

Press and the Succession Debate in ZANU-PF. A Look at Press Coverage of the Debate on President Robert Mugabe's Succession within ZANU-PF Party in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Zimbabwe has been ruled by President Robert Mugabe and his Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front since independence in 1980 but Mugabe has been at the helm of the party since 1975. There is however no talk about him retiring from politics any time soon from within the ZANU-PF rank and file as shown by the party's endorsement of his name as the sole presidential candidate in the forthcoming 2013 presidential and parliamentary elections. The government owned newspapers are also silent about the need for a succession discussion to President Mugabe from both party presidency and state presidency. The private newspapers have, however found it important to discuss the succession to the president within the ZANU-PF party and have come up with a number of suggestions as to who could replace him should the need arise. It is from this background that the researcher looked at how the private print media are writing about with regard to the succession discourse to President Mugabe within the ZANU-PF party. The aim of the study is to find out whether the succession debate is real or just imaginary, whether there is infighting within the party and who could eventually succeed the president should the need arise. The researcher mainly used content and discourse analysis as well as hermeneutics of interpretation, interviews and diagnostic analysis. The researcher found out that much as the public print media is silent about the succession debate within the ZANU-PF hierarchy, the succession debate is real and imminent. The research also found out that the private print media believes there are factions lining themselves to succeed President Mugabe with the belief that whoever succeeds him at party level stands a better chance of eventually winning the state presidency as well. The findings indicated that a number of names were being forwarded for succession but two stood out clearly namely, Vice President Joyce Mujuru and defense minister Emerson Mnangagwa, although both of them categorically denied leading any form of faction for succession purposes. It was clear from the findings that the private media promoted the succession debate as a way of stabilizing ZANU-PF thereby helping opposition politics in the process.

Keywords: ZANU-PF, Succession, Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe

Introduction

THE Zimbabwe African Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU – PF) party has ruled Zimbabwe since the country was granted independence from Britain in 1980 and its first secretary, Robert Gabriel Mugabe has been at the helm, and is assured of continuity at the helm even in the forth-coming 2013 harmonized election as he won the mandate to represent the party in 2012. But the astute leader is now 89 years old and one day he will have to leave party and national presidency to another person. Although the potential successor to his national presidency is open to every Zimbabwean, it is his successor from within the party that has proved elusive over the years with ZANU-PF party cadres famously known for fighting to show the president that they support him on the presidency than the rest. This paper is therefore an assessment of the potential successor to President Robert Mugabe's reign within the ZANU-PF party as given by the private newspapers in Zimbabwe and online newspapers operating from outside Zimbabwe. The public press which is known for supporting ZANU-PF has been silent about the ZANU-PF succession debate raging on in the private press.

Background and context

According to Robert Rotberg (2011) the future of Zimbabwe hangs on the potential successor to President Robert Mugabe, not at national level, but at party level within ZANU – PF itself. Rotberg even believes that the reason why Mugabe has ruled Zimbabwe for more than three decades is mainly because there hasn't been any serious challenger to his throne within ZANU – PF. Margaret Dongo, a long serving ZANU – PF intelligence officer who challenged her party to form her own political party, once told Zimbabweans that the president was surrounded by hens who could not challenge him, the only cock within the ZANU – PF hierarchy.

Dongo, who is a Harvard University fellow and one of the first people to break out of the former ruling party and contest for a parliamentary seat as an independent, was quoted in the Daily News issue of November 2012 urging Mugabe to retire and reflect on his achievements, in a clear show that the future of the country's presidential succession lies squarely within the ZANU – PF corridors, but there is none to come from, whose credentials can stand the heat without being tainted. The former Member of Parliament for Harare South said at 87, Mugabe is now of at a very advanced age and Zanu PF should let him enjoy his twilight years.

“Only Zanu PF can give him that but there are some in the party with corrupt tendencies who are greedy and are taking advantage of his age and association to engage in corrupt activities. These people do not want to see him go. Zanu PF is overworking Gushungo (Mugabe), he needs to rest. The law of diminishing returns also applies to humans, as you grow older you can't do all you used to do. Your mind and body get tired even look at me; I am 51, I can't do the things I used to do at 30 so well or even at 20. Mugabe must rest,” Dongo said (Daily News 2012).

