

## An Analysis of Barriers to Independence of Councillors in Zimbabwean Urban Local Authorities

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### Abstract

Councillors have specific roles as enshrined in the Urban Councils Act Chapter 29:15. They are democratically elected representatives of communities and are also members of the governing body (the council). As representatives, they are elected into council through a popular plebiscite. Councillors are legally mandated to attend and participate effectively in full council and in committees of council meetings. In discharging their roles councillors are expected to be independent in judgment. Councillor independence here is used to refer to the ability of a councillor or full council to make decisions independent of undue influence or detraction from higher authorities in the governance system. This paper is an analysis of the environment in which Zimbabwean councillors operate and the extent to which this compromises their independence. It demonstrates that in Zimbabwe, existing legislation and policy processes tend to militate against councillor independence. Critical reference is made to existing literature, policies and legislation that back the paper's view. Lack of councillor independence has been characterised by excessive central government interference, and unrestricted terms of office for councillors among other problems. Promoting councillor independence is a key factor in enhancing local development.

**Key words:** Councillor independence, Legislation, Urban local authorities, Urban Councils Act

### Introduction

This research paper contends that councillor independence in Zimbabwe though critical is not a reality because of a number of factors that undermine its practice. Councillor independence here is used to refer to the ability of a councillor or full council to make decisions independent of undue influence or detraction from higher authorities in the governance system or technical officers of the council's administrative arm. The councillor referred to in this study is the representative of a ward in Zimbabwe's urban local government system. Local government in Zimbabwe refers to a sub national level of government known either as an urban council or a rural district council (Mushamba, 2010). Local government can be