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Governmental Insensitivity to Accountability: Effects and Consequences for the ZANU PF Led Administration in Zimbabwe

By

Arthur Fidelis Chikerema, Vincent Chakunda and Tomy Ncube

Abstract

Government accountability to its citizens is a critical factor in development. Lack of government accountability is associated with citizen disloyalty and confrontations which may affect the economic and political situation in a country. This paper examined the effects of lack of accountability on the part of the ZANU PF led government in Zimbabwe. The established lack of sufficient government accountability in Zimbabwe has birthed an unprecedented unemployment rate of 96%. Informalization of the economy which has led to citizens surviving on being vendors has seen the competency of the government being put in question notwithstanding the political instability within the ruling. The internally fragmented ZANU PF had to suffer the effects of opposition politics, and pressure from social movement such as Tajamuka, Zimbabwe Shutdown. The Beitbridge border protest epitomised the displeasure of the citizenry; it also symbolizes an eco-political war against the Mugabe-led ZANU PF government. This paper adopted a desk research approach, due to its nature it utilised secondary sources such as newspaper articles, journal articles, commentaries and textbooks to conceptualize the problem under investigation. The study established that the insensitivity by the ZANU led government received a serious backlash which was an effort of bringing government to answer for its incompetence. On an overall note protests in Zimbabwe have been inspired by internalized anger and the undeterred interest to alter the political realities for the better, this time around with the citizens backed by social media to mobilize themselves fashionably. In future there is need for the government to necessitate a bottom up approach in its implementation statutes so as to involve the citizens in all levels of decision making.

Key words: Political Culture, mobocracy, vendor economy, citizen protests, government accountability, state capture.

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Introduction

The paper sets off with establishing the source of concern and the (I) research problem on contextual basis (II) government accountability in the light of service delivery and responsiveness. The study goes on to explore (III) Zimbabwe's political culture. In the second segment it evaluates the effects of lack of (IV) government accountability which results in public resistance and uproar. The foundation for analysis is hinged on the study's (V) theoretical framework which uses Cognitive Neoassociationist Model and Frustration Aggression Theory. In the last two sections, the paper gives the (VI) conclusion established from the study and (VII) recommendations.

Context

This study focuses on the Beitbridge border demonstration and other chain reactions such as the Tajamuka and #Zimbabwe Shutdown. The paper serves as a research contribution to understanding what citizens' involvement through acts of demonstrations means. The study seeks to assess the different reasons leading to the demonstrations. On the undertones of Beitbridge demonstrations the paper bases its premise on the conviction that the demonstrations were a result of implementation of the SI 64 of 2016. The assumption is that the protests were a response towards government's implementation of a policy with no meaningful engagement of the citizenry who were at the receiving end of poor administration of the economy.

Conceptualizing Government Accountability

The World Bank refers to government accountability as strongly attached to democratic principles with the sole need to create means to exert political oversight or control. In such a setup where government accountability is practised, appointed public officials are unswervingly answerable to the executive branch with sensible and reasonable policymaking frameworks that seek to endow development in education, citizen freedoms, and national defence up to environmental protection. Zimbabwe's case has been a different one as per the eco-political and social demographics which show prevailing trends of people languishing in abject poverty. The vendor economy is one of such living realities where the government sets policies and fail to be accountable to the electorate. In 2013 the ruling government's manifesto was premised on employment creation through ZIMASSET which outlined a progressive economic turnaround through the creation of 2 million jobs. Demands for explanation by the citizenry (tax payer) where suppressed by the national police. Giving an appraisal of the ZIMASSET Machiva (2017) presents the predicament of the policy by pointing out that instead of creating 2, 2 million jobs the opposite has actually happened; more companies have closed; a lot of workers fired on three months' notice and in the same line the government embarking on rationalisation of

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workforce leading to loss of employment. Under such circumstances the context of government accountability remains questionable in Zimbabwe as the government fails to account to the citizenry. Bloch (2014) starts a newspaper article in a stance that shows doubts in Government competency “where government often gets it wrong”, concurred by Machiva (2017) who also argues that “Zimbabwe has crafted so many economic policies from the early 80s, but all of them share a major flaw, they are too theoretical and they lack government accountability to the populace. These are signs of political dissatisfaction that should be benchmarks to judge the degree of conformity to principles of accountability that the government ignored leading to violent confrontations with cross border traders.

