

THE 'MENU OF MANIPULATION' AND THE 2013 ZIMBABWE ELECTIONS

Towards explaining the 'technical knockout'¹

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[W]hen all is said and done, the 2013 election are less likely to witness the menu of coercion (certainly not in the first round of presidential elections) and more likely to be characterised by the menu of manipulation.

Eldred V Masunungure, July 2013

Thousands of ordinary people walked distances of between 10 and 15 kilometres, some bare-footed, to attend the [MDC-T] rallies without coercion.

Phillan Zamchiya, 16 December 2013

That this week's general elections results were discreetly rigged through a chaotic and flawed electoral process, before you even factor in the decisive shenanigans of the shadowy Israeli security company, Nikuv International Projects, which deals with voters' registration and elections results, is as clear as an azure sky of deepest summer.

Dumisani Muleya, 2 August 2013

I have never seen an election that is perfect.

Olusegun Obasanjo, 2 August 2013

ABSTRACT

A year after Zimbabwe's July 2013 elections some are still mystified by the results, especially the overwhelming triumph of incumbent President Robert Mugabe and his Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF). The outcome seemed to go against the grain. Zanu-PF achieved a supermajority, capturing more than two-thirds of the parliamentary seats. Its chief rival, the Morgan Tsvangirai-led Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T) only offered feeble competition and was left befuddled, wondering

¹ This term was used by Phillan Zamchiya in his article on the July 2013 elections.

what had hit it. To date, few know what exactly happened to the opposition forces and their 'pro-democracy' allies in civil society and how it happened.² However, there is anecdotal and circumstantial evidence that can be used to deduce what might have taken place. This article seeks to do that.

INTRODUCTION

The article zeroes in on the sly deployment of mechanisms for winning elections *without* undue coercion in a context in which maximum coercion was most expected. The fact that there was so little violence baffled many, most of who had declared that 'violence was in Zanu-PF's DNA'.³ The reality is that a complex confluence of factors accounted for the electoral outcome and several writers have tried to unravel this complexity.⁴ It is beyond the scope of this article to delve into each of the causes, thus it will focus on what it terms 'the menu of manipulation' and the extent to which this contributes to explaining the 'surprising' results.

THE SUPREMACY OF ELECTIONS

In his celebrated book *In Defence of Politics*, first published in 1962, British political scientist Bernard Crick (1982, p 56), wrote: 'Democracy is perhaps the most promiscuous word in the world of public affairs. She is everybody's mistress ...' One is tempted to say the same of elections: everyone claims to love them, yet many vitiate their central tenets, one of which is that they must be free and fair. Thus, Richard Snyder and David Samuels (2006, p 168) assert that: 'Although the exact definition of democracy is vigorously disputed, wide agreement exists that free and fair elections are the cornerstone of any democratic system of government.' It is therefore now universally accepted that although elections do not democracy make, democracy's core value is that only the governed should determine who shall govern them. And they do so via elections. Elections have not yet found a universally acceptable rival as the procedural core of democracy.

All regimes apart from a few rabidly autocratic ones now embrace and conduct elections to choose their leaders, though their motives for doing so differ.

2 At the time of writing, President Mugabe hinted as much, but with reference to the British, the alleged masters of the MDC and civil society: 'The British up to now don't know what hit them on July 31' (see www.thezimbabwe.com/zimbabwe/20410-british-don-t-know-what-hit-them-on-july-31-mugabe.html)

3 Pedzisayi Ruhanya, cited in Tichaona Sibanda, 'Zanu-PF is unelectable with Mugabe as presidential candidate'. Available at: www.swradioafrica.com/2012/12/19/zanu-pf-is-unelectable-with-mugabe-as-presidential-candidate/

4 The first systematic study of the 2013 elections was the special issue of the *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39(4).

Some choose the electoral method because of their belief in the intrinsic value of elections, that is, their inherent superiority over other methods of choosing leaders, while others do so for instrumental reasons, for example, to be accepted by the international community as democrats and therefore as legitimate and respectable. The now commonly used and agreed minimum condition for democratic elections is that they be 'free and fair'.

Since Samuel Huntington's 'third wave' of democratisation, elections in Africa have been one of the defining features of the process. And, according to Mike Bratton (2013, p 10), their quality – rather than their quantity – matters: 'only free and fair contests foster democratization, whereas elections on an unlevel playing field are an institutional recipe for disguised autocracy'.

THE MENU OF MANIPULATION

Niccolo Machiavelli, the Italian political philosopher of the Renaissance era, wrote the classic work on power politics, entitled *The Prince*. It was intended as a technical manual for princes or rulers on the logic of acquiring, retaining and expanding power. Part of the advice Machiavelli dispenses is that the Prince should govern by two sets of rules: the rules of violence/coercion and the rules of caressing/manipulation. While coercion entails musclepower, manipulation involves brainpower.

Among the rules of coercion are that violence must be used only when absolutely necessary but that when the decision has been made to deploy coercion it must be used quickly and mercilessly. The reason is that violence not only engenders violence, it also breeds resistance and hatred and a wise prince must avoid being hated at all costs. Caressing involves giving gifts and granting favours. Unlike violence, which must be used quickly, gifts and favours must be given 'little by little': 'injuries should be done all together so that being less tasted, they give less offense. Benefits should be granted little by little, so that they may be better enjoyed' (thoughts.forbes.com/thoughts/niccol-machiavelli). Moreover, stretching the period of dispensing benefits maximises the sense of dependency of the recipients on the giver. Also useful in the toolbox of manipulation are deceit, feigning and double standards. Whether the rules of violence or caressing are used, the overriding and supreme goal is to maximise the acquisition, maintenance and expansion of power.

Though *The Prince* was written some 600 years ago, it appears that today's leaders still find the advice handy; certainly in Zimbabwe. It is said that *The Prince* was intended to be a technical manual for Lorenzo de' Medici, the ruler of Florence, 'who almost certainly did not read it when it came into his hands in 1516' (Nederman 2009). Medici's counterpart in contemporary Zimbabwe, Robert

Mugabe, made no such mistake, however, he read the manual thoroughly and is guided by its precepts.

The contemporary version of Machiavelli's suggestions of caressing is the notion of a 'menu of manipulation', which, to my knowledge, was first articulated by Andreas Schedler in an influential article published in 2002. In the article Schedler essentially discusses how elections, and specifically their quality, can be used to differentiate between and among regimes that hold them.

