Imagining the Diaspora Vote from Zimbabweans Abroad: Electronic Voting or Postal Voting?

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This article envisages the diaspora vote from Zimbabweans living abroad. The study applies a qualitative content analysis on Zimbabwe Electoral Commission officials and government's perspectives or responses to the call for diaspora vote. It further engages several politicians through in-depth interviews to discuss the possible challenges and the model that can be utilised for diaspora vote. This article draws some theoretical concepts from the diffusion of diaspora enfranchisement norms by Turcu & Urbatsch (2015) who posit that neighbourly countries are likely to emulate each other's policy making, adoption of electoral standards and mechanisms. Therefore, the article argues that Zimbabwe can enfranchise diasporas especially for presidential elections. Presidential elections may be conducted electronically or through personal vote combined with postal voting. Zimbabwe can implement personal voting at the embassies where results will be tabulated and electoral residue posted home. However, this article further argues that unlike e-voting, the management of personal voting combined with postal might be costly especially managing millions of Zimbabweans out-of-country, hence there is a need to start deliberating on e-voting or pilot e-voting for diasporas. The article acknowledges that a positive political will is fundamental for the effective implementation of the diaspora vote.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, several states have progressively extended voting rights to their nationals in diaspora (Lafleur, 2013; Turcu & Urbatsch, 2015; Tsourapa, 2020), dual citizenship (Mirilovic, 2014) and policies that strengthen relations with host countries (Gamlen, 2014). In Zimbabwe, however ordinary citizens or emigrants remain disenfranchised, only government officials on state duty out-of-country have the right to vote. This is irrespective of the fact that Zimbabwe has an estimate number of above 4 million nationals in the diaspora, who migrated due to various reasons such as economic and political challenges (Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN, 2019). The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Harare notes that there are 500 000 to four million Zimbabweans in the diaspora and the numbers doubled in 2008 due to political and economic crisis (Mail & Guardian, 2013). The closest neighbourly country, South Africa is estimated to have four million Zimbabweans (Mail & Guardian, 2013) while the rest are scattered across the globe in Botswana, Canada, United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia and New Zealand just to mention a few.

It is worth mentioning that emigrants and resident citizens have not been treated equally due to lack of electoral laws, policies and international standards that apply to expatriates (Turcu & Urbatsch, 2015; Bauböck, 2009). Since the late 20th century, the support for emigrant enfranchisement has increased and emigration or diaspora policies have become a global phenomenon (Tsourapa, 2020, p. 136: Délano Alonso & Mylonas, 2017; Koinova & Tsourapas, 2018). In Zimbabwe, the growing number of citizens in the diaspora has become the basis for the call of diaspora voting rights and representation (ZESN, 2019). In 2017 and 2018, several individuals from the diaspora approached the courts, seeking universal suffrage for all Zimbabweans living abroad however the constitutional court dismissed the challenge stating that the right to vote is not absolute and may be limited. Thus, public call for democratisation or universal suffrage has increased over the past 5 years due to the overwhelming number of Zimbabweans living abroad. This article reports on a study that analyses perspectives on the purported challenges, implementation and management of the diaspora vote. Little has been done academically to analyse the assumed challenges and the possible models for the diaspora vote in Zimbabwe. This article therefore, brings into light, perspectives on the diaspora vote and further argues the possible model that can be implemented for Zimbabwe diaspora vote.

External voting is not a new phenomenon, it dates back to the Roman Empire colonies where Emperor Augustus's local senate voted candidates for the city offices of Rome (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, 2010). In 1862, the United States of America in Wisconsin enacted "provisions to allow absentee voting by soldiers fighting in the Union army during the civil war" (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, 2010). The extension of voting rights to citizens in diaspora was started by Australia in 1902 (Turcu & Urbatsch, 2015). Over the

years and in different phases several developed countries such as the United Kingdom, France and United States of America amongst others extended voting rights to their nationals outside the country. Several African countries in the past decades extended voting rights to their nationals living abroad though with limitations to specific elections such as presidential elections (ZESN, 2019, p. 2). In 2014, it was reported that "30 African countries grant the right to vote to their nationals abroad, out of a total 115 countries that apply the principle around the world" (Laloupo, 2014, p. 22). In Southern Africa, countries that granted the right to vote to diasporas are South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique and Botswana whilst Zambia, Angola and Zimbabwe limit provisions to only those on national duty while everyone is entreated to travel back home (Laloupo, 2014; ZESN, 2019). Scholars believe that authoritarian governments aim to limit citizens' cross-border mobility and avoid emigration (Alemán & Woods, 2014; Hirschman, 1993; Tsourapa, 2020, p. 137).

