

OPINION PIECE

THE ALTERNATIVE VOTE FOR ZIMBABWE?

A Rhodesian Retrospective

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Only starry-eyed optimists ever hoped that the 2023 election in Zimbabwe would bring about a significant change in how the country is ruled politically. From 2008 onwards, when President Robert Mugabe survived a challenge presented by Morgan Tsvangirai only by orchestrating a brutal crackdown on his rival's supporters in a run-off in the presidential election, Zimbabwean elections have lost any shred of credibility. The electoral playing field is systematically stacked against challengers to the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), as those confronting the ruling party are faced by partisan electoral authorities, a battery of laws inhibiting opposition, restrictions on the media, the deployment of violence against opposition supporters, and so on (Southall 2013, pp. 107-32; Human Rights Watch 2018). In short, electoral outcomes are largely predetermined in ZANU-PF's favour, notwithstanding the bravery of those who continue to challenge the ruling party.

Yet hope still lingers. Hope that one day some unforeseen set of circumstances will open the door to meaningful political change. Hope that one day, the grip which ZANU-PF – backed by the military – holds on power will be weakened sufficiently for the forces of opposition to compel a re-arrangement of the political furniture to allow for a democratic renewal. Hope that one day there can be a genuinely meaningful election when ZANU-PF's claim to the support of all patriotic Zimbabweans is put to a proper test. If that day comes, we may be sure that calls for the independence of Zimbabwe's Electoral Commission will be matched by an extensive debate about the most appropriate electoral system for democracy to flourish.

The broad outline of that debate has already been anticipated (Zimbabwe Elections Support Network 2020). Fundamentally, the debate will revolve around whether Zimbabwe should retain its present majoritarian first-past-the-post

(FPTP) electoral system or move to an electoral system which guarantees a more proportional outcome (proportional representation, or PR). Proponents of the first stress that the single-member constituencies which FPTP (customarily) requires allows for a direct link between voters and their elected representatives in parliament. This enhances the direct accountability of the latter to the former, while encouraging tendencies towards a two-party system wherein to gain power the rival parties need to attract voters from the political centre.¹ Proponents of PR will reply that because FPTP enables candidates to win seats with pluralities of the vote (less than fifty per cent), and because it has a marked tendency to 'waste' votes (in constituencies where the winner sweeps over fifty per cent of the vote, all votes above the fiftieth percentile are 'wasted'), it enables governments to be elected which lack majority popular majority support but which enjoy disproportionately large majorities of seats.² They will therefore point to the guaranteed greater fairness of PR systems which ensure that the support which competing political parties receive in elections translates into a proportional number of seats. In turn, this almost always guarantees that governments that are formed after elections held under PR can claim to be backed by a majority of voters, even if they are formed by the coming together of two or more parties which individually received less than 50 per cent of the poll. In response, supporters of majoritarian systems will argue that because PR requires large (sometimes national) multi-member constituencies, the direct link between voters and their MPs is broken, and as a result, there is lack of personal and political accountability between 'the people' and their representatives.

This debate is so well known to readers of this journal that there is no need for further elaboration, suffice to make two simple points. First, if Zimbabweans are enabled to make a choice of electoral system, they will be influenced by not only their own experience of FPTP (which has delivered highly skewed outcomes in favour of ZANU-PF) but by other southern African examples. Two such examples stand out.

1 Steinberg (2023) (amongst many others) has railed against the way in which PR in South Africa has led to a multiplication of minor parties while entrenching a corrupt ANC in power: '... the best system for a country like SA is a first-past-the-post two-party system. Why so? Because to win an election under this system a party is forced to track to the centre. Either it wins a majority of votes or it loses. It must aggregate the broadest alliance of voter interests it possibly can. It must think like a nation, not like an ethnic minority. If it fails to do so it will be voted out, for its rival is trying to do the same.'

