Heal the beloved country: Zimbabwe's polarized electorate
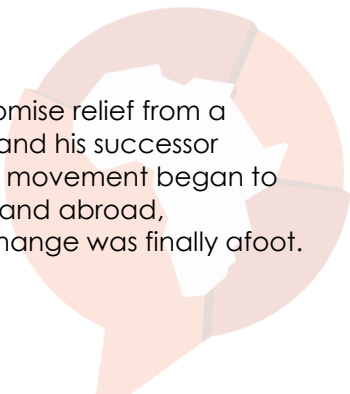
By Michael Bratton and Eldred V. Masunungure

For a moment, Zimbabwe's July 30, 2018, elections seemed to promise relief from a traumatic political past. An aging autocrat had been deposed and his successor intoned pledges of "a new dispensation." A dormant opposition movement began to reawaken to opportunities for open political campaigning. At home and abroad, Zimbabwe's well-wishers allowed themselves a cautious hope that change was finally afoot.

But change was not to be.

Another disputed election

Instead, the 2018 electoral contest left the nation deeply divided (Reuters, 2018). The run-up to the vote reproduced patterns of unfair campaigning, one-party dominance, and political intimidation inherited from the past. Election observers noted that the voters' register remained opaque and biased, that the ruling party showered its supporters with public handouts (including food aid), and that soldiers, party militants, and traditional leaders continued to threaten the electorate, especially in rural areas.[1] These combined irregularities helped the incumbent Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) to assemble enough votes for a two-thirds super-majority (180 out of 270 seats) in the lower house of Parliament.

The presidential election, however, was a far closer affair. According to official results, President Emmerson Mnangagwa secured 50.7% of the valid votes against 44.3% for the challenger, Nelson Chamisa of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Alliance (Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, 2018). This outcome was broadly consistent with Afrobarometer surveys of voter opinion conducted before the election.[2] Yet Chamisa cried foul; he denounced parliamentary results as "rigged," raised suspicions about delays in tallying the presidential count, and, before an official result was announced, declared that he had won the presidency. If nothing else, the challenger's refusal to accept the election outcome revealed a yawning chasm between the entrenched positions of the top political contenders. And the close and contested presidential result signaled that Mnangagwa had not succeeded in his bid to use the 2018 elections to legitimize his hold on power.

A divided nation?

This policy paper uses Afrobarometer data to explore whether elite divisions are mirrored at the popular level. It asks: Are ordinary Zimbabweans split along political lines? If so, how deeply and over which issues? And what, if anything, can be done?

The analysis documents a polarized electorate. It measures divisions within the general public with reference to deficits in various types of trust: social trust between individuals, trust between members of rival political parties, and popular trust in non-partisan institutions that are designed to reconcile political differences.

In the days following the election, disgruntled citizens in the capital city took to the streets to protest the skewed parliamentary result and the slow pace of the presidential count. The regime's response was brutal; soldiers opened fire on unarmed protesters, killing at least six. The army's over-reaction affirmed fears expressed during the campaign that the election would culminate in state-sponsored post-election violence (Afrobarometer, 2018). The

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[1] For example, the Joint International Republican Institute/National Democratic Institute Zimbabwe International Election Observation Mission (ZIEOM) concluded that "Zimbabwe has not yet demonstrated that it has established a tolerant, democratic culture that enables the conduct of elections in which parties are treated equitably and citizens can cast their vote freely." (ZIEOM Statement on the Constitutional Court Decision, 25 August 2018)

[2] See *Public attitudes toward Zimbabwe's 2018 elections: Downbeat yet hopeful?*, Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 47, and *Zimbabwe's presidential race tightens one month ahead of July 30 voting*, Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 223, www.afrobarometer.org. See also Viamo, Zimbabwe Elections Mobile Poll, 26-29 July 2018, www.kubatana.net.

crackdown demonstrated both that ZANU-PF's military-civilian coalition would never willingly surrender power and that the opposition faced few remaining options once the guns came out.

On August 24, 2018, the Constitutional Court dismissed an MDC Alliance petition to annul the results of the election. Reflecting polarized opinions, people took this decision to confirm either the difficulty of obtaining a fair hearing from Zimbabwe's politicized courts or the murky quality, at best, of the opposition's evidence.[3] Worst of all, the eruption of post-election violence confirmed the depth of the country's divisions and dashed popular hopes that Zimbabwe was on the brink of a political rebirth. Facing seemingly intractable social discord, citizens were left to wonder: Who would heal the beloved country?

Public attitude surveys

Afrobarometer, a pan-African, non-partisan research network, has conducted public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in Zimbabwe and other African countries since 1999. Afrobarometer employs face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

In 2018, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Afrobarometer's core partner for Southern Africa, commissioned two pre-election surveys in Zimbabwe. The Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI), Afrobarometer's national partner in Zimbabwe, conducted survey fieldwork (28 April-13 May 2018 and 25 June-6 July 2018). Afrobarometer provided technical support. Each survey interviewed 2,400 adult citizens, yielding country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

Key findings

- Zimbabweans are cautious about interpersonal interaction. Only 10% say "most people can be trusted." The remainder (89%) think that citizens should be "very careful in dealing with people."

- Zimbabweans who identify with an opposition political party are more likely than others to distrust their fellow citizens.

- The political divide in Zimbabwe in part reflects demographic structures. Ruling-party supporters tend to be older, less educated women who live in rural areas and who get news from government radio. Opposition supporters have opposite characteristics: younger, educated, urban men who consume news from the Internet and social media.

- The political divide in Zimbabwe is also reflected in political attitudes. One key dimension is attitudes toward traditional leaders, who often perform as electoral agents of the government. Whereas ruling-party voters trust traditional leaders, opposition supporters do not.

- Afrobarometer has devised a Partisan Trust Gap to measure the degree of political polarization between adherents of ruling and opposition parties. Over time, this gap has widened in Zimbabwe, and by 2017, it was wider than it had ever been.

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[3] A parallel vote tabulation estimated that the count in the presidential election was accurate, even though it could not definitively determine whether or not there should have been a second-round runoff. See Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network, "ZESN's Presidential Results Projection from Sample–Based Observation," www.zesn.org.zw. See also Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM), "Statement of Solidarity with ZESN over Observation of Zimbabwe's Harmonized Election."
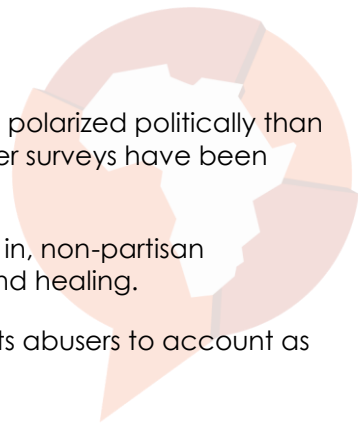
- According to the Partisan Trust Gap, Zimbabweans are more polarized politically than the citizens of 31 other African countries where Afrobarometer surveys have been conducted.

- Zimbabweans have low levels of awareness about, and trust in, non-partisan institutions designed to bring about national reconciliation and healing.

- Zimbabweans are twice as likely to want to hold human-rights abusers to account as they are to favour amnesty.

Do Zimbabweans trust each other?

Social trust – sometimes called interpersonal trust or generalized trust – is a basic requirement for the smooth functioning of any society. Beyond formal rules embedded in laws and contracts, people rely on informal expectations; they need confidence that others will desist from harming them and that fellow citizens will stay true to their word.

