

An analysis of factors that led to a political downfall:

The Case of Zambia's Patriotic Front Government 2021

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Introduction

On 12 August 2021, Zambia went to the polls to elect the President, Members of Parliament, Mayors and the Local Councillors. This election was characterised by a high turn out of electorates as citizens from all corners of the country lined up to vote as early as 02:00hrs with others spending their nights at polling stations. These elections saw the opposition political party United Party for National Development (UPND) which has in the past lost presidential elections five times, emerge victorious against the ruling Patriotic Front (PF) party. The electoral outcome was against the projected outcome by the Political Science Association of Zambia Political Opinion Poll conducted in 2021 a month before the general elections, to which the PF incumbent President Edgar Chagwa Lungu was projected to remain victorious against the opposition candidate Mr Hakainde Hichilema. As Zambia uses the 50% plus one electoral system for Presidential votes and First Past The Post for other electoral positions, the incumbent was alleged to have won during the round¹. On 16th August 2021, with 155 of 156 announced constituency results, the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) declared Hichilema of the opposition UPND Party as presidential winner with 2, 810, 757 votes against Lungu's 1, 814, 201 votes. Later on, Lungu who through state house stated elections were not free and fair later accepted defeat².

Legal Framework

According to Article 52 of the 2016 Amendment Constitution, general elections are to be held every after 5 years after the last elections. All candidates are regulated through the Electoral Commission Act and guaranteed access to the media, freedom to campaign without any motive to do harm to the country's democratic fabric³.

¹ Lusaka Times, "New Poll Predicts President Lungu would win by 56.8 votes", 06 August 2021, <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2021/08/06/new-poll-predicts-president-lungu-would-win-by/> Retrieved on 22 August 2021

² ALJAZEERA, "Zambias Opposition Leader Wins Presidential Vote", 16 August 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/16/zambias-opposition-leader-hichilema-wins-presidential-vote> Retrieved on 20 August 2021

³ 2016 Amendment Constitution Republic of Zambia

Factors Responsible for the PF Political Down Fall

During the 2021 General elections, many factors contributed to the Patriotic Front's political downfall with the most evident being tribal campaigns. To solicit votes from their alleged supporters, tribal remarks set the de-campaign ball rolling against UPND's President Hakainde Hichilema whose roots stem from the Southern Part of the country with Tonga as his native language. The message put across by the PF government was that UPND drew its political landscape on the lines of tribalism and that its many supporters were all Tongas and if given a chance to form government, many competent citizens will lose their jobs in government. This political strategy, which once worked in favour of the PF in 2016 did not resonate well with many citizens, especially youths since they realised that it was a form of political propaganda which when left untamed, was dangerous to the peace the country has upheld since time immemorial. Many citizens, including Zambians in the diaspora took to social media to denounce PF tribal talks and on 30th June, 2021 the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) banned Dr Chishimba Kambwili of the PF who was issuing tribal remarks from the ongoing campaigns. The ban lasted for a week and some days⁴.

Secondly, the shrinking economy coupled with increased youth unemployment levels under the PF government further contributed to the party's downfall. This was a Comparative Advantage that favoured the opposition (UPND) who promised to revive the deteriorating economic landscape if voted into power. With the Kwacha depreciating and debt hanging wide, Zambia defaulted its Eurobond debt coupon of \$42.5 million in 2020 during the Covid-19 era⁵. The cost of living and entrepreneurship/business became high for an average Zambian. With this hardship, the

⁴ Lusaka Times, "ECZ Lifts Kambwili's Suspension", 09 July 2021, <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2021/07/09/ecz-lifts-kambwilis-suspension/> Retrieved on 20 August 2021

⁵ Taonga Clifford Mitimang, "Zambia Misses 2027 Eurobond Payment-Finance Ministry Says", Business Live, 31 January 2021, <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/world/africa/2021-01-31-zambia-misses-2027-eurobond-payment-finance-ministry-says/> Retrieved on 22 August 2021

opposition political party preached the message of change and hope to reduce economic hardship and create a better Zambia with a slogan of “*Zambia Forward, Wind of Change, Bally (dad) will fix it!*”. This gained Hakainde Hichilema popularity amongst young people especially that they were once deemed 'disgruntled youths' by the then ruling Patriotic Front (PF) party.