Dongo, like all Zimbabweans did not want to link the succession debate with the President's health the two were different saying the health issue was a personal issue and had nothing to do with leadership abilities, but remained adamant that that ZANU – PF held the keys to their first secretary's departure from presidency if they handle their own party presidency well.

“The issue of Mugabe's health was his personal affair but he should pave way for someone else. Zanu PF holds the key to Mugabe's departure as they could discuss the matter during the party's conferences. However, the question may not be raised as there is a culture of fear and silence in Zanu PF. Those who have tried to raise it were destroyed. For the sake of the nation and Mugabe's own sake, Zanu PF should discuss the succession question,” Dongo said (Daily News 2011).

Dongo therefore believes that Mugabe should not leave his fate in the hands of others but must come up with a strategy to relinquish power and groom a successor. It is the premise of this paper to extrapolate the possible strategies, tactics and formations being employed both by President Mugabe himself and party members towards his succession.

ROBERT MUGABE and ZANU - PF

Colonized by Britain on 12 September 1891 when Cecil John Rhodes's pioneer column hoisted the Union Jack at Fort Salisbury, the country was named Zimbabwe in 1980 at independence. For 89 years however, different groups of British origin ruled the country at the expense of the local black populace. The resistance to colonial rule began immediately after occupation with the Shona and Ndebele uprising which were however ruthlessly defeated (Ranger and Bhebe 1998).

A second wave of resistance came in the 1950s when the educated blacks began their own groups first to demand for wages but the later for political space. The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland ended with Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia being granted Independence while whites in Southern Rhodesia, led by a hard line group spearheaded by Ian Smith, formed the Rhodesian Front party which went on to rule the country from 1962 to 1980. The Rhodesia Front announced Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from British rule thereby maintaining its grip on the country. At this time, the African nationalists were increasingly becoming agitated and a number of political parties emerged during the early 1960s but the majority of them were banned and the majority of the leaders were arrested and kept in restrictive camps.

Among the leaders were the intelligent and militant Robert Mugabe, who was firstly secretary general of the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front and then replaced the first president Ndabaningi Sithole in 1975 after the death of Herbert Chitepo, the chairman of the powerful Dare Rechimurenga (War Council). Mugabe was the automatic choice for the vacant leadership within ZANU – PF after the death of Chitepo (Tekere 2009).

Other political parties that were active during this period of the winds of revolutionary changes include the Zimbabwe African People's Party (ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo, National Democratic Party (NDP) and the short lived African National Council (ANC). ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU waged an armed struggle against the rule of the white supremacists led by Smith and the war ended in 1980 when the three influential parties of Rhodesia Front, ZAPU, and ZANU-PF together with other smaller parties agreed to the British engineered Lancaster House constitution that necessitated the holding of United Nations and British monitored general elections.

ZANU-PF won 57 seats, ZAPU won 20 seats, ZANU Ndonga won Three seats and RF were guaranteed of 20 seats from the Lancaster House agreement giving ZANU-PF leader Robert Mugabe the mandate to form a government. He entered into a coalition with ZAPU's Nkomo who was named minister of home affairs, as well as with a number of whites from the Rhodesia Front such as Dennis Norman who was named minister of health. Mugabe first ruled the country as Prime Minister, with Canaan Banana, a compromise member who was acceptable to the other parties, selected as the ceremonial president until 1987, the year that the majority of the statutes within the Lancaster House dictates expired. Mugabe became President from 1987 and is still the president as this research study is being carried out.

The first real challenge to Mugabe's rule has always been seen as the coming of the Movement for Democratic Change in 1999 and the militant personality of its leader Morgan Richard Tsvangirai. Their rivalry stuttered through the 2000 general election, 2002 presidential election, the 2005 general election and the 2008 harmonized election and the subsequent presidential run-off between Mugabe and Tsvangirai. The media played a big role in this history of Zimbabwe and have always been a partner of political events in Zimbabwe. President Mugabe has however used the country's history to his advantage over the years managing to silence all

challengers along the way from within ZANU PF itself and to silence challengers from opposition parties. The private media however, believe Mugabe's succession start and ends with his on succession within the party and that will cascade to the national level.