But social trust may be in short supply. In the course of regular surveys in Zimbabwe over a 20-year period (1999-2018), Afrobarometer has occasionally asked: "*Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you must be very careful in dealing with people?*" On every occasion, many more people have expressed wariness rather than trust (see Figure 1). On average, more than eight in 10 Zimbabweans say that "you must be very careful," whereas fewer than two in 10 are confident that "most people can be trusted."
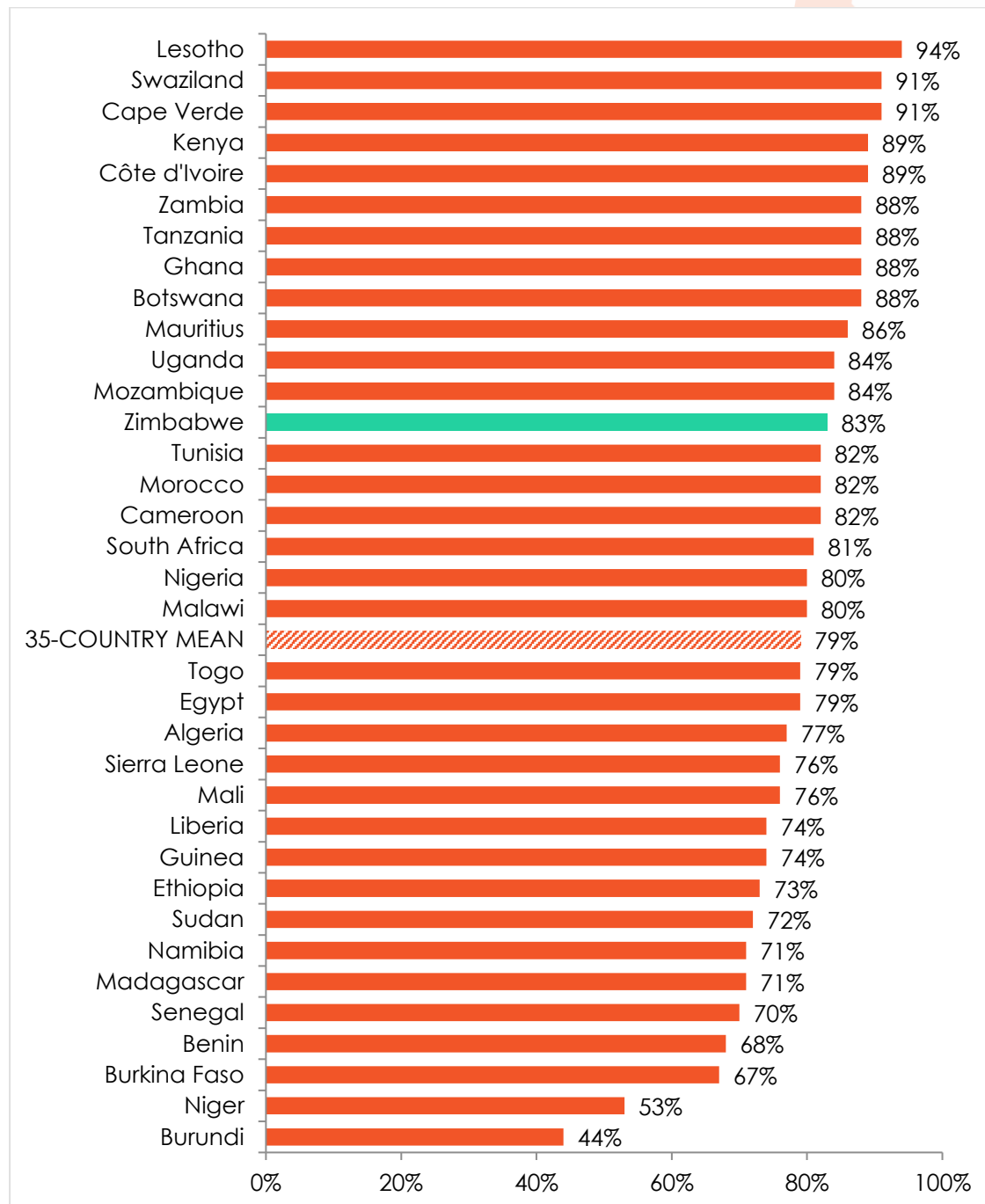
Figure 1: Social trust | Zimbabwe | 1999-2018
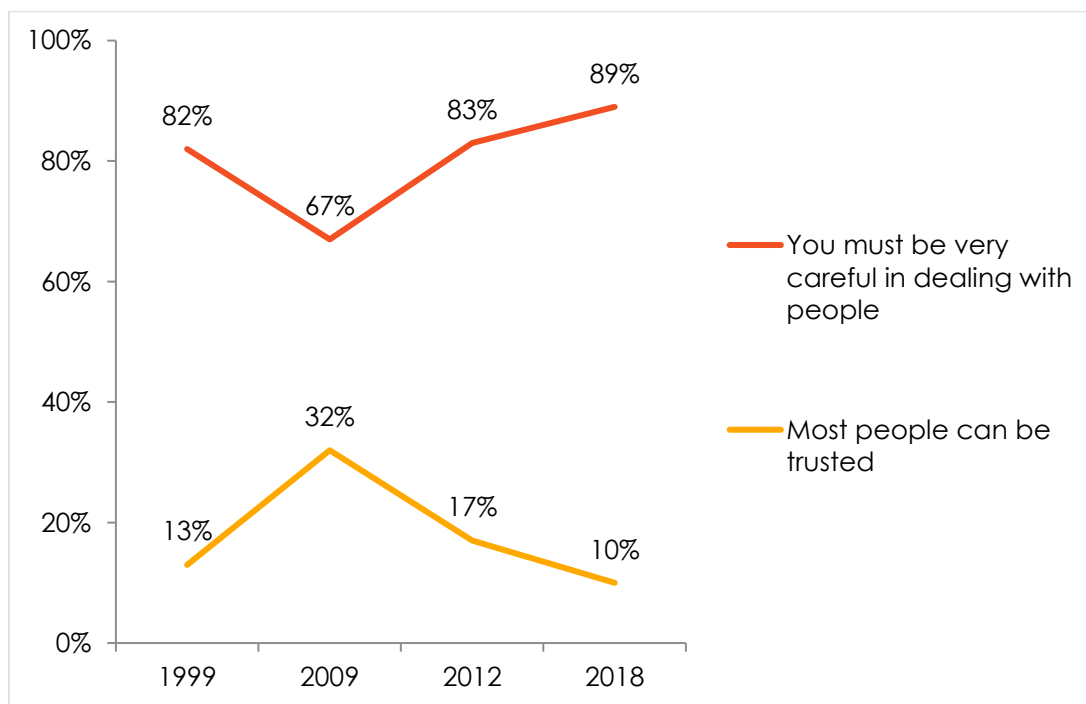
Note: Survey question texts for all figures and tables are listed in the Appendix.

Low levels of social trust are common across Africa, and in that regard, Zimbabwe is unexceptional. When Afrobarometer last asked the social trust question across multiple countries, in 2012, the mean continentwide level of distrust was 79%, a figure that differs little from Zimbabwe's 2012 score of 83% (see Figure 2). Moreover, Zimbabweans are apparently somewhat more trusting than their Southern African neighbours in Lesotho, Swaziland, Zambia, Tanzania, Botswana, and Mauritius.

Figure 2: Social distrust | by country | 35 African countries | 2012

Country	%
Lesotho	94%
Swaziland	91%
Cape Verde	91%
Kenya	89%
Côte d'Ivoire	89%
Zambia	88%
Tanzania	88%
Ghana	88%
Botswana	88%
Mauritius	86%
Uganda	84%
Mozambique	84%
Zimbabwe	83%
Tunisia	82%
Morocco	82%
Cameroon	82%
South Africa	81%
Nigeria	80%
Malawi	80%
35-COUNTRY MEAN	79%
Togo	79%
Egypt	79%
Algeria	77%
Sierra Leone	76%
Mali	76%
Liberia	74%
Guinea	74%
Ethiopia	73%
Sudan	72%
Namibia	71%
Madagascar	71%
Senegal	70%
Benin	68%
Burkina Faso	67%
Niger	53%
Burundi	44%

(% who say you "must be very careful in dealing with people")

As for trends over time within Zimbabwe, Figure 1 displays several interesting results. First, there was a sharp increase in trust in 2009, at the beginning of an unusual period of enforced inter-party coalition under a so-called power-sharing agreement.[4] At that time, people may have harbored rising expectations that cooperation between ZANU-PF and MDC in an "inclusive government" would spill over into less troubled relations in society as a whole. Second, such optimism did not last long; by 2012, with the "unity" government now deadlocked, people

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[4] Some of this difference may be due to a slight change of question wording in 2009: "I trust others to behave respectfully towards me" vs. "I must be very careful in dealing with people."

returned to their partisan corners, and social trust regressed to more normal – that is lower – levels. Finally, by May 2018, at the outset of the 2018 election campaign, Afrobarometer recorded the highest level of social distrust yet seen in Zimbabwe, with only one in 10 persons maintaining that "most people can be trusted."

