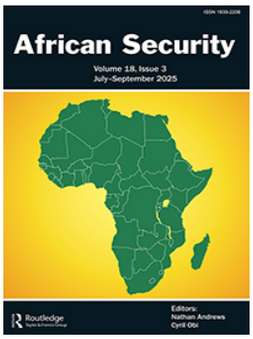

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Militarisation and Political (In)security in Contemporary Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This article augments studies on authoritarianism and civil-military relations in Africa by examining how militarization shapes political security. It uses the case of Zimbabwe, the concepts of militarization and political security defined from a human security perspective, and primary and secondary sources to argue that militarizing politics and the state severely undermines political security. The article shows that the increased human rights violations, disregard of the rule of law, and absence of political freedom in Zimbabwe were principally owing to militarization. It concludes that though a militarized, electoral authoritarian state effectively safeguards regime security, it cannot provide political security, among other human security elements.

KEYWORDS

Authoritarianism; human security; militarization; political security; ZANU-PF; Zimbabwe

Introduction

This article uses the case of Zimbabwe to augment studies on authoritarianism and civil-military relations in Africa[1] by examining how militarization shapes political security. In this article, political security is defined from a human security perspective as denoting the ability of people to live in a social order that respects their fundamental human rights, observes the rule of law and guarantees political freedom (32–33).[2] Similarly, Hassan and Wagle[3] concur that political security entails the sovereign values of democratic and inalienable rights, human dignity, political freedom, and individual safety from state repression and violence. In this context, political security equates to the narrow understanding of human security as freedom from fear, representing protecting individuals and communities from the risk or occurrence of political violence and warfare.[4] Therefore, the significance of focusing on political security rests in promoting civil and political rights, which many states fail to guarantee to their citizens.[5] As will be articulated in this study, in the Zimbabwean case, political insecurity entails widespread state repression

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that expresses itself through the violation of fundamental human rights, disregard of the rule of law and a lack of political freedom.

Zimbabwe has been described as a militarized, electoral authoritarian state.[6] An electoral authoritarian state denotes a political entity in which multiparty elections are frequently held across all tiers of government. Still, almost all are imperfect because of serious and systematic breaches of fundamental democratic principles.[7] On its part, militarization connotes "a process or set of connected processes facilitating the engagement of military institutions, activities and modes of the organisation into multiple spheres of social life" (204).[8] Though several studies on militarization in Zimbabwe exist,[9] its multifaceted implications for political security still merit further academic inquiry. Most of the studies concur that the intensification of the militarization of politics and the state in Zimbabwe was targeted at precluding the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) from democratically assuming state power.

This article contributes to the extant body of knowledge on militarization in Zimbabwe by demonstrating how increasing military involvement in politics and the state has brought increasing repression from 2000 to 2023. Its novelty goes beyond employing the concepts of militarization and political security, which is a subcategory of the human security paradigm. It also highlights that militarization has continued unabated and is primarily used to target the political security of Zimbabweans. This study shows that militarization affects political security and the resultant political insecurity acts as a tool for the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party and the military to hold on to power. The article argues that the militarization of politics and the state severely undermines political security. The militarization of the Zimbabwean state and politics adversely affected opposition political parties and threatened the general citizenry. The article demonstrates that the increased human rights violations, lack of the rule of law, and absence of political freedom in Zimbabwe were principally owing to militarization. Although some of the measures adopted by the ZANU-PF government resulting in political insecurity can also be present in non-militarized regimes, this article shows that the political state of affairs in Zimbabwe was primarily the result of the militarization of politics and the state.

The discussion now turns to the analytical framework before proceeding to provide the methodology of the study. After that, the discussion turns to an overview of militarization in Zimbabwe. Lastly, it focuses on how militarization affected state capacity in political security provision in Zimbabwe.

Militarisation and political (In)security in Africa

Militarization signifies the escalation of militarism. In this article, militarism is mainly understood from an institutional perspective as fundamentally meaning the encouragement of military power and the spread of "military virtues"

within society, with elites significantly influencing its creation.[10] Militarization is a complex process that comprises several components. These encompass the increase in arms and defense expenditure, the omnipotence of military principles and practices, and considerable military influence or authority over governmental programmes and initiatives. Some of the factors that make up militarization involve emphasizing military approaches for every security issue and the tendency to employ force or to display the threat of its application.[11] The militarization of politics signifies an increase in military authority and impact on political decision-making.[12] Analytically and theoretically, militarization helps to illuminate the existence and dominance of the military in public political and economic processes.[13] Similarly, Feaver[14] observes that concentrating on military power encapsulates the idea that the military institution could hold political supremacy even (or perhaps especially) when it does not seize direct power via a coup.

A militarized state denotes a polity where there exists a complete or partial merging between the military and other oppressive elements of society within the political power structure, consistently affecting the whole state apparatus.[15] Militarization can be either overt or covert, as mentioned above, where military individuals do not assume a visible and significant position in the political sphere. They simply utilize their strong influence over the official bearers of authority to slowly penetrate governmental frameworks, such as in the administration of particular crucial sectors or regions.[16] Militarization in certain contexts equates to the military overstepping its professional limits and encroaching into the political domain without invitation; an extreme example of such intervention would be a military coup.[17] In the scope of this article, militarization ought not to be viewed exclusively as a project of the military in which it employs its strategies and tactics to engage leaders in politics and governance. This is because the agency for militarization in the Zimbabwean state is also ascribed to the civilian political elite.

