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Economic Sanctions: A Panacea to Democracy and Good Governance in Zimbabwe?

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Abstract

Against a background of the augmented utilization of economic sanctions as a prescriptive measure to restore/establish democracy in autocratic or semi-autocratic regimes, this article seeks to explore the impact of economic sanctions on Zimbabwe's democratization process. This article argues that imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe further rendered the prospects of democracy attainment a murky area as reflected by some of the internal and external strategies espoused by the Zimbabwe government in redressing the unintentional manifestations of economic sanctions. Palpably, the use of economic sanctions to induce democracy in Zimbabwe has to a large extent failed, yet, on the contrary it has provided an opportunity, a scapegoat, and a fertile (conductive) platform for the government to further deny citizens their political freedoms whilst blaming it on external forces. This article's conclusions and results seek to bring out the significant policy implications related to the utilization of sanctions as an apparatus for attaining the political freedoms of people and to reveal some of the unintended outcomes of sanctions.

Key words: economic sanction, democracy, governance, Zimbabwe

Introduction

For close to a decade now, Zimbabwe has been under the scourge of multilateral economic sanctions from a host of countries that include United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Common amongst its sanctioners, are the fundamental beliefs and values attached to principles of democracy which the sub-

Saharan African state has failed to meet. More so, these fundamental beliefs have shaped these states' motives for imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe. Regarding the Zimbabwean situation, consensus prevails among the Western states that the fundamental objective of the Zimbabwe sanctions is to restore democracy and normalcy as according to the western modern standards of democracy¹. Accordingly, the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act of 2001, adopted by the United States Congress (ZIDERA), explicitly states that its adoption was meant to “*support the people of Zimbabwe in their struggle to effect peaceful, democratic change, achieve broad-based and equitable economic growth and restore the rule of law*”². Furthermore, given the pervasiveness of non-democratic targets in the past few decades, targeted for reasons of democratic restoration or its establishment, it is pertinent to explore the impact of sanctions on democratic governance as it is deemed one of the principal reasons for sanction imposition. Accordingly, (Hufbauer, et al. 1997) carried out the most comprehensive time-series cross-national data over the period 1972-2006 on the use of sanctions in the 20th century³. Empirical results of this research show that, about 49% of economic sanctions imposed on partly-free or undemocratic states are sent with an intention to promote democratic freedoms. In cases initiated after the Cold War, regime change (generally led by the United States and the European Union) emerges as a common strategy for restoring or promoting democratic forms of government. Africa has been a frequent locale, accounting for 14 of the 30 cases since 1989⁴. The use of economic sanctions as a foreign policy tool continues to increase as the wave of democratization promulgates, essentially also because the liberal democrats aspire to see a democratic world which they believe makes the world more secure, more prosperous and more successful⁵. Plausibly, the morale of this disposition is that, this democratic mindset and their efforts will eventually lead to an eternally peaceful world- Zone of Peace⁶ hence the imposition of sanctions to semi-democratic or non-democratic states that perpetrate policies objecting democracy as a concept.

The hypothetical conjecture and universal perception behind imposing sanctions is that, inflicting damage on the target country, its ruling elite and core support groups, will prompt the leadership to change its objectionable policies in response to a straightforward cost-benefit calculus⁷. Nonetheless, a voluminous amount of literature on

economic sanctions has proven that economic damage does not necessarily decipher into desirable policy change in the target. Consequently, the Zimbabwean situation has recently been used as a case study to illustrate the dismal failure of sanctions. However, most of this literature has revealed sanctions failure on the basis of humanitarian consequences and economic collapse ignoring their effect on the political objectives. The horrendous human face of starvation and death has, quite rightly, been given greatest media coverage but very little has been discussed on the achievements of sanctions political aims. Whilst it may be partly accurate that the sanctions regime played a crucial role in the formation of the coalition government in Zimbabwe and other reforms slowly taking place, it will be imprecise not to assess how sanctions have resulted in exacerbated levels of despotism. A comparison of the pre-sanctions and sanctions period lucidly shows the perpetual depreciation in democracy levels in Zimbabwe, with the latter epoch experiencing severe strains on democracy. Whilst it may be incorrect to say that the absence of democracy necessarily translates into authoritarianism, it is fair to say, there exists a thin line between the dearth of democracy and the existence of tyranny.

The Zimbabwean situation is a clear manifestation of the unintended political impacts of economic sanctions. Inadmissibly, as earlier indicated, the inadvertent political effects of economic coercion have negatively impacted on democracy. Significantly, the negative effects of sanctions provided the government with a platform to craft anti-democratic policies in order to ensure a consolidation of their power at the expense of the livelihood of the ordinary citizens. The socio-economic problems experienced under the plague of sanctions were characterized by hyperinflation, the protrusion of parallel markets, scarcity of basic goods and services, aggravated poverty levels, brain drain, low Gross Domestic Product (GDP) levels, lack of investor confidence, money laundering, externalization of foreign currency, poor delivery of health services, cholera outbreaks, segregation and reinforced rifts among people in the once cohesive communities principally because of different political affiliations, unemployment, corruption and decrease in quality and standard of education. These various consequences prompted citizens to find other illicit means of survival. On a political note, reported incidences of electoral violence, voter apathy, propaganda of the media, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) bans, hostility towards civil society,

nepotism and inequitable distribution of resources drawn on party lines, civil and political unrest, all worked against the enhancement of democratic attributes and good governance. Simultaneously, faced by these insurmountable problems, the government of Zimbabwe adopted various internal and external strategies to mitigate these unintended impacts of sanctions. However, a majority of these policies had a counterproductive effect on democracy. These included the adoption of the NGO Bill which principally made the operations of the civil society convoluted, militarization of the state, global isolationist policies, excessive powers accorded to the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) and the executive, lack of separation of powers and the adoption of draconian laws inhibiting the rightful exercise of democratic freedoms and political rights.