These data suggest that political partisanship plays a role in shaping social trust. As we have just seen, social trust rises when political parties try to cooperate, for example during the brief "power-sharing" interlude, only to fall again when parties openly contest for power, for example during the 2018 election campaign. In other words, social trust seems to have a political dimension that is amplified by the extent and intensity of partisan competition.

Do political parties make things worse?

According to Afrobarometer's May 2018 survey, the citizens of Zimbabwe hold complex – even contradictory – views about competition between political parties. On one hand, they value the opportunity to express democratic voting rights under a multiparty system. A clear majority (63%) agree with the statement that "Many political parties are needed to make sure that Zimbabweans have real choices in who governs them." Almost half (47%) agree "very strongly." On the other hand, they also recognize that political competition easily escalates into violence; the same proportion (63%) think that, often or always, "competition between political parties leads to violent conflict." In sum, Zimbabweans want multiparty politics but have learned, through bitter experience, that it can carry destabilizing downside risks.

By definition, political parties are partisan, meaning partial or biased. They favour their own followers over supporters of rival parties. But some parties are more partisan than others, or at least are seen as such by citizens. The May 2018 survey in Zimbabwe reminded respondents that "some political parties look after the interests of all people whereas other political parties look after the interests of their own members." Respondents were then asked their opinion on "whose interests" – all people or only members – are favoured by each of the two main parties in Zimbabwe. Respondents were twice as likely to say that, compared to MDC, ZANU-PF acts in partisan fashion in the sense of serving only its own members (50% vs. 26%). [5]

But much depends on the respondent's own party identification. Party ID is measured here by questions that ask (a) "*Do you feel close to any particular political party?*" and if "yes," then (b) "*Which party is that?*" In May 2018, six in 10 Zimbabweans (60%) expressed identification with (felt "close to") a political party. The remainder (40%) did not identify with any party, either by refusing to disclose a preference or by being genuinely noncommittal. It should be noted, however, that even proclaimed non-partisans make partisan choices when it comes to casting a ballot in an election. Nevertheless, for the purposes of accurately describing the main cleavages in the Zimbabwean electorate, the analysis below contrasts the 35% of adults who say they feel close to the ruling party with the 25% who say they feel the same about any opposition party (see Figure 3).

Party identification clearly matters for social trust. In an electoral authoritarian regime where competition is restricted, one might expect an individual's closeness to an opposition party to have a disproportionately negative effect on his or her sense of social trust. Evidence of this outcome is found in the data. As of May 2018, opposition partisans had a markedly higher sense of social distrust (an astoundingly high 95%) than ruling-party supporters (86%) (see Figure 4). Non-partisans match exactly the national average (89%). The divergence between partisans stands to reason if, as citizens have suggested, the ruling party favours its own members and discriminates against an opposition movement that it regards as disloyal and illegitimate. In short, political parties *do* make things worse – if by "things" we mean the general public's sense of mutual trust and social cohesion.

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[5] But more people held an opinion about the familiar ruling party (only 6% said "don't know") than the lesser-known opposition (38% "don't know").

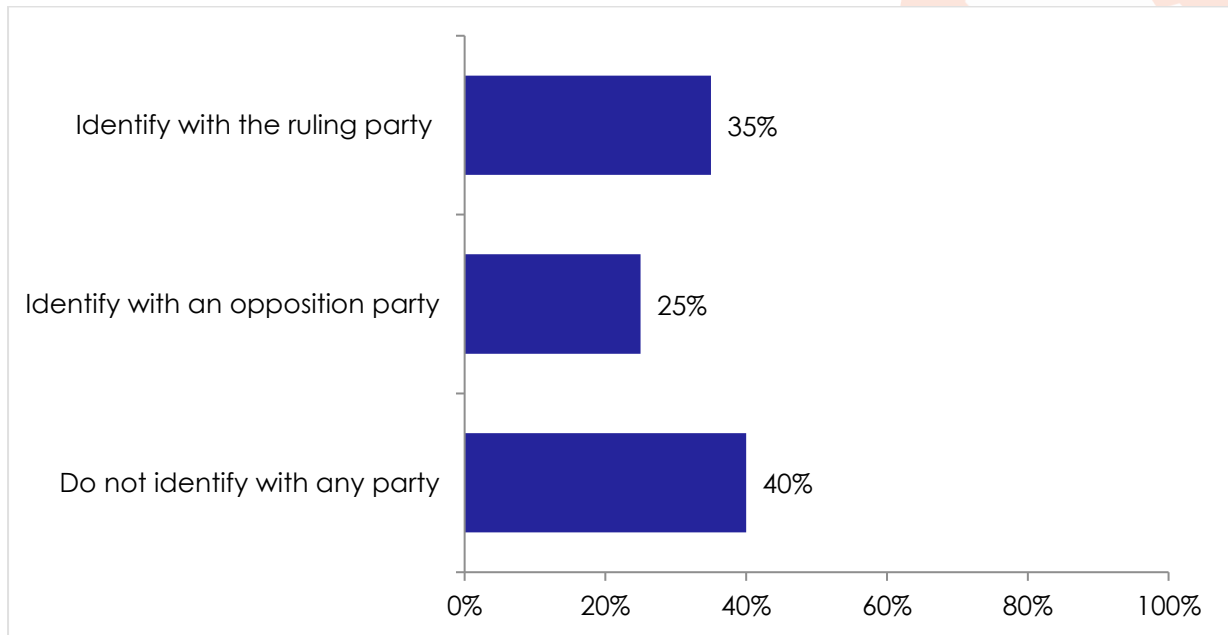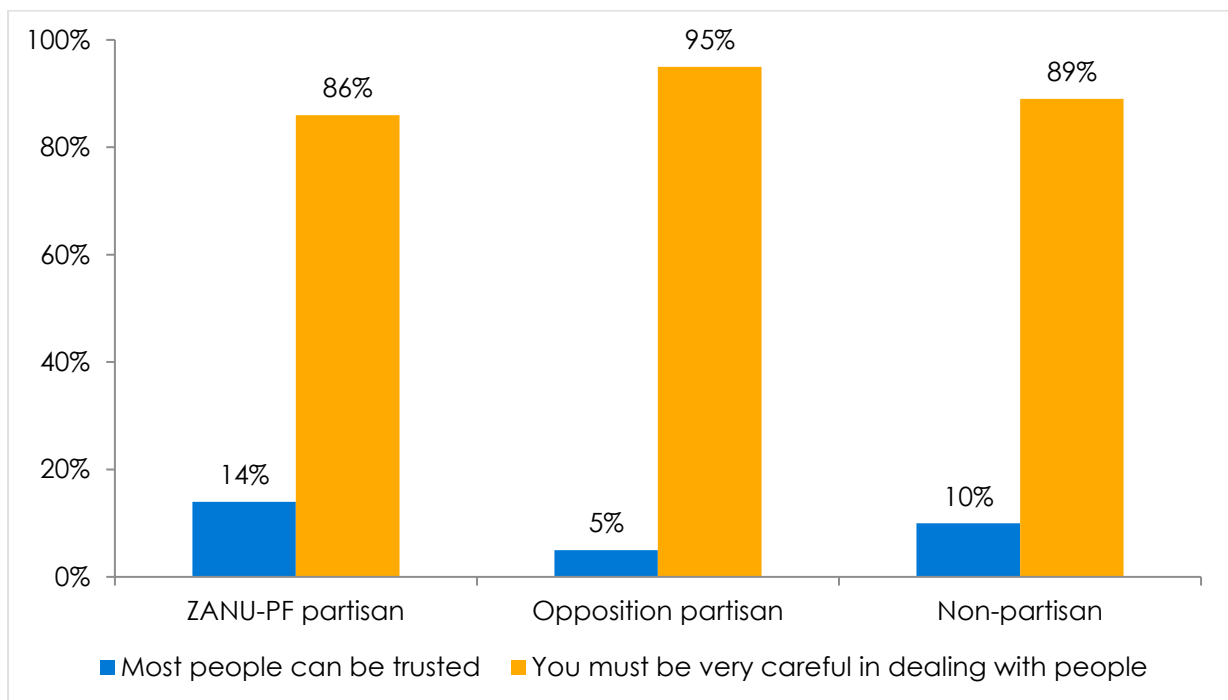**Figure 3: Political party identification** | Zimbabwe | May 2018

