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**An Exploration of the Role of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denomination's *Kairos*
Theology on General Elections.**

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In the

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**School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South
Africa.**

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Supervised by

Professor Lilian Siwila



Declaration Form


COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES


DECLARATION - PLAGIARISM

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Dedication

To my late grandmother Cecilia Dzinomwa (Gogola Shumba), the best soul to have ever lived on this earth. You taught me to be hardworking and resilient and to believe in my dreams. This work is a testament to the values you instilled in me. Your work of faith and legacy continues to live beyond the grave. I will Always Love You.

To my mother, Moreblessing Dzinomwa, whose unwavering love and wisdom have shaped me into the person I am today. Your sacrifices, determination and guidance have been my greatest strength.

To my wife, Elizabeth Yesaya, whose endless patience, encouragement, and belief in me have made this journey possible. Thank you for being my rock and my constant source of inspiration.

To my two beautiful daughters, Ariella, Mazvita Yesaya (8) and Gabriella, Zuvarashe Yesaya (4). For filling my life with joy, laughter and purpose. You are my greatest motivation, and this achievement is for you as much as it is for me.

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Abstract

This study interrogates the multifaceted phenomenon of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, particularly within the context of the theological responses of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD). Anchored in a historical narrative of political violence that began in the colonial era [i.e. political violence following the 1965 Unilateral Declaration of Independence and war of independence] and was adopted by independent Zimbabwe for use in contemporary electoral practices [i.e. marked by euphoria (1980-1990); decline (1990-2000); crisis (2000-2010); hope (2010-2020); skepticism (2020-2017-2025)]. The struggle for independence is referred to by Kriger as a struggle within struggles, leading to persistent escalation of violence since 1965, and later in 1980, re-assigned into the electoral landscape. Zimbabwe, a republic since 1965, professes to have a predominance of Christianity at 85% (Zimbabwe Demography and Health Survey, 2015). Nonetheless, the escalating cases of electoral violence cast doubt on the accuracy of the claim. If that's the case, then who is violating, and who is being violated during electoral disputes? There is a conspicuous gap in the scholarly discourse regarding religious institutions' engagements, particularly the ZHOCD, in addressing election-related violence, as highlighted by scholars such as Ndlovu-Gatssheni, Kriger, and Dube, among others, who have all examined the intricate dynamics of political conflict and its implications in Zimbabwe.

While extant literature has extensively documented the political underpinnings and socioeconomic ramifications of electoral conflict in Zimbabwe, there is a notable amount of work that examines how churches can respond to these crises. The Christian demography is justification enough for the church's involvement, but its theology, which is expected to guide how members ought to behave in a political context, has been found wanting, raising questions on the type of *Kairos* theology the ZHOCD must offer on electoral violence. The study posits that the ZHOCD and its constituent bodies have considerably influenced the electoral landscape of Zimbabwe through vigils, pastoral letters, and joint publications like the *Zimbabwe We Want* (2006) and *The Elections We Want* (2023). These communiques and documents emphasize on peace, dialogue, justice, and reconciliation to counter the prevailing culture of violence during electoral cycles. Utilizing a literature-based methodology, the research synthesizes various theological perspectives and strategic analysis of the ZHOCD's previous engagements during pivotal electoral moments in Zimbabwe's history [i.e. 2000/2 and 2005/8/9]. The study uses the *Kairos* principles in public theology that advocate for grassroots engagement and active participation in electoral discourses. The use of ZHOCD in transformative dialogues with political parties, electoral administrators, home affairs (especially the police and prison service), chiefs and church leaders to promote peaceful electoral contests at grassroots levels is of particular interest for this study. Thus, the study, given the ZHOCD's national vision in the *ZWWD* (2006), the *EWWD* (2023), and the recent publication on *Ecumenical Christianity* (2024), aims to elucidate more actionable pathways for the ZHOCD to engage with political parties in Zimbabwe to minimize violent practices during elections. Ultimately, the study proposes the *Kairos* election theory as a sustainable theory for election violence in Zimbabwe.

Key Words: Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD); Election Violence; *Kairos* Theology; Peacebuilding; Political Landscape; Faith-Based Organizations

Abbreviations

AICs	African-initiated Churches
CCC	Citizens For Coalition Change
CCJP	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
CCSR	Christian Council of Southern Rhodesia
CTT	Conflict Transformation Theory
EFZ	Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Program
EWWD	Elections we Want Document
FOG	Family of God Churches
GNU	Government of National Unity
GPA	Global Political Agreement
ICFI	International Centre for Frugal Innovation
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
NCA	National Constitutional Assembly
NDI	National Development Index
NVDD	National Vision Discussion Document
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
SRCC	Southern Rhodesian Christian Conference
UDACIZA	Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches and Zionists in Africa
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe National Union-Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army
ZCBC	Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference
ZCC	Zimbabwe Council of Churches
ZCTU	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union
<i>ZDHS</i>	Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
ZESN	Zimbabwe Election Support Network
ZHOCD	Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denomination
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army
ZNDS1	Zimbabwe National Development Strategy 1
ZWWD	Zimbabwe, We Want Document

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Chapter One

Introduction to the Study

1. Introduction

Violence during elections has recently attracted the attention of the global, regional, and local communities (Manin, 1997; Glazer & Grofman, 1984; Birch, 2020; Mlambo, 2014). As an academic discourse, electoral violence has also been approached across disciplines such as politics, sociology and anthropology. This study examines the discourse surrounding elections and electoral violence through a theological lens while acknowledging that insights from other disciplines may be referenced. The focus is on electoral violence in Zimbabwe, recognizing that the country, like many in Africa, identifies as predominantly Christian. According to the 2015 *Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS)*, over eighty-five percent of the population adheres to the Christian faith (ZDHS, 2015; Mlambo, 2004; Sachikonye, 2009; Chitando, 2013). Notably, seventy-seven percent of the Christian population in Zimbabwe is affiliated with the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD), as indicated by this survey. It is further estimated that sixty-two per cent of the members are regular members who attend and participate in church services and programs. This makes ZHOCD one of the strongest social pillars whose influence and impact cannot be ignored.

However, a significant body of literature does not speak much about the contribution of faith-based organizations to the cause of peace and non-violence. In rare cases where this has occurred, studies have focused only on individual ecumenical groups such as the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) (Tarusarira, 2020; Chitando, 2007) or the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) (Manyonganise, 2020). Little or no attention has been paid to broader ecumenical bodies such as the ZHOCD. Nevertheless, the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations remains one of the largest ecumenical bodies, commanding many of the Christian populace in Zimbabwe. Considering this, the study underscores that the ZHOCD has, since its inception, significantly contributed (i.e. as a liberator) to the realization of democratic, peaceful, free and fair elections in Zimbabwe. However, its contribution remains confined to theological documents such as pastoral

letters, interviews and press conferences without adequately affecting the national electoral atmosphere. Based on the above, this study brings forward the contribution of the ZHOCD to the cause of peace and non-violence, focusing specifically on the problem of electoral violence.

1.1 A Brief Overview of the Location of the Study

Zimbabwe is a Southern African Country bordering Zambia in the north, Mozambique in the east, South Africa in the South and Botswana in the west. Zimbabwe is a landlocked country famous for its cultural diversity and religiosity. Its' history is marked by colonial rule, liberation struggles, and a complex political landscape characterised by electoral violence. During the colonial era, Zimbabwe, formerly called Rhodesia, was colonised by Britain in the 19th century. The indigenous populace faced land dispossession and systemic discrimination under white minority rule. In the 1960s and 1970s, resistance against colonial rule intensified, leading to a liberation war (1964 - 1979). This war was fought primarily between the Rhodesian government and nationalist movements such as the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). The conflict resulted in significant loss of life and displacement.

In 1980, Zimbabwe gained independence from Britain with Robert Mugabe as its first Prime Minister. Initially, there was hope for peace and development. However, tension arose between ZANU and ZAPU, culminating in violence in Matabeleland Region from 1983 to 1987. Political turbulence in the 1990s and early 2000s saw economic decline and rising discontent, ultimately motivating the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The rise of a strong opposition political party in 1999 gave impetus to an intense crackdown on opposition political supporters. Electoral violence in Zimbabwe has a complex history; the early 2000s saw a significant escalation of violence, which continued to rise in the subsequent years until the 2023 elections. Throughout these years, electoral violence has often been marked by state-sponsored intimidation and brutality by security forces with impunity for perpetrators.

1.2 Background of the Study

The study recognises that the subject of electoral violence has become one of the growing areas in academic discourse. In the Zimbabwean context, electoral violence has been a significant concern, particularly during periods of political tension and electoral contests. General elections in

Zimbabwe began in 1980 after the protracted liberation struggle. This election was marred by violence and contestations between the ZANU-PF and its biggest contender, the ZAPU, led by Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo. General elections in 1985, 1990 and 1995/1996 are still remembered for violence, intimidation, and deaths (Bond 1999, p.50). Similarly, general elections continued to be more violent at the turn of the millennium when a new political opposition party, the MDC, was formed (Chitando and Togarasei 2010, p.5).

Thus, it can be said that elections have always been manifested within the context of violence, intimidation, and coercion. As a result, Zimbabwe's elections have always brought fear, doubt, confusion, and uncertainty among the citizens. This violence often escalates during presidential elections with reports of physical assaults, arrests, and, in some cases, fatalities for belonging to a different political ideology (Chikerema and Chakunda 2014, p.12). Yet, despite this, evidence has shown that the ZHOCD's response to these brutalities has often been slowed in quenching the urge for electoral violence because of implicit division within the Christian community in Zimbabwe. On the other hand, the *Zimbabwe We Want Document (ZWWD)*, also referred to as *Kairos Zimbabwe* spells out what is expected from the Christian community. Given its theological mandate and commitment to speak truth to power, holding the government accountable in matters of public interest such as General Elections. This perspective is further confirmed by Kaulemu (2010, p.5), who attests that the Church is called upon to make the world a better place for the vulnerable and the powerless. In this study, the ZHOCD does not assume to represent the church action in Zimbabwe, but where used, it refers to the visible action of what is expected of the church.

However, critics insist that the broader Christian community has not done much to speak against oppressive political systems that promote violence. Thus, many people believe that the community has been infiltrated and is meddling in partisan politics, which resultantly has crippled its prophetic role as spelt out in the *ZWWD*. However, it is necessary to understand that scholars such as Chitando (2013) and Kaulemu (2010) believe that throughout the history of Zimbabwe, the Christian church has always been a participant player in the struggles for a better Zimbabwe, as evidenced by its visibility in the liberation struggle, the much contested 2008 presidential runoff and its current efforts to bring about political dialogue between the two main political rivals, the Citizens For Coalition Change (CCC) and Zimbabwe National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF).

Thus, sufficient evidence exists to prove that the ecumenical church in Zimbabwe, particularly the ZHOCD that began as the Heads of Christian Denominations (HOCD) in Rhodesia, has made notable efforts to speak against the growing urge for electoral violence. This effectively suggests that the ZHOCD and the Church in Zimbabwe remain fundamental pillars of social integration, permeating through the fabric of society, including politics.

1.3 Motivation of the Study

This study has been motivated by various factors: my interest in the subject of the Church and the public space developed while doing my master's thesis entitled *Religion and Politics in Zimbabwe: An Investigation into the Public Role of Christianity 2008-2018: The Case of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC)*. In this thesis, I underscored that religious groups occupy a significant space in Zimbabwe's geo-political landscape. In this way, the study established that religious groups and, in this context, Christianity have historically been used to support violent and oppressive systems, as was the case during the Rhodesian colonial period. I have also been motivated by the discovery that the ZHOCD facilitated the formulation of the ZWWD (2006) and that the document summarises the action the ecumenical church must take in Zimbabwe. However, it is compelling to note that the same Church was also instrumental in liberating Zimbabwe from British colonial rule. Thus, the Church can be called a 'double-edged' sword responsible for oppression through complicity to what its members are doing to ordinary people and liberation through the voice and action it provides against politicians. This entails considering Christianity a significant influence that politics cannot downplay. It is this understanding that motivates me to investigate further the role of the ZHOCD in the growing problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe.

In addition, the discussion surrounding electoral violence in Zimbabwe often focuses on political factors, state repression, and socio-economic factors contributing to its upsurge. However, a notable scholarly gap exists in discussing the contribution of religious institutions, such as the ZHOCD. To this end, there exists an apparent absence of theological perspectives in the discussion of Zimbabwe's electoral violence narrative. The bulky of existing literature tends to overlook the theological and moral implications of electoral violence. Therefore, there is a need for a deeper

exploration of the ZHOCD's interpretation of violence, justice, and reconciliation, which could provide insights into the Church's place in Zimbabwe's electoral violence narrative. Thus, this study seeks to explore how the ZHOCD and its theology can be instrumental in addressing the problem of electoral violence.

Furthermore, while there are accounts of church bodies that speak out against electoral violence, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that systemic, scholarly studies on organized church activism, its impact on communities and the responses from political entities on electoral violence remain scarce. Thus, it can be said that there exists limited analysis of the ZHOCD's activism against electoral violence. This gap suggests the need for research exploring how the ZHOCD can influence congregations and public opinion on electoral violence.

Even so, the lack of grassroots voices in the discussion of electoral violence merits scholarly attention. Many discussions on electoral violence focus primarily on elite members of the political divide, neglecting the experiences and the voices of grassroots Christian communities who, in most cases, are directly affected by electoral violence. Qualitative studies that capture these narratives through the ZHOCD could enrich understanding and highlight ZHOCD's role in healing and community building. Similarly, scholarly voices on electoral violence often fail to capture the Church's evolving role in the political landscape of Zimbabwe. Understanding this historical context can provide a more comprehensive view of how the Church has responded to past electoral violence and its contemporary and future role.

Another motivation comes from the fact that Zimbabwe claims to be predominantly a Christian nation, boasting that over 85% of the country's populace is Christian (*ZDHS*, 2015). However, this claim does not seem to resonate with the evils witnessed during election season. The violence, killings, enormity, hatred, and hurtful speech in Zimbabwe's elections alienate Christian ethos. Therefore, the study wishes to explore the extent to which the ZHOCD has historically contributed to Zimbabwe's General elections and possibly suggest ways the Church can continue to be prophetic in realizing peaceful, free, fair, and credible elections.

Additionally, the Church in Zimbabwe has often served as a moral campus of the society and thus influences community behaviour towards any situation. Thus, understanding the Church's stanza in the context of electoral violence shows how faith-based institutions shape public attitudes towards conflict and peace. To this end, the Zimbabwean Church has a long-celebrated legacy of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. An awareness of this background makes it possible for the ZHOCD to foster dialogue and reconciliation. Furthermore, examining the Church's contribution to peace during electoral violence provides a model and strategies for resilience and healing, thus providing a model for other contexts facing a similar challenge. In summation, the quest to understand the contribution of the ZHOCD to the complexities of socio-economic and political challenges in Zimbabwe and the potential to transform societal perspectives on electoral violence has been a great motivation for this study.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Zimbabwe's elections have always been notable for the phenomena of electoral violence, particularly since the early 2000s. This violence has frequently taken many different forms, including physical assaults, threats, and harassment directed towards voters, activists, and political opponents. Several causes have contributed to Zimbabwe's electoral violence, including the desire to hold on to power by instilling fear of dissent, exclusionary political ideologies and the desire to foster a one-party state. To this end, violence often escalates with reports of politically motivated attacks, particularly against supporters of opposition parties. In this respect, allegations of state-sponsored violence and the involvement of security forces in suppressing democratic activities have been rampant. Therefore, the cycle of violence tends to perpetuate itself as fear and mistrust grow, making genuine democratic engagement impossible.

In light of this problem, the ZHOCD has made significant contributions to the plight of electoral violence in Zimbabwe through ecumenical bodies' pastoral letters, communiques, publications like the Catholic's *The Compendium of the Social Teachings of the Church* (Brust 2005) and media reflections, and their constituent members' actions like Churches in Manicaland's *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (2006), and the participation of churches in the formation of the Zimbabwe Elections Support Network (ZESN) among others. There are also secondary works by scholars such as Tarusarira, Manyonganise, Dorman and others. Essentially, the ZHOCD became a rescue

package for the national crisis, wherein it helped to negotiate a truce between the ruling ZANU-PF and the opposition MDC-T and MDC-N, which eventually led to the formation of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) and the 2009 Government of National Unity (GNU). Despite diaries and minutes of the churches' experiences, their participation in general elections in Zimbabwe remains limited.

Notwithstanding the above, various studies on general elections have been done by social scientists who bemoaned challenges in electoral management, processes, and products (Masengwe et al., 2021; Juma & Brazaville, 2018; Lewanika, 2018; Kapomba, 2018; Dorman, 2005). While others alluded to political tragedies associated with electoral violence (Dube, 2018; Edwin, 2018; Nyamutata, 2012; Letseka, 2005). Studies on general elections in Zimbabwe speak little about the contributions of faith communities in the build-up towards general elections. The teaching of the Church is not evoked when discussing electoral processes, which creates a problem in a claimed populous Christian nation of around 85% (ZDHS, 2015). Having 85% of the population following the Christian religion, and yet the nation struggles severely with electoral violence triggers the question: Who is involved in electoral violence? To whom is this violence being done? What theology informs these actions? This presents a problem as the faith seems to be failing, hence the need for reviving the *Kairos* theology and the role of ZHOCD in combating electoral violence. It is this misnomer that this study was carried out to transform electoral disputes amicably.

1.5 Key Research Question

General elections in Zimbabwe mark periods of turmoil, tension, social unrest, and political violence, especially since the turn of the century, with contestations between MDC and ZANU-PF. The contestations divided liberation politics from liberal politics. Given this problem, the study investigates the following question: *What role has the Kairos theology of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations played in mitigating electoral violence?*

1.6 Research Sub-Questions

From the key research question, the following sub-questions were sought to be answered:

- How has *Kairos* theology informed the historical context and current situation of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, and what specific role has the ZHOCD played in addressing this violence during general elections?
- In what ways can the ZHOCD utilize its theological foundations and teachings from *Kairos* theology to advocate for peace and mitigate electoral violence while also effectively engaging with local communities and political authorities?
- What insights can be gained from previous experiences of electoral violence in Zimbabwe that would shape a comprehensive theological framework for the ZHOCD to promote free, fair, and peaceful elections in the future?

1.7 Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to evaluate the role of *Kairos* theology within the ZHOCD in mitigating electoral violence. The objectives supporting this aim are:

- To analyze the historical context and current dynamics of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, focusing on how *Kairos* theology has influenced the strategies and actions of the ZHOCD in addressing the problem of electoral violence.
- To explore how the ZHOCD can leverage its theological principles and *Kairos* theology teachings to promote non-violence, engage local communities, and foster dialogue with political authorities to mitigate electoral violence effectively.
- To identify and assess previous experiences of electoral violence in Zimbabwe to develop a comprehensive theological framework that the ZHOCD can use in advocating for and ensuring free, fair, and peaceful elections in the future.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

In a bid to interrogate the problem of electoral violence and the contribution of the ZHOCD's *Kairos* theology, the study is limited in several ways:

First, research on electoral violence in Zimbabwe is still a sensitive topic, and as researchers or scholars, we have constantly faced resistance from political authorities, and participants have not always been collaborative. In Zimbabwe, the government is the only (authentic) voice of what is

happening on electoral violence, and any other sources are regarded as emotive and misinformed. In cases where the government communicates, it often underreports the impact by leaving out official statistics. While the study used the non-empirical method, it remains alive to the fact that the literature gathered on the subject has most likely faced the above challenges. Cognizant of this, the study used primary data from ZHOCD theological documents and secondary data from the scholarly world. This was hoped to bring about a comprehensive account of the problem of electoral violence and the contribution of the ZHOCD's theology.

Secondly, the study hypothesizes that electoral violence is a broader subject influenced by various factors. Therefore, holistically studying the problem of electoral violence is challenging as it demands a lot of resources and attention from the researcher. However, this research takes a holistic approach to studying electoral violence. It considers all its forms encompassing the periods before, during, and after the election process. While this seems like a broader scope, the study insists that to thoroughly examine the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, one needs to understand how the phenomenon has manifested in all forms. This is further necessary when one considers the fact that electoral violence in Zimbabwe is a multifaceted problem whose reasons for occurrence are inextricably intertwined throughout all the stages. Thus, investigating a single form of electoral violence does not provide a holistic account of how the phenomenon has manifested. This becomes even more important when one considers that the motivation for electoral violence in Zimbabwe cuts across all forms of social stratum. Thus, in most cases, the participants in the violence are often the same. Considering the above, this study emphasized that to get a comprehensive account of the causes, manifestations, and consequences of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, there is a need to bring forth its manifestation in all forms.

Thirdly, electoral violence in Zimbabwe is not a consistent problem; it is episodic, manifesting only during elections. This makes the phenomenon difficult to study as one needs to understand the patterns of its occurrence over time. In most cases, the researcher must keep up with current cases to deduce any notable changes in electoral violence's causes, forms and manifestations. To keep up with its current trend, the study focused on ZHOCD theological statements, political debates and discussions on television, newspapers and academic publications on the topic under

investigation. This provided a broader yet contemporary understanding of the problem and its manifestations.

Lastly, a study on the manifestation of electoral violence in Zimbabwe constantly faces the lack of longitudinal studies that track the context, nature and manifestation of the problem over multiple election cycles. This takes away a historical understanding of the problem essential for effective interventions. In most cases, studies on the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe have only focused on a particular election period, leaving behind the historical election accounts upon which its occurrence can be traced. To establish a detailed account of the problem, the study traced the history of elections in Zimbabwe from the colonial era through independence to contemporary Zimbabwe. This was hoped to provide a foundation upon which the phenomenon can be understood today.

1.9 Significance of the Study

Electoral violence in Zimbabwe remains one of the fundamental problems that the Zimbabwe society has continued to grapple with. The phenomenon has often presented its brutal nature, resulting in torture, brutality, intimidation and the use of force for political gains. Given the above, a study on electoral violence in Zimbabwe and the role of the ZHOCD's *Kairos* theology remains imperative. Among many reasons for its significance, the study presents a few factors.

This study is significant because it adds a nuanced dimension to the study of electoral violence in Zimbabwe by bringing the voice of the ZHOCD. In doing so, the study brings a newer perspective to Zimbabwe's election narrative. Thus, it provides a comprehensive understanding of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, presenting its causes, nature, and consequences to the general populace, particularly the Christian community. To this end, the study underscores that Zimbabwe's electoral violence narrative is not complete without a detailed exploration of the ZHOCD's theology and apparatus in addressing the scourge of electoral violence.

On the other hand, the study underscores that electoral violence has been responsible for the growing socio-economic challenges Zimbabwe has been experiencing since the turn of the millennium. In this respect, Zimbabwe elections have, over the years, suffered from legitimacy,

credibility and transparency. At the same time, various attempts have been made by different sections of society, such as politics, human rights, and anthropology, to break the vicious cycle of electoral violence without success. Hypothetically, this study believes that the involvement of the ZHOCD, arguably the most significant Christian body, could be a game changer in Zimbabwe's electoral trajectory and the quest for peaceful elections. Thus, this study is critical because it provides insights into Zimbabwe's political landscape, including the power struggles, the role of political parties, and the effects of violence on electoral outcomes.

The study is also unique in discussing electoral violence from the perspective of faith-based organisations such as ZHOCD. It is imperative to note that, over the years, various scholarly activities have occurred around electoral violence and its occurrences in Zimbabwe. However, these studies have often discussed electoral violence within the context of political violence. In contrast, this study brings a rare combination of the problem of electoral violence and the role of the ZHOCD in addressing the problem. To this end, the study insists that ZHOCD remains a significant part of Zimbabwean society, boasting a substantial membership to the country's demographics. Therefore, the study underscores that notwithstanding its challenges, the ZHOCD remains better placed to address the problem of violence. The ZHOCD is well-equipped and well-resourced to conscientious individuals and political parties about the consequences of electoral violence. With its teachings on peace, forgiveness and reconciliation, the ZHOCD can effectively participate in Zimbabwe's electoral violence narrative. Furthermore, the ZHOCD is also considered one of the most significant Christian bodies comprising Catholics, protestants, evangelicals and some Indigenous Churches. Statistically, ZHOCD commands the majority of Zimbabwe's Christian populace, which makes it strategic in representing the views and interests of the majority Christian populace.

The study is also significant because it sets the ground for conflict resolution and reconciliation. It indicates that Zimbabwe's dark history, characterised by hatred, violence, and murder of political opponents, needs to be addressed if the country is ever to experience peaceful elections. In this regard, the study insists that the current trend of electoral violence in Zimbabwe is an indication of a much deeper series of unresolved conflicts, such as *Gukurahundi*, *Murambatsvina* and violent

land redistribution, which has culminated into anger and hatred towards those who hold a different political opinion.

Lastly, the study is significant because it adds to the existing knowledge on elections, electoral violence, and electoral processes by bringing in the contribution of the ZHOCD. The analysis assumes that the theology of the ZHOCD remains critical in fostering peace and stability during election seasons. This hypothesis is premised on the fact that ZHOCD's teachings on truth-telling, forgiveness, healing and reconciliation remain imperative in the fight against the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. However, critics argue that the Zimbabwean Church is just as guilty as the country's politicians. This argument stems from the fact that the Zimbabwean Church has, over the years, been accused of siding with certain political ideologies and thus dragged into partisan politics, effectively losing its prophetic voice and significance in society. In this respect, many wonder if the Church in Zimbabwe can be trusted as a neutral player in addressing the scourge of electoral violence.

Thus, the study questions the close interaction between the colonial Rhodesian regime and the member churches that now constitute the ZHOCD. Many argue that most of the ZHOCD membership is comprised of missionary-established churches, whose role during colonisation was to endorse and legitimise the colonial process. While some white churches and individual missionaries stood firm against colonization, it is common cause that the majority of the broader Church remained passive in the face of gross violence unleashed against Zimbabweans. This history has made it almost impossible for the current ZHOCD to be considered a trusted player in Zimbabwe's electoral narrative as many still believe that the ZHOCD continues to hold significant ties with the country's former coloniser as evidenced by the financial and material support some of its member churches continue to benefit from western countries. Similarly, the Church's failure to speak with one voice amid the *Gukurahundi* massacres, the violent land reform program, and Operation Murambatsvina casts doubt on the Church's preparedness to address the country's socio-political struggles genuinely. Thus, in a way, this study endeavours to establish whether the Zimbabwean Church (ZHOCD) can still be considered the moral voice of the society.

1.10 The Scope and Limitation of the Study

The study is limited in exploring the role of the ZHOCD in Zimbabwe's general elections. In this respect, the study examines the Church's historical contribution to Zimbabwe's political struggles of the day. Although the term church will sometimes be used loosely to refer to the ZHOCD, the study emphasises its primary focus is on the ZHOCD. Therefore, in many instances, the Church shall refer to the work of the ZHOCD and its member churches. In cases where the term will be utilised to refer to the whole Christian body, the study will make a clear distinction. The study insists that the ZHOCD play a significant role in Zimbabwe's political landscape by promoting peace and providing a voice for the marginalised.

Of particular interest to this study is the understanding that the ZHOCD can mobilise communities and encourage them to participate peacefully in general elections while playing a mediatory role between political rivals. Thus, the study is specifically concerned with the contribution of faith-based organisations such as the ZHOCD in addressing the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. The study posits that the escalation of electoral violence in Zimbabwe since 1980 demands the attention of all societal stakeholders, of which the ZHOCD is a significant player. The study posits that the ZHOCD possesses an essential theological apparatus necessary to reduce the urge for electoral violence in Zimbabwe. ZHOCD's teachings on peace, reconciliation, forgiveness, and inclusion remain fundamental in fighting electoral violence as they continue influencing Christian thought and conduct during election periods.

On the other hand, some have questioned the efficacy of these same theological apparatuses, arguing that the Bible has, over time, been used to perpetuate and justify certain narratives such as slavery, patriarchy and the subjugation of the weak. As such, many have doubted the reliability of Christian teachings in addressing public matters. However, it can equally be argued that the fact that the Christian Bible (from which the ZHOCD's theology is rooted) has endured a long history of abuse under the interpretation of biased individuals. However, this does not negate the fact that the same Bible has, over the years, been instrumental in ending human struggles such as racism, slavery and colonialism. This makes the same Bible an instrument of both oppression and liberation. For instance, during colonialism, slavery and racism, the Bible was utilised to condemn

the inhuman treatment of blacks, women, and other vulnerable members of society. Given the above, it becomes apt to consider the authenticity and reliability of ZHOCD's teachings in the struggle with electoral violence.

Furthermore, it can be inferred that the ZHOCD has often been unaware of the country's electoral challenges. Most of its pastoral letters are often written in response to an already occurred violence, making the organisation reactionary rather than proactive. Even so, its primary form of engagement with politicians and ordinary citizens has been chiefly through pastoral letters, which are only accessible to the elite and literate members of society while deliberately neglecting the grassroots members whose accessibility to the internet is minimal. This leaves out a significant number of the country's populace who might be either victims or perpetrators of electoral violence.

Nevertheless, the study shall only approach electoral violence from a theological perspective. While scholarly work from other academic fields, such as social sciences, gender and anthropology, may be consulted and referenced, the study expects to maintain its theological approach to the problem under investigation. Thus, the study endeavours to understand how ZHOCD's *Kairos* theology has been utilised in Zimbabwe's general elections.

1.11 Theory, Literature and Method of the Study

1.11.1 Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

The key concepts in this study focus on electoral violence, public theology, and the specific application of *Kairos* theology within the context of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD). Electoral violence encompasses acts of harm and intimidation during electoral processes. At the same time, public theology refers to the engagement of the Church with societal issues, advocating for justice and peace. In the literature section, it is highlighted that religious institutions play a role in socio-political contexts. This underscores the need for a theology that speaks to spiritual concerns and engages deeply with contemporary socio-political issues.

In this study, I utilize public theology as a *Kairos* theory to examine electoral violence in Zimbabwe. I am aware of scientific theories like the Conflict Transformation Theory (CTT), which could be used in a study like this one, but the focus of my study is on examining the ZHOCD's mandate and vision on electoral violence, and I am not trying to deal with the phenomena from my actions. By employing *Kairos* theology, this research aims to demonstrate how the ZHOCD can shift from being a passive participant to being an active player in addressing the dynamics that contribute to electoral violence. The intersection of public theology and *Kairos* theology supports the notion that faith must engage profoundly with public life.

This study hypothesizes that integrating public theology, particularly *Kairos* theology, will enable the ZHOCD to mobilize communities against electoral violence more effectively. It posits that by promoting values of justice, inclusivity, and peace, the ZHOCD can foster an environment where citizens resist the urge to resort to violence during elections.

Public theology is particularly suitable for this study as it calls for a transformative engagement of the Church with society. It emphasizes that the Church has a prophetic role in advocating for justice and has historically aligned with struggles against oppression. This theoretical framework empowers the ZHOCD to confront issues of electoral violence, rooted in its mission to stand with the marginalized and promote peace.

The proposed theoretical framework establishes a clear connection between public theology and the ZHOCD's approach to electoral violence in Zimbabwe. By employing these theological perspectives, the research aims to elucidate practical pathways for the Church to engage more robustly in mitigating electoral violence, thereby asserting its relevance in the public sphere. This framework builds on existing literature and proposes innovative solutions and a renewed sense of purpose for the ZHOCD in its mission.

1.11.2 Literature Review

The complex phenomenon of electoral violence in Zimbabwe has been the subject of extensive scholarly discourse, underscoring the significant interplay between historical legacies, socio-political dynamics, and the framework of electoral processes. Scholars such as Mlambo (2014),

Sachikonye (2011), and Raftopolous and Mlambo (2009) articulate that the historic context of Zimbabwe—ranging from colonial oppression to post-independence conflicts—has perpetuated a cycle of violence deeply rooted in political culture and governance.

The colonial regime established a political landscape characterized by exclusionary practices, where the majority black populace was systematically denied electoral participation. This laid the groundwork for a political culture rife with intolerance and manipulation, as evidenced in subsequent elections post-independence. The *Gukurahundi* massacres, highlighted by Sachikonye (2011), exemplify the brutality exercised by the ZANU-PF government, reflecting how political power is maintained through violence against perceived dissent.

The emergence of opposition parties, particularly the MDC in 1999, marked a significant shift in Zimbabwe's electoral landscape, challenging the historical dominance of ZANU-PF. However, studies by Chemhuru (2010) demonstrate that this rising opposition faced severe repression, including violence and intimidation, as the ruling party sought to maintain its grip on power. The literature indicates that electoral violence serves not only as a tool of political control but also to perpetuate deep-seated ethnic divisions, as described by Birch (2020) and Burchard (2015). Such divisions exacerbate conflicts and hinder the emergence of a unified democratic front, leading to further cycles of violence and unrest.

Scholarly work, including the church's documents like the ZWWD (2006), *The March is not Ended* (2020), and *The Elections We Want* (2023), also emphasize the critical role of electoral management bodies and their credibility in establishing a fair electoral process. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) has often been criticized for its partisanship and inefficacy (Mlambo, 2014; Ndlovu, 2018). This systemic failure leads to electoral manipulation, disenfranchisement, and heightened public mistrust. With such serious accusations, emotions flared, resulting in violent reactions at minimal provocation.

