

Original article

# Governance and Development Dilemma in Zimbabwe: A Historical, Political, and Social Analysis

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## Abstract

Zimbabwe has faced multiple challenges in governance and development since its independence in 1980. Despite its rich natural and human resource base, the country has experienced political instability, economic decline, social unrest, and human rights violations. This study aims to explore the factors that have contributed to the governance and development crisis in Zimbabwe and to identify possible ways to overcome it. This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from surveys and indicators with qualitative data from interviews and document analysis. This research finds that the governance and development problems in Zimbabwe are rooted in the historical legacies of colonialism, liberation struggle, and post-independence authoritarianism. This study also reveals that the current political regime has failed to address the needs and aspirations of the majority of Zimbabweans and has instead pursued its own interests and agendas. The research suggests that for Zimbabwe to achieve sustainable governance and development, it needs to undergo a democratic transition that respects the rule of law, human rights, and social justice. This research also recommends that Zimbabwe engage in regional and international cooperation to foster peace, security, and economic integration.

**Keywords:** *Zimbabwe, governance, development, democracy, cooperation*

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## Background

Governance is a broad and contested concept that refers to the processes and institutions by which authority is exercised and decisions are made in a society. Governance encompasses formal and informal rules, norms, values, and practices that shape the interactions between state and non-state actors at different levels and domains. Governance affects the quality and outcomes of public policies and services, accountability and responsiveness of public officials and institutions, participation and representation of citizens and stakeholders, protection and promotion of human rights and the rule of law, and the management and resolution of conflicts and crises.

Development is a multidimensional and contested concept that refers to the process and goals of improving the well-being and capabilities of individuals and communities. Development encompasses not only economic growth, but also social, political, cultural, environmental, and human aspects. Development is influenced by various factors such as natural resources, human capital, technology, institutions, policies, and external relations. Development is also a normative and value-laden concept that reflects the visions, interests, and aspirations of various actors.

Governance and development are interrelated and interdependent concepts that mutually affect each other. Governance can enable or constrain development by creating or limiting the conditions, opportunities, and resources for development to take place. Development can enhance or undermine governance by strengthening or weakening the capacity, incentives, and legitimacy of the governance actors and institutions.

Governance and development can also be viewed as co-evolving processes that shape one another over time through feedback loops and dynamics.

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country in Southern Africa with a population of approximately 14.6 million people. It has a history of colonialism, liberation struggles, independence, political transition, economic crisis, social unrest, humanitarian emergency, constitutional reform, electoral contestation, power-sharing arrangements, military intervention, political change, economic recovery, pandemic response, and developmental challenges. It also has a rich and diverse natural resource base, a human capital base, cultural heritage, regional integration potential, international relations potential, and developmental potential.

Zimbabwe faces various governance and development issues that require a critical analysis and constructive engagement. Some of these issues include the following:

- The role and performance of the state in creating an enabling environment for development
- The quality and effectiveness of public policies and services in addressing people's needs and priorities
- Accountability and responsiveness of public officials and institutions to citizens' demands and expectations
- Participation and representation of citizens and stakeholders in decision-making processes that affect their lives.
- Protection and promotion of human rights and rule of law in society.
- Management and resolution of conflicts and crises that threaten peace and stability.
- Alignment and coordination of national development strategies with regional and global development frameworks.

## **Research Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the historical, political, and social aspects of the governance and development challenges in Zimbabwe. This study relied on two main data collection methods: document analysis and media analysis, which are suitable techniques for investigating the discourses and practices of governance and development in the country. Document analysis is a qualitative method that reviews and evaluates documents to understand their meaning and data (Bowen 2009). Documents are social products that reveal the values, perspectives, and interests of makers and users (Prior 2003). This study applies document analysis to various types of public records and personal documents related to governance and development in Zimbabwe, such as government reports, policy papers, speeches, letters, memoirs, and academic publications. The documents were chosen based on their relevance, credibility, and availability. This analysis aims to identify the main themes, arguments, assumptions, and implications of the documents to understand the governance and development challenges in Zimbabwe.

