The Impact of Voter Exit on Party Survival—Evidence from Zimbabwe

Chipo Dendere
Amherst College

March 2018

Can voter emigration sustain hegemonic undemocratic regimes at a time when elections and democratization are on the rise around the globe? I argue that the forced emigration of young, middle class, urban, educated migrants can sustain incumbent rule of authoritarian regimes. In additional to benefiting from traditional methods of centralizing power incumbent regimes can sustain their rule when opposition supporters are forced to emigrate because of deteriorating economic or political conditions. To substantiate this argument, this article investigates the impact of the exit of an estimated four million Zimbabwean voters on the survival of Zimbabwe’s ZANU PF. My findings suggest that the exit of voters both weakened the opposition movement and relieved political pressures on the incumbent party.
Introduction
What role did the emigration of an estimated two million Zimbabweans play in the survival of Zimbabwe’s ruling party the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) between 2000 and 2010? The goal of this paper is to provide an additional explanation to traditional theories of violence and voter fraud for explaining the survival of long serving dominant parties such as ZANU PF. Voluntary and forced exit of voters can sustain authoritarian regimes by limiting citizen access to participation.

Migration is a natural response to deteriorating political and economic conditions in modern states. When asked why they emigrated, Zimbabwean migrants of every socio-economic class, regional ties and race almost always responded “I had no choice but to leave, the conditions that were no longer palatable”. The majority of migrants are driven from home when they fear that their lives or the lives of loved ones are in danger (Davenport, Moore, & Poe, 2003; Melander & Öberg, 2006). The United Nations estimates that at least 215 million or 3% of the world’s population live outside their country of birth. The massive exodus of people has significant implications on the politics of the receiving and sending countries. The majority of migration research has emphasized the economic implications of migration -brain drain- and more recently the impact of waves of immigrants on receiving country politics. This paper contributes to a new literature on the political consequences of migration- voter exit- on the home country. Drawing on extensive interviews with one hundred Zimbabweans in four countries this paper argues that in addition to benefiting from traditional strategies of power centralization, violence, and, election manipulation, Zimbabwe’s ruling party ZANU PF was a benefactor of reduced opposition support as millions of would be opposition supporters emigrated in the period between 2000 and 2010.

Authoritarian regimes have reluctantly expanded voting rights to citizens living abroad (Lafleur, 2013). Zimbabwe is one of the few remaining regimes that do not allow citizens abroad to vote thus disenfranchising an estimated two to four million Zimbabweans living abroad. Additionally, the majority of Zimbabwean immigrants could not return home to participate for fear of political violence, because of high costs associated with travel. Zimbabwean transnational politics was also limited because most Zimbabweans felt that they could not openly engage in politics for fear of government backlash and because many abroad had not yet legalized their status and where living in the shadow of fear of deportation.

Elections including those in authoritarian regimes are a numbers game and voter turnout matters. The massive wave of emigration from Zimbabwe was sudden, the majority of emigrants had not made long term plans to emigrate. Most anticipated that they would return home soon to participate in politics.

“I never thought I would leave Zimbabwe. I was a teacher just outside Bulawayo. My entire family - my brothers are all here with me- we are educated. We went to the UZ. We are a family of professionals. I owned a house and a car. But they were targeting teachers, accused us of conscientizing rural folks so I left” Vucha activist-teacher, interviewed in the United Kingdom
While the massive wave of emigration in the early 2000s was not a ZANU PF strategy, the party benefited from the exit of supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The forced and voluntary exit of an estimated four million young, educated, professional, urban, risk-taking Zimbabweans like Vucha and his six brothers, who have not been able to participate in elections since 2000, thus contributed to ZANU PF’s hold on political power.

ZANU PF, has been in power since the country gained independence in 1980. The survival of ZANU PF presents an interesting academic puzzle because the party survived the worst political and economic crises in modern history. Failing economies and violent political crises of less magnitude have been credited for the demise of similar parties such as the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in Mexico, the Liberal-Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) in Japan, the United National Independence Party (UNIP) in Zambia and Socialist Party (PS) in Senegal.

“In 2004, I had just received my offer letter to start college in the United States when the government announced that we would only receive Zimbabwean dollars from Western Union. My mother had sent £800 for my ticket. I was being offered thousands of Zimbabwean dollars but British Airways had a new no Zim-dollar policy.” Tau interviewed in USA

Life was becoming increasingly difficult for citizens. Between 2000 and 2009, the annual rate of inflation rose to 516 quintillion percent – that is 516 followed by 18 zeros. Zimbabwe’s inflation surpassed the infamous German economic meltdown of 1923 when inflation reached 29,000 percent. A trip to the grocery store for a loaf of bread was accompanied by a basket of Zimbabwean dollars. Prices were changing by the hour. Those seeking to leave Zimbabwe were forced to buy foreign currency on the black-market as international airlines and other multinational companies refused to accept local currency until most of them left Zimbabwe altogether. And yet, the ZANU-PF regime and the man at the head of the government, Mr. Robert Mugabe, remained in power. After 36 years in power Robert Mugabe was finally ousted by his Vice President, Emmerson Mnangagwa, who came in via a military coup in November 2017, a move that will likely further consolidate the ruling party’s power.

In response to the economic and political crises, Zimbabweans had rallied behind the country’s first viable opposition party, The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), led by Trade Unionist Morgan Tsvangirai. In late 1999, partly in response to increased urban strikes and riots, and more vocal demands for land reform from war veterans, ZANU PF proposed a referendum to change the country’s constitution. Since gaining independence, Zimbabwe had used a constitution negotiated during Lancaster House agreements that brought an end to colonial rule. The government argued that this old constitution was no longer suitable for an independent and sovereign Zimbabwe. The election asked voters to choose between a new constitution that had been approved by Robert Mugabe and ZANU PF or to support Morgan Tsvangirai and his MDC’S NO Vote against the constitution. The majority of Zimbabweans, especially urbanites, voted against the new constitution and ZANU PF lost its first vote in over 20 years.
“To be honest I am not sure I had voted before 1999. My husband and I had two little girls then, we had just bought our home in Letombo park. We went with our new neighbors to vote NO on the constitution. It was electric we stood in line for what felt like 20 hours but we had no intentions of going home. I voted again in 2002 for MDC right before we left.” Angie interviewed in Scotland

The MDC had successfully revived urban politics, and the interests of young professionals like Angie who suddenly had hope for change. In June of the same year ZANU PF lost their super majority in parliament to the MDC new comers. Zimbabwean politics appeared to be following democratic transitional patterns in Senegal where the dominant Socialist Party of Senegal (PS) lost power to the SOPI opposition coalition in 2001, Zambia in 1992 when independence party The United National Independence Party (UNIP) lost power to the opposition coalition Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) and in Malawi where longtime leader Kamuzu Banda failed to extend his rule and his party Malawi Congress Party (MCP) lost to the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the 1994 Presidential Elections.