Zimbabwean media

According to Saunders, R. (1999) Zimbabwe has always had some of the oldest media institutions in Africa starting with the Masvingo provincial newspaper *The Nugget* in 1888 and the influential Cape Argus of South Africa owned *Mashonaland* and *Zambesian Times* which were hand-written. The newspaper media empire in Zimbabwe then began to spread through out the newly establish British colony named Rhodesia by establishing media organization in Harare (*The Herald*), Bulawayo (*The Bulawayo Chronicle*) and Mutare (*The Manica Post*). These newspapers however supported the ruling British South African Company and subsequent ruling governments up to present day ruling ZANU – PF. According to Rusike, E (1991) the Argus Company sold the Zimbabwean entity to the Zimbabwean government in 1980, and with a \$5 million loan assistance from the Nigerian government, created the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT) to manage the public media on its behalf. However, during the liberation war period before independence, the private media such as *The African Daily News and Moto* supported the efforts of black Africans in opposition to the ruling Rhodesian Front. After Independence, this polarization of the media continued with the public media supporting the ruling ZANU – PF while the private media supported opposition political parties such as the MDC. Influential private media that supported the opposition after independence included *The Daily News*, *The Financial Gazette* and the *News Day* newspapers.

Research Objectives

The major objective of this paper is to critically find out the role played by the press in explaining the shenanigans or the goings on behind the scenes within ZANU – PF in preparation for the eventual succession to the iconic and imposing figure of its president, Robert Mugabe. The paper also seeks to find out from newspaper coverage who could be the potential successors to President Mugabe at party level and to find out the criteria used in coming up with potential the potential successors. Also paper seeks to assess the portrayal, imaging, priming and toning of newspaper articles with the aim to explaining how the press covers the ZANU PF succession debate in Zimbabwe and finding out how this coverage affects the discussion itself. This paper sets out to make specific evaluation of the quality of the newspaper coverage in both local and online newspapers over the succession issue with a view to evaluating the short term and long term effect of the coverage to the nation and the ZANU – PF party itself. This paper therefore seeks to discuss the thematic areas covered by the newspaper regarding ZANU – PF succession issues.

Research methodology

Although content analysis dominated the research methodology, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods in data collection and analysis were also applied. A non-probability sample of private and online newspapers was also employed in which the News Day, The Daily News, and The Zimbabwean newspapers were the major contributors of stories under study. According to Dominick J, (2006), this was most appropriate because the research was not meant to generalize the study but rather to investigate the variable relationships. It was also appropriate because researchers used available samples for convenience. Available data was in form of newspaper columns and articles published in selected newspapers. After the data was collected, the articles were analyzed using content analysis method. According to Kerlinger 1986, (in Dominick 2006), content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for purposes of measuring variables. In the case of this study, newspaper articles that were studied for their theme, message and tone with regard to succession topic within the political situation in Zimbabwe. However, this paper attempted to study the messages in the articles and editorials with the sole intention of explaining how the succession debate in Zimbabwe was shaping up.

Findings

Much as the succession discussion in Zimbabwe is a thorny issue, the findings indicate that Zimbabweans are divided over the issue based on the articles published in the newspapers articles studied in this paper. The findings however, show a sense of both optimism and pessimism for the country and the world at large. Most articles reflected the challenges and opportunities that are associated with the debate for both ZANU – PF party and the country Zimbabwe. Focus of analysis was on the headlines, words and story angles that contained the succession debates, the names that dominated the debate and the analysts being used by the newspapers. The overall opinions in the newspaper articles as well as the specific emphasis of the stories were studied. Interpretations on the implications of these articles on the ZANU – PF party in particular and the nation at large were also probed.