Schedler proposes a four-fold typology: liberal democracy, electoral democracy, electoral authoritarianism and closed authoritarianism. The four are arranged in a continuum from liberal democracy at one pole to closed authoritarianism at the other. Of the four regime types, the first three hold elections, but the last, closed authoritarianism, dispenses with them. Schedler is particularly interested in the regimes between the two poles – electoral democracies and electoral authoritarianism – and what distinguishes them in terms of the quality of their elections. Like many others, he starts from the premise that elections are not all democracy is about: 'elections are a necessary but not sufficient condition for modern democracy' (Schedler 2002, p 37).

The distinction between liberal and electoral democracies is that the former

go beyond the electoral minimum' while the latter 'manage to "get elections right", but fail to institutionalize other vital dimensions of democratic constitutionalism, such as the rule of law, political accountability, bureaucratic integrity, and public deliberation.

Schedler 2002, p 37

The distinction between electoral democracy and electoral authoritarianism is also based on the *quality* of elections. Electoral democracies pass the test of 'free and fair' elections while electoral authoritarianism fails it. Here is how Schedler (2002, pp 36-37) describes the latter:

Electoral authoritarian regimes neither practice democracy nor resort regularly to naked repression. By organising periodic elections they try to obtain at least a semblance of democratic legitimacy, hoping to satisfy external as well as internal actors. At the same time, by placing those elections under tight authoritarian controls they try to cement their continued hold on power. Their dream is to reap the fruits of electoral legitimacy without running the risks of democratic credibility.

In short, authoritarian regimes hold elections which are neither free nor fair and have little bearing on the determination of who is in power. Such regimes 'carve the democratic heart of out of electoral contests' (Schedler 2002, p 42).

Table 1
The Chain of Democratic Choice

	Dimensions of choice	Normative premises of democratic choice	Strategies of norm violation
1	The object of choice	<i>Empowerment</i> : Democratic elections involve the delegation of decision-making authority	<i>Reserved positions</i> : Limiting the scope of elective offices <i>Reserved domains</i> : Limiting the jurisdiction of elective offices
2	The range of choice	<i>Freedom of supply</i> : Citizens must be free to form, join, and support conflicting parties, candidates and policies	<i>Exclusion of opposition forces</i> : Restricting access to the electoral arena <i>Fragmentation of opposition forces</i> : disorganising electoral dissidents
3	The formation of preferences	<i>Freedom of demand</i> : Citizens must be able to learn about available options through access to alternative sources of information	<i>Repression</i> : Restricting political and civil liberties <i>Unfairness</i> : Restricting access to media and money
4	The agents of choice	<i>Inclusion</i> : Democracy assigns equal rights of participation to all full members of the political community	<i>Formal disenfranchisement</i> : Legal suffrage restrictions <i>Informal disenfranchisement</i> : Practical suffrage restrictions
5	The expression of preferences	<i>Insulation</i> : Citizens must be free to express their electoral preferences	<i>Coercion</i> : Voter intimidation <i>Corruption</i> : Vote-buying
6	The aggregation of preferences	<i>Integrity</i> : One person, one vote. The democratic ideal of equality demands weighting votes equally – all votes have the same value	<i>Electoral fraud</i> : 'Redistributive' election management <i>Institutional bias</i> : 'Redistributive' electoral rules
7	The consequences of choice	<i>Irreversibility</i> : Elections without consequences do not qualify as democratic	<i>Tutelage</i> : Preventing elected officers from exercising their constitutional powers <i>Reversal</i> : Preventing victors from taking office, or elected officers from concluding their constitutional terms

Source: Schedler 2002, p 39

Schedler (2002, p 40) gives seven minimum conditions for effective democratic choice and seven corresponding tactics for engineering authoritarian elections. Table 1 summarises what the author calls 'the chain of democratic choice', a metaphorical chain, which, 'like a real chain, holds together only so long as each of its links remain whole and unbroken'.

Of interest to us are the 'strategies for norm violation' – see the last column of Table 1. Among the seven strategies, those numbered 3 to 6 are particularly relevant to Zimbabwe's 2013 elections. The article borrows this framework in its anatomy of the menu of manipulation employed during those elections. However, it disagrees with Schedler's inclusion of coercion (see row 5) in the menu of manipulation, instead it treats coercion as an ingredient in a different menu, which I call the 'menu of coercion'. This is a cruder menu, which, when applied heavy-handedly and extensively, has the effect of downgrading the offending regime from the ranks of electoral authoritarian regimes and placing it among closed authoritarian regimes.

The menu of coercion often defeats the very purpose of conducting elections, which is to derive a genuine measure of popular and international legitimacy. In some respects, the menu of manipulation (subtle and largely invisible) and the menu of coercion (overt and crude) can be regarded as substitutes for each other, that is, the existence of one tends to render redundant the need for the other. For instance, the June 2008 presidential run-off election was a cold-blooded display of coercion and cost the victor any semblance of legitimacy; few outside Zanu-PF recognised the outcome, and it was this perceived illegitimacy that necessitated the Government of National Unity (GNU) engineered by the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The logic of both the coercive and manipulative menus is to inject into the electoral process a high measure of certainty of outcome by reducing the risk of failure. However, inherent in the coercive strategy is that it often produces the desired outcome, that is, victory, but at the cost of electoral democratic legitimacy.

In 2002 Schedler (2002) calculated that electoral authoritarianism was the most common regime type in the world outside Western industrial democracies (and Japan). It emerged as the most frequent regime type in sub-Saharan Africa, claiming over half (54%) of all countries. Though not mentioned by name, Zimbabwe must be among those.

The country still has the credentials of electoral authoritarianism, though Masunungure (2011) characterised it as 'militarized, electoral authoritarianism' in recognition of the prominence of the military factor in Zimbabwe's elections since 2000 and especially in the run-up to the June 2008 presidential run-off elections and thereafter.

THE MENU OF MANIPULATION ON DISPLAY

The menu of manipulation suggests a cunning that somehow hypnotises both the adversary and the electorate without the manipulator dispensing 'hard power'. It involves shrewd caressing and the deployment of smart or soft power such that even if the victory is instinctively questionable, there is no really 'hard' evidence that can be presented to diminish the legitimacy of the outcome. In the 2013 elections many, both inside and outside the country could 'feel' that the elections were not right, that something was amiss, but could not proffer tangible evidence to support the suspicion. That is how smart the Zanu-PF party and associated state organs had been.