Moreover, while literature recognizes the impact of socio-economic issues, including poverty and corruption as catalysts for electoral violence, it tends to overlook the potential influence of faith-

based organizations, especially the ZHOCD. This absence in the literature presents a critical gap, as religious institutions historically play a vital role in conflict resolution and societal mediation.

Therefore, this proposed study aims to investigate how the ZHOCD can leverage its theological frameworks to reduce the growing trend of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, presenting a unique perspective that complements existing scholarship on electoral discourse and violence. Integrating faith-based approaches in political contexts could pave the way for restoring integrity and peace within Zimbabwe's electoral framework.

1.11.3 Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to examine the role of the ZHOCD in mitigating electoral violence, as presented in Chapter 4. The qualitative method is particularly suited for this complex social phenomenon, allowing for an in-depth exploration of individuals' experiences and perspectives regarding electoral violence in Zimbabwe. It utilizes a descriptive research design to facilitate a comprehensive overview of ZHOCD's interactions with electoral violence and its historical context. This design was chosen to enable a nuanced understanding of the church's role and theological responses to political and social challenges.

Data collection involves qualitative content analysis (QCA) of primary documents created by the ZHOCD, including theological documents, pastoral letters, and press statements related to electoral violence. The primary documents selected for analysis include the *ZWWD* (2006), *The March is not Ended* (2020), and *The Elections We Want* (2023), among others. These documents were chosen due to their relevance to the study's focus and historical significance in ZHOCD's engagement with issues of violence and governance.

A purposive sampling technique will gather documents addressing the ZHOCD's theological contributions and positions on election-related violence. This targeted selection process ensures the analysis focuses on materials rich in insight and directly related to the research questions. The total number of documents analyzed will be three, each representing critical advocacy efforts by the ZHOCD over a span of years.

Data analysis will be conducted using thematic analysis, where the selected documents will be reviewed and coded for recurring themes and patterns related to electoral violence and the church's theological response. This method provides a systematic approach to identifying key concepts and insights relevant to the study's objectives.

Ethical considerations include using publicly available documents to ensure that no individual participant's confidentiality is compromised. All findings will be presented objectively, highlighting the historical and current implications of the ZHOCD's theological contributions in the context of electoral violence.

In sum, the qualitative research design, alongside purposive sampling and thematic analysis, is well-aligned with the study's goals of exploring the ZHOCD's interventions and theological underpinnings concerning electoral violence in Zimbabwe.

1.12 Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter that introduces the entire research. It presents components of a research proposal, such as the study's background, the problem statement, the study's motivation, the study's significance, the study's key research question, and the study's objectives. It also highlights the literature review and conceptual and methodological framework of the study. The chapter sets the tone for the discussion of election violence in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 2 comprehensively discusses the history of Zimbabwe and its electoral account since independence in 1980. The chapter underpins that election violence in Zimbabwe is deeply embedded in the country's history, as shown by its occurrence in various historical epochs. The chapter further discusses the notion of election, its significance and purpose. The chapter insists that, in theory, elections are expected to bring about peaceful means to power, yet elections, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, have characteristically been defined by violence. Thus, the chapter presents scholarly views on the occurrence of election violence. Overall, chapter 2 comprehensively discusses the literature on the problem under investigation.

Chapter 3 introduces the institution of ZHOCD and highlights its vision, mission, and membership. It also discusses the ZHOCD's contribution throughout Zimbabwe's history. It introduces some of its notable theological contributions, such as the Zimbabwe We Want (ZWW), which insists that the primary role of the ZHOCD is to ensure the Church's involvement and active participation in issues of national interest, such as election violence.

Chapter 4 discusses the methodology as well as the theoretical framework of the study. The chapter upholds the literature-based research method, citing various reasons for choosing it. The chapter further outlines how the entire research process is carried out. The chapter also introduces the theoretical framework of the study. To this end, it discusses the essence of public theology as an appropriate *Kairos* theory for Zimbabwe's election violence. The chapter insists that the existence of commonalities between public theology and *Kairos* theory makes the two theories complementary to the study of election violence.

Chapter 5 presents data and analysis of selected ZHOCD theological documents. Thus, the chapter comprehensively discusses the *Zimbabwe We Want Document*, *The March is not Ended*, and the *Pastoral Letter on Elections*, indicating their strengths and weaknesses and their contribution to the problem of election violence.

Chapter 6 introduces the *Kairos* elections theory, a proposed theory for Zimbabwe's general elections. The theory is built upon themes outlined and discussed in detail. The chapter underscores that the *Kairos* elections theory is sustainable in addressing the problem of election violence in Zimbabwe. With this understanding, the chapter contributes new knowledge to studying Zimbabwe's elections.

Chapter 7 discusses ZHOCD's identity, mission and theological framework in general elections in Zimbabwe. The chapter focuses on the fundamental principles of ZHOCD as a Christian organisation aimed at ensuring peace and stability in Zimbabwe, particularly within the context of election violence. The chapter also presented a proposed theological roadmap for the ZHOCD on general elections, including speaking truth to power and being a voice for ordinary people, which are suggested as fundamental aspects of the *Kairos* elections theory. As suggested by the *Kairos*

elections theory, other theological marks of the ZHOCD's mission include concern for the poor and the marginalised, justice, indictment of empty worship, courage to take risks, and concern for the working class.

Chapter 8 presents the summary of the study, indicating its contribution to the body of knowledge and highlighting areas for future research.

1.13 Conclusion

The chapter has provided fundamental components of a research proposal, including the research problem, the problem statement, the research objectives, the key research question, the significance of the study and ethical considerations, among other things. The chapter described the problem of election violence, indicating the extent to which it is rooted in Zimbabwe's history. The chapter notes that since independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has been trapped in a vicious cycle of election violence permeating throughout the country's electoral history. In this way, election violence has been responsible for the country's socio-economic and political struggles, negatively impacting the country's regional and global relations. To this end, the chapter indicates that, notwithstanding its challenges, the ZHOCD has the potential to engage with its Christian constituency and the generality of the country's populace to reduce violence. In doing so, the ZHOCD can utilise its theological teachings on peace, justice, dialogue, conflict resolution and reconciliation to create a fertile environment for peaceful elections. The next chapter extensively discusses the history of Zimbabwe, its electoral history and the occurrence of election violence, thus setting the tone for discussing the role of the ZHOCD in general elections.

Chapter Two

Understanding Zimbabwe and its Electoral History

2. Introduction

The previous chapter unpacked the components of the problem under examination in the light of the elements of a proposal. This chapter, in alignment with one of the objectives, endeavors to demonstrate that electoral violence in Zimbabwe is not merely a byproduct of political competition, but a deeply entrenched factor interwoven with the nation's political landscape, reflecting the historical and socio-economic complexities that shape the dynamics of power, governance, and social identity in a predominantly Christian society. The chapter underscores that a contemporary exploration of the reaction of the ZHOCD to electoral violence necessitates a thorough review of the historical background within which the phenomena have manifested. Considering the above, I know that the problem under investigation is deeply embedded in the country's history and, therefore, necessitates a thorough understanding of its manifestation throughout its historical epoch. Considering this, the chapter's discussion follows three critical pillars: The history of Zimbabwe, the historical and socio-cultural development of the phenomenon of elections, the causes, the definition and the manifestation of electoral violence.

2.1 A Snapshot of Zimbabwe's History

Zimbabwe is a Southern African country, formerly Rhodesia. The country attained independence from Britain in 1980 through a protracted liberation struggle in which the majority black populace mobilised themselves and formed a resistant movement that resisted the colonial rule of the minority white people (Mlambo, 2014). This war for independence led to the election of the first democratically elected president, Robert Gabriel Mugabe, effectively bringing an end to the colonial British regime and ultimately giving rise to a new nation which would be named Zimbabwe (Raftopolous & Mlambo, 2009, p.24). The country's name is associated with stone-built monuments near a city called Masvingo (formerly Fort Victoria) (Mlambo, 2014, p.21).

Drawing from the work of Mlambo, it can be noted that the end of the nineteenth century saw the rise of the colonial wave in Africa. This wave carried the claim that Africa was occupied by an “uncivilised” and inhabited by ‘barbaric’ people without a history (Mlambo, 2014, p.18). Nevertheless, Zimbabwe has a rich history stretching back to the early period of the San hunter-gatherer societies. As shown by Mlambo, the advent of imperial British rule in 1889 tremendously affected this history as colonial rule brought along systems and developments that intentionally downplayed the essence of local socio-political structures (Mlambo, 2014).

In this regard, it needs to be noted that the pre-colonial period of Zimbabwe was characterised mainly by kingdoms under which different societies formulated states whose system of governance was spelt out and executed by the king with the assistance of mostly mature men (*Machinda aMambo*) whose experience and wisdom had to be tested to ascertain their eligibility to serve in the king’s court as advisors (Raftopolous & Mlambo, 2009, p.24). Mazarura (2020) shows that examples of these communities include the Munhumutapa State, the Rozvi State, and the Ndebele State, among others. It is necessary, therefore, to underscore that in these communities, the selection of kings followed a system of lineage under which a successor was crowned upon the death of a king or severe cases of incapacitation, such as mental illness or disabilities, which were very rare and unlikely in most African communities (Raftopolous and Mlambo 2009, p. 24, Pwiti, 1991).

However, even in these communities, elements of violence and abuse of political institutions for political gains were also evident. Given the above, I concur with literature from Mavengano and Chirongoma (2023) that the current trend of electoral violence can be traced back to early Shona communities in the fifteenth century when the Torwa dynasty migrated to other parts of the country for economic and political reasons. This period was also marked by the establishment of Mfecane’s tribes from the South and the arrival of the Portuguese. As Mavengano and Chirongoma (2023) show, the period was primarily defined by raids and conflicts between the Mwari cult and the royal family. This is further confirmed by Mlambo (2004), who states that politically motivated abuse of democratic values dates to pre-colonial Zimbabwe and was driven by the quest for land, resources, and chieftainship.

However, I contend that contemporary elements of electoral violence have taken almost entirely a different shape in form and manifestation. Whereas the traditional African communities tended to be civilian and authoritarian, have supported the development of the 'strong man politics' through military enforcement and claims of strong popular support by nationalists. While disagreements and dissatisfaction in Shona traditional communities had laid down structures under which the ruled (subjects) registered their concerns to the king (ruler) through the king's advisors (*Machinda Amambo*). The nation-state has been manned by formerly rogue elements whose only contribution was inclusion in the liberation war. The Shona structures, however, did not entirely eradicate cases of grassroots uprisings but minimised the existence of division and the occurrence of violence by the ruler to the ruled. In contemporary Zimbabwe, electoral violence has primarily been associated with elements of dictatorship and totalitarianism, under which dissenting voices are immediately crushed and silenced. At the same time, contemporary democratic means such as peaceful demonstrations have always been met by excessive force from the security forces such as the police, prison service, and the army. This effectively leaves the citizens with no democratic ways to register their displeasure to those who lead them.

This background is imperative because it brings to the fore the system of governance that existed in traditional African societies in Zimbabwe. Therefore, this becomes necessary as it is likely true that the ideologies and the leadership culture exhibited in the pre-colonial societies continued to influence local Zimbabwean politics upon attaining independence in 1980. In this regard, I concur with Mlambo that the Zanu PF party perceived itself as the de facto one-party state that resisted the idea of opposition politics and thus understood the rise of opposition as a threat to power (Mlambo, 2014). Therefore, it soon became apparent that the general populace expected independence to bring peace and prosperity to Zimbabwe. However, to the newly established ZANU-PF Party, nonviolence and peaceful leadership could only be guaranteed upon the subordination of the opposition political parties to the ethos of a one-party state ideology. In this regard, I underscore that the protracted liberation struggle came to be used as an essential legitimising factor in Zimbabwe's national politics, marking demarcation lines between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', 'friends' and 'enemies'. Therefore, it can be considered that from the onset, elements of authoritarian statism were essentially a component of the Mugabe-led ZANU-PF party.

The above became even more evident when, shortly after independence, the Mugabe-led ZANU-PF party unleashed atrocities that landed the country into a civil war, leading to the death of over 20,000 people, mainly from the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces, respectively. In the words of Sachikonye and Mlambo, these atrocities were mainly unleashed on the Ndebele-speaking people Led by Joshua N. Nkomo (Mlambo, 2014, p.22, Sachikonye, 2011, p.6). It is, therefore, necessary to articulate that, the *Gukurahundi* massacres were triggered by armed disputes between the two major armed forces Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) combatants who by this time were accommodated temporarily in Assembly Points waiting for possible integration into the National Army which was to include all military formations and deployment (Mlambo, 2014). The most regrettable clash took place in Bulawayo between November 1980 and February 1981, leading to more than one hundred deaths (CCJP, 1997).

This is further attested by Mlambo, citing that the tension continued to escalate afterwards, as evidenced by Joshua Nkomo's demotion from the position of Minister of Home Affairs in the Government of National Unity amidst allegations by Robert Mugabe that ZAPU was determined to overthrow the Mugabe government (Sachikonye, 2009). This was made worse by the police discovery of ZIPRA's military arms caches on farms and other ZAPU-owned properties in 1982 (Mlambo, 2014, p.196). These events subsequently led to the arrest of ZIPRA commanders Lookout Masuku and Dumiso Dabengwa and the abandonment of the National Unity of ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo and other party members (Mlambo, 2014, p.196). The above saw some frustrated ZIPRA cadres waging guerrilla warfare to protest the government's actions.

The Robert Mugabe government interpreted the move as a declaration of war by Nkomo's Party, as he was considered the father of dissidents, forcing him to flee the country for safety in 1983, returning only when the government assured him of his security (Mlambo, 2014). In response, the Mugabe-led government unleashed the Fifth Brigade in early 1983 to deal with the perceived insurrection. The fifth brigade unleashed untold terror and hardships among the Matabeleland and Midlands regions. As shown by the CCJP (1997), the fifth brigade perpetrated brutal human rights violations, including torture, beating, abductions, burning of people and property, murder, and rape

of mostly Ndebele-speaking people. Those who were lucky to survive this brutality were left with lifelong disabilities such as blindness, paralysis, miscarriages, impotence, infertility, kidney and heart injuries. Essentially, the fifth brigade carried on its back explicitly tribal connotations, which enforced and promoted the speaking of Shona, which stood as a continuous reminder of the Ndebele past raids against the Shona people.

As noted by Mlambo, the above sought to justify and qualify the Fifth Brigade's brutality as a necessary military act against the Ndebele people. Thus, these horrific acts of the fifth brigade have often been described as genocide and have come to be known as the '*Gukurahundi*', a Shona word which metaphorically refers to early rains that wash away the chaff (Mlambo,2014). In this way, the *Gukurahundi* has been responsible for the death of over twenty thousand people in the Matebeleland region, while many were seriously injured and thousands were displaced. (CCJP, 1997). Given the above, Sachikonye (2011), Linden (1980) and Mukonyora (2008, p.135) agree that the attacks on the Ndebele people forced Nkomo to surrender as he had lost most of his soldiers and his fellow Ndebele people pushing him to request for unity talks leading to the Unity Agreement between the two parties, giving rise to the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU- PF). This subsequently made Zimbabwe a one-party state. I, thus, argue that this understanding continues to inform the future of opposition politics in Zimbabwe as ZANU-PF seeks to protect the idea of a one-party state.

To this end, I underscore that the post-independent account of violence is imperative to this study as it brings to the surface that the notion of political violence and, subsequently, electoral violence in Zimbabwe is as old as the very history of the country itself. Thus, from the above, it can be deduced that the period after the first democratic election in Zimbabwe was soon accompanied by violence, brutality and the death of people for political reasons. Therefore, post-independence violence is worthy of discussion as it sets the tone for the growing levels of violence under which political ideologies continue to divide the nation, attracting severe punishment to the opponents, including murder, elimination, intimidation and abduction, leaving behind physical and emotional injuries, among others. This entails that electoral violence, as discussed in this study, does not exist without a background; thus, the phenomenon of violence stands on the shoulders of an already existing, well-structured system of brutality and intimidation of those with different political

ambitions. Considering this, it becomes paramount for any contemporary studies of political violence to understand and appreciate the ground upon which the roots of electoral violence are planted.

2.2 The Rise of Solid Opposition Politics

Literature from Mlambo (2014), Sachikonye (2013), and Raftopolous and Mlambo (2009) confirm that the unity agreement between ZANU and ZAPU created a de facto one-party state, which effectively eliminated the phenomenon of opposition politics in Zimbabwe. The few remaining opposition parties needed to be more robust to bring any meaningful challenge to ZANU-PF. However, even though political opposition remained weak and paralysed in Zimbabwe in the 1990s, literature from Raftopolous and Mlambo attests that many civil society organisations emerged. These began to add a critical vocal voice against ZANU-PF and its policies that were increasingly becoming anti-democratic (Raftopolous & Mlambo, 2009, p.36). These groups included human rights organisations, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, ZimRights, student organisations and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU), which had found its voice in the post-independent period. The ZCTU continued to be independent and influential, as evidenced by its firm resistance to the ZANU PF one-state project (Raftopolous & Mlambo, 2009, p.36). In this way, ZCTU refused to endorse ZANUPF in the campaign towards the 1990 elections. Instead, the ZCTU aligned itself with the student movements in protest of the growing levels of corruption in the ruling party in 1988 (Mukonyora, 2000, p.136).

The change in the ZCTU leadership saw Morgan Tsvangirai becoming the Secretary-General and bringing in a militancy degree that had been missing in the organisation. In this way, the ZCTU began to raise its voice not only for its membership but also for the generality of the socio-economic and political discourses of the day (Sachikonye, 2003). In this regard, the ZCTU slowly became the strong voice of opposition politics in post-independence Zimbabwe. In addition, Chemhuru (2010) shows that the ZCTU began to question and bring to light economic discontent caused by the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) in 1990. Thus, gradually, the ZCTU saw itself having to offer leadership to the growing coalition of organisations and civil society groups that demanded a new constitution to replace the 1980 Lancaster House Constitution,

which the government numerously amended to cement its political grip on the country (Mukonyora, 2008). These efforts gave birth to the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) in 1998, which consisted of over 100 civil society organisations. They all sought and advocated for a New Constitution. This unity for a common cause further saw the birth of the MDC in 1999 (Sachikonye, 2003, p.97).

To this end, I argue that the birth of the MDC brought in a total shift in Zimbabwe's political trajectory; not only did the MDC become a critical voice against the once-feared ZANUPF, but it became the most preferred alternative in the elections that would come and thus became ZANUPF's colossal contender. In this regard, Chemhuru (2010) confirms that the growing disinterest in the politics of ZANU-PF saw many Zimbabweans under the mobilisation of the MDC rejecting the constitutional draft, which meant giving President Mugabe excessive powers. The rejection of the referendum became ZANUPF's first defeat (Chitando & Togarasei, 2008; Chemhuru, M., 2010; and Auret, 2009). In response, ZANU-PF unleashed violence to thwart the growing new opposition movement, proving to be a force to reckon with (Chemhuru, 2010).

From the above, it can be deduced that the rise of the MDC was met with an intensified political environment characterised by violence, hatred and exclusion. Thus, the political trajectory at the turn of the millennium became heavily charged (Auret, 2009). It can be said that while several opposition parties were formed and continue to do so, Zimbabwe's politics at the turn of the millennium has proven to be primarily centred between the ZANU-PF and the MDC. Furthermore, while writing this thesis, I see that Zimbabwe continues to be deeply divided and trapped in a severe political struggle with evidence of confusion and uncertainty among the general populace. Currently, many Zimbabweans continue to live in fear, doubt, severe poverty and hunger. This background is essential because it locates Zimbabwe's political environment within which the problem of electoral violence has manifested over the years, thus providing the study with a context.

2.3 The Concept of Elections

Elections are a fundamental component of democratic systems. They are crucial in shaping governance and representation in a country, state, city, or village (Manin, 1997). Elections are

carried out with a purpose, through a system, by enlisting eligible voters, allowing voter campaigns, the voting process, administration of elections, the announcement of results, election observation, election participation and democratic legitimacy (Manin, 1997). In this way, elections are done in various settings; corporations elect directors as mandated by corporate law (Cai et al., 2009), and political parties' elect representatives in primary and national elections (Sandri & Seddone, 2015).

However, the rules and procedures used for both settings are fundamentally the same as those used in government elections (Glazer et al., 1984). Furthermore, various materials may be employed in choosing leaders depending on the number of people involved, wherein before the advent of technology, candidates would be lined up, supporters would then be asked to line behind a candidate of their choice, raise hands for a name, or write down the name of a candidate (Zetter, 2018; Gardner, 2019). In this way, the person responsible for the process usually holds a higher office and is interested in the election result (Zetter, 2018; Gardner, 2019). Similar processes around the world have been employed in pre-independence election processes where some used tree leaves in India, and a boy who has no interest in the results would be asked to adjudicate (Sengupta, 2011; Agnihotri, 2010; Dasgupta, 2005). In all these circumstances, electoral offices were not eligible for all citizens, although voting was for all classes of people, even among the Greeks (Stanton, 1990).

As Mann shows, the specific details of elections can vary across countries, reflecting their unique legal frameworks, political systems, and cultural contexts (Mann, 1987). In this respect, citizens are expected to influence decision-making processes as they exercise their right to choose representatives, giving citizens the power to say what they want about their candidates (Robinson, 1997, p.22–23). Therefore, elections allow citizens to express their preferences and hold their leaders accountable.

However, while the above submissions sound plausible, abundant evidence worldwide has proven that elections have, on numerous occasions, been used only as a mere ritual to legitimise the political authority of specific individuals and entities. This has been evident in most growing democracies, such as Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe,

among others, wherein the election process and outcome do not supersede the interests of individual political parties. Further, it is notable that while a growing literature, for instance, Lansford (2011), Burke (2008), Zetter (2018) and Burch (2020) attest that, in most countries, including Zimbabwe, office-bearers are determined through an electoral system defined by the constitution and the electoral law by which votes are cast, counted, and translated into seats or outcomes (Zetter, 2018). However, available evidence shows that in most African countries, especially Zimbabwe, elections have often been carried out in a hostile political environment characterised by gross violation of electoral processes and procedures.

Thus, I argue that elections can only reflect the will of the people when the electoral environment is conducive to freedom of choice and expression. Considering the above, a growing body of scholars, such as Sachikonye (2009), Ndlovu (2018), Masengwe, Makuvaza, & Dube (2021) have focused on the inconsistencies and irregularities of Zimbabwe's electoral processes pointing out various institutions such as the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and its failure to demonstrate neutrality in conducting elections. However, these studies leave out the contribution of faith-based organisations such as the ZHOCD to the cause of peaceful and democratic elections. For instance, the ZHOCD has historically embarked on a campaign trail encouraging citizens to register to vote and ultimately participate in the voting process. ZHOCD has also urged citizens and politicians to ensure the electoral process is undertaken in a peaceful and democratic space. This makes ZHOCD's work worthy of the attention of the scholarly world. Hence, this study brings forward ZHOCD's contribution to Zimbabwe's election narrative.

In addition, various scholars in the field of politics and social science, such as Lansford (2011), insist that if the electoral system is regarded as susceptible to manipulation, an electoral reform is suggested, in which case the process considered fair is introduced to improve the effectiveness of an existing system. Thus, Lansford details how voting occurs as mandated by the Constitution and the Electoral Act. However, I argue that his work does not account for instances where these procedures are violated and manipulated for individual or political gains. Given the existing gaps, this study suggests ways in which the theology of the ZHOCD can be utilised to achieve democratic and peaceful elections in Zimbabwe.

Accordingly, Zetter (2018) points out that requirements exist to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process. Thus, in most cases, the eligibility to vote is determined by age, citizenship and voter registration. Similarly, Chigwedere, writing on the History of Elections in selected African countries, elaborates that many formerly colonised countries in southern Africa did not include Indigenous people in voting because the law prohibited them, as they were regarded as juveniles without the understanding of voting and law for voting (Chigwedere, 2017). Using the age factor, many colonised countries underwent similar experiences, including prisoners who were not regarded as citizens or those who were not living in a community for local council elections, among others (Chigwedere, 2017). Likewise, it is known that colonial governments in Southern Africa, especially in Zimbabwe, required a level of education and property evaluation to restrict one's eligibility to participate in the election process. This was done with the understanding that participating in elections should be determined by one's social standing and the properties that one owns, which they intend to safeguard with election outcomes.

Interestingly, elections have also been held even during periods of conflict. For instance, since the beginning of the war in Afghanistan in 2001, voters have gone to the polls to elect office-bearers (Birch, 2020). However, despite the popularity of the institution of elections, their primary goal of ensuring a peaceful power transfer is rarely realised. Thus, in most cases, especially in Africa, the election institution has carried a worrisome electoral violence and coercion trend. As Birch shows, most elections held outside consolidated democracies are often accompanied by substantial violence, thus threatening the sustainability of the democratic process (Birch, 2020).

Furthermore, the phenomenon of elections is not peculiar to Africa, and the practice can be traced back to ancient Greek societies as an early democratic way to select leaders. In this regard, elections were held annually, and voting was restricted to only a few members of society who were considered influential. Status and Taylor show that male voters who owned property, land or businesses mostly converged to select a political leader. Similarly, in the early Greek voting system, voters wrote their preferred candidate on broken pieces of pots (Ostraka) (Status & Taylor, 2012). In this way, the selected leader was expected to remain accountable for serving the voters' interests and safeguarding the value of property, land, and business (Status & Taylor, 2012).

In contemporary society, elections are held essentially in nearly all countries in the world, except for a handful of states such as Brunei, where the leadership of the country has mainly remained monarchical, wherein the sultan exercises executive power, leading to the restriction of freedom of expression and association. The same is true for China, where elections are arguably undemocratic and are held under a controversial hierarchy system under which leaders at different levels are selected (Klauss, 2020).

Similarly, Eritrea has not held any national elections since its independence from Ethiopia in 1993 (Klauss, 2020). Thus, Eritrea has been under an authoritarian state that has withheld power and closed the democratic space for potential opponents. In the same way, it was only in 2003 that Qatar passed a referendum which provided partial elections for the council; however, the country has firmly resisted the idea of a multi-party system and, ultimately, the notion of elections. Likewise, Saudi Arabia remains largely resisting all forms of political rights and civil liberties, choosing to rely entirely on pervasive surveillance and criminalisation of dissent, appealing to sectarianism and ethnicity. In this sense, no national election of officials exists. Lastly, it is necessary to state that South Sudan is among the few countries that have also resisted the idea of holding elections (Klauss, 2020). Since its independence from Sudan in 2011, South Sudan, considered the world's newest country, has not held elections. Its first-ever attempt at the election in 2022 was later shifted to 2023 and 2024, which critics have understood as deliberate delays in holding the general election.

The essence of elections worldwide, including Zimbabwe, is to ensure a peaceful means to power and avoid violence, intimidation and coercion. This understanding is well captured by Birch, who states that:

In theory, the employment of elections to select leaders ought to provide a non-violent alternative to the use of force to adjudicate between rival claims to rule, and it ought to be a mechanism that allows citizens greater say over how they are governed. However, in practice, these expectations often fail to conform to reality. Many elections, especially those in democracies not yet fully consolidated, are fraught with significant violence during the campaign period, on polling day or in the aftermath of voting (Birch 2020: 2).

With this understanding, it should be noted that electoral violence can result in casualty tolls that meet the threshold of civil war within days or weeks; when this occurs, it can undo years of peace-building and development work, it can undermine democratic institutions, and it can even trigger civil war (Birch, 2020, p.3). In this regard, I concur with Birch that recent elections in the world, particularly those in Africa, have been characterised by significant violence. The study acknowledges the worrisome trend of electoral violence as alluded to by (Bokoe, 2012; Klauss, 2020 Mlambo, 2014 Sachikonye, 2009) and many others who have written extensively about political violence and its impact on the nation of Zimbabwe. This suggests that electoral violence has become a necessary topic to discuss in contemporary global politics, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and other growing democracies, because of the growing problem of electoral violence.

However, these studies have discussed electoral violence from a political perspective, leaving out the social and religious aspects of the phenomenon. This study acknowledges the work of Chitando (2013), Manyonganise (2020) and others who have written passionately about the role of Christian organisations in the public space. Nevertheless, these studies have focused mainly on one Christian body or a single denomination or congregation. Given the above, this study focuses on the ZHOCD, whose theological contribution is scarce in the academic world. Therefore, I make a strong case that while the manifestation of Electoral violence has been politically motivated, the phenomenon is firmly rooted in and indicates a broken society. This deformed social base is characterised by deep-seated division in the form of tribalism, unresolved conflicts, exclusionary politics and a deep sense of hatred towards those who hold a different social and political standing.

Given these factors, ignoring the inclusion of faith-based organisations such as ZHOCD has become unavoidable. However, the study is aware that while religion, particularly Christianity, has, since time immemorial, been celebrated as a significant contributing factor to the morality and social stability of societies, religion has also been a driving force towards violence and social unrest. Historically, religion, especially Christianity, has often been central to human struggles against inequality, ethnicity and gender. In these facets, Christianity has often been monopolised to legitimise oppression and exploitation. Be that as it may, it remains a fact that the role of the broader Church remains notable, permeating through the fabric of Zimbabwe's historical epochs, such as the colonial period, the liberation struggle, and post-independence conflicts, for instance,

the brutalities of the *Gukurahundi* massacres, the post-independence electoral violence, particularly elections that were held at the turn of the millennium. In these historical periods of moral fragmentation, the broader Church has contributed significantly to restoring morality through its dialogue, forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace theology. Given the above, the study uses this celebrated legacy of Zimbabwe's broader Church to assert whether the ZHOCD can be an instrument in the fight for peaceful, just and fair elections in Zimbabwe.

I also contend in this study that while various studies have been conducted in other fields, such as political sciences, social sciences psychology, religion, and other related fields, little or less attention has been paid to the contribution of Christian organisations in ameliorating the problem of electoral violence. At the same time, interventions designed to mitigate the problem of violence include a range of activities targeted at electoral actors, such as security training and electoral management, while deliberately excluding the contribution of faith-based organisations such as the ZHOCD. It can, therefore, be said that a growing body of literature examines the relationship between electoral competition and political violence. However, while this study acknowledges the already existing literature on the role of the Church and faith-based organisations in the public space, it still contends that not much work has been done to adequately bring forward the voice of broader ecumenical bodies such as the ZHOCD in the context of Zimbabwe's elections. Thus, this study adds to the existing body of knowledge by bringing the contribution of the ZHOCD to the cause of justice, peace and non-violent elections. This argument is grounded in ZHOCD's influence and positionality, given the country's Christian demographics. Within this framework, this study endeavours to bring the contribution of the Church into Zimbabwe's electoral conversation with a specific focus on the ZHOCD, arguably the most prominent Christian body commanding significant religious influence and respect in the country.

2.4 Zimbabwe's History of Elections

The history of elections in Zimbabwe has three distinct phases: elections during the colonial era, elections at independence, and elections in post-independence.

2.4.1 Zimbabwe's Elections in the Colonial Era

Elections in Southern Rhodesia were used from 1899 – 1923 to elect part of the legislative council and from 1924 to elect the whole of the Legislative Assembly, which governed the colony (Raftopolous, 2004). In this regard, elections were considered a means of legitimacy for the Rhodesian government. However, the Rhodesian government made it impossible for most Africans to participate in the election process (Mudenge, 1988). It can be stated, therefore, that participating in the electoral process in Rhodesia followed a set of stringent regulations and conditions to be followed. Sithole (1986) confirmed that the base requirement was that a voter should be a Rhodesian male subject aged twenty-one or over. In addition, the eligible voter was expected to be able to write their name and address and sign their name on the registration form. In general, as Kwashirai (2023) confirms, there existed three requirements that qualified voters to be eligible to vote:

- one was supposed to own a registered mining claim in Southern Rhodesia.
- one was supposed to be an occupier of immovable property of a stipulated worth and
- be a receiver of Southern Rhodesia wage of a stipulated amount.

In addition, voters were expected to have resided in Southern Rhodesia for at least six months. Literature from Kwashirai (2023) further attests that in 1912, the literacy requirements required voters to write fifty words in English at dictation if required by the registration officer. In addition, Sachikonye (2003) articulates that women were later included in 1919 on condition that they possess the same qualifications as those required for men. Similarly, Mlambo (2014) shows that in the 1970 constitution, the electoral system was changed, and several qualifications were dropped; instead, the electorate became segregated based on race. With Europeans, Asians, and mixed citizens meeting certain income and property stipulations, black Africans were generally segregated and excluded as they failed to meet the academic, financial, and material stipulations of the election.

Ian Smith justified this exclusion, arguing that most black Rhodesians lacked experience with democratic processes, yet, in reality, the Rhodesian government resisted the transition to majority rule like other democracies such as Tanzania, Ghana, and Uganda (Mlambo, 2014). In general, it can be concluded that Smith tried to delay the majority rule and the inclusion of Africans, citing

that Africans would be included as they understood democratic systems. Given the above, I make a case that elements of election violence have deep roots in colonial Rhodesia, wherein voter suppression, voter intimidation, closure of democratic space and coercion were, by and large, the order of the day. Consequently, the introduction of elections in Zimbabwe was primarily based on uneven electoral terrain, on which elections served solely as a tool to validate Rhodesian governance while stifling popular will. Thus, I categorically state that contemporary fundamentals of election violence in Zimbabwe borrow mainly from the foundations upon which the election phenomenon was introduced.