Militarization in Africa is caused by various factors that are closely connected to the processes of state formation. Militarization is deeply rooted in Africa due to the continent's extensive history of subjugation, during which colonial and post-colonial governments, occasionally with Western support, were predominantly authoritarian and relied on forceful means to rule.[18] Numerous institutions inherited by the African leadership from colonial rulers were reshaped to serve the interests of the elite, leading to the prevalence of neopatrimonialism in various nations.[19] The militarization of politics continues to be one of Africa's primary legacies from colonialism. Mamdani[20] points out that the lack of three essential characteristics: nationalism, sovereignty, and external independence, present in other modern states, causes the African post-colonial state, similar to its predecessor, to fail in serving the interests of its citizens. The post-colonial African states largely still reflect the

colonial states, which did not seek legitimacy from their people because they were very interventionist, made few claims about representing the opinions of their people, and governed through domination, backed by coercion.[21] The military remains a significant force in politics to mitigate the harm inflicted by the ongoing threats to statehood in Africa, which include issues like democratic shortcomings, government inefficiency, and legitimacy crises. A legitimacy crisis occurs when a government does not achieve public recognition of an effective and engaged political system. Signs of this include manipulated or irregular elections, declining trust in the state's public institutions, and the sidelining of minority interests.[22]

The reality of global imperialism has also spurred militarization in Africa. Western nations dominate the global economy and aim to promote their imperialist agendas through various methods, such as either backing corrupt and unpopular regimes in Africa or orchestrating the undemocratic ousting of certain governments.[23] The post-colonial African states have struggled to implement policies that benefit their citizens due to their ongoing connections to the previous colonial powers and rising powers like China.[24] The danger of global imperialism in Africa frequently brings to mind the concept of anti-imperialism, leading to the revival of liberation and anti-colonial struggle politics and actions by governments that are very wary of outside influences and aim to fiercely protect their hard-won independence.[25] Consequently, the continuing danger of Western imperialism further adds to militarized states and political dynamics in Africa. Within these post-colonial militarized countries, the invocation of anti-imperialism leads to the military not being explicitly drawn into politics but rather being an essential element of almost every political change occurring, or vice versa. This situation complicates discussions about coups occurring in these militarized states because the military has not been confined to the barracks from the very beginning.

The economic interests that are held or pursued by the military are also frequently highlighted by scholars as a catalyst for militarization. According to Thompson,[26] the corporate interests of the military involve position and resources. Position involves organizational independence, monopoly, unity, respect, and governmental roles. Resources include budget allocations, military strategy, and salary and advancement. Nordlinger[27] asserts that the armed forces mainly intervene in political matters (via a coup) either to safeguard or advance their corporate interests. As a result, the military elite frequently exert pressure on their political counterparts to acknowledge their interests, otherwise, they may be compelled to seize control of the state when they believe their interests are significantly endangered. This was true in most of the coups that occurred in Africa, such as the one that happened in Mali in 1968 and in Gambia in 1994.[28] Even beyond Africa, the protection of both personal and organizational military interests drives the military to become keen on

influencing those who occupy not only the top position in the country but also various critical government roles and sectors (174–175).[29]

The state continues to be the primary source of wealth in numerous post-colonial states, establishing a mutual relationship between the military and political elites to uphold their entitlement to utilize state resources. However, in many instances, even outside of Africa, like in Asia and the Pacific following the democratic shifts of the 1980s and 1990s, the military's business interests are politically ambiguous, while electoral politics has predominantly drawn in retiring military officials with personal political ambitions (174–175).[30] Political power is chiefly pursued or maintained in Africa for its material advantages to the political, military, and business elite (1323).[31] For instance, Egypt and Sudan have undergone persistent military dominance over the economy and related impact on politics.[32] Consequently, when the military is focused on identifying the leadership of both the government and the various strategic sectors, as is the case in Zimbabwe, it aims to ensure that their political and military formal and individual economic interests are safeguarded.

Militarization negatively affects political security and other categories of human security in many ways. The logic of militarization results in the African state being seriously incapacitated to deliver a range of political goods, particularly political security. Noteworthy is that state capacity is used in this article from a human security perspective. It entails, as Rotberg[33] (3–4) notes, the ability of the state to provide different kinds of political goods, such as public security, the rule of law, freedom to participate in political processes and politics, and the delivery of social services, particularly education and healthcare, necessary to protect and allow citizens to realize their potential. There is no agreement among scholars on the nature of the relationship between militarization and state capacity, especially in Africa. For example, while the military in Rwanda and Uganda, among other post-conflict settings in Africa, has formed the bedrock of state formation and maintenance of law and order, as well as economic development, these governments have become increasingly authoritarian.[34] This points to the fact that militarization can strengthen regime security and other aspects of human security, except political security.