As for the 2013 elections, few contested their freeness, but many disputed their fairness,⁵ though even those in the latter group could not pinpoint with certainty and confidence the source of the unfairness. They could 'sniff' it in the air, but could not lay their hands on it.

It is to this that David Moore (August 2013) was alluding when he observed the following regarding Zanu-PF's sweeping victory in the 2013 elections:

The ZANU-PF applied, Machiavellian-style, a classic Gramscian combination of forceful power and sly persuasion – the dialectic of coercion and consent – to confound the fourteen-year-old MDC challenge, along with most members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union, and the western world.

Moore hit the nail on the head when he wrote (August 2013)

The results [of the 2013 election] carefully pre-contrived by the ruling party and Nikuv, its electoral mercenaries from Israel ... with a myriad of tricks including a fantastical voters roll, and slanted in polling stations with such tricks as thousands of 'assisted voters' (instantly 'illiterate' voters being helped along by police officers, who in any case were overly-represented in the stations), will inevitably be proven fraudulent enough, but they will take months if not years to verify.

The thesis of this article rests on two legs. One is that the Opposition, especially the MDC-T, left itself open to being rigged; it was 'riggable', as it were. The second leg is that Zanu-PF – the alleged election rigger – did everything possible to make the 'rigged' result look credible and even inevitable. To this extent, Zanu-

5 Freeness and fairness are contestable and subjective terms whose application at ground level is largely contextual. However, and as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2006, p 73) asserts, ' "free" is about participation and choice', while ' "fair" is about equality of participation and of the vote, and about impartiality and non-discrimination; together, they imply respect for human rights at large and the absence of coercion'.

PF embarked on a two-track strategy whereby, while the menu of manipulation was being implemented behind closed doors during covert operations, the party simultaneously and publicly worked to make the manipulated result believable even by its most hardened detractors.

The latter aspect of the twin strategy involved systematically, consistently and deliberately exaggerating both the weakness of the MDC-T and the strength of Zanu-PF. The flaws of the MDC-T were portrayed as not only deep and getting deeper, but, and most importantly, as beyond easy and quick remedy.

Zanu-PF conveyed an elaborate and well-knit message of predestination, that is, that the MDC-T was predestined for massive defeat while Zanu-PF was predestined for massive victory. This was part of a sophisticated and well-orchestrated psychic and propaganda campaign targeted at both the Zimbabwe public and external 'detractors' and was designed to ensure that an overwhelming victory would not shock the nation and the international community. In short, the party wanted its victory to appear to have gone with and not against the grain. The reactions from various quarters (external and national – both opposition and within ZANU-PF) indicate that the campaign was not an entirely successful in persuading its target audiences.⁶

If my line of conjecture is correct, it suggests that Zanu-PF was acutely aware of the gap between its real or innate strength and the kind of strength that would be needed to deliver the envisaged resounding victory for the party. The psychic manoeuvres were designed to prepare the public to believe that the 'resounding' victory was in fact achievable and unavoidable given the decay and venality of the MDC-T on the one hand and the vibrancy and virtues of Zanu-PF on the other.

The task of filling the gap between the actual and the purported or desired strength of the party became an obsession, a frenzy of sorts. It reached a crescendo with the publication of the referendum results, whose meaning was deliberately twisted and interpreted to suggest that they were a harbinger of the outcome of the upcoming electoral contest. For instance, even before the full referendum results were released, *The Herald* (19 March 2013) surmised, in an article that was more about the presumed solid prospects of Zanu-PF winning the harmonised elections than about the referendum, that:

With voting trends showing most Zanu-PF strongholds in rural areas recorded high turnouts to drive the 'Yes Vote' with MDC-T-dominated urban areas recording low endorsement in some areas, *analysts say if the referendum results mirror the impending harmonised elections then Zanu-PF is poised for a landslide victory* (my emphasis).

Zvayi 2013

6 ZANU-PF's counter-reaction to the voices of scepticism was to dismiss them as evidence of sour grapes.

A month later, in mid-April, *The Herald* carried the following under a long headline, stating: 'Zimbabwe: MDC-T Backers Jump Ship, Dispatch Envoy to President, Make Reconciliation Overtures, Move Read in Context of Poll Outcome' (Machivenyika 2013):

Western media, among them CNN, *The Guardian* and *New York Times*, recently attacked Mr Tsvangirai, saying his public image had been soiled by his sexual escapades while corruption within the rank and file of the party would play against his party at the polls.

Several recent opinion polls pointed to a Zanu-PF victory in the harmonised elections.

Two days later, in the same paper, Share (2013) wrote: 'The overtures by Britain, the EU, US and their allies, analysts say, indicate that the MDC-T's handlers had realised that the regime change agenda has aborted and *MDC-T cannot form the next government*' (my emphasis).

The trick was to present victory as a self-fulfilling prophesy. Public opinion surveys by independent institutions like the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI) were craftily roped in too to fortify the narrative and provide alibis for Zanu-PF's overwhelming electoral triumph.⁷ In the above-mentioned article, Zvayi (2013) found ammunition in surveys that had been favourable to Zanu-PF. His argument is worth citing at length:

The view by analysts dovetails with several recent surveys that have given the revolutionary party the edge over its coalition government partner, the MDC-T.

In September last year, the UK-based pro-MDC-T group, Zimbabwe Vigil, said the MDC-T was likely to lose the forthcoming harmonised elections because of rampant corruption within its top leadership among other issues.

Zimbabwe Vigil's damning assessment of MDC-T's electoral chances came hard on the heels of two unflattering surveys by the US-based group, Freedom House, and Afrobarometer that said President Mugabe and Zanu-PF would win polls ahead of Mr Tsvangirai and the MDC-T. The Freedom House survey, that was released in August, said support for the MDC-T had fallen from 38 percent in 2010 to

⁷ All bona fide political parties go into elections exuding confidence of victory but some fail to use favourable public opinion surveys deftly to prepare the public for their 'inevitable' victory and this has been the case with the MDC in previous elections.

20 percent this year while support for Zanu-PF grew to 31 percent from 17 percent, over the same period.

The survey also said that President Mugabe would command the support of 31 percent of voters in a presidential election, compared to 19 percent for Mr Tsvangirai.

The survey said Zanu-PF had clear programmes such as the land reform and other empowerment programmes to sell to the electorate while the 'Change' mantra pushed by MDC-T had lost steam.

The Afrobarometer survey, entitled 'Voting Intentions in Zimbabwe: A Margin of Terror?', also put Zanu-PF ahead of MDC-T, but said another coalition government was likely. Another survey carried out later in the year, in November, by the Mass Public Opinion Institute and released in February this year said Zanu PF would win the parliamentary elections with 33 percent of the vote to 32 percent for the MDC-T.