There was a general expectation that the winds of change ushering in democratic governance had arrived in Zimbabwe, and, that the younger, charming and popular Morgan Tsvangirayi had the electoral support to topple Robert Mugabe. In 2000, a lot of urbanites voted for the first time and in the years that followed the MDC had more success than any other opposition party but could not oust ZANU PF.

**Figure 1 Referendum Vote 2000**

In the elections between 2000 and 2010, ZANU PF’s super majorities declined significantly. Since the unification of ZANU (PF) and PF-ZANU in 1986 Zimbabwe had functioned like a de jure one party state with the ruling party winning over 98% of seats in parliament and at least 80% of the electoral vote (M. Sithole & Makumbe, 1997a). In 2000, ZANU PF lost their supermajority to the MDC who won 47% of the parliamentary seats. This was the first time that the unified ZANU PF had faced significant opposition
from a party that had widespread appeal since Tekere’s bid in 1990. In 1990, Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) gained 18% of the vote and two seats in parliament. Between 1990 and 1999, no other opposition party had managed to gain significant votes or seats in parliament. The opposition was all but dead until the formation of the MDC in 1999.

The first test for the MDC was the 2000 constitutional referendum vote. The MDC advocated for the no vote. Harare had the largest turnout with nearly a third of the total vote population and the majority of Harare voters supported the MDC position. Bulawayo another urban province also had a high turnout and the majority of those who turned out voted no. The No results in predominantly ZANU PF areas in Mashonaland provinces were also striking as nearly half of those turned out also voted no on the new constitution (EISA, 2000). The 2000 referendum vote was met with a lot of public excitement especially among young urban professionals who had largely felt alienated from national politics.

Every election since 2000, had higher turnout than those in the pre-MDC era. Whereas the 1995 House of Assembly election and the 1996 presidential elections had a turnout of 1.5 million and 4.8 million respectively the House of Assembly and Presidential elections between 2000 and 2008 had a turnout of over 5 million each. The ruling party made some gains in the 2005 elections but lost again to the opposition in 2008.

Zimbabwe’s elections in the period under study were neither free no fair because ZANU PF manipulated the electoral playing field. The harassment of opposition supporters which led to forced internal and external migration greatly weakened support for the opposition. The majority of Zimbabwean asylum seekers were fleeing targeted political violence. Many of them reported that they were targeted by the state because of their political affiliation with the opposition. Among those interviewed for this study are
refugees like Vucha, a former activist in rural Matabeleland where he was a teacher left Zimbabwe after his home was set on fire by ZANU PF agents. Waves of large scale migration into South Africa and Botswana often followed the implementation of punitive policies for example the 2000 Citizen Act and operation Murambastvina which led to the forced displacement of over 700 000 (Morreira, 2010).

ZANU PF benefited from their control of state resources (Alvarez, Hall, & Hyde, 2009; Badza, 2008; Collier & Vicente, 2011), and, use of violence and intimidation against the opposition to retain power (Blair, 2002; Bratton, 2011; Bratton & Masunungure, 2007, 2008, 2012; Sachikonye, 2011). The different theories and explanations for the survival of ZANU PF in the last decade agree that the ruling party benefited from the forced exit or withdrawal of its opponents and forced entry of its supporters in elections. I propose that voters engaged in two types of exit; internal exit from politics wherein they refused to vote because of violence or retaliation to claims of voter fraud, and, important for this paper, voters physically exited the political system when they emigrated.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework
This analysis is based on data collected using the non-probability sampling technique of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a technique for locating respondents through referrals among people within the same community under study and it is most effective when conducting research on sensitive topics and or hard to reach communities (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Bloch, 2008). The Zimbabwean migrant population is especially difficult to study because respondents are suspicious of interviews and many live in a shadow of the regime in the home country in some cases deportation in the host country. I relied on a two-person referral for a final interview with the third respondent. Initial respondents were drawn from an extensive network of church leaders from high membership churches including ZAOGA, Zimbabwe Association groups in the United States and the United Kingdom, academics and civil society leaders. The researcher conducted preliminary research between 2011 and 2013 in four countries to build the afore mentioned networks. Multiple snowball starting points were used in each country and city. In total I made contact with more than 300 Zimbabweans in three countries and from there drew a final set of one hundred in depth semi-structured interviews lasting between two and three hours each. Interview respondents also included returned diaspora living in Zimbabwe. The interviews were conducted over an eight-month period beginning in the United States and concluding in Zimbabwe in April 2013, two months ahead of the 2013 elections Data was collected via semi structured interviews. Earlier efforts to conduct web-based anonymous surveys had poor response rates. In person interviews were better for assuring the respondents confidentiality and that their information was safe with a researcher whom they knew. (Further discussion of methodology is available from (Dendere, 2015).

The profile of a Zimbabwean migrant
The profile of exiles is important for understanding the ways in which exit sustains authoritarianism because demographic factors influence political choice, and this in turn influences the structure of the political scene. Additionally, migrant profile is important because **this is also the profile of the middle class and that of a risk-taking participant**
who is willing and able to organize opposition politics (Masunungure, 2011). Past and present research on political movements such as those in the Middle East suggest that the disproportionate involvement in the social movements by young, urban, middle class citizens who had access to social media played a big role in the toppling of regimes in the region (Beissinger, 2012; Papic & Noonan, Sean, 2011). When these voters are forced to exit the political process, their absence has negative consequences for the success of social movements. At a time when ZANU PF was at its weakest facing a strong domestic and international opposition and overseeing the worst economic crisis in history the exodus of millions of Zimbabweans alleviated pressures for change.

The key demographic features of the respondents’ sex, age and, ethnicity and income level are discussed below. The majority of Zimbabwean emigrants are young and generally under the age of 30. Among those who were interviewed, 80 percent of the respondents were between the ages of 21 and 40; over 70 percent of those interviewed were urbanites, having emigrated from Harare (57 percent) and Bulawayo (20 percent) the two major cities; 50 percent of the respondents were male; and 60 percent were highly educated, with at least 20 percent holding a degree beyond the first bachelor’s degree. This profile closely matches the profile of Zimbabwean exiled in larger studies. A survey study by Daniel Makina of 4,654 Zimbabwean migrants in Johannesburg, South Africa shows that the majority 58%, identify political push factors such as torture and harassment as the main cause for emigrating, 83% identify debilitating economy as another important reason. In the Makina study nearly 40% were from Bulawayo while 11% were from Harare, suggesting as I found that the majority of migrants are from the larger cities were the opposition carried most of their support. Data from the International organization of Migration, the Southern African Migration Center and Census Data from South Africa also shows that the majority of Zimbabwean migrants are young to middle age, many have some high school or university education and the majority were from urban areas.

