



LEVY MWANAWASA REGIONAL CENTRE FOR DEMOCRACY
AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

ZAMBIA GENERAL ELECTIONS 2021 PRE-ELECTIONS SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

August 2021

In conducting this analysis on the pre-election situation leading up to the general elections to be held in Zambia on August 12, 2021, the Levy Mwanawasa Centre for Democracy and Good Governance has focused on two particular considerations emanating from the ICGLR guiding principles. The first is the promotion of and contribution to the integrity, transparency, legitimacy and credibility of the electoral process in Zambia; the second is the preservation of societal consensus for stability and peace as part of healthy competitive elections.

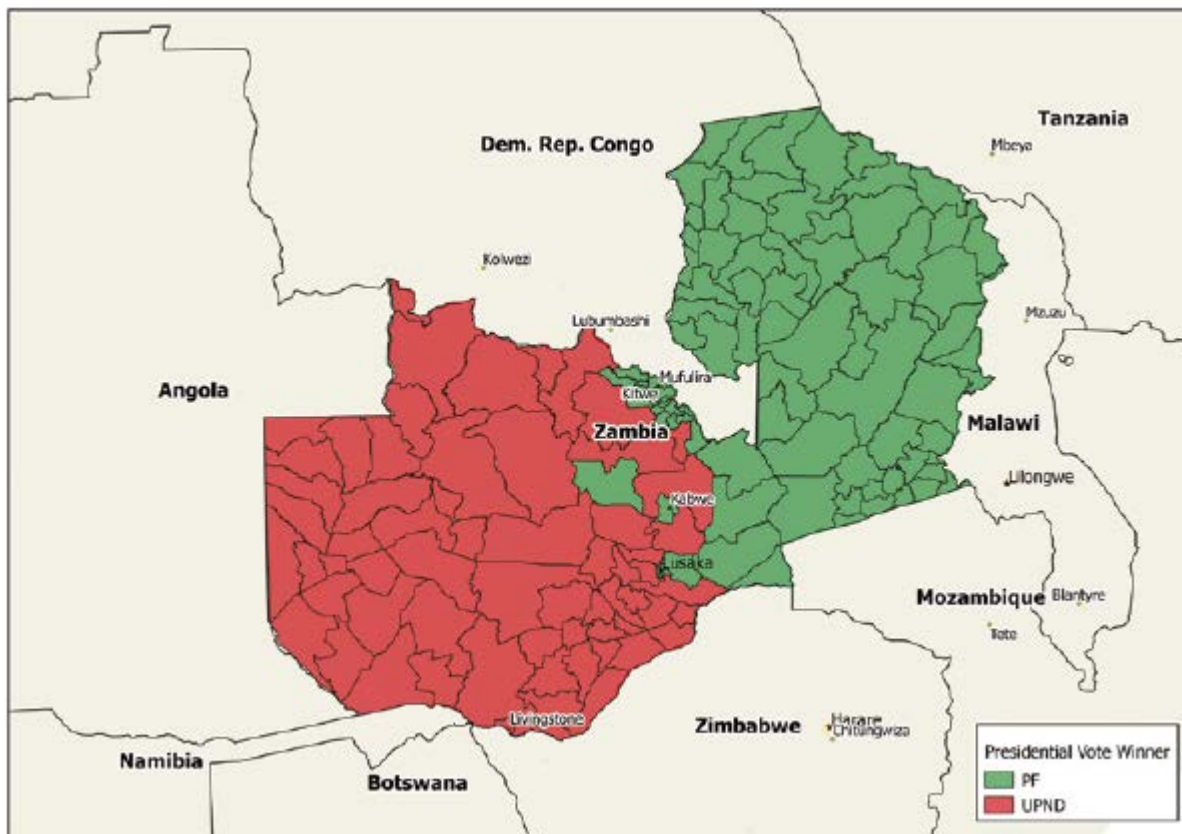
An encouraging finding of the report is that despite pre-election political tensions, Zambian society remains deeply peaceful with a relatively fluid political landscape. Two important threads run through the country's political history from independence to the present. The first is that political parties have historically tried to ensure that their parties transcend ethnic groups or at least form broad coalitions. The second factor is the critical role of urban areas, particularly the Copperbelt Province; it is almost impossible to win an election without the support of the Copperbelt and Lusaka Provinces. To a large extent, both of these factors can be explained by the high level of urbanization in Zambia, which has made the two urban centres into melting pots in ethnic terms. As a result, there is relative fluidity in Zambia's political landscape - subject to construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of alliances - despite situations of over incumbency influence and powers, incumbents have lost elections to less well-established political forces, making election results in Zambia relatively open.