This article will proceed as follows: First, I analyze the evolution of democracy in Zimbabwe since independence. The morale of this disposition is that, although the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) party worked to restore some of the democratic fundamentals immediately after independence, especially in regard to racial inequalities, the decade following that, experienced significant challenges in regard to democracy. An assessment of the pre-sanctions period (1990-1998) and the sanctions period (2001-2009) shows diminishing levels of democracy in Zimbabwe of the latter period. Next, I explore the impact of the unintended consequences of sanctions on Zimbabwe, concomitantly analyzing the various efforts adopted by the Zimbabwean government to redress the situation. Central to this argument, is to extrapolate how the government's course of action involuntarily or voluntarily facilitated in diminishing the prospects of democracy. Instead of promoting democratic principles, the crises laid an easy podium for the government to excessively control the activities of people and businesses, thereby restricting all political freedoms and human rights. In the final analysis, I proffer recommendations that are other ways of improving democracy and good governance in Zimbabwe apart from using economic sanctions.

The Evolution of Democracy in Zimbabwe

Although there is no specifically universally accepted definition of democracy, an analysis of both the procedural and substantive definitions of democracy shows that

democracy encompasses the following aspects: political participation of people, social and economic equality, granting of civil liberties, rule of law, checks and balances on the government, separation of powers, independent media, civil society and electoral democracy (Diamond (1990); Dahl (1970); Zakaria (1997); Phillips (1991); Barber (2003); Schumpeter (1943); Przeworski and Maravall (2003); Huntington (1996)). Over the course of the 20th century and with the beginning of the millennium, democracy and human rights issues have become some of the most fervently debated issues in Zimbabwe and internationally. Owing to the political developments in Zimbabwe, this sub-Saharan state has on several occasions been singled out for lack of democracy and human rights violations, committed with impunity under the leadership of ZANU PF⁸. Once perceived democratic and a respecter of human rights, the Zimbabwean government has lately been viewed as a pariah state that has lost respect for the rule of law, democracy and other principles of good governance and has perpetrated human rights violations⁹. Central to these issues, were the violent means used by the ex-war fighters in re-obtaining the land from the white minority, electoral violence, hostility towards civil society organizations and many others. Inexorably, Zimbabwe has been under the scourge of economic sanctions for almost a decade, from a group of Western states who perceive Zimbabwe as a state harming their interests of guarding and perpetuating democracy.

In order to fully comprehend the concept of democracy in Zimbabwe it is important to trace it back to the nation's independence. Clearly, one of the prime challenges confronting the post-independence government of Zimbabwe in 1980 was democratizing the inherited authoritarian colonial state and institutions in a society deeply divided along lines of race, class, ethnicity, gender and geography. At independence, the ZANU PF government committed itself to establishing an order based on democracy, social justice and equality¹⁰. Ostensibly, a number of strategic issues which will be discussed later were addressed in the process. Stripped to the bare bone, a closer analysis of the little democracy enjoyed in Zimbabwe after independence, shows that there was no external force inhibiting its existence. Observably, the ordinary citizens perceived ZANU PF as an omnipresent that played a crucial role in delivering them from the bondage of white supremacy. During that time, the Zimbabwe government was acting like a *decisive benevolent dictator*¹¹ implying, despite the one-party state frenzy that

gripped the country, the government still managed to push through reforms that were needed to get the economy moving.

Amongst the significant efforts made by the government to promote democracy was the enactment of laws such as the Legal Age of Majority (No 15 of 1982) giving guardianship powers to anyone over 18 years of age and the Sex Disqualification Removal Act, giving women rights to be appointed to any post in the civil service and giving them more rights to make individual decisions¹². Such a move had always been deemed as unattainable during the colonial rule. Furthermore, the government proceeded to dismantle colonial institutions and laws promoting oppression, ethnic polarization and racial disharmony by erasing the legal status of racial distinctions and their institutional supports¹³. All these efforts were considered a great and bold leap on the part. This is one of the reasons why currently the ZANU PF party enjoys support amongst the older Zimbabwean generation. Having witnessed and experienced the brutality of colonialism, the older generation would rather live peacefully under the dictatorship of a black leader rather than expose themselves to a new imperialistic power. Additionally, the government also sought to democratize the structures of governance in urban and rural areas through the devolution of powers, resources and responsibilities to local authorities and other locally administered bodies¹⁴.

Fundamental among these issues, was also the co-existence and reconciliation between the black majority and the white minority. Undoubtedly, in any setting, it is significant to redress problems caused by race as they are detrimental to both economic and political development as well as democracy. The government also ensured that there was unification amongst blacks themselves, for instance the merging of Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) into ZANU PF. Consequently, the new army was an integrated unit consisting of combatants from Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) and former Rhodesian Security Forces (RSF)¹⁵. This substantiates why the president of Zimbabwe has denounced the Western governments that have protested against the government's clampdown on the white farmers reiterating that it is his party that brought democracy to Zimbabwe at independence. Furthermore, this explains why the ZANU PF government has alluded to the fact that they are the

pioneers of democracy in Zimbabwe. They claim exclusive rights to the democracy introduced in Zimbabwe immediately after independence and afterwards. Evidently, support from Sweden and other western states coincided with a change in Zimbabwe's international identity, instead of being feared as a radical Marxist leader, President Mugabe was widely recognized and praised in Western foreign policy circles for his pragmatism, acceptance of democracy and capitalism.¹⁶ However, whilst it is true that the new black government sought to use democracy as a tool of statecraft to improve the rights of the black majority, it also sought to consolidate its power and rule amongst the ordinary citizens. The most important issue now, is to analyze the current status of Zimbabwe in terms of democracy levels because the current scant levels of democracy in Zimbabwe are slowly moving towards extinction.

