

## POLICY BRIEF

December 2021

### Land Redistribution as Stock-Based Vote Buying

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#### Introduction

Land reform in Zimbabwe is a dramatic example of how the issue of agricultural land distribution governs a country's political and economic development over several decades. Zimbabwe first experienced 20 years of moderate redistribution that eventually moved to a phase of massive redistribution in 2000. We see this as a result of the regime's strategic use of land to assure political support. Massive and chaotic redistribution occurred when the regime realized that redistribution was the only option left to stay in power. Our study shows that the support for the regime indeed went up in wards that experienced land reform. This is true even though agricultural output declined. The case of the Zimbabwe regime's strategic use of land is of general interest and may also interest South Africa and the many highly unequal countries in Latin America.

## Backdrop

The fight for independence in Zimbabwe was about democracy and also about ending the drastically unfair distribution of land. When democracy and majority rule came in 1980, however, the constitution negotiated under the Lancaster House Agreement established that the bulk of the highly productive land should remain in the hands of white farmers running large-scale farms, unless transferred through the market. This arrangement was respected and accepted for two main reasons: a) the former colonial power, the UK, set protection of property of white farmers as a premise for peace; and b) a productive and efficient agricultural sector was seen as critical for food security and for export earnings.

In the years following 1980, some redistribution of land happened, but the main parts of the productive land remained in the hands of some 6,000 white farmers. President Mugabe and his ruling party ZANU-PF largely met demands for redistribution of land with loose promises about redistribution in the future. The land issue lost prominence as the economy seemed to have decent growth and as modernization and industrialization were seen as the road to prosperity. This growth focus culminated with the *Economic Structural Adjustment Program* (ESAP) in 1991. In an evaluation of that program, the ESAP ambition with respect to agriculture was stated as follows: “*The development objective for the agricultural sector under ESAP included the production of enough food for the population, increase in agricultural exports, expansion of employment and the production of raw materials for the manufacturing industry and the deregulation of the sector.*” (p 18 AFDP 1997<sup>1</sup>). To achieve all this, the government should remove price controls and other regulations. This deregulation did not increase employment. The deregulation happened with no positive effects on employment. The removal of the grain marketing board and price controls meant, however, a higher cost of living for city dwellers.

In the second half of the 1990s, pressure started to mount on Mugabe’s regime. Formal employment in non-agriculture declined as global trade and competition from a democratic South Africa outcompeted local production and new post-independence Zimbabweans, with less loyalty to the Lancaster House Agreement, grew up with unemployment.

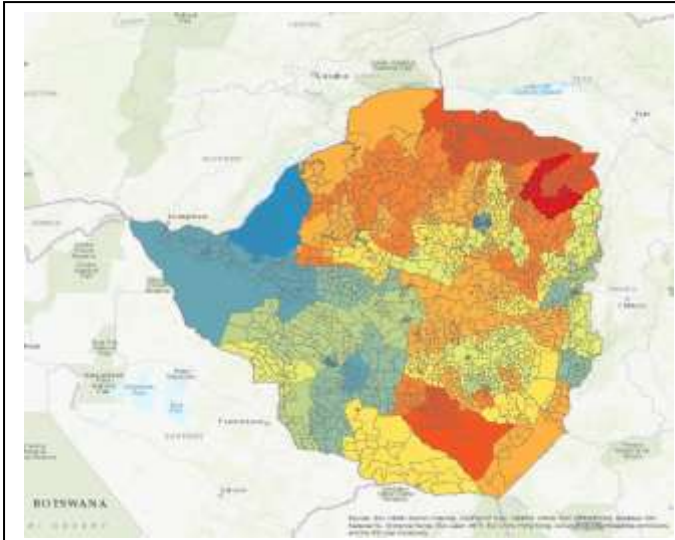
The resentments took two forms. A movement for drastic land redistribution and a political movement for an end to Mugabe’s, in effect, one party regime. In the parliamentary election in 2000, Mugabe’s party won 63 out of 120 elected seats, with most of the rest going to the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). While close in the aggregate, the vote exhibited a near complete divide between rural and urban voters. The MDC won **all** seats from the constituencies in the nine main urban areas in the countries. Hyper inflation and hyper rates of unemployment eroded ZANU-PF’s possibility of winning back the urban areas. The only option for Mugabe to gather support had to be based on rural areas and involved condoning and formalizing the land grab that had already started. Hence, during the period 2000-2010, a large part of the large-scale commercial farming areas was confiscated and redistributed, strengthening Mugabe’s party in large parts of the country. The map to the right in Figure 1 shows the support for ZANU-PF’s presidential candidate Emmerson Mnangagwa in 1,961 wards in the election in 2018.