**Gender**

The gender breakdown of the respondents interviewed was 50 percent female and 50 percent male. This is close to the gender breakdown in other key studies, such as those done by Makina et al (2007) where the gender breakdown of their respondents was 41 percent female and 59 percent male, and those by Pasura (2010) where the breakdown was 43 percent female and 57 percent male. In the United Kingdom gender distribution is more equal in part because it was a lot easier for women to find employment in traditionally female dominated sectors in health care and education. However, in South Africa were the majority of illegal migrants might have had to smuggle themselves in via extremely dangerous routes the were more male migrants. Proximity to Zimbabwe has also made it easier for women to travel back home and such the South African female migrants with children in Zimbabwe are more transient.

**Age**

The migrant population in this study is young, with 68 percent of the respondents between the ages of 21 and 40. This is consistent with the two comparable studies of Pasura (2008), Makina (2008) and the 2012 Zimbabwean census data, which showed that at 65% of Zimbabwean population are under 40. We know from previous research that
the young tend to be the ones who push for social movements (Halpern, 2015; London & University, 2013; Scott, 1978; University, 2013). The impact of their exit was felt in the declining public opposition to ZANU-PF. As Zimbabweans emigrated, in particular politically energized urban opposition party leaders, the number of people willing to take on leadership roles in the opposition declined.

Young respondents often said that leaving home is something that happened to them. A 22-year-old woman, Fungai in the United Kingdom said like most of her friends she was informed that she was leaving within a week to join her aunt in the United Kingdom. She had just completed her advanced level exams but she was unsure about the possibility of attending university because of the failing economic conditions. Fungai had never planned to travel to the United Kingdom and when she arrived she had no idea what her knew status first as an undocumented worker meant for her long-term survival in England. At the time of our interview she had regularized her status.

**Ethnic Identity**

The majority of respondents in the sample identified as Shona were Shona (70 percent); this is consistent with the actual group identity breakdown in Zimbabwe where an estimated 85 percent are Shona, 13 percent are Ndebele, and the rest are a combination of other minority groups: white, Asian, and others. The other groups, Ndebele (21 percent) and whites (9 percent), are oversampled, but given the size of the sample it provides a good balance of the diversity of views.
The majority of white Zimbabweans left in the early 2000s in response to the land reform policy that had turned violent. A former farmer, Claire, interviewed in Capetown revealed that her family sought asylum in South Africa where they had family ties after a violent attack on their farm by war veterans. She had a long knife gush on her face, evidence of an attack on her person. The early 2000 period negatively affected the relationship that white Zimbabweans had with the state and their fellow Zimbabweans. When Claire arrived for our interview she spat in my face. She later explained that she had not expected to be interviewed by a black Zimbabwean - a Shona - it brought too any harsh memories she said. Claire’s family like a lot of a lot of well-meaning white Zimbabweans had actively fundraised for the MDC and she felt that her father was murdered not because of his farm but his loyalty to MDC. In the past they had given money to ZANU PFto “keep peace” but with the formation of MDC there was hope within the farming community that a new opening for democracy was possible.

Hometown of Respondents
Consistent with findings from other studies (Makina, 2008; D. Pasura, 2009), the majority of those who left were urbanites. They emigrated from the two largest cities: Harare and Bulawayo. The MDC was an urban party; they relied on urban support to win elections. The mass exodus of urbanites was likely to weaken the opposition in their urban bases, and it did.
Urban participation in politics declined after the 1992 election. ZANU PF had very little incentive to mobilize urbanites who had consistently voted against the ruling party. Urbanites were also disenchanted with ZANU PF because the deteriorating economic conditions hit hard on the working class. Factory strikes had become a daily occurrence in the mid to late 1990s. A lot of urbanites also lost their jobs as the government restructured civil service to meet the demands of the structural adjustment programs. Those in cities also had the networks abroad or the skills needed to navigate a new environment. Diaspora from Bulawayo and Midlands found it a lot easier to move to South Africa because proximity and shared language. Migrants in large Zimbabwean communities in the host country were more engaged in home politics and stayed in touch with family more than those who were isolated or in communities without networks.

**Education**

The migrant population, in addition to being young, is also highly educated; the majorities of emigrants left after completing their high school education and have since furthered their studies. Figure 4 shows the age profiles of respondents for the large-scale project by Daniel Makina (2007) and for this study (2013). In the larger study Makina conducted interviews with over 5,000 Zimbabweans in Johannesburg, South Africa. The average Zimbabwean emigrant in the large-N and small-n studies is highly educated. Respondents in the small-n study have more education than the larger study, but that is probably a result of being a much smaller study with a sample size of 100.
During their time in the diaspora, most Zimbabweans have continued to further their studies, improving on the professional skills they had prior to emigrating. When they first emigrated, the majority of respondents either had a high school education (40 percent) or professional training such as a teacher-training certificate (20 percent). However, by 2013 the majority of respondents reported having a university degree (56 percent). Once people have completed their education, the next logical step is that they should find gainful employment to be able to support themselves and their families. As the economic situation in Zimbabwe declined, the young who were just finishing high school and university were unable to secure employment and opted to leave the country in pursuit of better opportunities abroad.

Among the Zimbabwean diaspora those who furthered their education in the host country have become less engaged in Zimbabwean politics. In 2013, most of those with high earning jobs showed very little interest in returning home to vote. This was particularly evident in South Africa where the comfort of a high earning job a stable income, access to mortgages and other loans, regular access to water and electricity, and access to good quality education for their children stood in contrast the harsh poverty back home and the obvious lack of opportunity. Respondents in the United Kingdom and the United States were more likely to have returned home more times than their counterparts in South Africa.

**Emigration in the politics of the sending countries**

There is a notable growing interest and literature on the relationship between migration and political institutions in the sending countries. Traditional migration studies have focused on the economic impact of emigration on the sending countries. Earlier work by economists argued that emigration could be detrimental to the sending country because oftentimes sending countries lose skilled professionals to receiving countries. However, newer research shows that the effects of brain drain might not be as dire as previously
estimated. Findings from recent studies suggest that the diaspora can not only contribute to economic growth but also positively contribute to the development of strong democratic institutions in their home countries. In essence the diaspora can remit democracy back home (Batista & Vicente, 2011; Docquier, Lodigiani, Rapoport, & Schiff, 2011; Lodigiani & Salomone, 2012; Pfitze, 2012). Scholars in this school of thought argue that the diaspora can remit democracy because they themselves are more likely to absorb the democratic beliefs of the host country and they will in turn influence the beliefs of their friends and family back home by exposing them to the new beliefs on governance. The diaspora can also directly influence politics back home by sponsoring the opposition or funding political revolutions as we saw in the Middle East during the Arab spring.