Consequently, it can be argued that increased corruption scandals and mismanagement of public funds cost the PF. In 2020 for instance, it was revealed that expired medicine, leaking condoms and defective personal protective equipment worth \$17 million was disbursed in various health centres across the country; putting the lives of people at risk of both endemic and pandemic diseases. This situation led to public condemnation of the PF government and later the President fired the Health Minister who was responsible for the procurement through various suppliers such as Honeybee pharmacy due to procurement procedures that were not adhered to. From that perspective, this caused uneasiness from the general public and political leaders who used this as an opportunity to de-campaign the ruling party due to its failure to manage the health system. This event created low public confidence in the PF government. Other corruption scandals that were unaccounted for include 48 houses whose owners are not known, purchasing of fire fighters trucks, scrambling for land in forest 27, an area that has been reserved by the state for purposes of water storage and delivery among others. These scandals led to a youth demonstration in the country demanding answers from the government. However, the government directed the police to deal with the protesting young people resulting in peaceful demonstrations being carried out in the bush. The Lusaka Provincial Minister and Member of PF, Mr Bowman Lusambo referred to the young people who were protesting as *disgruntled youths*⁶. This led to public resentment of the government as a whole. Some youths promised not to vote for PF any more while using social media to preach against the

⁶ UPND Zambia, <https://upndzambia.org/disgruntled-citizens-decides-who-rules-bh/> Retrieved on 19 August 2021

government's corruption scandals and failure to uphold the principles of good governance. This however, worked in favour of the opposition knowing that they promised to create jobs to the youths. Hence, in this election majority of youths tended to support the UPND marking a great milestone since Zambia's population is mainly comprised of the young people.

Another order of the PF regime was cadreism which gave not only incompetent but also brutal members of the public the power to demean and sample on others' rights and peace. The promotion of cadreism under the PF government cost them votes because most cadres had the mandate to control markets and bus stations leading to the dysfunction of the local government institutions. Coupled with thuggery, cadres became unruly and charging local marketers as well as beating supporters of opposition political parties. Further, the cadres would expose their monies on social media whilst majority of Zambians were complaining of economic hardship in the country and leaving below the poverty line. This was mockery to the Zambian citizenry living under economic hardship. The PF Secretary General Davis Mwila was in 2018 recorded whilst encouraging cadres to take charge of the bus stations. The PF cadres also victimized civil servants who were perceived of having different political views. Many incidents were recorded in which these cadres broke in public offices and threatened to burn those suspected of supporting the opposition political party mainly the UPND⁷. The unruly behaviour of PF cadres made Zambians to live in fear. This made the opposition political parties to promise the end of cadreism once voted in power. The UPND message of kicking out cadres from public places was sell-able to the Zambian citizenry. Following the UPND victory cadres have been directed to vacate Lusaka markets and bus stations ⁸so as to restore sanity and peace in public places. The general public later expressed their relief through social media channels and called for more measures to restore total

⁷ Fidah Nkonde-Mubanga, "PF Cadres Attack a Woman", Non-governmental Gender Organisations' Coordinating Council, <https://ngocc.org.zm/pf-cadres-attack-a-woman/> Retrieved on 18th August 2021.

⁸ Lusaka Star, "UPND Bans Cadres", 19 August 2021 <https://lusakastar.com/news/upnd-bans-cadres> Retrieved on 20 August 2021

sanity. It is clear, from these happenings that the citizens voted PF out due to cadreism coupled with political violence.

Another contributing factor leading to the election loss of the PF is the third term Presidential term. According to the Zambian constitution, a person sworn in twice as the country's president is not allowed to stand for presidential elections. However, the PF government stated that President Lungu was eligible because he was just finishing the late President Micheal Chilufya Sata term who died whilst serving as the country's President in 2014. The eligibility of President Lungu to stand for presidency for the third time led to public debates, and also individual lawyers petitioned his eligibility to the Constitution Court. However, the Constitution Court ruled that Lungu was still eligible to stand, the UPND retaliated by indicating that Lungu was not eligible and thus straining the tendencies of democracy⁹. Hence, some youths began campaigning against Lungu and a few individual groups stated that the general public will deny Lungu's eligibility through elections.

Also, the PF intentions to amend the constitution through Bill 10, led to some factions in some sections of society. The proposed Bill 10 failed to pass the proposed vote in parliament due to its proposed changes in the constitution. Several society members, NGOs and some political parties campaigned against Bill 10 with the view that it was against the general will of the people as citizens did not want the proposed re-introduction of Deputy Ministers and other proposed changes. These actions saw some members of society speaking against the Bill¹⁰ while others drummed support against the PF government proposed Bill. Hence, this led to UPND to gain more support from the society as the party fought against the Bill. This therefore, made the PF unpopular.