It can be argued that the introduction of all measures in the 1980's did not generate the desired results. The post-colonial project of building a just, equitable and non-racial society was not achieved and the foundation for a truly democratic order was not laid.¹⁷ With time, a substantial number of scholars have alluded to the continuity of authoritarian governance from the Rhodesian Front to ZANU PF. Scholars have traced the increasingly repressive nature of ZANU PF after independence and various factors have been identified as causal factors for this tyrannical nature of the government. Sithole (2001) alludes to the fact that the stunning defeat of a draft constitution backed by President Robert Mugabe and the opposition's unexpectedly strong showing in the June 2000 parliamentary elections may have marked the beginning of the end of the ruling party hegemony in Zimbabwe¹⁸. The implication is that this prompted a hostile response by the government to guard jealously their already built empire. Although the government's endeavored to introduce democracy, some analysts perceive that these efforts lacked the proper fundamentals to sustain them. Laws like Law and Order Maintenance Act (LOMA) from the Smith regime were inherited and have manifested themselves as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). Simply put, behind the façade of constitutional democracy lay an authoritarian political system characterized by the proscription of democratic space, serious violations of basic human rights and the rule of law¹⁹. The understanding is that, despite the frequent holding of multi-party elections throughout the

1980s and 1990s, the government still lacked tolerance of political diversity and commitment to democratic politics. Clearly, regarding the Zimbabwean situation the belief that elections equal democracy is a fallacy.

Despite the above mentioned factors contributing to exacerbated absence of democracy in Zimbabwe, the beginning of the 21st century marks a very important era in the political history of the country. A lot of issues were brought into limelight, among them the imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe for the first time after independence, but for the second time in its entire history. Never in the history of Zimbabwe had there been so much clamoring for a redress in human rights abuses and the absence of democracy than after the period after 2000. Although, significantly and undoubtedly, other factors have contributed to the free-fall of democracy levels in Zimbabwe, evidently one of the major factors necessitating this decline is the presence of sanctions. Whilst it is agreeable, it is actually the absence of democracy that triggered the introduction of sanctions; their presence advanced the critical dearth of democracy. In a nutshell, sanctions may not necessarily have been the initial causal factor, but it will be imprecise not to implicate them on the fall of democracy in Zimbabwe. To a large extent, the unintended impacts of sanctions have played a significant counterproductive role on democracy. However, contrary to the original objectives of the senders of the sanctions, this tool of statecraft has provided a fertile environment for the government to continue depriving and thwarting the efforts of democracy.

The Impact of Economic Sanctions and Governmental Strategies

As earlier stated while the original motive of economic sanctions was to support the people of Zimbabwe in their struggle to effect peaceful, democratic change, achieve broad-based and equitable economic growth and restore the rule of law, on the contrary, sanctions ended up unintentionally consolidating the repressive abilities of the Zimbabwean government. The choice of economic sanctions as the optimum solution to the problem of democratic governance is questionable. A growing body of literature shows that economic coercion hardly harms the coercive capacity of the targeted regimes²⁰. Conversely, sanctions generally harm the socio-economic and political status

of average civilians, while political elites remain insulated from the coercion (Weiss et al. 1997; Cortright, Millar and Lopez 2001; Weiss 1999; Gibbons 1999). The connection is such that when sanctions were imposed, they impacted negatively on the lives of the citizens; consequently, the government adopted various internal and external strategies to redress the inauspicious effects of sanctions. However, in the process whether deliberately or inadvertently, some of the government's prescriptive policies impacted unconstructively on democracy. The sanctions instead provided an enabling environment, favorable platform and a justification for the government to further deny ordinary citizens their democratic freedoms in order to preserve its hold on power.

Hyperinflation and Shortages of Goods

By 2007, Zimbabwe's economy was now in a state of free fall because of the insurmountable levels of inflation. Inflation, according to official (and thus very conservative) government figures, exceeded 8 000 percent a year²¹. Respected economists though propounded that inflation was around 150 000 percent a year²². To put this figure in perspective, the contrary with the next-highest inflation rate, Iraq had a rate of 53 percent a year²³. Additionally, the sheer fall in economic activity restricted income tax revenue, and the budget deficit unquestionably rose well above the already undesirable level of 60 percent of the GDP. One of the prescriptions proposed by the Reserve Bank governor, Gideon Gono was a "social contract". His intention was to achieve an agreement amongst business, labor, and the government, to hold prices, wages and government spending constant. Consensus was reached on the 1st of June 2007, but a mere 2 weeks later a huge spike in inflation caused the agreement to fall apart. Predictably, to deal with this issue the government's reactions laid blame on the business sector for being a "regime change" agenda sponsored by the West. The government ordered a 50 percent cut in the prices of basic commodities and backed by militia groups and police launched raids on businesses to ensure that they were complying with the order and thousands of managers were detained countrywide.²⁴ The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) was accorded extra-ordinary powers by the government to resolve the economic situation hence the duplication of roles between the RBZ and various other

ministries in the government. The replication of duties on the contrary further worsened service delivery and efficiency of state operations by giving rise to uncontrolled expenditure arising from the printing of cash to finance activities outside the national budget. Although the Reserve Bank Governor perceived it as a faster method of policy implementation and achieving economic turnaround as reflected by his statements that his fiscal functions were within the scope of the Reserve Bank. In an interview conducted by Zimbabwe journalists, the Reserve Bank Governor indicated that his interventions were mainly because he wanted to make Zimbabwe a “prosperous and better economy” and also because of the “absolute ineptitude by some officials accentuated by misplaced sectoral myopia on the part of those entrusted with the responsibility of running those portfolios....”²⁵ An interesting example is when the RBZ took over farm mechanization scheme and the distribution of farm implements inevitably overtaking the duties of the Ministry of Agriculture. Additionally, the distribution exercise was marred with a lot of controversy and an audit revealed that most of the beneficiaries were supporters of ZANU PF.²⁶ Not only was the RBZ accorded disproportionate powers, overall and on many instances, the governmental strategies crucially reinforced excessive executive powers resulting in a relatively weak legislature and judiciary. As recently reiterated by Justice Makarau, there is systematic undermining of the judiciary²⁷ by the executive hence the theoretical underpinnings of Montesquieu’s 3 arms of good governance are not realized. The government compromised the independence of both the judiciary and legislature in dealing with various problems.