The study also found out that the political parties were concerned about the silence on the succession debate within the ZANU – PF hierarchy, to the extent that some political parties were very disappointed about the silence. It was also clear that both opposition political parties and newspaper owners had resigned from removing the president by any political means and left this job to the ZANU – PF party itself to do that job for them. The only disadvantage was that most newspapers tended to reflect the opinion of either their owners or their funders, hence placing the selfish interests of political players masquerading as newspaper owners. These findings are summarized below according to their thematic underpinnings.

Call for succession debate

The call for the debate on the succession of President Robert Mugabe for the leadership of ZANU-PF does not in any way come from ZANU-PF power greedy cadres, no, it comes from the president' most critics and open enemies in the form of foreign governments, the civil society and the private media both from within and outside Zimbabwe, the so-called 'axis of evil'. President Mugabe has been clear with his open dislike of the civil society when he called them "agents of regime change" working in tandem with the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) to remove him and his ZANU-PF party from power. As expected the crusade is led by the private party which the president view as part of the "axis of evil" in conjunction with the civil society that are foreign funded as the opposition parties. Interestingly only three, private media especially the Diaspora-based online newspapers, opposition political parties and the civil society are all foreign funded and highly critical of the President's rule.

As such the Zimbabwe Independent Newspaper gave one non-governmental organization (NGO) leader a whole page in provide reasons on why the succession debate within ZANU-PF should be concluded as a matter of urgency. The NGO executive, from the Union for Sustainable Democracy, argued that Zimbabwe and the opposition parties are better off without Mugabe in the next elections.

"While everyone else concentrates on putting into effect the so-called "implementation matrix", salvaging the now doomed constitution-making process and considering the feasibility of holding an election next year, among other things, Zanu PF needs to preoccupy itself with one thing — and one thing alone — namely the completion of the succession debate within that party. To tiptoe around the issue and pretend it is of no consequence is to deliberately put the future of this country and its people in harm's way," wrote Maziwisa in the Zimbabwe Independent. (ZimInd 2012)

His fears were that President Mugabe has mastered the technique of defeating Morgan Tsvangirai on several occasion to the extent that Tsvangirai and the civil society hope for a change within ZANU-PF in order to defeat its candidate. The civil society and their foreign funders as well as the private press have lost faith in Morgan Tsvangirai.

"The crux of the matter though is our country's political instability is guaranteed to worsen should Mugabe die in office – especially if there is no succession plan in place acceptable to the two well-known factions within Zanu PF. The decision must be made without delay. Nor can the MDC be relied upon to single-handedly avert what could easily develop into an aggravation of our political woes. It is a matter of public record, for instance, that some of Zanu PF's notorious Joint Operations Command members have stated unequivocally that under no circumstances will they salute Morgan Tsvangirai should he attempt to wield any kind of authority as Commander-in-Chief of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces"(ZimInd 2012).

As a result, the coverage of the succession debate, whether imaginary or real, enhances the opposition's chances of winning the next election as it help to plant division and confusion within ZANU-PF. For the private press, much as the story sales, it also tallies well with the agenda of regime change, in which the removal of Mugabe from the leadership of ZANU-PF means a win for the MDC.

Potential successors

Several names have been thrown about by the media as serious potential Robert Mugabe but the newspaper, whether in Zimbabwe or abroad were all unanimous in explaining that none of the potential candidates can equate the same credentials as those of Mugabe himself. This even prompted one newspaper to quote war veterans leader Jabulani Sibanda saying Mugabe will be succeed by Mugabe himself. However, names have been forwarded to the nation by newspaper and the majority of them are current members of the powerful Joint Operations Command (JOC) which is in charge of the country's security.

Front Runners

The obvious two front runners that resonated across all newspapers that covered the succession debate were the current Vice-President Joyce Mujuru and the current Defence Minister Emerson Mnangagwa. Newspapers were even divided as to who they support on the issue as some supported Mujuru others supported Mnangagwa. The newspapers used various methods in order to justify their conclusion the Zimbabwe Independent used a survey of political activists in which they asked them on whom they believed had the better credentials to succeed

Mugabe giving reasons. For the independent, Mujuru seemed to pipe Mnangagwa but for the Diaspora media in their entirety Mnangagwa was almost sure of succeeding Mugabe ahead of Mujuru.