Turcu & Urbatsch (2015, p. 408) notes that granting diasporas the right to vote is a discretionary act rather than an international legal obligation. Hence, some scholars reflect on several political and economic reasons why states grant diasporas the right to vote (Lafleur, 2011; Rhodes & Harutyunyan, 2010; Wucker, 2004). Turcu & Urbatsch (2015, p. 408) show that expansion of voting rights to emigrants "revolve around benefits for the government: economic or policy benefits for the country as a whole or electoral benefit for political parties (if the newly enfranchised population is believed to prefer the incumbent governing coalition)". Authoritarian states suppress political dissent (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003) because "expatriates can be viewed as unwelcome promoters of democratisation" and suppressing their voices maybe a way to avoid or reduce pressure to reform (ZESN, 2019, p. 2). Most states in Africa have been rejecting calls for the diaspora vote while others harness political support and increase remittances back home by enfranchising diasporas (ZESN, 2019). According to ZESN (2019) opposition parties support legislation on diaspora voting hoping to win elections while the incumbent opposes in fear of losing elections especially if the diaspora is assumed to be anti-government. Thus, benefits for political parties are considered as reasons for diaspora enfranchisement or disenfranchisement. The underlining factors are remittances by diasporas, strategic alliances with the international community and political support by emigrants especially if aligned to the ruling party (Bunce & Wolchik, 2006; Lafleur, 2013).

The Electoral Systems and the Zimbabwean Context

There are several models of diaspora voting adopted by other countries depending on their electoral system and political context. In Zimbabwe, currently there are four types of electoral systems namely: presidential, legislative, local government and referendum elections. Thus, the harmonised elections in Zimbabwe include the presidential elections, the legislative elections comprised of 210 members of the National Assembly, local government elections for councillors and sometimes referendums. As for the national assembly and local government elections, the voter must be resident in the constituency or ward where he or she

would vote, thus making it problematic for diaspora voting unlike in South Africa where the electorate votes for a political party not a candidate.

Personal voting and postal voting are sometimes used interchangeably though they have slight differences. Personal voting is when a voter votes in person at the embassy or consular offices while postal voting is when voting is done by post either by courier or diplomatic pouch (International IDEA, 2007; ZESN, 2019, p. 9). The popular model for external voting is postal voting (International IDEA, 2007). As aforesaid, Zimbabwe currently utilises the postal voting only for government officials on duty outside the country with their legal spouses as specified in Section 72 of the Electoral Act. Unlike personal voting, postal voting rarely demands witnesses (International IDEA, 2007), the only challenge can be the packaging and dispatching of the ballot papers which may be risky, time consuming and eroding confidence in the electoral process (ZESN, 2019, 9)

The least used model of external voting is proxy voting where a citizen living or staying abroad votes through a proxy who casts the vote on his or her behalf at polling place in the country or abroad. The United Kingdom allows proxy voting to anyone registered and having applied for a proxy vote. ZESN (2019, p. 10) views proxy voting as assisted voting and claims it has had challenges in Zimbabwe where voters "were shepherded to vote for candidates not of their choice". The last modern external voting model is remote electronic voting. Electronic voting known as e-voting can be done through digital devices such as mobile or computers connected to the internet. Currently there are a few countries that allow remote e-voting from diaspora. Quite a number of developed countries such as Austria, Estonia, Netherlands, France, Switzerland, USA, Spain have tested and considering e-voting for their citizens living abroad (International IDEA, 2007).