Undeniably, the primary causes of food shortages were a combination of the seizure of white-owned farms, under-utilization of land, lack of knowledge by the new black farmers and power cuts that affected irrigation. Furthermore, inflation rates and lack of foreign currency to purchase imported wheat, maize and other foodstuffs helped to sustain the inadequacy of these resources²⁸. There is a possibility that, if Zimbabwe had not been under sanctions, this dire situation could have been quickly rectified. However, one of the major catastrophes perpetuated by economic sanctions in Zimbabwe was the severe shortage of basic foodstuffs and endless poverty. Paradoxically, long winding queues in order to buy bread, milk and other daily food products were witnessed. In the end, by 2008, an estimated 3 million Zimbabweans- one in every four of the

population were in need of food aid as hunger was described as “acutely serious”²⁹. Commonsensically, not only did the inadequacy of these resources heighten demand but also the value attached to these resources, in the process prompting governmental control of the few remaining resources. As any government would, the government of Zimbabwe took it upon themselves to exercise control over the distribution of the residual foodstuffs. Thus armed with the key assumption that governmental distribution brings sanity, this move would have been quite remarkable. Far from producing order and equitable distribution, the control of the shrinking resources was used as a tool for consolidating power, as the distribution of these resources was done on partisan lines, with the cohorts and the supporters of the ruling party obtaining most of these resources.

Capitalizing on the situation, the government did not only mitigate the economic harm for itself but also managed to redirect resources to and from domestic political groups. Furthermore, theoretically, although economic coercion aims to restrict political elite’s access to scarce economic and military resources, the leaders more often than not can mitigate the negative effect of economic coercion by controlling the allocation of the increasing scarce resources within the society, as well as using transnational black markets and illegal smuggling³⁰. The leaders paid off their political supporters and those pay-offs were more valuable because the sanctions had made the resources meager. Evidently, as the Zimbabwean economy contracted partly as a result of the precincts of economic ties imposed by the sanctions, the leadership redirected the economy such that they still had sufficient access to scarce goods and services while making the rest of the populace stomach the burden. Clearly, even though the sanctions are targeted, the elite did not suffer much the same way the Zimbabwean public suffered chiefly because the targeted officials had their own foreign currency reserves and enough savings that could sustain them.

Naturally, in a bid to cushion the suffering caused by the valueless Zimbabwe dollar, local citizens resorted to illegal means to ensure and maintain accessibility of goods and services. Among these illicit modes, was the outcrop of parallel markets, externalization of foreign currency, money laundering, deep-rooted corruption, theft and even prostitution. An informal survey carried out by IRIN around the capital, Harare, revealed that most shops had run out of basic commodities such as sugar, maize-meal,

flour, cooking oil, toothpaste and margarine. However, almost all of these commodities were readily available on the parallel market and in the backyard kiosks³¹. In Mbare, a poor suburb with abundant unofficial market activity, a 10 kg bag of maize-meal was being sold at \$90 000 (about US \$15) compared to the official price of Zim \$35 000 (US \$5.72), while a 2 kg packet of sugar was available for Zim \$15 000 (\$2.45), instead of the gazetted Zim \$ 7.500 (US \$1.22). A 750 ml bottle of cooking oil was fetching for \$22 000 (US \$3.59), almost double the official price of Zim \$13 000 (\$2.12)³². A thriving black market for fuel also mushroomed to further complicate the shortages.

In response, the Government of Zimbabwe initiated Operation *Murambatsvina* (or Restore Order) in May 2005, an exercise aimed at destroying allegedly illegal urban structures, such as informal housing (backyard kiosks where most of the illicit deals were being conducted) and markets. The understanding was that, a majority of these people involved in the illegal deals lived and carried out their deals in these shanty structures. Effectively, most of the people displaced inhabiting in these urban “slums” made a living out of trading on the black market. The government argued that Operation *Murambatsvina* was a program designed to restore the capital city to its former image as “the Sunshine City”, ridding the country’s urban areas of illegal structures that fostered criminal activity and stemming the black market trade in foreign currency³³. However, this governmental policy had a severe impact on the nation’s economy and on the livelihood of its citizens. A survey by Action Aid International, a Netherlands-based international development agency, found that 840 000 people were directly affected and 1.2 million people indirectly affected, while a survey by the independent research firm Afrobarometer reported that an estimated 2.7 million people were directly affected³⁴. By early July 2005, an estimated 700 000 urban Zimbabweans had been rendered homeless or unemployed by the operation, and an estimated 2.1 million (in total, almost 20% of the population) were indirectly affected by the demolitions³⁵. A lot of structures were forcefully destroyed against citizens’ wishes. The use of the police and the military to ensure complete destruction and displacement of people further instilled fear in people hence rendering the prospects of democracy gloomy. In fact, the military and the police pounded on defenseless citizens as a way to thwart these unlawful activities. An outcry from the homeless led the government into adopting yet another noble strategy of

providing accommodation to the displaced people. Unfortunately, the few houses that were completed under *Garikai* (Live Well), a housing scheme meant to benefit the victims of Operation Murambatsvina on the contrary benefited soldiers, police and some members of the ruling party³⁶. Overall, the scarcity of goods and services emanating for the economic crisis caused the inequitable distribution of resources and evidently only benefactors of the then ruling party were the major beneficiaries. Governments are also judged by their aptitude to ensure equitable distribution of resources but the situation experienced in Zimbabwe empowers even a layman to be quizzical about the country's levels of democracy.