The Zimbabwean Eye wrote as follows about Mnangagwa's chances:

Mnangagwa, 65, was Mr Mugabe's election officer in the violent 2008 presidential run-off. He is seen as the instigator of most political violence against Zanu PF's political opponents and widely blamed for the massacres of opposition supporters in Matabeleland between 1983 – 1987. As a young guerilla, the now Defence Minister was tortured by Rhodesian security forces during the independence war. A lawyer by profession, he despises Mr Mugabe's war-time commander Solomon Mujuru and has never denied his presidential ambitions. While known to be extremely wealthy, his lifestyle is less ostentatious than many in Zanu PF. Many Zimbabweans fear Mnangagwa more than they fear Mugabe and some regional leaders would be concerned if he became president.

The Zimbabwean Eye also provided the credentials of Joyce Mujuru and her chance on the throne:

Joyce Mujuru, 55, the youngest member of Mr Mugabe's first cabinet and wife of Solomon Mujuru, his wartime commander, is presently one of two national vice presidents. A teenager when she joined Mr Mugabe's anti-Rhodesian forces in Mozambique, she is popular in her rural home area and is seen by some regional leaders, especially South Africa, as an uncontroversial successor to Mr Mugabe, untainted by allegations of involvement in violence. A senior member of the Salvation Army, she also has a reasonable working relationship with Movement for Democratic Change leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, presently prime minister in the inclusive government. She is admired by many for the grace with which she endures her husband's public relationships with younger women. The couple is seen by many Zimbabweans as wealthy by unknown means.

The public media, seeing that the succession debate seems to be going offhand, sought to quell the discussion by quoting Kumbirai Kangai, the man who endorsed Mugabe's succession to Chitepo when Ndabaningi Sithole fell out of favour from the powerful Dare ReChiMurenga "War Council). Kangai stated that the successor to Mugabe, "should be a person who has committed, not only to government, but committed to the party, the founding principles of the party. That will be the successor who will be successful." (Sunday Mail 25 November 2012)

The army however, seems to have the last say on who should succeed the president according the Zimbabwean press from within and outside the country. Quoting the late army general Vitalis Zvinvashe, the newspapers claim that the army will not salute anyone who does not have solid war credential, putting paid little aspirations of would be potential successors. Both Mujuru and Mnangagwa however easily qualify as potential successors to Mugabe using the army selection criteria.

Dark Horses

Several names have been put forward as surprise successors with convincing credentials but the current army general Constantine Chiwenga and Security Minister Sydney Sekemera are in front of potential dark horses.

The *Zimbabwean Eye* in corroboration with the *Zimbabwe Independent* provides the credentials of Chiwenga as follows:

General Constantine Chiwenga, 55, commander of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces, is close to Mr Mugabe and chairs the JOC, which many accuse of planning and managing political violence against Morgan Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change over the past ten years. Gen Chiwenga began his political career by fighting with Mr Mugabe in the war of independence. He is now one of the richest men in the security forces and subject to EU sanctions. He hit the headlines before the 2008 elections, saying he would not salute Mr Tsvangirai if he were to win. Before he separated from his wife Jocelyn, the pair seized one of Zimbabwe's most productive white-owned farms, a move that reportedly earned them some \$20m. The farm's previous owner, Roger Staunton, claims that Mrs Chiwenga told him "she had not tasted white blood since 1980 and that she needed just the slightest excuse to kill someone."

The Zimbabwean Eye, in agreement with the Zimbabwe Independent, provides Sekeramayi's credential as follows:

Dr Sydney Sekeramayi, 67, has been in Mr Mugabe's cabinet since independence in 1980. Although a member of the president's inner circle of the party, he has managed to avoid appearing in the headlines and accusations of involvement in the more extreme political violence against the MDC during the last 11 years. A medical doctor by training who studied in Sweden, he has not yet been implicated as a looter of state assets like some of his contemporaries. He is presently minister of state security, in charge of the feared Central Intelligence Organisation. Zanu PF could choose Mr Sekeramayi to succeed Mugabe because of his less controversial history and his long involvement with the party.