In addition, militarization ruins human life, particularly by emphasizing the employment of coercive force within social relationships. This stems from the ruling elite considering political issues as fundamentally military domains. Moreover, military superiority over civilian entities leads to intensified intolerance for political rivalry and the worrying contraction of the democratic sphere (445).[35] Democratic governance is significantly restricted by the military when it persists in overseeing, controlling, or mediating the democratization process (83).[36] This aligns with the perspective that militarization effectively diminishes the restrictions that govern and requires the use of military force (67).[37] Given that militarization is enforced on the populace

without their approval, it causes political insecurity due to insufficient democratic progress and infringement of human rights. Militarization also significantly increases the influence of African militaries, resulting in, among other consequences, substantial military expenditures, human insecurity, and ineffective governance (9–11).[38] Increased military expenditure, particularly on small arms and light weaponry, by authoritarian governments indicates forthcoming suppression of opposing political groups and violations of human rights.[39] Similarly, the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report noted that political insecurity is prevalent in countries prioritizing substantial military spending over social expenses in health and education (33).[40] Therefore, militarization undermines socio-economic development and political security.

Militarization also promotes the increasing involvement of the military in the economy and corporate activities, leading to detrimental effects on economic and political growth. This includes military personnel being increasingly employed in key government roles as ministers, managers of state enterprises, and governors. Egypt and Sudan, along with Zimbabwe, serve as notable examples from post-colonial Africa that have exhibited this type of militarization and its related negative impacts on economic and political growth. Military-operated enterprises are not only rarely efficient, but the military also predominantly manages underground economies. This leads to the military elite obtaining a privileged position, which they strive to protect at any cost, while the lower ranks and the wider populace often do not reap any benefits.[41] When the military continues to occupy the centers of power following the end of an authoritarian era, its influence, along with related political and economic issues, is expected to persist rather than cease. For example, the militaries of Egypt and Sudan, akin to the armed forces of Zimbabwe, contemplated the most effective ways to sustain their power and influence after longstanding dictators were ousted.[42] Thus, the militarization of post-colonial states in Africa will likely continue to challenge political security and adversely impact economic development.

Methodology

The analysis in this article is based on both documentary sources and interviews. The interviews were carried out as part of a larger qualitative research project with various actors in Zimbabwe's public and private sectors between July and October 2019. The actors included ordinary citizens and key informants consisting of serving and retired members of the security sector, policymakers, civil society and opposition political parties. These important state security and political players are mainly located in Zimbabwe's capital, Harare, which is often disputed by different political factions. Residents of the nation's capital city come from all ten provinces in Zimbabwe. Key informant interviews and interviews with ordinary citizens were selected primarily based on

the participants' expertise as practitioners who could offer insightful commentary and had first-hand knowledge and experience of the political climate in Zimbabwe since 2000, respectively. This was intended to allow the research participants to tell their own stories about how the Zimbabwean government has been able to provide political security. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques were used to reach the research participants. The latter helped in getting around the challenges of locating, contacting, and enlisting the assistance of the research population in a politically divided setting that is primarily marked by suspicion and mistrust. Additionally, it made it possible to gather information and experiences from critical key informants and ordinary citizens who reside outside of Harare. It significantly enhanced the study's national representativeness and comprehensiveness. Although 50 interviews with ordinary citizens and 15 key informant (KI) interviews were carried out physically and online via WhatsApp call and Skype, only 13 interviews (eight key informant interviews and five interviews with ordinary citizens) are cited in this article. Given the sensitive nature of this study, all research participants are anonymized.

Documentary analysis included peer-reviewed works and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) reports. Both public and private newspaper articles were also consulted in order to overcome the challenge of media polarization in the country. A key advantage of the documentary sources used is that they provided access to information on militarization and its effects on political security across the country. They were crucial in making up for the researcher's inability to physically do fieldwork outside of Harare in all ten of Zimbabwe's provinces.

The gathered data was analyzed and presented using a thematic approach. Using themes derived from the analytical framework as a starting point, patterns were found, investigated, and documented during the data analysis process. This made it easier to arrange and incorporate conflicting information and viewpoints from the research participants. As a result, sections with their corresponding sub-sections are used to present and discuss the study findings.

Militarisation in Zimbabwe: an overview

Militarization in Zimbabwe predates the country's independence. In the 1970s, the militarization of the Rhodesian state was evident through the military's control of the Joint Operations Command centers (JOC), which were initially created to lead the Rhodesian regime's counterinsurgency efforts. At the national level, the JOC included the Minister of Manpower, the leaders of the security services operating under Combined Operations, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Law and Order, and the Minister of Internal Affairs. At the local level, the JOC consisted of representatives from all the security

services, including the army, police, intelligence services, and air force. Although army supremacy was established officially in 1977, its actions had previously undermined police functions, leading to the anti-colonial rebellion being perceived and dealt with as a military threat throughout the conflict (60–64).[43] Again, militarization in the Rhodesian state expressed itself through the high number of men under arms. These ranged from Rhodesia's regular army comprising "some 15,000 men plus 20,000 white-led territorials and 20–30,000 of the controversial auxiliaries" to Selous Scouts and paramilitary forces such as the District Assistants and Farm Militia (29).[44] There were also increased defense expenditure and reduced spending in other services and ministries (27).[45]

On their part, the main liberation movements, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni(302),[46] often employed violence as a crucial tool not only to resist colonial rule but also to ensure political survival. They seldom considered diversity, dissent, and varying perspectives in their pursuit of internal unity to effectively conduct the liberation struggle. In times of challenges concerning political leadership and the direction of the liberation movements, especially in ZANU, military leaders rather than political figures, dominated every decisive moment (313–322).[47]