2.4.2 The Coming of a New Dawn: Elections at Independent Zimbabwe

The thrust of the electoral system at independence was spelt out in the Lancaster House Constitution, which was brought about because of negotiations between the British colonial power, the nationalists or liberation movement and parties to the internal settlement set up in 1979 (Sachikonye, 2003, p.119). As shown by Mlambo, it is paramount to indicate that this was a compromise agreement intended to end a protracted civil war, paving the way for an internally recognised independence (Mlambo, 2014, p.24). Thus, from this perspective, it can be attested that up until 1979, the black majority had been denied the right to participate as voters in the electoral system fully. As Sachikonye (2003, p.120) confirmed, the much celebrated ‘one man, one vote’ and the proportional representative system used in the 1980 elections were enshrined in this constitution. Similarly, Makumbe and Campagnon (2000) and Spicer (2001) agree that the new constitution indicated a compromise that provided 20 reserved seats for the white minority in a 100-seat House of Assembly. In addition, the Lancaster House Constitution provided for an upper house, the Senate, with 40 members, of which 14 seats were reserved for blacks elected by the 80 black members of the Assembly.

In comparison, ten were reserved for whites elected by the 20 white members of the Assembly, 10 were reserved for traditional chiefs, and the remaining six were filled by presidential appointment (Moyo, 1992). This agreement continued to be effective until independence was achieved. To contextualise the problem under investigation further, the study must provide a summary of the elections Zimbabwe has had.

2.5 1985: Zimbabwe's First Attempt at Democracy

Although the country has enjoyed political stability for most of its early years in post-independence, Zimbabwe's election campaign has faced challenges (Sachikonye, 1999). In this regard, ND1 (2000), Sachikonye (1999), and Mlambo (2014) confirm that every election since independence, especially in 1985, 1990, 1995, 2002, 2008 and 2013, has been marked by varying degrees of violence and intimidation. Similarly, elections in 2018 and 2023 followed the same trend of violence, coercion and several disputes. It is worth noting that most of the documented cases of violence occurred between supporters of the ruling ZANU-PF and the opposition parties, especially the MDC, at the turn of the millennium.

With this background, the 1985 general election is critical in Zimbabwe's election history in that it was the first election to be conducted by black Zimbabweans in post-independence. As shown by Moyo (1992), Sachikonye (2003) and Kwashirai (2023), the independence elections in 1980 were superintended by the British administration and aligned with the Rhodesian state apparatus. Given this background, it can also be noted that the (1985) election allowed Zimbabweans to test the integrity of the government they had elected five years earlier. More than that, the election stood as a timely test for the Nkomo-led ZAPU party, which sought to establish its position as a national political party whose influence went beyond Matebeleland province (Mlambo, 2014). In this regard, it was Nkomo's last chance to reclaim or share power with the Mugabe-led ZANU-PF. In Moyo's words, it can be deduced that the 1985 general election was undertaken in a politically charged environment, which indicated ZANU-PF's determination to retain power at every cost (Moyo, 1992).

In this regard, as Kwashirai rightly notes, it is apparent that ZANU-PF was determined to stay in power on the pretext of protecting the gains of the liberation struggle (Kwashirai, 2023). In addition to this, ZANU-PF rode on the wave of mass emotion and general belief of the time, showing that the primary concern of the 1980 elections was to bring an end to both the war of liberation and the British imperial power (Kwashirai, 2023). Thus, this standpoint continues to take precedence in future elections, thereby minimising the phenomenon to little more than a recollection of a war that has since ended in 1980 and protecting that victory and that of individuals who claim to have made the victory a reality (Sachikonye, 2003).

Given this, the 1985 elections were characterised mainly by elements of violence and ethnic animosities between the Shona Ndebele tribes (Kwashirai, 2023). It can be attested, therefore, that violence shifted from the liberation struggle to ethnic-based violence. As Kwashirai shows, governance in post-independence Zimbabwe was heavily influenced by ethnically solid identities and militaristic political space. In this view, ethnicity and ethnic differences became a significant issue, demarcating political space and society. With this background, it is apparent that the 1985 elections were held against a backdrop of severe hatred, bitterness and mistrust between the ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU, further personified by Mugabe and representing the Shona and Nkomo representing the Ndebele political base. Moyo (1992) confirms that the significant problem of dissidents in Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands province, coupled with the terror of the fifth brigade reprisals, targeted not only the bandits but also civilians residing in these regions, thus openly playing ethnic hostilities between the two political rivals.

In the words of Sithole:

The irony of the 1985 election was the most unbelievable reaction of many ZANU-PF supporters, mainly women and youths in urban areas. A few days after news of the election victory, they went on a rampage, beating up and evicting members of the opposition parties from their houses. Families and their belongings were thrown out onto the streets. Several people were killed in this post-election violence (Sithole, 1986, p.12).

2.6 Elections in 1990 and the Escalation of Violence

The violent trend of elections continued to be evident in the 1990 election campaign when election-related intimidation and violence were reported in most provinces (CCJP, 1990). Similarly, literature from Sachikonye (2011) suggests that the most notable incident of violence was reported in Gweru, in which opposition candidate Patrick Kombayi, who contested a seat against the then ZANU-PF vice president, Simon Muzenda, was shot along with five other opposition members by individuals among Muzenda's security. In the same way, Makumbe and Compagnon (2000) confirm that violence and voter intimidation were also evident in Manicaland, the political stronghold of opposition candidate Edgar Tekere, whom ZANU-PF considered a threat to one-party state ideology.

It is necessary to state that Edgar Tekere, the then ex-minister of labour and workforce planning, ran against Mugabe as a candidate for the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM). He had been expelled from ZANU-PF following his consistent criticism of corruption. It is, therefore, imperative to note that Tekere was firmly against Mugabe's notion of a one-party state as he noted: "A one-party state was never one of the founding principles of ZANU-PF, and experience in Africa has shown that it brought the evils of Nepotism, corruption and inefficiency" (Kwashirai, 2023; Moyo, 1992). Tekere received unprecedented support for his critique of Mugabe and a one-party state ideology.

As a result, the 1990 election was characterised by violence and massive reports of election rigging in favour of ZANU-PF. In this regard, Sachikonye concurs that to survive violence, most of the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) supporters became known as "the Silent ZUM supporters" who did not wear ZUM regalia, sing any ZUM songs, or Chant ZUM slogans; stayed out of trouble only to cast their vote for ZUM.

In the context of the above, it must be noted that the 1990 elections were also the first to be contested in a single roll, with no separate voting for whites and blacks (Kwashirai, 2023). However, the elections were marred by elements of violence, with reports of intimidation and coercion to mostly opposition members. In this regard, Kwashirai confirms that the ZANU-PF deployed several security departments and paramilitary organisations against opposition members. Literature from Sachikonye further suggests that ZANU-PF abused legislative and judiciary powers to ensure continued stay in power (Sachikonye, 2011). Overall, there were selected incidents of intimidation and violence during the 1990 election campaign. However, this was not a foretaste of better behaviour in the future.

From the above, it can be deduced that the brutality against opposition politics has been a more significant and ongoing element of Zimbabwe's electoral landscape, stretching as far back as the early days of independence. Therefore, it can be said that the phenomenon of violence is deeply rooted in the country's history and thus requires a collective effort from various social groups, such as the ZHOCD, to minimise it. Accordingly, this study is premised on the desire to understand the root causes of the scourge of violence and suggest further ways to mitigate the problem.

2.7 The 1995 Elections and the Officialisation of a One-Party State Ideology

General elections in 1995 were held amid an intense debate on the constitution and the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP). As attested by Kwashirai (2023) and Mlambo (2014), the absence of a robust and viable opposition base made it possible for ZANU-PF to maintain its grip on power. In this regard, I underscore that weak and divided opposition politics existed with the Nkomo-led party being adopted into the ZANU-PF. This effectively saw ZANU-PF riding on a liberation struggle ticket, justifying its stay in power as necessary to protect and promote the legacy of the liberation struggle. In summary, it can be stated that the controversial constitution, coupled with the impact of the newly introduced ESAP, a weak opposition, and manipulation of the electoral process by the state, including the absence of political will to develop a viable voter's roll, essentially characterised the 1995 elections (Kwashirai, 2003). The source of violence during this election was ZANU-PF's intolerance to competitive electoral contests, and the shrinkage of democratic space characterised the 1995 election.

2.8 The 2000 Elections and the Rise of the Competitive Political Landscape

Elections in 2000 followed the same precedence set in the previous elections. In this regard, the 2000 elections are mainly remembered for violent campaigns accompanying the electoral process. As shown by Sachikonye, the election was carried out amid a degree of unprecedented intimidation and recorded the worst violence since independence (Sachikonye, 1999). It can, therefore, be noted that in the 2000 election, the nation witnessed an escalation of violent charged elections unheard of since 1980. However, it must be emphasised that although the period before the elections was marked by violence and intimidation, election day was generally calm. It appears, though, that the widespread violence which resulted in the death of more than thirty people was mainly perpetrated against opposition party members (Sachikonye, 2000).

To put everything in summary, one observer group indicated that “the election violence created an atmosphere of anxiety and fear”. It substantially restricted the exercise of freedoms of opinion, expression, association, Assembly, and movement, as well as the right to be secure from physical harm due to political affiliation. The abilities of political parties and many candidates, predominantly from the opposition, were seriously restricted to campaigning openly and freely. In

this regard, the 2000 elections failed to meet international standards for fair electoral competition” (NDI, 2000). The same sentiments were echoed by international observer groups such as the Commonwealth and the Election Observation Mission.

2.9 The 2002-2023 Elections and the Normalisation of Violence

The 2002 presidential election presented yet another trend of electoral violence following the precedence of violence and intimidation. This saw the opposition MDC challenging the election results at the High Court, citing several irregularities in the electoral process (Mlambo, 2014). The same trend of disputed elections was evident in the 2008 elections. Literature from Mlambo (2014), Auret (2009) and Sachikonye (2003) show that ZANU-PF unleashed state security agents, such as the army and Police, to deny MDC an equal platform to campaign and sell its vision to the citizens. In this regard, the Police disturbed and, in most cases, dispersed every gathering under which the MDC intended to campaign for support in the 2008 election (Auret, 2009).

On 29 March 2008, Zimbabwe held harmonised elections under which the nation was to vote for the president, local government, and parliament. Mlambo (2014) shows that the MDC won 100 parliamentary seats, ZANU-PF got 99, and the other MDC breakaway managed the remaining ten seats. In the presidential race, Morgan Tsvangirai of the MDC got 47.8 percent of the total vote in the election. ZANU-PF’s Robert Mugabe got 43.2 per cent of the total vote; the remainder went to Independent presidential candidate Author Mutambara. However, even though the above were ultimately considered the official election results, the presidential election results were highly contested, with bulk evidence of election rigging in favour of ZANU-PF.

Literature from Mlambo (2014, p.23) confirms that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) took thirty–four days to release the presidential results. This was not seen as a violation of the law because the election code stated that results should be announced within a reasonable period. However, the length of time taken disputed the aspect of reasonability. With the new code, the stipulated waiting period for election results exceeded the new stipulations by five hundred per cent, contradicting the previous issue of reasonable time. This led many to doubt the validity, credibility and reliability of these election results, fearing that ZEC had tempered the results to the disadvantage of Morgan Tsvangirai. The results meant no outright winner, as the constitution states

that a winner should have garnered fifty per cent plus one vote (Chemhuru, 2010). This meant the country needed to hold a presidential election re-run. Also, the law did not give political parties the liberty to combine their results to make an outright win in an election.

In this regard, as Chemhuru (2010) rightly shows, it is pretty telling that having suffered a defeat in the first round of the presidential election, Robert Mugabe and ZANU PF resorted to violence to retain power. Consequently, the country was dragged into a dark phase of electoral violence and experienced the worst human rights abuse after the *Gukurahundi*. Literature from Sachikonye (2011) attests that Government apparatus such as the army, Police, war veterans and ZANU-PF youths and supporters were deployed across the country to ensure ZANU-PF victory.

The murder of many MDC supporters followed this, while thousands were tortured and burned alive, with their houses burnt down (RAU, 2001). Those who survived were left with permanent injuries. For example, their hands were cut off under the famous ‘short sleeve or long sleeve slogan’, a statement ZANU-PF supporters would use to present a choice to MDC supporters on how long they would wish their hands cut. In the words of Chitando and Togarasei (2008), short sleeves meant the hand would be cut from the elbow, while those who chose a long sleeve’ would part ways with their whole hand.

As such, the period has memories that many Zimbabweans at home and abroad do not want to remember. Similarly (RAU, 2011) shows that reports of rape, abduction, and total disappearance of MDC supporters who were never found to this day were registered. In the same way, Morgan Tsvangirai himself was arrested, tortured, and detained, while many of his members of parliament and other leaders were captured and tortured (Chitando & Togarasei, 2008). In short, as (RAU, 2011) rightly puts it, ZANUPF was responsible for severe human rights violations, murder of MDC supporters and cruelty to MDC members.

Realising this, Morgan Tsvangirai withdrew from the presidential election run-off, citing that the political ground was not even as his supporters continued to be brutalised and victimised (Chitando & Togarasei, 2008). In response, Robert Mugabe ran a single-man race in the presidential run-off. Drawing from (Auret, 2009), MDC supporters, mostly in rural areas, were force-marched to vote

for ZANU-PF; they were also forced to renounce their affiliation to MDC if they wanted to stay out of trouble. As a result, Mugabe won the election. However, the African Union (AU) and other regional leaders refused to recognise Mugabe's win as it was marred by violence, murder, and brutality against opposition supporters (Mlambo, 2014). This forced Mugabe to give in to a power-sharing arrangement under the Global Political Agreement, which gave birth to a Government of National Unity in which Morgan Tsvangirai became the first Prime Minister. While Robert Mugabe remained President, Arthur Mutambara became the second prime minister.

Essentially, Auret (2009) holds that the government of National Unity was assigned to create an environment conducive to national healing and political stability. However, this did not happen; contrarily, while the Government of National Unity brought in a visible and undisputable economic turnaround to Zimbabweans, the political environment remained significantly unchanged, and the country remained divided mainly based on political affiliation. Thus, selective application of the law and human rights violations continued even during the time of the Unity Government. Commenting on the above, Sachikonye (2009) confirms that one of the agreed-upon tasks of the Unity government was to implement critical political reforms that included constitutional review so that the following elections would be held in a free, fair, credible and violence-free environment. This was hoped to restore sanity in Zimbabwe's political landscape, resulting in international recognition of the country's election outcome and economic fortunes. Nevertheless, as Sachikonye correctly notes, the implementation of the agreed reforms was met with suspicion by the ruling ZANU-PF and thus continued to drag its feet, resulting in the reforms failing to be implemented. At the same time, those that must be implemented happened much slower than required.

Furthermore, general elections in 2013 and 2018 were also characterised by violence, intimidation and coercion. The two elections were held under a new ZANU-PF administration led by President Mnangagwa, who promised a political turnaround characterised by democracy and respect for human rights. Considering this background, I concur with Mavengano and Chirongoma (2023), who attest that in both elections, most people expected significant change in line with President Mnangagwa's call for peace and promise of a newer political trajectory. However, these two critical elections were not immune to violence and several electoral disputes. In this regard,

Mavengano and Chirongoma show that in both elections, several members of the opposition politics were brutalised, persecuted and murdered on account of their political affiliation.

On the other hand, various electoral irregularities were raised by the main opposition, the CCC, with reports of voter suppression, intimidation and coercion being reported across the country. Even so, there continue to be alarming concerns about election rigging and the lack of independence of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, as alluded to by Mlambo (2014). These and many other concerns and disputes saw the 2013 and 2018 elections following the violent precedence set in most post-independence elections. This has significantly affected the country's regional and international investors.

However, the literature above has only focused on the history of Zimbabwe as a country and its account of elections without specific suggestions on what needs to be done to reduce the urge for violent means to power. While this study appreciates this body of literature, it makes deliberate steps towards addressing or otherwise minimising the problem of electoral violence. Thus, the study brings in the contribution of other social movements, such as Christian groups and ecclesiastical structures, like the ZHOCD, whose theology in morality and peace initiatives can be utilised in addressing the problem of electoral violence.

2.10 Defining Electoral Violence

The phenomenon of electoral violence has been defined in various ways by various scholars. Because of this understanding, it becomes necessary for this study to clarify what the phenomenon means in the context of this study. Thus, electoral violence in the context of this study denotes the intentional use of political actors' aggression against individuals, properties, and infrastructure to manipulate electoral processes and influence electoral outcomes (Bekoe, 2012; Harish & Toha, 2019). In this way, electoral violence is a subset of political violence identified by its target, timing, offenders, victims, and methods (Bakoe 2012, 2). Additional definitions of it include "any random or organised act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail, or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine delay or to otherwise influence an electoral process" (Fischer, 2002, p. 3), "acts or threats of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to effect an electoral process that arises in the context of electoral competition" (Leakso, 2007, p.227). It frequently entails the

instrumental use of coercion; examples include the murder of political candidates and their supporters, conflicts between rival groups, riots, threats, intimidation and coercion of rivals, voters, and or electoral officials, property destruction, forcible eviction, and unlawful detention (Laakso, 2007; Sisk, 2008; UNDP, 2009). It can, therefore, be deduced that electoral violence uses force and coercion against electoral actors and objects in the electoral competition.

A growing literature body on electoral violence, such as Birch (2018), Straus & Taylor, (2012), Birch (2020), Utas (2012) and Kovacs (2015), attests that the phenomenon of electoral violence can be observed from diverse sources throughout different stages of the electoral cycle such as pre-electoral and post-electoral violence. In this view, electoral violence can target various actors, including candidates, activists, poll workers, election observers, journalists and voters (Ron, 2011). Similarly, Seeberg, Wahman, and Skaaning (2018) and Taylor, Pevehouse, and Straus (2017) add that these include protests to influence the announcement of results and voter registration. In this case, it can be said that violence is strategically used as an alternative to voter mobilisation (Masengwe, Makuvaza & Dube 2021). Electoral violence, however, is more than just a strategy. It is driven by other underlying dynamics, such as sociopolitical and economic factors, including deep-rooted grievances, ethnic or religious tensions, economic inequalities, or political exclusion (Ünal, 2016). These practices undermine democratic institutions, erode public trust in elections, and perpetuate a culture of violence in politics. In this respect, “violence, even at levels below that which is witnessed in the most egregious cases, undermines the democratic character of elections by substituting free choice with coercion and by deterring participation”. In this way, Birch affirms that when force intrudes into electoral processes, something is seriously amiss with democratic institutions” (Birch, 2020, p.4). Correspondingly, Birch and Muchlinski (2018), writing on Electoral Violence Prevention in Kenya and Sub-Saharan Africa, further show that force and coercion distort the essence of an election process.

According to recent studies, electoral violence disproportionately affects electoral authoritarian nations worldwide, particularly those in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa (Birch & Muchlinski, 2017). However, it remains paramount to note that in Africa, only ‘lethal violence’ is covered in the media (Straus & Taylor, 2012), yet there are more casualties that can escalate the conflict into a civil war (Christensen & Utas, 2008; Ron, 2001). Thus, various datasets indicate that 78% of

Countries are at Risk of Electoral Violence (CREV) (Birch & Muchlinski, 2017). In the Electoral Contention and Violence (ECAV), over 50% witness more than three violent events in an election, and approximately 30% are deadly violence (Daxecker, Amicarelli & Jung, 2019), thus making violence a strategic feature of electoral manipulation.

2.11 Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa

Burchard (2015, p.50), in Introduction of *The Everyday Politics of Electoral Violence*, unveils the nature of electoral violence and the experiences of opposition politics across Africa. In this regard, I concur with Burchard that a growing body of literature suggests that more than half of African states have experienced electoral violence in the post-Cold War period. This position is further attested by the reality of electoral violence globally, regionally and locally. On this basis, it is imperative to note that recently held elections in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Iraq, Kenya, Nigeria, and Pakistan were marred by alarming levels of electoral violence manifesting in various forms (Birch, 2020, p.3).

It is, however, essential to note that, beyond the relatively few cases of genocide, widespread fear and insecurity attract international headlines, such as Kenya in 2007, Zimbabwe in 2008, and Cote d'Ivoire (2010). However, a more common scenario has been that of isolated cases of violence, harassment, and widespread coercive intimidation of both candidates and voters, including harassment, imprisonment, abductions and assassinations, violent riots and clashes between supporters or security forces of the competing parties (Birch, 2020, p.3). Electoral violence of such magnitude has been witnessed in countries such as Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Guinea, Madagascar, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda among others (Status & Taylor, 2012).

It must be noted that electoral violence has also resulted in or accompanied by a military takeover of the state, such as the coup detats staged in Guinea Bissau and Mali in 2012 (Burchard, 1015). In addition, Christensen and Utas (2016) confirm that, in some exceptional cases, electoral violence has resulted in civil wars, as demonstrated by the Burundi case in 2015. It can be noted, therefore, that while such cases are rare, they carry severe effects that affect neighbouring countries

through massive displacement of people, migration, and the increasing circulation of arms in already volatile regions (Klaus & Mitchell, 2015).

In the case of Zimbabwe, electoral violence has resulted in severe economic hardships that have left no stone untouched (Makumbe, 2006). In this regard, most economically active citizens have left the country for neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Botswana, and Zambia. Some have gone as far as the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, among others, in search of greener pastures as unemployment, inflation and currency volatility continued to affect the economy.

In this regard, literature from Themner shows that several African countries have witnessed the emergence of 'War Lord democrats', former military personnel or leaders of armed struggle groups who subsequently perpetrate electoral violence, particularly to their political opponents (Themner, 2017). This is especially evident in Zimbabwe, wherein former liberation fighters affectionately known as 'war veterans' have demonstrated their allegiance and loyalty to the ruling ZANU-PF party through violently charged electoral campaigns (Makumbe, 2006). The same can be said in Kenya, Zambia, South Africa and Uganda, wherein former liberation struggle fighters have continued to unleash fear, confusion and uncertainties among citizens to the advantage of ruling parties (Makumbe, 2006).

It can, therefore, be deduced that the use of force, intimidation and voter suppression by former liberation fighters is rampant in African democracies. In most cases, opposition leaders are jailed without trial. Opposition party rallies and campaigns are violently interrupted and disrupted by security forces or party supporters who are strategically and purposefully transported to various designated places (Kavacs, 2015). In addition, opposition party offices and symbols are vandalised and destroyed (Bjarnesen, 2018).

Writing on the escalation of electoral violence in Africa, Kovacs attests that the quest to ensure an extended stay in power has seen the engagement of politicians into precarious relationships with militia youth wings, militia, or other state security agents, resulting in violence (Kavacs, 2015).

In this regard, Hoglund enumerates that literature on African electoral violence highlights the precariousness of the institutional framework surrounding elections. Thus, the stakes of electoral contests may precipitate violent manipulation of electoral competition (Hogland, 2009; Salehyan & Linebarger, 2015). Therefore, it can be alluded that electoral violence seeks to substitute the people's free choice, replacing it with deliberate coercion and closure of the democratic space, making it impossible for contestants to participate peacefully without deterrence. Correspondingly, Burchard affirms that when force intrudes into electoral processes, it ultimately undermines the integrity and credibility of the institution of election (Burchard, 2015, p.50). Given the above, it stands to reason that various factors that cause electoral violence need to be explored.

2.12 Causes of Electoral Violence

While there are different viewpoints on the causes of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, it is a fact that most violence has a close relationship with the frustration emanating from the country's colonial history. Given the above, it stands to reason that the causes of electoral violence in Africa are as follows: *inattention to land rights, violent instigation by political actors, perpetration by politically connected gangs, the use of violence by the state, institutional failure and political allegiances that are based from ethnic divisions, the trajectory of democratic transition, the depth of social cleavages and economic stress* (Okpotor, 2015, p.5). It can therefore allude that there are multifaceted causes for electoral violence ranging from exclusionary militant politics to manipulation of the election itself, resulting in electoral fraud and flawed elections. In this regard, the causes of electoral violence can further be broadly divided into two categories: Firstly, structural factors related to underlying power structures prevalent in new and emerging democracies, such as informal patronage systems, poor governance, exclusionary politics and the socio-economic uncertainties of losing political power in bureaucratic and centralised power systems. Second, factors related to the electoral process and the electoral contest, such as failed or flawed elections, election fraud, and weak or manipulated institutional rules governing the electoral process (Adolfo et al., 2012). In the case of Zimbabwe, this further resembles the composition of the ZEC staff, who seem to be related and thus aligned with the ruling ZANU-PF. It can further be exhibited in electoral processes such as voter registration. Therefore, it becomes necessary that the study focuses on the causes of electoral violence in Zimbabwe.

2.12.1 Poverty

The World Bank defines poverty as “a pronounced deprivation in well-being where well-being can be measured by an individual’s possession of income, health, nutrition, education, assets, housing, and certain rights in a society such as freedom of speech and expression (United Nations, 2010, p.9). Poverty, thus, can further be understood as one’s lack of opportunities, powerlessness and vulnerability. Accordingly, one is unable or struggles to purchase basic consumption needs. In this regard, Malaba classified Zimbabwean poverty as a multi-dimensional phenomenon which, in addition to low incomes, is reflected in malnutrition, poor health, low literacy level, low wages, lack of access to safe housing, water, sanitation and adequate clothing, housing and low living conditions. Therefore, poverty in Zimbabwe is highly correlated with social exclusion, marginalisation, vulnerability, powerlessness, isolation and other socio-economic, political and cultural dimensions of deprivation. (Malaba, 2006, p.1) in addition, poverty entails stress, translating to a thousand petty humiliations and hardships. As put down by Malaba, the poor’s access to essential services is very limited because they cannot pay for them; people with low incomes are powerless, which subjects them to oppression by those who have power (Malaba, 2005). As indicated above, poverty in Zimbabwe is intertwined with the socio-economic and political struggles of the day. In this study, I am interested in the interlocking relationship between poverty and electoral violence. Thus, it can be said that there exists a closely tied relationship between electoral violence and poverty. Currently, Zimbabweans are living in extreme poverty, manifesting in the form of unemployment, corruption, and social injustice. Within this background, the poor continue to be used by the rich politicians as foot soldiers of electoral violence in exchange for material possessions.

It, therefore, stands to reason that poverty is still a major contributing cause of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. As demonstrated in several settings, including Kenya and Uganda (Burch and Muchlinski, 2018), electoral violence in Zimbabwe is typically instigated by politicians who, in exchange for cash incentives, hire primarily young people who are jobless and inebriated to inflict violence on their political opponents. This idea has gained more traction among other social groups such as churches, pastors, women and informal traders.

2.12.2 Unresolved Previous Conflicts

Unresolved previous conflicts are another leading factor of electoral violence. As shown by (Okpotor, 2015, 5), disputes around land civil wars, socio-economic marginalisation, and lingering post-conflict grudges frequently contribute to and exacerbate electoral violence. On this basis, I concur with Birch that localised conflicts amplify the possibilities for elites to recruit and mobilise people for electoral violence (Birch, 2020, p.4). This position is also confirmed by Bakoe, citing that the quest to strengthen and support land reforms is a primary factor in the prevention of electoral violence. Land origin and hereditary rights are among African political life's most crucial and contested aspects. At the same time, Sachikonye (2009) agrees that unresolved land disputes are often integral to a more significant pattern of political, social and economic inequalities.

Given the above, it needs to be noted that Zimbabwe is a country trapped in a series of never-solved conflicts; these can be located throughout Zimbabwe's historical epochs. Mlambo (2004) shows that Zimbabwe's first encounter with conflict was during the colonial regime, during which the nation faced severe oppression from the British government. It is sad, though, that this trend of violence was inherited by the nationalist movements upon independence, as witnessed by the post-independence conflicts such as the *Gukurahundi* 1983-1987 and only came to an end through the signing of the Unity Accord in 1987 (Chemhuru, 2010). Chemhuru further shows that the unity accord was not only expected to end the civil war between the ZAPU and ZANU but was hoped to address the effects of the civil war to unite the deeply divided society. However, little has been done to ensure healing and reconciliation between the predominantly Shona-led Party (ZANU) and the Ndebele-led Party (ZAPU).

Literature from Mlambo (2004) and Sachikonye (2009) affirms that ZANU-PF has offered no official apology for the genocide. Therefore, it stands to reason that while the actual conflict might have ended and a cosmetic agreement between political elites has been signed, the actual effects and gravity of the conflict, especially among grassroots communities, remain largely unaddressed. This is further testified by the hatred and animosity that currently exists between the Shona and the Ndebele tribe, manifesting in sports, infrastructure and national development. It is thus necessary to state that the failure to address the effect of the post-independence conflict has culminated in anger and the urge for vengeance. Therefore, I concur with Straus & Taylor (2012),

Chemhuru (2010) and Bakoe (2012) that unresolved conflicts characteristically resurface in another form. In this view, electoral violence provides a platform for the manifestation of the already existing hatred amongst Zimbabweans. Hence, it can be noted that Zimbabwe's post-independence elections continued to be defined by violence and hatred.

While the above discussion clearly articulates Zimbabwe's political and electoral trajectory, which is shrouded amidst a series of unresolved conflicts, the literature pays little or no attention to the Church's celebrated legacy in conflict resolution and management. Considering this, I argue that the Zimbabwean Church has a long, traceable history of conflict resolution from the colonial period, the independence era, and contemporary Zimbabwe. I, therefore, make a strong case that objective efforts towards conflict resolution in Zimbabwe cannot be adequate without considering the contribution of faith-based communities such as the ZHOCD. Thus, with this understanding, this study discusses the contribution of the ZHOCD to the cause of electoral violence in Zimbabwe.

2.12.3 Ethnicity and Tribalism

Literature on electoral violence, such as Birch (2024), Mlambo (2020), Birch (2018), and Straus & Taylor, (2012), attest that ethnicity and ethnic differences are some of the leading factors of electoral violence in most parts of Africa. Similarly, scholars like Burchard insist that electoral violence is intrinsically intertwined with ethnicity.

Ethnicity is intrinsically intertwined with the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. Thus, ethnicity should be considered the key driver of electoral violence in most parts of Africa. Scholars such as Dercon and Romero (2012) confirm that ethnicity interacts with powerful influences, such as the perception of a flawed electoral process, which then triggers violence across the political divide. At the same time, Snyder (2000) links the risk of ethnic violence during democratisation to elite incentives to foment exclusionary identities. Correspondingly, Rabushka and Shepsle concur that leaders use extremist nationalist rhetoric and ethnic outbidding to foster political support, build large voter coalitions, and retain political power when political competition renders their positions insecure (Rabushka & Shepsle, 1972; Mann, 2005). Similarly, Snyder (2000) concurs that, rather than resulting from ethnic animosity and deep-seated group rivalries that

preceded the introduction of democratic institutions, the upsurge in electoral violence is linked to reckless elite manipulation in the early phases of electoral democracy.

Given the above, it can be said that ethnicity remains an ingredient of electoral violence in most parts of Zimbabwe. It is necessary, however, to state that even though there are many different ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, only the Shona and the Ndebele tribes are particularly well-known for their conflicts, animosity, and ongoing quest for dominance. The ethnic rage between the Shona and the Ndebele tribes can be traced as far back as the pre-colonial era when the Ndebele tribe, originally from the Nguni people in modern-day South Africa, came to settle in Zimbabwe under the leadership of Mzilikazi (Bhebhe, 1980, Beach, 2009, p.2). The coming of the Ndebele tribe was encountered by some degree of resistance from an already weaker Shona state called the Rozvi State. Given the strength of the Mzilikazi's army, it did not take them long to conquer and overthrow the Shona (Rozvi people). At the same time, using the strength of his army, Mzilikazi and the Ndebele people constantly practised raiding among the Shona people, taking with them livestock, grain, women, and strong young men to be recruited into the Ndebele army. In this regard, it is apparent that the Ndebele tribe exercised their strong rule upon the predominantly Shona communities, allowing only the Ndebele to marry Shona women and not vice versa.

The animosity between these two tribes reached its peak in post-independence Zimbabwe in what came to be known as the *Gukurahundi*, at the same, continued into the turn of the millennium into contemporary Zimbabwe. In all these epochs, electoral violence has made it apparent that the notion of ethnicity is firmly intertwined. In this regard, many authoritarian leaders in Africa have politicised ethnicity to foment political support and to prevent challenges to their rule. Electoral violence remains a salient feature of electoral politics (Cheeseman et al., 2017).

However, the study insists that the problem of ethnicity, which is a crucial ingredient to the problem of electoral violence, is something that the ZHOCD can be useful in addressing. For instance, the ZHOCD has churches nationwide, including in the Ndebele and the Shona territories. To this end, the ZHOCD has made notable efforts to integrate both tribes in its leadership, which speaks to its international efforts to address the tribal rage between the Shona and Ndebele tribes. Given the above, I argue in this study that the ZHOCD remains a key player in resolving the

problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. Therefore, this study discusses the ZHOCD's place in Zimbabwe's electoral trajectory, showing how the theology of the ZHOCD can be instrumental in the discussion of electoral violence.