Then, just a day before the election, and in a blatant example of abuse of the public media, Zanu-PF actually invented a public opinion survey, supposedly carried out by Freedom House, whose results, the *Herald* claimed, had been suppressed. About the fictitious poll, the paper alleged that:

The United States has reportedly gagged one of its think tanks, Freedom House, from releasing its latest survey results that indicate a crushing victory for President Mugabe and Zanu-PF in harmonised elections due tomorrow.

...

Sources close to the US gag order said the Freedom House survey results give President Mugabe a 10 percent lead over Mr Tsvangirai of MDC-T and predicts a two thirds majority for Zanu-PF in the National Assembly where the revolutionary party is tipped to garner at least 140 seats in the 210 seat lower house.

Gumbo 2013

Susan Booysen, who allegedly supervised the bogus survey, denied doing so, but the concocted story was too juicy to drop. This was a deliberate act of what Robert Dahl (1976, p 46) calls 'manipulative persuasion', whereby 'A influences B by communication that intentionally distorts, falsifies, or omits aspects of truth known to A that if made known to B would significantly affect B's decision'. In short, manipulative persuasion means lying or misleading to get someone to do

something; this is unlike rational persuasion, which means telling the truth and explaining why someone should do something (also see [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert A._Dahl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_A._Dahl))

Many other stories from the domestic and international media were given maximum publicity in an effort to market the narrative of an inevitable and overwhelming Zanu-PF victory and an inevitable and disastrous MDC-T defeat. The following was typical (Huni & Muriro 2013)

So many research organisations, including the Western media that had been vilifying Zanu-PF, have turned tables against the MDC-T and are now predicting Zanu-PF victory in the forthcoming plebiscite.

They say Zanu-PF is a principled party whose support is now riding on the successful implementation of the land reform programme and some home-grown empowerment programmes.

Opinion polls carried by a number of organisations, most of which have traditionally backed the MDC-T, indicate that the party would lose the elections due to its failure to articulate practical policies to shape a government.

....

Corruption in MDC-T has alienated the party from voters and would negatively impact on its performance in the forthcoming elections.

The media accused the MDC-T of clamouring to delay the national elections, allegedly because the party had acknowledged the massive shift in support towards ZANU-PF:

the MDC formations are making spirited efforts to delay elections beyond June 29. MDC-T is not interested in early elections after it was unnerved by recent assessments by its traditional allies that have pointed to a Zanu-PF victory.

MDC-T recently admitted in its election strategy document that there had been massive voter apathy (in the referendum) in its perceived strongholds.

Mugabe 2012

RIGGING BY STEALTH?

The rigging thesis has been advanced with passion, but with little empirical evidence on which to anchor it. However, if it happened – and there is scope for

this, given the wild swings in voting preferences between March 2008 and July 2013 – it was done stealthily. For instance, it appears inconceivable that a party that won only six of 26 seats (27%) in Manicaland in March 2008 could have resurrected itself in five years to the extent that it could claim 22 of the 26 seats (85%), probably earning a place in the *Guinness Book of Records*.

The same could be said of Masvingo, where, in 2008, Zanu-PF won only 12 of 26 seats compared to the MDC-T's 14, but, in 2013, Zanu-PF snatched all 26 seats. No change of tectonic proportions took place in that province to explain the massive reversal of fortunes and misfortunes. When Freedom House analysed the results of the 2008 elections with the intention of identifying swing constituencies that were narrowly won by either ZANU-PF or the MDC-T, it found that of 26 constituencies in Masvingo three had been won narrowly (less than 5% of the valid votes in the constituency) by the MDC-T and might go to ZANU-PF at the next elections, while ZANU-PF had narrowly won one. The MDC-T had also won another two by less than 10%, while ZANU-PF had one seat in this category. This means the party had won the other nine seats with convincing and solid majorities, which had presumably melted away by the time of the 2013 elections. This is possible, but improbable, under normal circumstances.

To the extent that the rigging thesis is valid, the voters' roll must have been the centrepiece of the chicanery. However, it was not and could not have been the only instrument in the rigging toolbox. Rigging must have been a sophisticated multipronged and multistage process. And it was done craftily and with very few involved at the core of the drama.

But stealth in rigging also means the victory has to be made believable. In this respect, Zanu-PF went out of its way to make its victory credible, even to the most sceptical eye. The rigging thesis argues that Zanu-PF went the extra mile – in the words of its party spokesman, Rugare Gumbo, it worked 'meticulously' – not so much to win but to make its win believable and even inevitable. It did this by simultaneously besmirching its key rival – the MDC-T, especially its leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, while sanitising Zanu-PF, especially its leader, Robert Mugabe.

To this extent, it used (or rather abused) the public media with devastating effectiveness – particularly the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) and *The Herald*, the most widely accessed media outlets in the country.⁸

8 A survey conducted by the Mass Public Opinion Institute in October 2012 found that: at 42%, ZBC's Radio Zimbabwe was the one most commonly accessed for news on political and current affairs, followed by another ZBC station (Power FM, at 16%) and a distant third was the externally run VOA's Studio 7, at 8%. In terms of newspapers, *The Herald* commanded the largest proportion of readers (18%), followed by the privately run *NewsDay* (11%) and *Daily News* (7%). ZBC-TV also commanded 29% of viewership compared to SABC-TV (14%) for news on political and current affairs.

The fruits of its 'meticulous work' started filtering into public opinion polls by 2010. Table 2 provides a glimpse of this. The trend was clear. While the MDC-T's popular appeal – as reflected in voting intentions – was going down, that of Zanu-PF was going up. For instance, in May 2009 the MDC-T could have easily – even effortlessly – won the election, with nearly six in ten (57%) Zimbabweans preferring the party compared to only 10% who supported Zanu-PF. By November 2010 (barely one and a half years later), the MDC-T's popularity had precipitously fallen by 19 percentage points, to 36%, while that of Zanu-PF had increased by eight percentage points, to 18%. One and half years later, by July 2012, the MDC-T had been overtaken by its rival and was lagging behind by three percentage points.