After independence, how the government handled the Matabeleland conflict (*Gukurahundi* – first rains that wash away the chaff) of 1982–87 displayed early evidence of militarization and repression. ZANU and the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA)-dominated military considered the opposition a security threat rather than just a political opponent. This resulted in the reported deployment of the military to weaken ZAPU's support base during elections, which some senior military officers did not have any problem with executing on behalf of ZANU politicians.[48] In the late 1990s, the military also played a central role in quashing riots engendered by a sharp rise in the cost of living and tax as a result of, among other issues, the payment of unbudgeted gratuities to the war veterans of the liberation struggle (23–24).[49]

Militarization intensified in Zimbabwe since 2000 and this has primarily been evident through several measures that are contrary to professional military ideals. These measures encompass the growing appointment of individuals with liberation war experience and high military ranks to top roles in civilian state institutions and significant military participation in the election process. Furthermore, there has been active involvement of both current and former high-ranking military officials in patronage and lucrative networks of wealth generation, through direct oversight of production and trade and the awarding of government bids and contracts to businesses owned by these individuals. Militarization has also been reflected in a greater inclination to govern through military-style operations (811–812).[50] In this regard, Zimbabwe's security services, that is: the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF)

(army and air force), Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), Zimbabwe Prison and Correctional Services, and Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), were part and parcel of the militarization processes in that country. They were brought together by the JOC consisting of the heads of the army, airforce, police, and intelligence, which conceived, planned and executed several military-style operations to deal with many problems bedeviling the country after 1999 (235).[51]

Although the JOC was reinstated in the initial years of independence to oversee the government's efforts against internal and external security dangers, it was broadened to include the war veterans under the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association and the Ministry of Defence from 2000 onwards (359).[52] During this period, the JOC functioned as a parallel cabinet and its decisions effectively governed Zimbabwe with President Robert Mugabe merely serving as a civilian front (235).[53] The end of Mugabe's reign and the beginning of that of Emmerson Mnangagwa in 2017 as a result of a military intervention did not significantly change that arrangement (198).[54] Through the JOC, the military took on the responsibility for a series of decisions and actions including political strategy, the creation and execution of economic policy, and the election strategy of ZANU-PF (8–16).[55]

In light of the above, it is worth noting that the activities carried out by nonmilitary security services were also cases of militarization because they not only operated as paramilitary units from time to time but were also militarized (12–13).[56] Since the late 1990s, the headship of the police, intelligence and prisons has remained under ZANLA war veterans and military personnel (212–213).[57] Only the CIO has lately been under the leadership of individuals without military backgrounds. Isaac Moyo was appointed in December 2017.[58] He was succeeded by Fulton Mangwanya, who was appointed in January 2025.[59] Still, militarization has taken a quantum leap since November 2017, with many high-ranking military officers becoming cabinet ministers. Some generals continued occupying their positions in public institutions from the Mugabe era, while others were further promoted. As a result, unless specified, the military and its *modus operandi* dominated the other security services in the formulation and implementation of policies that affected political security.

On the other hand, Zimbabwe's war veterans are a case of militarization considering that they do not only consist of those that left the military soon or later after the country attained its independence in 1980. They also include those still serving and holding high positions in the military, other security services and government departments. Both groups' military backgrounds continue to influence how they conduct their everyday activities including in public affairs with a bearing on political security (213).[60] Again, paramilitary violence in Zimbabwe, especially during election periods, has been experienced at the hands of ZANU-PF youth and militias in cahoots with war

veterans and serving or former military personnel thus qualifying their activities as cases of militarization.[61] It is also worth noting that ZANU-PF itself has been increasingly militarized over the years with senior military officers heading many of its departments. As a result, militarization has served as the main method by which the elite of the former liberation movement, ZANU-PF, has aimed to uphold its dominance in both the state and society, leading to significant impacts on political security. This is in agreement with N'Diaye's[62] observation that genuine security sector transformation in post-colonial Africa has been elusive primarily owing to African leaders. These have benefitted from the legacy of widespread praetorianism, a lack of institutionalized civilian supremacy and democratic accountability, and transparency in the running of military institutions. As shown in the following section, militarization affects political security and the resultant political insecurity acts as a tool for ZANU-PF and the military to hold on to power.

Militarisation and political security provision in Zimbabwe

This section discusses how increased militarization resulted in increased political insecurity in Zimbabwe since 2000. The objective is to illustrate how repression increased owing to militarization in Zimbabwe rather than to exhaustively discuss every military involvement in politics. Therefore, the discussion revolves around human rights, the rule of law, and political freedom, which are central to the meaning of political security from a human security perspective as discussed earlier. It reveals that the increased militarization of politics and the state severely undermines political security.