There are a variety of e-voting channels such as the blockchain based electronic voting systems which were tested in a few countries (Rascko, 2019, p. 6). In December 2018, South Korea tested the blockchain voting system for a private sector (Zdnet, 2018) and in May 2018 primary elections in West Virginia utilised the mobile blockchain voting for diaspora voters (CBinsights, 2019; Racsko, 2019). The blockchain voting system in West Virginia was the first government-run in US history (Racsko, 2019, p. 5-6). In Africa, Namibia and Democratic Republic Congo so far successfully piloted e-voting for internal elections (Alam et al., 2020; ECN, 2014). Unlike postal voting, e-voting is convenient and can enhance voter participation and turn out as well as reducing financial cost for mailing ballots (International IDEA, 2007; Diamond, 2010).

A report by International IDEA (2007, III) argues that "technological progress (including but not limited to e-voting) can sometimes provide increasingly effective and efficient means for elections to be free and fair, even if a large proportion of the voters are outside their country of origin". The report further shows that "confidence in the process will depend on the level of trust in the IT system, which in turn to a great extent is dependent on confidence in the

EMB" (International IDEA, 2007, III). Two factors should be considered: the role of the election monitoring body and the efficiency of the channel of e-voting. To curb electoral fraud or double voting, most countries incorporated the biometric system which identifies the voter's physical features (Wayman, 2000; Rhodes, 2003). The biometric system can recognise voice and signature (Jain et al., 2004) and links the person to his or her identity such as nationality, gender, district and constituency (Wayman, 2000). The scanner is usually utilised to verify the user's characteristics and grants access when his or her characteristics match with the stored data.

Over the past decade, African countries that adopted the biometric system for voter registration and verification are: Ghana in 2012, Kenya in 2013, Nigeria in 2015 and Zimbabwe in 2018, just to mention a few. It is noteworthy that the biometric can boost high voter turnout, participation and confidence in the electoral process (Debra et al., 2017). The biometric acts as "forensic measure against election fraud such as impersonation and multiple voting" though it does not guarantee security from human error, slow verification of voter and policy manipulation by the election monitoring body (Nwagwu, 2016, p. 305; Debra et al., 2017, p. 1; Alam et al., 2020). The common problem with using the biometric technology alone is that voters can only cast votes at their registration centres and citizens in diaspora would not be able to vote outside constituency (Alam et al., 2020) unless incorporated with e-voting channels or registered in embassies where they will cast their votes. Zimbabwe used the biometric system for voter registration in its previous 2018 internal elections but the elections still experienced electoral fraud and perennial problem of deceased "ghost" voters in the voters' roll (Mathe, 2020). Mathe (2020) argues that technology cannot be used as a panacea but a tool to facilitate democratic processes. This article therefore discusses the possible model for diaspora vote from Zimbabweans abroad in respect to the political context and the electoral system.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Diffusion and Emulation of Diaspora Enfranchisement Norms

This study draws some theoretical concepts from the diffusion of diaspora enfranchisement norms by Turcu & Urbatsch (2015). They posit that emigrants transmit ideas across the borders and neighbourly countries buy each other's ideas in terms of policy making, adoption of electoral standards and mechanisms (Turcu & Urbatsch, 2015, p. 409). They argue that "neighbour's recent enactment of overseas voting nearly doubles countries' likelihood of also making the franchise accessible to their own expatriate citizens" (Turcu & Urbatch, 2015, p. 409).

Several studies opine that diffusion has been one of the factors of democratisation where ideas and innovations are learnt across borders (Starr & Lindborg, 2003; Wejnert, 2005). Diffusion and emulation are viewed as democratisation norms in terms of governance, policy

innovations, gender equality, economic liberalisation and activism for regime change (Pevehouse, 2002; Brooks, 2007; Krook, 2006; Meseguer & Gilardi, 2009). Turcu & Urbatsch (2015, p. 409) notes that diffusion as a norm happens "when governments emulate linguistically, economically, and culturally similar countries' decisions" and strongest ties with immediate neighbourly country influence the adoption of similar policies and solutions to national challenges (Skrede-Gleditsch & Ward, 2006).