The Civil Society

Living in a world where people subscribe to having a moral obligation of helping the needy and the poor, the impact of economic coercion in Zimbabwe prompted the apprehension and efforts of the civil society at large. Following the continued reports of human rights violations, political violence, food crisis and sharply exacerbating levels of poverty, crisis response organizations and groups accelerated and consolidated their efforts to assist. Lucidly, the role of the civil society was strengthened. Human rights organizations within Zimbabwe protracted that the figure 4 million Zimbabweans were in need of food aid was an underestimate because of the effect of poverty on so many Zimbabweans who were nominally employed at best³⁷. Exacerbated levels of poverty, rampant spread of diseases especially cholera, lack of proper sanitary conditions and other socio-economic problems enhanced the affinity of civic organizations towards Zimbabwe. In fact, for most humanitarian organizations, all roads led to Zimbabwe between the period 2003 and 2008. With an average per capita income of roughly \$1 a day, the organizations main focus was the deprived rural areas where most people lived and still live way below the poverty datum line. The Christian Alliance and the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) monitored human rights abuses and empowered victims to assert their human dignity and to claim their God-given rights. The Christian Alliance was also closely involved in monitoring elections on the 29th of March 2008 and committed itself to seeking a way out of the political impasse that rocked

Zimbabwe after the re-run elections³⁸. Presumably, state-civil relations have been known to be hostile in most African countries, but the civic organizations operating in Zimbabwe experienced one of the worst phases in their operations. Their methods of assisting people cushion the effects of economic coercion were highly queried by the state, further aggravating the already overwrought state-civil relations. Despite the NGOs efforts to improve the lives of citizens during the Zimbabwe crisis, accusations were traded between the government of Zimbabwe and the NGOs. The government in response alleged that NGOs were engaged in political activities undermining the government rather than the work they registered to do³⁹. President Mugabe reiterated that

“NGOs are hatcheries of political opposition.....The moment they seek governmental power and office as has happened in Binga, we begin to view them differently as political opponents. And political opponents are dealt with politically...They should not cry, for they have redefined the rules of engagement.”⁴⁰

It did not take long before the government re-defined the rules of engagement. They enacted policies designed to thwart the efforts of the watchdogs of society. After the NGOs heavily criticized the government for mass killings and human rights abuses, on the 9th of December 2004 the Zimbabwean government decided to introduce the NGO Bill. The bill contained stringent and inauspicious rules about the activities, funding and control of NGOs, prompting a substantial number of NGOs to relocate or close down for good. Governmental efforts were meant to debilitate the activities of the NGOs. Although the NGO bill was never assented into law, the mere introduction of the NGO bill was enough harm because the closure and/or relocation of these organizations was a direct consequence of the bill. Fundamentally, the more NGOs became vibrant, the more the government engaged in frustrating their operations. Additionally, skeptical governments are of the perception that, NGO activities if not strictly contained may interfere with important political events such as elections. Usually, the governments perceive NGOs to be influencing the voters against the ruling parties and in favor of the opposition parties. This is because NGOs interact with people at the grassroots levels. Following the contentious Zimbabwe presidential elections in March 2008, the government of

Zimbabwe accused NGOs of interfering with the trend of voting by influencing the people to vote for the opposition party. The government suspended the work of humanitarian organizations in May 2008 after condemning them of engaging in political activities during the hotly contested general election. Consequently, on the 4th of June 2008, before the presidential elections runoff, the government of Zimbabwe revoked all NGO licenses. Every organization had to re-apply and re-register to render its services in Zimbabwe. For the next two months, the poor masses who traditionally benefited from NGO aid suffered immensely. As earlier mentioned, NGOs usually assist the worst affected in crises, so the suspension of aid for any reason meant the ordinary citizens were the ones who suffered most, rather than the lavishing government elite. It was only in September 2008, 3 months after the presidential re-run elections, and exactly 3 months after President Mugabe was sworn in for the 6th presidential term of office that the ban was lifted for NGOs to resume humanitarian relief and development operations in Zimbabwe. Hostility towards civil society shows a serious lack of democratic rule in any system, as the civil society keeps checks and balances on governments. They also prevent the suffering of people from unjust systems and act as the voice of the voiceless of society. However, to governments that insulate themselves from criticism, for the love of power at the expense of the welfare of their citizens, it is an efficient strategy.

Governmental Legitimacy

Nevertheless, the tremendous suffering of the citizens from the effects of sanctions bolstered levels of mistrust and lack of buoyancy in the government by the populace. Since the masses were in anguish, with very little support from the government, signs of hesitation in the potency of the government were witnessed. As the sanctions took effect (or “bite” in sanctions jargon), making life gradually difficult for the citizens, and since these citizens being pain-avoiding value-maximizers, will seek to eradicate their pain by eliminating the proximate source of it- that is, they will seek to overthrow the existing authorities in favor of new governors who will abandon the state’s wrong-doing, thus causing the sender to withdraw its sanctions, and thus restoring normalcy⁴¹. In a nutshell, at that point, the theory of “rallying-around the flag”⁴² - a concept whereby when

attacked, either militarily or economically by a foreign power, the populace of a country usually rallies around the existing around leader- no matter how detestable he or she may be did not come to fulfillment. Key evidence emanated in March 2008 when ZANU PF lost parliamentary elections against the opposition. The 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe changed the balance of political forces in Zimbabwe in two crucial aspects; the power of ZANU PF and its leader was debilitated and secondly for the first time since independence in 1980, ZANU PF suffered defeat in the House of Assembly and in the first round of the presidential elections at the hands of the MDC.⁴³ The defeat effected a power shift that would have been impossible without the electoral verdicts. Although the 2008 elections failed to oust President Mugabe and ZANU PF, but they left them exposed, weakened in negotiations, and internationally discredited.⁴⁴