Following Albert Hirschman’s Voice – Exit – Loyalty voice and exit argument, and, building on the new literature, this paper argues that while the diaspora can contribute by remitting democratic norms, the exit of millions of voters, as was the case in Zimbabwe, undermines the democratic system and benefits incumbent regimes. Modern politics of transitioning countries is no longer dominated by outright dictatorships that disregard and stifle elections. Instead, we have seen an increase in electoral authoritarian regimes, (Cox, 2009; Donno, 2013; Gandhi & Lust-Okar, 2009; Geddes, 2005; Way & Levitsky, 2002). Levitsky and Way(2002) define these regimes systems under which “formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority”(2). Popular examples of these regimes are Zimbabwe under ZANU PF, Russia under Putin, Uganda under Musevini and Mexico during the pre-2000 PRI tenure. An important and unique characteristic of these regimes is that they regularly hold elections. In most cases the elections are marred with reports of violence and almost never regarded as free and fair. More importantly ruling parties consider elections to be an important avenue through which they maintain their legitimacy.

Ultimately, elections in democracies and electoral authoritarian regimes are a numbers game. Politicians in democracies and hybrid regimes alike depend on votes to stay in power. Those who are able to get their supporters to the polls win elections. In non-democracies the ability to prevent opposition supporters from participating in elections also guarantees electoral wins. Hirschman (1970) proposed the “exit” vs. “voice” dichotomy by which citizens unhappy with the domestic situation choose either to emigrate (exit) or to protest and contribute to political change (voice). Undemocratic regimes were only too happy to see the rebels leave. According to Hirschman, in the long term the exit of would-be opposition supporters would lead to democratization. In the Zimbabwean case and similar regimes, the exit of would-be opposition supporters provided a much-needed lifeline for the vulnerable incumbent party.

Kapur (2010), identifies the absence channel, he argues that the exit of talented individuals diminishes the supply of citizens willing to bolster political institutions. In Zimbabwe, the loss of professionals had a huge negative impact on all sectors of society including health and education, for example, Zimbabwe has lost over 50% of medical providers (Chikanda, 2006). Voter exit also affects the demand for better political and
economic institutions. Kapur (2010) writes “The more educated (and internationally marketable) are often better positioned to exercise “voice” and press for the changes in the status quo”. Over time, Zimbabwe’s activist and intellectual communities have become greatly diminished as more active citizens emigrated and those who remained were silenced by state repression on voices of opposition.

Masunungure (2010) also concluded that the mass exodus of Zimbabweans since 2000 dampened voice. The profile of a Zimbabwean voter, that of a young, educated male who emigrated for political reasons matches the profile of those who actively opposed the ZANU PF regime. Indeed, in response to excessive use of political violence members of the MDC who had the means to emigrate left the country. Tinotenda, 33, interviewed in Scotland emigrated in 2008 during the campaign for the bloody-runoff elections. In his capacity as a security officer within the MDC offices he claimed to have witnessed the death of his fellow comrades and he no longer felt hope that the situation in Zimbabwe would change. At the time of our interview in 2013, he had withdrawn from politics, the people in his Scotland networks knew nothing of his past as an organizer and took him for one of the many economic immigrants in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwean immigrants are not unique to other vulnerable populations in their distrust of figures of authority or anyone who might be an official. An important observation from the Zimbabwean diaspora is that both those who had legal status and those in various stages of legalizing their stay in the host country asked the researcher “Who sent you?” a probe to ensure that the researcher was not a member of the ZANU PF government or immigration officials in the host country. This fear of discovery forced most Zimbabweans to disengage with home politics and as a result much of the transnational political activity among Zimbabweans especially those in the United Kingdom was time bound. Among those interviewed for this study a small majority reported that they became engaged in MDC politics openly because it was the surest way to get papers. Julianna a 45-year-old woman from Harare, living and working in Washington DC said she had fled the increasing political violence in Zimbabwe in 2002 and came to the United States but she would not have been a vocal opposition supporter had it not been for the need to strengthen her asylum claim. Although she was an opposition supporter she had always felt that her participation and her vote choice was private. Like Julianna, Blessing, a 55-year-old hotel worker in England recalled an incident in which more than ten of her housemates were victims of a Home Office deportation raid. Many of them had spoken to officials whom unbeknownst to them were not from a charity organization but individuals collecting information on behalf of the Home Office.

The research was also conducted in the months leading to the 2013 elections. The last election in 2008 had been very violent. A group of respondents interviewed in Scotland emigrated to the UK following the bloody 2008 elections and they were wary about disclosing any details about their families back home. A young man who asked only to be identified as Z was forced to leave his home in the high-density area of Mufakose and sought refuge with a cousin who lived in the low-density parts of Greendale because of the increased violence targeting youth in his home area. Early attempts to conduct an
anonymous online survey suffered from a low response rate. Further inquiries with interview subjects revealed that most immigrants are very wary of responding to online political questionnaires because they do not know how the data might be used. With this contextual background in mind the decision was made to conduct in-depth interviews instead of household surveys or online surveys.

**Middle Class frustration increased opposition support**

Middle and working-class frustrations facilitated the formation of the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), led by Trade Union leader Morgan Tsvangirai. The formation of the MDC would present the ruling party with its first strong opposition movement since Tekere’s ZUM in 1991 (Meldrum, 1992; Moore, 1991; M. Sithole & Makumbe, 1997b). The MDC was founded on the back of a strong civic movement, accentuating the need for political and economic reforms, and the party was able to capitalize on the disgruntlement of urban citizens over the eroding economic conditions. The MDC came at a time when the younger generation of civic activists was no longer paralyzed by the fear of confronting the “Party of Liberation” and the ideological burden of liberation politics. The 1990s were a time of hopeful and energetic politics (Raftopoulos, 1992; Masipula Sithole, 1997).

The combination of constitutional reform and trade union activism provided the opposition with a broad national organizational reach and an expansive campaign opportunity that radically challenged the declining exclusivity of ZANU-PF’s nationalism. The newly founded MDC managed to engage thousands of activists and ordinary citizens across the country in a message of Change or Chinja, Ngukula Izenzo, a direct call to change the regime. Their “open palm” symbol became commonplace in towns and cities. For the first time in decades, the air of possibility and hope dominated the political space. The MDC’s mobilization and activism were rewarded in September 2000 when they successfully launched the “No” vote for constitutional reform. This would be the first time the ruling party would lose an election since independence. The constitution vote was the ruling party’s idea and their attempt at showing wavering supporters that they were still in control. When the majority of Zimbabwe’s voted no, the party acted in a very democratic way by accepting the election outcome.