Another vital contributor to the downfall of the PF was the

⁹ Waleed Tariq, "Zambian Top Court Okays President Seeking 2nd Full Term", 12 June 2021, *ANADOLU AGENCY*, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/zambian-top-court-okays-president-seeking-2nd-full-term/2271071> Retrieved on 19th August 2021.

¹⁰ Lusaka Times, "The Controversial Amendment Bill-10 Fails by 6 Votes in Parliament", 29 October 2021, <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2020/10/29/the-controversial-constitution-amendment-bill-10-fails-by-6-votes-in-parliament/> Retrieved on 18th August 2021.

adoption process which left out popular candidates from the party. This made other candidates to stand as independent members and the PF promised not to support everyone who stood independent¹¹. Hence, there was division of support as some members left the PF and stood as independent MPs and later won against the PF and other political parties¹². From this perspective, it is clearly seen that there was a division of votes as independent candidates carried with them some party members and made the PF politically unpopular. To the opposition strength, the UPND formed an alliance with other opposition political parties¹³. This alliance saw other political leaders campaigning for UPND. Thus, this move made UPND more popular than ever, making it possible to win more votes in some PF strong holds constituencies in the Copperbelt, Northern, Lusaka and Eastern Provinces compared to the 2016 general elections. The UPND alliance emerging winner in PF strong holds disadvantaged the PF party as it failed to get more votes in the opposition strong holds.

Also, it can be argued that the PF government intolerance towards individuals who criticized them cost them a vote. During the PF regime, some media houses were closed due to the criticism they offered towards the PF government. This reflected suppression of freedoms as individual freedom of speech and media freedoms were threatened. Also, the PF government through the use of the police restricted the opposition political parties' movement. The police have once under the PF shot individuals whilst dispersing UPND crowds in Lusaka in 2020¹⁴. Coupled with these events, some people complained of living under fear and hence wanted to vote the Patriotic Front government out.

¹¹ Ulande Nkomesha, "Those Standing as Independent Candidates Have Betrayed The Party-PF", Diggers News, 19 May 2021, <https://diggers.news/local/2021/05/19/those-standing-as-independent-candidates-have-betrayed-the-party-pf/> Retrieved on 20 August 2021

¹² Nchimunya Miyoba, "Binwell Mpundu Wins Nkana Seat", *The Independent Observer*, 15 August 2021 <https://tiozambia.com/binwell-mpundu-wins-nkana-seat/> Retrieved on 20 August 2021

¹³ <https://www.hh-2021.com/upndnews/hh-welcomes-new-upnd-alliance-members> Retrieved on 19 August 2021

¹⁴ Amnesty International, 28 June 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/06/zambia-killings-and-brutal-crackdown-against-dissent-set-the-tone-for-august-election/> Retrieved on 20 August 2021

In addition to the above, the PF focused on individual attacks instead of promising what they will deliver for the country to prosper if voted into power again. They mainly attacked Hakainde Hichilema in their political campaigns¹⁵. The PF government restricted Hichilema's political movements using the Zambia police citing Covid-19 and that he cannot campaign in the same area the ruling President was. These actions by the PF government made some professional associations such as The Law Association of Zambia to speak against restricted freedom of assembly¹⁶. These behaviours towards Hichilema of the UPND made the PF unpopular as it became a concern to the general public as to the reason the freedom of assembly was being hindered. Some sections of the society vowed to vote for Hichilema regardless of how the PF painted him. Therefore, it can be said that these individual attacks on the UPND and restricting campaign movements of the presidential candidate, Hakainde Hichilema, when the PF members moved freely was in a manner an indirect campaign for UPND as the citizens started to sympathise with the opposition political party.

Conclusion

The PF government loss to UPND candidate Hakainde Hichilema of the opposition political party can be attributed to many reasons which include corruption scandals, economic hardship, tribal talks, unruly cadres, political violence, internal conflicts within the PF, third term eligibility, Bill 10, UPND alliance, use of the police to restrict freedoms and a disregard towards the youth's request in relation to governance and unemployment levels in the country.

¹⁵ VMM, "HH Targeted Again as Chishima Kambwili Spoke at the PF Virtual Rally Held in Lusaka", 10 July 2021 <http://forum.vi-mm.eu/hh-targeted-again-as-chishimba-kambwili-spoke-at-the-pf-virtual-rally-held-in-lusaka-18-07-2021.xhtml> Retrieved on 21 August 2021

¹⁶ Lusaka Times, "LAZ Tells Zambia Police to Stop Blocking HH from Accessing Electorates", 3 August 2021 <https://www.lusakatimes.com/2021/08/03/laz-tells-zambia-police-to-desist-from-hindering-any-political-party-to-access-the-electorates/> Retrieved on 20 August 2021