Identify with the ruling party	35%
Identify with an opposition party	25%
Do not identify with any party	40%

Figure 4: Social trust | by party identification | Zimbabwe | May 2018

ZANU-PF partisan: Most people can be trusted 14%, You must be very careful in dealing with people 86%
Opposition partisan: Most people can be trusted 5%, You must be very careful in dealing with people 95%
Non-partisan: Most people can be trusted 10%, You must be very careful in dealing with people 89%

■ Most people can be trusted ■ You must be very careful in dealing with people

In a politicized context where one party is dominant and trust is linked to party affiliation, some citizens might wish to conceal their true political preferences. Indeed, whenever Afrobarometer inquires about voting intentions in Zimbabwe, up to one in four persons say that they "won't vote" or "don't know" or "won't say" for whom they will vote. The political reticence of these undeclared voters, which is especially prevalent among opposition sympathizers, makes election forecasting difficult (Sohlberg & Branham, 2017). Reflecting a modest degree of political opening in 2018, the proportions of citizens who refused to divulge a voting intention ("won't say") – 19% in the May survey and 20% in the July survey – were lower than usual. But, up through 2017, Zimbabwe led the Southern Africa region in the proportion of citizens who declined to declare the identity of the party for which they would

prefer to vote (see Figure 5). In many cases, they perhaps demurred because they distrusted how the information could be used against them.

Figure 5: Undeclared voters | 9 Southern African countries | 2014-2017
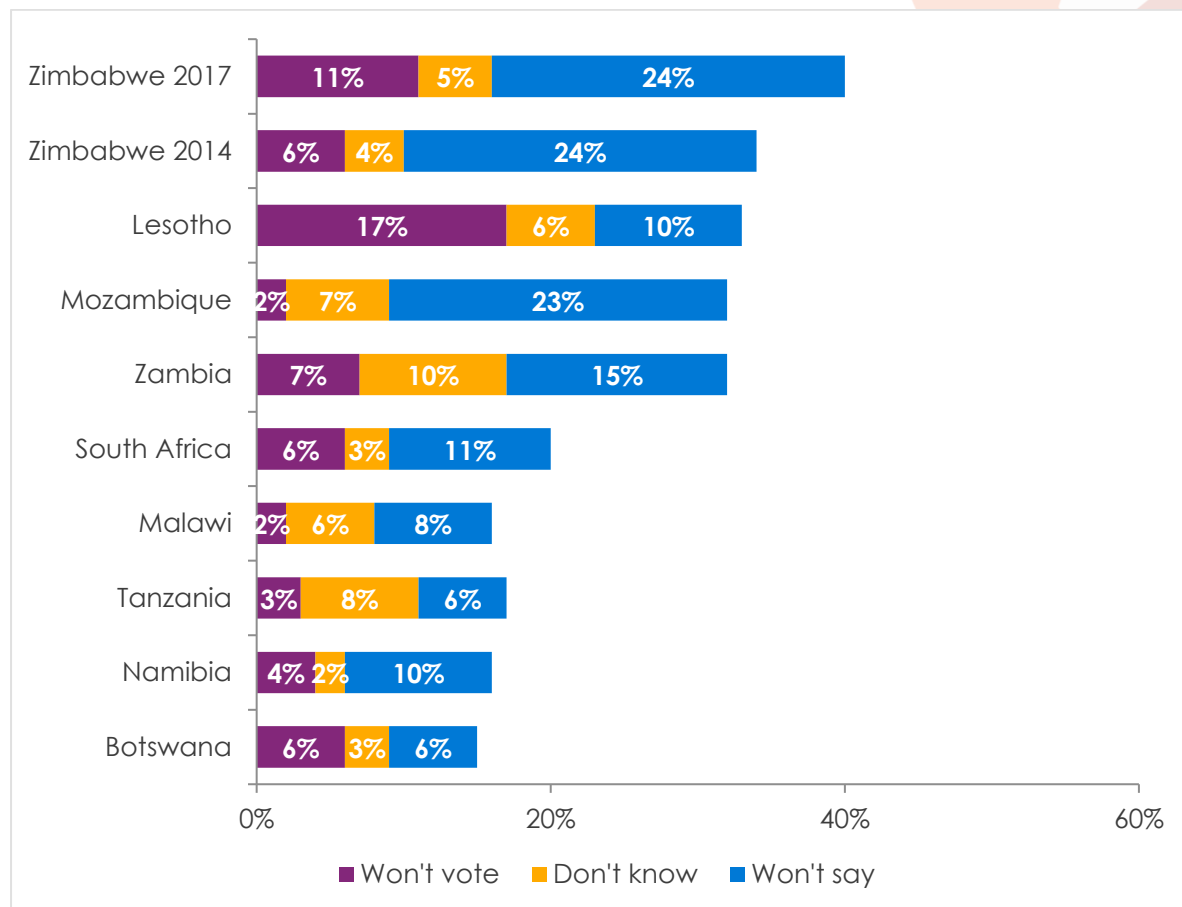
Source: Afrobarometer Round 6 (2014/2015) except for Zimbabwe Round 7 (2017) result

A tale of two electorates

Along which lines is Zimbabwean society divided? Are people who identify with rival political blocs drawn from different – even incompatible – segments of society and opinion? Answers to these questions lie in the demography of the country and the attitudes of its citizens. Importantly, individuals' choices of news sources, including among mass communications and social media, play a key role in forming mass attitudes.

Consider demographic distinctions (see Table 1). As is well known, the ruling party in Zimbabwe draws most of its support from rural areas; in the countryside, almost three-quarters (73%) of overt partisans align with ZANU-PF and just one-quarter (27%) with opposition parties. The pattern is almost perfectly reversed in cities and towns (72% opposition vs. 28% ZANU-PF). Women are also more inclined to identify with ZANU-PF, as are older people. But the best demographic predictor of partisanship is formal education; higher levels of schooling are very strongly associated with opposition sympathies.[6] In sum, the main parties draw their support from sharply different constituencies that are differentiated by age and gender but especially by residential location and education.