2 The most notorious instance of this occurring in the southern African context is the election in 1948 when Smuts' United Party won 49 per cent of the votes and 65 seats but lost to the National Party which won only 38 per cent of the vote but 70 seats, and proceeded to introduce apartheid. In Britain, governments are consistently formed by parties which have won less than 50 per cent of the popular vote (see United Kingdom general elections overview, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/united_kingdom.ge)

- The first is that of South Africa, where a national-list system of PR has delivered repeat majority victories for the ANC but at huge cost to popular accountability. It has now become a regular refrain that MPs are accountable not to the electorate but to the party bosses who determine whether they will be included on the party list at the next election (Steinberg 2023).
- The second is that of Lesotho, where since the election of 2002 MPs have been elected by a system of Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMPR), whereby the outcome of FPTP constituency elections in parliament are rendered proportional by the election of other MPs from party lists. Although successful in addressing the highly disproportional outcomes of elections held in 1993 and 1998, the overall outcome has been problematic, having resulted in the fragmentation of political parties and successive unstable coalitions since the election of 2012 (JAE 2023).

Consequently, and electoral system theory apart, it will be important for the Zimbabweans to refer to how the different electoral systems on offer have actually worked in southern Africa, where politicians have been as active in pursuing personal interests and 'gaming electoral systems' as anywhere else in the world. Real life experience is important. Hence it is worth throwing into this debate some reference to Zimbabwe's electoral past which has largely been forgotten.

In 1980, Zimbabwe's first truly democratic election was conducted under a system of PR, with a 5 per cent threshold being used in the allocation of seats in eight provinces. Three parties, ZANU under Mugabe, the Patriotic Front-Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) under Joshua Nkomo, and the United African National Congress (UANC) led by Abel Muzorewa contested 80 common-roll seats (ZANU winning 57, ZAPU 20, and UANC 3), with a further 20 seats being elected by whites. Subsequently, following an amendment to the Electoral Act, a reversion was made to the FPTP electoral system which, albeit employing a race-skewed franchise to ensure that there was no electoral threat to white minority rule, had operated for elections which had been held in 1970, 1974 and 1977. However, what is so often overlooked today is that previously the then Rhodesia had been a site for 'electoral engineering', with the elections of 1958, 1962 and 1965 having employed a system of Alternative Vote (AV), albeit combined with a race-skewed franchise (Fraenkel 2015; Leaver 2000; 2006).

The argument here is that the implementation of AV in these elections is worth re-visiting. If nothing else, they may serve to illustrate how the disproportional outcomes of FPTP can be ameliorated while retaining the accountability of elected MPs for which single-member constituencies is so highly praised by its proponents as supplying.

THE ALTERNATIVE VOTE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

One of the greatest virtues of AV is its simplicity. Voters are invited to list the candidates standing for election in single-member constituencies in order of preference. If no candidate wins a majority of the votes cast, the candidate with the least votes is eliminated, and his or her votes are redistributed according to these voters' second preferences. This process is repeated until one candidate receives fifty per cent of the vote, ensuring that no MP is elected by only a minority vote, as under FPTP. It is claimed by electoral system theorists that this process works to ameliorate political extremes (on a left-right spectrum) and/or to limit appeals to racial or ethnic sentiments, as parties in genuinely competitive political systems need to look beyond their own popular base to appeal to the 'second preference' votes of supporters of other parties. As a result, it is said, AV works to pull electoral outcomes to the political centre (Electoral Reform Society, undated; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, undated).

AV is categorised as a *majoritarian* electoral system as electoral outcomes continue to be heavily influenced by electoral delimitation. Consequently, if some seats are 'loaded' (that is, if some constituencies have more voters than the average number of voters relative to the total number of constituencies, this most commonly occurring where urban constituencies are allocated disproportionately more voters than rural ones), there is a resultant tendency towards a disproportional outcome enabling a party with less than a popular majority to win a majority of seats. On the other hand, AV operates to ensure that no individual MP is elected without a majority of the popular vote in his/her constituency.³

As in all single-member constituency electoral systems, the numerical fairness of outcomes rests heavily on the criteria used to determine the allocation of constituencies relative to voting age population. It is hugely dependent on this exercise being conducted in a politically non-partisan manner to avoid, for instance, the intentional devaluation of the votes of categories of voters by criteria such as race, class, or religion, by herding them into arbitrarily demarcated voting districts to limit their influence.

