The Role of Elections in sustaining Peace and Stability in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study investigated the role of elections in sustaining peace and stability in Zimbabwe. The study captures the diverse perspectives of electoral players and stakeholders in Zimbabwe. A comprehensive literature search informed the development of interview and questionnaire guides. Semi-structured interviews with 15 stakeholders from the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission's network and a structured questionnaire administered to 384 participants from the general population in two provinces provided valuable insights. Data analysis using NVivo and SPSS software ensured rigour and validity. The findings reveal that election success can be measured through indicators such as the absence of violence, transparency, and accountability. Competitive politics can be peaceful through cooperation and constructive dialogue among political parties. However, elections can either consolidate or compromise stability depending on the context. Power-sharing deals and independent election monitoring are crucial but present significant challenges. Power-sharing deals have a dual-edged nature, potentially mitigating or exacerbating electoral tensions. Independent election monitoring and observation are crucial in ensuring free and fair elections and promoting transparency and accountability. However, concerns about external interference and sovereignty have been raised, which has led to tensions between Zimbabwe and foreign election observers. The study highlights the importance of carefully managing the electoral process to harness its potential as a force for peace and prevent it from becoming a source of conflict. Effective management of the electoral process can promote peace and stability in Zimbabwe, and this study provides valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders.

Introduction

Zimbabwe has been grappling with the challenges of electoral democracy since its transition to independence in 1980. The country is struggling to hold elections devoid of violence and their outcome is always disputed (Chari, 2017). Electoral violence has become endemic to the country. The period between 2000-2023 has been particularly marked by electoral controversy, with five presidential elections held during this time in 2002, 2008, 2013, 2018 and 2023, all of which were marred by disputes over their legitimacy (Macheka, 2022; Makahamadze, 2019; Masunda, Musonza, Ehiane, & Uwizeyimana, 2019; Mwangovya, 2023). The presidential elections were characterized by allegations of vote rigging, intimidation, and violence, leading to contested outcomes and undermining the credibility of the electoral process.

Zimbabwe's history of electoral violence is a major concern, with the 2008 election being a stark example of its devastating consequences. There are reports of a violent crackdown on opposition supporters, which followed the contested election results, resulting in the deaths of over 200 people, the displacement of thousands more, and a severe deterioration in the human rights situation (Macheka, 2022; Ndlovu-

Gatsheni, 2012). This pattern of violence has continued, with the violent 2018 elections and disputed 2023 elections marking a prolonged period of electoral instability (Motlanthe, 2018; Solidarity Peace Trust, 2018; Mwangovya, 2023). The implications of these events are profound, including episodes of violent conflict, economic instability, and humanitarian crises, all linked to disputed electoral outcomes. The ongoing instability has far-reaching consequences, eroding trust in democratic institutions, fueling political polarization, and undermining economic development. Furthermore, it has strained regional relationships and attracted international concern, highlighting the urgent need for sustainable solutions to Zimbabwe's electoral challenges to ensure a peaceful and prosperous future for its citizens.

This study sought to investigate the role of elections in sustaining peace and stability in Zimbabwe. The research aimed to explore the complex dynamics surrounding elections in Zimbabwe, including the factors that contribute to electoral disputes, the impact of disputed elections on peace and stability, and the perspectives of various stakeholders on the electoral process. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research approach was employed, which involved capturing the diverse perspectives of electoral players and stakeholders. This approach recognizes that the phenomena of peace and conflict are complex and dynamic social processes, influenced by multiple factors and actors. The study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the role of elections in sustaining peace and stability in Zimbabwe by engaging with the experiences, perceptions, and opinions of various stakeholders.

Literature Review
Conditions for Successful Elections

Free and fair elections are the foundation of democratic governance, and transparency and accountability are vital components of this process (SADC, 2015). When elections are conducted in a transparent and accountable manner, citizens can have confidence in the outcome, and the legitimacy of the government is strengthened (Chari, 2017). Transparency ensures that all aspects of the electoral process, including voter registration, campaign financing, and ballot counting, are open to scrutiny and observation. Accountability guarantees that those responsible for managing the electoral process are answerable for their actions and that any irregularities or misconduct are addressed.

These aspects foster trust in institutions, promote citizen participation, and reinforce the democratic process. Electoral processes that are not open, however, can lead to disputed results, eroding trust in institutions and potentially destabilizing the country (Chari, 2017). When citizens suspect that the electoral process has been manipulated or compromised, they may question the legitimacy of the government and the democratic system as a whole. This can lead to social unrest, political polarization, and even violence. Ensuring transparency and accountability in elections is crucial for maintaining democratic integrity, promoting citizen trust, and preventing electoral disputes.

