



Matabeleland: Its Struggle for National Legitimacy, and the Relevance of this in the 2008 Election

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Matabeleland consists of three western provinces of Zimbabwe, namely Matabeleland North, Matabeleland South and Bulawayo. This region, stereotyped as marginalised and underdeveloped, and also as a hotbed of political opposition both historically and currently, is once more poised to play a strategic role in the forthcoming elections.

After Independence in 1980, Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands were subjected to a brutal and hidden period of oppression, in which an estimated 20,000 civilians were massacred and tens of thousands more were tortured by the Fifth Brigade, which answered ultimately to Robert Mugabe. Hundreds disappeared and thousands lost homes and livestock, as Mugabe relentlessly moved to effectively establish a one-party state in Zimbabwe.

The 1980s violence was without any doubt far in excess of anything that happened in affected regions during the 1970s war of liberation.¹ While the “dissidents” of Matabeleland can be blamed for some of the atrocities, all evidence points to government forces, in particular the Fifth Brigade and the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) being responsible for over 90% of violations.² It is fair to say that few people in Matabeleland claim **not** to have been affected by these events. Most people in the region – more than 70% - seem able to justify their claim to be primary victims of Fifth Brigade atrocities.³ The fact that to date these events remain largely unacknowledged at an official level, combined with continued perceived regional under-development, has had a lasting impact in terms of political outlook.

This paper will look in more detail at what led to this “Gukurahundi”⁴ era and then comment on the political context of Matabeleland in the run-up to the current election.

Ethnography and Geography

The population of Matabeleland North, South, and Bulawayo constitutes between 15% and 20% of Zimbabwe’s total, and the region is considered to be culturally Ndebele.⁵ While almost everyone in

¹ If we assume a number of 30,000 dead nationally over a decade of struggle in the 1970s, and consider an estimated 20,000 dead in an area representing 20% of the national population in the space of 30 months, the comparative intensity of the conflict becomes clear.

² Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and Legal Resources Foundation (LRF); *Breaking the silence, building true peace: a report on the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands 1980-1988*; Harare, 1997: Out of over 7,000 violations reported to the compilers of this report, fewer than 200 were attributed to dissidents. See also Alexander J, McGregor J, Ranger, T; *Violence and Memory: a hundred years in the dark forests of Matabeleland*; Weaver Press, Harare, 2000. Both write detailed histories of this era based on eye-witness accounts.

³ Extensive random surveys carried out by Amani Trust Matabeleland during the 1990s found that 77% of adults in Matabeleland North, and 75% of adults in Matabeleland South had been personally affected by Gukurahundi; Amani Trust, “Preliminary results of Survivors of Violence Survey”, internal paper, November 1998.

⁴ *Gukurahundi* is a Shona word meaning : “the first rain of spring that washes away from the fields the chaff left over from the last harvest”. The Ndebele were left in no doubt that they were the rubbish to be swept away by the Fifth Brigade.

⁵ The Ndebele are descended from the Nguni tribal groups that predominate in South Africa; the Zulu and Xhosa are both Nguni tribal groups. The Ndebele migrated north from what is now Kwazulu Natal in the mid 1800s. Ndebele is very similar to Zulu, and Ndebele is one of South Africa’s eleven official languages.

Matabeleland has become consolidated into an Ndebele identity, this has been a complex process ethnically, linguistically and culturally.⁶

In population terms, 80% of Zimbabwe is Shona-speaking. The Midlands Province of central Zimbabwe is linguistically and culturally both Ndebele and Shona, while the remaining six provinces are Shona-speaking. The Shona are not one homogeneous group or culture, just as the Ndebele are not. However, no political party can consider itself truly national unless it can claim legitimate, elected representation in the fiercely independent region of Matabeleland.

Matabeleland is generally less hospitable to human habitation than much of Zimbabwe. Rainfall is lower than in Mashonaland, and the land is less fertile. Water is scarce, and malaria is endemic throughout almost the entire of Matabeleland. However, the region has rich mineral deposits, including coal, gold, methane gas, and limestone. Vast reserves of hardwood timber and wildlife lie in the region. Extensive cattle ranches were established in colonial times, but no commercial crops are able to grow here on any scale. Peasant farmers consider their wealth to lie in their livestock, and in most seasons rural families do not grow enough maize to feed themselves. Matabeleland South in particular is reliant year after year on maize from outside their region. This is significant in a nation where the ruling party has a long established pattern of politically manipulating access to maize for its own political benefit.⁷

Political History: 1950s to 1980

During the 1950s, the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 with its forced resettlement of the Ndebele into infertile regions, and subsequently the Land Husbandry Act, which resulted in forced destocking, proved fertile ground for the rise of nationalism in Matabeleland – as elsewhere in Zimbabwe.