Media analysis is a qualitative method that examines the content and context of media texts such as newspapers, magazines, websites, social media posts, and audio-visual materials (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). Media texts are influential sources of information and opinions that shape public perceptions and attitudes towards various issues (McQuail, 2010). This study applied media analysis to explore how governance and development in Zimbabwe are represented and constructed in different media outlets both locally and internationally. Media texts were chosen based on their timeliness, diversity, and accessibility. This analysis aimed to identify the main frames, narratives, sources, and biases of media texts to understand the governance and development challenges in Zimbabwe. This study used a constant comparative method to analyze data from documents and media. This method involves comparing and contrasting data from different sources and categories to generate codes, concepts, and themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Triangulation was also used to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings by crosschecking data from different sources and methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

## **Governance systems in Zimbabwe**

Since independence, Zimbabwe has adopted a unitary system whereby every administrative authority, power, and decision making are centralized with the central government. Local authorities and municipalities delegate administrative duties to minimize the functions and duties of the central government. In recent dead decades, the Bush administration and the Ton Blair regime condemned the governance system of Zimbabwe to be aristocratic of which President Mugabe could not easily give in to such critics as he had to fight this at the United Nations 62 conference in New York with great animosity. Although Zimbabwe remained a one-party state for at least two decades after independence, the government has been endeavoring to be more democratic, although some democratic principles are missing, especially with respect to humanity, human rights, and freedom of expression for its people. Although this keeps people aloof state affairs due to fear, poor decisions and policies are made, which further up opposition and rejection by ordinary people in the state.

Currently, the Zimbabwean governance system is shifting to devolution, although this is a gradual democratic development to be realized by the coming generation if it matures into action. As a democratic principle, devolution will take long to be implemented as the likes of Joshua Nkomo, Robert Mugabe, Mnangagwa etc. criticized the process as a threat to the peace and sovereignty of the state. This devolution is misinterpreted as implementing federalism, of which Zimbabwe is too small to encompass such a system. Despite the revolutionary leaders' objection to the system, the people, especially those in Matabeleland, who feel that they have been sidelined for a long time view it as a political move to free them from Shona manipulation, as the introduction of the ideology has led to the emergence of factions such as the Mthwakazi Liberation Front, which advocates for the division of Zimbabwe. In response to this, the ruling party Zanu-pf has institutionalized every government ministry, department, and even the private sector is now administered by the government agency to address this challenge. In such a bid, the government contravenes the constitution, as exemplified by the appointment of politicians in administrative functions that require neutrality.

## **Illusion of Zimbabwean politics on development**

As a republic democratic state, Zimbabwe has a governance system that operates through political patronage. Separating governance systems from party politics is difficult. The governance system in Zimbabwe is complex and is more of a republic democracy. Participatory democracy is a cry for citizens and is unheard by the elites of the ruling party. Decision-making in the Zimbabwean government is made by the Zanu-pf politburo and the central government; the legislature and senatorial have little say in decisions made by the politburo and the central committees, as former President Robert Mugabe once said that the central committee is the government of Zimbabwe.

Administrators in the government are mainly appointed to political affiliations; merit is a secondary qualification for holding office in the government. The omission and trespassing of constitutional norms have become a tradition in the governance system, and development through government is a wish for all people, although unfulfilled. Development is expected to come with the private sector, where the public sector is considered corrupt, unrealistic, and unreliable at the expense of citizens.

Poor governance derailed the development process, particularly in rural areas. This has its roots in the centralized form of governance, and the appointment of administrators of rural district councils by the ruling party is centralized. Zimbabwe's centralized form of governance will continue to hinder development, as resources are unevenly distributed across the country and the center benefits when wealth is allocated. If devolution is adopted, the underdeveloped and undeveloped sectors of a country can achieve their preferences in terms of development. Decentralization of governance is only done to enlighten the central government of the duties that it must carry in service delivery, and authority is not completely decentralized to enhance development.

Ncube (2015) argued that the Constitution adopted in 2013 should be implemented to enhance the developmental agenda of various provinces that should be determined locally. Devolution is constitutional, but at the same time, unpractical, as it is manipulated by the power of guns and bombs that can send the paper constitution into flames. The ruling party's fear of cessation due to devolution is a fear of developing provinces that have abundant and untapped resources compared to others.