Free and fair elections, underpinned by transparency and accountability, therefore, are the cornerstone of democratic governance. When electoral processes are open, accountable, and transparent, citizens can trust the outcome, and the government's legitimacy is reinforced (National Research Council, 2000). This, in turn, fosters trust in institutions, encourages citizen participation, and strengthens the democratic process. However, opaque and unaccountable electoral processes can lead to disputed results, eroding trust and potentially destabilizing the country. Transparency and accountability in elections are essential for maintaining democratic integrity, promoting citizen trust, and preventing electoral disputes (Merloe, 2009). Governments and electoral authorities can safeguard the democratic process, by ensuring that citizens' voices are heard and their rights are protected.

Post-Election Violence

Disputed election results can have far-reaching and devastating consequences, often leading to violence that undermines peace and stability (Chari, 2017). When electoral outcomes are contested, tensions can quickly escalate, and violence can erupt, posing a significant threat to national security and stability (Tirivangasi, Nyahunda, & Maramura, 2021). This can manifest in various forms, including protests, riots, and even armed conflict. The consequences of post-election violence can be severe, resulting in loss of life, displacement of people, and destruction of property. Furthermore, it can also lead to a breakdown in law and order, erosion of trust in institutions, and a decline in economic activity.

The risk of post-election violence highlights the importance of ensuring that electoral processes are transparent, accountable, and free from manipulation (Solidarity Peace Trust, 2018). This includes ensuring the integrity of voter registration, ballot counting, and results transmission. It also involves promoting inclusive political processes, respecting democratic principles, and addressing grievances through peaceful means. Governments and stakeholders can reduce the risk of post-election violence and promote a peaceful transition of power by prioritizing electoral integrity and transparency. This contributes to a stable and secure environment, where citizens can trust the electoral process and have confidence in their leaders.

Disputed election results can lead to catastrophic consequences like violence, instability, and human rights abuses. To prevent this, electoral processes must be transparent, accountable, and free from manipulation (SADC, 2015). Governments and stakeholders can reduce post-election violence by prioritizing electoral integrity, promoting inclusive political processes, and ensuring equal participation. This can be achieved through robust electoral laws, independent electoral commissions, trained election officials, inclusive political dialogue, civic education, and independent media (Chari, 2017). These steps can protect democracy, uphold the will of the people, and create a stable environment where citizens trust their leaders and institutions.

Timing of Elections

The timing of elections plays a significant role in maintaining peace and stability (National Research Council, 2000). The timing of elections significantly impacts voter turnout, with off-cycle elections typically having lower turnout (Anzia, 2014). Off-cycle timing is a significant factor contributing to lower voter turnout in by-elections. Since by-elections usually occur outside of regular election cycles, they often do not coincide with routine voting habits or familiar election schedules. By-elections are typically characterized by a lack of widespread attention and media coverage and a shorter campaign period, which can lead to lower voter engagement and decreased motivation. Without the usual cues and reminders associated with regular elections, such as simultaneous contests for multiple offices or familiar campaign seasons, voters may overlook or forget about the by-election altogether.

The lack of attention on by-elections can lead to voter confusion, as the typical electoral calendar is disrupted, making it harder for voters to remember to participate (Anzia, 2014). As a result, even interested and eligible voters might fail to cast their ballots, further reducing turnout in these already lower-visibility contests. Additionally, by-elections are often seen as less crucial than general elections, and voters may experience fatigue if multiple elections are held in a short period. Some political parties may also invest fewer resources in mobilizing voters, making the elections a single-candidate race. These factors contribute to lower voter turnout in by-elections compared to general elections, making them a unique challenge for candidates and political parties.

The lower turnout benefits organized groups, as their members tend to vote at higher rates and make up a larger proportion of the electorate. As a result, off-cycle elections amplify the influence of organized groups, leading to policies that favour their interests. Lower voter turnout in by-elections can benefit specific groups and individuals, amplifying their influence and potentially skewing the outcome. Organized groups and special interest groups with dedicated members and clear agendas can exert more power when overall turnout is low. Incumbent parties and candidates, well-funded candidates, and partisan loyalists also gain an advantage in low-turnout elections, as their supporters are often more motivated to vote. This can result in disproportionate representation and influence for these groups, potentially leading to outcomes that may not reflect the broader electorate's preferences. The timing of elections, therefore, has significant consequences for election outcomes. The impact of these factors, however, can vary depending on the specific context and election.