In 1957, the nationwide African National Congress (ANC) was formed with Joshua Nkomo, an Ndebele as its leader. The ANC was banned by the colonial government in 1959. In 1960, the National Democratic Party formed, also under the national leadership of Joshua Nkomo, and this began to have a nationwide reach, beyond urban areas, including into rural Matabeleland, helping to consolidate a nationalist perspective that transcended the various Ndebele and Shona group identities.⁸ By 1961, the NDP was banned – only to resurface months later as the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). Once more, this nationwide party was led by Joshua Nkomo, supported by a predominantly Shona executive.

However, by 1963 rifts appeared within ZAPU, leading to a second nationalist party, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), under the leadership of Ndabaningi Sithole. The splits were caused partly by differences in policy and by personal differences between leaders, but increasingly over time, support for the two parties became regionally defined. Both parties considered themselves national in focus; neither ZANU nor ZAPU were tribalist by policy, but by the 1970s there was a strong association of ZAPU with Ndebele speakers and of ZANU with Shona speakers.⁹

⁶ While Ndebele identity has been incorporative of other identities, there are limits to this process, and linguistic minorities have also mobilised in peripheral districts against Ndebele dominance. However, what unites Matabeleland is a shared history: Allegiance to ZAPU cut across tribal tensions, and so has a shared history of post independence persecution. Alexander et al, op cit: see their chapter "Life in the dark forests" for an excellent overview of early settlement of Matabeleland North. The Rozwi state in the north existed before the arrival and conquest of first the Swazis and then the Ndebeles in the 1800s. By the early 1900s, there was fluid movement and co-existence of small groupings of Lozwi, Nyai, Tonga and Shangwe, with the Ndebeles arriving in noticeable numbers in Matabeleland north from the early to mid twentieth century onwards.

⁷ The use of food for political means by the ZANU-PF in fact dates back to 1984, when a strictly enforced food curfew brought the Matabeleland South population of around 400,000 to the brink of starvation during the "gukurahundi" era. Political abuse of food therefore resonates in a particular way in Matabeleland, being linked as it is to the massacres of the 1980s.

⁸ Alexander et al, *ibid*, pp 95 ff.

⁹ CCJP and LRF, op cit: much of the information following is summarised from their account.

The Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), the armed wing of ZAPU, prided itself on superior military training and intelligence networks. ZIPRA was Russian trained and by the end of the war, had operational tank and air units. The Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), the armed wing of ZANU, was Chinese trained. During the 1970s, fierce fighting increasingly broke out between the two guerrilla armies, in training camps in Tanzania, as well as within Zimbabwe, and left a legacy of distrust and polarisation between the two.

In terms of the peace accord signed between Joshua Nkomo, Robert Mugabe and Ian Smith in 1979, the two guerrilla armies of ZANLA and ZIPRA were to be integrated into one army together with the old Rhodesian Defence Force, to make up the Zimbabwe National Army. The long standing animosities between ZIPRA and ZANLA made this extremely problematic. As army integration began, ZIPRAs felt persecuted within the army. There were reports of forced disappearances from ZIPRA ranks, and disgruntlement over their lack of representation at senior level.

ZANU overwhelmingly won the election of April 1980 – although significantly, all 15 seats in Matabeleland were won by ZAPU, who also won 5 seats in other areas¹⁰. Tensions rose steadily between ZANU and ZAPU during 1980, culminating in a major outbreak of violence in November in Bulawayo. In February 1981 there was further ZIPRA – ZANLA violence in Matabeleland and the Midlands, and more than 300 lost their lives. In 1982, arms caches were “found” in Matabeleland, leading to five top ZAPU officials to be charged with treason, including Dumiso Dabengwa, and the dismissal of all ZAPU cabinet ministers, including Joshua Nkomo and Joseph Msika (the current vice president of Zimbabwe).¹¹ The treason charges were dismissed as baseless by the courts. Throughout these growing indications of a comprehensive clampdown on ZAPU, hundreds of ZIPRAs defected back to the bush. It was disillusionment and fear that led to these ZIPRAs choosing a life on the run, rather than any strong political motivation. Some of these ex-ZIPRAs were to become, in the course of 1982-3, a series of disparate bandit groupings with no overall leadership – and they were to provide Mugabe with the perfect pretext to launch a massive operation against the “dissidents” of Matabeleland.¹²