Other potential successors touted but with fewer credentials include Indigenization minister Saviour Kasukuwere, ZANU-PF chairman and former ambassador to South Africa Simon Khaya Moyo, Mines minister Obert Mpfu, ZANU-PF secretary for Administration Dydmus Mutasa and Law minister Patrick Chinamasa and Reserve Bank

governor Gideon Gono.

General public's response to the succession debate

The general public was also accorded a chance to have a say to the succession debate through the electronic response section just below a number of published stories. A good number of the responses indicated that openly discussing potential successors was actually helpful and health to both the nation and especially the ZANU – PF party.

One respondent on 09 December 2012 had this to say:

Succession is planning for future leaders after the current leader calls its quits. A party should be for the people and the survival of the party if the succession remains a taboo is compromised as in the event of the death of the leader fierce battles will surface and as a result split ups will occur giving the other rivals a chance to penetrate and as a result the party will lack vision and leaving sustenance of the party in jeopardy. Plan today for prosperous tomorrow

Others were very blunt in their opinions such as was Gibson on 06 January 2013:

HE MUST GO! HE MUST PAVE WAY FOR FRESH BLOOD

Others were more diplomatic by bringing in legal terms and sarcasm as well:

Inga wani tinokurudzirwa kuita ma wills kana kutora mapolicies. Think about it.(we are always encouraged to write wills and funeral policies)

One responded however, commenting on one ZANU-PF legislator Mandy Chimene who spilled the beans on a sinister plot to oust President Mugabe during the 2012 ZANU-PF congress in Gweru believed Mugabe is a hero and deserves to stay in power for ever and there was no need for a succession discussion.

Calling himself Chando Kupisa (hot ice), the responded wrote:

She was telling Mgbe the truth, to resign in time before a heavy defeat, what has he done to beat his rival Chematama, all the good living we have today including zanupf members is because of mdc in government. During his rule even news papers were not spared the herald used to print 2pages and there was no space for mahocho and manheru professor to write rubbish like what they are doing today. Let us vote wisely or risks sliding the country back to those days.

It is clear from the selected responses published that very few respondents supported Mugabe's continuous stay in power, but it was also obvious that there could have been other readers in support of his stay but was denied a chance to be head by the web manager. All respondents however were unanimous that the ZANU-PF party should open up the debate to the nation.

Conclusions and recommendations

The study indicated that discussion the succession debate is healthy to the nation but as long as it is a party issue it should be left to party cadres to decide. It is not for foreigners to decide when and how the succession debate to be done but the fact that it is given a platform to be talked of in the public is good because the succession of ZANU-PF leaders have direct influence to the nation and all newspapers showed that in their coverage. However it was also clear that the people who are leading the call for ZANU-PF discussion are not necessarily ZANU-PF cadres themselves but the civil society, the private media, the opposition political parties and foreign governments as indicated by the heavy involvement of the United States diplomatic cables as espoused by the WikiLeaks. It seems the American government was more interested in the succession debate than the Zimbabweans themselves. The ZANU-Pf succession debate also took a number of twists along tribal and party politics issues in which the Shona tribe has also pitted against the Ndebele tribe in the debate. The swallowed ZAPU also want a share of the spoils. However, it was clear from the newspaper coverage that the battle remains between current Vice President Joyce Mujuru and current Defence Minister Emerson Mnangagwa whose war credentials outwit the rest of contenders.

According to one commentator, Mujuru's biggest weapon is that she is a woman and is able to project herself as a safer face of the militarized ZANU-PF aggression and brazen resort to violence that ZANU-PF is sometimes associated with. On the other hand, Mnangagwa's biggest asset is believed to be his determination to become president and the years he has demonstrated the patience and the steely endurance of a long distance runner.

But both Mujuru and Mnangagwa have openly distanced themselves from having any ambitions to succeed Mugabe. From the findings above, the researchers here believe it is advisable for newspapers to avoid speculating on the succession debate with ZANU-PF or within any other party as that affects the well-being of a nation. It is better that the newspapers wait to be advised of such developments so that they write from an authoritative point of view.

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