Following the elections, ZANU PF entered into a power-sharing government with the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). However, the government did not take the defeat frivolously as it alleged that the loss of ZANU PF implied a power transition to former colonizers represented by the MDC. During the parliamentary elections, for example, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) severely restricted the appearances of opposition political party candidates on both radio and television while the ruling ZANU PF's candidates were more than adequately covered each time they held campaign rallies⁴⁵. Rampant reports of election violence by ZANU PF supporters as well as the use of the military and police to coerce voters were brought up. In some cases, there were numerous amendments of the laws, most of which had a motive of disenfranchising sections of the electorate who were suspected of supporting opposition political parties. Additionally, in 2004, the Zimbabwean government amended the Electoral Act (of 1990) restricting voter education to approved civic organizations and those that would have submitted their voter education syllabi to appropriate government authorities for approval. Clearly this move was meant at curbing the civic activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) suspected to be sympathetic to the opposition parties. The violence and intimidation that became ZANU PF's trademark of electoral politics produced a sense of political tension, fear and despondency among Zimbabwe's

electorate⁴⁶. Commenting on the parliamentary elections of 2008, one monitoring mission noted that

“The political environment did not accord the eligible voters their basic freedoms. These freedoms of movement, associations and expression are essential if individuals are to make personal, independent political decisions. In many parts of the country, due to the unsettled political situation, people are restrained from discussing political issues, especially those who are on the opposite side.”⁴⁷

Ominously, the operational environment of government opposition has never been a fair and just atmosphere. The question therefore, is how accurate and to what extent is the “naïve” theory of sanctions that tight, comprehensive and targeted sanctions can push Zimbabweans into overthrowing the ZANU PF regime.

Global Isolation

Since sanction imposition emanates from the hostility of ties/relations between and amongst states, senders of the sanctions strive by all means to ensure that the targeted state is secluded. The sender state’s motives are to punish the state perpetrating policies it deems deplorable, and isolation to them is a sure way of doing it. Punitive measures may involve isolating the targeted state in terms of trade, diplomatic ties or any other form of cordial relations once shared. Effectively, multi-lateral sanctions are designed that way with a host of allied states striving to isolate a certain targeted state. In a world where globalization is vital for the development of states, and considering opportunity costs that would have been accrued by associating with certain states, forced disengagement with other states is extremely costly. Frantic efforts by some states of self-imposed isolationist policies or policies of disengagement have never worked, even without any economic coercion involved. In the Zimbabwean case, the collective efforts of Zimbabwe’s former colony Britain, its long-established and reliable trading partner the European Union, United States of America, other medium powers who still are strategically important like Canada and Australia and the neighboring Botswana thwarted the efforts of Zimbabwe in reaching out. Consequently, sanctions isolated and restricted communications between

the intelligentsia, professionals, media groups, sporting groups, civic society groups and other educated Zimbabweans. Generally citizens were cut off from the contemporary and new thinking around the world, hence this restricted intellectual fertilization. One of the off-shoots of this isolation is a younger generation that is maturing without awareness of dynamism in thinking⁴⁸ with regard to Zimbabwe in the African region and elsewhere. The material people see in the local media tends to highlight negative Western attitudes with regard to Zimbabwe and its people. What democracy is there in a country where radio and television stations with views different to the government are banned? Parallels can be drawn with the North Korean situation in which the population is heavily insulated from the world affairs and what Iraq went through during the more than a decade long comprehensive sanctions (thirteen years to be precise).

In December 2003, the Commonwealth, including 19 other influential African members voted to suspend Zimbabwe from Commonwealth indefinitely, following observations by the Commonwealth of Nations observer team to the March 2002 Presidential Election in Zimbabwe that documented that “the conditions in Zimbabwe did not adequately allow for the free expression of the will of the electors”⁴⁹. This was the first action against ZANU PF by a body that included African states. However, the government responded by withdrawing Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth and ruling out any further discussions or a possible return⁵⁰. Ironically, the Zimbabwe government withdrew from the Commonwealth citing that it was all of a sudden unnecessary for the country to be a member although it had enjoyed the fruits of membership from independence in 1980. Evidently, this move saw the regression of Zimbabwe from her previous assertive position as a global player to being a regional if not a domestic player, the segregation of the country in some beneficial public –private partnerships for trade and investment in Commonwealth countries and essential networking and information sharing not only for business but for educational, employment and other purposes. As a result, challenges paused on the ability to network; governmental control of the media, propaganda, and media laws that centered more on censoring the media further isolated the people of Zimbabwe. The motive was to disable people from receiving information especially information that disparage the government. All these moves are detrimental to any efforts advanced in promoting democracy.

Opposition Political Parties

Not only did the impact of economic coercion in Zimbabwe attract the efforts of civic groups but also helped the further transition, cohesion and development of a formidable opposition group, the MDC. Although the MDC had been formed earlier on in September 1999, the imposition of sanctions on the ruling party gave the opposition leverage over the ruling party. For almost 30 years Zimbabwe had been under the governance of one ruling party with a one- party state manifesto. Stripped to bare bones, the existence of a strong domestic opposition group is one of the indispensable factors determining the success of sanctions against a targeted regime. However, the stronger the opposition force, the more likely a government is to implement strategies to try containing its activities, as a way of consolidating their power in the process jeopardizing democratic attributes. The stronger the opposition political parties in a given autocratic country become the more manipulative, virulent, vicious and violent the ruling party becomes in order to perpetuate its rule⁵¹. The violence and intimidation that rocked most parts of the country came as a result of the development of multi-partism. Never before had such kind of electoral violence been experienced. In Zimbabwe, the government proceeded to adopt the controversial POSA, AIPPA, the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, (Criminal Law Code) and the Miscellaneous Offences Act (MOA) which are very draconian in nature. These laws are very restrictive in nature; oppressive at their best, meant to foil political freedoms. Although the government has argued that AIPPA encourages responsible journalism, clearly these laws have been used to break up public meetings and genuine and peaceful demonstrations. These worked to restrict and limit powers of opposition groups hence compromising human rights and other issues.