Elections and Power-Sharing Agreements

Power-sharing agreements, often implemented in the aftermath of disputed elections, can have both positive and negative consequences (ACCORD, 2020; Masunda, Musonza, Ehiane, & Uwizeyimana, 2019). On one hand, these agreements can reduce election-related violence by providing a framework for political compromise and cooperation, thereby preventing the escalation of conflict and promoting stability. On the other hand, they can also erode the will of the people by undermining the democratic process and creating a culture of political expediency, where accountability and transparency are compromised.

Power-sharing agreements can have a positive impact by reducing election-related violence and promoting stability (Makahamadze, 2019). These agreements can create a framework for political cooperation and compromise, reducing tensions between rival political groups and promoting calm in the aftermath of elections by providing a peaceful resolution to electoral disputes (ACCORD, 2020). This can help to prevent the escalation of violence, promote a sense of calm and stability, and create an environment conducive to democratic governance.

However, power-sharing agreements can also have negative consequences, eroding the will of the people by undermining the democratic process and the rule of law. These agreements can reduce accountability and transparency in government, leading to a lack of trust and confidence in institutions by creating a culture of political expediency and compromise (Masunda, Musonza, Ehiane, & Uwizeyimana, 2019). Furthermore, they can foster a sense of disenfranchisement and disillusionment among citizens, leading to a loss of faith in the democratic process and potentially undermining the legitimacy of the government.

Election Monitoring and Observation

Independent election monitoring and observation are essential to a transparent and trustworthy electoral process. Various organizations have undertaken electoral observation. The African Union (AU) and regional economic communities including the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) have deployed electoral observer missions to several countries on the continent, with a three-pronged goal. The missions aim to provide an impartial and accurate assessment of the election, evaluating its adherence to regional, continental, and international standards for democratic elections (SADC, 2015). Additionally, they offer constructive recommendations to enhance future elections based on their findings (African Union, 2024).

The electoral observer missions demonstrate the commitment of the regional blocs to supporting member states' electoral processes and democratization efforts, contributing to the consolidation of democratic governance, peace, and stability (Gromping, 2020). The presence of independent observers provides an added layer of assurance that the election is free from manipulation and irregularities. These observers can offer an unbiased assessment of the electoral process, pinpointing areas of strength and weakness, and identifying potential vulnerabilities. Doing so helps to build trust among citizens, political parties, and other stakeholders, ensuring that the electoral process is credible and legitimate.

Independent observers play a crucial role in ensuring the integrity of elections, going beyond mere observation to identify areas for improvement and provide constructive recommendations. Through their analysis, they detect vulnerabilities in the electoral process, such as weaknesses in voter registration, ballot counting, or campaign financing, and offer actionable solutions to address these issues (SADC, 2015). Doing so promotes accountability and transparency, holding stakeholders to high standards, providing a framework for improvement, and fostering a culture of openness (Gromping, Domestic Election Monitoring and Advocacy: An Emerging Research Agenda, 2017). Ultimately, independent observers are essential for ensuring free, fair, and transparent elections that reflect the will of the people, and their recommendations are vital for strengthening the democratic process and upholding electoral integrity.

Moreover, independent election monitoring and observation can help to deter electoral malpractices, such as voter suppression, ballot tampering, and fraud (Gromping, 2017). The presence of observers can serve as a deterrent to those who might seek to manipulate the electoral process, knowing that their actions will be scrutinized and reported. Therefore, independent election monitoring and observation are vital for ensuring the integrity, transparency, and accountability of the electoral process. The independent observers' objective assessment of the election can help to build trust, promote credibility, and uphold the principles of democracy.

The Zimbabwean Context

Zimbabwe's history of electoral violence is a major concern, with the 2008 election being a stark and disturbing example of its devastating consequences (Masunda, Musonza, Ehiane, & Uwizeyimana, 2019). There are reports of a violent crackdown on opposition supporters, which followed the contested election results, resulting in the deaths of over 200 people, the displacement of thousands more, and a severe deterioration in the human rights situation (Macheka, 2022; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). The suppression of political dissent and the targeting of opposition activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens led to a climate of fear and intimidation (Chari, 2017). This dark chapter in Zimbabwe's history set a troubling precedent for future elections, normalizing violence as a means of resolving political disputes and undermining trust in the electoral process.

