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COMMODIFICATION OF ELECTIONS: THE FUTURE OF ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract: The economic voting theory and the responsibility hypothesis posit that voters hold the government accountable for economic performance and will vote for the incumbent if the economy is good. The core assumption is that there is an incumbent and an opposition contesting in an election. But, this is not always the case. In elections following a transitional power sharing government, the schism between the incumbent and the opposition is generally blurred. Political parties that usually contest in the elections would have been part of the transitional power-sharing government. In such cases, voters are not able to apportion responsibility, and political parties compete to claim credit and assign blame. This increases the propensity for election commodification. Applying this proposition to Zimbabwe's 2013 elections, this paper contends that commodification of elections increases in polls following a transitional power sharing government when political parties contesting in the elections were part of the transitional power sharing government, making it difficult for voters to determine responsibility for policy, and leading to intense competition among political parties to claim credit and apportion blame for the performance of the transitional power-sharing government.

Key words: *elections, commodification, power-sharing, responsibility, political parties*

Introduction

The power-sharing government in Zimbabwe emerged from the disputed March and June 2008 elections, and lapsed with the holding of elections on 31 July 2013. Political parties that constituted the power-sharing government formed in February 2009 contested in the 31 July 2013 elections. This raises doubt to the incumbent – opposition assumption postulated by the economic voting theory and the responsibility hypothesis. Premised on the blurring of the incumbent and opposition

narrative in elections following the lapse of transitional power-sharing governments, this paper analyses the impact of such governments on clarity of responsibility and the ability of voters to hold political parties to account through elections, and how that may lead to increased commodification of elections.

First, the paper makes a case for the expansion of the economic voting theory and the responsibility hypothesis' explanatory power in order for them to effectively explain why commodification of elections increases in polls following the end of a power-sharing government. The paper will then secondly provide a background to the power-sharing government in Zimbabwe, focusing on the clarity of responsibility before the power-sharing government was formed and after its formation. This will lead to a discussion of the commodification of the 31 July 2013 elections. Lastly, the future of elections in Zimbabwe will be discussed. It will be argued that commodification of elections is likely to continue for as long as political parties consider the state to be a prize to be won and they rely on clientelistic networks to gain political support.

Re-framing the incumbent-opposition assumption

The economic voting theory posits that “citizens vote for the incumbent government if economic times are good; otherwise they vote against it” (Bratton et al. 2013: 29; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000: 183); hence, “voters hold the government responsible for economic events” (Lewis-Beck and Paldam 2000: 113). At the core of that hypothesis is an assumption that there is an incumbent and an opposition contesting in an election. But, this is not always the case. In elections following a power sharing arrangement, the schism between the incumbent and the opposition is usually blurred (Powell and Whitten 1993: 401), and the effects are apparent to both voters and political parties. On the one hand, “voters face an added barrier of identifiability by making it harder to determine responsibility for policy” (LeVan 2011: 14), on the other, when the power-sharing “agreements lapse or elections eventually take place, parties that share power compete to take credit or assign blame” (LeVan 2011: 14). That is because in a power-sharing arrangement, the constitutive political parties effectively make up the incumbent government - sharing both political power and decision-making responsibilities; thus, challenging the

basic assumption upon which the economic voting theory and the responsibility hypothesis are premised.

In order to explain electoral conduct in elections following the lapse of a transitional power-sharing government, the responsibility hypothesis has to be expanded because “coalition governments would seem to blur the responsibility of individual parties for whom the voter must vote” (Powell and Whitten 1993: 402). But, first, a distinction has to be made between ‘permanent’ and ‘transitional’ power-sharing arrangements. In the latter, voters and political parties are likely to engage in aggressive electoral competition because votes are converted into political power and “parliamentary seats with a high degree of accuracy” (Franklin 2004: 113). The former is different - political power and representation is normally guaranteed.