Methodology

This study adopted a desk research approach. Management Study Guide online and Crouch and Housden (2003) describe a desk research as basically the collection, collation and synthesis of already existing data. In this case, the study used Newspaper articles, commentaries and text books to get information related to the overall study. In analysing the data, thematic analysis was used to take note of key burning and dominant issues that were in line with the research concerns. Thematic analysis has been commended for its richness in examining and recording patterns which are later taken as "themes" thus making it a necessary approach in qualitative researches. Virginia and Clarke (2006) Daly, Kellehear and Glikzman (1997) note that themes are conceptualized as patterns across data sets which are essential to the description of a phenomenon and explaining the association of the patterns to the research question.

Understanding Zimbabwe’s political Culture

Almond and Verba (1963) define political culture as historical, shared beliefs in societies, feelings and values about the nature of political organisations in their midst, these beliefs usually serve as a link between government and citizens. The relationship between the government and citizens thereof in Zimbabwe has been more or less been marked by the downplaying of citizen capacity to question the audacity, actions and practices of the government. Protests, demonstrations and any other efforts to initiate checks and balances have been met with severe punishment. Solidarity Peace Trust (2004) notes that the Zimbabwean regime has become more proficient at preventing resistance to its rule. Demonstrations are usually stopped and disenfranchised despite them [demonstrations] being crucial ingredients to the bouillabaisse of democracy. Youth militias engage in terrorist activities against opposition supporters, whilst detentions-and-release cycles are applied to opposition and civic leaders, combined with endless court actions to wear down stamina and resources of such oppositionist forces. In the same line Sachikonye (2017) captures Zimbabwe’s political culture as follows:

The new ruling Zanu PF party was more committed to consolidating its newly won state power for “nation building” at the expense of laying foundations for a broad-based democracy. The trajectory of nationalism and the espousal of socialism that it subscribed to presented long-term repercussions on intraparty democracy, interparty relations, and, more broadly, on political values. It grew a

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tendency of intolerance and cultivated a propensity for the use of violence against political opponents which became the defining. Feature of post-independence politics in Zimbabwe. As a consequence, instead of nationalism imbued with broad democratic values and practice, a resilient variety of authoritarianism emerged. The correlated political culture has reflected the drift toward intolerance, exclusivity, authoritarianism and violence.

At the core of Zimbabwe's political processes is the use of hard power as the mode of maintaining political relevance by the ruling elite. The series of demonstrations in year 2016 pose a great question to whether the hard power which has remained a political scarecrow is withering away. Sachikonye (2011) notes that the consequences of violence run wide and deep, with violence being aimed at inflicting trauma and fear on its victims, whilst remaining a means towards moulding a culture within which personal freedoms and dreams are strangled and the end being the impunity enjoyed by its perpetrators. Since Almond and Verba note that political culture is a historical practice, it is noteworthy to interrogate the genesis of this culture. Sachikonye (2011) notes that the roots of Zimbabwe's contemporary violence boil down to actions of the Rhodesian armed forces, and the inter-party conflicts that occurred during the liberation war. Nietzsche once cautioned that those who fight monsters end up being monsters in the process.

In the political exodus from the Rhodesian government, ZANU party had the sentiments of violence as the cornerstone and prerequisite ingredient to the vilification of the colonial forces. In 1976, Prime Minister in waiting Robert Gabriel Mugabe uttered that:

Our votes must go together with our guns, after all any vote... shall have been the product of the gun. The gun, which provides the votes, should remain its security officer, its guarantor

Analytically votes will represent the democracy that was being clamoured for whereas the gun represented violence, the speech presents the importance of democracy and violence in their level of priority in the concept of the political setup. To justify the claim of prioritization, Masunungure (2010) captures the prioritization in a manner which symbolises the political culture and violence as conjoined twins, relating to the 2008's election which had Major General Engelbert Rugeje saying: "This country came through the bullet, not pencil. Therefore it will not go by the X of the pencil."

Violence seems to be the centre of Zimbabwe's political culture and the language used in order for political messages to be understood.