In other words, whether AV would be a viable option for a democratic Zimbabwe would depend heavily upon:

3 It is important to distinguish between AV and Single Transferable Voting (STV) systems. Whereas AV operates in single-member constituencies, STV (in which voters are invited to rank all (or as many) candidates before them in order of preference) operates in multi-member constituencies, and results in a proportional outcome. Note, however, that in colonial Rhodesia, the AV system introduced for the 1958 election was often wrongly referred to as STV.

- i) the existence of a non-partisan constituency delimitation authority and process whose independence was widely accepted;
- ii) the definition of clear criteria for the allocation of constituencies (that is, if factors other than the numerical equality of voters per constituency were taken into account, these should be transparent and justified according to stated principles); and
- iii) the constitutionally-mandated regularity of delimitation exercises to take into account changing electoral demography (such as migration) affecting the population size and composition of individual constituencies.

THE INTRODUCTION OF AV INTO RHODESIAN ELECTIONS⁴

It must be emphasised from the start that the introduction of AV into Rhodesian elections was part and parcel of white settler politics. The population at the time was composed of 178 000 whites (usually then referred to as 'Europeans'), 2.3 million Africans and 13 200 people from other minority groups (usually referred to as 'Asians and Coloureds'). What was then the 'Southern Rhodesian' government was run by politicians representing the white minority, yet it was under increasing pressure for enfranchisement by the black African majority. Although there was provision for six seats for Africans in the parliament of the colonial-inspired Central African Federation (formed in 1953 and composing then Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland (Malawi)), Africans remained unrepresented in the Southern Rhodesian legislature.

With the formation of the federation, the most ambitious white politicians from Southern Rhodesia wanted to emulate their prime minister, Godfrey Huggins, by moving 'upwards' into federal politics where they thought the most exciting and important political and economic action would be happening. This meant there were vacancies in government at territorial level, and it was these which allowed Garfield Todd, who had moved into politics following some two decades as a missionary, to become prime minister. He did so with the backing of Huggins, who had a high regard for his ability, despite his being identified as a 'liberal'. Indeed, to give Huggins his due, he recognised that if the federation was to work, it needed to be able to accommodate African political aspirations, and there was no settler politician more likely to meet these than Todd (Hancock 2008; Woodhouse 2018).

⁴ I would like to stress that this article is intended to remind Zimbabweans of a part of their electoral history that is too often forgotten, and that it makes no claim to originality, having drawn its data primarily from Fraenkel 2015, but also Leaver 2000 and 2006.

Todd may have been a 'liberal', yet he was also a man of his time. He did not believe that Southern Rhodesia's African population was yet ready to rule the country, yet neither did he accept the demands of the more politically extreme settler politicians who wanted to emulate the racially exclusivist politics of South Africa. As prime minister, Todd committed himself to the advance of Africans in the civil service, devoted himself to the reform and expansion of African education, and dismantled the colour bar in many public spaces, and in so doing he earned widespread African support. His intent was not only to allow Africans to ascend the steps of 'civilisation', but to woo middle-class Africans (largely composed of professionals, teachers, and nurses) away from the emerging African nationalist movements. These movements were following the example of their counterparts in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland in calling for majority rule, independence, and the dissolution of the federation. In turn, Todd's reforms received the reluctant acceptance of 'centrist' settler politicians who aspired to Southern Rhodesia's own independence, and recognised that Britain, the formal colonial power, was unlikely to grant this independence to a settler state with a racially restricted franchise.

To find a workable solution to these conflicting political pressures, the Todd government appointed a commission, chaired by the federal Chief Justice, Sir Robert Tredgold. It was fundamentally concerned with the problem of finding a franchise formula which would enlarge African participation while ensuring that the result of this change would strengthen the majority enjoyed by what was regarded as the 'moderate' centre (Leys 1959, pp. 227-28). Its official task was to devise a system 'under which the Government is placed and remains in the hands of civilized and responsible persons'. Its report argued that a universal franchise required a 'homogeneous electorate', with party divisions based on policy differences rather than those of 'race and colour'. It simultaneously acknowledged the dangers posed by the denial of the franchise to the majority of the population. To begin to address this, it recommended the introduction of a new 'special' qualification of £180 per annum, plus literacy, for entitlement to the franchise. Under this arrangement, the Commission anticipated that, as incomes rose, increasing numbers of Africans would qualify for inclusion as voters on the electoral rolls, although such 'special registrations' were to be capped at no more than one-third of the ordinary voters' roll in any constituency. It envisaged the enfranchisement of several thousand of the wealthiest and best-educated Africans and held out the hope that they would at least tilt the balance of voting away from the most extreme segregationists (*ibid.*).

