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions (ZFTU), Zimbabwe Public Workers Services Co-operative Society (ZPWCS) and the Zimbabwe Industrial Revolution Workers Federation (ZIRWF). They also include self-proclaimed pan-African organisations such as The African Cause Trust (TAC). These CSOs criticised the MDC-A, liberal democracy CSOs, western governments and the EU.

Research methodology

Most CSOs which undertook advocacy and peacebuilding roles in the 2018 election cycle generated documents with relevant information for this study such as news bulletins; magazines; press statements; weekly, monthly and annual reports; and reports of the 2018

elections. Some of these documents were available on the respective CSOs' websites. The author visited the offices of some CSOs to obtained physical copies which were not available online. He undertook forensic analysis of these documents, paying attention to the activities and pronouncements of CSOs on peacebuilding. In-depth interviews were conducted with civil society activists and officials. Because of the sensitive nature of some of the issues discussed in this study, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of informants.

Pre-election peacebuilding

This section examines the various peacebuilding initiatives undertaken by CSOs in the pre-election period. Most of the pronouncements and activities discussed here were undertaken by FBOs and liberal leaning CSOs mainly funded by the western donors. Throughout the electoral period, through its national peace campaign, dubbed '13 Million Voices for Peace', HZT promoted cohesion and harmony through peace messaging.[49] For example, on 12 January 2018, HZT released a statement lamenting that politically motivated violence was increasing in both rural and urban areas.[50] HZT stated that inter and intra-political party violence mainly involved ZANU-PF and the main MDC party. On 3 and 14 May 2018, HZT released statements condemning intra-party violence in ZANU-PF and the main MDC during the respective political parties' primary elections.[51] HZT lamented that intra-party violence would compromise peace towards elections and urged political parties to restrain their supporters from engaging in political violence.[52] HZT urged the police to arrest all perpetrators of political violence. HZT also advised President Mnangagwa to take measures that ensured that the 2018 elections would be held in a peaceful environment. In addition, HZT called upon the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) to roll out measures which would prevent electoral violence before, during and after the 2018 elections. HTZ also urged the NPRC to partner with other stakeholders such as CSOs and the church to establish an effective early warning system to detect areas with potential conflicts and resolve disputes.[53] Pronouncements by HZT reveal CSOs' efforts to engage with political parties, the government and relevant statutory bodies to promote conflict resolution and ensure peaceful elections.

FBOs played a significant role in promoting peace in the country ahead of the 2018 elections. In March 2018, realising that there was high competition and tensions among political rivals, ZCA launched peace campaign rallies throughout the country, which were dubbed the 'Pray and Heal Zimbabwe Campaign'.[54] The campaign encouraged forgiveness and healing on previous violence and discouraged violence as the nation moved towards the elections. ZCA

emphasised the role of the church in ensuring peaceful elections and urged pastors to be the custodians of peace in their communities.[55] ZCC launched the 'I Pray I Vote Campaign'.[56] ZCC deployed 'monitoring personnel' to areas where electoral violence regularly flared up so that they could detect and report areas that needed intervention.[57] The above cases reveal that FBOs used their influence and proximity to communities to encourage peace in those areas where the state was apparently inactive.

One of the FBOs, EFZ, introduced the theme 'Thinking Theology' and came up with a radio dialogue programme, which explored ways of preventing election violence.[58] This led to increasing engagement with the youth, religious institutions and leaders on ways to prevent electoral violence. This dialogue and engagement among different social groups contributed to the creation of a more peaceful pre-election environment. EFZ, in collaboration with ZCC, issued several statements calling for peaceful participation, post-election peace and reconciliation.[59] The Union for Development of the Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe (UDACIZA) created peace committees which operated across provinces, urging church leaders to conduct sermons 'supporting the Zimbabwean peace process'.[60] UDACIZA also established youth committees which promoted peace.

Civil society defused tensions by providing political parties platforms for dialogue and engagement in an attempt to build trust ahead of the 2018 elections. At these platforms, political parties disseminated information, marketed their manifestos and debated policies.[61] ZESN, for example, created a platform called 'Making Elections Make Sense', while the Southern African Political Economy Series Trust and other CSOs provided platforms where policy makers and political parties discussed matters related to elections.[62] NANGO approached leaders of political parties, such as MDC-A and a coalition of independent candidates, People's Own Voice, and urged them to strengthen and deepen their democratic practices and tolerance, adhere to the rule of law, respect human rights, allow people to freely express their opinions, denounce derogatory speeches and defamation of character, and to denounce political violence and respect the sanctity of life.[63] In addition, NANGO encouraged leaders of opposition political parties to respect vulnerable groups such as women and children, avoid vote buying and discrimination in the allocation of public resources, and end intra-party violence and conflicts through establishing internal conflict management and resolution mechanisms.[64] The Election Resource Centre had a series of radio programmes in which political leaders and citizens participated, while the Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust interacted with

first-time voters across political parties.[65] These duties cannot be carried out solely by the state or political parties, hence the invaluable role of civil society in peacebuilding.