2.12.4 Resistance to Multi-Party Ideology

Electoral violence continues to manifest within the broad-based idea of exclusionary politics and resistance to multi-party politics. Thus, Bjarnesen insists that in most African countries, electoral violence is motivated by the desire to safeguard a 'one-party state' ideology. Writing on electoral violence in Kenya, Bjarnesen (2018) underscores that, from 1970 up to 1992, the Kenyan African National Union (KANU) was the sole political party running the Kenyan state. The first president, Jomo Kenyatta, established a de facto one-party rule extended after he died in 1978 (Bjarnesen, 2018, p.31; Mueller, 2014). Similarly, Daniel Moi, the successor of Jomo Kenyatta, firmly resisted the legalisation of opposition parties, citing that this would usher in tribal conflict and disrupt national unity (Barkan, 1993, p.90).

In this way, Kenyan elections conducted since 1992, when both internal and international calls for a multi-party state were tense, have been with violence resulting in the death and displacement of people (Hoglund, 2009; Salehyan & Linebarger, 2015). Thus, it can be alluded that the rise of a multi-party system created hatred and animosity. The opposition members suffered from pervasive factionalism, and its political leaders were divided by ethnicity and personal conflicts (Mueller, 2014). Accordingly, most African liberation struggle parties have sought to perpetuate and deliberately push towards a one-party-state ideology. For example, the civil war in Zimbabwe ended with a 'Unity Agreement' signed between the two rival political parties, ZANU, led by Robert Mugabe and ZAPU, by Joshua Nkomo, respectively. This rendered Zimbabwe a de facto one-party state in which opposition politics was met with resistance and hatred (Mlambo, 2014).

However, it is necessary to point out that most African countries originate from kingdoms and chiefdoms under which the leadership of a community rests upon the king, whose authority and decisions cannot be questioned or opposed. Thus, the emergence of electoral democratic processes posed a significant threat to the institution of traditional leadership, its selection, and processes.

On this basis, Bjarnesen, writing on Violence in African Elections, cites that the rise of multi-party ideology in post-independent Sub-Saharan Africa has led to competition and contestations between various political divides as each party contests for power (Bjarnesen, 2018). However, with the deteriorating space for traditional means of electoral fraud and manipulation, contending political elites have resorted to coercive and intimidating tactics to influence the electoral process and outcome (Bjarnesen, 2018). In this context, Utas argues that political elections in many parts of the developing world, especially Africa, remain primarily characterised by the pervasiveness of patronage politics (Utas, 2012). The exact position is echoed by Kovacs (2015), affirming that electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa is marked by harassment, intimidation, persecution, and violence against members of opposition politics.

Similarly, elections are known in Zimbabwe to incite animosity, resentment, and rage toward opposition politics. It is apparent, therefore, that Zimbabwean elections have been a vehicle for expressing hate and retaliation against others, particularly against opposition political figures and leaders. Given the above, it is sufficient to note the prevalence of electoral violence globally and exclusionary politics towards the other. Moreover, especially across the continent of Africa, warrants the urgency of the Church's *Kairos* theology in supporting the creation of legitimate and effective electoral frameworks and institutions, implementing reforms to lower election stakes, promote devolution of powers, raise public socio-economic status, and develop strategies that prevent and manage electoral violence, safeguards the identity of elections, fosters peace, and ensures peaceful transfer power.

2.12.5 Corruption

Corruption is one of the leading factors of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, influencing the political landscape and the behaviour of various stakeholders. Corruption in Zimbabwe permeates the electoral processes, including voter registration, ballot tampering, and using state resources for political gains. In addition, corrupt activities in Zimbabwe often carry onboard intimidation tactics in which political parties or candidates use violence or threats to coerce voters. This creates a climate of fear, discouraging free and fair participation in elections and often leading to violent confrontations. Similarly, corruption is evident in resource allocation and distribution.

In many cases, state resources are diverted for political purposes, creating a favourable environment for the ruling party to maintain power through proximity to state finances. This imbalance has often provoked opposition parties and their supporters to react, resulting in violent clashes. Furthermore, corruption is also present in Zimbabwe's judiciary system, which often leads to impunity for violent actors, especially those linked to the ruling ZANU-PF party.

To this end, there have been growing calls and lamentations over the law enforcement and judiciary processes that are grossly compromised, wherein those who engage in electoral violence often escape accountability, which then further perpetuates a cycle of violence. Further, corruption fosters a system of patronage, where political loyalty is rewarded with resources and positions. This leads to factionalism and further promotes the escalation of tension, thus contributing immensely to violent confrontations during elections. In the same way, corruption leads to public disillusionment with the political system. When citizens feel that their votes do not count or that the electoral system is rigged, frustration can boil over and breed violence, especially among the disenfranchised populace. It can, therefore, be said that corruption in Zimbabwe not only undermines the integrity of the country's elections but also breeds an environment ripe for violent confrontations and disputes as various groups or individuals respond to perceived injustices and power imbalances, which effectively increases hatred, violence and instability.

2.12.6 Poor Leadership

Poor leadership remains another contributing factor to the rise of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. Poor leadership gives rise to a lack of trust and confidence. It has become increasingly accurate that most Zimbabwean citizens have lost trust in the leadership of the ruling ZANU-PF party; this has further heightened tensions, forcing citizens to form their resistance, which in most cases leads to confrontations and violence. In the same way, poor leadership often results in manipulating electoral processes, such as voter intimidation, rigging and other unfair practices.

This often incites anger and frustration among opposition supporters, culminating in violence. Other factors include partisan security forces, which demonstrate a partisan approach in discharging security duties. In Zimbabwe, there is a widespread outcry over the partisan nature of the security forces whose support for the ruling party is evident. Even so, poor leadership in

Zimbabwe has often been followed by a deep sense of hatred towards the dissents. This has seen the intimidation, torture, and, in some cases, deaths of opposition party supporters. Given the above, it can be deduced that poor leaders can create an environment ripe for electoral violence by fostering distrust, manipulating electoral processes, and engaging in suppression and failure to address the needs and grievances of the populace.

2.12.7 Lack of Independence and Credibility of the Electoral Bodies

The lack of independence, credibility and impartiality from independent electoral bodies has notably been a contributing factor to the scourge of electoral violence. Elections in most of Sub-Saharan Africa are overseen by independent electoral bodies that aim to conduct free, fair, and credible elections. Hence, it is sufficient to emphasise that Election Management bodies strengthen democratic principles to guarantee the constitutionality and legality of electoral conduct (utas, 2016).

The ZEC manages the election process in Zimbabwe. Thus, ZEC oversees presidential, parliamentary, and council elections to ensure fairness, transparency, and integrity. According to its responsibilities, the process starts with voter education, registration, cleaning and maintenance, polling station organisation, verifying the validity of votes, and announcing the results (Chigora & Chilunjika, 2016).

The absence of impartiality and autonomy from ZEC, Zimbabwe's election oversight authority, exacerbates the country's electoral disputes, giving rise to electoral violence. Therefore, it can be stated that ZEC has not acted impartially or transparently as observers at polling stations and has yet to do so regarding the production of ballots by Print Flow and Fidelity Printers (Chikwawawa 2019, 12). Therefore, it makes sense to state that voters' confidence in fair and legitimate election outcomes has further been shuttered by controversial appointments at ZEC, where individuals directly or indirectly affiliated with the ruling ZANU-PF comprise most of the staff. As such, ZEC has continued to systemically exclude and downplay the concerns of the opposition politics, such as the publication of the voter's role, timely displaying of electoral results outside polling stations and availability of adequate voting material across all polling stations. Consequently, in several elections, ZEC has been accused of vote rigging and suppression to the advantage of the ZANU-

PF party. In this way, ZEC has been taken to court in several elections to resolve disputes about how elections were conducted and results announced.

From the above, it can be alluded, therefore, that the failure of ZEC to superintend a credible and transparent election process has created a sense of mistrust and doubt amongst citizens, leaving many with no option but to employ violent means of forcing ZEC either to announce the results or to order a recount of elections. Based on this, several cases of electoral violence directly linked to ZEC's conduct during elections have been recorded. It is, therefore, apparent that ZEC's conduct during elections has also contributed immensely to the scourge of electoral violence.

Based on the above, widespread electoral violence can be inferred to be a sign of resistance to competitive and democratic elections to protect one-party state ideology.

2.13 The Nature of Electoral Violence

Electoral violence is an essential subject in contemporary democracy and politics. Therefore, it is imperative to understand that a study of electoral violence is incomplete without a deeper understanding of how the phenomenon has manifested over the years. It therefore becomes necessary to note that electoral violence in Zimbabwe can be categorised into three distinct phases: violence before, during, and after elections. As the discussion notes, these three phases can further present various sub-forms. It is thus appropriate at this juncture to discuss these phases.

Pre-electoral violence refers to acts of violence before an election occurs. This form of electoral violence aims to influence the electoral process, shape the political landscape, and intimidate opponents (Amnesty International, 2023a). Pre-electoral violence can manifest in various ways, such as intimidation and threats, political intolerance, disruption of campaign activities and voter suppression. These activities will be discussed in close reference to the experiences of political parties in southern Africa, especially in Zimbabwe.

2.13.1 Intimidation and Threats

Literature from Amnesty International (2023), Sachikonye (2004) and Ndlovu (2018) makes it clear that ZANU-PF has predominantly used intimidation tactics, threats, or harassment to

dissuade opposition candidates or voters from participating in the electoral process. To this end, different forms of physical violence have widely been reported in 2005, 2008, 2018 and 2023 run-up to general elections by local and international observers, where opposition activities have been discouraged by barring their rallies and gatherings using state security forces (Amnesty International, 2023a). In this regard, state-sponsored violence has primarily depended on the police and military to disrupt opposition campaigns and suppress dissenting voices, as well as the use of the courts to press oppressive charges and judgments on opposition candidates and supporters. To this end, reports of excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests, and torture have been documented during election periods (Amnesty International, 2023b, c).

Literature from Reuters (2023) confirms that in the recent run-up to harmonised general elections, ZANU PF has been accused of using legal and administrative mechanisms to hinder or limit the ability of opposition candidates to participate, campaign or gain support for the elections using restrictive electoral laws, biased electoral commission, and targeted disqualification of opposition candidates based on technicalities (Reuters, 2023). This usually exerted control over state-owned media to limit opposition access to public platforms, which promotes a biased narrative favouring the ruling party (Conroy-Krutz, 2020). To this end, opposition candidates have faced restrictions in obtaining media coverage, while state-controlled media has been used to discredit and demonise opposition figures (Staff Reporter, 2023; Sachikonye, 2004). This has given rise to the use of user-generated media, such as social media, which has diffused the rate of disinformation by the state. This is besides voter intimidation involving voter registration irregularities, voter roll manipulation, and targeted intimidation of opposition supporters in constituencies or the monitoring of polling stations to create an atmosphere of fear and coercion (UN, n.d.). In this context, the complexity of electoral challenges has been shown by criticisms from opposition parties, civil society organisations, and international observers (Demmelhuber & Youngs, 2023).

2.13.2 Political Intolerance

In Zimbabwe, pre-electoral violence has often arisen from deep-seated political tensions and intolerance. These clashes always rise between rival political factions (intraparty) or parties (interparty), often instigated by inflammatory rhetoric or provocative actions (Amnesty International, 2023a). In this landscape, as has happened in other countries of the region, ZANU

PF has had opposing forces led by different politicians, and similarly, this has happened in the MDC (Shale & Gerenge, 2021). In this political landscape, clashes posed significant challenges to the political stability and democratic processes in Zimbabwe through inflammatory rhetoric, provocative actions, the problem of civilians, and the problem of public institutions, lack of democracy and lack of dialogue to resolve conflict (Mbah et al., 2019).

To this end, political leaders and their supporters from different factions in Zimbabwe have been known to employ inflammatory rhetoric, using language that is divisive, derogatory, or incites hostility towards rival factions. In this regard, ZANU PF has often been at the centre of such rhetoric, heightening tensions, fueling animosities, and contributing to a hostile political environment, especially towards general elections (Weedon, 2021). In response, opposing forces have often engaged in equally provocative actions, such as demonstrations, protests, or public gatherings organised by rival political factions or political parties, thus escalating tensions and increasing the likelihood of political clashes. In this sense, members of opposing political parties or factions have frequently engaged in violent altercations with one another because of polarising speech and provocative behaviour that shape public opinion and deepen divisions, making it challenging to find common ground for communication and peaceful coexistence (Hanna, Vanclay, Langdon & Arts, 2016).

Further, the response of state institutions such as the police, the judiciary and other security forces have fueled rather than controlled rival political clashes. Accordingly, Sachikonye (2009) and Chemhuru (2010) confirm that the response lacked impartiality and professionalism in maintaining law and order, protecting citizens' rights, and preventing violence (diffuse tensions). It can be noted, therefore, that the clashes by the security departments, unfortunately, undermine democratic processes by limiting the space for peaceful political competition and the free expression of political views (Dinnen, 2000). In this way, electoral violence or intimidation has often restricted factions or political parties from participating in politics, deterred individuals from engaging politically, and eroded trust in democratic institutions. These challenges can be resolved using constructive dialogue, mediated negotiations, and conflict resolution mechanisms between rival political factions and parties (Neblo et al., 2018). These mechanisms can engage in meaningful

discussions and promote a culture of tolerance and respect for different political views to help reduce tensions and prevent violence.

2.12.3 Disruption of Campaign Activities

Acts of violence can be employed to disrupt or sabotage campaign activities of political rivalries. This can involve damaging campaign materials, attacking rallies or public gatherings, or preventing candidates from reaching their constituencies (Kwashirai, 2023). In addition, Kwashirai (2023) shows that in Zimbabwe, campaign materials like posters, banners, and billboards belonging to opposition parties have often been vandalised or destroyed by political opponents. This negatively impacts the visibility and outreach of opposing candidates, making it more challenging for them to convey their messages to the electorate (Ndlovu, 2018; AllAfrica.com, 2008).

In this regard, opposition factions or parties have been attacked using physical assaults on supporters, disruption of speeches, or the use of force to disperse or intimidate attendees (Ndlovu, 2018). Opposition candidates, thus, have often been restricted from reaching their constituencies due to roadblocks, restrictions on movement, or other tactics that hinder their ability to campaign effectively. Such actions have limited candidates' interactions with voters, denied them access to critical campaign areas, and undermined their electoral prospects (Kwashirai, 2023; Smyth et al., 2019). This has been accompanied by reports of intimidation and harassment targeting opposition candidates, supporters, and volunteers involving threats, verbal abuse and physical violence, thus creating an atmosphere of fear and coercion that hampers the democratic process. Furthermore, the perception of state complicity or inaction in addressing such incidents has eroded people's trust in public institutions and deepened political polarisation (Bloomfield et al., 2003).

Political violence in Zimbabwe has often been influenced by multiple factors, including historical grievances, power dynamics, and social tensions; hence, not all acts of violence during campaign activities could be attributed to ZANU PF (Kwashirai, 2023). Given the above, electoral violence requires government commitment to fostering a peaceful and inclusive political environment for all political parties to campaign and engage with voters freely and without fear of violence or intimidation.

2.13.4 Voter Suppression

Pre-electoral violence has been used in Zimbabwe to suppress voter turnout in rural areas and among specific demographics of opposition strongholds. This often involves intimidating or threatening potential voters, restricting their access to polling stations, or manipulating voter registration processes, creating an environment of fear that hinders the participation of specific groups or individuals. To this end, potential voters for opposition parties have been intimidated and threatened to dissuade them from participating in the electoral process through targeted violence, verbal abuse, or direct threats against individuals and their families. Such tactics create a climate of fear, making people reluctant to exercise their right to vote (Sachikonye, 2011).

In some instances, there have been reports of restrictions on access to polling stations, particularly in opposition strongholds. These restrictions include roadblocks or checkpoints that deter voters from reaching their designated polling stations. Therefore, it can be alluded that by impeding voters' physical access, the goal is to reduce turnout in specific areas (Matiashe, 2023).

Similarly, another way to suppress voter turnout is by manipulating the voter registration process. This can involve biased registration practices, such as selectively targeting or excluding specific demographics or opposition-leaning constituencies. Eligible voters may be disenfranchised by manipulating the registration process or face difficulties casting their votes (ACLU, 2019). Furthermore, efforts to educate and mobilise voters can be disrupted through acts of violence or intimidation. Even so, civil society organisations, opposition parties, and independent groups engaged in voter education campaigns may face obstacles, such as threats to their safety or disruptions of their activities. These disruptions limit the dissemination of information and can discourage potential voters from engaging in the electoral process (Kriger, 2005).

In this regard, the suppression of voter turnout undermines the principles of democracy, as it restricts the ability of citizens to express their political preferences freely. Thus, creating an environment that ensures democracy, safety, and security of voters entails the promotion of inclusivity and upholding the integrity of electoral processes (Van Ham & Lindberg, 2015). However, it is necessary to underscore that these tactics are not unique to Zimbabwe and can be

employed in various contexts where there is a desire to manipulate or control the outcome of an election.

2.13.5 Voter Intimidation

In the context of Zimbabwe, the tactic of intimidating voters and preventing them from exercising their right to vote freely by ZANU PF militias during periods of elections has been documented (Nenge, 2018). This involves physical threats, coercion, or harassment targeting specific individuals or groups based on their political affiliations, ethnicity, or other factors. Such acts aim to suppress the votes of specific population segments and manipulate the electoral outcome (Jongman, 2017).

To this end, ZANU PF supporters have often been accompanied by youth militia groups such as the infamous “Green Bombers,” the affectionate “Chipangano”, who reportedly have engaged in acts of violence and intimidation towards opposition supporters (Reeler, 2003). This has involved physical attacks, property destruction, or threats of violence against individuals and their families. These actions create an atmosphere of fear, making it difficult for opposition supporters to participate in the electoral process. This has further led to the accusation of ZANU PF as targeting specific individuals or groups based on their political affiliations, ethnicity, and other factors. Wasosa shows that opposition supporters, activists, and human rights defenders have faced harassment, surveillance, and discrimination. This includes arbitrary arrests, detention, or denying fundamental rights and services (Wasosa, 2023).

Recently, ZANU PF has been accused of disrupting opposition rallies, public gatherings, and campaign activities. This involved deploying state security forces to disperse or intimidate opposition supporters, confiscate campaign materials, or deny them permits to hold rallies in certain areas (LeBas, 2006), thus limiting its ability to mobilise support and connect with voters. Further, ZANU PF has been accused of manipulating electoral processes to suppress the votes of opposition supporters. This includes biased voter registration practices, such as selectively targeting or excluding opposition-leaning constituencies (News24, 2023). There have also been allegations of voter roll irregularities, including deceased individuals on voter lists and the slashing

of existing names for known opposition supporters to undermine the integrity of the electoral process and deter potential voters (Wasosa, 2023).

These actions by ZANU PF are widely criticised as tactics aimed at suppressing opposition support, consolidating power, and maintaining ZANU PF's dominance in Zimbabwean politics. Voter intimidation and suppression undermine the principles of free and fair elections, restrict democratic participation, and limit citizens' ability to express their political preferences without fear (Arbab, 2006).

2.13.6 Clashes Between Political Supporters

There have also been reported clashes between ZANU PF supporters and the MDC, as well as some such ugly clashes between ZANU PF and the CCC (Zimeye, 2023). These clashes are often fueled by political tensions, rivalries, and sometimes manipulation of emotions and perceptions by political actors, with severe fatalities from armed attacks. Clashes usually begin as verbal altercations or confrontations at campaign rallies, public gatherings, or polling stations (African Union Panel of the Wise, 2010). They quickly escalated into fights involving fists, stones, or other makeshift weapons. In some cases, firearms or other deadly weapons are used, resulting in serious injuries that call for the involvement of the police.

While the fights often stem from deep-rooted political divisions and histories of political antagonisms by passionate supporters of rival parties, they are often heightened by other sociopolitical and economic issues that trigger emotions and willingness to engage physically (Macheka, 2022). Interestingly, while ZANU PF has been blamed for triggering most of the fights in the past, it is also evident that members of the opposition have also been responsible for some cases of violence.

This reality has called for political leaders to reconsider how their supporters should engage in peaceful and inclusive campaigns by fostering an environment of tolerance, respect for democratic principles, and the rule of law. This is possible when security measures are adequate, impartial, and independent. Accordingly, Macheka (2022) insists that the need to understand rival political factions has often promoted dialogue, reconciliation, and understanding rather than escalated

tensions, as free, fair, and violence-free elections allow citizens to exercise their democratic rights without fear or intimidation (Akwu, 2022).

2.14 Security Forces' Response

During elections in Zimbabwe, the response of security forces, including the police and military, has been a subject of concern and criticism. There have been instances where the actions of security personnel have contributed to or exacerbated violence rather than preventing it, especially where they have been suspected of using excessive use of force, brutality, or heavy-handed tactics towards supporters of the opposition parties (Sachikonye, 2011). This undermines the integrity of elections and violates voters' rights. To this end, reports of security forces perceived as partisan by their use of violence against opposition supporters, engaging in voter intimidation, or obstructing the activities of rival political parties have raised serious human rights concerns, leading to an escalation of tensions that often compromise the conduct of peaceful elections. Security forces, however, are expected to ensure the security and safety of all citizens by maintaining law and order as voters exercise their democratic rights, including the protection of polling stations, ensuring the safety of election officials, and responding to any instances of violence or disruption (Howard-Hassmann, 2010). This has eroded the public's trust in the police and security sector's ability to uphold the principles of fairness and impartiality in Zimbabwe.

To address these issues, Zimbabwe needs a robust security arrangement that prioritises the protection of citizens and the adherence to human rights standards. Training programs for security personnel should emphasise the importance of professionalism, impartiality, and respect for human rights in their interactions with the public during elections (Mavhinga, 2021). This can be enhanced by impartial international observers providing an additional layer of oversight and accountability and ensuring that security forces act under established rules and regulations.

Finally, voter education and awareness campaigns are needed to promote peaceful elections by informing citizens about their rights, the electoral process, and the proper channels for reporting violence or misconduct (Amnesty, 2023). With a comprehensive approach, security-related challenges require the rule of law, fostering a culture of accountability, and promoting dialogue and cooperation between political actors, security forces, and civil society organisations.

2.15 Election-tide Violence –Calmness on the Day of Elections

Violence on Election Day refers to acts of violence that occur specifically during the voting process, from the opening of polling stations until the announcement of preliminary results. This type of violence is aimed at disrupting or influencing the electoral process and can significantly affect elections' credibility, fairness, and integrity (Amnesty International, 2023). This is marked by various challenges such as:

2.15.1 The Sudden Disappearance of Names in the Voter's Role

In most cases, urban voters are frequently astonished to discover that their names are missing from the voter's list on election day, even after registering to vote and confirming the voters' role. These occurrences have been reported by opposition members, whose names mysteriously disappear from the voter's role and prevent them from voting. Conversely, many testimonies confirm that most rural voters—in areas considered ZANU-PF strongholds—rarely see such occurrences, raising the possibility that such actions may be intentional attempts to suppress the vote in opposition strongholds.

2.15.2 Unavailability of the Voter's Role and Ballot Material

The Zimbabwean electoral process continues to be characterised by the need for more ballots and other voting equipment. This was especially evident during the last general elections in August 2023, when most metropolitan polling places lacked the necessary ballots to start voting. As a result, some voters were irate and returned home without casting their ballots. This occurred despite ZEC assuring the country they were ready and had everything in place for a free, fair, and credible election.

2.15.3 Incorrect Names and Party Logos on the Ballot Paper

The August 2023 general elections exposed confusion and probably incompetence of the ZEC. It is worth noting that the ZEC has historically been accused of failure to be neutral, exhibiting strong bias in favour of ZANU-PF. This is further worsened by the ZEC commissioners, who are directly related to or somehow connected to ZANU- PF bigwigs. To this end, criticisms have raised concerns over ZEC's neutrality and capability to bring about free and fair elections. Against this

background, ZEC has repeatedly refused to provide the voter's role to the opposition leaders before the election day to allow inspection and correction where necessary. In this regard, numerous efforts, including legal measures, were employed in vain to force ZEC to provide the voter's role. Critics believe that ZEC's failure to provide the voter's role publicly is a deliberate move to allow the manipulation of figures in favour of ZANU- PF.

However, on election day (August 2023), ZEC produced ballot papers on which contestants' names were misspelt and party logos exchanged. The case in question is where a ZANU-PF candidate had a CCC logo against his name; the same was also the case for a CCC member, which left voters confused about where to cast their vote, thus forcing the election to halt. This could not have happened had ZEC provided the voter's role as requested by the CCC leadership. Such mistakes would have been corrected before election day.

2.15.4 Unnecessary Delays

In August 2023, general elections voting in some areas (Particularly urban areas) was delayed as late as 12 hours, with citizens having to endure the voting line for 12 hours or give up the voting process altogether. Zimbabwe witnessed an unprecedented scenario where voters in some areas were forced to start voting at midnight. Most of these challenges occurred in cities and towns. These are generally considered opposition strongholds, which forced critics to think that the unavailability of the ballot paper was a deliberate strategy meant to suppress the opposition vote to the advantage of ZANU-PF.

2.16 Post-Electoral Violence – Disturbances after Election-Tide

Post-electoral violence refers to acts of violence that occur after the announcement of election results. These incidents often stem from grievances related to the electoral process, such as allegations of fraud, disputed outcomes, or perceived unfairness. Post-electoral violence can include:

2.16.1 Protests and Demonstrations

Discontent with the election results in Zimbabwe has called for protests and demonstrations by opposition supporters in response to perceived electoral irregularities or grievances related to the

election results. These potentially large-scale protests, often escalating into violent confrontations between protesters, security forces, and rival political factions, have been met with vandalism, arson, or physical clashes (Torchia & Mutsaka, 2018; Burke, 2018). These protests serve as a means for opposition supporters to voice their discontent and demand accountability and change.

Protests can take various forms, from peaceful demonstrations and marches to confrontational actions. While peaceful protests are a legitimate expression of citizens' rights to freedom of assembly and speech, they can sometimes escalate into violent confrontations due to various factors (Mudau, 2022). Sometimes, clashes between protesters and security forces occur when law enforcement responds with excessive force or employs heavy-handed tactics to disperse the demonstrators. In this view, the use of tear gas, water cannons, rubber bullets, or even live ammunition can further inflame tensions and result in injuries or casualties (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Moreover, rival political factions or groups with differing interests may exploit these protests to incite violence or provoke confrontations with opposing supporters. This can lead to vandalism, arson, looting, or physical clashes between different factions, exacerbating the overall volatility and potential for violence during protests (Mudau, 2022).

The escalation of protests into violence is not exclusive to the opposition. However, it can also involve supporters of the ruling party or those with vested interests because of political tensions, economic hardships, or a polarised political environment. To mitigate risks of violence during protests, peaceful and constructive expressions of dissent that respect and protect the rights of citizens to assemble and voice out their concerns without fear of repression or violence should be protected by impartial law enforcement agencies trained to handle such protests in a manner that upholds human rights standards and avoids unnecessary use of force (Fagan, McGee & Thomas, 2021).

Furthermore, examples elsewhere indicate that dialogue and engagement between political actors, civil society organisations, and the government to address underlying grievances and promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts should involve efforts of building trust, promoting inclusive political processes, and addressing systemic issues that contribute towards electoral disputes and political tensions (Orjuela, 2003). However, as stated earlier, international observers and monitors

on protests provide an added layer of transparency and accountability that ensures human rights are respected, adequately documented, and addressed, especially when they involve electoral protests.

2.16.2 Retaliatory Attacks

Zimbabwe, as in many other countries, has had disputed election results that sometimes led to retaliatory attacks between supporters of opposition political parties and the ruling party. A strong perception of electoral injustice or grievances has escalated tensions and increased acts of violence (Sachikonye, 2012). Retaliatory attacks have taken various forms, such as targeted violence against individuals perceived to be associated with opposing parties, destruction of property belonging to political opponents, and clashes between rival factions. These acts of violence can further exacerbate community divisions and contribute to a cycle of retaliation and conflict (Sachikonye, 2011). Retaliatory attacks have been detrimental to the democratic process with severe social, political, and economic consequences because they undermined social cohesion, hindered reconciliation efforts, and impeded the country's development and progress. Addressing retaliatory attacks and resolving conflicts requires a comprehensive approach promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and peaceful dispute-resolution mechanisms.

However, this can only be possible if institutions responsible for upholding the rule of law and ensuring the impartiality and effectiveness of the justice system are strengthened and resourced (Humbe et al., 2023). It is also essential to foster a culture of tolerance, respect for diversity, and peaceful coexistence among different political factions and their supporters. This can be achieved through inclusive political processes, civic education, and promoting respect for human rights and the principles of democracy. This calls for using value-founded institutions like religious organisations (Baidhaw, 2007). Efforts should also be made to promote accountability for acts of electoral violence and ensure that those responsible for inciting or carrying out retaliatory attacks are held accountable under the law. By addressing the underlying causes of political violence and promoting a culture of peace and reconciliation, Zimbabwe can work towards a more stable and inclusive society (Evans, 2009).

2.17 Political Unrest and Instability

Post-electoral violence, which sometimes escalates into a broader sense of political unrest, has significantly affected political stability in Africa and Zimbabwe. This unrest has manifested in various forms, such as protests, demonstrations, and economic sabotage (Goldsmith, 2015). Power struggles and grievances arising from contested election results or allegations of electoral fraud have further fueled political instability as unresolved disputes have led to prolonged periods of political unrest that sometimes escalated into civil war, with different factions within the country engaging in armed conflicts to pursue their political objectives (Fakir, 2021).

However, the nature and extent of political unrest in Zimbabwe have varied depending on each election cycle's specific dynamics and context. Factors such as the level of public trust in electoral processes, the perceived legitimacy of political institutions, and the effectiveness of conflict resolution mechanisms all shape the outcome (Macheka, 2021). Understanding and conceptualising electoral violence has been crucial for developing strategies to prevent, mitigate, and address such violence (Birch et al., 2020). This has involved promoting inclusive and transparent electoral processes, ensuring the independence and impartiality of electoral institutions, fostering a culture of dialogue and peaceful dispute resolution, and promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law. By addressing the root causes of political unrest and implementing measures to prevent electoral violence, Zimbabwe, and any other country facing similar challenges, can strive towards a more peaceful and inclusive democratic process, ultimately enhancing political stability and the well-being of its citizens (Macheka, 2022).

2.18 Conclusion

From what has been said thus far, it is apparent that violence has played a significant role in defining the country's electoral landscape throughout Zimbabwe's electoral history—from the colonial era to independence and beyond. The literature above offers an in-depth framework for my investigation, highlighting gaps in the literature and ultimately creating new knowledge in the study of Zimbabwe's elections. The study underscores that the depth within which the problem of electoral violence is embedded in Zimbabwe's history warrants significant attention from all social structures, including the ZHOCD, which statistically commands most of the Christian community and ultimately constitutes a significant number of the country's populace. The study upholds the

Kairos theology of the ZHOCD in alleviating the urge for electoral violence. In summary, the chapter presents the history of Zimbabwe and its election history, showing electoral violence through various historical epochs. The chapter has demonstrated how electoral violence has been deeply embedded in Zimbabwe's political history from the colonial era through the independence period to contemporary Zimbabwe. I also argued in this chapter that the militaristic nature of the liberation struggle has continued to create an appetite for electoral violence and exclusionary politics, as evidenced by the constant reference to the language and ethos of the liberation struggle. This, too, reinforces the idea of a one-party state as it shuts the democratic door for new political parties. In this way, the chapter underscores that electoral violence has been an ongoing character of Zimbabwe's elections and thus requires the participation of all social players, including the ZHOCD. Given the above, the next chapter unpacks the ZHOCD, its vision, mandate and mission.

Chapter Three

The Identity of the ZHOCD

3. Introduction

The preceding chapter discussed Zimbabwe's history and its electoral predicament. In this chapter, I introduce an Ecumenical body called the ZHOCD, discussing its vision, mission and membership. In this regard, the chapter shows that the ZHOCD endeavours to be a strong voice of the Christian community on matters of national interest. Thus, the ZHOCD seeks to support government initiatives on national building programs while holding the government accountable for poor governance and abuse of power. This chapter emanates from the first objective and seeks to contribute to understanding the ZHOCD as an ecumenical body. The chapter underscores that to understand the role of the ZHOCD's *Kairos* theology in the problem of electoral violence, there is a need to critically explore how the ZHOCD, through its membership, has historically contributed to the unfolding history of Zimbabwe's elections. In this regard, the chapter's discussion is organised under three main themes: the discussion of ZHOCD's membership and formation, the discourse of the ZHOCD, its vision and mission. In doing so, the chapter acknowledges both the past and contemporary efforts of the ZHOCD to electoral violence.

3.1 The ZHOCD's Membership and Composition

The ZHOCD is an Ecumenical body that was formed in during the colonial era as the Heads of Christian Denominations (HOCD) in Rhodesia (1967) and later revived in 2005. It comprises of the ZCC, the ZCBC, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) and the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches and Zionists in Africa (UDACIZA). Research from Matikiti (2009), Gaga, Masengwe, and Dube (2024) attests that the membership of the ZHOCD is primarily from the mainstream churches. To better comprehend the ZHOCD and its membership, the study needs to discuss the background of mainline faith churches and the ecumenical bodies that ultimately constitute the ZHOCD. These churches are Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical and Indigenous religious traditions.

