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Notably also was the fact that the majority of voters were not sure (*mean score= 3.22*) whether SADC election monitoring processes should be done by professionals, not sure (*mean score= 3.43*) whether it was feasible for SADC Electoral monitors to start election monitoring work 2 to 3 years before elections. Not sure (*mean score= 2.59*) whether it was feasible for SADC not to allow a system where the rulers elect opposition MPs and finally of the quantitative analysis the majority of respondents were not sure (*mean score= 2.88*) whether it would be feasible for SADC to decree that unelected MPs should not be allowed into member countries’ parliament.

The following verbatim quotes from University Lecturers, Opinion leaders, NGO Representatives and Political Journalists on alternative solutions which can be implemented by SADC in order to break the deadlock of conflict between the two main political parties in Zimbabwe



-University Lecturer 1 gave that, the politics of impunity be Zimbabwe's ruling elite is so entrenched that SADC, now need to draw up a strong code of conduct on how to conduct elections in the SADC region. He went to say

*-NGO Representative 1 concurred by saying our number one problem are a flawed electoral process. In some countries all political players are treated equally but, in this country, when we go to the polls, we already know who is going to win our elections, this is a shame as it shows lack of accountability that permeates our electoral system. Consequently, Zimbabwe 's democratic trajectory is not certain, and the international community should remain vigilant and engaged in supporting the people's call for a genuine transition*

### **Discussion of Findings**

The study is anchored by the Timeline analysis theory which basically examines Zimbabwe's timeline between 1980 and 2020. Between gaining independence from the British in April 1980 and 21 November 2017, the Republic of Zimbabwe was ruled by Robert Mugabe, the leader of the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). Two decades after independence, Zimbabwe had fallen into an extended period of economic decline and crisis, which was primarily linked to the implementation of a controversial land reform in 2000 - a policy that led to low agricultural productivity, high unemployment and hyperinflation (Gebremichael, Fitwi, Kidane, Belay & Sharrif, 2018). It is important to look into numerous factors that can explain the difference between the 2008 and 2013 elections in Zimbabwe. During the 2008 electoral violence, youths were used as proxies and employed to carry out acts of violence in exchange for financial gains, in many cases, necessary for them make ends meet or support their families. These factors can be identified and analyzed with the help of timeline analysis. SADC found itself embroiled in the Zimbabwean electoral debacle following the 2008 elections.

The majority of respondents *strongly agreed* that, SADC has no political will to mediate in the Zimbabwe conflict, also that SADC cares little about Zim's economic meltdown, SADC cares little about human rights violations in Zimbabwe, SADC guidelines on elections are rarely used in Zimbabwe, SADC mediators are always biased against the people's wishes, also they agreed that SADC mediators are more interested to their own countries gains at Zimbabwe's expense. The above resonates with Chikohomero (2019) who views the electoral processes in Zimbabwe as a mirror to Southern African Development Community (SADC) shortcomings with regards to entrenching democratic values. Though not the only measure of democratisation, elections remain a key component with which to measure the extent of a

country's embracing of political freedoms and citizen participation. However, there was a minority voice which supported the role of the mediator as fair, the following is what he said "in Southern Africa, we are lucky to have a regional grouping call called SADC. That organization was born out of the spirit of revolutionaries; thus, they know serious political parties and those that are championing the cause of imperialist powers.

Furthermore, on whether they thought SADC was fair in the execution of their role of conflict resolution and peace building. The following is what came out of the survey, the that the majority of respondents strongly agreed (mean score= 4.55) with the assertion that Zimbabwean leaders have a propensity for power, strongly agreed (mean score = 4.88) that Zimbabwe leaders are materialistic hence use power grabbing strategies to amass wealth, strongly agree (mean score= 4.70) that leaders are selfish, and are afraid their crimes will follow them after they leave power. Marios (2015) supports the above view when he says the result of this approach is that SADC cannot coax member states into instituting comprehensive and democratic electoral reforms. The slow pace of reform has been frustrating for citizens and activists. Electoral integrity and credibility have been elusive in most SADC member states. Elections and electoral processes have been a source of contestation and, in some instances, instability, leading to open conflicts in Southern Africa and elsewhere in Africa.

The Zimbabwean political conflict has been ongoing for nearly two decades and, at each turn, SADC has failed to act on principle. Instead, it has sacrificed its own rules for political expediency in the name of solidarity and stability. The 2013 elections clearly showed a deliberate disregard of the SADC Principles and Guidelines. However, the response from the regional body was understanding and conciliatory and merely suggested cosmetic improvements. SADC displayed neither force of conviction nor determination to guide Zimbabwe towards alignment with its own constitution and the Principles and Guidelines. The failure by SADC to enforce its own rules against a 'strong' member state like Zimbabwe over the last few decades partly contributed to its inertia during what some might refer to as a coup in November 2017.

The role of regional organisations such as SADC in the resolution of political and economic crisis in member states is a very exciting area for political discourse. Within such a context, there is need for third-party intervention in African conflicts or crises as in the case of Zimbabwe. Agbu (2006:19) notes that, the term "third party intervention" is used to refer to a person or team of people who become involved in a conflict to help the disputing parties manage or resolve it. For Agbu (2006) states-mediators not only facilitate discussions, but

they usually impose a structure and process on the discussions that are designed to move the parties towards mutual understanding and win-win agreements. The concept of third-party intervention is particularly crucial in the Zimbabwean case. While the role of SADC and its mediators in Zimbabwe has previously resulted in a power sharing agreement that was signed by the leaders of the opposition and the ruling party. Unfortunately, SADC faced a number of challenges with the full implementation of the power sharing deal, in such a way that the conflicting parties did not follow through on their agreements. This lack of follow-through is at least partly attributable to SADC as the mediating party. SADC just let the ruling party do as they wanted. SADC should have shown its teeth, but alas, they just continued being one sided.