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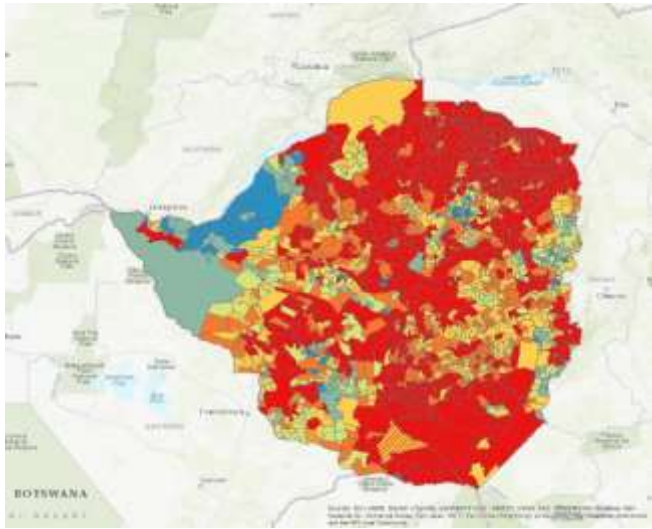
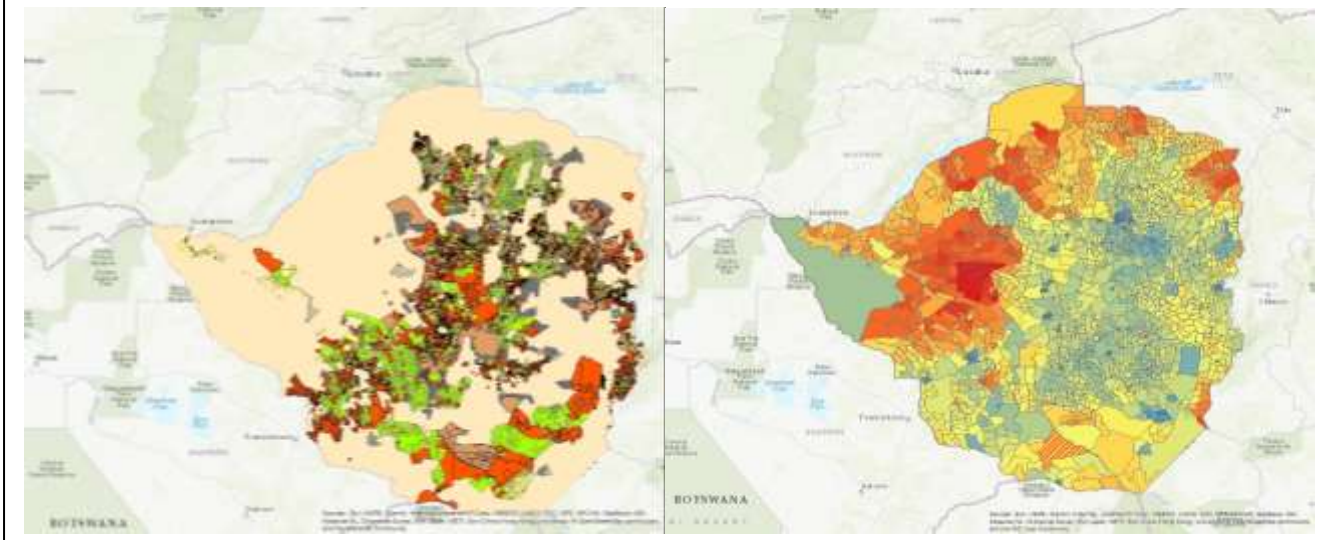
<sup>1</sup> AFDB (1997) “Zimbabwe Economic Structural Adjustment Programme Project Performance Evaluation Report”, Operations Evaluation Department (Opev) 9 December 1997