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[6] Pearson's r = .372, sig = <.0001

Table 1: Party identification by demographic factors (partisans only) | Zimbabwe | 2018

		Ruling party	Opposition party
Location			
	Urban	28%	72%
	Rural	73%	27%
Gender			
	Male	54%	46%
	Female	64%	36%
Age			
	18-25	51%	49%
	26-35	51%	49%
	36-50	59%	41%
	51 and older	74%	26%
Education			
	None	85%	15%
	Primary	82%	18%
	Secondary	56%	45%
	Tertiary	17%	83%

Reinforcing this structural gulf within the electorate, partisans tend to draw political information from separate news outlets. In May 2018, a relevant survey question asked, "*How much information on the 2018 elections have you received from the following sources?*" Table 2 shows that ruling and opposition partisans both tend to rely on word of mouth about election campaigns from everyday personal contacts with family and friends. Thereafter the two groups part company. Ruling-party supporters are much more likely than opposition supporters to receive election information directly from officials of their party (69% vs. 31%) or from community development meetings (77% vs. 23%), which in practice are often captured and controlled by ZANU-PF operatives. Importantly, partisans of the ruling party also seek election information from traditional authorities (81%), who may serve as ruling-party agents. Opposition partisans rarely rely on the latter source for political news or guidance.

Table 2: Party identification by sources of political news (partisans only), 2018 election campaign | Zimbabwe

	Ruling party	Opposition party
Family members	55%	45%
Friends, neighbours, and co-workers	52%	48%
Community development meetings	77%	23%
Political party officials	69%	31%
Traditional leaders	81%	19%
Religious leaders	69%	31%
Government newspapers	36%	64%
Private newspapers	27%	73%
Government radio	60%	40%
Private radio	41%	59%
Government television	43%	58%
Private television	28%	72%
Internet	20%	80%
Social media	23%	77%

The electorate also displays a bifurcated pattern of mass media consumption. Opposition partisans are much more likely than ruling-party followers to access election information from newspapers and television, especially private media. By contrast, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation with its government-controlled messages is far and away the most important mass media source of political information for ZANU-PF partisans (60%). Opposition partisans tend to shun ZBC radio in favour of independent news sources available from private media, on the Internet (80%), or via social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp (77%). Ruling-party partisans have barely begun to make use of these outlets.

As a result, elections in Zimbabwe involve different campaigns with divergent messages directed at two distinct electorates. Less-educated ruling-party backers tend to consume a stodgy diet of heavy-handed central government propaganda whereas young tech-savvy urbanites have access to a welter of critical voices and debates, including even confusing fake news and hate speech. In this way, dissimilar patterns of media consumption reinforce a deep demographic divide and give rise to polarized sets of public opinion.

Table 3, which is based on selected results from the latest full Afrobarometer survey in Zimbabwe, dated February 2017, confirms that Zimbabweans possess politically polarized attitudes. Take economic views. Whereas 55% of ruling-party partisans thought at the time that the country was going in the right direction, a view derived directly from their assessment of the national economy, just 11% of opposition partisans thought the same. By contrast, whereas just three in 10 ruling-party supporters (29%) had ever considered economically motivated migration to another country, almost two-thirds (64%) of opposition partisans had done so.

Or take political attitudes. The two electorates are far apart in terms of fear of electoral violence (28% for ruling-party supporters, 69% for oppositionists). And whereas ZANU-PF supporters prefer a government that is effective to a government that is accountable, the pattern reverses for opposition supporters: Even when faced with the attractive option of a "government that gets things done," 70% still prefer to have "a government that is accountable to citizens."

Finally, the two electorates reflect divergent political cultures. Consistent with their preference for accountable government, oppositionists are more likely to be active citizens. Compared to acolytes of the ruling party, twice as many of them "discuss politics frequently" (27% vs. 13%). By contrast, ruling-party sympathizers tend to display the passivity of political subjects. They are almost twice as likely to place their trust in traditional leaders (78% vs. 40%), the most conservative and politically compromised elements in Zimbabwean society.

Table 3: Party identification by popular attitudes (partisans only) | Zimbabwe | 2017

	Ruling party	Opposition party
Economic		
See country going in the right direction	55%	11%
Ever considered emigration (a little bit/somewhat/a lot)	29%	64%
Political		
Fear political intimidation/violence (somewhat/a lot)	28%	69%
Prefer accountable governance	43%	70%
Cultural		
Discuss politics frequently	13%	27%
Trust traditional leaders (somewhat/a lot)	78%	40%

Us vs. them

How deeply are Zimbabweans polarized? An argument can be made that party identification – with either a ruling or opposition party – runs so deep that it now constitutes an important social identity. Whether partisan identity rivals other, more permanent elements

in the population's repertoire of social identities – such as ethnicity, race, class, and gender – is open to debate. But there can be little doubt that party ID shapes much political behaviour, including, of course, voting.

As a means of measuring the depth of political polarization, Afrobarometer employs an original index that we call the Partisan Trust Gap (PTG).[7] As the label suggests, the PTG portrays the extent to which partisans on opposite sides of the political divide trust the main political parties. In a nutshell, the PTG captures the degree to which partisans trust "us" vs. "them."

The formula for calculating the PTG is shown in Box 1.

Box 1: Calculating the Partisan Trust Gap

Operationally, the PTG uses standard Afrobarometer survey questions that ask: "*How much do you trust each of the following: (a) the ruling party? (b) opposition parties?*" Unlike for social trust, the objects of trust in this case are political parties rather than one's fellow citizens. Valid responses are: "not at all," "just a little," "somewhat," or "a lot." Respondents are scored as trusting a party (or parties) if they respond either "somewhat" or "a lot." The difference between two values – trust in one's "own" party and trust the "other's" party – is calculated for both ruling-party and opposition supporters. The mean of these two figures constitutes the Partisan Trust Gap. The PTG is standardized on a scale of 0 to 100 in which 0 signifies no polarization and 100 means complete polarization.
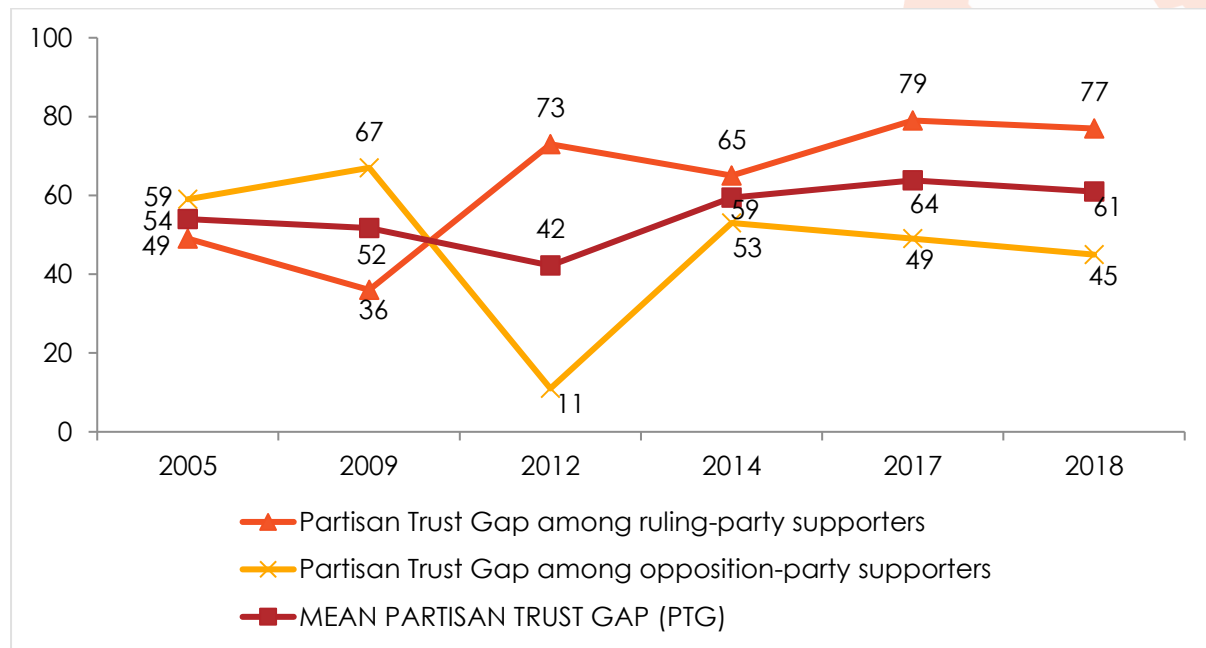
Figure 6 displays the PTG for Zimbabwe over time. In May 2018, among persons who felt close to ZANU-PF, 88% trusted their own party ("us") as compared to the 11% who trusted opposition parties ("them"). Subtraction yields a PTG of 77 for ruling-party supporters. At the same time, among persons who felt close to any opposition party, 54% trusted the opposition bloc ("us") and 9% trusted the ruling party ("them"), which yields a PTG of 45 for opposition-party supporters. The overall (mean) PTG for Zimbabwe was therefore 61. This figure suggests a high level of polarization since it lies above the midpoint on a 100-point scale between no polarization and complete polarization.