1980-1987: “Gukurahundi”

While the massacres of the 1980s have been remembered by many of its victims as being directed against “Ndebele”, the motivation for the repression was more politically than ethnically driven. While the Fifth Brigade itself, in its rhetoric and actions, conflated being a “ZAPU supporter” with being “Ndebele” with being a “dissident”, it appears that the intention behind the onslaught was a perceived need to crush ZAPU as a viable political entity, and to create a *de facto* one party state. However, the need to suppress the ZAPU-supporting Matabeleland region was obviously a long standing one for Robert Mugabe. In October 1980, less than six months after assuming power, Mugabe entered into an agreement with the North Koreans to train a praetorian guard that would answer to him personally – this became the notorious Fifth Brigade, given the name of “Gukurahundi” by Mugabe himself. In October 1980 there was no possible justification for such a squad to exist: This was prior to the first Entumbane uprising and at a time when ZAPU and ZANU were sitting together in cabinet.

¹⁰ There were 100 elected seats nationally in 1980.

¹¹ CCJP and LRF, op cit. Arms caches had in fact been found all over Zimbabwe, including in ZANLA areas, as nervous guerrillas stashed arms, and an ad-hoc committee to deal with the *known existence* of these arms had been set up. But ZANU had obviously decided to use the arms caches as the “point of no return” in the growing crisis.

¹² The government's own figures for “dissidents” in 1984 were 400: see CCJP and LRF, *ibid*. Dissidents themselves admitted they were ultimately leaderless and were not taking instructions from any senior ZAPU official. In their own words – “Apart from defending ourselves, there was very little we wanted to achieve.” Cited in CCJP and LRF, p 34, *ibid*. also see Alexander et al, op cit, for an extensive discussion of events in the 1980s from the point of view of the dissidents themselves, as well as from those civilians affected by events.

The 5,000-strong Fifth Brigade was extraneous to the rest of the army, and was trained by the North Koreans in peculiar contrast to the rest of the army, which was trained and integrated by the British.

The Fifth Brigade was unleashed in Matabeleland North in January 1983, with devastating results. Within weeks, thousands of civilians were massacred in rural villages.

The Fifth Brigade was easily identifiable, as they wore red berets, spoke Shona, and drove around in unique Chinese vehicles. They sang revolutionary songs as they travelled and their movement was marked by screaming, gunshots, and the burning of homesteads – this was not the behaviour of an army brigade intent on hunting down small groups of elusive dissidents. This was a brigade with a mandate to terrorise and murder civilians. It was other units from the main body of the army – namely Fourth Brigade, Sixth Brigade, the paratroopers and the Police Support Unit – that carried out a quite separate campaign against the approximately 400 highly dispersed bandits that came to be called dissidents.¹³

The Fifth Brigade's modus operandi changed over time, becoming more clandestine as their atrocities began to draw intense criticism from the Catholic Church in particular.¹⁴ They moved from a campaign in 1983 of well witnessed, epidemic violence in the community setting, to mass forced translocations to large detention centres in 1984, to a more clandestine policy of forced disappearances in 1985, ahead of the elections. Thousands were murdered in 1983 and 1984: In 1985, hundreds of key community leaders were called to their doors in the middle of the night, taken away in vehicles without number plates and have never been seen again.

The persecution of civilians perceived to support ZAPU was happening in the context of an onslaught against senior ZAPU leadership. Joshua Nkomo narrowly escaped assassination and had to flee to Botswana, while other leaders were detained for years without trial.¹⁵ Throughout this time, the new ZANU government made use of the repressive legislation inherited from the colonial regime, and of the "resilient and equally military oriented structures left by the retreating settler state".¹⁶ ZANU replaced colonial authoritarianism with a nationalist authoritarianism. However, in areas outside of Matabeleland, this nationalism manifested itself differently – other parts of the country saw the development of roads, agricultural markets, schools, clinics, a vast land redistribution exercise, and even national pride! The almost total government control of movement and of the media, meant that people in other parts of the country, who were harvesting the fruits of liberation, did not understand the scale or the facts of what was happening in Matabeleland.