Development is determined by local governance, which is informed by its power to make decisions that may be centralized, decentralized, delegated, or devolved. Although Zimbabwe has legally accepted devolved state administration, power is not shared between the national government and lower-level spheres of the state, such as provinces and local authorities. This has been supported by Mapuva (2015), who articulated that there has been a delay from the legislature to realign, reconcile, and harmonize the myriad of local governance legislation from the previous legislative regime to the new constitutional dispensation. This failure is the leading cause of the development quagmire in Zimbabwe, and the government is the leading cause of underdevelopment in the country. However, Mapuva (ibid) goes on to say that the government may be threatened by the effects of politicized devolution and ends up voluntarily not implementing the devolution of power; hence, participatory democracy will be a mockery.

Zimbabwe's concept of the winner takes all after elections ruined the governance system and barred development. In Zimbabwe, the winning political party embraces all ministerial posts, and opposition parties do not have a say, and their potential is dismissed. This has a negative impact on development, as people with the potential and capacity to develop the state are side-lined and those with political credentials are appointed to run governmental ministries and departments despite their incapability and incapacity. Hence, proving the functionality of Gaddafi's third universal theory to sound acute as a representative democracy represses people's wishes.

### **Democracy and development today**

Democracy as a concept of governance is easier to understand. The true meaning of democracy and its implications for the development of Zimbabwe lies in the apprehension of its tenants, which requires commitment to those in public leadership. In contemporary times, democracy has remained the preferred form of government (Dawood, 2015:64). Challenges in understanding and applying democracy and its principles jumble their relevance and contribution to development. There are countries that claim that they are democratic but remain poor, and there are authoritarian countries that have managed to push the development agenda. Democracy is praised for its theoretical existence; however, on the face, it experiences practical fatigue. The way to a real democracy has always been slippery for Zimbabwe, together with its meaning in development.

Democratic governance yields a meager of benefits for the development of a county, region, or nation. A clear and proper follow-up on the tenets of democracy, which also involve principles of good corporate governance, can contribute significantly to development. The major hallmarks of democracy include popular participation, supremacy of majority will but with respect to minority rights, constitution of government by popular choices through periodic elections, competition for public offices, freedom of the press and association, incorruptible judiciary, respect for the rule of law, open and accountable government, and the existence of competing political parties whose programs and candidates provide alternatives for voters (Dawood, 2015:64). Such elements of democracy are fundamental requirements for effective governance (Dawood, 2015, p.64), which is a prerequisite for development.

As one tenet of democracy, the rule of law obliges those in power to follow the prescribed legal procedures in governance. This allows for the proper implementation and upholding of policies and other statutes. Leaders and managers in the private and public sectors do not deviate from the rules of law. Failure to comply with the rule of law allows bad governance practices that can destroy the development fabric of a locality or nation. For example, the literature is skewed, with evidence of corrupt activities among most local authorities in Zimbabwe. Therefore, the legal provisions for public participation need to be strengthened to

reinforce local democracy (Chatiza, 2010). Failure to provide public goods and services is therefore ascribed to the failure of the rule of law, in which defaulters are neither brought to book nor apprehended for their undemocratic actions. Hence, following the rule of law is an excellent recipe for development.

Transparency and accountability are good governance principles and tenets of democracy. In simpler terms, transparency ensures the following clear procedures in the sight of the public in governing. Accountability refers to the answerability of those who hold public office positions. Who should public leaders, managers, and others in influential positions be accountable? The answer is that they must be accountable to the public as number one stakeholder at local, national, regional, and international levels. Leadership anchored on a good character places the interest of the people above that of the self (Ouwaseyi, 2009:224). A less accountable government renders virtuous citizens suffering, with resources benefiting only a handful of elites who have the political muscle to loot public resources for their own gain. Many scandals have been reported in Zimbabwe, since independence indicates an absolute slacking of transparency and accountability on the side of office bearers. Failure to probe and deal with corrupt circumstances leaves the public with no confidence but just to appreciate the poor governance practices that ruin democracy and the subsequent decadence of the development of a country such as Zimbabwe.