**Opposition to ZANU-PF**

Until the 2000 referendum election, ZANU PF had sailed through elections, winning every election with super-majorities. ZANU PF had enjoyed popular ratings especially in urban areas. However, starting in 1999 there was a marked decline in ZANU-PF popularity (see table below). In 1999, only 29 percent of respondents said that they felt very close to ZANU-PF and only 5 percent said they felt close to the MDC. By 2009 only 8 percent of respondents said that they felt close to the ZANU-PF and 37 percent of respondents said that they felt close to the MDC. Of note is that, over time, support for other opposition parties that are not MDC had also declined as support for the MDC rose. A troubling pattern of Zimbabwean responses is the high number of respondents refuse to identify a political party preference. The majority of respondents are likely to say that
they do not feel close to any party. This supports a general theory of voter exit and or withdrawal from politics.

The profile of the opposition supporters who remained behind: urban, young, educated, and, unemployed, matches that of those who emigrated. The table below shows that the relationship between being urban and supporting the opposition remained strong from 1999 to 2009. If support for ZANU-PF was declining (table above) and inversely the support for the opposition was rising then why that support did not translate into votes? The explanation that I provide is that the core opposition supporters as identified in the table above are the same people who left. In order to win the elections, the opposition needed a decisive win, a super-majority win that would be fraud-proof. Slight wins were open to manipulation by ZANU PF. For example, in 2008 the MDC failed to take over the presidency because the official election results reported that the opposition had only received 49 percent of the vote instead of the 51% needed to secure a decisive win. The MDC had produced its own results that indicated that the opposition had won the election with 52% of the vote with a three percent margin of error. In fact, 80 percent of respondents in our modest study said that they would have voted for the MDC had they been able to vote in the last decade. Clearly these findings are based on evidence from a small-targeted sample of Zimbabweans in the diaspora but the support for the MDC in the diaspora is evident from the mock elections held in U.K. concurrently with elections in the home country.

The exit of millions of potential opposition supporters had real implications for how well the MDC did during elections in the last decade. The majority of respondents attributed their decision to emigrate to frustration with the failing economy as a result of poor governance. If voter anger had translated to votes during elections then it is unlikely that ZANU-PF would have been able to hold on to power. Instead opposition supporters voted with their feet by leaving the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The profile of the Opposition supporter</th>
<th>R1-1999</th>
<th>R2-2004</th>
<th>R3-2005</th>
<th>R5-2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opposition Support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>-1.214</td>
<td>-0.542</td>
<td>-1.094</td>
<td>-1.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.23)**</td>
<td>(2.78)**</td>
<td>(4.37)**</td>
<td>(2.70)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.000</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.41)</td>
<td>(1.44)</td>
<td>(3.42)**</td>
<td>(0.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.753</td>
<td>0.882</td>
<td>0.750</td>
<td>0.906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.08)**</td>
<td>(6.09)**</td>
<td>(5.90)**</td>
<td>(3.11)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>-0.243</td>
<td>-0.606</td>
<td>-0.062</td>
<td>-0.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.38)</td>
<td>(3.09)**</td>
<td>(0.25)</td>
<td>(2.53)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Household</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.253</td>
<td>0.249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.09)</td>
<td>(0.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.979</td>
<td>0.394</td>
<td>1.135</td>
<td>1.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.36)</td>
<td>(0.88)</td>
<td>(2.83)**</td>
<td>(1.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Opposition Voters’ Profile
Voter exit also benefited ZANU-PF because some in the diaspora began to feel frustrated with the opposition. This might explain the 16 percent of respondents who said that they supported ZANU-PF. Some of the respondents also admitted that they joined MDC at its inception in 1999 because they believed that the new party was the only alternative to ZANU-PF rule. As professionals and students, they had been active members of MDC; however, after the party lost the 2002 election and then the 2005 election many doubted that any party could win a free and fair election. When asked if the problems that MDC was facing at home had changed their perception about the MDC as a viable opposition to ZANU-PF, the interviews suggested that those in the diaspora were frustrated with the events at home. Many of them follow the news at home every day (77 percent) and others at least once a week (20 percent) with only a minority reporting that they hardly follow the news. But Zimbabweans abroad such as those I spoke to at home admit that although MDC is an imperfect party there is great need for an alternative to ZANU-PF rule. Emigration presents a big challenge for parties like the MDC and indeed any party that relies on the diaspora for support because their support does not translate into votes. In their absence they cannot vote.

**Figure 6 Diaspora Party Identification**

Migration reduces turnout for the opposition

Many factors are at play in an election but ultimately elections are a numbers game. The party with the most votes wins the election. In every election since 2000 while votes for ZANU-PF declined, the support for the opposition was not big enough for a decisive win. In the 2002 elections Morgan Tsvangirai narrowly failed to win the presidency. Turnout amongst the remaining urbanites was high, but their support base was not as big as it had been in the 2000 election. The MDC losses in 2002 can be tied to their declining support in urban areas and the fact that the ruling party had maintained a strong hold in rural areas. In 2002, turnout was an impressive 3,130,913 (55.4 percent) but this reduced to 2,537,240 (43 percent) in the first round of the 2008 election. In 2008 the economy was at its worst and another wave of emigration began just before the March 2008 elections.
In the diaspora an impressive 80 percent of respondents said that they identified with the MDC but only 36 percent of those in the diaspora have participated in elections. Among those who have voted just 29 percent voted in an election where they supported the MDC.

![Voting between 2000-2010](image)

**Figure 7 Diaspora Voting Patterns between 2000-2010**

An overwhelming 64 percent of respondents said they had never voted in any election between 2000 and 2010. Among those who said they had never voted 42 percent of the respondents said that they have never voted in Zimbabwean election because they had been out of the country during every major election. Another finding of importance was that 9 percent of respondents said that they had never voted because when they left the country they were not yet of age. That group of respondents would now be in their late 20s and early 30s and yet they have never participated in the democratic act of voicing their preference for leadership because Zimbabwe does not allow for external voting and most of the young people would not have been able to afford to return home because of the prohibitive costs.

**Voter Exit Prevents Participation, which benefits ZANU-PF**

In some established democracies, when someone leaves the country they are not necessarily giving up their right to vote. The majority of countries voting provisions for their citizens in the diaspora, they either allow for mail-in ballots. In Africa, the provision of the diaspora vote is increasingly popular with recent laws passed in Nigeria and Kenya. The Zimbabwean diaspora has been lobbying the ZANU PF government for the right to vote for decades, in 2018, the Supreme Court reserved judgement on the hearing. In the past the courts routinely refused to hear diaspora vote cases. Thus, when a Zimbabwean emigrated unless they are willing to spend money travel back home during the election. In this section I discuss additional barriers to political participation faced by those in the diaspora. These barriers I argue benefited ZANU-PF.