Growing Public Resistance: An analogy of the pesticide resistance

It is public knowledge that pests are defined as bubonic plague or destructive insect, in this context *civil disobedience*, *demonstrations* can be referred to as the bubonic plague against government rule with the pesticide being synonymously violence to control such. With Zimbabweans having had an ensuing political culture of being so scared to comment on the

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politics of the day at any point in their lives not to mention acting upon their dissatisfaction, the Beitbridge border post protests reflect a resistance to state organised violence. Despite the concept of the source of fear being induced by presumptions that state agents are everywhere, there are ears and eyes of the government who report and spy on the disgruntled and discontented. Such a belief has created an atmosphere of political fear and apathy to a point that no major demonstrations or protests have been seen in Zimbabwe since 2005. This is exacerbated by lack of confidence in the legal system that is meant to protect the citizens, laws are crafted to solidify government power at the expense of individual and political freedoms and security, Jafari (2003) concludes that laws have been instituted to solidify Mugabe's hold on power by subrogating any alternative while claiming to uphold the rule of law.

Under such realistic circumstances, the Beitbridge border post protests however present a twist to a political reality of submissiveness and docility becoming an antithesis to the synthesis of apathy derived from political intimidation. The protests presented quite a number of questions which are premised on, questioning whether the tables are turning. Whether the citizens are sending a message to say enough is enough? Whether the most feared ZANU PF government is losing grip? Such questions linger in regards to the protests. Such a political foundation has not been seen in Zimbabwe's political landscape for years.

(V) The Masses and Government insensitivity: Reaction to Statutory Instrument 64 of 2016

Advice has been that, "Never push a loyal person to a corner". Striving on a vendor economy which is being nourished by imports the citizens hustle on the corridors and pavements in town reselling imported goods to strike a balance with the 2 million promised jobs, instead of passing laws to empower and improve the vendors, the government unleashed Statutory Instrument 64 of 2016 which was simply a piece of legislation to control imports. SI 64 of 2016 outlined goods which were to be under customs tariff and this move was seen as an insensitive approach to the problems of the day. According to ENCA news (2016) government's move to announce and gazette Statutory Instrument (SI 64/2016) which imposed an import ban on most products which most cross-border traders relied on, this meant that their businesses were at the brink of collapse hence the gazetting of SI 64/2016 was a major contributory factor to the protests. Herald Newspaper (2016) gave a report on the frustration that the Statutory Instrument induced amongst the citizens with mobs torching ablaze infrastructure belonging to Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) warehouse containing seized goods and over 40 vehicles worth hundreds of thousands of dollars as demonstrations against the implementation of Statutory Instrument No. 64 of 2016. The situation on the ground posed a historical *déjà vu* of the insensitive Marie Antoinette who once said "If they can't afford bread, let them eat cake" thus building up a ripe spirit for the series of revolutionary marches (Women's march) that led to the French revolution.

Reformation of political culture: 4th wave of democratization: The age of Social Media and the youth frenzy

Huntington (1991) talks of the 3rd wave of democratization which he purports is a series of factors that will lead to the global outpour of democracy. Huntington reflects on five causative dynamics that will lead to such democratization namely the illegitimization of authoritarian rule,

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external efforts to spread democracy, growth of global economic outputs that will lead to modernization, urbanization and provide a constellation of a rising middle class that will demand democratic governance, religious groups that will demand individual rights and regional contingency factors such as the spread of demonstrations.

The Beitbridge border protests can be attributed to a number of factors that Huntington points out, the deviant case is a complex one which can be referred to as the Fourth Wave of democratization with a media frenzy as one of the causal effects coupled with the need to hold government accountable. Zimbabwe's neighbouring country has had a number of demonstrations and these have never spiralled over or inspired Zimbabweans to take demos as a political alternative, what has changed becomes a multi-million dollar question. Gambanga (2016) comments on the role of social media platforms in the protests as he writes in an article titled "WhatsApp, Facebook emerge as kingmakers as social media becomes Zimbabwean political tool". Brever (2012) points out that the revolutions that ousted Tunisia's President Zine el-Abidine were due to the merge in disparate forces which depended on modern communication technologies and social media to exacerbate the cause in action, such is the role of media. Social media platforms have been there since 2010 and political grievances have been part of the aired concerns and dissatisfactions. How then did social media have such an influence to propel the masses to the streets in 2016? Was it a moment of a political frenzy, a moment of madness or demon + stration (unwanted spirits + crazy inspiration/ movement = demonstration).

*Stration meaning borrowed from striation, though the meaning was remodelled to suit context.