Citizen participation as a practice of democracy is on a desktop debate in terms of not only its contribution to development, but also the reality behind pure participation and involvement of the public. Regardless of the contested discussions on citizen participation, the authors argue that when citizens are allowed to participate, they are not taken by surprise for whatever arises in terms of public policies, development programs, and other governance issues. Hence, their input into development affairs is crucial. This is the basic reason why the Prime Minister of the Republic of Zimbabwe issued a directive to decentralize development functions to local communities through the 1984/85 directive. Decentralization is an approach to democratic governance that allows citizens to deliberate on their development issues on various local platforms. According to the Government of Zimbabwe (2002), cited by Chatiza(2010), decentralization aimed to promote democracy (public participation and civic responsibility), increase efficiency and effective service delivery, and reduce the role of the central government in local services provision and management. Hence, if fully fledged, decentralization coined with succinct citizen participation has sufficient potential to yield development, an area that Zimbabwe is lagging behind.

Scholars in academic debate argue that one cannot speak of democracy without mentioning elections. Elections are important in that citizens can decide not to re-elect undemocratic leaders who are corrupt and do not follow the rule of law. Through elections, democracy must also guarantee the removal of a government that fails to serve the desired purpose (Ouwaseyi, 2009:217). The replacement of incompetent public officials through elections allows citizens to voice their opinions through the ballot. This is the only reality in which elections are practiced with extreme fairness and freedom. Turning to Zimbabwe, fairness in elections is subject to controversy, indicating that, at some point, democracy is just a soft copy appendage with dwindled practice. Despite allegations of a lack of fairness, where elections are conducted freely and citizens can express their voices clearly by electing leaders of admirable characters in terms of ushering in development. The lack of an immediate recall system, for example, for misbehaving and corrupt councilors in Zimbabwean local authorities compromises the acceptability of elections as a way to develop, since corrupt councilors can stay in council until their term ends, and at times they are re-elected. For example, in 2015, suspended Gweru City Council (GCC) councilors on allegations of corruption were reinstated because of the lack of an independent tribunal to deal with the matter. In such circumstances, where does Zimbabwe focus on development?

The constitution of Zimbabwe outlines the principles of public administration and leadership, one of which is the promotion of a high standard of professional ethics (Government of Zimbabwe, GOZ, 2013). The Constitution also raises the need for transparency, accountability, representativeness, fairness, cooperation, and impartiality in governance. It sets good governance as a national objective, which is important for the development of the country. Hence, in Chapter 9, the Constitution pleads for the need to use resources

economically and efficiently. As a country, when these principles deviate from mere blueprints and become practiced, development can be synonymous.

### **Democracy as a panacea to development**

Is democracy a way to pursue Zimbabwe's development agenda? As discussed earlier, elections, one of the elements of democracy, center the debate on their credibility, as reported by media and human rights bodies. In many countries, elections are usually five years, but the extent to which they have been free and fair is doubted not just in Africa but also in America, Europe, and elsewhere in the world (Larok, 2011:3). The argument is that elections by themselves do little to improve the democratic trajectory of any nation; it is what happens between elections that really matters for strengthened political accountability, elected leaders, and the state would be more responsive to citizens' demands and aspirations (Larok, 2011:10).

Although citizen participation is noble, it lacks meaning in Zimbabwe. Citizens have the right to participate in government through transparent and democratic elections, decentralized governmental structures, and the freedom to associate politically, professionally, and socially coupled with the independence of such associations from the state (Ouwaseyi, 2009:217). However, elections have long been regarded as administrative formalities that lack true meaning to citizens who simply cast their ballots and vote for irresponsible leaders. An instance of this is that of councilors who were alleged of many corrupt activities around Zimbabwe's local authorities. During the Government of the National Unity (GNU) era, Members of Parliament abused constituency development funds. Inconsistencies were also observed where councilors were involved in illegal selling of housing and commercial stands, such as at Chitungwiza Municipality, one aspect that is a development concern in the country. Corruption is still the stock-in-trade of Nigerian democracy, rooted in the centralized, clientelist nature of politics (Dawood, 2015:69). In this regard, Plato described democracy as "a form of government (anarchy) which violates the fundamental principles of justice, according to which men, being born with different capabilities, should do only the work of which they are fitted (Momoh, 1993:36 cited by Ouwaseyi, 2009). Hence, although elected by democratic means, their character is far from being coded as democratic. In a more direct, the blame has not been shouldered on democracy but "greed" (Ouwaseyi, 2009:223).