Political freedom

The military elite conceived and implemented an array of measures that starved many Zimbabweans of political freedom. The latter is broadly defined as "the opportunities that people have to determine who should govern and on what principles, and also include the possibility to scrutinize and criticize authorities, to have freedom of political expression and an uncensored press, to enjoy the freedom to choose between different political parties, and so on" (38).[63]

The military elites were central to the politically motivated violence that disenfranchised voters during most of the elections because they ran the ruling party's campaigns.[64]

For example, there was Operation *Tsuro* (Rabbit) of 2000, which was carefully planned, directed and executed by the security services with support from war veterans and ZANU-PF youth (4).[65] It aimed to seize farms owned by Zimbabwe's 1,600 white commercial farmers and stop MDC opposition party's inroads into farming and rural areas, especially then ZANU-PF

strongholds of Manicaland and Mashonaland, to mobilize electoral support for the ruling party in the coming 2000 parliamentary elections and the 2002 presidential election (359–360).[66] As a result, in 2000, over 10,000 people were internally displaced by violence denying them the right to vote in the parliamentary elections held that year (22).[67] In the 2002 presidential election, widespread coercion and cruelty, including the confiscation of about 1,300 national identity cards from real or perceived MDC supporters, especially in rural areas, denied them the right to vote. This had a bearing on the degree to which the election's outcome resulted from a free and fair process.[68] Accordingly, as some research participants averred, the MDC's initial high visibility in urban areas compared to rural areas was largely not the outcome of its deliberate decision but the restrictive political milieu it operated in, which has largely continued.[69]

Furthermore, it was during the period immediately before the 2002 presidential election when the JOC, led by General Vitalis Zvinavashe, set a dangerous precedent by declaring its unconditional support to leaders with liberation war credentials at the expense of those without even if the latter emerge winners in elections.[70] The JOC's 2002 declaration has been restated by high-ranking military officials in various ways and fora, especially just before nearly every general election, resulting in a similar effect of instilling fear within the voter population. This was particularly prominent as the nation neared the presidential run-off election on 27 June 2008.[71] As one research participant indicated, "Zvinavashe's 2002 declaration was confirmed and enforced in 2008 when no iota of doubt was left regarding the view that the military in Zimbabwe is the final arbiter of who should rule the country."[72] This is in sync with many researchers'[73] observation that the state-sponsored electoral violence which was executed under the code name *Operation Makavhotera Papi* (Where did you put your X?) demonstrated that the ruling ZANU-PF and the military elite in control of the Zimbabwean government are unwilling to relinquish power through an electoral process. The violence was severe in the Mashonaland East and Central Provinces, where ZANU-PF had formerly garnered the majority of its backing.[74]

Over the years, the simple mention of the 2008 terrible violence during the run-up to each election has resulted in the electorate, especially in rural areas, reluctantly casting their votes for ZANU-PF for fear that past atrocities might resurface.[75] In the 2023 elections, the role of Forever Associates Zimbabwe (FAZ), a quasi-security intelligence organization dented the credibility of the entire election process owing to its intimidation tactics.[76] This dovetails with a research participant's opinion that "ZANU-PF has remained a two-faced politico-military institution as during the liberation struggle and now operates as a party-military regime with the military continuing to be dominant."[77]

Considering that the remarks made by the military elite, initiated by Zvinavashe, validate the articulated anti-imperialist rationale directing the

liberation war generation's stance in Zimbabwe, it is accurate that their primary focus was on the local opposing political party figures rather than exclusively the West (830).[78] On the one hand, the military claims can be seen as preemptive veto coups, denoting a situation in which the military engages in political matters to prevent the transfer of power to an incoming government. This occurs by prohibiting public involvement and repressing widespread dissent, usually following a plea from the current civilian administration (63).[79] On the contrary, it is problematic to say the Zimbabwean armed forces are requested to interfere in politics because of the nature of the state formation process, rooted in the liberation struggle thus making the military elites indistinguishable from the political ruling elite. In this instance, Zvinavashe and his successors' political declarations mainly focused on sidelining Morgan Tsvangirai, who contested Robert Mugabe in the 2002, 2008, and 2013 presidential elections. The declarations fundamentally mirrored other security-related actions taken by the military and ZANU-PF leadership, in which the MDC was viewed as a front of the West and a fundamental danger to Zimbabwe's status as a sovereign state.[80] This rationalized the brutality that was inflicted upon the opposition backers and the ordinary populace whenever they sought to confront ZANU-PF via democratic avenues. Therefore, akin to the Nigerian experience, the elite political culture in Zimbabwe is responsible for the rise and continuation of organized political violence.[81]

The Zimbabwean experience during those elections accompanied by violence confirms the idea that some governments resort to pre-election violence and other forms of manipulation when the threats to their hold on power through an election are very high.[82] According to many people interviewed, the increasing popularity of the MDC and Morgan Tsvangirai prompted the military elites' different machinations aimed at disenfranchising voters, especially electoral violence and related activities.[83] Akin to the experiences of other countries like Nigeria and India, electoral violence, especially voter intimidation, served a dual purpose of demobilizing and mobilizing voters to increase the turnout for the incumbent party.[84] The citizens and MDC supporters were often left without or with restricted freedom to choose a candidate on the ballot (46).[85] Pre-election violence was designed to tilt the balance in support of ZANU-PF. Post-election violence was meant to communicate to the electorate that ZANU-PF hegemony should not be challenged, no matter what (31).[86]