The 2008 election violence also exposed weaknesses in the country's democratic institutions, highlighting the need for comprehensive reforms to prevent similar violent electoral conflict from occurring again (Tirivangasi, Nyahunda, & Maramura, 2021). A power-sharing agreement between ZANU-PF and the MDC formations was implemented to resolve the post-election impasse, but it was criticized for creating a dysfunctional government, undermining the will of the people, and failing to address the underlying issues driving political tensions (Masunda, Musonza, Ehiane, & Uwizeyimana, 2019). This highlights the need for careful consideration of the implications of power-sharing agreements and the importance of prioritizing democratic principles and the will of the people.

The legacy of this electoral violence continues to haunt Zimbabwe, serving as a stark reminder of the dan-

gers of unchecked political power and the importance of protecting human rights and democratic principles. The pattern of violence has continued unabated, with the violent 2018 elections and disputed 2023 elections marking a prolonged period of electoral instability that has become a defining feature of Zimbabwe's political landscape (Macheka, 2022; Motlanthe, 2018; Solidarity Peace Trust, 2018; Mwangovya, 2023). These events have led to profound and far-reaching implications, including recurring episodes of violent conflict, economic instability, and humanitarian crises, all inextricably linked to disputed electoral outcomes.

The ongoing instability has had a corrosive effect on the country's democratic fabric, eroding trust in democratic institutions, fueling political polarization, and undermining economic development. The persistent uncertainty has also led to a decline in investor confidence, a brain drain of skilled professionals, and a worsening of socio-economic conditions, pushing vulnerable populations to the brink of survival (Chikanda & Crush, 2018). Furthermore, the normalization of violence and intimidation has stifled political participation, silenced dissenting voices, and entrenched a culture of impunity, making it increasingly challenging to envision a peaceful and prosperous future for Zimbabwe.

The situation has become increasingly urgent, straining regional relationships and attracting international concern, as Zimbabwe's electoral instability threatens to destabilize the entire Southern African region (HRW, 2023). The need for sustainable solutions to Zimbabwe's electoral challenges is clear and pressing, requiring a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including the government, opposition parties, civil society, and the international community, to ensure a peaceful and prosperous future for its citizens. This includes addressing the deep-seated root causes of electoral violence, such as political polarization, ethnic divisions, and economic inequality, through inclusive national dialogue and reconciliation processes.

Additionally, promoting democratic reforms, such as electoral law reforms, voter registration, and voter education, is crucial to restoring trust in the electoral process (Chari, 2017). Fostering a culture of tolerance and inclusivity, where diverse perspectives are valued and respected, is also essential to creating a conducive environment for peaceful elections. Only through such comprehensive measures can Zimbabwe break the cycle of violence and instability, and build a brighter future for generations to come, characterized by democratic governance, economic prosperity, and social cohesion.

Methodology

This study did not involve primary fieldwork or data collection. Instead, I drew insights from analyzing data collected for my ongoing PhD dissertation, "Towards a New Model of the Transitional Justice Mechanism of Truth Commissions: An Evaluation of the Role of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission of Zimbabwe." The reflections presented in this paper are a secondary outcome of the analysis of the data, the emergent theme of the role of elections in sustaining peace and stability in Zimbabwe. The ongoing study assessed the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission's (NPRC) effectiveness in promoting national healing, reconciliation, and post-conflict justice in Zimbabwe. Established to confront the country's troubled past, the NPRC provides a platform for citizens to acknowledge past injustices, reconcile, and work towards a harmonious future. Since the insights presented in this paper are derived from the aforementioned study, the research methodology used is described in its entirety, albeit focusing on the role of elections in sustaining peace and stability in Zimbabwe.

Research Design

This study employed a concurrent embedded design, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate the NPRC's success in achieving its objectives, exploring whether a new or modified transitional justice model is needed to prevent future conflicts in Zimbabwe. Interviews were the primary data collection method, supported by a survey to gather data from a larger sample size. The study was predominantly qualitative, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of these complex processes. While quantitative data from the survey provided valuable insights, it was insufficient to capture the richness and complexity of the research questions. The qualitative approach allowed for a more nuanced understanding of individuals' beliefs, actions, and social realities, while the survey enabled data collection from a larger sample size, providing a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the impact of NPRC on transitional justice processes in Zimbabwe, the researcher employed a concurrent mixed-methods approach, combining interviews and a survey. The primary objective of this design was to describe and document the experiences, perceptions, and opinions of various stakeholders involved in transitional justice processes including the electoral process. The integration of quantitative survey data with qualitative interview data allowed for a more robust analysis, mitigating the limitations of each approach and enabling the validation of findings. Driven by resource constraints and a limited timeframe, the concurrent design enabled the researcher to collect both types of data simultaneously, ensuring a thorough and nuanced exploration of the research questions.