**Barriers to Diaspora Vote:**

Zimbabwe does not allow for external voting with the exception of citizens who hold
diplomatic posts abroad. The constitution in 1980 was ratified to allow for postal of voting for Zimbabweans living abroad while in service to the government. In 2005 the Electoral Act was amended limiting voting rights for those abroad and there is no mention of voting at a diplomatic mission “Eligibility to vote by post is limited to persons ordinarily resident in Zimbabwe who are resident in the constituency (electoral district) in which the election is to take place or where resident in that constituency 12 months preceding polling day and have good reason to believe that they will be absent from the constituency or unable to attend at the polling station by reason of being ‘absent from Zimbabwe in the service of the Government of Zimbabwe’ (section 71(1)(b)).”

The electoral authorities have taken great care to ensure that the external voting process is transparent for the minority who are granted the right to vote. However, the authorities in Harare have been unwilling to expand voting rights to the millions of Zimbabweans living abroad. In the last decade Zimbabweans in the diaspora, especially those in the UK, have been very vocal in their demand for the right to vote. In 2005 a coalition of Zimbabweans resident in the UK lodged a case against the government to the Zimbabwe Supreme Court (Case no. SC 22/05). The Supreme Court dismissed the case arguing that it did not hold any merit despite the fact that the constitution provides suffrage for all Zimbabweans regardless of race, creed or place of residency at the time of an election (Tungwarara, 2005). This ruling had grave implications for Zimbabwean democracy. By denying the diaspora a vote ZANU-PF was disenfranchising more than a quarter of the country’s population. It is not over-reaching to conclude that the ruling party was afraid that if those in the diaspora were allowed to vote they would have voted in support of the opposition and brought an end too ZANU-PF rule.

Zimbabweans in the diaspora have accused the ZANU-PF government of discriminating against dispersians by only allowing a minority of population to vote. In response to the court case, the Zimbabwean government, represented by the Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, denied that Zimbabweans living abroad were being discriminated against by the absence of external voting provisions in the constitution. The Minister who was cited as the first respondent also argued that the electoral law disqualified voters from the voting process who had been absent from Zimbabwe for 12 months or more prior to the election. When Zimbabweans in the diaspora pointed to the voting rights as documented in the Southern African Development Committee (SADC) Declaration of Human Rights Charter, the government argued that the SADC charter is a “guide that SADC countries must follow towards a future democratic idea, (but that) it is not a legal document that is binding on member states”(Tungwarara, 2005).

The government response to demands of enfranchisement by the diaspora is consistent with the ZANU-PF response to most if not all demands for better governance from citizens in the last decade. ZANU-PF has used democratic institutions such as courts to strengthen their hold on power. In 2012 the diaspora vote issue once again came to the forefront of Zimbabwean politics during the constitution making deliberations. The Constitution Committee (COPAC) sought out a diversity of opinions and feedback on the constitution including opinions of Zimbabweans living abroad. The Zimbabwean diaspora asked for three provisions to be included in the constitution; dual citizenship, devolution of power and a diaspora vote. Dual Citizenship is important for Zimbabweans
who have established residency abroad but also wish to maintain ties with their homeland. Zimbabweans living abroad argue that they should not be asked to choose between places where they have built homes for their families and their country of birth. Dual citizenship and a provision for diaspora vote would allow Zimbabweans to participate freely in their host countries as well as in the affairs of their homeland. Most Zimbabweans who migrated continue to maintain strong ties with family members who remained in Zimbabwe.

ZANU-PF party leaders have simply ignored the current draft insisting instead on 26 amendments to the current document, which could result in an entirely new document. Under their proposed draft ZANU-PF clearly objects to dual citizenship (“Zimbabwe’s constitution process a battleground,” n.d.). International and local political analysts and journalists alike argue that ZANU-PF’s objection to dual citizenship is politically motivated and interest driven. Opposition party supporters argue that ZANU-PF is afraid that dual citizenship will work in favor of the opposition parties during elections. In recent years the Zimbabwean government has argued that the current economic and political situation in Zimbabwe makes it impossible to establish external voting provisions for Zimbabweans in the diaspora.

With regard to the diaspora vote the constitutional draft was silent, and opposition leaders appeared to be backtracking on their support for the measure. The MDC’s national Secretary, Mr. Bhebhe, in September 2012 argued that his party was now tabling the issue of the diaspora vote because their fear of rigging of postal votes by the ZANU-PF. Mr. Bhebhe said that his party’s position was that the diaspora vote be addressed at a later date as “[i]t is not clear how the government would allow the generality of Zimbabweans outside the country, some of whom are illegal immigrants, to vote. The parties (in government) agreed that the rest of the Diasporas should be left out for now.” He added that while the MDC-T agrees “in principle” that citizens in the Diaspora should be allowed to vote, there are “united liberation movements” in Southern Africa that will do anything to support their counterparts in elections.” The MDC is now arguing that governments in the SADC region would rig election outcomes in support for ZANU-PF because leaders in the region are local to ZANU PF because of shared experiences in the liberation movements.

MDC’s current position on the diaspora vote was in direct contradiction with past statements by then MDC President Mr. Tsvangirai who on a number of occasions in the past openly supported the diaspora vote. The MDC Prime Minister in 2011 called for the restoration of the Diaspora Vote, which was scratched from the books by ZANU-PF in the late 80s as they feared the votes of exiled white Zimbabweans. The Prime Minister said, “The MDC believes that all adult Zimbabweans, regardless of their station either at home or in the diaspora, must be allowed to vote in the next and in any election if democracy has to assume its generic meaning out of today’s political transition.”(Marambanaye, n.d.).

The ZANU-PF has remained consistent in their opposition to the diaspora vote. ZANU-PF Minister of Defense Emerson Mnangangwa, spoke on behalf of his party on the
Chipo Dendere

diaspora vote issue arguing that the MDC wanted those in diaspora to be able to vote because they are the only ones who can address voters in Europe. The party has consistently argued that the sanctions placed on their top leaders barring them from visiting the most western countries including the United Kingdom home to the largest Zimbabwean diaspora population made a diaspora vote hostile for the ruling party. Mr. Mnangangwa repeated the party line that, “Sanctions must go first and if they don’t, those in the diaspora would not be able to vote until they returned home”.