Table 2
Zimbabweans' Voting Intentions, 2009-2013

	MDC-T	Zanu-PF	Other parties	Refused to answer	My vote is my secret/ Would not vote
May 2009 (AB)	57	10	-	25	5
November 2010 (AB)	36	18	2	32	7
December 2010 (FH)	38	17	3	8	30
June 2012 (FH)	20	31	2	8	34
July 2012 (AB)	30	33	2	24	9
November 2012 (NED)	32	33	4	10	20

Key: AB – Afrobarometer; FH – Freedom House; NED – National Endowment for Democracy

Question: 'If a House of Assembly election were held tomorrow, which party's candidate would you vote for?'

Note: In the May 2009 and November 2010 surveys, the question referred to 'presidential' election.

In short, Zanu-PF would have won *even without rigging*, though not with the margin of victory it finally achieved. Thus, any rigging that was done was in order to ensure that 'victory was certain' and to leave no stone unturned on the road to State House. Any rigging was therefore designed as a kind of insurance against any chance – however remote – that the MDC-T could win; it was meant to reduce that risk to no more than zero.

So, how was the menu of manipulation prepared and served? Many have commented on aspects. It appears this was a comprehensive and total strategy that left nothing to chance. This is how the editor of the influential weekly *Independent* put it (Muleya, 2 August 2013):

This whole election process, from preparations to voting day, was a big farce. It was a charade in which President Robert Mugabe and Zanu-PF were determined to win by fair means or foul.

There were a series of problems including the controversial fixing of the polling day, chaotic voters' registration process, a messy voters' roll, the turning away of registered voters and thus massive disenfranchisement.

There were also illegalities like registering people after official closure of the exercise and criminal voting through the back door.

Table 3 summarises some facets of the manipulation. The menu was served throughout the electoral cycle, from the pre-election period to election day and, finally, the post-election period. The table also shows beyond any shadow of doubt who in the GNU had the power to dictate the trajectory of the elections.

Table 3
Menu of Manipulation via Violations of the 2013 Elections

No.	Manipulative moves prior to the elections	Explanation
1	Unilateral proclamation of election dates	President Mugabe unilaterally declared election dates without consulting Cabinet and GNU partners as per Constitution.
2	Illegal amendment of Electoral Act	Amendment of Electoral Law through presidential proclamation in violation of both Constitution and Presidential Powers Temporary Measures Act.
3	Breach of Constitution and unfair registration of voters	2013 Constitution mandated a 30-day window for special and intensive registration after publication of new Constitution. This was not done; the truncated process took only 20 days and covered only about a third of the 1 958 wards. Skewed registration of voters; voters' roll of 19 June 2013 showed 99.97% of rural voters had benefited from the registration exercise compared to 67.94% of urban voters.
4	Unfair media coverage in breach of law	State media – radio, TV, newspapers – promoted Zanu-PF and excluded competing parties in violation of Electoral Act.

5	Partisan application of law on damage to campaign material	Selective application of law in respect of damage to campaign material; Zanu-PF agents not arrested for destroying campaign material of rival parties but MDC supporters arrested for doing same.
6	Manipulation of special vote	Facility allowed advance voting to security forces on duty during elections. Police allegedly abused this by granting 25 109 more officers special votes; about 28 000 failed to vote because of chaotic voting arrangements and the Constitutional Court violated the Electoral Act by allowing the 28 000 to vote on 31 July. Probability that the special voters would again vote on 31 July.
7	Failure to provide electronic copy of voters' role	<p>ZEC failed to supply an electronic copy of the voters' roll to parties and candidates, in violation of s 21 (6&7) of the Electoral Act. The printed copy was only supplied the day before voting and only after a court order. ZEC blamed a 'technical fault' for its failure to supply an electronic copy, which, by law, should be in a searchable and analysable format.</p> <p>Election analysts allege the voters' roll was the most likely epicentre of any rigging that might have taken place. Some election observers also pointed to multiple acts of omission and commission involving the voters' roll, eg, inflation to facilitate multiple voting, massive disenfranchisement, deliberate removal of names from their proper ward to another far away within the same constituency, outright removal of names, retention of names of people in the diaspora and of deceased to facilitate multiple voting (thus inflating numbers for Zanu-PF).</p>
8	Election-related intimidation	Intimidation by Zanu-PF activists invoking the ghost of '27 June' in reference to the massive wave of terror in April-June 2008; this was a very potent psychological tool even though no physical violence was unleashed.
9	Election-related bribery	Rampant vote-buying, eg, distribution of foodstuffs, agricultural inputs, caps, T-shirts, etc, in violation of s 136 of the Electoral Act and the Code of Conduct for Political Parties, with Zanu-PF as the chief culprit.

10	Excess ballot papers printed	8.7-million ballot papers were printed, 2.3-million more (35%) than required for the 6.4-million registered voters. International best practice allows for only 5% more. What were the extra ballot papers for?
During Elections		
10	Presence of police, who carried out voting activities inside polling stations	In violation of ss 55(6) and 62 of the Electoral Act police were present inside polling stations – this was highly intimidatory; they carried out various voting activities, eg, transmitting information about votes cast, assisting some voters, turning away others. They were also present during vote counting.
11	Busing in of voters and allowing them to vote	Hundreds of voters not resident in some targeted constituencies were bused in to vote en masse.
12	Turning away of eligible voters	Thousands of registered voters were turned away in many constituencies – in total, ZEC says, 304 890 voters were turned away. The highest percentage (15.2%) from MDC stronghold Harare and the lowest (4.9%) from the Zanu-PF strongholds of Mashonaland Central and Mashonaland East. Main reasons were: improper identity documents, not being on the voters' roll, being below voting age.
13	Unusually high number of assisted voters in Africa's most literate country	ZEC recorded 206 901 voters assisted for various reasons, including high illiteracy among old voters. Critics and observers say many literate voters were compelled to seek 'help' at the instigation of Zanu-PF functionaries, who did the 'assisting'.
Post-elections		
15	ZEC failure to provide details of voting patterns in presidential election	ZEC refused to supply details of presidential voting patterns by constituency and polling station.
16	Questionable court decisions	Widespread perception that election was 'conducted, won and lost in the courts': Constitutional Court ruled that the elections were held in accordance with the Constitution and the Electoral Act despite violations of both. Constitutional Court ruled that the election was free, fair, and credible and the result was a reflection of the free will of Zimbabwe's voters. High Court ruled that the ZEC was not compelled to provide the MDC-T with the final voting patterns (see 15 above), resulting in the withdrawal of the MDC-T's electoral court challenge for lack of evidence.