Literature Search

The first component of the methodology was a comprehensive literature search, which aimed to provide a solid foundation for understanding the electoral process in Zimbabwe. This involved a thorough review of existing literature on electoral processes, democratic governance, and political transitions. The literature search encompassed a wide range of sources, including academic journals, books, reports, and online resources. The literature search provided a solid foundation; it helped to identify gaps in existing knowledge and informed the development of the interview and questionnaire guides. This multi-faceted approach ensured a thorough examination of transitional justice processes, zooming in on the electoral process, to provide valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of key stakeholders.

Interviews

The second component involved conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants selected purposively from a range of organizations and entities that constitute the stakeholder network of the NPRC, which include the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), ensuring a diverse and representative sample of voices and perspectives on the electoral process in Zimbabwe. The selection included ZEC officials responsible for electoral administration, dispute resolution, and conflict management. Political party representatives, including leaders, agents, and polling agents, were also chosen. Additionally, officials from relevant government departments, such as Justice and Home Affairs, were selected, along with representatives from other constitutional bodies. Leaders and representatives from civil society organizations focused on election observation, voter education, and electoral reform were also included, ensuring a comprehensive range of viewpoints and experiences.

In qualitative research, determining sample size lacks standardized guidelines, as the focus is on exploring themes and patterns rather than quantifying views. Samples are purposefully selected to provide in-depth data relevant to the research problem. The interview sample in this study was guided by the saturation

principle, where data collection ceases when new participants do not yield additional insights. A small sample size is typical in qualitative research to facilitate in-depth investigation, and the study aimed for 15-20 interviews with individuals from organizations from the stakeholder network of ZEC.

However, the final sample consisted of 15 persons, sufficient to encompass a broad spectrum of viewpoints while reaching saturation. This procedure provided a broad understanding of the electoral process from the perspectives of various stakeholders. The interviews allowed for open-ended discussions and explorations of participants' views and experiences, which provided rich, qualitative data that complemented the quantitative data gathered through the questionnaires.

Questionnaire

The third component involved administering a structured questionnaire to participants to gather quantitative data from the public in Zimbabwe on their perceptions, experiences, and opinions on the electoral process, focusing on two provinces that represent the country's main ethnic groups: Mashonaland East (Shona population) and Matabeleland North (Ndebele population). Zimbabwe is a country divided along ethnic lines, with Mashonaland and Matabeleland regions reflecting the Shona-Ndebele divide. The survey targeted these two provinces due to their geographical significance and active ethnic groups challenging the dominant narratives. Mashonaland East surrounds the capital city Harare, while Matabeleland North is a cosmopolitan province with such ethnic groups as the Tonga and Nambya, other than the Ndebele. Each province has a population of around 1 million people, providing a target population of 2 million. The survey aimed to gather data from these diverse groups to understand their perspectives and experiences.

The survey sample selection procedure adhered to the conventional methodology for determining the optimal sample size in quantitative research (Fox, Hunn, & Mathers, 2009). This two-stage process involves initially calculating the sample size for an infinite population, followed by adjusting it to accommodate the specific population size. The sample size calculation formula can be represented as follows:

Step 1: Formula for calculating the sample size for the infinite population.

$$N = Z^2 \times P \times \frac{(1 - P)}{M^2}$$

Step 2: Formula for calculating the adjusted sample size.

$$\frac{(N)}{1 + \frac{(N - 1)}{Population}}$$

The sample size calculation formulas involve parameters such as N (sample size for an infinite population), Z-Score (confidence level constant), P (target population proportion), and M (margin of error). The confidence level estimates how accurately a sample represents the population within the margin of error. Using these formulas, a sample size of 384.086 was determined for a survey in Mashonaland East and Matabeleland North provinces, with a combined population of 2,000,000. This calculation was based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Therefore, the researcher aimed to recruit a sample of 384 people from the general population in these provinces.

The study employed snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, to select participants from a hard-to-reach population. This method relies on networking and referrals, starting with a small number of initial connections who invite others to participate. Snowball sampling is commonly used in qualitative

research but can also be used in quantitative research. It's a cost-effective and efficient method that allows for rapid data collection and access to specialized groups within the target population. However, it has limitations, such as minimal control over the sample and potential sample selection bias. The technique has three variants: linear, exponential non-discriminative, and exponential discriminative snowball sampling, which differ in the number of respondents mobilized by each participant. Despite its drawbacks, snowball sampling is widely used due to its efficiency and effectiveness in reaching hard-to-access populations.