Mainline churches were primarily started by missionaries from the colonial period to the late colonial era; hence, they are missionary-founded Churches. On this basis, they carry on their back a history of colonialism as they were started alongside the rise of Western colonialism. Literature from Sachikonye in the context of colonialism and Zimbabwe's journey to being a nation (2014) suggests that the context of early colonial strategies involved the weaponisation and instrumentalisation of the Christian gospel and, subsequently, the Bible itself in justifying the racial ideologies of white supremacy prevalent during those times. In this way, Auret (2009, p.6), Sachikonye (2003) and Mlambo (2014) agree that early missionaries pretended to have brought the good news of the gospel when, in fact, they shared the same colonial agenda with their fellow Europeans on the political front who spearheaded the colonisation of Zimbabwe.

On this basis, the mainline version of Christianity has had to try and shade off the marks of colonialism that were traditionally attached to them. It is nevertheless imperative to note that currently, without overgeneralizing. However, some churches have maintained a diverse membership, one can hardly find the physical presence of 'white people' in some black churches (Chitando, 2013). Accordingly, the membership, as well as the leadership of these Churches, have predominantly been 'black Africans', which seems to suggest that mainline Churches have been entrusted to and are under the stewardship of the Indigenous black Zimbabweans (Chitando, 2013, p. 34). This characteristically eradicates the colonial influence of missionaries who founded these churches.

Nevertheless, I argue that it is a known fact that most mainline churches have continued to benefit materially, ideologically, and theologically from the Western countries. Hence, the invisible influence of the former colonisers continues to be glary in some of the mainline churches (Chitando, 2013, p.35). This is evident in churches such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church, which continue to be called the 'Church of Rome' and the 'Church of England' respectively. However, Literature from Chitando (2013) suggests that these Churches insist on their independence from the former colonial founders, arguing that they operate outside the influence of Western countries. To this end, I contend that despite the above views, mainline Churches are traditionally celebrated for being stable, firm and sometimes reliable in their teachings and proclamations of the gospel. In this regard, mainline church groupings have outlived

various versions of Pentecostal Christianity that have emerged and were short-lived, like the prosperity gospel preaching churches, and now the neo-Pentecostal/Prophetic Churches. As such, the mainline version of Christianity is celebrated for being resolute and unweaving in its approach and proclamation of the gospel. Churches in the mainline faith category include the Catholic Church, Anglican, Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, United Methodist Church, Church of Christ in Zimbabwe, Presbyterian Church and The Evangelical Lutheran Church, The Salvation Army church, and Presbyterian Church, among many others.

Similarly, Togarasei (2006, p.7), Masengwe (2009) and Chitando (2013, p.38) agree that the ZHOCD- aligned mainline churches are further situated within a denominational framework of three distinct groupings, for instance, the ZCBC, which embodies 8 of the Catholic dioceses. The ZCC incorporates the Liberal- Protestant traditions, namely the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe, and the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, among others. The EFZ consists of mostly Pentecostal Churches, such as the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFM) and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Zimbabwe (PAOZ), among others. It is necessary to point out that, to broaden its influence and impact across the Christian community, the ZHOCD later accommodated other Christian versions, such as The Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches and Zionists in Africa (UDACIZA). These four Christian bodies constitute the ZHOCD. Therefore, it is appropriate to unpack each member of the ZHOCD to appreciate the uniqueness, ideological, and theological fundamentals in the convergence of the ZHOCD. On this basis, the subsequent section explores the specific work carried out by each member organisation of the ZHOCDs, highlighting their contribution to the social transformation and organisation of Zimbabwean society.

3.2 The Zimbabwe Council of Churches

The ZCC, formerly called the Christian Council of Southern Rhodesia (CCSR), was founded in 1964 at St. Cuthbert's Hall in Gweru (Gaga, Masengwe & Dube, 2024) as an offshoot of the Rhodesian Missionary Conference, then called the Rhodesian Christian council (Bornstein, 2002, p.6). Its birth was prompted by the resistance of white church ministers in the Southern Rhodesian Christian Conference (SRCC) to incorporate black church ministers in bringing about inclusivity in the country's governance (Gundani, 2001; Matikiti, 2009, 2015, and Bornstein, 2002, p.8). In

addition, Masondo's (2018) literature on the Church's earlier engagement with the broader society confirms that the division between the SRCC and the CCSR stemmed from their ideological differences in dealing with white racism and support for the African Nationalist Movements. On the one hand, African Christian leaders supported these movements, while on the other, white Christian leaders condemned them, thus sparking a racial division within the Church (Masondo, 2018). In this regard, it can be noted that the SRCC continued to reflect visible marks of colonialism in the racial ideologies prevalent during colonial times.

With this background, it can be deduced that the CCSR was, therefore, a product of black church ministers who sought to engage with the deteriorating socio-political plight of Zimbabweans whose rights and personhood continued to be threatened by the brutality of colonialism (Chitando, 2011). Thus, the formation of the CCSR created a *modus operandi* for the Church's involvement in public matters in the then Rhodesian Patriotic Front Government (Gundani, 2008, p.10). In this regard, the ZCC was hence predominantly black, with a few white ministers who sympathised with their plight and fought to restore black personhood (Bornstein, 2002, p.9). These include Garfield Todd (Church of Christ), who worked tirelessly to empower local black people whom he believed were equally capable of leading themselves (Masengwe, 2009, p.29). Todd considered colonialism to be an unnecessary evil which needed to be corrected. He is still remembered for his liberal approach, which was in sharp contrast to the policies of the colonial Rhodesian (Zimbabwean) government (Gundani, 2008, p.12). Garfield was a New Zealand protestant missionary who migrated to Southern Rhodesia. His desire to empower the local black Zimbabweans saw him spearheading and successfully establishing the Dadaya New Zealand Churches of Christ Mission School, under which Robert Mugabe was one of the teachers (Masengwe 2009, p.29).

On the other hand, Literature from Bornstein (2002, p.8), Gundani, 2008 and Masengwe (2009) agrees that as a missionary, Garfield Todd spearheaded the formation of the CCSR as a space for black ministers to participate in the socio-political struggles of the day. Similarly, Bourdillon (1990, p.20) states that Todd got support from his fellow white missionaries like Bishop Skeleton of the Anglican Diocese of Matabeleland (ZCC's first president), Bishop R. Dodge, who was the last white Bishop of the United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe and an outspoken advocate of

racial justice in Africa (Masengwe 2009, p.25). These, along with a few other white ministers who sympathised with the plight of the black majority, led to the formation of and became active members of the CCSR, now called ZCC. The primary purpose of the CCSR was to foster dialogue among Christian communities and the government to witness together and act together in response to the socio-economic and political plight of the day. Upon independence in 1980, the ZCC was established as a successor of the CCSR with the same mandate and additional responsibility of supporting the new government in rebuilding the nation (Gaga & Masengwe, 2024). Thus, the mandate of the ZCC is to empower churches to renew society (Chitando, 2013, p.36).

The ZCC consists of twenty-six member churches and para-church organisations; some of its member churches include Anglicans, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, Congregationalists, Restorationists, Calvinists, the Salvation Army, and African-initiated Churches (AICs) (Gundani, 2000; Verstraelen, 1995, p.189). These Churches automatically become members of the ZHOCD.

Literature on ZCC is essential because, as previously mentioned, the ZHOCD broadens the political space by bringing various experiences and projects to the ZHOCD. Thus, ZCC's suitability as a ZHOCD member hinges on its ability to provide the essential background from which the ZHOCD was derived. It is also critical to keep in mind that the ZCC had a significant role in the creation of the ZHOCD; as a result, it is appropriate to attest that it is impossible to comprehend the ZHOCD's activities without a firm grasp of the ZCC's previous operations.

3.3 The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference

The ZCBC was established in 1969 with the vision of establishing a reconciled Zimbabwean Society living in harmony, justice, and peace in a developmental state struggling to be democratic (Gundani, 2008, p.23). It is from this vision that the ZCBC has, over the years, engaged Zimbabwe's socio-economic and political space. It can, therefore, be noted that, through its various arms, the ZCBC has been instrumental in bringing to light the struggles of ordinary Zimbabweans (Gundani, 2008, p.24).

One of its early visibilities in the public space was during the *Gukurahundi* genocide, during which ZANUPF embarked on a political campaign known as *Gukurahundi* (Matikiti, 2003). Literature

from Matikiti and Gundani attest that the campaign was justified as an attempt to stamp out dissidents and terrorist activities allegedly spearheaded by the predominantly Ndebele party, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) (Matikiti, 2003, Gundani, 2008, p.18). According to the United Nations report, the *Gukurahundi* massacres saw the death of over 20 000 people (United Nations, 2005, p.2).

In this regard, the ZCBC, through its arm, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), brought to the surface the details of this genocide under “Breaking the Silence: Building True Peace” (CCJP, 1997, p.5). Accordingly, the ZCBC challenged the ruling ZANU-PF to take deliberate steps towards healing and reconciliation in the Matabeleland and Midlands Regions (CCJP, 1997, p.13). It is therefore necessary to note that the ZCBC has continued to be prophetic throughout the years, calling the government to account for human rights violations, social unrest, and economic and political instability, among other things.

ZCBC literature is crucial to this research because it offers a historical account of the Church's early engagement with the state and the public space. Therefore, it must be highlighted that the Church—and the ZCBC in particular—has always played a crucial role in promoting and bringing about equality, justice, and peace in Zimbabwe. Its prophetic work can be followed from the colonial era to independence and contemporary Zimbabwe. Throughout all these epochs, the ZCBC has sought to provide support for the Zimbabwean government on matters of national interest while questioning elements of violence, abuse of power and human rights violations by the state. This background is significant in the study of the ZHOCD because not only does it make the ZCBC a suitable member of the ZHOCD, but it also further provides the necessary background which informs the ZHOCD in its contemporary engagement with public matters such as electoral violence, tribalism and political persecution. The Catholic Church represents most of the country's populace and is celebrated for its stability and resilience. In this way, its membership in the ZHOCD not only brings the necessary background but adds credibility and integrity to the ZHOCD.

3.4 The Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe

The EFZ was formed in 1962 in Salisbury (now Harare) in a meeting inspired by W. Taylor of the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (EFMA) (Verstraelen, 1995, p.192). From this background, the ZHOCD was an alliance of evangelicals impacting the nation by obeying the Great Commission (Matikiti, 2013; Chitando, 2013). Thus, the EFZ seeks to mobilise and empower—network evangelicals to accomplish the Great Commission in Zimbabwe (Zulu, 2016, p.14). Togarashi (2008) articulates that the EFZ is comprised of primarily Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Church in Zimbabwe (AFM), the Evangelical Church of Zimbabwe, the Alliance Church in Zimbabwe (ACZ), and Assemblies of God, among others.

Literature from Bhebhe further attests that the fellowship sought to counter perceived liberalism and ecumenism, which it believed compromised the unity of the Christians (Bhebhe, 1988, p.312). Similarly, literature from Ruzivo attests that initially, the EFZ envisioned encompassing all Central Africa but needed to be more specific about the federal government of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (Ruzivo, 2009). The primary purpose of the EFZ was to provide evangelical Christians with spiritual fellowship, promote Christian unity, offer Christian education, facilitate prayer, and support the ministry. On this basis, it sought to cooperate with evangelicals in other African countries to combat the dangers of ‘modernism’, false cults and ecumenicity achieved at the expense of vital Christian faith (Bhebhe, 2008, p.321). From the above, it can be deduced that the EFZ opposed ecumenism because it believed that the Church should focus solely on spiritual matters and avoid involvement in ‘worldly affairs. As such, the fellowship preferred that evangelicals remain spiritually focused and refrain from engaging in public life, especially politics and state governance (Bhebhe, 1988, p.325).

In this regard, it needs to be noted that the fellowship did not condemn the RFP but strongly condemned the liberation struggle, viewing it as a communist advancement. Accordingly, it perceived the RFP as deserving of Christian support, prayers and protection of its armed forces (Bhebhe, 1988, p.325). However, the credibility of the EFZ with nationalists and ecumenical Christians became highly questionable, making it difficult for it to engage in post-independence politics with credibility. In this way, the EFZ was haunted by its previous, limiting its ability to monitor and minister effectively to the black government. As a result, the EFZ’s focus shifted

primarily to moral issues and social development until the formation of the ZOCD in 2005 (Matikiti, 2013). Its visibility increased during the ZHOCD's engagement in forming the GNU.

3.5 The Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe, Africa

The UDACIZA is an umbrella body representing African Indigenous Apostolic and Zionist Churches in Zimbabwe (Masengwe, 2018). The UDACIZA was formed in 1993 by Bishop Xavier Chitanda to address 'neglected' public and social life issues among the Zionist and Apostolic churches in Zimbabwe (UDACIZA, 2007). These included developmental matters of common concern found among the Apostolic and Zionist Churches with specific attention to child protection, water and sanitation, youth and women empowerment and HIV AIDS (Chingwaru and Munayiti, 2016, p.21). In this way, the vision of the UDACIZA is to "be a leading reputable network of Apostolic and Zionist Churches championing spiritual and socio-economic development of members and ensuring improved quality of life, social justice, and equality (UDACIZA, 2000, p.2).

As Masengwe (2018) has shown, the UDACIZA was formed by members of the AICS, who were locally based. Interestingly, AICs have become a significant factor in studying Christianity in Africa. In this way, *ZDHS & ICFI* (2016) and *ZNDSA*, (2017) all agree that the AICs constitute about thirty-three per cent of the country's populace. This is despite allegations of syncretism and cultic that are laid down by other Christian versions. The UDACIZA emphasised conservatism and adherence to traditional values of the Christian faith to indigenise Christianity and redeem ancestral beliefs into the Christian faith (Gaga & Masengwe, 2024). It can, therefore, be said that the UDACIZA sought to regain religious and cultural identities, bringing to question the imported version of Christianity, which came on the back of colonialism, slavery, racism, elitism, and wealth (Bourdillon, 1993, p.86).

Drawing from the work of Bhebhe (1988), who writes on the church-state relations in both the colonial Rhodesian and Independent Zimbabwe, it can be deduced that the conception of the UDACIZA provided these churches with a platform to have a unified voice on matters of public life. In this regard, the ZHOCD utilises various forms of engagement with the state, such as

pastoral letters, Church bulletin, social media, and prayer breakfasts to mobilise members and spread awareness. Accordingly, Matikiti (2014, p.96) says that the union became an imperative tool for fostering spiritual communitarian and Christian education derived from cultural beliefs and practices. In this regard, UDACIZA has, over the years, made a notable impact in areas of health and education, as attested by its endeavour to combat HIV and AIDS through awareness campaigns, particularly among youths (UDACIZA, 2007, Matikiti, 2014). Some of its contributions are evident in its struggle against cholera in 2008, promoting sanitation and hygiene among members (Matikiti, 2014). Correspondingly, the union represents a growing Christian base, as stated by Pobee and Ositelu: “AICs, by their style, represent the spontaneous expansion of the Church. The whole Church, leadership and all, assume that it is the Church’s task to multiply and do missions, and they do so through the simplicity of confession and simple Christian witness” (Pobee and Ositelu, 1998, 50). Matikiti (2014, p.105) further shows that the impact of the UDACIZA has continued to be felt in the promotion of primary education and women’s empowerment within their churches. However, it has also challenged patriarchal tendencies such as child marriage and wife inheritance. In this regard, the UDACIZA has empowered women to take leadership roles within the Church and society, thus contributing to poverty alleviation and social transformation.

The literature from the UDACIZA is essential for this study because it includes the perspective of AICs, who constitute a significant number of the country’s populace. Despite their differences from their mainline counterparts regarding the context of origins and approach to interpreting the Christian message, AICs are included in the ZHOCD, which brings diverse and holistic community views.

3.6 The Discourse of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations

The ZHOCD seeks to offer an ecumenical response to issues of national interest such as politics, economics and other social ills like poverty, prostitution, drug abuse, violence, tribalism, corruption and criminality (ZHOCD, 2005). In this regard, ZHOCD endeavours to make the Christian gospel a reality by engaging and redeeming socio-economic and political structures that subject ordinary people to injustice, poverty, and inequality (ZHOCD, 2005). Its main task is to ensure economic development, constitutionalism, political tolerance and the realisation of

democracy, respect for the rule of law and a shared national vision whose values are owned and supported by everyone, including people from the grassroots (ZHOCD, 2005).

Its formation is marked by the shrinkage of democratic space, growing poverty levels, deep-seated divisions, and economic meltdown. On this basis, the ZHOCD became involved in public matters as early as its formative years by engaging in humanitarian issues such as eradicating poverty, human rights, political violence, HIV and AIDS. Notably, its closer engagement with socio-economic and political struggles increased in 2006 and resulted in the publication of the *Zimbabwe We Want Document* (Matikiti, 2009). ZHOCD's presence continued to be felt in the 2008 electoral violence. This was when electoral violence in the form of torture and intimidation reached its peak.

Given the predicament, the ZHOCD issued a statement:

The deteriorating humanitarian situation is plummeting at a frightful pace. The cost of living has gone beyond the reach of many of our people. There is widespread famine in most parts of the countryside due to poor harvests and delays in importing maize from neighbouring countries. The shops are empty, and basic foodstuffs are unavailable. Electoral violence has reached a worrisome level. Members of the opposition politics have suffered significantly under state-sanctioned violence. The victims of state-organised torture who are ferried to hospitals find little solace as the hospitals have no drugs or medicines to treat them. This has left ordinary citizens stranded with no hope for life (ZHOCD 2008, p.2).

From the above, it can be alluded that the ZHOCD is distinguished from other Christian organisations by its commitment and determination to engage with robust government structures and security systems, advocating for a peaceful and fair society (ZHOCD, 2005). As shown by Gaga, Masengwe and Dube (2024) and Matikiti (2009), the ZCBC, the ZCC, the EFZ, and the UDACIZA seek to recover Christian unity and identity through interfaith and interreligious dialogue. In this way, it can be deduced that the ZHOCD is hinged upon ecumenism, which seeks to exhibit visible Christian unity of all believers in Christ, transcending human culture, race, gender, creed, policy and denominationalism. Thus, the ZHOCD draws its membership from different denominations and traditions, fostering respect and collaboration among believers and emphasising areas of commonality that cut beyond the doctrines, rites, and policies of other denominations (Matikiti, 2009, 2015).

In this sense, I concur with Masengwe and Dube (2021) that the ZHOCD's involvement with service institutions and diversity in membership among African-initiated churches, Protestantism,

Catholicism, and Pentecostalism allows it to reach a broader constituency, thus making its influence felt by many. The work of the ZHOCD has significantly impacted Zimbabwean society, bringing about justice and equality. Some of ZHOCD's works include supporting the vulnerable, providing psychosocial counselling for survivors of electoral violence, and empowering marginalised citizens politically, economically, and socially (Pobee, 1997).

The ZHOCD's engagement in social transformation is a necessary evolution in Christian thought, where the application of Christian principles becomes inseparable from the social application of the gospel. This motif is further confirmed by Matikiti (2009) (2015), Pobee (1997) and Gaga (2024), citing that the Christian gospel calls upon its followers to a radical response to socio-political and economic structures that impede growth and development. Given the above ascension, I subscribe to Banana's view that the Christian gospel is solely concerned with the total and complete transformation of individuals and societies in all aspects of life and human activities (Banana, 1985, p.12). For this reason, Banana insists that the Church is expected to function effectively and efficiently, being aware of the vast array of social, economic and political issues affecting humankind (Banana, 1996a, p.334). This is further echoed by Verstraelen (1998), citing that:

The Church is critical in that where there is limited democracy, civil society is undeveloped. The Church is sometimes the only civil organisation that can inspire and support a movement towards true democracy and develop a civil society that can counteract and change a monopolising one-party state political system that abuses its power (Verstraelen, 1998, p.86).

Similarly, Bosch and Matikiti writing on the place of the Zimbabwean Church, concur that this understanding enables the Church to call for social reconstruction and transformation in Zimbabwean society (Bosch, 1979, Matikiti, 2009, 2015). The above literature is paramount to this study as it stands as the basis upon which the operations of the ZHOCD can be measured and evaluated. This study explores the contribution of the ZHOCD to Zimbabwe's election narrative. Considering the above, it follows that the vision and mission of the ZHOCD are expected to mirror that of Jesus Christ, who demonstrated commitment to justice, defended the cause of the powerless and advocated for an equal society. These fundamental ideologies influence the work of the ZHOCD (ZHOCD, 2005). In this study, I focus specifically on the role of ZHOCD's theology in Zimbabwe's general elections, particularly on electoral violence.

With this understanding, Gaga (2001), writing on the Church's public role in Zimbabwe, posits that the formation of the ZHOCD is marked by the shrinkage of democratic space, growing poverty levels, deep-seated divisions, and economic meltdown. Against this background, the ZHOCD became involved in public matters as early as its formative years by engaging in humanitarian issues such as eradicating poverty, human rights, political violence, HIV and Aids (Matikiti, 2009). Moreover, Masengwe, et al. (2024), in "Using Ecumenical Experiences to Respond to New Public Life Challenges", articulate that the ZHOCD's closer engagement with socio-economic as well as political struggles increased during the 2008 pre-electoral violence (Masengwe, et al. 2024). It is necessary to note that the indicated period was marked by economic meltdown, political crisis as well as electoral violence in the form of political segregation, torture and intimidation.

The impact of the ZHOCD continued to be felt in influencing the formation of a Government of National Unity in February 2009 between the ZANU-PF and MDC parties. The ZHOCD further emphasised the need for continued engagement between the two main political parties. Thus, the ZHOCD called the politicians to end state-sanctioned violence and advised that members of security, such as the army who were fingered as playing a pivotal role in brutalising opposition members, should desist from violence and instead focus on protecting the country, ensuring security for all (ZHOCD 2009, p.4). In this way, the ZHOCD further urged the government to stop violence and instead concentrate on peace building, reconciliation, and healing (ZHOCD 2009).

Similarly, in 2014, the ZHOCD issued a pastoral letter raising concerns about the mushrooming of political violence nationwide. The ZHOCD cited that the government continues to violate people's lives in a party-sanctioned manner (ZHOCD, 2014). On this basis, ZHOCD expressed concern over the growing levels of violence that were continuously on the rise. This violence was mostly unleashed against ordinary citizens, between the state and the people (ZHOCD, 2014, p.4). In furtherance, Jena (2014, p.2) confirms that the ZHOCD deplored the conduct of the police in which violence was unleashed against angry citizens who were demonstrating against the arrest of opposition party members. In this way, ZHOCD also noted that violence was being identified around minority domination of politics and the economy. Thus, in the words of Jena, the Church decried political violence and called upon politicians to shun violence and promote peace among citizens (Jena 2014, p.5). Likewise, Antonio (2014, p.8) insists that such violence has not only

taken place for political reasons but for many other reasons, such as the clash between elected leadership and traditional leadership, between men and women, between younger and older generations and between ruling and opposition members. Thus, the ZHOCD noted that Zimbabweans have suffered under the grip of electoral violence, with the rights of many being violated (ZHOCD 2009, p.5).

Furthermore, the ZHOCD launched an initiative to increase coordination and advocacy efforts during elections and related voting programmes (ZHOCD 2010, p.3). This initiative sought to promote an enduring culture of peace in Zimbabwe and facilitate peace, national healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation (Antonio 2014, p.8). In this regard, the ZHOCD insists that “we aim to bring electoral violence perpetrators and victims under one roof and educate them on the culture of peace in national processes” (Antonio, 2014).

However, the above literature leaves out the confusion and indecisiveness surrounding the ZHOCD’s earliest engagement with the public space through its publication, the *Zimbabwe We Want Document* in 2006, under which it reflects ZHOCD’s close interaction with Robert Mugabe and the ZANU-PF party, which then affected its role in addressing the problem of electoral violence. The study investigates the possible setbacks the ZHOCD experienced due to its close interaction with ZANU-PF during its Inception. At the same time, it is necessary to note that the ZANU-PF party has consistently dismissed the ZHOCD’s claim to be non-partisan, citing that its theological mandate has always been aligned with the Western ideology of coloniality.

However, the ZHOCD disputes this narrative, citing that it remains neutral and dedicated to ‘speaking truth to power’ without bias towards any political party. Therefore, the ZHOCD claims to have the mission of speaking on behalf of people experiencing poverty, the voiceless, and the marginalised (Antonio, 2014). In this regard, the ZHOCD considered its mission to be that of the conscience of society (ZHOCD, 2005). Thus, I concur that, in the past, the Church stood against the oppression and subjugation of the powerless and the marginalised. It is, however, imperative to note that in doing so, the Church has always colluded with the state. Thus, the ZHOCD takes a combative approach towards state tyranny and has proactively sought solutions for public life

challenges (Gaga, et al., 2024). However, some have criticised the ZHOCD for reacting to Zimbabwe's crises.

3.7 The ZHOCD and Electoral Violence in Zimbabwe

The study will provide a brief overview of the broader Church's historical contribution to Zimbabweans' struggles to situate the ZHOCD's contribution to the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe.

In this regard, it must be noted that the discourse of the Zimbabwean Church and elections cannot be divorced from its role in politics. It is, therefore, worth noting that the Zimbabwean Church has, over the years, been part and parcel of people's struggles. The Church has historically engaged and hence identified with the suffering of the masses. Through such engagement, the Church has upheld the principles of public theology, as stated by Volf (Volf, 1995, p.28). Public Theology underscores the need for the Church to play a catalytic role in the liberation of the majority (Guettierrez, 1973, p.156). In this regard, the Church's close interaction with political ideologies of the day can be traced as far back as the 1890s when Christian ministers of Religion were involved in the pioneer column which birthed the colonisation of Zimbabwe (Zegeye, 2010, p.179, Gundani, 2008, p.215, Chitando 2002, p.4).

Recent studies, for instance, Bourdillon (1990, p.22) and Mlambo (2014, p.18), have made it abundantly clear that in many instances, missionary Christian Ministers and colonial officers sought to establish and were guided by the agenda of western superiority and African inferiority. In this way, they shared the 'white man's burden of bringing Christianity, civilisation, and commerce to Africa (Chemhuru, 2010, p.181). This close interaction between the colonial Rhodesian regime and the Church brought about the rapid spread of Christianity. In this way, the early Christian missionaries can, therefore, be hardly divorced from the establishment of colonialism. It is nonetheless worthy to concede that there are instances in which the two were in sharp contrast, particularly in moments that involved human rights abuse and violence towards Africans (Randolph 1971, p.32).

It remains necessary to note that the Church's panic, disagreement, and indecisiveness today in the face of crisis moments can be further located during the liberation period. In this sense, Churches became undecided upon encountering the liberation struggle, holding different opinions on whether to support the nationalists and the guerillas in their bid for political independence.

However, for some Churches, institutionalised racism demanded the taking up of arms; thus, the liberation quest by the Africans was, therefore, a 'just war' worthy of support. In this regard, missionaries such as Garfield Todd (Church of Christ), Bishop Dodge (American Methodist), Bishop Lamont and many others supported Africa's cause for independence. They sought to equip and empower Africans to take over leadership from Colonial Rhodesia (Chitando and Togarasei, 2010, p.163).

On the other hand, some Churches held the conviction that the Church and, subsequently, Christians were called upon to lead a quiet, peaceful, and violent free lifestyle. As such, they were against the involvement of the Church in the political struggles of the day (Ranger, 2003, p.112). This gave rise to sharp differences within the Zimbabwean Churches. Therefore, the Church in Zimbabwe then, like in most political struggles today, found herself unprepared and unsure how to respond to colonisation and liberation struggle (Maenzanise, 2008, p.2). The relationship between the Church and the state appeared relatively good in the post-independence period. Robert Mugabe (the then Prime Minister) rallied the state towards unity; he called the nation towards love, reconciliation and forgiveness despite race, gender, ethnicity, and political differences. In this regard, Mugabe went on record, inviting the Church to help unite the deeply divided nation. Therefore, the Church found Mugabe's efforts consistent with the Church's teaching on love and forgiveness and supported his efforts (Antonio, 2009, p.8). However, this was not to last long as Mugabe's regime soon initiated and unleashed the fifth brigade to perpetrate the historical genocidal attacks in mostly Matabeleland and some parts of Midlands provinces respectively (Auret, 2009, p.35).

According to Zegeye (2010), the relationship between the Church and ZANUPF further deteriorated at the turn of the millennium when economic woes and escalating poverty peaked. On this basis, Zegeye (2010, p.5) cites that Mugabe's regime resorted to violence and brutality to quell

the growing opposition voices through the newly formed MDC party. This was when all the economic hopes were shuttered, and things reached a point of no return. The resort to violence and brutality set the stage for the darkest phases in the post-independence history of Zimbabwe's elections. In this way, the ZHOCD became critical of Mugabe and, subsequently, ZANU-PF's abuse of power, suppression of the rule of law in the face of deteriorating living standards and escalating poverty levels (Tsvangirai, 2011, p.3). In this regard, the relationship between the mainline churches and the government has deteriorated since the turn of the millennium. The Mugabe-led government was not prepared to entertain any diverging views against the government (Raftopolous, 2009, p.3). This saw the ZHOCD through its arms, such as the ZCBC and the ZCC, speaking out through pastoral letters in critique of Mugabe's government and his governing policies along with alarming levels of electoral violence. Some of these letters shall be explored during the study. It, however, suffices to note that the current engagement of the ZHOCD with the public space is deeply embedded in the country's history.

3.8 Conclusion

The chapter articulates the vision and mission of the ZHOCD. Thus, the chapter has shown that the intention of the ZHOCD over the years has been to be the Church's voice in Zimbabwe's socio-political and economic landscape. Accordingly, the ZHOCD has engaged political figures to discuss factors that have impoverished and oppressed the citizens over the years. These include, but are not limited to, corruption, freedom of speech, democracy, human rights, peaceful elections, and respect for the rule of law, among others. In this respect, the ZHOCD utilises pastoral letters, press statements, and television interviews to express their views on national governance and public matters. The chapter further unpacked the membership of the ZHOCD, which constitutes the ZCC, ZCBC, EFZ and UDACIZA. The four bodies that make up the ZHOCD comprise the different mainline line churches that make up the ZHOCD. In this way, the chapter traced these member bodies' historical and contemporary contributions, bringing to light their suitability as members of the ZHOCD. The chapter also underscores that, based on the statistics of congregational influence, the ZHOCD significantly influences the citizens in public matters. In the end, the chapter provided a brief background of the interaction of the Church and government from the colonial period through independence to contemporary Zimbabwe. This was hoped to set the

stage for a detailed discussion on the location of the ZHOCD in public spaces. The next chapter deals with the methodology for this study.

Chapter Four

Theory and Method of the Study

4. Introduction

The preceding chapter explored the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHODC), focusing on its Vision, Mission and Membership. The chapter established that the ZHOCD was explicitly formed to provide an ecumenical response to issues of national interest such as politics, economics, poverty, human rights, democracy, peace, forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. In this chapter, I present the research methodology, indicating its significance in research. Thus, the chapter discusses the methodology used in this research under the theoretical framework of public theology. Public theology is a general concept used in this study, while *Kairos* theology focuses explicitly on the contextualisation of public theology in Zimbabwe. The chapter describes and shows how the study was carried out and how the processes are justified.

Accordingly, the chapter upholds literature-based research, sometimes called the Desktop research method, as an appropriate method for this research, highlighting its thrust and relevance to this study. The chapter shall also discuss data-gathering procedures, analysis, and interpretation. The discussion of the chapter follows key methodological components such as the definition of research methodology, the characteristics of qualitative research and its relatedness to the study, the data collecting techniques such as primary and secondary data and their relevancy to the study, data collection and analysis tools and lastly the research paradigm and its suitability to the study. In the end, the chapter emphasises the empirical data acquired, especially the considerations for sampling methods, data collection techniques, analysis procedure, ethical applications, validation procedure, self-reflexivity, and the methods' limitations. This chapter deals with two things: the theoretical framework and the study methodology, as will be seen in the following pages.

4.1 Theoretical Framework

The study uses public theology, also known as the *Kairos* theory, as a theory for electoral violence in Zimbabwe. In the discussion, a particular focus is placed on the central tenets of the theory and

its relatedness to the area under investigation. To this end, I comprehensively examine public theology as enshrined in the *ZWWD*, exploring its origins, aims, and relevance as a theory towards general elections and the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. The discussion starts by thoroughly discussing public theology, detailing its nature and historical context. After this, I qualify public theology as a *Kairos* theology, discussing its major tenets. In this respect, the existence of essential commonalities between public theology and *Kairos* theology merits academic consideration and warrants attention. In this way, *Kairos* theology is a public theology, as indicated by the openness of both theologies to humanitarian struggles. As a result, two terms have been used interchangeably in exploring the role of the ZHOCD's *Kairos* Theology on General Elections.