The Unity Accord

In spite of three years of unrelenting atrocities against them, in 1985 Matabeleland yet again voted overwhelmingly for ZAPU, which once more won all seats in the region. However, ZAPU was in a much weakened position, with many leaders in detention without trial and others facing yet another treason case. Violent rhetoric and torture continued. The 1980s violence was eventually brought to a close with the signing of the Unity Accord in December 1987, which effectively led to the absorption of ZAPU into ZANU and the *de facto* creation of a one-party state. Matabeleland received no apology, no compensation, no regional development – and a blanket amnesty in April 1988 protected primarily the Fifth Brigade from prosecution.¹⁷ In return for signing, ZAPU was

¹³ CCJP and LRF, op cit.

¹⁴ The following patterns are clear from hundreds of interviews by the current author since the 1990s, as well as from existing written accounts. See CCJP/ LRF and Alexander et al for very detailed accounts of Fifth Brigade activities.

¹⁵ Todd, Judith, *Through the Darkness*, Zebra Press, Johannesburg, 2007 vividly captures the impact of these years on senior ZAPU leadership.

¹⁶ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J: "Putting people first –from regime security to human security: a quest for social peace in Zimbabwe, 1980-2002", in Alfred G Nhema, *The Quest for peace in Africa*; International Books with OSSREA, Addis Ababa, 2004.

¹⁷ Atrocities by CIO and other state forces were also pardoned. Dissidents also benefited from the amnesty – and 122 surrendered. However, the Fifth Brigade, the most consistent violators, benefited most from the amnesty.

guaranteed little other than that one of the Vice Presidents of Zimbabwe would henceforth be from ZAPU ranks.

Matabeleland: continuing the struggle for national legitimacy

The struggle for the people in Matabeleland to be incorporated into the nation in a manner that allows them a legitimate voice in government and legitimate recognition for the historical role they played in fighting for freedom in the 1970s, is considered by many to remain unfulfilled. "The brutal campaign of violence directed against Matabeleland in the 1980s powerfully confirmed its exclusion from the nation."¹⁸ At the level of national memory, the role played by ZAPU and ZIPRA remains belittled or ignored. Most written histories and school curriculae continue to downplay or denigrate ZAPU. Those who fought in the ZAPU campaign are far less likely to be declared National Heroes and to be buried at the National Heroes Acre.¹⁹ "It remains difficult and dangerous for people to seek to erect monuments to those slain in the 1970s, let alone those who died at the hands of the state in the 1980s".²⁰ The Unity Accord of 1987 is seen by many in the region to represent the political emasculation of Matabeleland; in a clear rejection of this accord by the people of Matabeleland, most of those political leaders involved in the signing or implementation of it, have proved incapable in recent years to win positions in parliament or the senate, in Bulawayo in particular.²¹

The MDC

The formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999, which incorporated at its highest level many longstanding and highly respected Ndebele activists, including trade unionists, civic leaders and several senior ex-ZIPRAs, seemed to be the realisation of this aspiration for a Matabeleland voice at a national level. Indeed, in the early years, the MDC provided a home for an inclusive, national, democratic discourse that seemed able to challenge the increasingly repressive and stale ZANU hegemony. Matabeleland immediately established itself as a major force within the MDC. In 2000 the MDC won 21 out of 23 parliamentary seats in the three Matabeleland provinces. To date, Matabeleland North and South have proven to be the only *rural* districts in Zimbabwe able to deliver MDC parliamentary seats – in addition all Bulawayo seats went to the MDC. Matabeleland's share in 2000 was 37% of all the MDC's parliamentary seats (21 out of 57) – more or less double the 15-20% which Matabeleland represents in national population figures.²²

However, in 2005, after years of intense state oppression, the MDC finally fractured into two, with most of the more credible Ndebele leadership thereafter in one faction. This split, which crystallised around the issue of whether or not to participate in the Senatorial election of 2005, was driven by a lack of good leadership and ideological unity.²³ The MDC had, since 2001, conducted four internal commissions of inquiry into intra-party violence and poor discipline, which had become increasingly ethnic in its manifestation. The inquiry into internal violence conducted in November 2004, found that there was "a strong anti-Ndebele sentiment that has been propagated, orchestrated and

¹⁸ Alexander et al, op cit, page 1.

¹⁹ Lookout Masuku, a very senior ZIPRA commander was only declared a national hero in the late 1980s – too late to be buried at Heroes Acre. To date this pattern continues – in the closing months of 2007, Isaac Nyathi and Masala Sibanda, both senior ex-ZIPRAs, were only reluctantly declared national heroes after a regional outcry – again too late to be buried in the National Heroes Acre.

²⁰ Alexander et al, page 8.