In terms of political parties' participation, sixteen (16) political parties are contesting yet the presidential race is largely between the Patriotic Front (PF) and the United Party for National Development (UPND). In respect to parliamentary elections, six (6) political parties are participating but only the PF, the UPND, the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party have field significant numbers of candidates.

Among the campaign issues of focus by the opposition political parties has been the socio-economic challenges that the country has been facing since 2016 such as the rise in inflation and the poor performance of the Zambian Kwacha against major foreign currencies leading to an increase in the cost of living. While the ruling party campaigns bordered on infrastructure development, initiatives such as the Civil Servants Debt Swap, Social Cash Transfer and Farmer Input Support Programme.

From the material presented in this report, a number of conclusions can be drawn. The first is that these elections are likely to be as contentious as it was the case in the previous elections in 2016. However, unlike in the previous elections, the kind of coalition-building that has taken place as the country was moving towards the elections has the potential to mitigate the extent of political polarization along ethnic lines to the extent that it was during and after the 2016 elections. With the realignments that have taken place, the PF is likely to increase its electoral support in the Western and North-western Provinces. On the other hand, the aggressive stance that the UPND has taken over the question of coalition building is also likely to improve its support in the northern region significantly.

2016 Presidential by-election results by constituency



Source: Nicole Beardsworth, 2020.

The management of the 2021 elections by the Electoral Commission of Zambia and other supporting bodies such as the police have been contentious as has been in the previous elections. The Commission's management of the voters' registration exercise has shown that the areas where they registered fewer voters were opposition strongholds and where they registered more voters than those that voted in the 2016 elections are ruling party's stronghold. Other than the issue of registration of voters, there seems to be no other strong basis for dissatisfaction with the work of the Commission given the difficult conditions which sometimes it finds itself in such as the legal exemptions given to the Republican President on the restrictions placed on others which has clearly disadvantaged the other participants but for which the Commission cannot do much about. Even under these conditions, the Commission has been able to engage all political participants during the campaign period either to try to resolve some problems or just to update them on some process; they have been able to take action even against the ruling party by banning them together with the UPND for political violence.

The attitude of the opposition political parties towards the role of the police has been more unfavorable than it has been towards the Electoral Commission. The Police have been working under even more difficult conditions than can be said of the Electoral Commission. They have been greatly distrusted by the opposition who have accused them of working under the instruction of the PF by taking a hard line against the UPND and a soft one on PF. Evidence

of this was the reaction of the PF leadership when the Inspector General of Police blamed the PF cadres for the Mandevu violence.

The public media houses have generally maintained their strong pro ruling party stances against the provisions of the Electoral Code of Conduct. The way the senior members of staff for these public electronic and print media houses are appointed makes it difficult to do otherwise.

The use of state resources has not generated as much protest as it did in previous elections and this could be because the abuse seems to have been greatly reduced during this time and two factors could account for this. The first is that while during the 2016 elections ministers refused to vacate their positions on the dissolution of the National Assembly and continued to have access to state resources which they used for campaign purposes this is not the case this time. The Ministers vacated their offices on the dissolution of the National Assembly and therefore had no access to state resources. However, the President and the Vice President have used state resources in terms of transport and logistical support when they visit various parts of the country “inspecting” development projects and other similar activities. The restrictions on campaigns have also significantly reduced the need to travel throughout the country as happens when they have rallies and other similar activities

The COVID- 19 has had some impact on the 2021 elections. As a result of the pandemic, the Electoral Commission has been forced to put some restrictions on the mode of campaigning. It has banned public rallies and put some restrictions on roadshows and door to door campaigns to the dissatisfaction of the political parties, particularly the opposition political parties. The opposition political parties feel that they are being disadvantaged by the ban. The enforcement of the COVID-19 health guidelines by the police is what has the potential to disadvantage the opposition political parties.

Another important factor that has impacted electoral politics has been political violence. Violence at election times has been endemic in Zambian politics and has been reported in every election since the reintroduction of multiparty elections. What, however, seems to be different this year is that while in the previous elections the members of the opposition were generally on the receiving end as in the 2016 situation, this time around it has not been the case, the UPND cadres have been involved in violence, so much that the two parties were forced to have peace agreements to stop the political violence.

The balance in the perpetuation of political violence forced the two major political parties to sign peace accords. The significance of these peace Accords is that this could signify the beginning of the reduction of political violence. The fact that senior leaders of major political parties sign such accords show that there is some admission that the cadres are involved in political violence which is a useful starting point in addressing the problem as it has been rife in Zambia’s multi-party politics since the time of independence.