Nevertheless, a substantial number of authors have alluded to the fact that targeted sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe facilitated the formation of the coalition government (affectionately known as the Government of National Unity) amongst the major parties in Zimbabwe. However, it is important to realize that the coalition government is still marred with a lot of problems protracting reservations and doubts as to its future implications. Undoubtedly, it is a major step towards the attainment of

democracy as it reflects political tolerance and multipartism. However, the peculiar features of all the three examples of governments of national unity enjoyed in Zimbabwe before, are such that they succeed periods of severe conflict, and were thus aimed at “buying peace at any cost”⁵². It is critical to note that all the three ultimately failed, in their espoused objective and one wonders if the 2008 Government of National Unity (GNU) could become an exception to this trend ⁵³ . Furthermore, one other counterexample normally cited is the South African case where economic and cultural sanctions are alleged to have contributed not only to the fall of the apartheid regime but also to a successful democratic transition. Indeed , students of South African politics (as opposed to students of sanctions) tend to argue that that there were numerous factors that brought white South Africans to a realization that the kind of South Africa that had existed in the halcyon days of apartheid in the 1950s and 1960s was no longer sustainable (Price 1991; Klotz 1995). Sanctions invoked by governments to pressure the South African state into change are generally seen to be only one of these factors⁵⁴. As Crawford and Klotz note, unraveling the causality in the South African case will be difficult; the role of sanctions in that process is likely to remain essentially contested. South Africa was unusually amenable to this kind of pressure because it retained a functioning multiparty democracy and because, unlike many other pariah states it was not willing to be a pariah⁵⁵.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The notion that economic sanctions can induce democracy among authoritarian regimes is a myth. Clearly, as illustrated by this article, economic coercion has had adverse effects on democracy. Sanctions create conditions that help consolidate the regime’s hold on power and create new incentives for the regime to limit democratic freedoms. The imposition and unrelenting utilization of economic sanctions leads to a decrease in democratic rights, and more acutely sanctions will have a more intense, negative effect on democracy. Significantly, the undesirable effects of economic coercion have impacted negatively on the prospects for democracy by providing a platform and exhibiting the oppressive characteristics of the Zimbabwean government. Consequently, the

government seems to know how to capitalize on the effects of unintended consequences. Ominously, the effect of economic sanctions was expansive spreading to infinity thereby affecting an unintended audience. As a result, the ordinary citizens devised illicit methods of survival which attracted the iron fist of the government to contain these illegal activities. Typically, in the cases of Iraq, Haiti, Cuba, North Korea and Zimbabwe, sanctions seemed only to empower the regimes incumbent snuffing out the original motive of democracy. As Nossal rightly puts it, sanctions only amount to a rain dance—in other words, an activity that actually accomplishes very little, but that makes the participants feel good because something is being done about a serious problem⁵⁶. Global isolation and increased seclusion only renders it easy for targeted governments to blame external forces for a country's suffering. It also makes it easy for the government to feed the citizens a diet of propaganda hence making it difficult for the survival of democracy.

As demonstrated by this article the domestic and external strategies espoused by the Zimbabwe government rendered democracy murky yet on the contrary promoting repression. Such strategies included the drafting of new draconian laws, tabling of the NGO Bill of 2008, militarization of the state, global disengagement policies, excessive powers accorded to both the executive and the RBZ. Whilst it is undisputable that Zimbabwe needs democracy for proper and effective development to occur, this article has just proved that imposing sanctions on an autocratic regime to effect democracy may not be the best strategy. Also of fundamental significance and rather peripheral, is to first analyze whether Zimbabwe has the capability and ability to stomach democracy with its current level of development. Consequently, it becomes imperative to first improve the standards of ordinary citizens, and for the civic society to teach the grassroots what democracy entails.

Conclusively, regarding the current catastrophe in Zimbabwe, constructive engagement which is often snubbed as slow and less forceful tends to bring out better results than sanctions. Additionally, market liberalization policies, interlinkages and interactions at any levels, emancipate and enlighten societies and their expectations. This means that ordinary citizens are aware of the standards expected from their governments for which failure to deliver may prompt political discontent and antagonism. Trade,

tourism, cultural exchanges, intellectual exchange and participation in international institutions all serve to erode the legitimacy of repressive regimes because the society is more open to the dynamics of the world affairs. In brief, isolating the people of Zimbabwe through the use economic sanctions is not the best way to attaining democracy. Rather, the repressive nature of governments is further bolstered. ZANU PF despite the disastrous consequences of their authoritarian rule has been able to blame poverty and economic stagnation on the coercive measures imposed by Western governments. The material deprivation suffered by the Zimbabweans through sanctions paradoxically makes it less likely that the oppressed will throw off their chains and that the oppressors will unleash the shackles.

NOTES

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¹ Chingono Heather: *Zimbabwe Sanctions: An Analysis of the "Lingo" guiding the Perceptions of the Sanctioners and the Sanctionees*; Journal of African Politics and International Relations; 4(2) Feb (2010) p1. These modern standards of democracy and human rights revolve around the upholding of political freedoms and civil liberties. Furthermore, emphasis also lies in preventing human rights abuses by all means possible, enhancing rule of law, freedom of expression and belief, associational and organization rights, personal autonomy, individually rights, political pluralism, participation, fairness of the electoral process and freedom to elect officials into power.

² *Obama to Tighten Screws on Mugabe?* allAfrica.com; 13 December 2008
<http://allafrica.com/stories/200812180812.html>

³ Hufbauer Gary Clyde, Jeffrey Schott, Ann Elliot and Barbra Oegg: Pape Robert: "*Why Economic Sanctions do not work*": International Security 22(2): (2006),pp 90-136.

⁴ Ibid p 68

⁵ See Nye Joseph S Jr: *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History 5th Edition*: Peking University Press; Beijing. (2004) p 48. He provided a quotation from President William J Clintons' speech at the 49th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, on the 26th of September 1994.

⁶ Elman Colin : *Introduction: History , Theory and the Democratic Peace*: The International History Review 23(4) (2001) pp 757-766

⁷ Kirshner J: *The Micro foundations of Economic Sanctions* ; Security Studies 6 (1997) p42

⁸Phiri B J: *Democracy and Human Rights in Zimbabwe History*: The Journal of African History; 44 (3) (2003).

⁹ Consequently all these events led to the souring of relations between the Western governments criticizing the government of Zimbabwe for undemocratic rule and human rights abuses.