Pérez- Armendáriz & Crow (2010, p. 119) believe that "international migrants are agents of democratic diffusion" while Brücker & Schröde (2011) theorise that immigration-related policies are likely to diffuse. This means neighbouring countries can learn from each other's policies. This maybe one of the reasons why some states are faced with growing pressure to grant the right to vote to their nationals in diaspora because other states are doing it. Turcu & Urbatsch (2015, p. 413) puts it clearly that "observing other diasporas' mobilisation or their host country granting the franchise to expatriates clearly shows diasporas that extending such rights is feasible". They call the adoption of international norms as "direct emulation" (Turcu & Urbatsch 2015, p. 413). They also argue that direct emulation is not the only basis on which policies spread from one country to another but competition among states prompt the adoption of international standards (Elkins & Simmons, 2005). Krook (2006) notes that due to international relations many governments try to show commitment to democracy by adopting widely accepted norms. Some countries especially in Africa, often invite international observers to monitor elections due to electoral challenges, hence such governments visibly demonstrate compliance with international electoral standards (Hyde, 2011; Turcu & Urbatsch, 2015, p. 414)

Turcu & Urbatsch (2015) further theorise that extending the right to vote to diasporas can be a silent signal of commitment to democratisation. Thus, the international communities, where the diasporas are resident, may directly witness diaspora enfranchisement as democratic inclusion. States also enfranchise diasporas to demonstrate good faith and convince the "world that they are as respectable as their neighbours" (Turcu & Urbatsch, 2015, p. 414). While despotic governments find it hard to enfranchise emigrants, some scholars argue that authoritarian regimes may exploit diaspora enfranchisement to demonstrate good faith, solve party conflicts or intra-government conflicts and facilitate power sharing among elites while holding on to power (Morse, 2012; Brand, 2010; Turcu & Urbatsch, 2015). Turcu & Urbatsch (2015, p. 414) highlight that for authoritarian regimes, a "simulacrum of democracy is the most democratic signal available"; hence they can allow elections for formality sake.

Besides there has been growing external or international pressure for diaspora participation in elections making it hard for despotic governments to continue with disenfranchisement (Schedler, 2002; Lust-Okar & Jamal, 2002; Turcu & Urbatsch, 2015, p. 415). The South African Development Community Electoral Observation Mission (SEOM) recently recommended that the government of Zimbabwe should consider permitting voting rights to Zimbabweans in the diaspora (ZESN, 2019). The Zimbabwe diaspora community, civil

organisations and political parties continue to pressure the government of Zimbabwe to amend the Electoral Act for diaspora vote. The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN, 2019, p. 3) proposed that the country should "institute mechanisms in the electoral laws that ensure that the right to vote is extended to all citizens including those imprisoned and, in the diaspora". Therefore, this article takes into considering the democratic developments in neighbouring countries as well as the models used for diaspora vote which Zimbabwe can adopt.

METHODOLOGY

To extract perspectives from the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), government of Zimbabwe and other several politicians, the study applied a qualitative content analysis on diaspora vote news articles in Zimbabwe. The debate on the diaspora vote from Zimbabweans living abroad dates back to 2016, the study, therefore made use of articles between 2016 and 2020. Articles on diaspora vote were extracted from The Herald (state-owned media), The Sunday Mail (state-owned media) and privately owned media such as The NewsDay, Centre for Innovation and Technology (CITE) and ZimLive.com (an online news article). It is notable that qualitative content analysis can be employed to analyse a corpus of data or texts such as news stories (Mayring, 2000; Krippendorff, 2004). Content analysis as qualitative research method can "handle the unstructured matter as data" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 41). An analytical tool called Nvivo11 was used to analyse perspectives from news articles.

The study also made use of a semi-structured interview guide to dialogue with 20 politicians from different political parties, namely: Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF); Movement for Democratic Change-Alliance (MDC-Alliance); People's Party (PP); and Zimbabwe People First (ZimFirst). The whole purpose of the interviews was to extract perspectives on the purported challenges and possible model for the diaspora vote. The interviews were done between March 2020 and June 2020. Due to coronavirus lockdowns, most of the interviews were done telephonically through WhatsApp.

Qualitative research is "rooted in a phenomenological paradigm which holds that reality is socially constructed through individual or collective definitions of the situation" (Firestone 1987, p. 17). This study therefore, uses interviews as a qualitative research method to extract in-depth information from participants. A quantitative approach would have limited the study from obtaining in-depth perspectives on the diaspora vote. Participants' identities were kept anonymous and confidential as they could not be revealed against their consent. Ethical research principles such as anonymity and confidentiality require that participants' identities should be concealed or not to be revealed against their consent (De Vos, 1998). Using thematic analysis, the research interview data was transcribed and loaded in Nvivo11 for analysis.