These data provide interesting insights. First, as of 2018, popular opinion was much more cohesive within the ruling party (88% trust "us") than within a fragmented opposition (54% trust "us"). Second, ruling-party supporters were more distrustful of their opponents (PTG = 77) than their opponents were of them (PTG = 45), a situation that has prevailed since at least 2012. Taken together, these observations suggest that, even as leaders remained deeply polarized, supporters of opposition parties may have moderated their views of ZANU-PF in recent years, beginning in, and especially during, the power-sharing interlude. This inclination is consistent with the willingness of some opposition sympathizers to vote – whether sincerely or strategically – for ZANU-PF in 2013.

But, as indicated by the trend line for the mean PTG, partisan polarization in Zimbabwe, already deep, has increased over time. In 2005, the mean PTG (54) hovered midway between no polarization and complete polarization. It then declined (to 42) during the years of the Government of National Unity coalition, when all main parties held shares (albeit unequal) of power. But since that time, driven largely by a ruling party that is more cohesive than a fragmented array of opponents, the mean PTG climbed steadily (to 64 in 2017). This result suggests that there is now less room for compromise between the main contenders for power in Zimbabwe than at almost any time since polarization was first measured.

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[7] Among political scientists, political polarization is conventionally measured in term of divergences in citizens' positions on public policy (Hetherington, 2001; Fiorina & Abrams, 2008). It is reflected in party sorting, that is, a correlation between policy views and partisan identification. In African politics – where personality and patronage matter more than policy – polarization is best measured, in our view, by alternate means.

Figure 6: Partisan Trust Gap | by party identification | Zimbabwe | 2005-2018

- Partisan Trust Gap among ruling-party supporters
- Partisan Trust Gap among opposition-party supporters
- MEAN PARTISAN TRUST GAP (PTG)

Moreover, Zimbabwe represents an extreme case of political polarization. Figure 7 compares Zimbabwe with 31 other African countries in 2014, the last time for which a complete set of the relevant cross-national data are available. It shows that, in terms of the mean Partisan Trust Gap, Zimbabwe (PTG = 59) was twice as polarized as an "average" African country (PTG = 27). Furthermore, with the exception of Uganda – another dominant-party electoral autocracy – Zimbabwe is the only African country to occupy the upper half of the 100-point PTG scale. In short, Zimbabwe's profound levels of partisan polarization lead not only the Southern Africa region, but also the continent.

Figure 7: Partisan Trust Gap | by country | 32 African countries | 2014
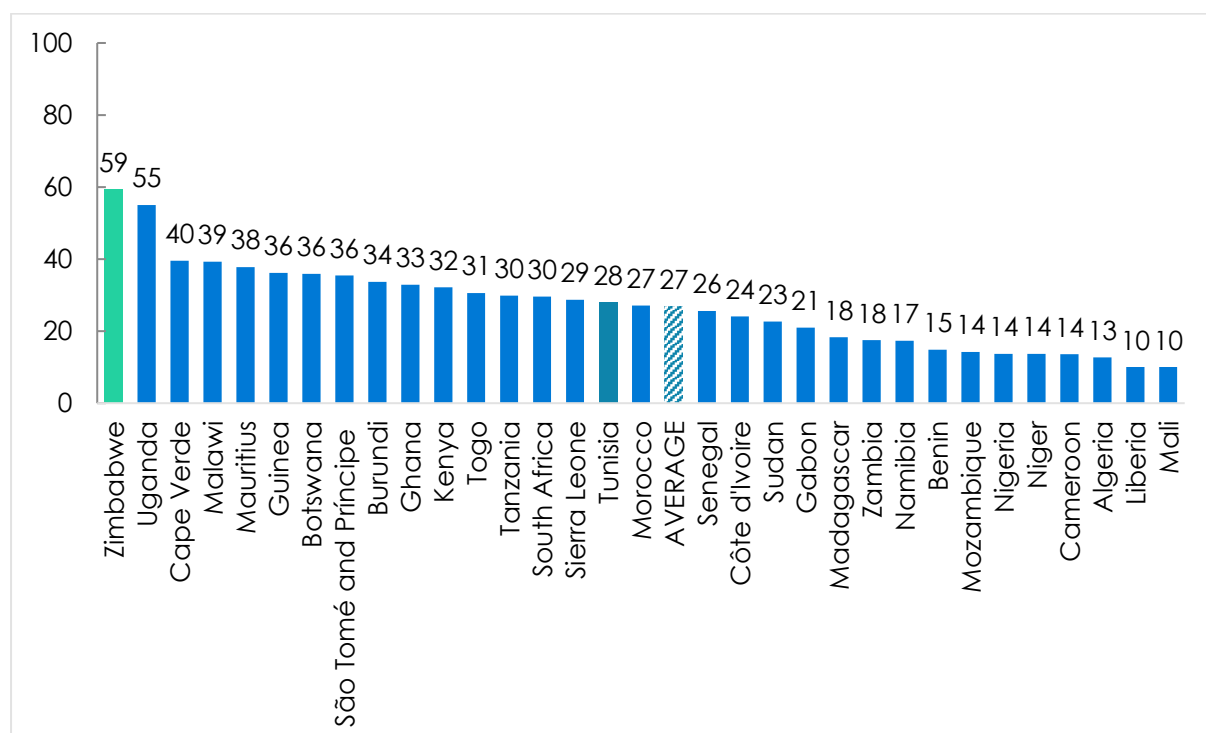
Who is responsible?

It would be wrong to assume that political polarization is somehow innate in Zimbabwe's culture and society and that Zimbabweans are therefore congenitally unable to coexist. On the contrary, the vast majority of Zimbabweans are peace-loving people who share a profound desire for their beloved country to be democratic and prosperous. Survey respondents repeatedly (including in 2018) cite control of violence as the highest-priority requirement for genuine elections. In general, they even rank peace – understood as political unity and social harmony – above the pursuit of justice, for example for human-rights abusers (Bratton, 2011).

Yet political leaders have deliberately promoted division and conflict as means to secure and maintain power. As Masipula Sithole (1999) argues, ethnic identity and conflict have long been more prevalent among Zimbabwe's political elites than among ordinary citizens. Asked to choose between national and ethnic identity in a 2017 Afrobarometer survey, fully three-quarters of Zimbabweans reported feeling either only a national identity (34%) or equally national and ethnic (41%). Thus it takes a malign external stimulus, for example from cynical and manipulative political leaders, to pit citizens against one another.

Along these lines, Adrienne Le Bas (2006) traces partisan division in Zimbabwe to the choices of political elites, who create organizational vehicles – political parties – to mobilize constituencies for contesting elections. To distinguish "us" vs. "them" and to forestall internal fragmentation, leaders emphasize confrontation and discourage moderation, even policing inter-party boundaries with violence. Rather than crafting democratic pacts, rival leaders forge "extreme polarization." In her account of this process, Zimbabweans have come to view political and economic developments "through the heavily tinted lens of party affiliation … where party affiliation (is) not chosen, it (is) imposed" (p. 420).
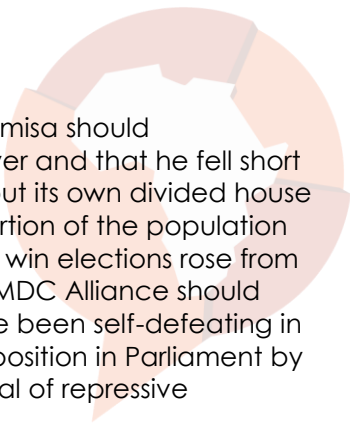
Who will heal a divided nation?