The researcher used exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling to recruit participants for the study on conflict and peace in Zimbabwe. This method was chosen due to the challenging nature of reaching populations with a history of conflict, where mistrust and fear are prevalent. Snowball sampling helped overcome these challenges by leveraging social networks and referrals to increase accessibility and trust. Participants were identified through social networks, professional connections, and acquaintances, with no direct link to the researcher to avoid conflicts of interest. Eligibility criteria included the ability to provide informed consent, excluding those under 18, over 80, and individuals with mental health conditions. Only Zimbabwean citizens and legal residents were included in the survey to ensure local ownership of national processes and policies. Participants provided informed consent and were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any point before completion and publication.

Data Analysis

The study utilized two software tools for data analysis: NVivo and SPSS. NVivo was used to transcribe interview audio recordings and manage qualitative data, facilitating the organization, sorting, and analysis of interview transcripts. Its features enable pattern recognition, data exploration, and cross-examination. On the other hand, SPSS was used to analyze survey data, providing comprehensive insights and practical findings. SPSS is a user-friendly software designed for social sciences research, compatible with various data types, and suitable for users with varying expertise levels. The use of NVivo and SPSS ensured a robust and detailed analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data respectively.

Trustworthiness of Data

To ensure the rigour and validity of the study, a multi-faceted approach was employed. Triangulation was used to validate findings by combining literature, questionnaires, and interviews. Triangulation involves integrating data from multiple sources to identify patterns, validate findings, and address discrepancies. To achieve this, similar questions and categories from both methods were compared to identify consistencies and inconsistencies, validating findings by corroborating or challenging results. Throughout the research process, I reflected on my own biases and assumptions to minimize their impact on the findings. This reflexive approach helped to ensure that the results were objective and trustworthy.

Findings

Measuring Election Success

The study's findings underscore the significance of successful elections in maintaining peace and stability in Zimbabwe. When elections are conducted in a transparent, free, and fair manner, they can help to reduce tensions and promote a sense of legitimacy among the citizenry. Successful elections can also foster a sense of trust in the electoral process, which is essential for building and maintaining peace and stability. Furthermore, successful elections can provide a platform for resolving disputes and addressing grievances

through peaceful means, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflict. However, when elections are marred by irregularities, violence, or other forms of malpractice, they can exacerbate existing tensions and create new ones, leading to instability and conflict.

Election success can be evaluated through three key indicators: absence of violence, transparency, and accountability. The absence of violence ensures a secure electoral process, free from intimidation or coercion. Transparency requires clear and accessible information about all stages of the electoral process, including voter registration, voting procedures, and election results. Accountability involves strict adherence to electoral laws, effective oversight, and accountability for electoral malpractices. The success of an election can be comprehensively measured, and areas for improvement are identified through these indicators, ensuring the integrity and credibility of the electoral process.

Competitive Politics

The study reveals that competitive politics can be conducted without undermining peace if political parties cooperate and engage in constructive dialogue. Competitive politics can be conducted in a manner that prioritizes peace and stability by fostering an inclusive and democratic political environment. When political parties prioritize peaceful competition over violent confrontation, they can create an environment conducive to peace and stability. This can be achieved through various mechanisms, such as electoral pacts, codes of conduct, and dispute resolution mechanisms. Political parties can reduce the risk of election-related violence and promote a culture of peaceful competition by working together. This involves ensuring that all political parties and stakeholders are actively engaged in the political process, without exclusion or marginalization.

However, this requires a willingness to compromise and prioritize the national interest over partisan interests. Moreover, adherence to fundamental democratic principles, such as the rule of law, respect for human rights, and protection of individual freedoms, is crucial. By doing so, the political process becomes truly representative, fair, and reflective of the diverse interests and perspectives of the citizenry. This, in turn, helps to build trust in institutions, promotes social cohesion, and reduces the likelihood of conflict, ultimately allowing for competitive politics to thrive without compromising peace.

Elections and Peace

The study's findings suggest that elections can either be a crucial step towards peace or the final act of conflict, depending on the context. Elections play a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of peace, possessing the dual capacity to either consolidate or compromise stability. On the one hand, elections can serve as a vital catalyst for peace by providing a legitimate and peaceful mechanism for transferring power, allowing for the democratic expression of citizens' will, and fostering a sense of ownership and accountability. Elections can provide a platform for resolving long-standing disputes and addressing grievances, leading to a peaceful resolution, which can help diffuse tensions, build trust, and create an environment conducive to sustainable peace.