RESULTS

This article discusses different perspectives from ZEC, government officials' and participants on the assumed challenges and the model for the diaspora vote. A qualitative content analysis discloses themes such as challenges with the amendment of the electoral law, finding the suitable diaspora voting model and lack of resources to implement the diaspora vote.

Electoral Act

As shown by literature, the findings of the study confirm that the current legislation in Zimbabwe limits voting rights to government official out-of-country. The courts passed the judgement that the state was not obliged by law to establish polling stations outside the country and all Zimbabweans away from home for personal reasons should travel back to vote. The then ZEC chairperson, Justice Makarau acknowledged that:

"Those in the diaspora should return to Zimbabwe not only to register to vote, but to exercise their right to vote while in the country. They can come back here, present themselves before a voter registration officer, with their proof of identity and an address within Zimbabwe. Come voting day, voting has been allocated to a polling station" (The Herald, 7/07/2017).

"In the event that the Electoral Act is aligned to the constitution, ZEC would either set up polling stations in the different countries where Zimbabweans are resident or turn embassies into polling stations" (The Herald, 7/07/2017).

The disavowal of diaspora vote by the constitutional court was based on the premise that the "right to vote is absolute", backed by Professor, Lovemore Madhuku who added that "in terms of the Constitution, the right to vote was not listed among those rights that cannot be taken away, meaning such a right can be withdrawn in certain circumstances" (The Herald, 7/07/2017). In 2016, Professor Jonathan Moyo through his twitter handle noted that:

"Diaspora vote would require a constitutional amendment & not alignment of Electoral Act with the new Constitution. It means that the right to vote is not absolute but is subject to other provisions of the Constitution that might limit it".

The then Acting ZEC chairperson Mr Emmanuel Magade in 2017 argued that "there is a Supreme Court judgment which guides us on (the diaspora vote), and the law also binds us to polling station-based voting" (The Sunday Mail, 14/12/2017). He also articulated that due to the shortage of resources, ZEC cannot manage the diaspora vote but they can comply if the law changes.

The Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Ziyambi Ziyambi told The Sunday Mail newspaper on the 7th of October 2019 that government will perhaps "commission an international study to see how other jurisdictions are implementing the diaspora vote and hopefully we will be done with that by June 2020" (The Sunday Mail, 7/10/2019). He also added that, once the commission gives back its report then government will decide to amend the law to accommodate the diaspora vote or not. Tawanda Chimhini the director of the Election Resource Centre (ERC) suggested that there is a need to extend the postal voting "not only to people on government business, but to all people who are registered voters" (The Sunday Mail, 7/10/2019). He further argued that:

> "But what is clear is that the diaspora vote cannot be extended to every country where there is a Zimbabwean voter although other African countries have diaspora voting systems that ensure citizens are not disenfranchised. They extend the right to countries where there is a significant population from their countries. The only difference is that they have different electoral systems from ours" (The Sunday Mail, 7/10/2019).

Recently on the 10th of September 2020, ZEC Commissioner, Dr Qhubani Moyo added to the debate that "parliament must work to change the laws and make sure there was a formula around the diaspora vote" (CITE, 10/09/2020). He noted that:

> "We understand there are many Zimbabweans in the Diaspora that need to have voice and contribute a lot to this country but now the question is how then do you make sure that those come to vote" (CITE,10/09/2020).

> "Other countries had designated about two or so constituencies for those who were diaspora, as a way of making sure they also partook in national processes but in Zimbabwe no one has really come up with a model that can be adapted for use or to make sure those in the diaspora have a voice" (CITE, 10/09/2020).

Resources

The finding of the study confirms that there has been international and national pressure on the government of Zimbabwe to extend voting rights to expatriates. In 2018, President Emmerson Mnangagwa, attending the UN General Assembly, promised Zimbabweans living abroad that government was considering extending voting rights, however lack of resources were limiting the efforts. President Mnangagwa said the following:

> "I agree with that request (diaspora vote), but we were not able in the time available to have the logistics put in place to implement that objective. We now have five years where we can work on that objective, where we can see whether we can implement it" (The NewsDay, 26/09/2018).