Theoretical Framework: Cognitive Neoassociationist Model

The study was informed by the cognitive Neoassociationist model proposed by Berkowitz (1993). The model suggests that whenever an aversive stimulus is encountered, the individual automatically experiences negative affect. This negative affect will trigger a variety of lower-order associations, leading to the triggering of aggression-related ('fight') and escape-related ('flight') tendencies. These tendencies include aggression and escape-related motor responses, physiological reactions, thoughts, and memories. These two one part of the network has been activated; the other components are also activated. The relative strength of these two tendencies will depend on a number of factors, such as the genetic make-up of the individual, learned responses that the individual has acquired, and the situation itself. If aggression-related tendencies are stronger, the individual will experience rudimentary anger as a result of conscious and preconscious awareness of these aggression-related reactions. Similarly, if escape-related tendencies are stronger, preconscious and conscious awareness of these escape-related reactions will lead to a rudimentary fear experience. Berkowitz (1993) notes that in a sense his theory parallels the James-Lange theory of emotion. In essence, it is not the experience of anger or fear that leads to various aggression or escape-related responses, but rather the aggression or escape-related responses that produce anger or fear. Depending on the circumstances, the individual may subsequently engage in higher order cognitive processing regarding the consequences of various courses of action, the severity of the aversive stimulus, and/or the degree to which the aversive stimulus was intentionally or unintentionally induced. Although these higher order cognitions are important in Berkowitz's model, they are clearly secondary to affect. Such cognitions are not

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sufficient to trigger aggressive behaviour by themselves, but do lead to potential decreases or increases in aggression by enabling the individual to more explicitly examine the cause(s) of the aversive stimulus, as well as potential consequences of aggressive behaviour. Berkowitz emphasizes that these higher order cognitions are not necessary for aggression to occur. An individual can become aggressive without engaging in higher order cognitive processing. In other words, aggressive behaviour does not require a deliberative decision. In many instances individuals may engage in aggressive behaviour without any awareness of why they are aggressing.

Government insensitivity: Addressing the problems head on - Frustration-Aggression

Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mower, and Sears (1939) elucidate the relationship between frustration and aggression by noting that [frustration] which is "the state that emerges when circumstances interfere with a goal response" often leads to aggression. Adding on Harris (1974) notes that the amount of frustration and consequent aggression depends on how near the individual is to the goal when they are blocked. This explains the aggression that was shown during the Beitbridge border protests, since the economy has been informal due to the closure of industries, the vendor economy strives on imports, having the imports tempered with or controlled through SI 64 of 2016 presented a blockage to the goal of survival hence the outburst of the demonstrations. Noteworthy is that the protests were a show of the frustrations that the people already had brewing within themselves. The diagram below shows the link between the personal frustrations and these frustrations linked with common grievances through the use of social media hence leading to the concept of mob psychology.

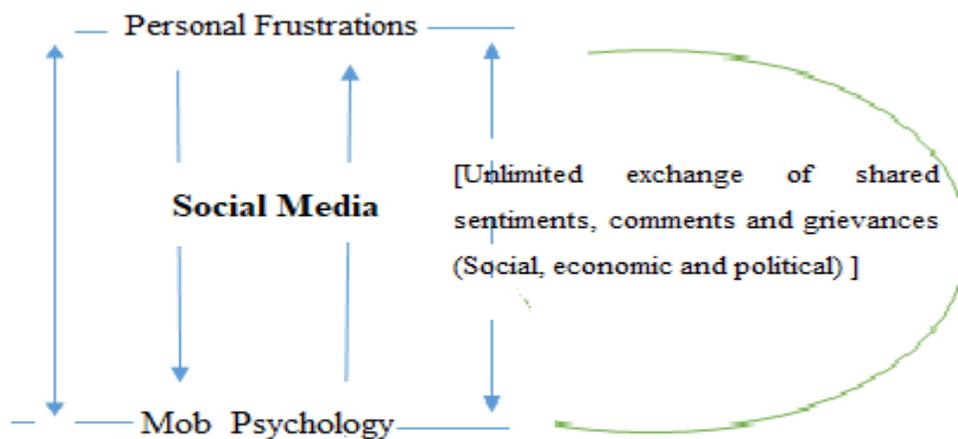


Fig 1.1 shows how Frustration Aggression Theory applies to outbreak of protests as noted by the researchers.

Berkowitz puts forward the contention that aggression is resultant of an interaction between an internal emotional state [personal frustrations in this case – job loss, long queues at

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the bank, poor health facilities] and cues that are available in the environment [social media]. Frustration alone is not sufficient to produce aggression. A frustrating experience creates a readiness to aggress thus therefore for an aggression to occur depends on stimulus cues. The outbreak of the protests in 2016 therefore can be accounted for through using Berkowitz's frustration-aggression hypothesis in line with the above notation discovered during the research.