However, in other cases, elections can be a trigger for violence, particularly if they are marred by irregularities or perceived as unfair. If mismanaged, elections can become a flashpoint for violence, exacerbating existing tensions, and plunging a country into chaos and instability. The outcome of elections can also be a source of conflict, particularly if the results are disputed or rejected by one or more parties. While elections can provide a platform for resolving long-standing disputes and addressing grievances, they can also be a trigger for conflicts. The context in which elections are held is critical in determining

their impact on peace and stability. Therefore, it is imperative to carefully manage the electoral process, ensuring its integrity, transparency, and inclusivity, to harness its potential as a force for peace and prevent it from becoming a source of conflict.

Power-Sharing Deals

The study revealed that power-sharing deals possess a dual-edged nature, harbouring the potential to either mitigate or exacerbate electoral tensions. Power-sharing deals can reduce election-related violence but may also erode the will of the people. On the positive side, these agreements can effectively reduce election-related violence by providing a peaceful mechanism for distributing power, thereby averting the escalation of conflicts and promoting stability. Power-sharing agreements can provide a mechanism for resolving disputes and addressing grievances, reducing the likelihood of violence. Moreover, they can foster cooperation and collaboration among rival political factions, creating an environment conducive to national unity and reconciliation.

However, such agreements can also be seen as undermining the will of the people, particularly if they are perceived as being imposed from above or as a means of maintaining the status quo. However, if not judiciously crafted and implemented, power-sharing deals can also have deleterious consequences, such as undermining the democratic process, disenfranchising the electorate, and creating a culture of political expediency, where leaders prioritize personal interests over the will of the people. Power-sharing deals can create new tensions and conflicts, particularly if they are not inclusive or if they prioritize the interests of elites over those of the broader population. Therefore, it is crucial to approach power-sharing deals with caution, carefully calibrating their terms to ensure they bolster rather than compromise democratic principles and the pursuit of lasting peace.

Election Monitoring and Observation

The study's findings highlight the importance of election monitoring and observation in ensuring free and fair elections. Independent election observers can help to promote transparency and accountability, reducing the risk of electoral malpractice. Furthermore, election monitoring and observation can provide a mechanism for addressing disputes and grievances, reducing the likelihood of conflict. Independent election monitoring and observation bodies should decide if elections are free and fair. These bodies should assess the electoral process, including voter registration, candidate nomination, voting procedures, and election results. Based on this assessment, they should determine if the elections were free and fair and provide recommendations for improving the electoral process. This ensures that the electoral process is transparent, accountable, and fair. However, the effectiveness of election monitoring and observation depends on various factors, including the independence and impartiality of observers, the scope of their mandate, and their ability to investigate and address complaints.

Zimbabwe has often expressed concerns about international election observation missions, citing fears of external interference in the country's electoral processes. The government has been skeptical of the motives of Western observer missions, accusing them of seeking to legitimize their own interests rather than promoting democratic principles. Zimbabwe has also expressed concerns about the potential for observer missions to compromise the country's sovereignty and independence. Furthermore, the government has argued that local observer groups are better equipped to understand the complexities of Zimbabwe's electoral landscape and should be given priority in observing and monitoring elections. These

concerns have led to tensions between Zimbabwe and the international community, with some observer missions being denied accreditation or facing restrictions on their activities.

Conclusions

The findings of this study underscore the significance of evaluating election success through a multifaceted approach, encompassing three crucial indicators: absence of violence, transparency, and accountability. This comprehensive framework enables a nuanced understanding of electoral outcomes and their impact on peace. Moreover, the study stresses the imperative of fostering inclusive political processes, upholding democratic principles, and exercising meticulous management of the electoral process. By doing so, elections can be harnessed as a powerful tool for promoting peace and stability.

The study reveals the dual nature of elections in relation to peace, wherein they possess the potential to either propel peace or precipitate conflict. This dichotomy underscores the need for careful management of the electoral process, lest it inadvertently sow the seeds of discord. Furthermore, power-sharing deals must be navigated with caution, lest they compromise democratic principles and undermine the electoral process. By adopting a judicious approach, stakeholders can ensure that elections contribute to a peaceful and democratic environment.

The study underscores the vital role of independent election monitoring and observation bodies in ensuring the integrity of electoral processes. These bodies bring a critical perspective to the assessment of electoral procedures, providing invaluable recommendations for improvement. Their presence serves as a safeguard against electoral malpractices, thereby upholding the principles of transparency, accountability, and fairness. Stakeholders can foster trust in the electoral process and promote peaceful outcomes if these bodies are established and empowered.