Zimbabwe has a representative democracy where councilors, Members of the House of Assembly, and the president are elected. In this instance, people are simply represented in their absence. It is therefore a question of how and to what extent do those elected to office represent the majority. The quest for representative democracy is questionable, because rulers do so in their own capacity and not in the capacity of those they represent. Thus, Ouwaseyi (2009) argues that in many modern democracies, those who rule are really the government and bureaucracies, not the people. It is highly debatable whether representative democracy is possible at all and yet often it is reduced to elite rule and tyranny over the majority for if we consider policy and decision making as a process that considers 'inputs' - citizen views, 'with-inputs' elite judgment and finally 'outputs' in terms of policies and programmes in response to citizen demands, we realize that the 'with-inputs' are most critical and therefore represents in some ways, a 'coup' by the elite (Larok, 2011:5).

Another problem in democracy is the exaggeration of its development benefits. Many scholars have argued that democracy is an ideal that does not and cannot deliver exaggerated promises (Ouwaseyi, 2009). Larok (2011:7) quotes Nyamnjoh (2005) for deliberating that the greatest shortcoming of liberal democracy is its exaggerated focus on the autonomous individual, a reality contrary to Africa's dominant communal spirit. Hence, democracy as a process takes time to arrive at decisions, which may prove fatal (Ouwaseyi, 2009). The word democracy has its origins in the Greek tradition, and it involves a paradigm transition to how it is modelled in the current nations. Thus, democracy was dictated by history and responses to specific circumstances; it was about direct participation and not overt delegation, and it was about negotiation and not a blueprint. In Africa, it is thus critical to inquire into what history shapes democracy. (Larok, 2011: 2). Other

scholars regard democracy as a ‘promiscuous’ term that lacks consistent applicability in various scenarios. Therefore, democracy is difficult to express if it is an option for development.

Zimbabweans are hungry for civil liberties that allow them to participate autonomously in their development affairs. People are afraid to voice their opinions in public gatherings for fear of being victimized later, and this severely undermines the chances of true democracy in a nation (CCJP and LRF, 1999). This is indicated by repressive laws like the Public order and security Act (POSA) of 2002, and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) of 2002. Though democracy calls for the rule of law, draconic laws suffocate the reality of democratic governance. “There is still much pain in the communities as a result of what happened. This affects not only the bodies, but the hearts and minds of those who suffered. Some people are bitter and suspicious of the Government to this day. This means people often do not feel that their ability to contribute in Zimbabwe is recognized, or do not see any point in taking part in development projects” (CCJP and LRF, 1999). Hence, under such circumstances, it becomes a rare phenomenon to deduce development.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore the factors that have contributed to the governance and development crisis in Zimbabwe and to identify possible ways to overcome it. It adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from surveys and indicators with qualitative data from interviews and document analysis. Firstly, it found that the historical legacies of colonialism, liberation struggle, and post-independence authoritarianism have created a political culture of violence, corruption, and patronage that has eroded the democratic institutions and processes in the country. Secondly, it revealed that the current political regime has pursued its own interests and agendas, often at the expense of the majority of Zimbabweans. It has also infringed on the human rights and freedoms of its citizens, especially those who oppose or criticize it. Thirdly, it suggested that for Zimbabwe to achieve sustainable governance and development, it needs to undergo a democratic transition that respects the rule of law, human rights, and social justice. This requires the participation and inclusion of all stakeholders, including civil society, opposition parties, traditional leaders, and the international community. It also requires the reform and transformation of key institutions, such as the security sector, the judiciary, the media, and the electoral system. Finally, it recommended that Zimbabwe engage in regional and international cooperation to foster peace, security, and economic integration. This entails resolving its outstanding issues with its neighbors, especially South Africa and Botswana. It also entails strengthening its ties with other African countries and organizations, such as the African Union and SADC. Furthermore, it entails re-engaging with the global community and seeking support from multilateral agencies, such as the UN, the World Bank, and the IMF.

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