One of the successes of civil society in peacebuilding towards the 2018 elections was the incorporation of the Political Parties Code of Conduct in the Electoral Act. Since November 2017, CSOs have been demanding a binding legal framework to maintain peace in the pre-election period. This code of conduct was taken on board in the Electoral Amendment Act which was passed on 28 May 2018.[66] The Political Parties Code of Conduct outlined how political parties and their supporters should campaign without offending or deriding other political players.[67] Leaders of political parties were required to restrain their supporters during the campaigns. As a result of the incorporation of this code of conduct, the Electoral Act now criminalises the threatening of voters by telling them how candidates they voted for can be discovered.[68] The major political parties, ZANU-PF and MDC-A, agreed to observe and adhere to the Political Parties Code of Conduct during the 2018 elections to prevent violence.[69]

Most notably, CSOs played an important role in the signing of the National Peace Pledge. On 26 June 2018, the NPRC organised the signing of the National Peace Pledge by political parties which were contesting in the 2018 elections.[70] The National Peace Pledge signing ceremony, which took place at the Harare International Conference Centre, was presided over by the NPRC Chairperson, Retired Justice Selo Masole Nare and the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) which comprises of the EFZ, ZCC, Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) and other FBOs.[71] The event was attended by CSOs, diplomats; delegates from the police, ZHRC and ZEC.[72] The signing ceremony took place under the theme 'The Journey Towards The Zimbabwe We want – Seek Peace and Pursue It'.[73] All political parties and the 23 presidential candidates or their representatives pledged their commitment to peace before, during and after the elections.[74] They pledged to encourage their respective candidates, party members and supporters to maintain and uphold peace and allow citizens to choose leaders of their choice.[75] ZHOCD urged political parties and election candidates to adopt an inclusive political approach which tolerates and accommodates diversity.[76] The signing of the National Peace Pledge instilled a sense of peace, tolerance and non-violence to the contesting political parties and their candidates.[77] Arguably, CSOs gave more legitimacy to the National Peace Pledge.

Despite the promise to abide by the Political Parties Code of Conduct and the signing of the National Peace Pledge by political parties, the National Transitional Justice Working Group

noted a surge in harassment, intimidation, political violence and partisan distribution of food aid in rural areas a few weeks before the elections.[78] In its monthly report for July 2018, ZPP noted that political parties deliberately violated the Political Parties Code of Conduct as the election date drew closer.[79] As noted by the ZHR NGO Forum, towards the 30 July 2018 elections, there was rise in the use of 'language of violence'.[80] For example, songs with hate messages with potential to cause violence were sung at political rallies.[81] In urban areas, social media fueled hate speech and inflammatory language. The Alliance of Community Based Organisations stated that intimidation by ZANU-PF activists, war veterans and traditional leaders increased in some rural areas, such as Bindura and Guruve in Mashonaland Central.[82] A week before the elections, villagers in most rural communities reported to ZPP that ZANU-PF activists urged them to 'vote wisely'.[83] ESR also noted that most citizens received campaign messages, with details of their voting wards, urging them to vote for ZANU-PF candidates.[84] This intensified feelings of intimidation among the electorate.

Muddying the waters: Narratives of government aligned CSOs on pre-election violations

This section captures the voices of CSOs aligned to ZANU-PF on the pre-election environment. ZFTU and ZPWCS credited the ZANU-PF leader Mnangagwa for preaching peace and denouncing violence while accusing the MDC-A and its leader Chamisa of failing to embrace peace.[85] ZFTU accused MDC-A supporters of provoking ZANU-PF supporters in Bulawayo and Chegutu.[86] ZFTU also protested against the police for allegedly failing to arrest and prosecute violent MDC-A supporters.[87] The above narratives reveal that civil society is a terrain with multiple and sometimes contradictory voices. What is also apparent above is that pro-ZANU-PF CSOs overpraised ZANU-PF and appeared to exaggerate the shortcomings of the MDC-A and its leader, Chamisa. Thus, CSOs can be partisan on issues that affect peacebuilding. As noted by Cubitt, when a civil society association becomes one of the political players with partisan interests, it loses its mediatory role and capacity to build peace.[88] This is one of the challenges in the civil society sphere as different NGOs lean in favour of certain political parties and, in the process, lose legitimacy to promote peacebuilding.