Transitional power-sharing arrangements can be defined as a temporal “purposeful distribution of government posts among the most powerful political parties or groups... [It] distributes rights to make decisions according to formally defined procedures” (LeVan 2011: 6). In sub-Saharan Africa, their main objective is cessation of violent conflicts; and a return to democracy, usually, through competitive multiparty elections. Notable examples include the 2008 power-sharing governments in Kenya and Zimbabwe. Their primary goal was cessation of post-election violence; they had a fixed tenure within which, political, constitutional and electoral reforms necessary for holding credible elections were instituted. Both power-sharing governments lapsed with the holding of elections in 2013 and a subsequent return to single-party dominated governments.

In view of the above, in transitional power-sharing governments, the (1) distinction between incumbent and opposition is blurred, which results in (2) the inability of voters to distribute responsibility for economic events, and lead to (3) competition among political parties to apportion blame and claim credit for economic events. In such cases, it seems probable that (4) political parties will resort to measures such as vote-buying to enhance their chances of winning elections, hence (5) commodification of elections increases. Accordingly, the emergent proposition is that: commodification of elections increases in polls following a transitional power-sharing government, when: (a) political parties contesting in elections formed part of the

transitional power-sharing government; (b) voters are not able to determine responsibility for performance; and (c) political parties are not able to claim sole credit for economic performance thereby resorting to measures such as vote-buying in order to enhance their chances of winning elections. These propositions will be applied to the case of Zimbabwe's 2013 elections.

Background of the power-sharing government in Zimbabwe

The power-sharing government in Zimbabwe emerged from disputed March and June 2008 elections. The first round of the elections was conducted on 29 March 2008, but no candidate garnered the required 50% + 1 vote required to form a government. However, for the first time in post-independent Zimbabwe, Mugabe lost the presidential election to Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change – Tsvangirai (MDC-T); Tsvangirai got 47.9% of the votes cast while Mugabe trailed with 43.2%. Without a conclusive winner, a presidential run-off was scheduled for 27 June 2008. Fearing an imminent loss, Mugabe and his party, Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), unleashed a wave of state-sponsored violence which resulted in the death of several hundreds of MDC-T supporters, mass internal displacements and intimidation. As a result, Tsvangirai officially withdrew his candidature from the presidential run-off on 23 June 2008. But, the Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) argued that Tsvangirai's withdrawal had been issued late therefore the presidential run-off proceeded as scheduled. When results of the presidential run-off election were announced on 29 June 2008, Mugabe had 90.2% of the votes compared to 9.8% for Tsvangirai. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) election observer missions condemned the violence but accepted the result; the European Union (EU) and the United States of America (USA) refused to recognise the elections and imposed further sanctions on Mugabe's regime.

Apart from an apparent lack of legitimacy, ZANU-PF also faced the world's highest inflation officially pegged at 231 million percent by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2010). The breakdown of health services and water supply led to a cholera outbreak in

Harare and Beitbridge amidst a countrywide shortage of basic commodities (World Health Organization 2008). Facing mounting internal and external pressure, particularly from SADC, Mugabe conceded to political negotiations with the MDC-T and its smaller faction led by Welshman Ncube, MDC-N. Under SADC's mandate, South Africa facilitated the negotiations, which culminated in the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) between ZANU-PF and the two MDC formations on 15 September 2008, and subsequent formation of a power-sharing government in February 2009.

Power-sharing government institutions and clarity of responsibility

Political institutions and institutional divisions of power are essential to establishing accountability and assigning responsibility for government performance. For voters to be able to hold government to account there should be clarity on institutional divisions of power. The Global Political Agreement (GPA) provided for political institutions but lacked clarity on the division of powers among the institutions. For instance, executive authority was equally vested in and exercised by the Prime Minister, Morgan Tsvangirai (MDC-T), President Mugabe (ZANU-PF) and the cabinet which comprised of 15 ZANU-PF, 13 MDC-T and 3 MDC-N nominated ministers¹. The horizontal distribution of executive power among the President, Prime Minister and Cabinet arguably weakened the ability of voters to hold them responsible for their respective policies and performance individually. Public opinion surveys conducted before and during the power-sharing government illustrate the change from clarity of responsibility during the single-party government led by ZANU-PF until 2009 to the lack of clarity of responsibility in the power-sharing government.