In fact, and throughout the GNU, it appears the veteran Zanu-PF leader and his close lieutenants designed two games that were being played concurrently but in different arenas. The first was a public game played openly and with the GNU partners – this was the ‘soft’ game for public consumption; it was often high profile but served a decoy function. A high level of political symbolism was attached to this game, which, in reality, did not affect the strategic direction of the country. The Monday afternoon ‘Principals Forum’ was the most prominent symbolic expression of this soft power game. Here the two most prominent politicians, Mugabe and Tsvangirai, would meet weekly. It involved considerable Machiavellian deception.

For instance, in late 2012, Prime Minister Tsvangirai was invested with false power when he was put in charge of the supervision of the electoral processes that would lead to the 2013 elections. In that capacity he regularly ‘summoned’ officials in various strategic institutions ostensibly in charge of preparing for the elections, for instance, the leadership of the ZEC, especially the female duo of chairperson Justice Rita Makarau and her deputy, Joyce Kazembe, Ministers of Justice and Finance, and the Registrar General’s Office. The latter would presumably brief the prime minister and a lot of media hype accompanied the meetings.

In reality, the meetings were full of sound and fury but signified little. In this context it should be noted that the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) was, itself, practically an empty shell in terms of power, even when the Global Political Agreement (GPA), a power-sharing agreement between the then ruling Zanu-PF party and its two MDC rivals, signed in September 2008, formally invested the office with the responsibility to ensure the implementation of GNU policies. By the middle of the GNU’s lifespan the PMO had been reduced to a symbolic and ritual structure and few ministers took the PM and his office seriously. In short, the soft power game was a game for show. The real game was elsewhere and Tsvangirai was not there.

This second game was one of hard power and it is where the real subterfuge was played out, behind locked doors and without the non-Zanu-PF GNU partners. Especially telling is that Mugabe and his party deliberately, subtly and quietly transferred the arena for the real planning and organising of the elections from the institution constitutionally mandated to do so, the ZEC, to other players, away from the glare of both the GNU partners and the public. This essentially entailed doing things surreptitiously. In a casual conversation, one war veteran and Zanu-PF activist remarked: ‘We pretended to the MDC that we were playing the game at the National Sports Stadium when we had moved it to Rufaro. They were at the National Sports Stadium; we were at Rufaro and that’s where the game was being played!’

NIKUV AND THE HARD-POWER GAME

Central to the hard-power game was a shadowy Israeli security company, Nikuv International Projects (now just known as Nikuv). Apparently the company had been hired by the Registrar-General's Office as far back as 2000, ostensibly to upgrade the computers to be used for the computerisation of the central registry. A litany of its alleged sins includes:

- Producing a voters' roll riddled with duplicated names, names of people outside the country and names of dead people;
- Producing different copies of the voters' roll;
- Setting up hastily established and largely anonymous polling stations;
- Issuing fake voter registration slips – these were reportedly used by Zanu-PF supporters not on the voters' roll to vote at multiple voting stations;
- Diluting the indelible ink used for elections so it could easily be washed off, thus enabling people to vote more than once and in different constituencies;
- Supplying a special watermarked ballot paper used to give Mugabe a resounding victory.⁹

Apparently, Tsvangirai and his MDC party did not become conscious of the sophisticated game of trickery until well after the elections and only when they were trying to work out what had hit them. The MDC-T compiled a 54-page dossier in which they belatedly observed that:

The national body [ZEC] tasked and mandated with running and conducting elections was reduced to a bystander in the electoral rigging fiasco and merely forced to play the rubber-stamping role as the secret structure of military and intelligence officials deployed to implement the rigging mission directed and controlled everything.

Nehanda Radio, 6 November 2013

The dossier is obviously partisan and intended to serve partisan, self-serving purposes, yet it reads very coherently and cannot be summarily dismissed as a case

⁹ See Mambo 2013. Sibanda 2013 reported that: 'There is growing speculation that Nikuv designed a special watermarked ballot paper that gave a resounding victory in areas where Mugabe has failed to win an election since independence. These unconfirmed reports allege that the ballot used on Wednesday had a clever water mark against Mugabe's name that was activated by any ink used against any other candidate, making him the winner.'

of partisan sour grapes. The details of the strategies, tactics, actors, institutions, and processes lend the dossier considerable credibility. Informal sources also corroborate most of the allegations.

VOTE-BUYING

Vote-buying is a rampant phenomenon in political campaigns almost everywhere, yet there is no systematic evidence that it produces the desired results. This is largely because of the commitment problem under conditions of elections in the modern era in which secrecy is one of the sacrosanct requirements to achieve the 'golden' standard of a free and fair election. According to Eric Kramon (2013, p 101): 'Where the vote is secret, politicians lack mechanisms to ensure voter compliance, while citizens cannot credibly commit to providing their vote after a gift or bribe is secret.' In short, the targeted vote seller gets the goods and services that are 'on sale', but this does not determine his or her conduct in the ballot box.

Vote-buying is not without effect, but the effect is not necessarily what the vote-buyers intended – it may increase voter turnout but it will not necessarily mean more votes for the vote-buyer. In his research into the 2002 Kenya elections Kramon (2013, p 102) found that individuals who had been approached by a vote-buyer were 'about 15 percentage points more likely to vote than those who have not been approached'. In another study, Pedro Vicente (2007, p 30) arrived at the same finding – that vote-buying increases voter turnout by 'energising' potential voters. So, the chief effect of vote-buying is to get the voter to the polling station rather than to determine where he or she puts the 'X' on the ballot paper.

It is not possible to estimate cause-effect relationships in the Zimbabwe case as no such systematic study has been done in respect of the 2013 elections.¹⁰ What is indisputable, though, is that there was massive but asymmetrical vote-buying, with Zanu-PF pampering potential voters in both rural and urban areas and doing so on a large scale. The party was clearly well endowed and this did not escape the notice of voters. Solidarity Peace Trust (2013) cites several voters who acknowledged the power of material inducements:

The other thing was the rice; the rice issue was a problem. You see food was used in campaigning and people had no choice. They ended

10 In 2008 voters were ordered to bring their ballot numbers so as to ensure it could be verified that indeed they voted for Zanu-PF. Some went as far as suggesting that Zanu-PF would use 'binocular technologies' to find out how voters had voted – a tactic intended to instil fear, especially in the rural constituencies. Those constituencies that did not vote for Zanu-PF were subject to violent reprisals. It is reasonable to argue that this had a psychological impact on the 'gift receivers' and that, in 2013, many voted Zanu-PF fearing a repeat of the violence. This may help to contextualise the effect of gift-giving and voting patterns.

up giving that bucket of rice an exaggerated value, maybe because it could have found them without mealie meal at home ... when election time comes they have no choice but to vote for that bucket of rice.