On July 10, 2012 Parliament engaged a debate on the Electoral Amendment Bill brought forth by ZANU-PF spokesperson and Minister of Justice Mr. Patrick Chinamasa. MDC-W, MP Mr. Mkhosi argued that parliament should allow the diaspora vote arguing that

“Our children that have left this country to reside and work in other countries and these children are now being denied their birthright to determine the future of this country because ultimately, they will come back here and deal with the mess that we the elders have created. Let us allow them, they are our children, they should be allowed to come or to vote wherever they are. In case you do not want those that are in Europe to do the vote, why not allow those that are in the SADC. We are members of the SADC countries; allow them to vote for their future. When you vote, you will be voting for your future because the government that will be in place will be there to look after your future.” (Zimbabwe Parliament Debate, 2012)

In response the Minister of Justice reiterated that those in the diaspora could always return home to register to vote. And yet, even as he said it, parliament was not in agreement about the dates for the election. The Minister argued that there were an additional “101 reasons” why Zimbabwe is not ready for the diaspora vote chief among his arguments was that Zimbabwe was under sanctions imposed by western countries, in particular Great Britain where the majority of the Zimbabwean diaspora resides. He argued that the sanctions placed travel restrictions on senior ZANU PF officials and that their inability to campaign in the United Kingdom would put a damper on the democratic process. Mr. Chinamasa also argued that Zimbabwe did not have the financial resources required for multiple polling stations abroad. Like Mr. Mnangangwa, Mr. Chinamasa argued that the sanctions undermined the democratic process. Referring to the impact of travel bans on the ZANU-PF elites he said, “those individuals (referring to sanctioned elites) are senior people in a political party and one of the fundamental elements of democracy is that the voters must be accessible to all those candidates who want to seek office. They must be accessible to all not only to a few. It must not be a hostage population, only free and accessible only to one of us” (Zimbabwe Parliament Debate, 2012).

It is highly unlikely that the Zimbabwean diaspora will get their vote (anytime soon). The ZANU PF position is consistent with the party’s position on the diaspora at the time. Opposition infighting also contributed to the struggle for the diaspora vote. The Tsvangirayi led opposition faction in public has always supported the call for the diaspora vote but in parliament they raised concerns that a diaspora vote in Africa would
be rigged by ZANU PF. The majority of Zimbabweans in the diaspora, almost two million, are resident in South Africa. The Zuma government remains one of the biggest MDC cheerleaders on the continent. The second largest Zimbabwean diaspora is resident in Botswana, another pro-MDC government. With the exception of the Cha Chama Mapinduzi regime in Tanzania former opposition parties lead most Southern African governments with more ties to MDC than they do with ZANU-PF. At his wedding the late Prime Minister Tsvangirai had a minister from the Zambian cabinet as his best man.

Transnational Fear Dampens Political Participation

The majority of Zimbabweans who emigrated in the last two decades did so under extreme conditions of duress. In particular, white Zimbabweans who emigrated, left behind burning homes and many have not returned and do not know if neighbors or employees survived the violence. Carla, a white Zimbabwean woman interviewed in Capetown revealed that it was two years before her family had full details on the way in which her father died. Peter a hotel manager in High Wycombe had never thought of himself has British, but, he was grateful for family connections in the U.K. when his farm just outside Bulawayo was attacked. Their cattle ranch including more than 200 cattle were burned to ashes. Peter walks with a slight limp – what he calls his parting gift from home.

Back home in Zimbabwe, ZANU PF had increased their assault on white Zimbabweans stripping them of their citizenship and property. Robert Mugabe would routinely give speeches arguing that white Zimbabweans had no claim to their country of birth, at the ZANU PF congress in 2000 he said, Our party must continue to strike fear in the heart of the white man, our real enemy," (Chris Chinaka, 2000). ZANU PF targeted white farmers who either had real financial ties to the MDC or were rumored to have given financial support to the opposition. Like the majority of Zimbabweans, white farmers had been hopeful that the new opposition could turn the economy around and indeed some of them, like Mariah whose family owned one of the largest tobacco farms they had stopped giving patronage to ZANU PF and directed support to the opposition. When I asked white Zimbabweans if they would join rallies in the diaspora they all said no. The situation has changed slightly since 2016 but the majority especially older white Zimbabweans would prefer to disengage in home politics altogether.

Simon, now a lecturer at a university in Capetown was a student activist at the University of Zimbabwe. The day he left home he had no final destination in mind. For six months he worked cleaning trains in Botswana but as violence against Zimbabwean nationals increased he paid smugglers who delivered him in Johannesburg where he joined a commune of homeless Zimbabweans for a year. Wali, a journalist left Zimbabwe soon after the attacks on independent media houses. He had the phone number of a colleague in Capetown. They had previously discussed that should he need to escape his colleague would give him shelter in South Africa. Unfortunately for Wali and countless poor migrants his friend was no longer reachable. The day Wali arrived in Capetown, after failing to reach his friend, Wali slept on a bench at the terminus where he was later mugged and saved by a group of semi-homeless Zimbabweans who lived under a bridge. When we visited the bridge in 2013 we met at least 20 young Zimbabwean men
who were clearly strung out on a variety of drugs.

Those who went to the United Kingdom before 2003 did not need a visa to enter the country. One only needed to establish their tourist intentions upon arrival to get a stamp of entry. Regardless of their entry route, the majority of migrants sold their belongings to pay for passage to the host country. Therefore, many had very little to no material ties to the home country. On arrival in the host country most Zimbabweans lived under the shadow of fear, fear that the situation at home would further deteriorate, fear of being deported by the host country and fear that the long arm of ZANU PF’s secret police would find them and cause them harm. This fear explains the minimal transnational activity of Zimbabweans abroad.

Wali, Simon and others who have finally curved out a decent life for themselves in South Africa did not want to risk their stable situations by engaging in politics actively. Wali said he missed journalism but did not believe that the ruling party would change their ways and he like Simon and Peter did not think diaspora voices could make a difference politically. Wali was more interested in raising funds to bring his sister to join him in Capetown.

Experiences of the Zimbabwean diaspora are quite diverse. Groundbreaking work on Zimbabwean diaspora politics by Kuhlmann (2010), drawing on interviews with more than 40 activists in greater London reveals that transnational activism is alive and well. Pasura’s ethnographic study at pubs and with the prominent activist group vigil revealed that their Zimbabwean diaspora is not heterogeneous, his findings also suggested that those who drawn to activism in the 2000-2013 era where been motivated by their undocumented status in the United Kingdom. Indeed, participation in MDC meetings in the U.K and USA along with interviews with their members revealed that political activism was bound by people’s legal status in the host country. The situation has changed a lot since 2016 when the #thisflag protests swept across diaspora communities drawing Zimbabweans of each socio-economic class, ethnicity and religious background.

Leaders diaspora activist and political groups MDC UK/US, Zimbabwe Associations in the UK/US, Nehanda Radio, Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO organizations, and Zim Vigil among others are generally driven by political motivations but the involvement of their members has been more transient and tied to personal motivations. The MDC chairman in the United States expressed concern that their membership numbers were directly influenced by the demands for papers. The majority of their regular dues paying members are individuals applying for asylum. ZANU PF membership in the diaspora has also been shaped by the political conditions in the home country but most ZANU PF supporters tend to have stronger ideological ties to the party. Until the recent shifts in November 2017, ZANU PF members in the diaspora operated in the shadow of fear of being identified with a party that was generally shunned in Western countries.