Before the power-sharing government was established in 2009, the economy under ZANU-PF's government had reached "crisis proportions" (UNDP 2010:3). The "Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was estimated to have contracted by a cumulative 50.3 percent; official inflation peaked at 231 million percent in July 2008; capacity utilisation in industry fell below 10 percent by January 2009" (UNDP 2010:4). Unemployment was upwards of 80%. The education system was not

1 Article 20.1.1 and 20.1.6 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 19) Act, 2009.

spared either, “Primary Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) fell from 99 per cent in 2002 to 91 per cent in 2009... completion rates dropped from 74 per cent to 68 per cent with secondary school enrolment reporting a 7 per cent decline from 2006” (UNICEF 2011:3). An opinion survey conducted by the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI) during that time, suggested that 89% of Zimbabweans described the country’s economy as ‘bad’ (38%) and ‘very bad’ (51%) (MPOI 2007). ZANU-PF, which had ruled the country for more than three decades, bore responsibility for that economic and humanitarian crisis. Consequently, in the 2008 elections, ZANU-PF lost its two-thirds majority; suggesting that “the protracted and deep economic crisis and the poor policy responses had taken their toll..., [demonstrating] the convergence of economic well-being and political allegiance. [Hence] economic discontent translated into political discontent via the medium of the ballot box, marking the intersection of electoral politics and economics” (Masunungure 2010: 77).

The economic and humanitarian situation changed for the better with the establishment of the power-sharing government. The economy grew by an average of 5 percentage points each year, inflation was reduced to a single digit and there was improvement in basic services’ provision and availability of basic commodities. The power-sharing government was credited for these socio-economic improvements. For instance, 82% of Zimbabweans credited the government of national unity for controlling inflation and 71% for improvements in the economy. But, the biggest beneficiary of these positive opinion polls was Prime Minister Tsvangirai. His performance in the power-sharing government was approved by 81% of Zimbabweans compared to 24% that expressed satisfaction with the performance of President Mugabe.

However, in 2010, the Prime Minister and his party, MDC-T began to lose popularity. In a survey conducted by Freedom House in 2012, “only 52% of Zimbabweans attributed success of the inclusive government to MDC-T, and by 2012 this recognition had fallen to 15%... amongst MDC-T supporters in 2010 a total of 87% had reckoned that the good work was mainly attributable to the MDC-T. By 2012 this was the opinion of only 44% of the MDC-T supporters” (Freedom House 2012: 7, 26). The survey claimed that ZANU-PF picked up a proportion of the shifting credit. By the time elections were conducted in 2013, there was a greater tendency by Zimbabweans to credit both parties

equally. This can be attributed to the lack of clarity in institutional divisions of power in the power-sharing government; consequently, affecting the ability of voters to determine responsibility and appraise respective performance. In such cases, attempts by voters to sanction political actors were “less likely to punish the actual culprit” because, power-sharing governments “blur the responsibility of individual parties for whom the voter must vote and offer a possibility of vote switching within the government” (Powell and Whitten 1993: 402).

The power-sharing government was also fragmented along political lines, and characterised by policy inconsistencies among ministries. Government policies were implemented on the basis of political party interests; hence political parties in the power-sharing government traded accusations against each other of running parallel governments. A notable example of policy inconsistency emanating from political expediency was the issue of civil servants’ salary increment. Although, both ZANU-PF and MDC-T acknowledged the need to increase civil servants’ salaries, they both accused each other of stalling the process. For instance, Mugabe accused Tendai Biti (MDC-T), the former minister of finance in the power-sharing government of sabotaging the government by refusing to increase civil servants’ salaries. In turn, Biti accused Mugabe and ZANU-PF ministers of failing to remit diamond revenues necessary to increase the salaries (Muleya 2011). Both parties sought to obscure their responsibility by blaming each other (Powell and Whitten 1993: 399). As a result of the absence of an identifiable and cohesive incumbent, voters’ ability to hold the government or any part thereof responsible for its performance was diminished. This is because voters are at times “preoccupied with whether they can identify a cohesive political actor (whether it is a person, a party, or a coalition of parties) that they can assign responsibility to and sanction accordingly” (Hobolt et al. 2010: 9). Arguably, in the face of accusations and counter-accusations among parties in the power-sharing government, responsibility lines were further distorted making it difficult for voters to decide on whom to sanction or appraise for the transitional power-sharing government’s performance.