If leaders promote division and citizens are distrustful of one another, then it is unclear where the impetus for repairing society is supposed to come from. The requirements for national reconciliation are so far-reaching that no single actor holds the key. Instead, a range of actors must seek to bridge disunion on multiple fronts and at every level of society.

To be sure, any shift toward a nation-building agenda would mark a radical break with the state-building strategy pursued by the Zimbabwean government since independence. On the foundation of a strong state inherited from the settler-colonial regime, ZANU-PF invested heavily in the security sector, which it used to marginalize perceived rivals, especially in Matabeleland region and the urban informal sector. What is now required is nothing less than a redeployment of substantial resources away from ensuring state control of society in favour of healing the torn fabric of society itself.

If opinion surveys are anything to go by, Zimbabweans at large would welcome the following conciliatory and restorative actions:

- <u>By the president</u>. Mnangagwa must add substance to his inaugural slogan of "moving forward as one nation." To make progress on this front, the government must first hold accountable those responsible for the indiscriminate killing of unarmed protesters on August 1, 2018. The president should also openly acknowledge that the close presidential race left his administration without a convincing political mandate. His official actions must disprove the nagging fears of one-third of the population (32%) – and more than half (56%) of MDC partisans – who think that "Mnangagwa will govern the same as Mugabe." He must reach out to the 91% of opposition supporters who continue to think that ZANU-PF only looks after the interests of its own members. Inviting talented technocrats into an inclusive Cabinet would be a helpful initial move.

- By the leader of the opposition. By toning down rhetoric, Chamisa should acknowledge the practical reality that the 2018 election is over and that he fell short in his quest for the presidency. The opposition's first task is to put its own divided house in order by bringing fragmented factions together. The proportion of the population who think that inter-party alliances would help the opposition win elections rose from 56% to 60% between May and July 2018. Going forward, the MDC Alliance should steer clear of electoral or parliamentary boycotts, which have been self-defeating in the past. Instead, the opposition should leverage its minority position in Parliament by continuing to push for meaningful reforms, including the repeal of repressive legislation and the strengthening of electoral laws.

- By the armed forces. The trend of growing militarization of political institutions, which accelerated after the November 2017 coup, should be reversed. Seven out of 10 Zimbabweans (71%) disapprove of a situation where "the army comes in to govern the country." An even larger majority (78%) believe that the armed forces should limit themselves to their constitutional role of providing national security and "*not be involved at all* in the country's politics" (emphasis added). For this reason, and following a clean-out of political deadwood across the public service, all government and parastatal appointees should be qualified civilians selected strictly on merit.

- By provincial and metropolitan councils. The 2013 Constitution provides for the devolution of government powers and responsibilities.[8] But slow implementation has deepened feelings of ethnic and regional alienation. Residents of Matabeleland can justifiably claim that a Shona-controlled ZANU-PF government has dragged its feet in implementing devolution. To the extent that local governance can allow for the representation of minority and opposition interests, devolution can potentially dilute the winner-take-all character of the country's politics and contribute to national healing. But to be effective, provincial and metropolitan councils will need adequate resources and political autonomy. It would also help if more than a bare majority of citizens (51%) could learn to trust local government councils (see Figure 8).

- By traditional authorities. In the 2018 elections, many chiefs and headmen continued to play overtly partisan roles by spreading ruling-party messages and mobilizing their subjects to vote obediently for incumbents. Yet, according to the Constitution of Zimbabwe, traditional leaders must not "act in a partisan manner (or) further the interests of any political party or cause."[9] As it happens, ordinary Zimbabweans agree: In July 2018, 65% wanted these leaders to remain non-partisan.[10] To level the electoral playing field in Zimbabwe, steps are required to sever the patronage ties between ruling party and traditional authorities and to limit the latter to their conventional functions as custodians of customary law.

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[8] Section 264 recognizes "the right of communities to manage their own affairs and to further their development." Section 268 establishes provincial councils in the eight rural provinces and metropolitan councils in Harare and Bulawayo. To implement devolution, the Constitution requires an Act of Parliament and the allocation of 5% of the national budget to devolved structures. Neither step was taken during the 2013-2018 five-year term.

[9] Constitution of Zimbabwe, Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013, Clause 281 (b) and (c).

[10] The question asked: "*Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement 1: Traditional leaders must represent all of their people equally. They should remain non-partisan, and not affiliate themselves with any political party. Statement 2: Traditional leaders are citizens like everyone else, and have the right to decide for themselves whether or not to support a particular party.*"

Figure 8: Institutional trust | Zimbabwe | 2018
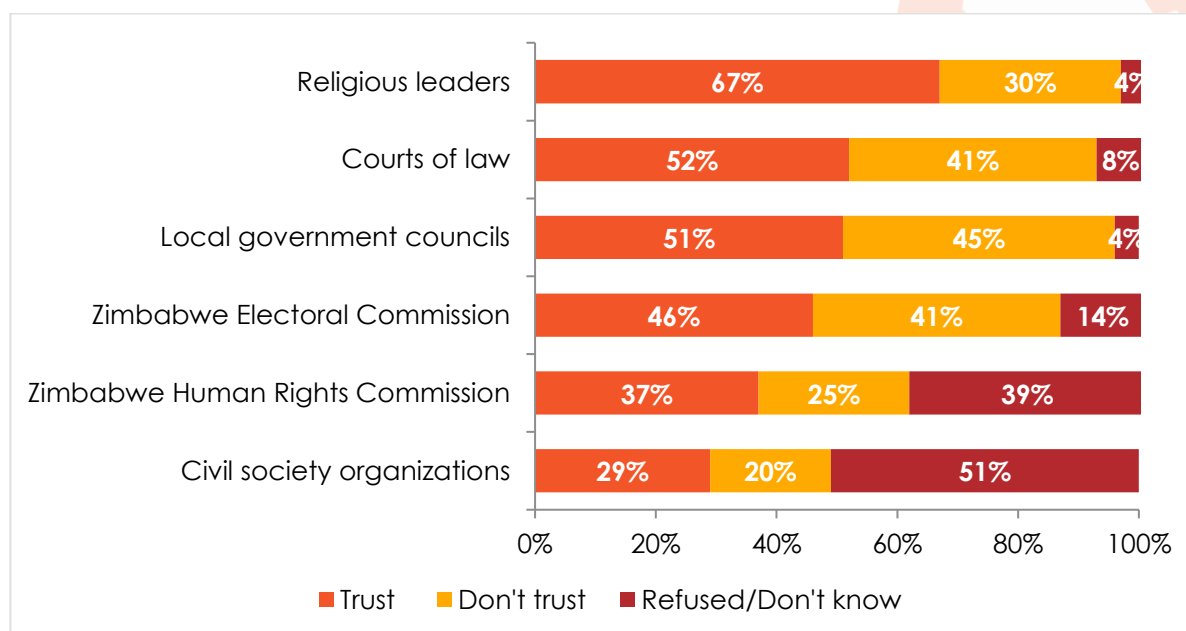
By independent commissions. But who will take on such tasks? Much depends on whether an array of independent commissions can be activated and adequately resourced. For example:

- The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) still has work to do to build public confidence in its independence; as 2018 elections approached, fewer than half of all citizens trusted the ZEC (46%) (see Figure 8) or thought that the ZEC was a neutral body (47%).

- The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) has begun to play a constructive role in investigating human-rights abuses and promoting tolerance. But between one-third and one-half of Zimbabweans haven't heard enough about the ZHRC to know whether it is trustworthy (39%) or whether it was adequately prepared for the 2018 elections (56%).