In addition, the Commission proposed the introduction of AV in the territory's existing single-member constituencies (locally and misleadingly referred to as a Single Transferable Vote, STV, which operates in multi-member

constituencies). It hoped thereby to facilitate the election of candidates who could satisfy African aspirations while simultaneously allaying white fears about impending loss of political control. Its justification was that the introduction of AV would mean that no candidate or party would be able to appeal to the electorate on racial grounds without alienating key bodies of support whose second preference votes might be required to gain election.

The cabinet was reluctant to embrace Tredgold's recommendations in their entirety, and Todd was compelled to compromise. The outcome was that the 1957 Electoral Amendment Act retained the existent minimum franchise requirement of £240 income per annum, but a 'special qualification' was added of either two years of secondary education or an annual income of £120 per annum for two consecutive years. Furthermore, special qualifications were to be capped at one-sixth of 'ordinary' registrations, instead of one third, as Tredgold had recommended. 'Although still extremely restrictive, the law entailed the extension of the franchise to several thousand of the best educated or wealthiest Africans' (Fraenkel 2015, p. 1172).

With good reason, we today decry the various qualifications introduced by a settler government to contain the size of the African vote. However, the purpose here is to focus upon how, within this context, AV operated, and the extent to which it worked to pull electoral outcomes to the political centre in a context which was racially fraught.

AV IN THE 1958 ELECTION – AND WHY IT (SORT OF) WORKED

Todd's modestly reformist politics proved too much for his cabinet, which worried that his liberal intent would lose their United Federal Party (UFP) votes at the forthcoming election. As a result, he was ousted from power in February 1958, following which he established the United Rhodesia Party (URP) in April, reviving the name which the UFP had used prior to the establishment of federation.

As a result, the 1958 election was a three-corned contest between the ruling UFP, now led by Sir Edgar Whitehead who had replaced Todd as prime minister, Todd's URP, and the Dominion Party (DP). The UFP was the predominant party of the time, backed by professional, senior civil servants, and major mining and commercial interests. It identified strongly with the federation project, while simultaneously embracing modest political reforms and 'multi-racialism' to strengthen its case for independence from Britain. In contrast, the DP, which strongly opposed the extension of the franchise and the introduction of AV, appealed to lower-class whites who feared they had much to lose from African upward mobility, as well as to conservative rural settler interests. Todd's URP made its appeal not only to liberals, but as it saw it, political 'moderates' among

the white electorate, as well as being regarded as the champion of African middle-class interests (Hancock 1984).

The electorate was composed of voters on two rolls. The A roll was for voters with ordinary qualifications, and was composed of 74 000 whites, 1 500 Asians and 1 500 Africans. The B roll was for voters with special qualifications, and was composed of 1 500 whites, 8 000 'Coloureds' and Asians, and 1 500 Africans. However, both categories of voter cast ballots on a combined single roll for the 30-seat legislature.

Given the new electoral arrangements, the UFP could expect to benefit from AV and to receive the second preferences of URP voters, who were unlikely to vote for the more right-wing and racially exclusive DP, and this is how the election turned out:

Table 1: The 1958 General Election

	First Preferences	%	Final Vote	%	Seats
Dominion Party	18,142	45.7	18,314	47.0	13
United Federal Party	16,840	42.7	17,516	45.1	17
United Rhodesia Party	4,662	11.7	2,991	7.7	0
Independents	67	0.2	67	0.2	0

As is made clear, the DP won a plurality of both first preference and the final votes but lost the election. Fraenkel's detailed study, from which this table is sourced, reckons that without AV, and under FPTP, the DP would have won 17 seats to the UFP's 13. Instead, the outcome in seats was reversed once the second preference votes were in, with two-thirds of URP voters opting for the UFP as the lesser evil. In nine constituencies, results were decided by second preferences. In four of these, the DP, ahead at the first count, lost the final election. In total, the UFP won six seats after the transfer of second preferences. In constituencies where there were substantial number of African voters, around 45 per cent of those who gave a first preference to the URP, chose not to express a second preference (Fraenkel 2015, pp. 1172-75).