Clarity of responsibility is not only dependent on political institutions and division of institutional power, but on the exercise of political power by parties in the power-sharing government. In the

case of Zimbabwe, institutional divisions of power and responsibility underestimated the entrenched neo-patrimonial political dynamics in the country. For that reason, “the incompatibility between institutions on paper and informal power structures” (LeVan 2011: 10) accounted for the myriad of policy discord that characterised the power-sharing government. For instance, the Security Service chiefs refused to acknowledge Morgan Tsvangirai’s authority. ZANU-PF ministers boycotted the Council of Ministers chaired and supervised by Morgan Tsvangirai in his capacity as Prime Minister (Newsday 2012) - the Council of Ministers was a constitutional body aimed at assessing the implementation of government policies (Constitution of Zimbabwe 2009, Article 20.1.5). Although executive decisions had to be made through consultation, in reality, Mugabe made several unilateral decisions. They included the renewal of service contracts for the Police Commissioner-General Augustine Chihuri, Defence Forces Commander General Constantine Chiwenga, Lieutenant General Philip Valerio Sibanda (Zimbabwe National Army), Air Marshal Perrance Shiri (Air Force of Zimbabwe) and Retired Major General Paradzai Zimondi (Commissioner of Prisons) (Radio Vop 2012). He also unilaterally appointed six High Court Judges (Sibanda, Kwaramba 2013). Furthermore, he invoked the Presidential Powers (Temporary Measures) Act Chapter 10: 20 to bypass Parliament and declare the 31 July 2013 election date unilaterally (Nyashanu, Matenga 2013). On the other hand, ZANU-PF accused the Minister of Finance, Tendai Biti (MDC-T) of unilaterally freezing civil servants’ salaries (Nkatazo 2010), and refusing to fund revival of industries in Bulawayo (Mahumashava 2013), Zimbabwe’s second largest city, as well as fund agriculture (Mushava 2012). Trading of accusations and counter-accusations provided opportunities for both ZANU-PF and MDC-T to diffuse responsibility for government performance in the run-up to the elections, making it difficult for voters to determine responsibility and use the ballot as a sanctioning tool.

Elections: The principal objective of the transitional power-sharing government

The immediate objective of the power-sharing agreement in Zimbabwe was to end endemic political violence and foster reconciliation, peace and national healing (Global Politics Agreement 2008, Article

7.1). But, the principal aim was to make institutional (Global Political Agreement 2008, Article 13), constitutional² and electoral reforms aimed at creating a conducive environment for holding new elections. From the onset, political parties considered the power-sharing government to be a means to winning the next election, and the subsequent return to a single-party government. Arthur Mutambara (MDC-N), one of two Deputy Prime Ministers in the power-sharing government, succinctly put it: “We are in the inclusive government because we had... inconclusive elections..., and so we were forced into this arrangement..., so the key mandate of the inclusive government is the creation of conditions for free and fair elections” (Gonda 2010). Mugabe described the power-sharing arrangement as a humiliation. A few days after signing the Global Political Agreement, he told his party officials and supporters that: “if only we had not blundered in the March... elections we wouldn’t be facing this humiliation” (BBC 2008). He then declared that “we are still in a dominant position which will enable us to gather more strength as we move into the future” (Blair 2008). That future was the holding of elections at the end of the power-sharing government’s tenure, elections, which had to be won at any cost to ensure a return to a single-party government. For the MDC-T, its aim was to establish a new democratic dispensation, while for ZANU-PF, it was to re-establish its hegemony in Zimbabwean politics. But for both political parties, the aim was to win the 2013 elections with “supermajorities... to project the image of invincibility and strength...” (Magaloni 2008: 729).