CSOs aligned to the ZANU-PF government accused Chamisa of inciting violence. ZFTU, for example, claimed that Chamisa declared himself the winner of the presidential election and urged his supporters to reject any other outcome.[89] ZFTU alleged that Chamisa incited his supporters at rallies to turn violent if he lost the election.[90] Chamisa allegedly urged his supporters to gather outside polling stations after voting until all the results were announced.[91]

ZFTU argued that this created an unsafe environment for election officers and observer missions.[92] ZIRWF stated that statements made by MDC-A top officials did not promote post-election peace.[93] ZFTU also accused liberal democracy oriented CSOs, the EU, International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute (IRINDI) Observer Mission representing the US and other Western observer missions of turning a blind eye to statements by MDC-A leaders, allegedly, inciting violence.[94] ZFTU accused these observers of failure to reprimand Chamisa on his utterances which, as claimed, had the potential to cause violence.[95] Furthermore, ZFTU accused the EU, IRINDI Observer Mission and various human rights NGOs of partisanship and being biased against ZANU-PF.[96] Arguably, the perspectives of CSOs discussed in this section on the pre-election environment and the question of incitement of violence are biased in favour of the ZANU-PF government. What makes the narratives of the above CSOs suspect is their failure to capture and highlight violations by ZANU-PF activists. What is emerging from the above narratives is that governments can sponsor CSOs to churn out narratives aimed at countering or neutralising the views of their critics.

Election day

On election day, 30 July 2018, people voted with enthusiasm and voter turnout was over 80%.[97] The total number of voters was 5,7 million of which women constituted 52% while 60% of the voters were below 40 years.[98] CSOs were among key observers on election day. Most of these CSOs liaised with various election observer missions to demand free, fair and credible elections.[99] While the election day was largely peaceful, most CSOs reported intimidation and a number of malpractices. ZESN noted that at two percent of the polling stations, there was intimidation, harassment and violence.[100] In some areas, ZANU-PF youths 'paddocked' and 'shepherded' voters to polling stations queuing them for surveillance and intimidation and asked them to vote in a particular way. [101] ZESN also expressed concern at the high percentage of assisted voters in rural areas. At 45% of the polling stations, mainly in rural areas, 'many people' (26 or more) people were assisted to vote.[102] These figures are too high and they raise suspicion that those who were assisted to vote had been intimidated.

The perspectives of CSOs aligned to the ZANU-PF government on the election day varied. ZPWCS stated that the election day was very peaceful and citizens cast their votes without any form of coercion.[103] Although ZFTU endorsed the election day as peaceful, it claimed that the few violations that took place, such as campaigning within the 300m radius from the polling station, were mainly committed by MDC-A activists.[104] These CSOs developed narratives to

counter the perspectives of liberal leaning CSOs and Western observer missions. However, the above assertions partly reveal divisions and disagreements among CSOs on whether the election day was peaceful and the political party responsible for most violations.

Post-election violence and civil society polarisation

Considering pre-election violations and mistrust, the 2018 post-election period had potential for violence. Most CSOs called for peace in the immediate post-election period. ERC, for example, urged ZEC to be more transparent in the transmission, tabulation, verification and announcement of results to avoid the escalation of tensions that were already simmering and threatening peace.[105] Unfortunately, there were more gross human rights violations in August 2018 than any other month in the run up to the elections.[106] There was intense and deadly violence which took place on 1 August 2018 in Harare's central business district. As highlighted above, most CSOs focusing on elections and opposition political parties have always argued that ZEC was biased in favour of ZANU-PF.[107] ZDI, for example, accused ZEC of announcing results inconsistently and in a confusing manner. Although ZEC had up to five days to release all results, it did not stick to the timeframe which it promised citizens.[108] ZDI argues that ZEC's delay in announcing the presidential election results led to suspicions of tampering with results and this flared tempers.[109] ZDI argues that the symbiotic relationship between ZEC, ZANU-PF and the military was the major cause of the violence in the post-election period.[110]

On 1 August 2018, supporters of the MDC-A protested against ZEC in Harare's CBD for the delay in the release of the presidential election results.[111] The police prevented the protesters from reaching the Rainbow Towers Hotel, where ZEC had established a national elections results centre, and they used water cannons and teargas to push them back.[112] ZPP stated that the military was arbitrarily deployed to deal with the protests which were turning violent.[113] Within moments, military vehicles entered the city and soon, reports of killed and injured civilians started to spread on social media. Six citizens were killed and over a dozen were injured, including those who were fleeing.[114] Immediately after the killings, President Mnangagwa blamed the violence on the MDC-A.