Zimbabweans, especially those sections of society perceived to have strong MDC support, were also denied the right to vote through the enactment of the Citizenship Act of 2001. It resulted in whites and migrant farm workers, mainly from Mozambique, Malawi, and Zambia, being prohibited from voting in the 2002 presidential election based on either having dual citizenship or being an alien (122).[87] Between 4,000 and 96,000 people were disenfranchised owing to a six-month period they were given to sort out their citizenship

status. This was deliberately calculated to prevent the affected people from seeking legal recourse (6).[88] Further, the introduction of restrictions to postal voting disenfranchised over a million people in the diaspora in 2002 who appear to be largely MDC supporters in exile or as economic migrants (374–375).[89] Though the diaspora vote was enshrined in the constitution in 2013, the government has not implemented it, citing inadequate logistical resources.[90] The arbitrary changes to the country's citizenship and electoral laws are one primary tactic the military elites and ZANU-PF have employed to disenfranchise those citizens they are well aware that they do not vote for the governing party. This view is reinforced by the abuse of the postal voting provision or "special voting" where the police, prison, and army officers, and other electoral officials who would be working on polling day have been consistently forced to vote under the watch of their superiors.[91]

The introduction of a succession of security and repressive laws under the guidance of JOC constricted media space and the freedoms of expression, association, and assembly in the post-2000 era. Some of these laws encompassed the Public Order and Security Act (POSA, now the Maintenance of Peace and Order Act [MOPA] since early 2021) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) that were enacted in 2002. These laws were often selectively used to suppress dissent and influence politics. For example, AIPPA's implementation led to the arrest, intimidation and harassment of private media players, as well as the 2003 closing of the *Daily News* and the *Daily News on Sunday* (4).[92] For instance, from June 2000 to March 2002, about 40 journalists and 44 media workers were harassed, beaten, threatened with death and arrested for critically reporting on the government regarding the political or human rights concerns in the country respectively (135).[93] On its part, POSA not only imposed restrictions on media that amounted to the shrinking of media space and freedom of expression (14).[94] It also effected significant restrictions on protests and electioneering by making it unlawful to hold political meetings devoid of notifying and seeking permission from the police. As a result, about 42 people, mostly MDC supporters, were arrested in a month after POSA began to be implemented. The use of POSA in the run-up to the 2002 presidential election also resulted in the MDC only managing to hold eight major rallies compared to ZANU-PF's 50, which negatively affected the former's capacity to canvass for electoral support (12).[95]

Additionally, the ZANU-PF government, both during Mugabe's and Mnangagwa's leadership, operated under the direction of the JOC to suppress any organized or attempted protests against the nation's worsening socio-economic and political conditions. For example, in the March and June 2003 demonstrations, 400 and 800 individuals in Harare and other cities and towns were detained, respectively.[96] The other major violent disruptions of protests occurred in 2006 when about 15 leaders of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade

Unions (ZCTU) were arrested for protesting.[97] Once more, on 11 March 2007, the riot police, assisted by the army, raided a prayer gathering organized by the Save Zimbabwe Campaign, which united civil society groups and opposition political groups. They killed one person, apprehended 50 individuals, and reportedly injured several for supposedly conspiring to protest against the government. The security services subsequently engaged in a two-week crackdown on Harare's high-density areas and temporarily prohibited public gatherings using POSA (18–22).[98] Likewise, in 2016, the forceful reaction of the government to demonstrations and protests led to more than 600 arrests of political and social activists, journalists, lawyers, and citizens (3).[99]

In the period following Mugabe's rule, the military orchestrated violence against demonstrators after the elections, notably on 1 August 2018 in Harare, along with a crackdown on opposition leaders and supporters.[131] The debate over who ordered the military to be on the streets of Harare on 1 August 2018 and how the soldiers suppressed the protests supports the notion that militarization conceals and disrupts the frameworks that oversee and direct the application of military force. The Commission of Inquiry set up to investigate the events surrounding the 2018 post-election violence was important, and its findings showed the extent to which the military is intertwined with Zimbabwean politics, thereby validating longstanding concerns (v-vii).[100]

The ongoing dominance of the military and the associated inability of the state to ensure political freedom were also evident during the protests in January 2019. The state sent in the military along with the police to suppress the demonstrations across the country's major cities, leading to more than 1,800 instances of human rights violations (3).[101] The authorities instituted an internet blackout lasting three days during the protests, infringing upon various human rights norms, particularly those concerning access to information online, the sharing of ideas, and personal expression.[102] The internet blackout was intended to weaken the organizing efforts of the civil society leadership, labor unions, and other protest coordinators. It also served Mnangagwa's interests by preventing the dissemination of images depicting state violence against protesters to the outside world (19).[103] For numerous individuals interviewed, the involvement of security services in politically driven violence together with ZANU-PF officials and militias made the public view them as oppressive and intimidating.[104] Fear and a sense of vulnerability prevented many citizens from engaging in public activities and calling for governmental transparency and accountability.[105] Amnesty International's five-year[102] review of the Mnangagwa administration's human rights record reveals that there has been continuity of Mugabe's violent suppression of dissenting voices. Therefore, militarization severely weakens a state's capacity to provide political freedoms and the resultant political insecurity has been central to ZANU-PF and the military to hold on to power. This dovetails with

Barron's[106] argument that the military's structure, functions, and behaviors are central to understanding its key role in national competition for political power and the overall political and social environment.