SADC, the guarantors of the Global Political Agreement also considered democratic elections to be the prime goal of the power-sharing government. Former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, framed the post-2000 Zimbabwe crisis as a struggle for popular legitimacy between Mugabe and Tsvangirai. He argued that “this cardinal issue undergirded the SADC-mediated negotiations which were conducted with the unwritten and strategic goal of settling the political impasse ‘once-and-for-all’ and via the electoral route” (Masunungure 2009: 4). In order to achieve that ‘strategic goal’, the Summit of the Organ Troika on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation held on 31 March 2011 in Livingstone, Zambia, resolved that, “the Inclusive Government in

2 Article 6 of the Global Political Agreements, 2008 provided for the setup of a Select Committee of Parliament to lead public consultation and subsequently draft a new constitution for Zimbabwe. See: Global Political Agreement, 2008.

Zimbabwe should complete all the steps necessary for the holding of an election that will be peaceful, free and fair, in accordance with the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections.” (Parliament of Zimbabwe) Resultantly, parties in the power-sharing government agreed and signed the ‘Roadmap to Zimbabwe’s Elections’ on 22 April 2011. The ‘Roadmap to Zimbabwe’s Elections’ gave time-lines within which political and legal reforms had to be made before elections were conducted. As argued by Masunungure, it seems both SADC and political parties in Zimbabwe agreed that, “a transition to democracy can never be achieved without meeting at least one minimum standard and this is the installation of a government freely and fairly elected by the Zimbabwean people” (Masunungure 2009: 8).

Commodification of elections: Winning by all means necessary...

In the run-up to the June 2013 elections, there was a greater tendency among Zimbabweans to credit both parties equally – suggesting that the electorate was increasingly becoming unsure of the performance of each of the political parties in the transitional power-sharing government. Between 2009 and 2010, MDC-T benefited from positive public poll approvals due to “some specific contributions to IG [Inclusive Government]. Yet such credits.... [were not] transferred into the kitty of party political endorsement and declarations to support the party come the next round of elections” (Freedom House 2012: 13). The waning support of MDC-T from 2010 onward could “be explained by the high expectations towards the party’s performance in the GNU; its failure to ideologically and practically to distinguish itself from ZANU-PF during the transitional phase; faction fighting within the MDC; financial and personal misdemeanours committed by the movement’s leaders; and neglect of political organisation within local structures” (Mutisi 2013:5). On the contrary, ZANU-PF gained electoral advantage from its association with the power-sharing government. As Adrienne LeBas puts it “ZANU-PF emerged from the power-sharing period strengthened. It found new means of deploying patronage, not just to military officials and loyalists but also to potentially vulnerable MDC-T voters” (LeBas 2014: 62). Thus, “some voters apparently attribute[d] the country’s ‘right’ direction, the economy’s

‘good’ management, and improved delivery of educational services to ZANU-PF” (Bratton and Masunungure 2012: 8).

However, although ZANU-PF gained more support through the power-sharing government than MDC-T did, overall, both political parties struggled to convince the electorate of their individual contributions. The clarity of responsibility was blurred, and voters found it difficult to determine responsibility for policy and performance amidst competition between ZANU-PF and MDC-T to claim credit and assign blame. Surveys conducted by MPOI (2012) and Freedom House (2012) suggested a closely contested election. For instance, the MPOI survey showed that Mugabe would win the 2013 elections by 33% of the vote compared to 31% for Tsvangirai. Suggesting that, both parties were unable to capture the ‘swing’ vote or convince each other’s supporters of their contributions to the socio-economic well-being attributed to the power-sharing government. But, with both parties intending to win the election with a clear majority and thereafter form a single-party government, they had to do all things necessary to win the election in the first round.