4.1.1 Public Theology as a Theory for Electoral Violence

While the theoretical framework of public theology as a *Kairos* theory provides a comprehensive understanding of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, it does have limitations. One potential counterargument is that public theology may be too broad, attempting to address various social issues from politics to economics, which could hinder its depth in addressing the specific nuances of electoral violence (Saldana & Omasta, 2016). An alternative framework is “Liberation Theology”, which focuses on the Church's role in confronting social and economic injustices. It may offer a more nuanced understanding of the ZHOCD in the context of the country's historical struggles for independence (Togarasei, 2009). However, liberation theology may not effectively address the political and institutional factors contributing to electoral violence and may lack a clear framework for how the ZHOCD can stabilize electoral disputes. Another option is the “Social Constructivist” framework, which emphasizes how electoral violence is socially and culturally constructed (Marty, 1979). Still, another theory is the “Conflict Transformation Theory”, which emphasizes transforming the direction of conflict in any dispute, and the ZHOCD can use it to help contest political parties look at the brighter side of unity and progress. While this approach could illuminate the ZHOCD's impact on public opinion, it may not adequately address the institutional factors underlying electoral violence. While these offer valuable insights, public theology remains the most robust framework for understanding the ZHOCD's role in addressing electoral violence in Zimbabwe.

In addition, it is fundamental to note that the thrust of public theology is the engagement and dialogue between the Church and the more significant part of society, effectively creating a public society characterised by fairness, respect for human life and equal access to economic and political privileges. These fundamental tenets of public theology resonate well with the Zimbabwean context, wherein the influence of the Church in public matters has, over the years, deteriorated significantly. Thus, the Church's role has generally been limited to eschatology, with little influence on the country's day-to-day operations. Nevertheless, public theology empowers the ZHOCD to grapple with issues of common interest, such as peace, democracy, electoral violence and reconciliation, to establish the common good for everyone (Becker, 1970). Some notable figures in the development of public theology include Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1949), William Temple (2009), Martin Luther King Jr (1968), Desmond Tutu (1992), Deon Foster (2018), Jurgen Moltmann (1987), Miroslav Volf (1996) among others.

Considering the above, the study posits that public theology is an appropriate theory for this study because of its relatedness to the problem under investigation. To this end, the research contends that the absence of a laid down theology of the Church that governs elections in Zimbabwe has created a deep void, leaving elections entirely to politicians while the Church is confined to the periphery of society. In sharp contrast to the above notion, public theology insists that a critical moment has come under which the theology of the ZHOCD needs to be utilised in addressing the growing trend of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. In doing so, public theology as a *Kairos* theory of elections underscores that no society throughout the history of humanity has been prosperous in sidelining the influence of faith-based organisations such as the ZHOCD in matters of public interest. This assertion is even true when one considers the history of Zimbabwe, where the Church in Zimbabwe has, throughout history, been a significant player in addressing the plight of primarily familiar people in the face of the brutalities of colonialism, tribalism and economic meltdown. This attribute of the Zimbabwean Church dates to the colonial era when the Church challenged the dominant colonial structures and supported the nationalist movement that sought to wage war for independence.

Similarly, the Zimbabwean Church, via the Catholic Church, denounced the violence against the predominantly Ndebele people that followed independence. The same became increasingly

apparent as Zimbabwe's political tension deepened at the turn of the millennium. In all these epochs, the Zimbabwean Church, inspired by fundamentals of public theology, took sides with the poor, the marginalised and the powerless. However, it remains apparent that while all this speaks to the Church's active participation in the public space, it can still be said that, currently, apart from the ZHOCD's encouragement to vote and its notable letters condemning the use of violent means to power, no clear theology of the Church exists in the context of elections. To this end, and under the persuasion of public theology, I argue that the rising cases of electoral violence in Zimbabwe warrant the *Kairos* theology of the ZHOCD that can guide and motivate citizens to desist from the use of violence, intimidation and coercion in the context of general elections.

Therefore, it can be said that the distinctive character of public theology is the endeavour to understand a God who actively engages with every facet of human life. This assertion is further confirmed by the reformed theologian Jurgen Moltmann, who understands public theology as "the theology of the kingdom of God that must engage with the political, cultural, educational, economic, and ecological spheres of life (Moltmann, 1987, p.12). He notes, "the Church's theology influences Christian lives, which lives are in turn influenced by the contexts in which Christians live" (Moltmann, 1987, p.13). Thus, it can allude that, as a *Kairos* theory, public theology motivates the ZHOCD to understand that there are no purely private convictions, which means that Christian beliefs will always permeate the facets of life, including public life. This implies that public theology persuades the ZHOCD to fully and actively participate in addressing the scourge of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. Using the *Kairos* theory of public theology, the ZHOCD can navigate through the problem of electoral violence by bringing its theological apparatus to peace, inclusivity, and democracy. In this way, I contend that the theory of Public Theology enables the ZHOCD to address the disconnection between Christian life and the rest of the public life.

Thus, public theology brings a corrective version of understanding the message of Christ, arguing that the ZHOCD is called upon to the transformation of the world through the message of Christ, which is threefold: proclaim the word which God has spoken, demonstrate the way of Christ, and participate actively in the healing of the nation (Boff, 1985; Volf, 2006; Rowan, 2002). These core tenets of public theology resonate well with this study. In this view, it can be said that electoral

violence in Zimbabwe has become a significant problem that follows a vicious cycle, permeating through the fabric of socioeconomic and political life. Considering the above, the study underscores that while the ZHOCD has made numerous efforts to engage with the public space by advocating for a just and peaceful Zimbabwe, it can allude that more still needs to be done to undo the vicious cycle of electoral violence. On this basis, the study is anchored on the fact that, notwithstanding its challenges and weaknesses over the years, ZHOCD remains better situated to engage with the public space in dealing with the problem of electoral violence by using its theology on dialogue, inclusivity, peace, conflict resolution, forgiveness and reconciliation as appropriate resources in fighting the scourge of electoral violence in Zimbabwe.

In this way, public theology focuses on constructing what is public and private, conceptualising the interrelationship between state, market, civil society, and political structures as constitutive of everyday life. Fundamentally, public theology holds that all that exists is descended from God and sustained by God's power, and as a result, everything that exists ought to exalt God. Accordingly, every aspect of life, including leadership, work, wisdom, politics, economy, enterprise, intellect, technology, science, art, the humanities, business, and the media, is meant to exalt God (Bedford, 2007, p.25). Therefore, public theology inspires the Zimbabwean Christian community to understand that the world is not shaped by the Bible alone but also by the surrounding public that Christians inhabit. The beliefs and behaviours of the people around them affect what Christians believe and how they behave (De Cruchy, 2001). In this way, public theology helps this study investigate the socio-political factors contributing to the rampant growth of electoral violence. By engaging with the socio-political space, the ZHOCD successfully fulfils the critical concerns of public theology.

Accordingly, public theology insists that the ZHOCD's beliefs in non-violence, love and respect for life should be shared with the broader society. Thus, in its many forms (Individuals, congregations, denominations, ecumenical bodies), the Church is present as the body of Christ in public life. Hence, it engages with and participates in public discourse and reasoning in the diverse and complex aspects, spheres, structures, and institutions of public life. It speaks many different languages simultaneously (Haberman, 1989). To this end, using public theology as a theory of this

study will enable the ZHOCD to translate God's presence into public activities, such as economics, politics, business, and many others.

Similarly, using public theology as a theory of this study provides the ZHOCD with the requisite apparatus to reflect on faith's meaning, significance, and implications in and for public life. Thus, Public theology applies theology in areas traditionally covered by public discipline, like economics, politics, and ecology. When applied to electoral violence in Zimbabwe, public theology as a *Kairos* theory allows the ZHOCD's theology to engage in discourse with both the perpetrators and the victims of electoral violence, promoting tolerance and reconciliation across the political divide.

However, besides its public role, public theology should not be mistaken for sociology or other general disciplines; on the contrary, it should maintain its theological nature and ensure the presence of a theological voice in public life (Smit, 2007, p.11). Nevertheless, the public theology theory calls upon the ZHOCD to remain vigilant and attentive to its mandate of speaking truth to power and calling for justice and fairness in society. In this respect, public theology remains resistant to cooption by the state or other robust social structures. On the contrary, it calls the ZHOCD to be critical, in opposition, resisting, warning, critiquing, and opposing the evils of electoral violence in Zimbabwe's political landscape. These fundamentals belong inherently to the gospel and, therefore, the Church's role and the task of theology (De Gruchy, 1995). The above submission calls upon the ZHOCD to enter the public space, critically engaging with institutions and systems promoting electoral violence. Thus, as Albert Nolan stresses, a proper engagement of public theology and the public sphere gives rise to the "coming of God's kingdom, God's reign on earth as the object of 'Christian hope' and yet without losing its perspective of the language of transcendence. Our hope, he assumes, is that "God's will be done on earth", and what God wills is always the common good, best for all and the whole of creation" (Nalan, 1988, p.1988).

4.1.2 The Thrust of Public Theology

The above description of public theology makes the theory better placed and appropriate for examining the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. As part of its concerns, public theology is motivated by the desire to model a society that is characterised by oneness, forgiveness, peace

and democracy while at the same time standing opposed to any institution that seeks to threaten the above. Considering this, using public theology as a theory for this study enables the ZHOCD to confront injustice, critique electoral violence, and condemn political structures responsible for the same. At the same time, public theology targets Christian believers who are still determining civic engagement's religious fruitfulness. It argues that Christians can become better Christians and Churches will become better Christian communities through understanding and participating in public life (Mathewes, 2007, p.2). With its interaction with issues of public interest, public theology stretches its influence beyond the ZHOCD, thus reaching to Christians and non- alike.

Further, the theory of public theology underscores that contemporary Christians are socialised in a world of fragments of previously coherent tradition and formerly intact communities. Thus, public theology insists that human identities and moral sensibility are shaped not by cultural framework but by bits and pieces of skills, wisdom, and insights we discover (Peterson, 2002). This understanding is fundamental in the quest to study the problem of electoral violence. In this view, public theology enables the ZHOCD to understand the underlying socio-cultural factors contributing to the upsurge of electoral violence and use that framework to address contemporary struggles. To this end, it can be said that electoral violence in Zimbabwe is deeply embedded in cultural, tribal, racial and gender differences that have characterised the Zimbabwean society. Therefore, employing the public theology lens will help to clarify the root cause of these deep-seated existential conflicts, thus paving the way for dialogue and reconciliation, which are fundamental ingredients to ending any form of violence, including electoral violence.

4.1.3 Major Tenets of Public Theology as a Kairos theory

Public theology, as a *Kairos* theory, decisively breaks with the colonial and neo-colonial captivity of the churches, with the state or Church Theology underpinning it (Degruchy, 1991, p.38). Thus, as a theory, public theology always presents a timely voice for the oppressed, suffering, and powerless citizens. The theory fundamentally opposes state theology and church theology while endorsing prophetic theology.

4.1.3.1 State Theology

State theology denotes a theological justification of brutal and inhuman policies of oppressive systems of governance. As its main characteristic, the ideology of state theology always insists that nothing needs to change. It is a theological framework designed to provide legitimacy to anarchy. For example, the apartheid government in South Africa and the colonial regime in Rhodesia endorsed totalitarianism, capitalism, and racism as antagonistic to most black Africans while intentionally supporting the state (Degruchy, 1991, p.39). To ensure support, state theology always refers to scripture to enforce the submission and loyalty of the citizens to the government of the day. In this way, state theology often weaponises and misrepresents the Bible while sustaining the doctrine of the superiority of one race over the other to legitimise the persecution and subjugation of mostly the majority by a minority group. In this vein, Togarasei (2009, p.149) attests that, throughout the history of humanity, the Bible has been read and interpreted differently to address the existential needs of the Christian community and the people in general. Thus, the Bible has been used to justify slavery and to end slavery, to validate colonialism and to fight for liberation, to legitimise apartheid and to fight for its end. Accordingly, the Bible can be termed an all-weather book (Togarasei, 2009, p.149).

Comparably, in the context of the electoral violence in Zimbabwe, state theology is promoted by Church leaders who openly support ZANU-PF, claiming that the party has a divine mandate to govern forever. Most of these leaders are affiliated with African Independent churches whose formation broke from the missionary-established churches. Consequently, African Independent Churches have, since inception, demonstrated allegiance and support for ZANU-PF. In most cases, African independent Churches have dismissed the essence of elections, citing that ZANU-PF has been divinely ordained to rule Zimbabwe forever. They consistently insist that nothing needs to be changed and that electoral violence and other forms of human rights violation are the work of the enemies of the state.

Further, when electoral violence breaks out, and people are killed, injured, or taken hostage by the government, it is startling that these same religious leaders remain mute. If they choose to speak, they usually throw their finger at opposition politicians, who are often the victims rather than the perpetrators of electoral violence. Examples of ZANU-PF Church leaders who have publicly

supported state theology include Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), Reverend Andrew Wutawunashe of the Family of God Churches (FOG), and leaders of predominantly African Independent Churches (AICs). It is assumed that such supporters of state theology get rewarded by the state with material possessions such as farms, agriculture inputs, gold mines, and money, among other benefits. However, stating that all independent churches support ZANU-PF oversimplifies the state of dissent in Zimbabwe - it's an impression of a monolithic theology that ignores variations.

In this regard, the theory of public theology brings state theology to question, condemning it for serving only the interests of a few individuals in positions of power while deliberately suppressing the voices of the majority powerless populace. As a *Kairos* theory, public theology calls upon Christian groups such as the ZHOCD to critique state theology, citing that the theology of the Church should take after the example set by Jesus Christ, who constantly stood opposed to oppressive political ideologies of his day, while deliberately taking the side of the poor, the marginalised and the powerless. To this end, public theology is appropriate for this study as it motivates the ZHOCD to critique state theology while endorsing a theology that speaks for the people and seeks to liberate the oppressed.

4.1.3.2 Church Theology

Church theology is another form of theology which public theology firmly opposes. In the case of South Africa, Church theology became an indictment against South African English Churches- Church theology, which claimed a 'middle ground' position relative to the theological concerns of the day. In this regard, the South African *Kairos* Document 1986 notes:

We have analysed the statements the so-called English-speaking churches made from time to time. We have looked at what church leaders tend to say in their speeches and press statements about the apartheid regime and the present crisis. We understand this type of theology does not express the faith of most Christians, who form a more significant part of most Christians today... In a limited, guarded, and cautious way, this theology is critical of oppressive governments. Its criticism, however, is superficial and counter-productive because it engages in an in-depth analysis of the signs of our times. It relies upon a few stocks of ideas derived from Christian tradition and then uncritically and repeatedly applies them to our situation *Kairos* Document (1986, p.4).

From the ongoing discussion, it can be deduced that Church theology is a form of theology in which the criticism of the state is superficial, guarded, exaggeratedly, cautious, and ultimately impertinent to the signs of the times from the perspective of suffering. Church theology is thus bourgeois, liberal and not zealously committed to dealing with structural challenges in the society that demanded social and ecclesiastical transformation. In this regard, Church theology is always divorced from the concerns of most citizens; however, numerous aspersions shrouded its cast against those considered. According to Nalan, it casts against those outside the norm and canons of mainstream traditional theology. Its exponents always perceive prophetic theology as “too harsh” and “unchristian”.

In the Zimbabwean context, Church theology speaks to the doctrines of churches that choose not to take a position on issues of public concern, such as violence during elections. These churches maintain that Christians must concentrate on the Church’s heavenly message. Thus, since politics and other public issues are seen as falling outside the Church’s goal and thus deviating from the core agenda, the Church should refrain from getting involved. In this way, church theology is evident in churches that recognise the escalation of electoral violence and discourage their members from participating without necessarily engaging with government systems such as politicians, security departments and ruling party members responsible for it. Accordingly, church theology has consistently demonstrated an unwillingness to ‘push hard’ in addressing the problem of electoral violence. This, thus, does not help much in addressing the problem under study. Among many others, the Jehovah’s Witnesses is one of the churches that has popularised the church theology. Therefore, it can be said that church theology does not attempt to address the problem of electoral violence. Instead, it considers that participating in any electoral activities, such as voting and peaceful demonstrations, is against the Church’s ethos. Thus, church theology maintains the status quo and does not want to upset authorities by advocating for change.

4.1.3.3 Prophetic Theology

The third model of the *Kairos* theory is prophetic theology. A prophetic theology is considered objective and essential to the *Kairos* theory of public theology. Several scholars, such as DeGruchy (1919, p.35) and Khabela (1991), point out that prophetic theology is an essential force that connects the Church’s struggles and the efforts for liberation. In this context, Kairo’s prophetic

theology insists that public theology must be spiritual, pastoral, and prophetic. Its counters should include, among other things, the following themes: social analysis, critical biblical interpretation to debunk oppression in the Bible, the tyranny in the traditional Christian tradition and a message of hope (Khabela, 1991, p.275). Thus, *Kairos* theology is essential to this study because it brings a newer, critical, and objective theological methodology that emphasises structural sin, political injustice, and systemic oppression as a crucial hermeneutical key for radical change. It, therefore, suffices to acknowledge that the prophetic voice of the *Kairos* theory calls the Church to a radical departure from the state and church theology. In this way, Boesak (2004, p.10) maintains that prophetic theology can be traced to the ‘protest model’ of resistance against the hegemony and dominance of white Christianity because the white Church was so intertwined with the colonial project that it lacked spirituality and prophetic presence from a Western perspective. To this end, Boesak (2004) notes that:

Understanding the intertwined nature of Christianity, colonialist expansion, and white racism, one should not be surprised at the lack of resistance and critical thinking of a prophetic presence in the Christian Church in society at that time. The Church identified wholly with the colonial project and could not conceive of a vision divorced from the vision of the imperial power ...this led to the destruction of African people together with the cultures and the enslavement of people, indigenous and imported All this was not only permissible. It was unavoidable and necessary for the colonial project and, therefore, the will of God (Boesak 2004, p.10-11).

Thus, Boesak expressed the contrast of the above to the prophetic history of Christianity in South Africa:

In the early history of Christianity in South Africa, the prophetic instance, the movement of recognition that the truth of the gospel was crushed to earth and needed to rise again, was created and underdeveloped. However, it was not by the institutional Church and its theologians but by the representatives of the missionary societies in South Africa and the African people themselves (Boesak, 2004, p.11).

On this basis, the motif of confession as political praxis establishes prophetic theology. Thus, Christians are urged to share the Christian worldview with those around them and the rest of the world to help the faith be rediscovered and authenticated. The compulsion of prophecy, which is the compulsion of the prophetic mandate to be loyal in testimony and unity of faith rather than unity of societal systems, is the foundation of prophetic theology (Smit, 2007, p.11). Such a drive

springs out from the impulses of history's underside, which are hidden beneath the outward institutional structures of the Church and the state.

Like the above, it is essential to note that using public theology as a theory of this study helps the study to appreciate the role which the ZHOCD and its member churches have previously played in challenging, critiquing, and protesting government policies that ran counter to equality, development, and peace over the years. In this context, the ZHOCD has questioned Mugabe's long rule, which was characterised by corruption, greed and economic collapse. In this way, the ZHOCD has demonstrated its vision, and, ultimately, the Church's vision is to ensure the realisation of a national leadership that is accountable, responsible and answerable to the citizens. Essentially, with the escalation of electoral violence, the ZHOCD has made efforts to engage with the state to bring an end to the politics of violence and vengeance. However, the scourge of electoral violence is deeply grounded in hatred, tribalism and exclusion. Therefore, public theology inspires the ZHOCD to go beyond writing pastoral letters and engage in other forms of communication with the government to address the plight of electoral violence. Thus, it can be noted that to quench the urge for electoral violence, more still needs to be done.

4.1.4 The Relevancy of Kairos Theory as a Public Theology in Zimbabwe

Public theology insists that the theology of the Church must be in conversation with the public humanitarian experiences such as poverty, violence, political unrest, and socioeconomic challenges (Wolterstorff, 1983; Wolterstorff, 2011; Stats SA, 2014). In this way, Thesnaar (2013) cites that there has been a historical theological debate on the public role of the Church. On the one hand, some Christians insist that the Church and the Christian community were called out to lead a private life confined in church buildings and other religious areas. This notion can be traced back to the colonial era when the Rhodesian government closed the door to the Church's participation in national interest issues. The Church, in the repressive colonial rule of Ian Smith's Regime, made efforts to speak against the evils and oppressive system of the Rhodesian government. In this way, the Church decried the subjugation of the majority African people under the minority white government. However, this was often met with resistance in the form of arrest, torture, and long imprisonment terms for church leaders.

In the post-independent Zimbabwe, the situation has remained essentially unchanged. Thus, the majority rule of the ZANU-PF soon adopted the same oppressive strategy of the colonial Rhodesian government. On this basis, the ZANU-PF-led government has made significant efforts to silence the Church in its attempt to dialogue with human experiences in the public space (Bratton & Masungure, 2018). Several Christian leaders who resembled prophetic tendencies have all been met with brutality and severe struggle. Names such as Archbishop Pious Ncube, Pastor Shingi Munyeza, and Apostle Talent Chiwenga, among others, are quickly brought to memory. Ecumenical bodies such as the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian denominations and its member churches have been criticised mainly by the government for embodying a regime change agenda (Edwin, 2018). In this way, it has become apparent that the ruling ZANU-PF government has consistently considered church leaders who demonstrate *Kairos*, prophetic tradition, as lacking patriotism and serving the interests of the opposition party for a regime change agenda. Thus, the government has often descended heavily on Church leaders who engage in public matters such as electoral violence.

The selection of public theology as a *Kairos* theory for electoral violence has been motivated by the intention of this study to engage with humanitarian issues that have continued to affect the livelihood of ordinary Zimbabweans, questioning socio-political structures that support electoral violence. With its emphasis on contextuality, public theology becomes an appropriate theory for this study as goes beyond other theological lenses, such as liberation theology, African theology, and feminist theology, that only seek liberation from previously oppressive socioeconomic structures. Thus, while the above-mentioned theological lenses also seek to bring about meaningful change to the previously oppressed groups, public theology is distinctive in that it gets into the public space to converse with social structures that have subjected people to poverty, injustice, and subjugation. Thus, public theology as a *Kairos* theory interrogates fundamental systems of society that have promoted and participated in the surge of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. Thus, public theology makes it possible for this study to examine oppressive socioeconomic and political structures to bring about not just the liberation of the people but also a radical mindset shift in those in positions of power. In this way, public theology as a theory for the study becomes distinct from other theologies or social groups in that while it confronts the root causes of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, such as corruption, totalitarianism and uncontrolled appetite for political power, it

also appeals to biblical examples in whom the fundamentals of public theology are evident. Therefore, public theology goes out to Zimbabwe's spirituality and appeals to socioeconomic and political faculties while highlighting the dangers of violence, hatred, and coercion. In this regard, public theology, as a *Kairos* theology, is a necessary theory for the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe as it embodies the vision of a just social order which challenges individualism and promotes the welfare and fulfilment of society (Brown, 2014). Therefore, public theology militates against community-centeredness, challenging the possessive individualism central in the mind of oppressive social structures.

From this perspective, if the ZHOCD has been involved in public issues, how has it balanced its historical role with risks associated with the task? In this way, public theology insists that it is the ZHOCD's role to keep those in power accountable and, at the same time, empower those who are weak to stand for their rights for the betterment of society (Vellem, 2010; Moltman, 1993; Banana, 1996). In this respect, public Theology is appropriate for the Zimbabwean situation as it engages with the volatile socioeconomic and political environment responsible for electoral violence, confronting the state by standing opposed to oppressive theologies such as state and Church theology. This motivates the ZHOCD to play a catalytic role between the powerful and the powerless, the oppressor and the oppressed, and the victims and the perpetrators of electoral violence, thus bringing about a just society characterised by equality, fairness, and peace. In pursuit of the tenets of public theology, the study motivates the ZHOCD to participate in overthrowing oppressive social structures and inhuman activities such as electoral violence, abuse of human rights and shrinkage of democratic space.

4.1.5 Critique of the Theory

While the theory of public theology seems appropriate for the study of electoral violence, it has weaknesses. To this end, one of the main criticisms levelled at public theology is its vast scope of concern emanating from the theory's attempt to address every social issue ranging from politics, economics and anthropology. As a result, public theology can find itself overextended in addressing these areas because it needs more subject matter competence, which causes it to fail to confront the issues with enough depth and academic rigour; after all, each topic requires a different technique and expertise. To this end, this overt broadness may also result in public theology

needing a concentrated strategy and methodology. For instance, consider Zimbabwe, where nearly every facet of human existence—including politics, economics, and anthropology—is engulfed in a multifaceted crisis. This makes it impossible for public theology to effectively address every topic of human experience in the public space. Considering this, I maintain that to adequately address the concerns of Zimbabweans in public space, public theology needs to be used in conjunction with another theory, such as the *Kairos* theory.

Another critique against public theology is the intrinsic challenge of maintaining public relevance while protecting Christian distinctiveness and identity. Thus, public theology encroaches into other areas requiring different skills and apparatus. However, this view seems to downplay that public theology is primarily concerned with people and their world experiences while connecting these experiences to God's original plan for humanity. In this way, public theology embodies an intentional interest in what happens in the public space as its primary concern. Unlike its contemporary theologies, such as feminist theology, African theology, practical theology and many other growing theologies whose interests are limited to one area of human experience, public theology insists that the study and practice of theology must be done holistically, engaging with all aspects of human life. Thus, public theology enables a rare yet necessary relationship between the theology of the Church and what happens in the broader society.

With this understanding, the study combines public theology and *Kairos* theology, arguing that the two theories provide an almost similar yet complementary concern for examining the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. As a result, the theory is appropriate for this investigation as it offers a hybrid theoretical framework for the problem of electoral violence.

4.2 Methodology

Khotari (2004, p.23) defines an operational description of research methodology as the systematic solution of research problems through collecting data using various techniques, interpreting that data, and formulating conclusions based on the research data. It may further be understood as a science of studying how to conduct research scientifically. It presents the various steps generally adopted by the researcher in studying a research problem and the logic behind them. Accordingly, research methodology is the blueprint that unpacks how the research will be carried out (Bhojanna,

2009, p.32). Research methodology is further defined by Birks and Mills (2011, p.4) as a collection of guidelines and concepts that influence how research is designed. The above definitions are appropriate for this study because they provide a broader holistic perspective of the research process and objectives. This provides the study with a detailed account of how the problem of electoral violence is to be engaged and discussed, detailing the sources for both primary and secondary data and their appropriateness to the problem under investigation.

From this perspective, research methodology encompasses issues like the reason behind the choice of the research methods that the researcher has chosen to employ Khothari (2004, p.23). According to Holden and Lynch (2004), research should not only 'be methodologically led', but the choice of which methodology to use should be consequential not only to the social science Phenomenon to be investigated but also to the philosophical stance of the researcher. Similarly, Goulding (2002) attests that the choice of methodology should be based on the researcher's interests, beliefs, and convictions. Other significant factors, such as epistemological concerns, must also be considered when choosing research methodology (Goulding, 2002). In this section, Buchmann and Bryman (2007) indicate their usefulness to philosophical foundations and personal convictions, practical factors such as time, resources, and the quantity of existing data or knowledge that can influence a researcher's choice of methodology that applies to Zimbabwe's electoral violence (Ahmed et, 2016, p.32).

4.3 Research Paradigm

The research paradigm is defined by Bryman (2012, p.630) as a model or pattern for undertaking research. It is a set of ideas, beliefs or understandings within which theories and practices converge and function to formulate a research plan. This research uses the interpretivist approach. The interpretivist approach fundamentally believes in multiple realities instead of single ones (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004). In this regard, the approach underscores that human behaviour is so complex and unpredictable that it cannot be predicted by predefined probabilistic models (Bowen, 2003). Thus, knowledge can only be established through interpreting the meaning that people put on behaviours and events. Accordingly, the interpretivist approach underpins that knowledge of reality is intertwined with people's experiences, providing primary knowledge of contextual reality that helps them understand the world around them.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) further posit that the interpretive approach is holistic and contextual as opposed to reductionist and Isolationist. In this respect, interpretivism approaches focus on language, signs, and meanings from the participants' perspective involved in the social phenomenon (Yin, 1994). In addition, Bryman (2012) attests that interpretive researchers receive critical attention; in some cases, the researcher is considered part of the social phenomenon, although expected to remain neutral and objective in letting the phenomenon speak.

The fundamental qualities of the interpretive approach dovetail with the nature of this study, the key research question, the interpretive approach dovetail with the nature of this study, the key research question, the research objectives and the problem under investigation. To comprehend the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, I aim to understand human behaviour, the reason for the abrupt behavioural shift, and how this behaviour shift leads to using force instead of dialogue, hatred in place of unity in diversity, and violence instead of dialogue. I further intend to establish how the *Kairos* theology of the Church can be a catalyst in alleviating the problem of electoral violence. From this perspective, the interpretive method appropriately addresses the issues raised by the study since it provides the framework necessary to comprehend and analyse the concept of electoral violence in Zimbabwe.

4.4 Qualitative Research

The study uses the qualitative research stratum to investigate the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe's elections. Bryman notes that in its generic definition, qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of interpretive material practices that make the world visible. As a research strategy, qualitative research primarily emphasises words rather than quantification in its data collection and analysis. From this perspective, qualitative research is broadly inductivist, constructivist, and interpretive. Thus, qualitative research pays special attention to nature, explanation and understanding of the phenomena under study. As a result, qualitative researchers are not measured in terms of frequency or quantity but are examined for in-depth meaning and processes. In this vein, the distinctive defining characteristics of qualitative research are "a focus on interpretation rather than quantification, an emphasis on subjectivity rather than objectivity, flexibility in the process of conducting research, and an

orientation towards process rather than outcome. Concern with context regarding behaviours and situations as inextricably linked in forming experience and, finally, explicit recognition of the impact of the research process on the research situation (Bryman, 2012, p. 45). To this end, the qualitative research method enables the study of social behaviours like electoral violence and ascertains the driving force towards its upsurge.

In this way, qualitative data cannot be accurately measured or counted. Instead, it is generally expressed in words rather than numbers, essential human attributes such as ideas, customs, and beliefs that are instigated in studying human beings and their societies. As such, qualitative research concerns the phenomena's nature, explanation and understanding of the phantom of electoral violence. Accordingly, qualitative research shall explore ZHOCD's contribution towards the general elections. Further, qualitative research seeks to understand the motivation and purpose of electoral violence. Thus, the study examines the historical contribution of the Church to the problem of electoral violence. The behaviour of the ZHOCD, its member bodies, affiliated denominations, and the general populace will be studied.

Khothari postulates that an underlying premise of many qualitative researchers is "seeing things through the eyes of the people being studied". This denotes that the subject matter of the social sciences (that is, people and their social world) does differ from the subject matter of the natural sciences (Khothari, 2004, p.25). Consequently, many qualitative researchers demonstrate a commitment to viewing the social world through the eyes of the people being studied. Hence, the social world needs to be interpreted from the perspective of the surveyed people rather than as though those subjects were incapable of reflecting on the social world (Bryman, 2012). For most qualitative researchers, concepts and theories are usually inductively derived from the collected data. Considering the preceding, this research settled for the qualitative research paradigm as it relates well to the topic under study. Qualitative research enables this study to explore the problem of electoral violence and its motivation. This provides the study with a platform to understand the extent to which the Church has historically contributed to the struggles of humanity. By engaging with the Church's legacy qualitative research, the theological work of the ZHOCD thus enables the study to have a broader engagement with the problem of electoral violence.

Like most qualitative research projects, this study seeks to objectively make sense of the problem of electoral violence, taking notes from the experiences of victims and the intervention of the theology of the Church. In analytical research, the researcher uses the currently available information and analyses it to critically assess the subject (Bryman, 2012). This study uses literature drawn from scholarly views on electoral violence. Elections in Zimbabwe have historically been marred by exclusion, intimidation, and brutality. In this regard, qualitative research adequately suits this study as electoral violence is a “lived” experience of the people. On this basis, the study intends to generate possible suggestions for the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe.

In this study, the non-empirical research method described by Bryman as one in which the researcher does not interact directly with the participants was used (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, it becomes less likely that the researcher will influence the social behaviour being studied. The study opted for a non-empirical research method due to the challenging nature of collecting data from survivors of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. Many survivors fear victimization and are reluctant to share their experiences. As a result, the study relied on existing literature to provide insights into the issue. However, it’s crucial to acknowledge that this approach may not fully capture the nuances of survivors’ experiences. To this end, literature and document analysis, including theological documents and pastoral letters on the topic under study, shall be employed as primary data to get requisite data for the study. The methods used are Literature review and document analysis.

4.5 Desktop Research or Literature Review

Desktop research methodology refers to data gathered through analysing texts on a particular subject. It collects and analyses information from secondary sources such as documents, reports, academic publications, and other material available online or in libraries (Caufield, 2023). Thus, literature-based research is a systematic procedure of reviewing or evaluating printed and electronic documents. In keeping with the thrust of analytical methods in qualitative research, literature-based research requires that data be examined and interpreted to elicit facts, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As a research method, literature-based or desktop research particularly applies to qualitative research-intensive studies

that produce detailed descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organisation, or program (Stake, 1995).

Literature-based research provides:

- An interface and context of past events.
- A firm historical background account of the topic under study is needed.
- Providing the researcher with firm roots of the problem under investigation.

In this way, the literature-based research method enables this research to interact with the historical background of electoral violence. This helps to appreciate the extent to which the problem is rooted, thus providing the study with an account of how the phenomenon has been handled, the strategies used, and their effectiveness, thus contributing to generating new knowledge to address the same problem.

Literature-based, sometimes called desktop research methodology, falls under the qualitative research stratum. It examines and interrogates literature to establish its relatedness to socio-cultural and political contexts. To this end, ZHOCD theological documents such as the *ZWWD* and *The March is not Ended*, among others, shall be explored and discussed to provide a socio-historical interaction of the ZHOCD with public matters.