The Zimbabwe based political parties have failed to bring strong ties with the diaspora community notwithstanding weak membership in the MDC diaspora factions. The average migrants (between 2000 and 2010) fell under Pasura (2008) definition of
“dormant members” who are not active -- would not participate in protests- but are highly interested and knowledgeable about the political system at home. As discussed earlier, fear of immigration law enforcement in the host country and imagined ZANU PF played an important role in migrants’ lack of political action. Respondents also said that they did not feel that the MDC was interested in recruiting them for membership. Tsvangirai and the MDC leadership did not hold major rallies in the diaspora between 2000 and 2010. MDC diaspora offices where not officially recognized by the party until 2006. Charles, 36, left Bulawayo in 2005, he had been an active MDC youth organizer in his community. Charles said on arrival in the United Kingdom he had hoped to connect with other “brothers from the movement and strategize ways we could send money back home and other equipment to retaliate operation clean-up but when I landed I couldn’t feel the political energy. Everyone was tired. It was all about the shifts”. Indeed, diaspora politics has been very fragmented but there is great variation in this. Zimbabwe Opposition politics in the United States has not been active and Zimbabwe based officials had their first US tours after the formation of the unity government. The United States diaspora is more spread out than the U.K. diaspora and much more difficult to organize.

The MDC split in 2005 also negatively impacted diaspora activity. Migrants tend to settle in areas with a large population of their social network. Zimbabwean migrants with the exception of those who emigrated primarily for education or work opportunities tend to live near family or friends from home thus the diaspora is loosely divided by regional ties. Ndebele MDC activists interviewed in the diaspora revealed that many in their community felt that the split within MDC had occurred along tribal lines. Vucha said, “most of us were really shocked that Tsvangirai had fallen out with Gibson Sibanda, it felt as though Ndebele contributions are not appreciated”, in the United States the MDC office in Washington DC was run by Ndebele officials who had facilitated asylum for hundreds of Zimbabweans. An MDC official in Washington said, “we will keep working with the party but most of our people feel a little disappointed”, many Ndebele’s I spoke to felt more than a little disappointed. While they did not support the secessionist movement Mtwakhazi they felt detached from Zimbabwean politics. In South Africa those who speak Ndebele had an easier time with assimilating and took extra efforts to claim a South African identity because of Xenophobic attacks against foreigners. In the end a combination of poor party mobilization by the party, fear of the state (host and home) resulted in very weak transnational activity.

Remittances strengthened ZANU-PF hold to power
The puzzle at the heart of this project is the survival of ZANU-PF under the worst economic crisis in global history. Economic voting literature informs us that voters tend to vote out the incumbent if the economy is not doing well. The Zimbabwean economy has not been doing well for more than fifteen years. I argue that while the economy declined remittances from the diaspora provided a financial lifeline for the struggling regime. While over 90 percent of Zimbabweans in the country where unemployed between two and four million Zimbabweans had found employment outside the country and the majority of those in the diaspora were remitting money on a regular basis.
The table above shows the remitting behavior of Zimbabweans between 2008 and 2013. On average Zimbabweans interviewed for this project said they remitted at least $100 a month. By the time these interviews took place the amount being sent home had declined for a number of reasons in particular the declining global economy. In earlier studies people were sending back as much as $500 a week. These personal reports are substantiated by data from the World Bank, the Zimbabwean government and other agencies that report on global economies. According to the International Fund for Agriculture, in 2008 when the Zimbabwean economy was at its worst the diaspora remitted nearly US$361 million and that number doubled in 2009. By 2012 diaspora remittances made up to 40 percent of the local GDP, reaching almost US$1, 4 billion (Makina, 2012). The receipt of remittances sustained the staggering economy allowing those who remained at home to continue purchasing local goods and services. Most families, urban and rural alike, depended heavily on support for everyday basic commodities from their family members in the diaspora (Bracking & Sachikonye, 2006). Sachikonye et al (2006) found that one in three families in both rural and urban areas were receiving some sort of financial support from a family member in the diaspora. Most families tie their survival in the last decade to the receipt of remittances from the diaspora.

Remittances funded the survival of ZANU-PF. At a time when the country was not producing any goods for export the ZANU-PF regime had a steady foreign currency income. The chart below offers a visual representation of the impact of remittances. As the economy declined, remittances increased; remittances became the second major source of national economy after agriculture.
The availability of remittances allowed the government to ignore demands for change. The government had no reason to provide welfare because they knew that Zimbabweans would get support from friends and family abroad. Zimbabweans in the diaspora did not just remit money, they also remitted basic goods rice, bread, cooking oil and in some cases fuel. ZANU-PF did not need to change their economic policies. For example, the government left the indigenization act in place, even though it was hurting the economy, because they had no incentive to do so. While the government could not tax the citizens resident in the country, they could tax those working high paying jobs abroad. Voter Exit was the gift that kept giving for ZANU-PF. ZANU-PF would speak negatively about those in the diaspora all the while benefiting from their exit.

**Concluding thoughts**

ZANU-PF survived the most difficult decade since independence because a significant population of Zimbabweans that would have handed the revolutionary party electoral defeat were exiled. In the decade starting in 2000 an estimated 4 million Zimbabweans left their country in response to the deteriorating political and economic situation. The profile of those who left is young, urban, educated – this is the profile of individuals who typically support the opposition and bring regime change. When this population of Zimbabweans left, they created a political vacuum that weakened the opposition movement. Over 80 percent of Zimbabweans in the diaspora say that if given the opportunity they would have voted for the opposition. However, Zimbabwe has no provision for external voting and thus disenfranchised millions of its citizens. Ultimately elections are a numbers game and the opposition suffered from the exit of its supporters.
It is a puzzle that ZANU-PF survived with its government managing the worst economy in the world. The exit of millions of its workforce should have brought the Zimbabwean government to its knees and maybe forced the regime to concede defeat, and it did, but it also provided income for the failing government. ZANU-PF benefited from income from remittances. The average Zimbabwean was sending between $100 and $500 a week to family in Zimbabwe. The government was able to tax the foreign currency and feed the income into the broke government. Citizen participation determines the quality of a political system and its processes. When voters vote and engage their politicians through petition and in some cases demonstrations it legitimizes the political system. When voters are prevented from participating, are disengaged and or stay away from politics the quality of the democratic process is undermined.
Bibliography


Chipo Dendere


101%20reasons%20exiles%20can%20vote%20minister/news.aspx