²¹ Dumiso Dabengwa, for example, a senior commander in ZIPRA, has stood on a ZANU-PF ticket and been trounced in two parliamentary and one senatorial election since 2000. Joseph Msika, who is the Ndebele Vice President guaranteed by the Unity Accord, had to be appointed to parliament by Mugabe; John Nkomo, another senior ex-ZAPU leader, has also had to be appointed to parliament, as he is unable to contest in the polls in Matabeleland and win.

²² In the 2005 election, with a national voter turnout that was considerably lower and in a climate that was far from free and fair, the MDC fared less well, winning only 41 parliamentary seats. However, Matabeleland maintained its representation of 40% of these seats, winning 16.

²³ Raftopoulos, Brian: "Reflections on opposition politics in Zimbabwe: the politics of the Movement for Democratic Change", in *Reflections on Democratic Politics in Zimbabwe*, Eds Raftopoulos and Alexander, Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Cape Town, 2006. This essay examines the issues leading to the split in great detail.

instilled into the innocent party members' minds by a senior party leader under the guise of sheer hatred for the Secretary General at a personal level".²⁴ The causes for the split were complex, and did not result in a simple tribal or geographical division: the so-called pro-senate (Mutambara) faction remained with seven MPs from Mashonaland and the Midlands and thirteen from Matabeleland, while three Matabeleland MPs and eighteen from elsewhere remained in the so called anti-senate (Tsvangirai) faction.²⁵

However, it is undeniable that the MDC split has led once more to the perceived marginalisation and regionalisation of Matabeleland's political voice. To many, it has felt like history repeating itself, particularly since the contemptuous withdrawal of the Tsvangirai faction from what seemed a certain coalition deal in early February of this year. Just as ZANU – admittedly with incomparable violence – aimed to regionalise and crush ZAPU and then incorporate its weakened leadership into a coalition that effectively meant its absorption, Tsvangirai hopes to do the same to MDC Mutambara. It will be interesting to see what representation each MDC faction succeeds in winning in Matabeleland, considering Matabeleland's history of resistance to political bullying. In the face of the huge support that Tsvangirai has within Harare, it is unlikely that the five MPs that the Mutambara faction has there will retain their seats, although one or two might.²⁶ This will leave the Mutambara faction represented almost entirely, or entirely, in Matabeleland, even though the leaders of this faction are national and not regional in outlook, have structures with some, if limited, support on the ground nationwide, and aspire to play a national role.²⁷

Matabeleland 2007- 2008: The Current Election

In the wake of the MDC split, there was a perceptible revival in Matabeleland of separatist and federalist voices and groups. This is perhaps best typified by the application of *Welshman Hadane Mabhena and Others* to the British Government in May 2007, for Britain to revoke its conquest of the Kingdom of Matabeleland in 1894, so that Matabeleland can be free after "114 continuous years of oppression"!²⁸ This application is accompanied by the "Resolution of Rededication to the Restoration of the Kingdom of Matabeleland". Such an extraordinary application from such a highly respected veteran politician as Mabhena would not have been likely in the time between 2000 and 2005.²⁹ There have long been separatist and federalist tendencies in Matabeleland, from the 1920s claims of Ndebele royals, to Kayisa Ndiweni's federal party of late 1970s, to the 1990s re-emergence of ZAPU. Cultural groups such as Imbovane with an explicitly tribalist and separatist agenda were also visible during the 1990s, but this quest for regional separatism became imperceptible after the 2000 election. The re-emergence of separatist sentiment can be seen as a response to the failure of Matabeleland to remain adequately represented and heard within a unified, national opposition party: Since colonial times people in Matabeleland have had a long established tradition of not expecting the government, or any other national player, to take their needs and demands into consideration; they have been resigned – or have aspired – to be self-reliant.³⁰ This is always their fallback position. For example, since independence the government has not built any new dams in the Bulawayo water catchment area, and this in spite of the fact that

²⁴ MDC; Commission of Inquiry into Party Headquarters (Draft Report), December 2004, p 31.

²⁵ While the two factions were originally referred to as pro- and anti-senate, this designation has had to fall away now that the "anti senate" faction is contesting the 2007 senate elections! The two factions are now known by their leaders' names: Tsvangirai and Mutambara.

²⁶ There is a greater chance that Tsvangirai will lose ground to Makoni than to Mutambara in Harare.

²⁷ The Mutambara MDC has nominated candidates in around 60% of contested constituencies nationwide.