Human rights

Militarization in Zimbabwe also contributed to an increase in the violation of fundamental human rights like the right to life, freedom from torture and the right to education and healthcare. It is worth noting that the proclivity to use military solutions to every problem through such military-style operations as *Tsuro*, *Makavhotera Papi*, *Murambatsvina* (Restore Order, 2005), *Garikai/* Hlalani Kuhle (Live Well, 2005), *Maguta/Taguta/Sisuthi* (Feed the Nation, 2005–7), *Dzikisa Mitengo* (Reduce Prices, 2007), *Chikorokoza Chapera* (No more Illegal Mining, 2006), *Hakudzokwi* (No Return, 2008) and *Dzikisai Madhishi* (Remove Your Television Satellite Dishes, 2008) violated many fundamental human rights.[9] There was also widespread murder of many citizens, especially the MDC activists. For instance, in the run-up to the 2000 parliamentary elections, prominent MDC activists such as Talent Mabika and Tichaona Chiminya in Buhera district in Manicaland province, and David Stephens, a white farmer from Macheke, Mashonaland East province, were killed. The perpetrators of these violations were state agents, war veterans, and ZANU-PF youth militia (2–3;[107] 2).[109] Additionally, Operation *Makavhotera Papi* left around 300 people, especially MDC supporters, dead (29).[108] The post-election violence in Harare in 2018 resulted in the deaths of six individuals and the injury of 35 others due to military actions, raising doubts about the integrity, completeness, and peaceful nature of the entire election process (10).[109] The violence inevitably harmed the Mnangagwa administration's urgent need to rectify the coup by obtaining legitimacy through conducting a credible election (148).[110]

Torture has also been increasingly used in Zimbabwe after 1999, owing to the increasing militarization of politics and the state. Its purpose was to control the population by destroying vocal leaders of either opposition political parties or civil society and instilling fear in the community (1–2).[111] For instance, torture was the dominant category of human rights violations and recorded at 24% between July 2001 and December 2004 (8).[112] In 2002, 453 cases of torture were documented countrywide from the beginning of January to mid-March alone (3).[113] In 2008, numerous instances of politically motivated abductions, arbitrary arrests, imprisonment and torture of lawyers, students, civilians and opposition political activists were reported.[114] Between 2012 and 2016, victims of torture, unfair trials, and enforced disappearances included several human rights activists and lawyers.[115] The various methods of torture encompassed beatings, electric shocks, rape and other gross human rights violations. The

perpetrators of torture included government-linked militias, war veterans and members of the army, among other state security organizations.[116] As Alexander[117] indicates, in post-2000 Zimbabwe, the imprisonment of political activists awaiting charges and rejecting their bail was designed to extend periods of incarceration and work as a form of penalty. This dovetails with one research participant's experience. He said that when they were arrested as a group in March 2007, the judiciary had consented that those injured should seek medical attention before they were tried. However, they were kidnapped from the hospital by soldiers and put in Chikurubi Maximum Prison for incarceration without trial.[118] In this light, the militarized Zimbabwean state violated many citizens' fundamental rights, thus causing political insecurity.

The use of torture and unfair trials continued beyond the Mugabe era. For instance, in November 2017, the military police arrested several former ZANU-PF ministers and officials, detained them without any charge, and blocked them from having access to relatives or legal representation (407).[119] The January 2019 protests also resulted in extreme brutality, dragnet arrests, and the holding of some of the protesters in solitary confinement.[120] The cases of enforced disappearance, torture, arbitrary deprivation of life, and degrading treatment by the government have increased.[121] This displays that the increased militarization of politics and the state contributed to the increasing use of torture and related violations of fundamental human rights against those citizens involved in politics or protests against the party in government.

The increased militarization of politics and the state also resulted in the government struggling to provide social services, particularly health and education. The Zimbabwean government has been increasingly favoring spending on security services at the expense of the social sector. For example, between 2000 and 2005, defense spending was higher than spending on health (28–29).[122] Between 2010 and 2013, the average national budget spending on defense was 8.99%, in contrast to 7.46% for health and 6.11% for higher and tertiary education (11).[123] Since 2018, the Mnangagwa administration has continued prioritizing the military at the expense of health and education in national budget allocations.[124] Consequently, there has been a continuous decline in the provision of quality education, a breakdown of infrastructure, and an exodus of skilled staff at both the elementary and higher education levels (221–229).[125] Private schools and universities that emerged primarily due to the state's inability to provide adequate education are unaffordable for numerous citizens.[126] State-sponsored violence against teachers and other groups of people in the country for not actively supporting ZANU-PF during election periods also resulted in the closure of some schools, especially in rural areas.[127]

On its part, the country's healthcare system also collapsed. It continues to face severe shortages of nurses and doctors, a lack of electricity, water,

protective clothing, adequate remuneration, medical drugs, and medical equipment, with rural areas being the most affected.[128] Akin to education, private healthcare, which has nearly replaced public healthcare in urban areas, is unaffordable for many citizens.[129] Therefore, increased militarization resulted in the Zimbabwean state failing to safeguard its citizens' inalienable rights.