Middle-aged man, Insiza, in Matabeleland South Province

ZANU gave just anyone, if you happened to be near when they were passing by they would give you, either a cap, or a doek [scarf], to tie your head, they were not discriminating. Other parties did not have.

Old Man, Umzingwane, in Matabeleland South

A keen observer summed up the asymmetry in resources between a visibly well-funded Zanu-PF and a meagrely funded MDC-T:

the MDC-T had little campaign finance. Each aspiring councillor in the local government elections was given \$100, which was supposed to pay for fliers, posters and all campaign-related expenses. Aspiring members of parliament (MPs) for rural constituencies were given 1,200 T-shirts each and aspiring MPs got 800 T-shirts each. Each MP was given \$1,400 for the campaign and 1,000 campaign posters. The MDC-T had 300,000 T-shirts in total and by the third rally held in Masvingo the shortage of regalia was already evident. This affected the visibility of the party.

Aspiring MPs from ZANU (PF) received a new double cab truck each from their party, whereas the MDC-T had one car for each province, serving an average of 20 aspiring MPs. In some constituencies the difference in resources was astonishing.

Zamchiya 2013, p 961

Other vote-buying incentives were less direct but perhaps more significant, especially in urban areas. They included the cancellation of local authority rates and tariff bills by the Zanu-PF-controlled Ministry of Local Government a month before the elections, a move designed to endear the party to the pro-MDC urban electorate. According to the Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI 2013, p 19), 'The timing of the move clearly shows that ZANU-PF was on a serious vote-buying spree. This could be partly the reason why ZANU-PF got six seats in Harare'. The MDC acknowledged the efficacy of this move:

We also lost on strategy, as technically ZANU-PF had an upper hand, they announced a cancellation of outstanding local authority bills,

giving a tangible reprieve to the electorate and it won them some degree of support.

MDC-T lawyer, Bulawayo, quoted in Solidarity Peace Trust 2013

Other goodies were also distributed by the Zanu-PF leadership elite, including by the First Lady, Grace Mugabe. At every rally addressed by the president just before the elections she donated large quantities of foodstuffs, including maize meal, sugar beans, cooking oil and salt. At one such rally, the state-controlled media reported that Grace Mugabe 'donated food stuffs worth thousands of dollars to the Madamombe community. Among the food stuffs were 10 tonnes of maize meal, 10 tonnes of sugar beans, 2 tonnes of salt and 560 cases of 12x2 litres cooking oil' (Chipunza 2013).

Zanu-PF's rivals complained bitterly about this unethical conduct, which violated the Code of Conduct signed by all political parties. More importantly, these actions also violated the legislation governing electoral conduct. For instance, Part XIX of the Electoral Act, section 136(1)(c) criminalises 'any gift, loan, offer, promise, procurement or agreement to or for any person in order to induce such person to procure or endeavour to procure the return of a candidate at an election or the vote of a voter at an election'. Significantly, the complainants themselves had dirty hands too. For instance, Tsvangirai's wife, Elizabeth Tsvangirai, also donated goodies during the election campaigns. The difference was that Zanu-PF had a larger patronage cake, as ZDI (2013, p 19) notes: 'ZANU-PF, because of its access to state resources and possibly to diamond revenue, had more resources at its disposal.'

Part of the vote-buying paraphernalia was the US\$20-million Presidential Well-Wishers' Special Agricultural Inputs Scheme (PWSAIS), ostensibly intended to benefit disadvantaged farmers during the 2012-2013 agricultural season. This was unveiled by the president and, on paper, was designed to benefit the poor, regardless of political affiliation. However, in practice, it became part of Zanu-PF's campaign strategy. The Zimbabwe Peace Project (2012, p 2), for instance, reported that:

Zanu PF started distributing maize seed and fertilisers under the guise of the Presidential Inputs Scheme to mostly card carrying members of the liberation party and in exceptions to everyone present. In most cases recorded suspected MDC supporters were denied the farming inputs by the Zanu PF officials and soldiers who were controlling most distribution centres.

Almost in all of the country's 210 constituencies there was distribution of maize seed packs and in some cases fertilizer. The distributed

packets had stickers with the image of the president. These stickers have been used to deny some villagers access to the inputs. The Presidential Inputs Scheme debacle may well have set the tone for the 2013 electoral campaign period with vote-buying emerging as one cornerstone of Zanu PF's electoral strategy.

ELECTION DAY IRREGULARITIES

Turned away

As Table 3 shows, many potential voters were turned away. ZEC statistics released in early August 2013 show a total of 305 000 (8.7%). Suspiciously, the highest numbers were in urban areas which were also the strongholds of the opposition parties and where only 68% of the electorate was registered, compared to nearly 100% registration in the rural areas. Up to 21% (64 483) of those turned away were in Harare alone.

According to the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), a non-governmental election monitoring organisation, potential voters were turned away from 82% of urban polling stations, 'in sharp contrast to rural areas where only 38 percent of polling stations turned away many potential voters' (ZESN 2014, p 5). These glaring anomalies led many to suspect foul play. The African Union Election Observation Mission (2 August 2013, p 3) also noted 'with great concern the high incidence. According to the ZEC the reason was that people had arrived at polling stations without proper documentation or were not on the voters' roll.¹¹

Assisted

In 2013 Zimbabwe was ranked the most literate country in Africa, yet as many as 206 000 people ostensibly needed to be assisted, according to the ZEC, because of 'a high turnout of the old-aged people in this election which category has a high illiteracy rate'. The ZEC also said there was a high turnout of physically challenged people. But sceptics were not convinced, especially since the assisted voters were concentrated in the Zanu-PF heartland of Mashonaland provinces. One young man in Inzisa South chronicled how it worked:

They would ask aged people, 'Gogo [grandmother] can I go with you inside so that I can assist you?' That was a plot. Aged people would want to go in, vote fast and go home. They would in the end

¹¹ Regrettably, and as the Solidarity Peace Trust notes: 'It is not possible to say much about these figures compared statistically to previous elections, as reports for elections back to 2000 simply do not report the percentage of voters turned away' (October 2013, 38, emphasis original)

agree, though not fully. Like being honest about who would they really want to vote for.