The NewsDay newspaper reported that President Mnangagwa has shut the door on diasporas, "saying they will not be able to vote in this year's elections because government does not have resources to set up polling stations in their host countries" (The NewsDay, 28/03/2018).

Postal Voting and Electronic Voting

This study reveals two models possibly suitable for the Zimbabwe diaspora. ZEC suggests the extension of postal vote through designated polling station while the MDC opts for electronic voting. While ZEC shows that it does not have powers to manage the diaspora vote until there is a constitutional amendment in favour of the electoral law, the current ZEC chairperson Priscilla Chigumba hinted that they are contemplating "extending postal vote to those registered in the diaspora" (ERC). However, it remains unclear, how they intend to do that because there is still no adjustment of the electoral act or any model brought forward in parliament. The Director of the Election Resource Centre (ERC) Mr Tawanda Chimhini once said that Zimbabwe can take up the Mozambican model where the electorate in the diaspora "vote at their designated polling stations through postal voting" (The Sunday Mail, 7/10/2019). He went on to say that "what is needed is to extend postal voting to all voters in the diaspora on the condition that they register to vote" (The Sunday Mail, 7/10/2019). Mr Tawanda Chimhini had the following to say:

> "In Mozambique, for example, they have created a diaspora constituency, where they vote for a diaspora representative. In South Africa they have proportional representation, which means that voters cast their ballots for political parties, not necessarily for individuals" (The Sunday Mail, 7/10/2019).

> "We already have a postal voting system that works, the same provision can be extended to everyone. It is important for government to carry out this study so that we can come up with a system that works for us" (The Sunday Mail, 7/10/2019).

On the other hand, the opposition political party, MDC argues that there must be constitutional fundamental reforms with the entire electoral act in Zimbabwe. Raising several grievances around the management of internal elections in Zimbabwe, the MDC reasons that the ZEC as an election monitoring body must be disbanded (Zimlive, 12/07/2019). In 2019, Tendai Biti, the Vice President of the MDC-Alliance said that electoral reforms must not be limited to only a biometric voters' roll but Zimbabweans should be able to vote electronically (Zimlive, 12/07/2019). Thus, the diaspora vote can also be run electronically without limiting the process to a polling-station-based voting.

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE INTERVIEWS

Electronic Voting for the Diaspora

Perspectives from several political actors show that the diaspora vote is possible only when there is positive political will. It is noteworthy that the diaspora has access to digital technologies such as social networking sites; hence a technology-based election will be more advantageous for the diasporas than the people in the country. Although some participants believed that a technology-based election will be expensive, others noted that the diaspora can support and sustain a technology-based election because the diaspora has sustained Zimbabwe economy through remittances. Participants had the following to say:

> "The use of social media platforms has gone a long way bridge distance between people the world over. Diaspora voting and campaigning can indeed be made possible using appropriate technology".

> "Technology applications are easily available to people in the diaspora but the issue is with the implementation authority. Would they be able to use those technologies in a way that inspires the citizen's confidence in the electoral process?"

> "The diaspora vote is practical in a limited sense. The only way to maximise voting access to diasporans is to use digital platforms".

The only challenge singled out was the issue of polling stations which can only be set up at Zimbabwean embassies and consulates. A ZANU PF inclined participant argued that Zimbabwean embassies are only present in a few countries and cannot be accessible to all diasporas. He further mentioned that the diaspora vote is not compatible with the current constitution because voting is constituency-based, meaning the voter must reside in one of the 210 constituencies. A participant commented that:

> "Which of the 210 MPs will receive the diaspora vote since diasporans are not resident in any of the 210 constituencies? In fact, the courts have already ruled that the diaspora vote is unconstitutional. As it stands, only those out of Zimbabwe on state duty are allowed to vote from outside Zimbabwe".

Another participant argued that the diaspora vote through embassies and postal ballot is impractical and for legal reasons burdensome. A participant further argued that the diaspora vote which can only be possible for presidential elections would require staff to be above polo iCal reproach and above political lineage to agree that they will abide by the decisions and not temper with the votes. A participant opined that:

"Their vote should be limited to a presidential vote only as the current provisions of the Electoral Act stipulate that one has to reside in a particular constituency to cast their parliamentary and local government votes".