Response of liberal leaning CSOs

Just like other observers, most CSOs were shocked by military brutality and condemned its actions. CSOs, such as EFZ, CCJPZ, ZHR NGO Forum, CiZC and HZT, released statements or reports expressing regret and dismay at the military's excessive use of force. The ZHR NGO

Forum, through its various members, documented and exposed military brutality and, through its anti-impunity campaign, brought over 70 cases from 1 August 2018 killings and injuries before the courts of law.[115] However, perpetrators were neither arrested nor tried. ZHR NGO Forum's actions in the 2018 elections reveal that civil society's activities went beyond observing and documenting violence, but also attempted to ensure justice for the victims, which is a legitimate role of CSOs in peacebuilding.

Response of government aligned CSOs

CSOs aligned to the ZANU-PF government had a different narrative on the causes of the 1 August 2018 violence. ZIRWF and TAC claimed that the MDC-A rejected results when they realised that these were in favour of ZANU-PF.[116] ZFTU, for example, claimed that, facing defeat, MDC-A supporters organised violence following pre-election orders from Chamisa.[117] ZFTU averred that most of the youth who participated in violent demonstrations lacked full understanding of the law and they protested when ZEC was within schedule to announce results.[118] ZPWCS stated that MDC-A youths became violent; harassed people; and set cars, buses and other property worth thousands of dollars on fire.[119] Although pro-ZANU-PF government CSOs regretted the loss of life,[120] they defended military intervention. ZIRWF, for example, claimed that MDC-A took advantage of the few police officers in Harare's CBD, as many of them had been deployed to election related sites.[121] ZPWCS holds that the police were outnumbered and overpowered by MDC-A youths which made it necessary for military intervention to restore law and order.[122] TAC argued that it was hypocritical for human rights NGOs and western observer missions to accuse the military of killing civilians without condemning the MDC-A for inciting violence in the pre-election period.[123] ZFTU castigated human rights NGOs and western observer missions such as the EU and the IRINDI Observer Mission for hypocrisy and for coming up with what it called biased reports endorsing the false claims and violent behaviour of the MDC-A.[124] The above narratives reveal that human rights NGOs and CSOs aligned to the ZANU-PF government differed on the causes of the 1 August 2018 violence and on whether military intervention was justified.

Crackdown on the MDC-A and civilians

After the military's intervention on 1 August 2018, there was a crackdown on real and perceived supporters of the MDC-A.[125] The army and unidentified men in masks conducted overnight raids on MDC-A leaders, activists and those suspected to have organised the 1st of August 2018 protests.[126] ZHR NGO Forum, ZPP, ZADHR and ZDI also noted that in Harare

province's high-density suburbs, such as Chitungwiza, Kuwadzana, Dzivarasekwa, Glen Norah, Glen View and Highfields, men in military fatigues and moving around in military vehicles assaulted some residents in bars, restaurants, and other night spots.[127]

Disputed presidential election result

In general, tensions were also stoked by the results of the elections. ZEC's results for the National Assembly show that ZANU-PF won 145 seats, MDC-A 63 seats and one seat was won by an independent candidate.[128] While these election results were generally accepted, the presidential election results stoked tensions. According to ZEC, ZANU-PF's presidential candidate, Mnangagwa won 50.8% of votes while MDC-A candidate Chamisa won 44.3% of the votes.[129] Mnangagwa was declared the winner but this was fiercely contested by the MDC-A which accused ZEC of tampering with the results. The MDC-A took the matter to the Constitutional Court.[130] Although the Constitutional Court confirmed Mnangagwa's victory, his legitimacy remained hanging in the balance and this increased tensions in the country.

Conclusion

Determined to project itself as a reformist government different from Mugabe's regime, the Mnangagwa administration initially opened some space for civil society activity. Arguably, CSOs took advantage of the available political space and used their local knowledge of the Zimbabwean situation to contribute to peacebuilding. Civil society's various interventions and their interactions with political parties, the NPRC and citizens reduced violence and contributed to peacebuilding in the pre-election period. However, as demonstrated in this study, Zimbabwean civil society is polarized and some CSOs are partisan and have ulterior motives which obstruct peacebuilding. Despite some CSOs' strenuous efforts at peacebuilding, intimidation and violence continued both in the pre-election and post-election period. The pernicious role of the military in the post-election period further exposed polarisation among CSOs and rendered their peacebuilding activities futile.

Acknowledgements

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