Implications for Election Success

The findings of this study have far-reaching implications for the role of elections in sustaining peace and stability in a country. Firstly, they underscore the importance of measuring election success beyond mere peaceful conduct, to include transparency and accountability. This ensures that elections are not only free from violence but also fair, representative, and reflective of the people's will. Stakeholders can ensure that the electoral process is truly democratic and contributes to peace when a comprehensive approach to evaluating election success is adopted.

The study demonstrates that competitive politics can be managed in a way that promotes peace, through inclusive processes and respect for democratic principles. This implies that elections can be a powerful tool for promoting peace and stability, rather than a source of conflict. By fostering an inclusive political environment, stakeholders can harness the potential of elections to build peace and stability.

The findings emphasize the dual role of elections in peace, underscoring the need for careful management to ensure they contribute to peace. This requires a nuanced understanding of the electoral process and its potential impact on peace. Stakeholders can take steps to mitigate the risks associated with elections and leverage their potential to build peace when they appreciate the complex relationship between elections and peace.

The study highlights the importance of independent election monitoring and observation bodies in ensuring free and fair elections. This ensures that elections are transparent, accountable, and fair, which is critical for sustaining peace and stability. By empowering independent election monitoring bodies, stakeholders can ensure that the electoral process is credible, trustworthy, and contributes to peace.

The findings suggest that elections can play a crucial role in sustaining peace and stability, but only if they are carefully managed, transparent, and accountable. By adopting a comprehensive approach to evaluating election success, fostering inclusive political processes, acknowledging the dual role of elections in peace, and empowering independent election monitoring bodies, stakeholders can harness the potential of elections to build peace and stability.

Recommendations for Application

To ensure a transparent and accountable electoral process in Zimbabwe, it is recommended that independent local election monitoring and observation bodies be established. These election monitoring and observation bodies should comprise local civil society organizations, community groups, and faith-based organizations. Their focus should be on monitoring the electoral process at the local level, including voter registration, campaign periods, voting, and counting. They should provide real-time observations and reports on the electoral process to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), highlighting any irregularities or concerns.

It is important to note that these independent bodies are distinct from ZEC, which is a permanent electoral management body responsible for administering elections. While ZEC focuses on the technical aspects of the election, independent bodies would focus on the integrity, transparency, and accountability of the process. To ensure effective collaboration, these independent bodies should work closely with ZEC to avoid duplication of efforts. ZEC should provide independent bodies with access to information, documentation, and electoral materials, while independent bodies should provide ZEC with recommendations for improving the electoral process.

It is important to note that Zimbabwe already allows international organizations such as the African Union, European Union, and United Nations and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) to observe its elections. The focus of these missions is on observing the electoral process at the national level, including the legal framework, electoral administration, and political environment. They provide reports on the electoral process, highlighting areas of strength and weakness. However, Zimbabwe has had problems in relating with some of the international electoral observation missions. The independent election monitoring and observation bodies will ensure a comprehensive and robust electoral observation process that complements the work of ZEC and upholds the principles of transparency, accountability, and democracy.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings, the following recommendations for future research can be drawn:

1. Investigate the impact of election management bodies on peace and stability: Future research can explore the role of election management bodies in ensuring peaceful and stable elections, and identify best practices for effective election management.

2. Examine the relationship between power-sharing deals and democracy: Further research can investigate the effects of power-sharing deals on democratic processes and institutions, and identify conditions under which they can contribute to peace and stability.

3. Analyze the role of independent election monitoring and observation bodies: Research can assess the effectiveness of independent election monitoring and observation bodies in ensuring free and fair elections, and identify ways to strengthen their role in promoting peaceful and stable elections.

4. Explore the intersection of elections and conflict resolution: Future research can investigate how elections can be used as a tool for conflict resolution, and identify strategies for managing elections in post-conflict environments.

5. Investigate the impact of technology on election transparency and accountability: Research can examine the role of technology in promoting transparency and accountability in elections, and identify ways to leverage technology to improve election management.

6. Develop indicators for measuring election success: Future research can develop and refine indicators for measuring election success, including the absence of violence, transparency, and accountability.

7. Examine the role of civil society in promoting peaceful and stable elections: Research can investigate the role of civil society organizations in promoting peaceful and stable elections, and identify ways to strengthen their engagement in the electoral process.

8. Investigate the impact of electoral reforms on peace and stability: Future research can assess the impact of electoral reforms on peace and stability, and identify best practices for electoral reform.

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