Blockchain Technology

Participants agreed that electronic voting can enhance citizen participation in the diaspora unlike postal voting. While others feared the hacking of votes, others noted that the blockchain technology has been proven to be secure in a number of pilot projects and should provide a channel for diaspora-based Zimbabweans to participate in voting. The blockchain technology was described as having the ability to incorporate biometric systems. Participants had the following to say:

"Blockchain technology is a decentralised, distributed ledger that records the provenance of a digital asset that is transmitted in real time. This is indeed something that could work in Zimbabwe, but political will is required. It will indeed help in reducing fraud and bring transparency".

"Relevant and tested technology should be deployed to capture as many votes as possible without compromising the security of the vote".

"A digital election is possible in Zimbabwe. What is needed is the consensus of most stakeholders. In my opinion, most political parties in Zimbabwe would rather prefer the manual voting system because it is almost impossible to breach it. Digital platforms can be hacked".

"Digital voting might be progressive if it is not subject to hacking which is difficult to guarantee since our country is behind technologically speaking. We do not have functional first class".

In reference to the biometric voter registration used in the previous 2018 elections, a participant noted that "we already had a hacking in the 2018 elections but digital technologies can produce positive outcomes if handled correctly". Technologies were viewed as progressive but with good electoral governance. On another note, one participant said ZEC argues that there are insufficient resources to conduct the diaspora vote and Zimbabwe largely depends on donors such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to fund its electoral processes. One participant highlighted that:

"At this stage it might be difficult to use blockchain technology. Perhaps this can be deployed to cater for diaspora votes, funding permitting".

Political Will

It was noted that lack of sufficient resources to manage the diaspora vote was not the only challenge but lack of political will. Participants highlighted that Zimbabwe has historical political challenges associated with electoral malpractices such as rigging which will make it difficult to conduct a free and fair election even for the diaspora. Though electronic voting would be progressive as in ensuring more citizen participation in the diaspora, participants highlighted, the ruling party, ZANU-PF lacks positive political will and will always interfere with the electoral processes. Participants highlighted that:

"As long as there is political will to conduct free and fair elections, Zimbabwe will be ready for digital voting".

"It can work only if election reform that takes away the ability ZANU PF's ability to interfere with the voting process".

"As long as ZANU PF maintain a grip on the electoral process any efforts invested to improve the voting process will be futile if they do not address Election Reform".

"Although digital voting will happen at some point even if it takes a long time to come through but Zimbabwe will be one of the slow countries to get to this process".

DISCUSSION

This study shows that there has been much pressure on the government of Zimbabwe to extend the right to vote to Zimbabweans out-of-country. Turcu & Urbatsch (2015, p. 413) has shown that "observing other diasporas' mobilisation or their host country granting the franchise to expatriates clearly shows diasporas that extending such rights is feasible". Thus, Zimbabweans in diaspora witness democracy and development in other countries, hence demand their own government at home to implement the diaspora vote policies.

On the other hand, the findings of the study reveal that government of Zimbabwe, however, suspect that the implementation of diaspora would be challenging, citing lack of resources and complications with the voting model for Zimbabweans out-of-country. This displays that although neighbourly countries are likely to buy each other ideas in terms of policy making, adoption of electoral standards and mechanisms (Turcu & Urbatsch, 2015, p. 409), Zimbabwean government remains doubtful of any feasible and effective model of diaspora voting. Zimbabwe has had a series of troubled internal elections and this casts doubts on the proper management of the diaspora and positive political will, for instance the Electoral Act has not been amended yet.