- Finally, the current mandate of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) is too restricted to "promote national healing, unity and cohesion in Zimbabwe (and) to bring about national reconciliation by encouraging people to tell the truth about the past."[11] For example, the lifespan of the commission should not be limited to 10 years, as is currently the case under the 2013 Constitution. The NPRC's powers must also be greatly expanded in order to meet popular demand: Consistently over time, about two out of three Zimbabweans (70% in 2018) consider that those responsible for past political abuses must be held accountable, including through legal prosecution, rather than being excused with an amnesty (see Figure 9).[12]

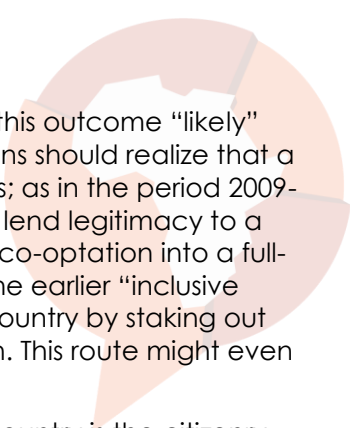[11] Constitution of Zimbabwe, Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013, Clause 252 (b) and (c).

[12] The question is worded as a choice between two options: Either "*Those who are responsible for past political crimes should be granted amnesty, which means they would never be prosecuted*" or "*Those who are responsible for past political crimes should be held accountable; they should face consequences for what they have done*."

Figure 9: Popular attitudes toward transitional justice | Zimbabwe | 2018
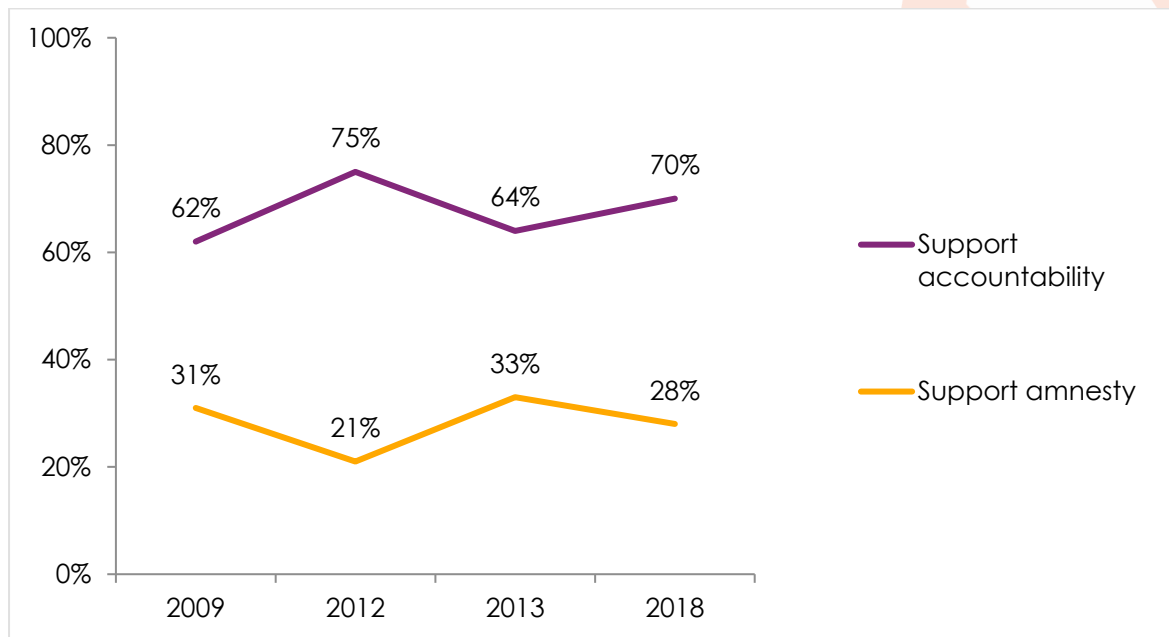
- <u>By civil society</u>. Nongovernmental organizations must play essential civic roles. For example, the Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (ZESN) should channel popular demands for the reform of the electoral commission, and the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum should campaign to strengthen the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission. For their part, civic organizations must integrate with grassroots society; they cannot have impact where – as is currently the case – large majorities of the population do not know what they do[13] (see Figure 8). Most importantly, civil society must end embedded relationships with opposition political parties, which were on open display in the 2013 and 2018 elections. To contribute to nation-healing efforts, NGOs – as well as the mass media -- must rise above partisanship.

- <u>By religious and educational organizations</u>. The public consistently cites religious leaders as the most trusted figures in society; 67% (74% in rural areas) said they trust them in May 2018 (see Figure 8). Most Zimbabweans are affiliated with one or another of the diverse Christian churches in the country. These religious institutions can potentially bridge differences within their congregations, which include adherents (including senior politicians) from both sides of the political divide. Religious leaders have not so far robustly deployed their national healing aptitude in any systematic way. They need to step up, as do the leaders of educational institutions. As agents of socialization, churches and schools can impart the same message of tolerance, namely that people can differ without being enemies and that there is virtue in unity with diversity.

- <u>By citizens</u>. It is clear that Zimbabwe's long-suffering citizens constitute a strong and potentially powerful constituency for political healing. They want rival parties to work together, even to share power. In July 2018, 60% of Zimbabweans expressed support

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[13] For example, in May 2018, only 3% of citizens reported getting election information from election watchdog groups (ERC and ZESN were mentioned as examples). A mere 29% expressed trust in civil society organizations (ZimRights and ZHRNGO Forum were mentioned as examples). At least half of all respondents didn't know enough about such organizations to hold opinions on them.

for a government of national unity, though only 41% thought this outcome "likely" (Bratton & Masunungure, 2018). On reflection, however, citizens should realize that a standard power-sharing formula does not fit all circumstances; as in the period 2009-2013, an awkward unity government may even inadvertently lend legitimacy to a disputed election. Thus MDC would be well advised to avoid co-optation into a full-blown governing coalition under ZANU-PF along the lines of the earlier "inclusive government." Instead, election losers can better serve their country by staking out independent policy positions and acting as a loyal opposition. This route might even increase prospects for an eventual democratic transition.

In the end, the greatest resource available for healing the beloved country is the citizenry itself. In this regard, an observer report on the 2018 elections offered a timely reminder:

"The tremendous turnout of voters on Election Day demonstrated their will for a tolerant, peaceful and prosperous country. The country's political leaders should honor those aspirations and recognize that the divided vote emphasizes the need for reconciliation and inclusive, responsive governance."[14]

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[14] ZIEOM Statement on the Constitutional Court Decision, 25 August 2018

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Appendix

Figures 1, 2, and 4
- *Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you must be very careful in dealing with people?*

Figure 3
- *Do you feel close to any particular political party? [If yes:] Which party is that?*

Figure 5
- *If a presidential election were held tomorrow, which party's candidate would you vote for?*

Table 1
- *Do you feel close to any particular political party? [If yes:] Which party is that?*

Table 2
- *Respondents were asked: How much information on the 2018 elections have you received from the following sources?*

Table 3
- *Let's start with your general view about the current direction of our country. Some people might think the country is going in the wrong direction. Others may feel it is going in the right direction. So let me ask YOU about the overall direction of the country: Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?*
- *How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live? (% who say "a little bit," "somewhat," or "a lot")*
- *During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence? (*
- *Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*
Statement 1: It is more important to have a government that can get things done, even if we have no influence over what it does.
Statement 2: It is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly.
- *When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters frequently, occasionally, or never?*
- *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Traditional leaders?*

Figures 6 and 7
- *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The ruling party? Opposition parties?*

Figure 8
- *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")*

Figure 9
- *Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*
Statement 1: Those who are responsible for past political crimes should be granted amnesty, which means that they would never be prosecuted.
Statement 2: Those who are responsible for past political crimes should be held accountable; they should face consequences for what they have done.
(% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

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