In short, the outcome of the vote demonstrated a tension between majoritarianism and proportionality inherent in AV. On the one hand, the UFP won a majority of seats, despite receiving a smaller popular vote than the DP (presumably, because of varying sizes of constituency electorates). On the other hand, it is apparent that the UFP was preferred to the DP by a majority of the voters. In short, the tendency of AV to encourage centrism was confirmed – although

as Fraenkel argues, it is difficult to disentangle this from the 'cross-voting' by B roll voters. However, this was settler politics, at a time when the tide of African nationalism was rising. One participant of the day looked back retrospectively at Rhodesia's 'lost chance' of avoiding the racial polarisation that followed (Holderness 1985).

THE 1962 ELECTION – AND WHY AV DIDN'T WORK

The response of Africans to the failure of Todd's URP to win a single seat led to an upsurge of support for African nationalism. Events moved fast.

Leaver (2000, p. 9) characterises Whitehead as a technocrat who was disposed to a cautious reformism which 'he knew to be in Rhodesia's best interests'; yet when faced by increased African protest, he clamped down on it harshly. Within a year of the 1958 election, he had declared a state of emergency and arrested around 500 leaders of the Southern African National African Congress and banned it via the passage of an Unlawful Organizations Act. When African leaders formed the National Democratic Party (NDP) in the SRANC's place, he arrested those too. But after authoritarianism to regain white support, came reform to attract African votes. Although repression had alienated much African middle-class support, 'the fate of the UFP now rested critically on the sustainability of its middle-of-the-road (racial) partnership position: its ability to attract growing African support while retaining backing from its predominantly white electorate'.

Whitehead pressed on with reforms inaugurated by Todd. He abolished colour bars in public swimming pools, cinemas, and restaurants; the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1959 eliminated race-based rules for negotiation; the higher ranks of the civil service were further opened to Africans; and an Education Act promised elementary schooling for African children. In addition, in August 1960, the size of the legislature was increased to 50 seats, in the hope that a few Africans might be elected. He also inaugurated talks with leaders of the NDP, which was pressing for reserved seats for Africans.

Whitehead's principal objective was to secure a political settlement which would pave the way to internationally recognised independence from Britain. A key moment came in January 1961 when the NDP participated in a constitutional conference, chaired by Whitehead, where a compromise arrangement was brokered by Duncan Sandys, the British Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations. The key features of this were:

- Membership of the legislature was increased from 50 to 65
- Two voters' rolls were now to have their respective allocated seats, with 50 'constituency' seats allocated to A roll voters who met higher

income and educational qualifications (these being mainly white); and 15 'District' seats being allocated to B roll voters, comprising voters registered on lower income and educational qualifications (mainly Africans), but now also including various chiefs

- Each voter now had two votes, one in each type of constituency. Votes cast by B roll voters were able to influence outcomes in the 50 constituency seats, up to a maximum of 25 per cent. Votes cast by A roll voters were likewise entitled to influence outcomes in the District seats, up to 25 per cent. Any 'surplus' votes would be devalued so as not to exceed the 25 per cent limit.

Although these (complicated and highly unequal) new electoral rules (which were almost certainly opaque to many voters) allowed for significantly larger numbers of Africans to be enfranchised than the previous common voter roll system, they drastically limited the value of their votes.

NDP leader Joshua Nkomo initially accepted the additional 15 seats and the cross-voting provisions, but rapidly back-tracked when faced by opposition from within his party. The DP also rejected the new rules, but Whitehead pressed ahead with a referendum under the existing and largely white franchise which had preceded the conference. The referendum was approved by a large majority, 42 004 votes to 21 846. However, the NDP arranged its own referendum, the result of which registered overwhelming African rejection of the new constitution (372 446 against, a paltry 471 for). Nkomo followed up by declaring that the party could not accept a constitution which entrenched the superiority of the white population. For all his earlier willingness to compromise, Nkomo's rejection of the constitution 'mortally wounded' Whitehead's approach, which had been to outflank the far-right in the form of the DP by winning the support of African 'multi-racialists' (Leaver 2000, p. 9).