Solidarity Peace Trust 2013, p 3

In any case, 'the illiteracy rate is NOT equivalent to the number of people needing assistance in an election', as individuals who cannot read and write can easily recognise the symbol of their party on a ballot paper and place an X beside it (Solidarity Peace Trust 2013, p 39). The AU Mission (2 August 2013, p 4) also expressed concern at 'the occurrence of high number of assisted voters in many polling stations nation-wide'.

Bused

While some potential voters were being turned away there were reports of others being bused from far away constituencies to vote in what were perceived to be 'hostile' constituencies where Zanu-PF had only a slim chance of winning. Most such incidents were reported in targeted Harare constituencies including Mt. Pleasant, Mbare and Epworth, all of which were ultimately won by the party when, in previous elections, they had been comfortably won by the MDC.

Voter registration slips

The GNU partners had agreed on the eve of the election that those who had registered late and whose names were therefore not on the voters' roll would nonetheless be allowed to vote using temporary voter registration slips. It appears that this facility was grossly abused, with credible allegations of thousands of fake voter registration slips being produced and distributed to enable Zanu-PF supporters to vote in constituencies in which they were not registered. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions asserted that 'the arrest of people with fake registration slips means that there is a possibility of thousands of fake voters having voted throughout the country' (Election Resource Centre 2013).

Extra ballot papers

According to the voters' roll released by the ZEC on 19 June 2013 there were 5 890 169 registered voters out of a possible 6 651 858 adults as per the 2012 Census estimate. As indicated in Table 3, 35% more ballot papers were printed than the number of registered voters, presenting an opportunity for electoral malpractice via ballot stuffing. The AU Observation Mission expressed the hope that the ZEC would account for the unused ballots to the satisfaction of stakeholders; at the time of writing, this had not been done, further raising fears of electoral chicanery.

SADC AND AU VERDICTS: IS A 'NEW' ELECTORAL STANDARD EMERGING?

Article 22.6 of the GPA states that: 'The implementation of this agreement shall be guaranteed and underwritten by the Facilitator, SADC and the AU.' In that capacity, as third-party guarantors SADC and the AU played a potentially decisive role, thus their opinions about the elections were critical. For instance, two weeks before the election the European Union promised that it would lift 'our restrictive measures' if African observers declared Zimbabwe's elections to be free and fair and there were no protests by the opposition: '[W]ho are we as the EU to say "no, we know better than SADC?"', the EU's Ambassador to South Africa, Roeland van de Geer, said (quoted at: african.howzit.msn.com/Article.aspx?cp-documentid=256338463).

Five days after the elections, the SADC facilitator to Zimbabwe, South Africa's President Jacob Zuma, congratulated Robert Mugabe on his re-election following 'successful harmonised parliamentary and local elections' which 'election observers reported to be an expression of the will of the people' (quoted in Nemukuyu & Murwira 5 August 2013). When pressed to explain what 'successful' meant and whether the congratulations implied the elections were free and fair, South Africa's then Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister, Tina Joemat-Pettersson, responded that 'we are in no way making a pronouncement on the elections, we are congratulating that the elections ran smoothly without violence and without any incident of severe violence' (quoted in *Mail & Guardian*, 13 August 2013).

In its summary statement on 2 September 2013, the SADC Electoral Observer Mission said:

On credibility of the election process, a lot has been said to the negative. The SEOM, however, while agreeing that there were issues such as the delay of voters' roll and media polarisation, there were so many other elements that when put together elevated the election to a credible status: the free election environment, the peaceful environment in which election took place, unhindered and non-intimidation to candidates and voters, free expression and campaigns, transparency and free voting constitutes the credibility under the prevailing circumstances, *particularly when compared to 2008* [my emphasis].

The head of the SADC Mission, Tanzanian Foreign Minister Bernard Membe, urged those disputing the election results to reconsider: 'In democracy we not

only vote, not only campaign, but accept the hard facts, particularly the outcome' (BBC, 2 August 2013).

The African Union, in both its preliminary and final reports, studiously avoided passing an unambiguous judgement on the elections, preferring to stress their peaceful nature and that they were 'professionally and successfully conducted' by the ZEC. Significantly, even the 27-page final report does not say that the elections were free or fair or credible. However, the head of AU Election Observation Mission, Olusegun Obasanjo, had said two days after the elections that they were free and fair 'from the campaigning point of view'. With regard to allegations of fraud, he retorted: 'I have never seen an election that is perfect' (BBC, 2 August 2013).

It was remarkable that neither SADC nor the AU gave their own electoral guidelines and standards pride of place in passing judgement. Instead of assessing the Zimbabwe elections with reference to the agreed SADC and the AU rules of the game, they judged the contest with reference to the country's past elections, especially the presidential run-off of 27 June 2008, thus virtually remaking the rules.

Their logic was simple: there was no violence, therefore the elections were free, fair and credible. And if you behaved badly yesterday and you behave less badly today you pass the test. The two bodies, which were, in many ways, certifiers of the elections, lowered the bar. If the elections are violence-free they must be acceptable – no more, no less. This is clearly a dangerous precedent. With five elections in the SADC region in 2014 it remains to be seen how the regional body will conduct itself. It is, however, hoped that SADC's verdict on the Zimbabwe elections will remain an aberration. Otherwise the region will surely find itself on the path to democratic reversal. It would be a giant step backwards.

CONCLUSION

Elections in Zimbabwe since 2000 have unfailingly been hotly contested and grossly lopsided; competitive and unfair. They have also been violent – to the point where non-violent elections are regarded as an aberration. The July 2013 elections were one such aberration. Instead, however, they were a classic example of the Machiavellian game of manipulation. Zimbabweans and other observers were treated not to raw violence – Zanu-PF's trademark campaign tool – but to a sly and bloodless electoral coup in which many tricks were unleashed, to dazzling effect and with no tangible trail of subterfuge.

There also appeared to be an amazing synchronicity of both action and inaction among electoral institutions and proximate stakeholders locally and regionally. The incumbent, Robert Mugabe, clearly had more institutional

sympathy than his main challenger, Morgan Tsvangirai. The electoral body, the ZEC, was not a hindrance, neither were the various courts, from the Electoral Court to the High and Supreme Courts and right up to the Constitutional Court. And African observers and leaders felt compelled to pass a verdict of 'free, peaceful, and credible', though SADC stopped shy of calling the elections fair.

The salutary lesson of the 2013 elections is that such contests can be free in the sense of not being enveloped in violence and intimidation and may even be credible but without being fair. Just as elections do not democracy make, peace does not necessarily make for free and fair elections.

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