## Approach

The question we address in this project is what role the land redistribution played in this strengthening of support for ZANU-PF. We use data on some 10,000 properties as recorded in 2002/03. Figure 2 illustrates the land distribution data. At that time, approximately 60 percent of large-scale commercial farms were already redistributed, partly as small A1 farms (in green) and partly as larger A2 farms (in yellow). The red farms are large-scale commercial farms (LSCF) that in 2003 were not yet redistributed. Approximately 50 percent of this land was redistributed in the following years. The main remaining areas are communal land and natural reserves in light yellow, former resettlement in brown and small-scale farming in gray. None of these were subject to redistribution. Our empirical analysis is simple. We want to explain the ward-by-ward change in support for ZANU-PF in the 2018 election relative to the election results in 2000, as shown in the left panel of Figure 1. The variable of main interest is land redistribution, as shown in Figure 2. Additional controls are regional dummies at the province level and ward by ward poverty levels, as shown in Figure 3. The empirical results show that land redistribution indeed explains the strengthening of support for ZANU-PF in major parts of rural Zimbabwe. Over and above what is explained by other controls, for each additional 10 percent of a ward area that is allocated to A1 farms, ZANU-PF support increases by 2.8 percent. For each additional 10 percent of a ward that is allocated to A2 farms, the support for ZANU-PF increases by 2.1 percent. Finally, for the remaining large-scale commercial farms, 10 percent more land results in a 1.1 percent increase for ZANU-PF. That the latter number is smaller is natural, as approximately fifty percent of this land was redistributed. That support for ZANU-PF can be understood in two ways: *Backward looking*: those living on the land may feel gratitude; or *Forward looking*: those living on the land may feel that their continued possession depends on ZANU-PF in power. The difference in estimated effect between A2 farms and A1 farms could reflect that A1 farms are smaller and involve more people per square kilometer of resettled land.



**Figure 1** Election Zimbabwe 2000 vs. 2018, ZANU-PF=yellow to red, MDC=green to blue





The estimated coefficients reported above reflect the difference in support between wards with little vs. much land redistribution. Our main thesis is that this difference is a result of land redistribution going together with higher support. However, in principle, if land redistribution caused negative sentiments toward ZANU-PF in Communal Lands, that could also explain the results. We know, however, that ZANU-PF increased their support all over rural Zimbabwe, and we find it inconceivable that land reform did not contribute to these gross numbers. We therefore interpret our estimates to indicate that for the 1,455 rural wards we consider, the land redistribution led to a 3 percentage point increase in support for ZANU-PF, ranging from 22 percent in wards with full redistribution to zero in regions with no redistribution. Taken together, the results demonstrate a clear pattern of vote buying by land redistribution.

## Conclusions and Policy Implications

In our analysis, we link data on voting to data on land redistribution in Zimbabwe. We show that the ruling regime indeed benefited in the elections by implementing land reform. Knowing that agricultural production dropped dramatically and knowing that farm workers were laid off in large numbers, it is clear that the chaotic reform was very costly. The two general questions we relate to are: i) how can negative economic development and massive land redistribution be understood in light of the political completion and political polarization of the country; and ii) how do the unresolved land issues of the past play into the present? In addressing these questions, the project captures the essence of bad policies as good politics. The project enables us to understand the foundation of authoritarian populism and inequality in Africa. The experience of Zimbabwe should also be relevant for all agrarian economies that are based on unequal land distribution.

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