¹⁰ Muzondidya James: *From Buoyancy to Crisis 1980-1997* p 174 in Raftopoulos, B and Mlambo A.S (eds) *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from Pre-Colonial Period to 2008*: African Books Collective

¹¹ See Dambisa Moyo in her Book *Dead Aid: Why Aid is not Working and How There is Another Way for Africa* .Penguin Books (2009) p xi. She reiterates that what “poor countries at the lowest levels of economic development need is not multi-party democracy but rather an authoritarian but kind leader, who whilst craves for power but is willing to ensure a proper welfare of citizens and economic development. Accordingly, she implies that economic development should be attained before full-fledged democracy.

¹² Kazembe J: *The Women Issue in Mandaza (ed) The Political Economy of Transition in Zimbabwe*; Dakar: Codesria(1986): pp 386-394

¹³ Kaplan S: *Zimbabwe: Ethnicity and Race*: Chapter 2B: Countries of the World (1991)

¹⁴ Weizter R: *Transferring Settler States: Communal Conflict and Internal Security in Northern Ireland and Zimbabwe* Berkeley: University of California (1990)p 134

¹⁵ Rupiya M: *Demobilization and Integration “Operation Merger” and the Zimbabwe National Defense Forces 1980-1987*; African Security Review 4 (3) (1995)pp 52-64

¹⁶ Gevisser Mark: *As Zimbabwe Goes*: The Nation 8 April (2002)p4

¹⁷ Raftopoulos Brian and Alois Mlambo: *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008*: African Books Collective (2009).

¹⁸ Masipula Sithole :*Fighting Authoritarianism in Zimbabwe*: Journal of Democracy ;January 12 (1) (2001):

¹⁹ Ncube Welshman: *Constitutionalism, democracy and political practice in Zimbabwe*; SAPES Books(1991) pp 156-157

²⁰ Drury Alfred and Peksén: Drury Cooper Alfred and Peksén Dursun: *Economic Sanctions and Democracy*: Boston, Massachusetts (8) (2006)

²¹ Opicit p 20

²² Mugari Shakeman: *Zimbabwe: IMF Estimates Inflation at 150000 Percent*; (2008) allAfrica.com, January 18; <http://allafrica.com/stories/200801180772.html>

²³ Central Intelligence Agency, The World Fact Book-Iraq, February 2008, <http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

²⁴ Opicit p 17

²⁵ http://www.zimbabwejournalists.com/story.php?art_id=1216&cat=4

²⁶ Top RBZ Official on the Run after Fraud: April 1, 2009
<http://www.thezimbabwetimes.com/?p=14399>

²⁷ Makarau Calls for Separation of Powers:*NewZimbabwe.com*; January 11, 2010

²⁸ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/oct/01/zimbabwe.chrismcgreal>

²⁹ The estimations are according to The World Food Programme. However this information appears in an article under the title *Zimbabwe Runs out of Bread*: October 1, 2007.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/oct/01/zimbabwe.chrismcgreal>

³⁰ Andreas Peter: *Criminalizing Consequences of Sanctions :Embargo Busting and Its Legacy*: International Studies Quarterly 49(3) (2005) pp 335-360

³¹ <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=54280>

³² IRIN: *Zimbabwe : Parallel Market Flourishes as Shelves Empty*; 6 May 2005

³³ “Clean Up Commendable,” *The Herald*, May 23 , 2005

³⁴ Action Aid International; *The Impact of Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order in Zimbabwe*; August 2005

The U.N. Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe ; Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to Assess The Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina July 2005

³⁵ The U.N. Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe ; *Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to Assess The Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina* July 2005

³⁶ See AI Report : Solidarity Peace Trust , *Meltdown : Murambatsvina One Year On* , August 30, 2006

³⁷ Coltart David: *A Decade of Suffering in Zimbabwe: Economic Collapse and Political Repression under Robert Mugabe*; The CATO Institute; March, Number 5(2008)

³⁸ Shaw Graham: *A difficult Birth: The Struggle for Democracy in Zimbabwe*: May 9 2008
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³⁹ Muzondo T H: *International Human Rights*: CSO Development Consultant. (2009)

⁴⁰ *Mugabe warns against meddling*: the Herald 13 October 2002

⁴¹ Opicit p 11

⁴² Mueller John : *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* ; John Wiley and Sons (1973)

⁴³ Booysen Susan: *The Presidential and parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe , March and June 2008* ;Graduate School of Public and Development Management; (2008) p 1

⁴⁴ Ibid p 1

⁴⁵ Makumbe John (2006): *Election Politics in Zimbabwe: Authoritarianism versus the People*: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa: Volume XXXI Number (3) p 49

⁴⁶ Ibid p 48

⁴⁷ Transparency International Zimbabwe (TIZ) 2000:17

⁴⁸ Halliday Denis J: *The Impact of the UN Sanctions on the People of Iraq*: Journal of Palestine Studies; Winter XXXVII, Number 2 (1999) p35

⁴⁹ Commonwealth Observer Group's Preliminary Report on Zimbabwean Presidential Elections, March 14, 2002. (Available at <http://www.afrol.com>).

⁵⁰ Mugabe Rules Out Zimbabwe's Return to the Commonwealth, AFP, December 16

⁵¹ Opicit p46

⁵² Chigora Percyslage and Guzura Tobias: *The Politics of The Government of National Unit (GNU) and Power Sharing in Zimbabwe: Challenges and Prospects*: A Paper Presented at the European Conference on African Studies: Institute of African Studies, University of Leipzig, Germany, 4-7 June (2009)

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Nossal Kim Richard: *Liberal-democratic regimes ,international sanctions and global governance* in Raimo Vayrynen, ed., *Globalization and Global Governance* ; Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield (1999) p 127-49

⁵⁵ Bremmer Ian: *The J Curve: A new Way to understand why nations rise and fall*: Simon and Schuster (2006)

⁵⁶ Opicit p. xiii.