The literature-based research method has been considered appropriate for this study for various reasons.

Firstly, literature-based research enables the study to make inferences about the message within texts, the writer's audience, the culture of the recipients and the time surrounding the text (Coleman, 2023). In this regard, information from literature and documents can help suggest essential questions that need further discussion in the context of the problem under investigation. Third, desktop research provides supplementary research data and insights that help understand the problem under study (Yin, 1994). This further provides a record for tracking changes surrounding the problem under study. Electoral violence is intrinsically intertwined with Zimbabwe's political history, and the phenomenon has kept changing to suit the contemporary

context in the political landscape. It is necessary, therefore, for current research to track such changes using previous research to generate new knowledge.

Additional considerations for selecting literature-based research include the method's efficiency. Yin (1994) cites that the method is less time-consuming and, therefore, more efficient than other research methods. One of its key advantages is that it requires data selection, not data collection, thus saving time. In addition, the advent of the internet and technology has made the accessibility of literature a lot easier. The method has also been emulated for its effectiveness in terms of costs. It is arguably a less costly research method than other methods. In addition, Merriam (1988) attests that literature-based research is stable in that the researcher is left with no room for manipulation of data or changing the data to his or her advantage.

However, literature-based methodology may need to adequately and objectively discuss an area under study. Furthermore, previously written documents may carry within them the bias of both the writer and the data. In this regard, the literature-based method may leave room for a biased selection of literature which speaks only to the researcher's hypothesis (Yin, 1994, p.80). To address these and any other obstacles, the study will thoroughly dialogue with various literature sources, including data from the ZHOCD in its description of electoral violence as it manifests in pastoral letters, press statements, and updates. The interaction between the scholarly literature on electoral violence and the ZHOCD theological materials on the same topic is expected to yield comprehensive data crucial for producing new knowledge on the subject.

Accordingly, literature-based research methodology is essential in exploring the role of ZHOCD's *Kairos* theology in general elections. As an ecumenical body, the ZHOCD has issued many pastoral letters and ecclesiological documents that need to be utilised to generate new academic knowledge on the Church's public role. ZHOCD pastoral letters on the Church's public role will be examined within the context of the topic under study. Furthermore, the ZHOCD has historically held press conferences and radio and television interviews, which the study will utilise to understand the role the ZHOCD has historically played in electoral violence and how that can be utilised to cultivate the theology of the Church on general elections. Newspaper articles, fliers, and advertising material will all be identified and utilised within the context of this research.

4.6 Sampling and Data Collection

The data was extracted from a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling, or purposeful sampling, is primarily used in qualitative research to select participants or literature to gather comprehensive and in-depth data on the phenomenon under investigation (Bryman, 2012). The selection of participants or literature follows stipulated criteria determined by the thrust of the research and the availability and accessibility of data. In this regard, the data selection was influenced by the critical research question, the study's thrust and emphasis, its objectives, and the public theology framework, also referred to as the *Kairos* theory. This included primary data from ZHOCD's theological documents and pastoral letters and secondary data from previously published literature on general elections, electoral violence, and the Church's role in electoral violence.

4.6.1 Document Analysis

Document analysis is a systemic objective analysis of message characteristics (Neuendorf, 2002, p.1). Document analysis involves skimming, thoroughly examining, and interpreting documents. Using this method, researchers can learn about popular cultures, beliefs, and many other issues by studying the characteristics of messages delivered through documents, media, and other sources (Weber, 1990). The document analysis method studies text, speech, broadcast, and visual images. The method develops a procedure for coding various aspects of the textual aural or visual material and analyses this coded content. Document analysis is a research method for systematically analysing and making inferences from the text. Document analysis aims to develop inferences from communication, including books, articles, songs, films, speeches, and others (Weber, 1990). It can be understood as a survey of some documents or other records of prior communication. As such, document analysis is a survey designed with fixed-choice responses to produce qualitative data that can be utilised in explaining the nature of things (Bryman, 2012). In this respect, documents such as ZHOCD pastoral letters, theological documents, vision documents, and press statements, among others, shall be studied to explore the ZHOCD's role in Zimbabwe's general elections.

Given the above, the study shall explore three critical documents that the ZHOCD has issued calling the government to task on humanitarian crises such as poverty, electoral violence, shrinkage of democratic space, poor governance, economic meltdown, and rampant human rights abuse. The documents to be explored are the *ZWWD* (15 September 2006), *The March is not Ended* (14 August 2020), and the Pastoral Letter on the 2023 elections, the *EWWD* (15 July 2023).

4.7 Primary Data

Primary data was collected from three theological documents published by the ZHOCD in response to a growing humanitarian crisis, socio-political unrest and alarming levels of violence, including electoral violence. It is necessary to note that while the ZHOCD and its member churches have published several publications and pastoral letters, this study shall focus primarily on *the ZWWD (2006)*, *The March is Not Ended (2020)*, *the EWWD (2023)* because of their relatedness to the study as well as the impact they brought along in the theological fraternity. Interestingly, the *ZWWD* by the ZHOCD and *The March is not Ended by the ZCBC* documents were published fourteen years apart. Nevertheless, the circumstances for which the documents were written remain substantially unchanged and, in most cases, worsen. Interestingly, the two documents share much common regarding themes, concerns, and language. In this regard, *March has not ended* (14 August 2020), and *the EWWD (2023)* continuously refers to the *ZWWD (15 September 2006)*.

4.8 Procedure and Analysis of the Documents

Document analysis entails a careful review and interpretation of the data. The iterative technique incorporates analysis themes and thematic analysis. Document analysis classifies data according to the critical research question (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The primary data was organised thematically. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) understand this as a method of identifying patterns in the data by identifying emerging themes that form the categories for analysis. A thorough, more concentrated rereading and review of the data is part of the process. From this perspective, the selected data is thoroughly examined and categorised, depending on the features of the data, to find themes relevant to a phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To ensure familiarisation, the primary data from the ZHOCD documents were carefully studied, with particular attention paid to the language, substance, context and objectives of these publications. Primary data sources ensured data validity, reliability, objectivity, and authenticity (Kabir, 2016).

The data was categorised according to the topic and aligned with the critical research question and the study's objectives.

4.9 Data Collection Techniques and Analysis

This study understands data collection as collecting information from all the relevant sources to solve the research problem. It evaluates the outcome and predicts future trends and possibilities (Kabir, 2016). In this case, data collection techniques enable one to conclude an answer to the relevant research questions (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Data was collected from selected ZHOCD theological documents: the *ZWWD*, *The March is not Ended*, and the *EWWD*. These have been carefully selected in keeping with the critical research questions, objectives, and the problems under investigation. The study further uses qualitative content analysis (QCA) to analyse and interpret the content of textual data on the subject under investigation. In this respect, QCA seeks to construct a model for the description of the phenomenon in a conceptual form (Kabir, 2016; Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Accordingly, Weber (1990) and Bryman (2012) concur that QCA provides a systematic model to identify patterns, concepts, and more prominent themes within the data to derive insight into the meaning and context of content. Correspondingly, QCA endeavours to answer the why, how or what? Through an iterative of coding and interpretation (Kabir, 2016). A critical advantage of QCA is that it often quantifies the frequency of words, phrases, and concepts (Weber, 1990). In this regard, frequency helps identify concepts that warrant further exploration. In line with the QCA, the study uses thematic analysis, a qualitative data analysis generally applied to studying text, books or published and unpublished literature (Kabir, 2016). In this regard, the researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes, topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly (Weber, 1990). The most common trend of thematic analysis follows the trend of familiarisation, coding, generating, and reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing up (Kabir, 2016). Thematic analysis enabled the study to understand people's views, opinions, knowledge, experience, or values on the role of the ZHOCD in electoral violence.

4.10 Conclusion

The chapter outlined the methodology of this research, starting with the theoretical framework and then the methodology. The theoretical framework for the study cites that public theology intersects with public matters such as politics, elections, violence, economics, poverty, and unemployment, among many challenges. Public theology in the context of this study has been described as the Church's work in realising a just, peaceful, and democratic society. By rejecting the contemporary dichotomy of faith, politics, religion, and civil society, public theology advocates for a constructive public role of religious discourse in a pluralistic society, interrogating essential existential issues such as human rights, tolerance, and equality. In this respect, the chapter comprehensively discussed public theology, showing the interconnection between public theology and *Kairos* theory. Given this, I argued throughout this chapter that, considering the common ground between the concerns of *Kairos* theory and public theology, it is necessary to combine the two theories in a complementary manner to address the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe effectively. Thus, the chapter considered public theology as a *Kairos* theory of the ZHOCD in dealing with electoral violence. In this respect, the chapter upholds public theology as a *Kairos* theory to the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. Thus, the chapter underscores the prevalence of electoral violence in Zimbabwe and its negative impact on the legitimacy of the country's electoral systems, which urgently calls for the *Kairos* theology of the ZHOCD. Thus, the study underpins that the *Kairos* theology of the ZHOCD is a sustainable theory in the study of electoral violence in Zimbabwe.

The chapter further discussed the research methodology. Key terms such as research methodology and qualitative research methods have been qualified and discussed in relation to the problem under investigation. The chapter endorses literature-based, sometimes called desktop research, as an appropriate data collection and analysis method for this study. The fundamental components of the literature-based method have been adequately discussed in keeping with the research problem, the key research question, and the objectives. The chapter further outlines the reasons behind the choice of the literature-based method. However, the chapter emphasised that this did not affect the research process and results. In this respect, the chapter followed primary data from ZHOCD's theological documents, such as *the ZWWD (2006)*, popularly known as the *ZWWD*. Additionally, primary data was drawn from pastoral letters such as *The March is not Ended (2020)* and *Pastoral Letter on Elections (2023)*. Furthermore, secondary data from global, regional, and local

scholarships on Church and violence, Church and human struggles, and Church and democracy have been utilised. The chapter also outlined the procedure and analysis of data collection techniques for primary and secondary data collection methods. Accordingly, the chapter endorsed the interpretivist research paradigm as appropriate for this study, considering the interconnectedness of the fundamental aspects of this approach and the problem under investigation. The next chapter focuses on presenting data from selected ZHOCD theological documents. It shall further present the *Kairos* elections theory as a sustainable theory for electoral violence in Zimbabwe.

Chapter Five

Presentation of Data and Analysis of Selected ZHOCD Theological Documents

5. Introduction

The previous chapter comprehensively discussed the study's research methodology and theoretical framework. In this chapter, I concentrate on the presentation of the data on the three selected ZHOCD theological documents: *The ZWWD* (September 15, 2006), sometimes called *Kairos Zimbabwe*, *The March is not Ended* (August 14, 2020) and *Pastoral Letter on the 2023 General Elections* (July 15, 2023). The reasons for selecting these documents have been alluded to in chapter four (methodology chapter) of the study. In this regard, these findings are based on the indicated documents and other secondary data derived from scholarly perspectives on the said documents. The details about the procedure of primary data analysis have been articulated and discussed in Chapter 4 (the methodology chapter) of the study. After a presentation of each document, a comprehensive discussion follows before introducing another document. The chapter answers the study's second objective, "*To explore how the ZHOCD can leverage its theological principles and Kairos theology teachings to promote non-violence, engage local communities, and foster dialogue with political authorities to mitigate electoral violence effectively*".

Given the above, the chapter follows three distinct pillars: a discussion of *the ZWWD* highlighting its impact, influence and significance, thus highlighting its strengths and weaknesses. This is followed by the discussion of *The March is Not Ended* pastoral letter, taking note of its influence among the general Christian populace, the government, and the nation at large—lastly, the discussion of *ZHOCD's Pastoral Letter on the 2023 general elections*.

5.1 The Zimbabwe We Want Document

The ZHOCD (whose membership and composition have been discussed in Chapter Three of the study) is the largest ecumenical body that produced a document, the *ZWWD*. The ZHOCD leaders, in consultation with their membership, gathered information on issues concerning national peace,

justice and human rights violations and penned down the Church's concerns over the growing cases of violence and socioeconomic and political meltdown. The document was also written in consultation with various societal leadership structures such as student unions, civic society, clergy members, workers' representatives, politicians, and lawyers (Makamure, 2006). These representatives drew information from across society, including labour, law, industry, the Church, students, civil society, and parliamentarians.

The Zimbabwe We Want was, thus, published on September 15, 2016. It was launched at the National Day of Prayer held at Harare sports ground. The document was distributed to all the country's ten provinces through church leadership (ZHOCD, 2006, p.1). The *ZWWD* was covered in the country's National Flag colours. It was forty-eight pages long (Masengwe, 2009, p.24). According to Masengwe, the *ZWWD* is still among the highly thought-out writings the Church has produced in reaction to the deepening economic crisis, political unrest, and alarming spike of violence, especially electoral violence (Masengwe, 2009, p.13). It is worth noting that the *Zimbabwe We Want Document (ZWWD)* is known by several names, such as the National Vision Document (NVD) and the *ZWWD*.

Given the preceding, the *ZWWD* is officially considered to have given birth to *Kairos* theology in Zimbabwe. Therefore, this study shall interchangeably use *Kairos Zimbabwe* to refer to the *ZWWD* where necessary. It is necessary to understand that the *ZWWD* is one of the many *Kairos* traditions that have emerged across the globe. Thus, in pursuit of the *Kairos* tradition, the *ZWWD* exhibited the same trends as other *Kairos* documents, such as *Kairos* South Africa, Palestinian *Kairos*, and the United States *Kairos*, among many others. In this context, as before, the Church in Zimbabwe tried to realise justice, peace, and fairness.

Coincidentally, at the time of writing, the three ecumenical bodies forming the ZHOCD were led by Bishops who all hailed from Manicaland, namely Bishop Trevor Manhanga for the EFZ (EFZ), Bishop Patrick Mutume for the ZCBC and Bishop Sebastian Bakare for the ZCC. This coincidence brought in the assumption that leaders from one region heavily influenced the *Kairos* document. At the same time, Manicaland is known for its enormous contribution to the liberation struggle, with fighters such as Hebert Chitepo, Ndabaningi Sithole, Bishop Abel Muzorewa, Margret

Dongo, and Edgar Tekere all hailed from the Manicaland Region. In addition, Manicaland has become the home of opposition politics since 1980 (Dewolf, 1981; Mungazi, 1985; Kriger, 1988), making it one of the prominent regions in Zimbabwe's history from where notable milestones in the country's history derive. Given this background, the government viewed the *ZWWD* as one of the Manicaland church's efforts to unsettle the government and destabilise the ruling ZANU-PF party. Thus, the earlier stages of the document were viewed with scepticism and wide criticism from the government. However, the ZHOCD insists that the *Zimbabwe We Want Document* was a national document which sought to bring to attention the plight of ordinary Zimbabweans and their daily experiences.

The *ZWWD* sought to provide a platform for dialogue to “define a national vision for Zimbabwe and reach consensus on how it was to be achieved” (The *ZWWD*, 2006, p.6).

The Church leaders who crafted this document perceived that the document is:

A Kairos moment of reflection, repentance and a new vision of a Zimbabwe that will be shared by all, owned by all, and loved by all its citizens regardless of religion, tribe, race, gender, or political affiliation...It is a call to do a collective reflection on the dire national situation and its toll on our economy, quality of life, families and the future of our children and our nation. It is an attempt to inspire ourselves to draw lessons and national-building principles from our past mistakes to envision a better and greater Zimbabwe –Zimbabwe we all want (The Zimbabwe We Want, 2006, p.6).

The *ZWW* document was, therefore, a call for a consultative debate on critical issues affecting the country's ability to realise its potential to reach a shared vision for Zimbabwe. The document also envisaged an end to all forms of violence, including electoral violence, torture, hatred, vengeance and all forms of unrest, including socioeconomic and political unrest. In this sense, the *ZWWD* envisioned the start of a unification rooted in diversity, inclusiveness, acceptance, harmony, and cohesion.

5.2 The Context of the *ZWWD* (*Kairos Zimbabwe*)

The Zimbabwe We Want Document was crafted when the country was going through a myriad of challenges. These unfolded against a backdrop of socioeconomic and political struggles. Chitando (2011) cites that the country began to show signs of deteriorating socioeconomic and political standards since the turn of the millennium. These struggles clearly indicated that the nation was

reaching a point of no return unless ‘proper’, ‘decisive’ actions were to be taken to save the country from nosediving (Chitando, 2011, p.10). This mirrors the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1982, p.9), who says that a prophetic church retains the heart and conscience of society, understands times, and knows how the nation should react to crises. In this sense, the ZHOCD noted that:

The situation in our country is no longer a matter of political affiliation, ideologies, and policies. Instead, the contention is now between what is good and what is evil ... Christian leaders and the entire Christian Community must face reality and speak out against the evil that has bedevilled the nation due to poor governance, corruption, and violence (ZHOCD, 2006, p.2).

However, it is worth noting that by its admission, the ZHOCD acknowledged that the escalating levels of Zimbabwe’s situation awakened the Church from a deep slumber (Antonio, 2009, p.21). This prompted ZHOCD to craft and publish the *ZWWD* in 2006. Ecumenical leaders who were involved acknowledged that the Church was “beginning to wake up to its socio-economic and political role in Zimbabwe’s affairs in a more comprehensive manner” (The *ZWWD* 2006, p.11). Thus, it is necessary to point out that in the past, the Church has spoken against the legacy of colonialism and racism. However, in post-independent Zimbabwe, the Church remained broadly weak and passive in the face of gross human rights abuse. It boggles the mind and raises curiosity about how a once vibrant institution that opposed colonial structures can observe the *Gukurahundi* disturbances without action or voice. This suggests that the Church’s silence must have been necessitated by various factors, including the fact that, during the liberation struggle, the Church, particularly mainline churches, closely identified with and thus supported the cause of the nationalist movement (Bhebhe, 1988). In this view, the Church offered prayers and financial and material support to the nationalists to support independence.

Given the above, it can be suggested that upon independence, this bond became unbreakable as the Church began to benefit land, minerals and money in exchange for loyalty and support. To this end, it can be attested that most mainline churches in post-independence Zimbabwe were weakened, infiltrated and contaminated by the ZANU-PF-led government, making it impossible to condemn most of the post-independence violence. This is clear in the context of the *Gukurahundi* genocide, which only the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) condemned and criticised (Zakeyo, 2008). With this said, it can be alluded that the broader

Christian community and Church Ecumenical bodies in Zimbabwe have always stood divided and undecided in the face of growing levels of corruption, violence, poverty and human rights abuse. Therefore, it can be attested that apart from pastoral letters against violence, there has not been a conclusively agreed-upon position on the ZHOCD's standpoint and participation in electoral violence. On the other hand, the ZHOCD does not seem prepared to explore other non-violent yet intentional means to register dissatisfaction over electoral violence. This study argues that the current methods of utilising pastoral letters to communicate with the government do not seem to bring about the desired change, as evidenced by the growing problem of electoral violence.

With that said, the *ZWWD* was conceived at a meeting between the head of the Zimbabwe Catholic Church, Archbishop Ndlovu and his South African counterpart, Cardinal Napier, in May 2006 (Masengwe, 2009, p.19). Before the meeting, the Catholic Parliamentary Liaison (CPL) In Cape Town had, on behalf of the Denis Hurley Peace Institute, held talks with the South African Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning Zimbabwe's situation (Masengwe, 2009, p.23). Though the Foreign affairs confirmed knowledge of what was happening in Zimbabwe, they waited for Zimbabwe to provide an official communique on what Zimbabweans themselves wanted (*The DHPI Zimbabwe Review*, June 2007, p.7). Thus, at Zimbabwe's Church leaders' meetings, it was emphasised that Christian leaders articulate what they wanted. Therefore, the Zimbabwean Church Bishops took the matter seriously from this meeting. When they went back home, they initiated and set up an ecumenical consultation that included leaders from civil society who, together with the Christian leaders, resorted to informing the world of what the ordinary citizens sought to experience in Zimbabwe (*The DHPI Zimbabwe Review*, June 2007, p.7). These efforts culminated into the launch and publication of *Zimbabwe We Want Document* on September 15, 2006 (Masengwe, 2009). Before launching the document, Church leaders invited then-President Robert Mugabe to launch it (Masengwe, 2009, p.16).

As a point of departure, the document took notes of the gains of the liberation struggle and notable achievements in post-independence Zimbabwe in areas such as education, health, communication, agriculture, and social welfare, among other areas (The *ZWWD*, 2006, p.7). These positive developments signalled a brighter future for the country. However, *ZWWD* notes that from 2005, the country witnessed deteriorating socioeconomic standards and growing levels of electoral and

other forms of violence (ZWWDD, 2006, p.8). From this perspective, ZWWDD pointed out that the country's problems emanated from its failure to have a laid out national vision since independence which resulted in people's failure to rally behind a common cause (ZWWDD, 2006, p.8).

Other contributing factors included the lack of a home grown constitution, the growing corruption, international isolation, political intolerance, electoral violence, enactment of draconian laws that resulted in the shrinkage of the democratic space and a denied level political ground to all political parties (ZHOCD, 2006). In addition to the above, the ZWWDD also took note of the alarming division within the Church itself. With this said, ZWWDD defined the Church's mandate, stating that the Church is called upon to speak a holistic message to the world. On this basis, the ZWWDD indicated that:

The God we have come to know in Jesus Christ is the God of love, justice, and reconciliation, and he has made us ambassadors of these divine values. Our task is to manifest God's presence and activity in all spheres of life. Politics and economics are serious activities that affect people's lives and cannot be left to secular authority alone...The Church's concern with good governance, justice, and peace demonstrates God's concern for humanity (ZWWDD 2006, p.12).

From this perspective, the ZWWDD further positioned the Church as the voice of the voiceless, an institution that seeks to render hope, especially in the national healing agenda (Tutu,1982, p.4, Volf 1996, p.23). In this view, the ZHOCD notes:

Zimbabweans are suffering; their freedom and fundamental rights are violated daily with impunity. Freedom of association has become a nightmare. The ZANUPF-led government has continued to thwart those with different political ideologies. The right to vote has been denied as electoral violence continues to take its toll on members of opposition politics. In this context, the Church reminds the State that God appoints leaders to address the needs of the people. When the government turns its back on the citizens and begins to attack its people, it would have lost its mandate and thus need to be reminded of such (ZHOCD, 2006, p.2).

In response, Mugabe, who was a member of the Catholic Church, criticised the ZHOCD for meddling in politics rather than focusing on spiritual matters:

Once the Bishops turn to political issues, we automatically cease to regard them as spiritual leaders. Our relationship with them would be conducted as though we were dealing with political entities, a dangerous path they have chosen for themselves (Chitando, 2009, p.23).

From the above, it can be deduced that the ZHOCD's earliest engagement with the public space was quickly met with firm resistance and sizable intimidation from the government, which was intolerant of contending voices. However, it goes without notice that the ZHOCD was determined to revive its prophetic role in the public space by advocating for peace, democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The ZHOCD, thus, would achieve this by appealing to those in and outside Zimbabwe's borders. To this end, the ZWWD envisioned a democratic nation where opportunities and resources are afforded to all despite one's political affiliation. Thus, it needs no emphasis to say that the ZWWD sought to uphold respect for human rights and an end to all forms of violence, including violence against women, Children, the elderly, people living with HIV and AIDS and people of different political ideologies. Given the preceding, it can be inferred that the ZWWD envisioned a nation that recognises gender equality, a nation where justice and the rule of law are upheld, and a nation that fears God and regards moral standards (ZWW, 2006). In this regard, the ZWWD understood the Church as a key player whose influence on national building could not be downplayed.

5.2.1 Mixed Reactions to the ZWWD

The launch of the ZWWD in September 2006 triggered mixed feelings among Zimbabweans. On the one hand, people applauded and celebrated the timely work of the ZHOCD, which they argued resonates with the mandate of the Church as demonstrated in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in general, the document was hailed for bringing forth a new dispensation in the history of the Zimbabwean Church, wherein the Church became an active player in national politics. In contrast, others found the document guilty of not following robust consultative methods with all stakeholders, including ordinary Zimbabweans. To this end, Masengwe (2009, p.30), who uses the National Vision Discussion Document (NVDD) in his Masters' thesis NVDD, expresses the Church's visible unity in responding to national problems. Thus, Masengwe (2009) considers this response positive for the nation and the churches, as their ecumenicity reduces their differences and enhances their unity towards common issues rather than focus on Church divisions. Similarly, Leary (2007) posits that "the NVDD was a well thought, well researched comprehensive document laying bare a positive vision for the nation".

However, it also needs to be noted that the *ZWWD* has also been largely criticised for how the document was produced. In this regard, Kandenge (2010) attests that prior to the launch of the document, the ZHOCD leadership went to meet then-President Robert Mugabe, seeking his endorsement of the document. However, in doing so, many Zimbabweans, including opposition parties and civil society, questioned the rationale behind this decision, making it the first criticism of the document.

Thus, it can be attested that Zimbabweans from different facets of life immediately criticised ZWW soon after its launch. From this perspective, the document received wide criticism from other Christian groups who, too, felt excluded and sidelined in the crafting and publication of the document. The information above proves that the generality of Zimbabweans could not find ownership of the document. On this basis, the *ZWWD* remained essentially elitist and appealed mainly to the few educated urban populaces at the ignorance of the peasant farmers. Speaking on the same, Kandenge posits that:

As a Christian Alliance, we perceived the document as the President's assignment to the church leaders. The very obedient churchmen then went ahead and came up with this document. If these Church people ever want us to believe that the original idea was theirs, they must explain to the nation how the State House encounter affected that document Kandenge (2010, p.13).

These sentiments attest to the suspicion in some sections of society over the document's origin as to whether it was a *Kairos* revelation of the Church or a project of the State. (Kandenge, 2010). Commenting on the document in 2009, the late Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai postulates that A national consensus and a national vision shall remain elusive for as long as the dictatorship defines, in its terms, what constitutes people's freedom, people's choices and people's way of life (Masengwe, 2009, p.24). In this respect, the *ZWWD* is accused of lacking grassroots consultations which was reflected in the Church's considerable reliance on the State (Maforo, 2020). Similarly, Mutambara argued that the document's process was fundamentally flawed (Masengwe, 2009, p.24). Considering the preceding, Kandenge confirms that the lack of involvement of key players led to the spectacular failure of the document launch, which ended up a ZANUPF project in self-indulgence (Kandenge, 2010, p.4). Similarly, Makumbe argues that the process involved was very much under the control of ZANUPF (Masengwe, 2009, p.25). Consequently, ZHOCD appeared to have totally 'lost the plot', thus giving room for manipulation by ZANU-PF. Similarly, Masengwe

(2009, p.25) argues that if people were not consulted and ZANUPF controlled the process, the product could not affect national transformation and could otherwise buy time for ZANUPF's demise without bringing needed national and social transformation.

Based on the above, it is, thus, the conviction of many that the final document that was launched contrasted sharply with the original document. In this regard, Kandenge (2010, p.4) alleges that the "final copy was edited by the government and removed certain sections which were not palatable". This assertion is strengthened even further by the reality that before the launch of the *ZWWD*, the leading clerics met with then-President Robert Mugabe at his residence and discussed the document. Many believe the original *Kairos* document was watered down at this meeting to sympathise with and speak politely about the government. This meeting saw the invitation of Robert Mugabe as the guest speaker at the document's launch, to which critics suggest that the original document could have been edited, thus drifting from its intended purpose. Hence, between the launch of the *ZWWD* from September to December 2006, students, leftist church clergy, the media, the parliamentarian community, and political leaders such as Author Mutambara, Morgan Tsvangirai and Professor John Makumbe reacted negatively to the document and doubted its sincerity and impartiality.

Similarly, Archbishop Pius Ncube confirmed that the government altered a few passages before the document's launch, especially those deemed radical (Kandenge, 2010, p.5). In furtherance, Kandenge attests that Church leaders cited that they had to compromise to have a document which the government viewed positively (Kandenge, 2010, p.5). Given these circumstances, it becomes appropriate to assume that some critical issues essential for discussion were deliberately left out in the compromising process. Thus, even though there was a need for full consultations, the dominant involvement of the ZANU-PF-led government brought the document to serious disrepute. To this end, popular clerics such as Bishop Wakatama from the Catholic Church confirm that the *ZWWD*'s reputation was heavily flawed by the participatory role played by then-President Robert Mugabe. Therefore, many questioned whether the *ZWWD* was still the original voice of the ZHOCD. In this context, it is noteworthy that close engagement with *ZWWD* exhibits language infused with ZANU-PF flavour (Masengwe, 2009), suggesting that ZANU-PF's concepts were given precedence in the publication (Wakatama, 2006).

Examples of issues possibly toned down include media freedom, which needed more attention in the *ZWWD*. However, it remains one of the vital democratic struggles Zimbabwe has dealt with over the years. The *ZWWD* was further criticised for not paying attention to *Gukurahundi*. In this regard, Mutambara argues that:

Another area of contention in the document is *Gukurahundi*, which is treated shamelessly as a footnote. The document celebrates the first fifteen years of independence as blissful and full of hope. However, it was during this period that the regime of Mugabe massacred over 20,000 civilians in Matebeleland... Hence no! *Gukurahundi* cannot be a footnote in a national vision for Zimbabwe (Masengwe, 2009, p.30).

Considering the above, many have doubted the document's moral authority. However, some still insist that even in its watered-down form, the *ZWWD* still contains sections critical of the government such as corruption, violence and impunity among others, and thus essential for national discussion.

After the document was launched, it was envisaged that gathering people's input would follow and take up to six months with the information included in the final document. However, critics maintain that even then, the *ZWWD* did not bring anything new except that they were putting known ideas together for discussion. In this regard, Makumbe (2006, p.6) argues that "the issues raised in the document were well known to Zimbabweans". For him, Zimbabweans had communicated their views in 2000 when they rejected the constitution draft. Hence, instead of wasting time re-consulting the people, all interested parties should have come together to map the way forward.

However, it is necessary to state that the *ZWWD* attributed the deteriorating conditions to the government and every citizen, citing deterioration of the national health system, the education sector, the public service sectors, and the soaring inflation (*ZWWD*, 2006, p.8). While these issues raised were real concerns, it can be deduced that the *Kairos ZWWD* document failed to directly locate the root of the problems within the framework of lousy governance under ZANU-PF. In contrast, the *Kairos ZWWD* document categorically refused to mention this. It only highlighted:

“We are not seeking to blame any one person, party, or group. We are all as much a part of the problem and must, therefore, be a part of the solution” (The Zimbabwe We Want 2006, p.8).

However, it can be alluded that this pietistic diagnosis of Zimbabwe’s problem was not so objective, particularly considering that most Zimbabweans knew they had done nothing wrong to contribute to the crisis except that they found themselves as victims of an oppressive and suppressive regime (Manyonganise, cited in Chitando, 2013, p.145). It, however, remains veld in obscure why the Church leaders crafted the document in such a flowery and theologically authoritative language, yet along the way, the ZHOCD seems unwilling to speak the truth out. Based on the above, the ZWWD has been criticised for its toned-down and apologetic language. The ZHOCD appears unprepared to genuinely and sincerely face Zimbabwe’s problems, including rampant corruption, poor governance and maladministration. Based on this, it can be said that although the ZHOCD appears to have been ready to tackle Zimbabwe’s problems, the implementation of the *Kairos* document suggests reluctance and a lack of willingness to confront the relevant authorities holding them accountable.

Another area of ZWWD that has sparked debate is where the ecumenical bishops confessed the Church’s sins at the document’s launch. This action of the Church, especially within the context of the State’s failure to act, leaves the readers of the document guessing whether the Church’s apology to the nation was made on behalf of the State (Chitando, 2013, p.145). Thus, from inside and outside the Church, the state’s interference with the ZWWD was not viewed favourably. On the contrary, the church leaders involved in the writing and launching of the ZWWD insisted on the independence and authenticity of the document, citing that the document was an undiluted voice of the Church to the nation. Thus, the originality and ownership of the *Kairos* document become a question of debate, casting doubt on the integrity and sincerity of the ZWWD. It is on this basis that many scholars such as Masengwe (2009), Chitando (2013), Wakatama (2006) and Makumbe (2006) concur that the document also lacked more comprehensive consultations, and, on the other hand, ZANU-PF controlled the entire process, which, thus, suggests the document fell short of effecting national transformation and could otherwise be a ZANU-PF strategy to pacify the predominantly Christian community. Given the above, it is sufficient to conclude that the double-faced nature of the ZWWD without over-relying on criticism of government responses, has

been its major weakness, unfortunately as we do not have focus on positive engagements during the post-document releases.

5.3 The Strengths and Weaknesses of the ZWWD

The strengths and weaknesses of *Kairos* stem from Zimbabweans' mixed reaction to the *ZWWD* document. However, it is worth reflecting on these in detail.

5.3.1 Strengths of ZWWD

The *ZWWD* has been highly respected as a timely theological work of the Church in post-independence Zimbabwe. The voice became an appropriate call in the context of growing humanitarian challenges. Thus, the vibrant nature of the *ZWWD* set the stage for dialogue and engagement. The document can thus be credited for the reiteration of the call for dialogue, which saw the birth of the inclusive government in February 2009 following the Global Political Agreement in September 2008 (Zulu, 2016). As attested by Chitando (2013) and confirmed by Wakatama (2006), the ability of *Kairos* to have originated from a united ecumenical body speaks volumes about the commitment of the Church in Zimbabwe to participate in the people's struggles.