Whitehead was encouraged by the size of majority he won in the 1961 referendum, believing it would translate into white backing for his approach in an election which was held in December 1962. The local press and the British government fell in behind him, and both expected a UFP victory and the defeat of white settler irreconcilables but failed to recognise that 'majority settler backing for the new constitution had not reflected endorsement of the UFP's multi-racialism', but rather support for concessions designed to achieve full independence' (Fraenkel 2015, p. 1176). Even more critical, however, was that the NDP under Nkomo, scrambling to keep up with more radical African nationalist opinion, called for a boycott of the election, and as a result, was banned by Whitehead only a few days before the polls.

Whitehead had sorely miscalculated. By banning the NP, he had appealed to white prejudices, stimulating a white intransigence which had already been inflamed by events in the Congo. Roy Welensky, who had succeeded Huggins as federal prime minister, had backed the Katangese secessionist leader, Moise Tshombe. For many white voters, anarchy in the Congo represented all they feared at home if African nationalists were to gain power, their fears thrusting them into the arms of the newly formed Rhodesian Front (RF) under Winston Field, which by now had succeeded the DP as the champion of the right.

The 1962 elections saw the registration of 92 131 ordinary (A roll) voters, who were overwhelmingly white (87 447 white, 2 416 Asian and Coloured, and 2 268 African). They were joined by 11 014 'special' (B roll) voters (561 white, 267 Asian and Coloured, and 10 186 African). They were to participate in an election which, in effect, had become a two-party race with the UFP confronting the RF, for by now the URP had collapsed, Todd having alienated much liberal support by calling for British intervention into Rhodesia. Although he had now established the Centre Party, his increasingly radical posture gained little traction among white Rhodesians. The outcome of the election recorded a significant shift to the right.

Table 2: The 1962 General Election

	%	Constituency Seats	District Seats
Rhodesian Front	54.7	35	0
United Federal Party	43.5	15	14
Centre Party	1.6	0	0
Independent Ahrn Palley		1	0

Two key features of the election explain why AV and preferential voting had virtually no impact on the outcome. The first was the markedly higher level of racial polarisation, which had severely squeezed the remaining hopes for 'multi-racialism' and 'moderate' political reform as embodied by the platform of the UFP. The second, and more significant was the boycott of the election driven by the NDP:

- As noted above, electoral reforms had opened the door to significantly increased numbers of Africans. It is estimated that without the boycott, up to 50 000 Africans could have registered as special voters; but in the event, only about 2 600 Africans voted, far too few to influence the outcomes in all but one constituency election (where

a narrow RF first preference outcome was overturned in favour of the UFP).

- In 15 districts, the 2 577 votes cast on the B roll largely determined the results, whereas the 64 904 A-roll votes cast mainly by whites were 'devalued', so that they represented only 25 per cent of B-roll votes in any district. Although the RF was ahead in 12 of the 15 district seats on the basis of the totals of both A and B roll votes, the UFP candidates ended up ahead in 14 of the district seats once A roll votes were devalued.

In retrospect, the key aspect of the election was the boycott by African voters. According to Leaver (2000, p. 9), Whitehead's defeat 'aborted a liberal plurality attempted from local liberals, multi-racial blacks, constitutional reform and imperial cajolery'. African failure to vote meant too few votes or 'second preferences' to overturn RF's first preference lead amongst whites. Fraenkel (2015, p. 1177) agrees: 'Without the African boycott, the UFP would probably have won the election, not primarily because of the AV system, but because of the influence of B-roll votes in the 50 constituency seats'. Second-preference vote transfers would have proved significant only if the outlawed NDP had been allowed and willing to contest the election.