This article argues that the extension of voting rights to emigrants in other neighbourly countries will eventually cause the government of Zimbabwe to implement the diaspora vote. Although the implementation of the diaspora vote might take some time, scholars argue the increasing external or international pressure for diaspora inclusion, would pose much challenge on despotic governments to extend voting rights (Schedler, 2002; Lust-Okar & Jamal, 2002). Therefore, this article argues that the government of Zimbabwe sooner or later will consider extending voting rights to vote to expatriates as said by President Emmerson Mnangagwa in the US although it might a "simulacrum of democracy" (Turcu & Urbatsch, 2015, p. 414). Scholars argue that authoritarian regimes may exploit diaspora enfranchisement to demonstrate good faith, solve party conflicts or intra-government conflicts and facilitate power sharing among elites while holding on to power (Morse, 2012; Brand, 2010; Turcu & Urbatsch, 2015). Despotic government may also want to show a signal of democratic inclusion to promote international relations as shown by Turcu & Urbatsch (2015, p. 414) that for authoritarian regimes, a "simulacrum of democracy is the most democratic signal available", hence this article argues in their desperation to demonstrate democratic inclusion or respond to international pressure, the government may extend voting rights.

Although, the diaspora maybe implemented, there is no guarantee that elections will be free and fair. Participants highlighted that Zimbabwe has historical political challenges associated with electoral malpractices such as rigging which will make it difficult to conduct a free and fair election even for the diaspora. A qualitative content analysis of news articles on diaspora and participants' perspectives has shown that over the years, the government of Zimbabwe under ZANU-PF lack positive political will to implement the diaspora vote. ZESN (2019, p. 2) assumes that "expatriates can be viewed as unwelcome promoters of democratisation" while Østergaard-Nielsen (2003) argues that avoiding diaspora voting by authoritarian states is meant to suppress political dissent. Most diasporas left Zimbabwe due to economic and political challenges hence democratic inclusion may pose serious political threat to the incumbent. This article argues that the implementation of the diaspora will be determined by a good political will at home. The management of internal elections will determine the management of the vote but so far literature and the findings of the study show that internal elections are still chaotic. This study therefore, recommends that there must be political good will.

Although the implementation of diaspora voting may be challenging, observing and learning how other countries are doing is vital. For instance, e-voting especially for the diaspora vote seems manageable. Zimbabwe can implement a pilot study on electronic voting for the diaspora vote. Diasporas should be allowed to participate in presidential elections considering the fact that parliamentary and local government elections demand one to vote within a constituency where registered. If there would be need for establishing constituencies in diaspora, Zimbabwe can simply learn from the Mozambican diaspora policy that allows

emigrants to vote for their representative out-of-country. Turcu & Ubatsch, (2015) argue that a country can emulate good policies from its neighbours.

Presidential elections may be run through electronic voting or personal voting combined with postal voting. Zimbabwe can establish polling stations at embassies where voters can personally vote and the election residue can be transmitted home. Due to the fears of electoral fraud and other challenges with postal voting, ZEC officials at the embassies, in the presence party agents should be allowed to tabulate results soon after the election, and send election residue to Zimbabwe. However, personal voting combined with postal voting might be cumbersome, this article, therefore recommends that Zimbabwe should implement electronic voting or for start-up, pilot e-voting. Unlike postal voting, e-voting may reduce costs and can boost participation or voter turnout by millions of Zimbabweans in the diaspora. The channel of e-voting selected should incorporate biometrics which identifies the voter's physical characteristics such as fingerprints or facial appearance to curb electoral fraud. Digital systems such as the blockchain technology can be combined with biometrics, hence applying e-voting can be less challenging especially for the diasporas, as reflected by the findings of the study that technology applications are easily available to people in the diaspora. The diaspora has sustained Zimbabwean through remittances (ZESN, 2019), hence establishing e-voting may not be costly as alleged if expatriates are engaged and democratically enfranchised by the government of Zimbabwe.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that implementing the diaspora vote would demand a positive political will and electoral reforms. Electoral reforms should begin with the amendment of Electoral Act to extend voting rights to emigrants. Zimbabwe should learn from neighbourly countries that have already extended the rights to their emigrants. Extending the rights to vote to out-of-country citizens has become a global phenomenon. Some countries manage diaspora vote through postal voting while other use e-voting. Unlike postal voting, e-voting is cheaper and boosts political participation and high voter turnout. Technologically the world is advancing and Zimbabwe should not lag behind especially having more than 5 million citizens out-of-country. This study, therefore recommends that the government of Zimbabwe should start contemplating on the diaspora vote policies as well as the models suitable for external elections.

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