The study revealed the stigma that has come to characterize Zimbabwe's image in other countries makes the playing field uneven. Every Zimbabwean is being tarred with the same brush, all of us are known as thieves and prostitutes. Besides, lack of official documentation has led to the vulnerability of Zimbabweans in South Africa as they end up doing all sorts of odds jobs just to sustain themselves. During interviews respondents noted that, it has increasingly become embarrassing to be associated with the Zimbabwean brand when one visits any of our neighbouring countries, because whether it's the law enforcement agents or just ordinary citizens one is labelled as a scoundrel who is always living outside the law. Once Zimbabwe was known as the bread basket of the region but now we are the basket case of the region. Unfortunately, the truth is never told, while I acknowledge that the tag Zimbabwe has become a liability in neighbouring countries, but this is simply because of illegal sanctions that were imposed on Zimbabwe by the imperialist forces. Could these people who called for these sanctions please, now go out there and request that these sanctions be retracted.

Another Opinion Leader *added that it was embarrassing being labelled as a Zimbabwean in neighbouring countries as everybody was being labelled the same.* Besides, most Zimbabweans do so without any presence of official documentation has led to the vulnerability of Zimbabweans in South Africa as they end up doing all sorts of odds jobs just to sustain themselves (Miller, 2010). Bimha (2017, p.8) sums up the actions of desperate Zimbabweans' actions as reminiscent of the push-pull theory which is migrant-centred in that it focuses on explaining how individuals, as rational actors, decide to migrate if there are perceived economic gains in the country of destination."

More so, this same theory defines migrations as primarily a function of economic differences between the place of migrants' origin and the country of destination (Bayisa, 2017). Miller

(2010) and Tarnu. (2015) however caution against calling the Zimbabwean exodus to South Africa economic migration as they bring a new dimension into the predicament migrants find themselves in their country of birth. “In addition to the economic turbulence in Zimbabwe, the unstable political environment has also played an important contributing role in prompting the exodus of Zimbabwe to their southern neighbour” (Miller, 2010, p. 1). While concurring with Miller’s view Bimha (2017) argues that the mass movement of Zimbabweans to their southern neighbour has assumed a new dimension, it has also become a humanitarian migration in addition to the already existing economic migration crises which was already existing when desperate job seekers were finding all means possible to just cross the Zimbabwe /South African border.

### **Conclusion**

The study identifies the causes of the conflict in Zimbabwe as economic mismanagement and failures of governance, leading to social alienation and dislocation to which the ruling party responded by increasing repression. The security structures remain powerful actors and seem determined to ensure that ZANU-PF does not lose power. SADC seems increasingly divided over how to deal with the issue, and the future remains uncertain. ZANU-PF is determined to maintain itself in power, for to lose control of the state is to lose practically everything, and given the changing demographics, there will probably be no way back. The departments of state, and especially the higher ranks of the security agencies (defence, police and especially intelligence) are dominated by ZANU-PF ‘cadres’ as a result of years of politically-motivated placements, and the state is the principal vehicle for patronage. Moreover, the party sees itself, especially with regard to the land, as engaged in a new liberation struggle the ‘third *chimurenga*’ or liberation war (the first being the resistance to the early white settlers, the second the war against the Ian Smith regime). It is no coincidence that the slogans and rhetoric (and some of the political mobilisation methods) of the liberation war are used in the present.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the above findings the following recommendations were made:

#### **SADC principals**

It is recommended that given that the SADC principals have been treating the Zimbabwean question with kid gloves for a long time, the Zimbabwean question should now be escalated to the Africa Union, failure to which it should be handled by a special impartial mediator.

## **Government of Zimbabwe**

The government of Zimbabwe should enable laws that make it possible to file complaints at the polling-station level on election day and include instructions on the procedures and forms to do so in polling manuals and information provided to the candidate and party agents. The government of Zimbabwe should conduct a comprehensive review of the electoral legal framework well in advance of the next elections to further clarify, update, and harmonize respective laws.

## **Zimbabwean Judiciary**

The Zimbabwean judiciary should uphold the legal rights of citizens and the country's domestic

and international commitments to the U.N. human rights conventions, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Declaration of Rights of the Zimbabwe constitution

(Chapter 4, Section 50: Protection of the Rights of Accused and Detained Persons.)

## **Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC)**

It is recommended that the ZEC should provide public information on a regular basis and allow for a meaningful observation of ZEC activities. Information on decision-making and all other activities should be made available through briefing papers posted on the ZEC website and through regular, timely briefings for candidate agents and observers. ZEC should enhance the effectiveness of ZEC training on election-day procedures, with a particular focus on the vote count and how to complete summary results forms by dedicating more time to practical exercises on these issues. Furthermore, ZEC should adopt and publicize transparent procedures for the tabulation, transmission, and announcement of results.

Moreover, ZEC in accordance with international covenants and principles of equality, should ensure clear distinction between activities of the party in power and activities of the government to avoid abuse of state resources. The ZEC should be legally empowered to enforce provisions within the Electoral Act that strictly prohibit the politicization of food aid,

agricultural inputs, and other social welfare benefits including penalties for misuse of state resources and the involvement of public officials in political activity.

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