Leaver's judgement is that white Rhodesians bear ultimate responsibility for that outcome, as they had frustrated African aspirations and hence nourished political and racial militancy (Leaver 2000; 2006). However, he also insists that because of their decision to boycott the elections, African nationalists share responsibility for the defeat of the UFP. They had supposed that a better majority-ruled world was imminent through Pan-African liberation, but this was their 'gravest miscalculation'. 'Majority rule, without some degree of white acquiescence, was never a realistic option in 1962, as thirteen years of insurgency and civil war to 1979 was to show' (Leaver 2000, p. 9). However, as Fraenkel (2015, p. 1179) argues, Leaver's conclusion only holds if we can believe that Whitehead's UFP was genuine about sharing power with Africans and would have been able to sell this to its white electorate.

Subsequent events suggest it was not. By the time of the next election in May 1965, the RF under Ian Smith had consolidated its hold on power. The break-up of the Federation had left Southern Rhodesia isolated, and had undermined the UFP's platform, leading to its collapse. No strong alternative to the RF, which was threatening to declare independence unilaterally, emerged. As a result, 22 of the 50 constituency seats in the election were uncontested, with the RF being opposed in the remainder only by the newly formed Rhodesia Party, which opposed a break with Britain. All were won by the RF, with no need for the counting of second preference votes. Although the RF failed to win a single District seat (the RF won

ten, with five being won by independents) it had won 50 out of the 65 available seats in parliament. After declaring UDI on 11 November 1965, it passed a new constitution in 1969 which re-organised the legislature on a strictly racial basis, allocating 50 constituency seats to the white electorate, and 16 to Africans (half of these going to chiefs). It also dropped AV and reverted to the FPTP system which had operated before 1965.

LEARNING ABOUT AV FROM RHODESIA

It would be thoroughly understandable if, when given the chance to review their electoral system, Zimbabweans were to regard AV as having been fatally tainted by its use in Rhodesia. Furthermore, any analysis of how it worked in the 1958 and 1962 elections requires us to disentangle how AV worked from the restrictions introduced by the government of the day to limit the African vote and to maintain white minority rule. Two conclusions follow:

- AV worked in 1958 insofar as the small minority of African voters who were enfranchised used their second preference votes to elect the UFP, which they regarded as the less objectionable white party on offer.
- AV did not work in the 1962 election because of increased racial polarisation brought about by the fraught regional and national politics of the day. Given the collapse of the URP and its replacement by the more radical Centre Party, the 'moderate' alternative within the white sphere was fatally squeezed, rendering the election a de facto two-party contest. Meanwhile, any chance that AV might have worked was collapsed by the African nationalist boycott.

The lessons that Fraenkel (2015, p. 1178-80) draws from careful study of the 1958 and 1962 elections are apposite:

- AV has a potentially significant impact only in settings where a substantial third or multiple political parties contest. The survival of third or multiple parties often rests on regional pockets of support or special minority interests. The transfer of votes from third parties, via second preferences, often rests upon transfers of votes being likely to transfer in both directions, between two major parties. In cases where, as happened in Rhodesia in 1958, a third party gains no seats, it is unlikely to survive, especially where if preference ranking is optional.
- Political polarisation undermines the conditions under which the

transfer of preference votes may affect electoral outcomes. This needs to be particularly borne in mind where racial or ethnic loyalties influence voting patterns.

- Electoral institutions aimed at encouraging political moderation or compromise are not value-free devices, and in transitional situations they often find favour among those who benefit from the status quo. 'For marginalized groups, support for such arrangements requires some political judgement that dominant groups genuinely intend to share power.' However, in other settings, use of AV may allow for the emergence of multiple parties without the potential damage to ethnic unity that is likely to be entailed under a FPTP electoral system.

If Zimbabweans are enabled to consider any far-reaching political change, they will need to be informed not merely of the merits and demerits of different electoral systems as outlined by theorists, but by how different systems have operated in the real-life context of southern Africa, where none of the three major alternatives routinely seen as being on offer – FPTP, list PR and MMP – have proved to be unproblematic. No option will be problem free, and, in any case, any final choice will likely be heavily influenced by the politics of the day, which is likely to be extremely fluid and highly contested. Nonetheless, there is sufficient evidence from the Rhodesian experience, deeply flawed though it was, to suggest that AV should at least be considered as one possibility for the reform of the Zimbabwean electoral system.

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