In previous elections, ZANU-PF had used violence, but, that led to international rebuke making it an unviable option in 2013. On the other hand, MDC-T lacked the political machinery to use violence and coercion; hence with both parties unable and/or unwilling to use violence to win elections, they resorted to ‘commodification of the election’, that is, the transformation of an election into an underground private market at which the voter’s choice on the election day can be exchanged for particularistic group or personal material benefits. In that case, both voters and the politicians were tacitly aware that the particularistic material benefits were in exchange for votes. This ‘market for votes’ “emerges when parties cannot use coercion... to control voters” (Lehoucq 2002: 2), and where “there are no other cost-efficient ways of influencing voters” (Lehoucq 2007: 34). Trading of votes in Zimbabwe was by no means the only cost-effective way of winning votes, political parties also used intimidation and voters roll manipulation among other things. But, whereas manipulation of the voters roll was done mainly by ZANU-PF, vote trading was prevalent in all political parties hence widespread.

The neo-patrimonial system in Zimbabwe means that government accountability is not just based on the delivery of collective goods, such as, economic growth, employment, or health care “nor does it rest on improving *overall* distributive outcomes along the lines favoured by broad categories of citizens (e.g., income and asset redistribution through taxes and social benefits scheme)” (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007: 2). Rather, it is also based on direct material inducements, such as, access to employment, food aid or cash hand-outs to individuals and groups in exchange for political support. The resultant citizen-politician linkage significantly “diffuse the connection between voting choice and government performance” (Powell and Whitten 1993: 399). Therefore, “relationships of loyalty and dependence pervade a formal political and administrative system and leaders occupy bureaucratic offices less to perform public service than to acquire personal wealth and status” (Bratton and van de Walle 1994: 458).

In the course of the power-sharing government, members of parliament, ministers and councillors from all political parties scrambled for “housing grants, cars and per diems for everything from local and global conferences to the drawn-out public participation process for developing a new constitution” (Moore 2014: 105), they also distributed state resources such as mining rights, government contracts, residential stands, and other resources to their political supporters and families. In essence, they transformed the state into a ‘patrimonial administration’ concerned with being “proprietors, distributors, and even major consumers of the authority and resources of government” (Jackson and Rosberg 1994: 300). It seems, getting into power was an opportunity for them to regain investments they had made to gain elected political office. Hence, although, the economic situation improved in the course of the power-sharing government, “patron-client relations dominate[d] politics and the state fail[ed] to develop as any sort of ‘neutral container’ for its people” (Buzan and Waever 2003: 226).

The commodification of elections in Zimbabwe is therefore linked to the blurred distinction between public and private, state and non-state as well as politics and economics (Taylor 2009:10). Because of that lack of distinctiveness, citizens “expect and mostly get incompetence, bias, venality, and corruption” (Berman 1998: 341). Oftentimes, ordinary citizens argue that voting someone into power is voting for him,

and his kith and kin to benefit from government resources. In view of that, “control of the state is equivalent to control of resources..., satisfying the selfish desire of elites to enrich themselves, often in quite spectacular fashion” (Taylor 2009: 12).

Indeed, political power is “the best and perhaps the exclusive means for acquiring and generating the material wealth necessary for becoming the ruling class” (Fatton 1988: 255). For instance, in 2009, amidst the economic and humanitarian crisis, members of parliament demanded car loans of US\$30 000 each; cabinet ministers and their deputies had several cars each, including top-of-the-range Mercedes Benz (LeBas 2014: 61). Yet, they could not raise civil servants’ salaries. Meanwhile, councillors and mayors approved hefty packages and awarded themselves housing stands and luxurious cars while council workers went for months without salaries and residents continued to experience water rationing, power cuts and non-collection of refuse.