The rule of law

The increased militarization of politics and the state impaired nearly every institution within a state's bureaucratic system that can hold the military elite accountable. Operation Restore Legacy, which ousted Mugabe and the other military-style operations executed in Zimbabwe mentioned earlier, were clear manifestations of the degree to which the rule of law was weakened. The military elite operated free from censure partly because, among other issues, they influenced "appointments within the judiciary and [the]granting [of] clemencies to those that commit human rights violations upon instruction from securocrats" (99).[130] The purging of the judiciary, which took place from 2000 to 2005, encouraged the intentional interpretation of the law by a judiciary dominated mainly by military elites and executive agendas. The Attorney General's office was also headed by Retired Colonel Sobuza Gula-Ndebele, who was succeeded by a ZANU-PF loyal supporter, Johannes Tomana (431)[131]. After the division of the National Prosecuting Authority from the Attorney-General's office in 2014, 160 employees, comprising almost three-quarters of its workforce, were recruited from the police, military, and prison services.[132]

That the purges carried out on the judiciary since 2000 were designed to transform the legal system into a submissive tool of the militarized ZANU-PF government was evident in numerous instances. For instance, how the majority of electoral petitions from 2000 to 2018 were managed revealed the extent to which the Zimbabwean judiciary was compromised and weak. Most election petitions merely highlighted the electoral irregularities without reversing the outcomes (2)[133]. Furthermore, the endorsement of the November 2017 coup by the Zimbabwean courts is yet another clear illustration of how the judiciary remains compromised and biased due to the militarization of politics and the state. Apart from the high court exceeding its authority to decide on an issue that falls under the Constitutional Court's domain, it overlooked that Section 213 of the nation's constitution states that only the president possesses the authority to deploy the military. Critics argue that the high court's ruling regarding the coup suggested that the military operates as an independent branch of the state, not accountable to the executive in the same way that parliament and the judiciary are (150).[134] There were also cases of fast-track trials when at least 1,000 citizens were arrested during the January 2019

protests.[135] This left the arrested people with no time to consult with their lawyers and the latter with no time to prepare the defense.[136] As Verheul[137] observes, the targeted application of the justice system against citizens who oppose ZANU-PF remained unchanged when Mnangagwa ascended to power. Therefore, the increased militarization of politics and the state eroded the rule of law with far-reaching adverse effects on citizens' access to justice.

The rule of law also lost its significance as the military and political elite co-opted the ZRP to ignore court orders that did not benefit ZANU-PF. For example, NGOs indicated that amid politically driven violence since March 2000, the ZRP, under the orders of the military and political elite, failed to respond when ZANU-PF leaders and supporters were involved.[138] The justification of enforcing strict laws such as POSA and AIPPA also indicates that the concept of justice was substituted with a façade of legality or rule by law. Within this framework, the militarized presidential run-off election campaign of 2008 demonstrated the absence of state capability to protect the rule of law. In line with prior electoral experiences, NGOs reported that the police acted under rigid directives from the military and ZANU-PF elites and facilitated political abuses. They were not meant to detain any ZANU-PF offenders of violence or address any violence complaints from the MDC and its supporters.[139] One research participant pointed out that "the ZRP was immobilised when the army was in charge of the political campaigns for ZANU-PF."[140] When the military and ZANU-PF groups murdered many MDC supporters in the lead-up to the 2008 presidential run-off election, only two arrests were made, but with no prompt prosecution.[141]

In the post-Mugabe era, cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, lack of judicial independence and unjustified arrests and prosecution of journalists have increased.[142] Unsurprisingly, a July 2018 Afrobarometer survey revealed that the level of public trust in the courts, police, and military – the three primary institutions essential for upholding security, law, and order – has never exceeded 65% (2).[143] The foregoing displays the paucity of state capacity in maintaining the rule of law when the state and politics are increasingly militarized thus political insecurity. This shows that, similar to Nigeria, the absence of accountability destroys ordinary citizens' trust in public authority and weakens the state's capacity to enforce the rule of law.[144]

Conclusion

This article has discussed the consequences of the increased militarization of politics and the state on political security in Zimbabwe. Employing the concepts of militarization and political security, this article contributes to the study of authoritarianism and civil-military relations in Africa in two main ways. First, it reveals that militarization seriously undermines the state's capacity to provide political security, though it is useful in safeguarding regime

security. The military has so far proved instrumental to the survival of the ZANU-PF regime, both under Mugabe and Mnangagwa. Second, the article shows that militarizing politics and the state does not target the opposition alone but also threatens the citizens in general. Among other manifestations of militarization, the tendency to employ military strategies in governmental responses to different socio-economic and political situations in Zimbabwe highlighted that militarizing politics fosters a dictatorial method of governance where policies are formulated by the elite without dialogue and contributions from the populace. Consequently, the Zimbabwean government violated political freedoms and human rights and disregarded the rule of law, principally owing to increased militarization. This demonstrates that militarization affects political security and the resultant political insecurity acts as a tool for ZANU-PF and the military to hold on to power. It is clear that a militarized, electoral authoritarian state, as in Zimbabwe, is incapable of providing many human security elements, especially political security. Accordingly, future research should consider how citizens cope with political insecurity in Zimbabwe. A comparative analysis of how civilians and those citizens employed in the security sector of the Zimbabwean government have coped with political insecurity also emerges as another potential avenue for future research.

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