Mobocracy: Demanding the answers from an unaccountable government

Depending on the different arms of the government to provide a platform for debate, introspection and neutral appraisal of the political players has not yielded much or any results to the populace in Zimbabwe. Quora online, Merriam Webster define Mobocracy or ochlocracy as the rule of government by mass of people where a powerful mob or mass of people take control of government The concern over security sector reforms has been one such debated issue which has been aborted before any progressive gestation in the political womb. Doro (n.d) concludes that Zimbabwe is a country that was born out of a liberation party where the political processes are guided by that historical truth. He notes that the heads of the security institutions are former veterans who answer to a specific ideological persuasion hence security policies that exist are fundamental facts that cannot be wished away.

Doro adds on that the Zimbabwe National Army and the other security institutions are grounded in history and the power relations during the armed struggle predictably predetermined the post-colonial security apparatus arrangement. With such inconsistencies in the morphology and anatomy of Zimbabwe's democracy, *mobocracy* took the lead in holding the government accountable for its different mishaps both in the economic dispensation and politics. According to Media Monitors (2016) the Beitbridge protests marked a turning point in addressing the Zimbabwean conflict which has been in a prolonged state of conflict which is an undeniable fact. Bearing political anger within their hearts, the citizens seemingly had a common ground to revolt and seek to attract government's attention. Still on the same ground the Zimbabwean government had a unique interpretation of the protests, writing on the Opinion and Analysis column Tshuma (2016) concludes that the Beitbridge border post demonstrations were no ordinary street march but a programme by opposition parties to cause anarchy in the country. Tshuma's presumption that the Beitbridge border protests were an anti-government project is a shared feeling with Doro who also concurs that the SSR agenda is so conspicuous from a very brief and rudimentary inspection of the facts on the ground which show an obsessed group of civil societies and the neo liberal minded academic who are marauding under a smokescreen which lurks with the "regime change" plot.

Looking at all the defences set loose by sympathizers of the Zimbabwean government and the government on its own, there is common belief that speech and debate cannot work since all efforts of engaging the government are seen as "anti-government", whilst the government exonerates itself from accountability through playing the victim. The Beitbridge border protests seemingly were a manifestation of unanswered questions in all the spheres of life for Zimbabweans. To some point, the pretext that there can be no adjustments to demilitarize the government due to the historical guerrilla background also pressured the citizens to go to the streets.

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Conclusion

The custom in Zimbabwe's political history has been that demonstrations are taboo, despite economic downturn and turmoil, resilient docility has become the political culture of Zimbabweans. The study established that the sudden outburst of the demonstrations against the government present a scenario of a government that is losing its grip on the political landscape which is cited by Tinhu (2016) who notes that the protests appear to be an effect of Zimbabweans being prepared to try something new to address various problems facing the nation. This can be alluded as a new genetic modification to the culture of political submissiveness which has been diluted by social media and the need to hold the government accountable and direct the political trajectories of the nation to a desired destiny.

To some point, government insensitivity came out as a factor that led to the protests. Morken (2016) cements the study's premise that insensitivity of the administration precipitated the protest, this is brought out by Morken's conclusion that the imposition of import controls became the final straw which broke the camel's back with 1 July characterized by mass [protests](#) at the Beitbridge border on both the Zimbabwean and South African sides as an expression of anger.

Pro-democracy came out as a motivator for the outbreak of the protest. The culmination of the protests are a series of events to engender a democratic tradition in Zimbabwean politics. The study found that the heroic declarations of one man demonstration Itai Dzamara, Pastor Evan Mawirire and the #Tajamuka movements against the government reflect a new route to democracy.

Recommendations

In future the government should revise its approaches to making policies and gazetting statutory instruments through adopting participatory approaches to decision making in order to involve all actors for the development of the nation. Participation led policies receive much positive responses from the people which they should serve since they present their sociocultural and economic concerns and realities.

On another note, government policies and actions should be put to scrutiny and debate. The process of scrutiny and debating will encourage checks and balances towards government actions, this will minimize on exacerbated collective actions such as strikes, demonstrations which can be taxing when not well negotiated or mediated leading to destruction of infrastructure and loss of lives seen in the burning down of the ZIMRA offices.

Government accountability and answerability can be improved through establishment of more rigorous commissions and review boards that will be made up of civil society groups, NGOs and ministries. These commissions and boards will help to monitor, evaluate and give feedback on government performance.

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