Because political power is perceived as a sure means to gaining state resources for personal enrichment, citizens also consider election periods as ‘harvesting seasons’ - “the time to reap the fruits of the parliamentary tree, so to speak” (Lindberg 2003: 125). One rally attendee who had received groceries at a ZANU-PF rally said that, “at least we get something during the campaign period because that is when the ordinary person becomes relevant to the politician. They usually go away soon after the election only to come back when another election beckons, so this is our time” (Tafirenyika 2013). Accordingly, “from the standpoint of ordinary people..., elections are the times when equality and justice are temporarily achieved as their patrons fulfil their financial obligations to support them in times of need” (Ibana 1996: 130-31).

Another contributing factor to the commodification of elections in Zimbabwe is that, the majority of Zimbabwe’s population (65%) lives in communal rural areas or in resettlement areas where agriculture is their main source of survival. With the majority of its support base in rural communities, ZANU-PF used state sponsored agricultural inputs such a seeds, fertilisers, tractors and pesticides to consolidate its support and maintain its grip on resettled farmers who benefitted from the government’s land reform programme. Agricultural inputs were usually distributed by traditional leaders and only to supporters

of ZANU-PF. On the other hand, MDC-T used Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) sympathetic to its cause to dispense particularistic benefits such as local community activist jobs, and paying allowances for attending community meetings conducted by the NGOs. Attendance of those meetings was usually limited to known MDC-T supporters or at least those perceived to be non-ZANU PF supporters. Notably, after the July 2013 elections, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Davis Marapira (ZANU-PF) told villagers in his constituency that, “we will be distributing these inputs to you to thank you for supporting our party and the President. You voted resoundingly for us and this is your reward..., those who opposed our party should not waste their time to come when we distribute the inputs, we will screen our members and make sure that they are the ones to get the inputs. Why should our enemies want to benefit from our programme, we are now in our own government and we will do things our way” (Chikara 2013). Voters were therefore kept loyal “in part because of the benefits they receive and in part because of the fear of being expelled from the party’s spoils system” (Magaloni 2008: 729).

Solicitation of benefits by voters

Literature on vote buying often suggests that voters are passive participants in the trading of votes –waiting for politicians to solicit and then respond. To the contrary, voters in Zimbabwe often solicit for gifts or private benefits from politicians during election times. The ‘benefits’ vary depending on the social status of the voter - in poor communities, votes can be exchanged for school fees, funeral and wedding expenses, alcohol, agricultural inputs, grocery parcels and cash; while in upper and middle-class communities, votes can be bought with government contracts, mining rights, commercial farms and business loans - “politicians who refuse to be responsive to their constituents’ demands for selective incentives will be held accountable by them and no longer receive votes and material contributions” (Kitschelt 2000: 852). In such cases, the election is won by politicians able to make “credible patronage commitments” (Bratton et al. 2013: 32).

An MDC-T candidate in Mberengwa West constituency complained that he had to make contributions and attend funerals in his constituency, provide school fees and agricultural inputs or risk losing votes to his opponent. He lost the election to a ZANU-PF candidate

who was able to provide material benefits more than he could. Unlike MDC-T, ZANU-PF was able to respond to demands for particularistic benefits from voters in all classes of society: to rural farmers demanding agricultural inputs, ZANU-PF through the Presidential Well-Wishers Agricultural Fund, provided agricultural inputs; to the unemployed youth, ZANU-PF employed thousands of youths as youth officers in the Ministry of the Youth Economic Empowerment and Indigenisation as well as in the army and police force; to the middle class youth demanding business start-up loans, it provided a youth fund; to urban dwellers demanding housing, it provided residential stands through several ZANU-PF linked housing cooperatives; and to urban residents struggling to pay council bills, the Minister of Local Government, Ignatius Chombo (ZANU-PF), instructed all councils to cancel residents' debts weeks before the elections on 31 July 2013. For voters in the upper echelons of society, ZANU-PF provided mineral rights and ownership of equity in foreign companies through the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Policy, which required all foreign companies to dispense 51% of their shares to local Zimbabweans. ZANU-PF was therefore able to respond to voters' demands for particularistic benefits - showing its ability to meet the immediate needs of the electorate in exchange for their votes.