²⁸ "An application to review the verdict of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the 'Land Case of Matabeleland' on 19th July 1918, with the view to ascertain its justification and to hear the demand of the people of Matabeleland who are praying for the revocation of the Matabeleland Order-in-Council of 18th July 1894 with the subsequent restoration of the Kingdom of Matabeleland and the accompanying restitutions". Heads of argument submitted to the British Embassy in Harare in May 2007, asking for a broad based Judicial Committee be constituted to hear the issue.

²⁹ Mabhena was ZANU-PF Governor of Matabeleland North until 2000 and is a ZIPRA veteran of the war of liberation.

³⁰ This is not only a problem at the level of government service delivery: Civic organisations that claim to be national are often perceived to impose Harare agendas on Matabeleland without due consultation; big corporations with Harare headquarters are perceived as recruiting tribally, preferring to transfer Shona expertise to Bulawayo than to employ Ndebeles in senior positions – and so on.

the population has more than trebled since. At every election, the central government will promise to pipe water from the Zambezi – yet this has never happened. The Bulawayo city council, which has an MDC majority, has for years procured chemicals for water purification (in part from former Bulawayo residents in the diaspora), well-knowing that central government will take no action. It has also successfully resisted attempts by the central government to take over its water supply system. Residents of Bulawayo live with permanent strict water rationing schedules.³¹

However, the rise of groups such as the Patriotic Union of Matabeleland (PUMA), the Federal Democratic Union (FDU) and the ZAPU-Federal Party (ZAPU-FP) is unlikely to have any impact on the forthcoming elections. Although they field 13 candidates in the eleven Bulawayo constituencies, and in spite of a revival of sympathy for a federalist agenda, it is very doubtful that any of these parties will win more than a sprinkling of votes. The perception of most people in Matabeleland arguably remains that the region is part of a bigger nation and must continue to battle to be meaningfully represented nationally. It is therefore no surprise that, in the wake of the failure to form a coalition with the Tsvangirai MDC, the Mutambara MDC has formed a loose coalition with the ZANU-PF breakaway Simba Makoni in his quest to be president. In return for the support of the MDC Mutambara, Makoni has agreed not to field candidates in Matabeleland and to campaign for the MDC Mutambara locally. There seems to be considerable support for Makoni in Matabeleland and unprecedented numbers of people rushed to register to vote after he announced his candidature. Makoni thinks that the Mutambara faction of the MDC can bring him most support in the Matabeleland provinces – they currently hold the majority of parliamentary seats – and in return, in the event of a Makoni win, the MDC Mutambara would expect seats in the cabinet.

Interestingly, most of the old ZIPRA group that became incorporated into ZANU after the Unity Accord are backing Makoni and therefore MDC Mutambara in this election. This group includes Dumiso Dabengwa, and, if one is to believe the rumours, also Vice President Joseph Msika and Speaker of the House John Nkomo. This raises questions as to the future of the Unity Accord; it is doubtful whether any of those who were originally party to it will remain within Mugabe's ZANU-PF after this election, should Makoni win or not.

However this election turns out – and it is suddenly very unpredictable – Matabeleland is going to be a hotly contested region. ZANU is likely to continue to win some parliamentary seats in Matabeleland, notably in the extreme, drought-prone, donor dependent south, and in Bubi / Umguz / Insiza North where resettled farmers reside in numbers. Some ZANU candidates could also benefit from the split MDC vote, but overall they are once more likely to win a minority of seats in these three provinces. However, ZANU is also likely to contest fiercely: Under the revised constitution the president cannot appoint any MPs where previously he could appoint 20. This means the remnants of the old ZAPU guard, who have relied on being appointed to parliament and cabinet, will have to win at the polls this time around.³² Particularly in view of Makoni's challenge this could lead to a brutal campaign.

Simba Makoni relies on the Mutambara MDC to deliver him the region, and the Tsvangirai MDC is determined to squash what they perceive to be a rebel MDC faction, and to use the ZANU split to deliver them the presidency. As rural and urban Matabeleland voters can be relied upon to vote predominantly for one opposition or another, rivalry for these votes will be intense. In general, Matabeleland can be predicted to vote in a way that gives it a strong and independent voice at the national level: How individual voters will try to achieve this remains to be seen.

³¹ While Harare also has unreliable water supplies, the causes are different: The dams servicing Harare have water, but the takeover of this water supply by the central government and the interference with the elected council, which has prevented it from running the city, has resulted in shockingly poor services. By contrast, Bulawayo water is operated well – only on almost no resources.

³² Sithembiso Nyoni for example, who continues to support the Mugabe faction of ZANU, has never won at the polls. She is currently a minister and must win in Nkayi or lose her government post.