Voters' demands for particularistic benefits were not just driven by need, but also, by lack of trust in government's ability to fulfil election promises. People could not "wait for material rewards and therefore [preferred] targeted hand-outs to the distant benefits of policy change..." (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007:25). Explaining reasons for their loss in the July 31 elections, Tendai Biti, the MDC-T Secretary General argued that, "we [MDC-T] were selling hopes and dreams when ZANU-PF was selling practical realities. We (Zanu PF) are going to give you a farm, it's there. We [Zanu PF] are going to give you \$5 000 through (Saviour) Kasukuwere's ministry." (Chikwanhi 2014) In addition, the majority of Zimbabweans, particularly in rural areas, lack the capacity to understand how government policies could translate to their individual benefit. This is because of a string of economic policies, such as, the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), The National Economic Revival Programme (NERP) and Short Term Emergency Recovery Programme (STERP), which were either not implemented fully or failed to improve people's livelihood. Resultantly, ZANU-PF's July 2013 election campaign combined the

promise of economic empowerment policies with immediate material benefits such as community share ownership schemes, agricultural inputs and food hampers, which, were distributed at every campaign rally; whereas, MDC-T's political campaign centred on its economic blueprint - JUICE – an acronym for Jobs, Upliftment, Investment, Capital and Environment. Comparing the MDC-T and the ZANU-PF campaign strategy, Tendai Biti queried, "What was our position on indigenisation? We had JUICE, yes, it was good but trying to explain it to Mai Ezra in Chendambuya... So, the issue of articulating an alternative discourse which is walked and lived is very important." (Chikwanha 2014) The election was therefore won by a party that was able to combine immediate material benefits to cater for voters' immediate needs and promise for future individual benefits after the election. This was strategic, voters that did not want to be excluded from official patronage networks opted to vote for ZANU-PF.

Conclusion: The future of elections in Zimbabwe

What is apparent from the discussion above is that transitional power sharing arrangements challenge in a fundamental way the basis upon which the responsibility hypothesis and the economic voting theory are founded. Far from strengthening accountability among political parties constituting the transitional power sharing government in Zimbabwe, the transitory nature of the government led to the commodification of elections – blurring the divide between the incumbent and opposition while simultaneously incapacitating voters from determining responsibility for government performance. The emergent dynamic is that elections became a 'market' on which the voter's choice on the election day was exchanged for particularistic group or personal material benefits. Contrary to the dominant vote buying discourse, at that 'market' it is not just politicians who sought to buy votes, potential voters actively solicited for vote buyers. Resultantly, elections were not won on the basis of performance in government but on the ability to proffer the right price for the vote. So, what is the future for elections in Zimbabwe?

To reclaim elections in Zimbabwe, the socio-economic and political contexts within which elections are conducted require an overhaul. As argued by Said Adejumobi, the focus should be on strengthening "the constitutive and regulative mechanisms and precepts necessary

to promote a healthy and free electoral competition” (Adejumobi 2000: 62). Yet, the reality is that Zimbabwean politics is a zero-sum game, where political parties are focused on sustenance of the neo-patrimonial political system which requires a regular flow of resources to maintain the clientelistic network of patronage. In order to secure those resources, political parties struggle for control of the state – making politics a zero-sum-game. What raises the stakes further is the ‘winner-take-all’ electoral system, where loss in elections means exclusion from the state and its resources. Simply put, “winners control state resources in a context where private economies are weak – which lends election campaigns the tenor of life-or-death struggles” (Bratton et al. 2013: 32). The aim of elections is therefore to capture the state because, “once an incipient ruling class takes over the state, it monopolises it for its exclusive material and political gain and uses it for the violent exclusion of potential rival groups’ (Fatton 1988: 255). Instead of elections becoming the means for voters to hold the government to account and punish non-performing politicians and political parties, they have become a means of exchanging and gaining personal material benefits. For the politician wanting to gain political power and for a political party aspiring to form the next government, election time is investment time, on the contrary, election periods are harvesting periods for voters. This appears to be the cycle in which Zimbabwe’s elections are trapped.

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