Furthermore, the *ZWWD* raised vital issues affecting the welfare of ordinary citizens, such as economic growth and social stability. Its emphasis on ending political violence, human rights violations, segregation of the minority, oppression of the weak, and subjugation of the vulnerable became a necessary theological voice that cannot go unnoticed in the face of growing cases of state-sanctioned violence against contending voices and government critics. The document is also praised for criticising the government for rising corruption levels, which has a domino effect on growing poverty levels as most people struggle to meet their basic requirements. Given the preceding, it suffices to suggest that the *ZWWD* is seen as a theological turning point in which the Church seriously embraced its calling to serve as God's prophetic voice.

Additionally, the *ZWWD* gave other voices a platform to be heard on matters of national importance. In this regard, it is imperative to note that before the *ZWWD*, the Mugabe-led administration was known for resorting to violence against opposing viewpoints. On this basis, the kidnapping of opposition figures and representatives of civil society organisations and student

unions defined the events leading up to *Kairos*. These reflect ZANU-PF's intolerance of those who have opposing viewpoints. One of the voices amplified by the emergence of the *ZWWD* statement was the creation of the "Save Zimbabwe Coalition" (Masengwe, 2009).

Similarly, members of the civic society, labour unions, and students were too motivated to speak out bravely against ZANU-PF-led government policies. In this way, the *ZWWD* gave many hitherto silent voices a voice. Because of this, the ZANU-PF became enraged, as seen by the rise in political persecution cases and the brutality of the police against opposing viewpoints (Wakatama, 2006). It is, however, essential to note that the formation of the *ZWWD* revived and ushered in the beginning of a newer wave in Zimbabwe's socioeconomic and political development.

5.3.2 Weaknesses of the *ZWWD*

The *ZWWD* ignited debate across the societal divide. Many raise questions about the process, content, and objective of the *ZWWD*. Several groups such as student unions (Katema, 2006), Jesuits (Matikinye, 2006), Clergy (Watakama, 2006), media (Mathuthu, 2006) and (standard Comments 2006), residents associations (Davies, 2006) and others (Kahiya, 2006; Ruhanya, 2006) MDC presidency (Mutambara, 2006; Tsvangirai, 2006) and members of parliament (Stevenson, 2006) indicate that many people in Zimbabwe were highly suspicious over State's involvement in the process that led to the publication of the *ZWWD*.

This unfolds against a background of a known history of church capture, manipulation of Church leaders and formation of parallel church structures that sympathise with the government. The State of the *Kairos* document further confirms this, as it failed to pinpoint that the government was responsible for societal ills (Masengwe, 2009). Contrarily, the *ZWWD* casually blamed everyone for the problems facing the country, "we are all responsible for the situation that we find ourselves in as a country.... We all need to confess our sins..." (*ZWWD*, 2006, p.10). Such utterances remain meaningless to ordinary citizens who have endured an unjust governance system for decades. Therefore, such statements testify that the Church was unsure of the root of the country's problems and thus randomly held everyone responsible. Thus, it defeats the document's purpose, which readers expect to be anchored on accountability, transparency and truth-telling.

With this said, it can be inferred that the *ZWWD* indicated an awareness of the country's problems but somehow chose to take a casual, all-encompassing approach to making those responsible accountable. For example, the document's passive reference to the capture of the media by the State, where the document states, "Our media is polarised and is not always helpful in uniting the nation" (*ZWWD*, 2006, p.39). This left a lot to be desired, especially considering that over the years, ZANU-PF has weaponised and monopolised the media to speak only in favour of the ZANU-PF narrative while denying other political parties the same opportunity. Furthermore, it is necessary to point out that the media has been a significant tool the ZANU-PF government has utilised to close the democratic space (Mlambo, 2014). Thus, many wonder if the *ZWWD* did justice by passively mentioning the capture of the media by the State.

Given the preceding, it can be stated that the document leaves much to be desired regarding pinpointing who is responsible for the country's problems. In this respect, Archbishop Pius Ncube argues:

Someone from the three ecumenical bodies involved in the writing of the *Kairos Zimbabwe* document leaked it to the government, which in turn demanded that certain sections of the document needed to be edited by the State before the document can be published. Thus, the document reflects toned-down sections and passive language on key issues (Chitando, 2003).

With this said, Archbishop Pius Ncube and many other citizens doubted if the published document was the Church's original voice to the State. Thus, Bishop Ncube insisted, "This is not the document the churches adopted and agreed upon" (Chitando, 2003).

Another central area for improvement in the *ZWWD* is that the document needs more comprehensive consultations with the grassroots people. Thus, the document remains essentially elitist and sophisticated as it lacks the involvement of marginalised communities. With this said, it is apparent that the document lacked the involvement of the citizens and remains a product of the elite Christian leaders. This is further worsened by the document's failure to be translated into local languages. In this respect, it can be stated that many people in rural communities and some parts of society still do not know about the document.

It is pivotal to State that while Zimbabweans are generally celebrated for a high literacy rate (Makumbe, 2006; Mlambo, 2004), it is common cause that some communities still hardly read and understand English. Such communities have remained firmly rooted in their local tribal languages, with a few that have gone beyond the tribal languages. Considering this, the failure to have a translated version of the *ZWWD* into local languages to reach the grassroots people was an oversight that deliberately left out a significant number of citizens whom the document claimed to represent. However, the ZHOCD insists that the *Kairos* document has been widely spread and read with copies made on recycled soft paper. However, this claim does not justify the exclusion of non-English reading communities. Therefore, it is appropriate to State that *ZWWD* needed more endorsement and support from the grassroots people the document claimed to represent.

Another area for improvement that can be pointed out is that the document downplays the severity of the national crisis and fails to succinctly describe the nature and origin of the economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe. MDC President Author Mutambara notes that “at the root of our national problems are issues of bad government, political legitimacy, economic mismanagement, corruption, and political dictatorship, all due to the absolute failure of Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF” (Mutambara, 2006). Furthermore, the absence of a root cause analysis in the *ZWWD* raises questions about the document’s sincerity and authenticity in addressing the escalating humanitarian catastrophe. This impacts how the document’s content evolves and encompasses a new vision and strategy for economic and social justice that considers the country’s historical circumstances.

Some academics contend that the document’s flaws might be attributed to its poor organisation, which generalises problems that must be explicitly addressed. Accordingly, Mutambara attests that the *Kairos* document’s primary flaw, which has hampered the free exchange of ideas and conversation, especially regarding restoring justice, is its attempt to generalise information rather than single out each issue for discussion (Mutambara, 2006).

It goes without notice that the document has drawn heavy criticism for its lack of thorough public engagement to ensure citizen ownership and participation. The document’s creation and release purposefully omitted timely consultations with critical civil society, politics, business, and

religious players. This shows that the *ZWWD* should have consulted with some of its most important stakeholders throughout the document's writing. In this regard, Wakatama posits that some segments of the civil and religious societies desired the Church to enter dialogue with its fundamental prerequisites, such as the requirement that the State demonstrate its commitment to civilised society by disengaging the uniformed forces, including the national youth service program, from political advocacy (Wakatama, 2006).

Thus, involving other socioeconomic pillars, such as labour, students, and civil society, would give the *ZWWD* a different perspective beyond the perception of a religious document. In the same way, Masengwe (2018, p.34) points out that because the *Kairos* document addresses national issues differently than church confessions, the document must involve politicians, students, labour unions, alliances, coalitions, and assemblies who are critical players in the Church and civil society. Similarly, Mutambara (2006) notes that the *ZWWD* reflects an apparent affinity to the Church's theology; however, as a document to the State, it fails to be inclusive by widely consulting with other religions (Mutambara, 2006). With this understanding, many still wonder if the State's involvement in crafting the document automatically sidelined other players as the government would consider enemies.

Additionally, the *ZWWD* left most of its topics hanging without timeframe guidelines. The issues discussed imply that there needed for additional criteria to track and follow-up on the achievements of the document. Thus, the objectivity of the document remains wanting. Furthermore, it has been noted that the *ZWWD* reflects a bias towards Catholicism and its teachings on social justice, which suggests that while three ecumenical bodies are responsible for crafting the document, one body dominates the content and tone of the document (Wakatama, 2006). However, it is noteworthy that catholic social teachings connect well with the marginalised communities, which provides answers to Christian engagement in social transformation (Masengwe 2009, p.34). Thus, the exclusive use of Catholic social teachings, downplays the peculiarity of other Christian traditions, specifically their contribution to the lives of the marginalised communities (Kaulemu, 2006).

Given the above, many argue that the *ZWWD* failed to achieve the purpose for which it was crafted. As such, the ZHOCD has been criticised for being complicit with the ruling ZANU- PF

government (Makumbe, 2006, p.7). Its critics, among many, include Shingi Munyeza, who argues that “the Church has sinned against God and state actors have not acted in the manner God would have expected...” (ZCPV, 2016, p.12). Munyeza insists that the ZHOCD was failing to be prophetic by not firmly “defending the cause of the weak and the oppressed (ZCPV, 2016, p.12). Furthermore, the ZHOCD has also been criticised for supporting and participating in seemingly politically motivated projects such as the National Day of Prayer and ZANUPF-sanctioned gatherings like National Sanctions Day. Critiques argue that, while attending such national events was not a problem, the real problem came when the ZHOCD could not publicly speak out against the root causes of the suffering. In this regard, it has been argued that the Church leaders did not speak against the oppressive rule of Mugabe as the backbone of Zimbabwe’s struggles (ZCPV, 2016, p.18).

Nevertheless, Zulu (2016) argues to the contrary that ‘lack of direction, policy inconsistency, economic stagnation, and absence of political will to tackle current challenges was responsible for the national crisis, all of which had been well diagnosed and spoken loudly by the ZHOCD as causes of Zimbabwe’s problems. It needs to be noted, though, that, by and large, the ZHOCD was seen as largely manipulated by politicians to quieten the already oppressed masses. The ZCPV thus interpreted the ZWWD as hypocritical, ‘cheap grace’ and a manifestation of partisan politics in the Church as defined by the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1949, p.5). Similarly, Chingwaru and Munayiti (2016, p.8) cite that, while it was assumed that the ZHOCD would bring about independent Church operations and reduce partisan politics, it is unfortunate that the ZHOCD appears to be a group that is primarily sponsored by the Catholic Church, hence tipping the ship towards Catholicism rather than the ecumenical frame for which it was expected to represent.

However, despite the preceding, the ZHOCD insists that the document was a *Kairos Zimbabwe*, which gave birth to a *Kairos* theology for Zimbabwe. It was undoubtedly a timely document that brought to the surface a church that engages with the plight of the people as spelt out by German Theologian Deidrick Bonhoeffer (1949, p.5) and confirmed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1994, p.3). However, Church leaders are currently in agreement that the initiative has been temporarily shelved due to the hijacking of the whole project by politicians. Some believe that the government

completely changed the Church's intended purpose for the document, so the Church felt it could not continue taking part in the initiative, which had ceased to be theirs (Chitando 2013, p.146).

In sum, the growing criticism of the *ZWWD* has negatively impacted its credibility and authenticity. Thus, bringing to question its capacity to address humanitarian crises. Its failure to connect with essential social structures and the grassroots people disconnects the document from most people. Its exclusive use of the English language denied the illiterate members of the society from accessing the document. Also, the heavy presence of ZANU-PF and the politics of Mugabe attracted a great deal of criticism and questions from other sections of society. In all, the above evidence is sufficient to suggest that while the *ZWWD* was a timely, well-thought theological voice of the Church, the document lacked straightforward, strategic, and aggressive implementation, which opened the door for infiltration by the same politicians it sought to critique.

5.3.3 ZCBC's '*The March is not Ended*'

The new dispensation saw typically tricky relations between the Church and the State. One of the most controversial works of the Church that provoked the anger of the Mnangagwa regime was a pastoral letter titled: '*The March is not Ended*'. The March has not ended is a pastoral letter from ZHOCD's members called the ZCBC. The ZCBC insists that '*The March is not Ended*' build upon and is a follow-up to issues raised in the *ZWWD*, which the letter acknowledged to have been sixteen years old at the time of writing, but no deliberate efforts have been made so far (ZCBC, 2020, p.1). On this basis, the ZHOCD member took it upon itself to revive and reinvigorate the ethos of the *ZWWD*. Therefore, the March has not Ended and should be understood and located within ZHOCD's prophetic framework and engagement with the Zimbabwean government on several humanitarian struggles. With this said, the ZCBC issued a pastoral letter titled '*The March is not Ended*'. The pastoral letter sought to surface the growing concerns of many Zimbabweans. These struggles range from electoral violence, political victimisation, violence against women and the vulnerable, as well as growing concerns over economic meltdowns (ZCBC, 2020, p.2). As the nation struggled with a multidimensional crisis in the post-Mugabe era, the bishops witnessed a profoundly divided nation whose citizens did not look at the crisis from the same angle. There existed a clear indication of contradiction between what ordinary Zimbabweans were experiencing and what the politicians in the government understood. *The March has not ended*; therefore, should

be understood within the context of a widening gap that continued to grow between the State and its citizenry. The Church took it upon itself to bridge this gap by raising pertinent issues responsible for this illusion.

From this perspective, the pastoral letter was titled after the work of John Robert Lewis, an American politician and civil rights leader who advocated for equality and an end to racial discrimination in America (ZCBC, 2020, p.1). The *March is Not Ended* is thus one of his most remembered works, and he reiterates that the road to America's freedom and equality continues to be very long. He insisted that people in America, particularly the minority race, continue to suffer under the grip of segregation and inequality. Against this background, Lewis attests that an unbridged gap exists between those who think they have arrived at freedom and those convinced that the journey to freedom has not yet been realised.

5.4 The Zimbabwean Context

The ZHOCD, through its member, the ZCBC, argued that John Robert Lewis's understanding of freedom is symptomatic of Zimbabwe's situation (ZCBC, 2020, p.1). In this view, the bishops attest that the gap between those who think they have arrived and those who still see a long journey ahead continues to widen. The gap is also evident between those who believe in the completed work of the liberation struggle and the liberal critics who are convinced that the journey to Zimbabwe's freedom is still far (ZHOCD, 2020). This gap has grown significantly in the face of socioeconomic and political nosedive. Thus, the bishops articulated that the ruling ZANU-PF continues to pride itself and boast over the complete struggle for liberation the party spearheaded, and many Zimbabweans participate in it (Mlambo, 2014).

Notably, attaining independence in 1980 has continuously been a significant reference in ZANU-PF politics. Based on this, ZANU-PF leadership and several state departments such as the army, war veterans and traditional leaders have publicly declared that Zimbabwe will never be governed by anyone without war credentials (Sachikonye, 2009). This suggests that any political party whose leadership did not actively participate in the liberation struggle cannot be entrusted with leading the country. Historically, army bosses, war veterans and traditional leaders have on numerous occasions warned opposition leaders that a win on the ballot does not translate to the

presidency, arguing that independence did not come without the shedding of blood. Thus, the gun barrel cannot be exchanged with the power of the ballot (Mlambo, 2014). Therefore, elections in Zimbabwe do not have the power to reverse the gains of liberation. These submissions reduce the credibility of elections in Zimbabwe, thus making elections mere rituals to authenticate ZANUPF's stay in power. The history of liberation here can be accused of being oversimplified and can misinform readers on the current situation in Zimbabwe, however, it is straightened when various factions that have existed in the nation are mentioned to inform this discussion.

On the other hand, the opposition CCC argues that denying election winner victory on the pretext of not having war credentials is a manifestation of an authoritarian regime that does not respect the will of the people (Zulu, 2006). In this regard, it is significant to note that Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the then MDC, won the Presidential election in 2008. However, many procedures were evoked to deny his ascendancy to the highest office. The army, war veterans, and traditional leaders vowed they would not acknowledge Tsvangirai's presidency because he lacked war credentials. When Morgan Tsvangirai was appointed Prime Minister, some army bosses publicly refused to salute him as required by the law and the constitution (Sachikonye, 2013). This was a clear indication that, indeed, the barrel of the gun can never be reversed by what happens in the ballot, and thus, *The March has not ended*.

With this background, the bishops argued that the situation in Zimbabwe has two diverging views that characteristically continue to divide the nation. These are those who think 'the march is ended' and want to call off the March, while others on the March still insist '*The March is not Ended*'. Given the above, it is an open secret that many youths have argued that ZANU-PF cannot continue to hold the nation at ransom because it participates in the liberation struggle. As such, the youths have requested that ZANU-PF give the country back to the colonisers and see if no one would rise to fight for liberation (Masengwe, 2023). All this is to suggest that ordinary Zimbabweans still feel unliberated and in bondage under ZANUPF and, therefore, the need for liberation. Hence, the Bishops argued that the March to freedom has not ended (ZHOCD, 2020).

5.5 Content of *The March is not Ended*

The bishops noted that the conflict between those who believe they have reached their destination and others who are still on the March has produced a multi-layered catastrophe of the confluence of economic collapse, escalation of violence, deepening poverty, food insecurity, corruption, and human rights abuses, among other issues that require immediate response (ZCBC, 2020, p.3). In this regard, the ZCBC further noted that the rising call for demonstrations expresses the growing annoyance and aggravation caused by the circumstances that most Zimbabweans experience (ZCBC, 2020, p.3). In this view, the church leaders insist the nation's predicament will only worsen. The crisis will deepen if people's fury is suppressed. This is happening against a backdrop of unattended previous grievances like *Gukurahundi*, which continue to incite an even more enraged new generation (ZCBC, 2020).

In this context, ZCBC (2020) notes that numerous voices from different nations, the European Union, the African Union, and the United Nations, on Zimbabwe's situation have affirmed that government agents are violating human rights and that Zimbabweans' lives matter. The bishops also postulate that:

We have also seen attempts by the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, to intervene by sending a special envoy following the government's crackdown on dissidents during the July 31 demonstrations. Was this chance not lost because they failed to consult widely with the Church and civil society at this turbulent time? (ZCBC, 2020, p.4).

In addition, ZHOCD (2020, p.4) noted that,

While this happens, some of our people are still hiding out while others are on the run. Many of our people today are paralysed by fear. It is unprecedented how dissent has been suppressed. Is this the Zimbabwe We Want? Having different opinions should not make people enemies. On the contrary, it is precisely from the contrasts of opinions that the light comes. It is unfortunate that the government continuously labels anyone with a different opinion as an enemy of the state (ZHOCD, 2020).

5.6 Key issues raised

The March is Not Ended raised several issues, including corruption, exclusion, and an end to violence.

5.6.1 Corruption

The letter maintains that the country's corruption level is worrisome and that most patriotic Zimbabweans agree that corruption continues to be the country's most significant economic enemy (ZCBC, 2020). In this regard, the bishops noted that there have not been any deliberate measures taken to curb this scourge and that the judiciary system, which is supposed to hold the perpetrators accountable, is itself compromised and thus a part of the problem. Thus, reported corruption cases are not seriously dealt with, as evidenced by the 'catch and release' game played by the judiciary (ZCBC, 2020). This has seen big names having to escape the wrath of the law over corruption allegations. This has created mistrust and a lack of confidence in the judiciary system as many continue to doubt the independence of the judiciary system (ZHOCD, 2020, p.3).

5.6.2 The 'Us' Against 'Them' Approach (Identity)

The Church leaders also noted that while the nation continues to hold those who participated in the liberation struggle with great respect and honour; there seems to be a growing trend of segregation and victimisation of people based on their participation in the liberation struggle (ZCBC, 2020). Thus, the 'us' against 'them' mentality has been popularised and has been responsible for the growing cases of electoral violence and political persecution of the opposition members like the purging of the opposition in the Sengezo Tshabangu inferno (Rukuni, 2023). In this context, church leaders condemned divisive political ideologies borrowed from the liberation struggle. In this view, the bishops advocated for a more embracing and encompassing politics, arguing that,

We want our politics to build a united nation and not to divide us. Turning the military who are expected to continue the memory and legacy of the late heroes against the ordinary citizens who fed, clothed them, and gathered intelligence at the significant risk to save many of our fighters from peril is not only unacceptable but unbecoming" (ZCBC, 2007, p.2)

With this background, the Church leaders condemned elements of the 'us' against 'them' and called politicians to shun divisive politics. Thus, evoking memories of the liberation struggle, the letter wondered what happened to the gutsa ruzhinji 'the will of the majority' mantra, a liberation struggle chant which pointed to the essence of the majority. In this regard, the Church called for the new dispensation to demonstrate concern for the poor, who seem to have been long forgotten (ZCBC, 2020). The church leaders thus argued that the new dispensation must ensure the

vulnerable's rights, safety, and security. In this way, the bishops called the new dispensation to account, citing that,

It is not clear to us as your bishops that our national leadership has the knowledge, social skills, emotional stability, and social orientation to handle the issues we face as a nation. All we hear from them is blame our woes on foreigners, colonialism, white settlers, sanctions, and the so-called internal distractors. When are we going to take responsibility for our affairs? When are we going to submit to the requirements of national accountability? (ZHOCD, 2020, p.4).

From this perspective, the ZCBC emphasised that '*The March is not Ended*' stands on the shoulders of and builds upon the work of the ZWWD by the ZHOCD. They insist: "We have already emphasised the necessity of the above-mentioned processes in our ecumenical discussion document: 'The ZWWD' of 2006". Thus, the ZCBC (2020, p.4) cited that "it has been fourteen years, and nothing deliberate has materialised. We make an urgent plea to end political victimisation, militarisation of the State, and electoral violence" (ZCBC, 2020).

In this regard, the Church called the State to inclusive engagement, dialogue, and collective responsibility for transformation, citing that, as John Lewis noted, '*The March is not Ended.*'

5.7 Government Response to *The March is Not Ended* Pastoral Letter

The March is Not Ended was broadly accepted as a timely and non-violent intervention of the Church amidst growing socioeconomic and political challenges. This has seen a rise in poverty levels; for instance, 76.3% of rural children are affected by extreme poverty, and roughly 74% of the working populace are underpaid, while 13.5 million are affected by HIV and AIDS, at least 60% of rural women are poor, life expectancy reduced to 44 years, but with a high adult literacy of 89% (Louis, 2021). In this regard, the pastoral letter was received by other Christian groups, civil society and the generality of the citizenry as a voice of reason. Therefore, the letter was applauded for raising the citizens' critical existential problems, such as corruption, poverty, unemployment and a polarised political ground. However, while *The March is Not Ended* was very popular among ordinary citizens, the government frowned upon it. In this respect, it can be alluded that the relationship between the Church and the new dispensation reached a point of no return following the publication of the "March is Not Ended" Pastoral letter by the ZCBC. Thus, it can be said that the bishops' letter was met with resistance and dismissal by the government.

Thus, the government of Zimbabwe (GoZ), through the Minister of Information and Publicity Monica Mutsvangwa, responded with a blistering attack on Archbishop Christopher Ndlovu, the bishops, the Catholic Church and ultimately the entire Christian fraternity. On this basis, Minister Mutsvangwa accused the bishops of meddling in politics, citing that the government would respect church leaders if they knew the boundary between Church and politics (Zim Live, 2020). In this respect, the new dispensation categorically stated that the government will not tolerate any regime change agenda that comes under the disguise of the Church (Chimtom, 2017).

The government accused Archbishop Ndlovu and his team of trying to incite violence to remove a constitutionally elected government (Zimlive, 2020). As such, the GoZ argued that the bishops' letter was a well-calculated move aimed at creating insurrection, insisting that it was by no means coincidental that the letter was released after the recent demonstrations and published during the heroes' celebration (Zim Live, 2020). In this context, the Minister accused the bishops of serving the interests of Western countries who seek to reverse the gains of the liberation struggle. Thus, Mutsvangwa called the bishops an "evil-minded flock of misled, narrowminded bishops" (Zim Live, 2020). In this way, Mutsvangwa went on to single out Archbishop Ndlovu, whom she accused of dragging petty tribal issues into national politics (GoZ, 2020). It is interesting to note that bishop Ndlovu is from the minority tribe of Ndebele, whose people suffered the post-independence atrocities resulting in the death of over 20,000 people. Monica Mutsvangwa's decision to single out Bishop Ndlovu in a letter written by a group has been criticised by many as ZANU-PF's little tricks to create division within the Church itself.

Commenting on the government's response to *The March is not Ended*, Rev Dr Mtata, Secretary General of the ZCC and a sister member of the ZHOCD, argued that the government's reaction to the pastoral letter reflects elements of the deep hatred and mistrust between the Church and the State, he argued the tone in which the Minister of information responded to the letter reflects the government's unwillingness to accept constructive advice that comes from concerned citizens and fellow leaders who see things from a different perspective (Mtata, 2017). In this regard, Mtata notes, "We knew the situation would escalate but not at this rate. The way the government has chosen to respond to the pastoral letter is worrisome and reflects the government's intolerance to critical voices". Mtata hoped that President Mnangagwa would tone things down, arguing that "at

this rate, we will be crushing sooner than later”. To this effect, several Ecumenical bodies issued statements in solidarity with the ZCBC calling for the government to withdraw its direct attack on the person of Archbishop Ndlovu, citing that the personal attack was not only unfortunate but uncalled for. Critiques argued that the government’s emotional response to the pastoral letter indicated that the government had missed the “unifying and national orientation” of the letter.

Thus, on behalf of the government, Monica Mutsvangwa categorically stated that the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) vehemently condemns in strongest terms the letter by Archbishop Ndlovu and his ‘coterie of catholic bishops’, “its evil message reeks with all the voices that have perennially hobbled the progress of Africa” (Zim live, 2020). With such submissions, Mutsvangwa criticised the Archbishop Ndlovu-led team of Bishops for trying to cause misdirection, despondence, and instability in the country to derail the rebuilding efforts of the new dispensation. Thus, the Minister argued that the letter sought to divide the nation and incite citizens to disprove the Mnangagwa-led administration. In this way, Mutsvangwa denounced Archbishop Ndlovu for not enlisting in the liberation army if he was as patriotic as he sounded in the letter. Therefore, *The March is not Ended* exposed the weakening relations and growing tensions between the new dispensation and the Church.

5.8 ZHOCD Pastoral Letter on 2023 General Elections

The ZHOCD pastoral letter on the 2023 general election sought to conscientise citizens on the significance of the 2023 elections. In this view, the ZHOCD noted that the elections were a time to decide on the future of the nation (ZHOCD, 2023, p.1). In this regard, the pastoral letter encouraged every citizen to ensure they are registered to vote and that they would participate in the voting process. Thus, the ZHOCD popularised the mantra ‘*I pray, I vote*’ to motivate the Christian community to consider voting equally as an obligation and constitutional exercise. The pastoral letter acknowledged that while an election is “a human activity, it is God who knows people’s heart” (ZHOCD, 2023, p.1). Given the above, the pastoral letter called the various political parties to desist from hate speech, dehumanising people, name calling and hatred (ZHOCD, 2023, p.2). In this regard the ZHOCD urged the nation to desist from electoral violence and pursue peaceful means to power. In this way, the ZHOCD reiterated that:

Reject all forms of electoral violence and coercion. Violence and coercion only serve to discredit elections. Any use of force takes away the credibility and integrity of elections. Thus, people must be able to make free choices according to their judgement” (ZHOCD, 2020, p.1).

In this regard, the ZHOCD called for an end to electoral violence and invited citizens to participate in political inclusivity, dialogue, and tolerance. Thus, the pastoral letter called on the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to exhibit neutrality, transparency, and accountability in the election process (ZHOCD, 2023, p.2). The Church leaders cite the need for fairness, equality, and an even political field for all political parties as politicians campaign for support (ZHOCD, 2023). In summary, the ZHOCD pastoral letter on the 2023 elections emphasised the need for peaceful, non-violent, transparent, accessible, and fair elections marked by inclusivity, unity in diversity and tolerance.

5.9 Analysis of the Letter

While ZHOCD is applauded for its culture of crafting peace-related pastoral letters during election seasons, it has increasingly become worrisome that the circumstances surrounding these elections have remained essentially unchanged. In this regard, it is known that Zimbabwe has, since independence, experienced violent charged elections characterised by intimidation, coercion, abductions and, in some cases, deaths. This gruesome cycle has continued to be evident throughout the history of the country’s elections (Sachikonye, 2009).

It is, therefore, necessary to launch an inquiry into these pastoral letters’ effectiveness in alleviating the electoral violence problem in Zimbabwe. The preceding question is whether pastoral letter communication is effective in the context of Zimbabwe’s electoral violence. Based on the above, it is a known fact that while electoral violence in Zimbabwe takes place all around the country, it remains apparent that most of the devastating cases of electoral violence usually take place in rural areas where ZANU-PF commands most of its support (Mlambo, 2004). Given the above, it becomes necessary to question the proximity and accessibility of pastoral letters to grassroots communities. On this basis, it is the position of this study that while pastoral letters are an essential form of communication, the method remains essentially elitist and accessible only to the literate populace mainly residing in urban areas while at the same time remaining foreign to the grassroots population where electoral violence has historically been severe. Given the preceding, the ZHOCD

must employ other engagement efforts with the grassroots populace through storytelling, Dare ‘gathering’, music and peace lessons. These make it possible for the grassroots communities to dramatise the essence of peace and the dangers of violence.

Additionally, ZHOCD has been criticised for only being visible during elections. Therefore, no intentional, active engagement exists with the people between elections. Thus, there is no trust, consistency, or reliability between the ZHOCD and the grassroots communities. This makes it impossible for grassroots communities to take ZHOCD’s calls for peace seriously.

Similarly, ZHOCD has been criticised for releasing pastoral letters only reactively with no systemic approach to ending electoral violence. In this view, ZHOCD has been criticised for failing to stay connected with its audience, especially in the post-election period. Thus, this study submits that the desire to end electoral violence should be anchored on a healthy relationship between the ZHOCD and the perpetrators, leading to reconciliation and forgiveness.

This study connects theology and sociopolitical issues with overarching implications on the ZHOCD’s endeavours for peaceful elections, dialogue, engagement, and building trust and dependability with the grassroots communities.

5.10 Conclusion

Overall, the first section of the chapter sought to present and analyse data on three selected ZHOCD documents. In this regard, it discussed data from the *ZWWD* (2006), *The March is not Ended* (2020) and the *Pastoral Letter on Elections* (2023). Sufficient evidence has shown that the above-mentioned documents have been celebrated for raising critical issues for discussion. Some topical issues discussed in these documents include socioeconomic and political ills such as the escalation of poverty, the rise in unemployment, the growth of violence and the need for economic adjustments. The section acknowledged that the *ZWWD* (2006) was an essential theological document that set the stage for the Church’s engagement with the State and thus is celebrated for reviving the prophetic work of the Church.

However, as shown in this chapter, the document has also been criticised for being too close to the ZANU-PF government. In this view, many doubt the ZWWD's capacity to remain neutral and resolute when crafting the document. This section also discusses the pastoral letter '*The March is not Ended*'. This section acknowledged that Zimbabwe's socio-economic and political space remains polarised mainly. In this way, I underscore that Zimbabwe continues to be a deeply divided nation with its populace divided between young and old, rich or poor, men or women, ruling or opposition party. This has effectively created a gap among the citizens between those who have arrived at freedom and those who feel the March has Not Ended. Thus, the section underscores the need for dialogue and reconciliation to close the gap between the main political parties.

Lastly, this section discussed ZHOCD's *Pastoral Letter on Elections* (2023). In this regard, the study acknowledged ZHOCD's commitment to ending electoral violence over the years; however, it has also been argued that pastoral letters are not always effective among the grassroots populace, and others may not be able to read and write them. Thus, ZHOCD should develop other engagement methods to reach the grassroots communities. Overall, the chapter acknowledged the interconnection of the three selected ZHOCD documents and how they relate to this study. The next chapter focuses on the second set of data presentations on the ZHOCD Elections Theory and new knowledge.

Chapter Six

The Proposed *Kairos* Election Theory for Elections

6. Introduction to a *Kairos* Theory for Elections

The previous chapter presented data gathered from primary data on the role of the ZHOCD in general elections, demonstrating the context of ZHOCD's theological documents and discussing their strengths and weaknesses. In this chapter, I propose the *Kairos* Election theory as a suitable and sustainable theory of general elections in Zimbabwe. This theory is built upon eight fundamental themes intertwined with the theory. To this end, the *Kairos* Elections theory hopes to contribute to new knowledge in the fight against electoral violence in Zimbabwe. From this perspective, I articulate how the *Kairos* theory can be instrumental in reducing the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, in keeping with the key research question: *What role has the Kairos theology of Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations played in mitigating the problem of electoral violence?* This further seeks to present the data collected in line with the following research sub-questions:

[1.] *How has Kairos theology informed the historical context and current situation of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, and what specific role has the ZHOCD played in addressing this violence during general elections?*

[2.] *In what ways can the ZHOCD utilize its theological foundations and teachings from Kairos theology to advocate for peace and mitigate electoral violence while also effectively engaging with local communities and political authorities?*

[3.] *What insights can be gained from previous experiences of electoral violence in Zimbabwe that would shape a comprehensive theological framework for the ZHOCD to promote free, fair, and peaceful elections in the future?*

The chapter's discussion follows the third objective: *To identify and assess previous experiences of electoral violence in Zimbabwe to develop a comprehensive theological framework that the ZHOCD can use to advocate for and ensure future free, fair, and peaceful elections.* In this regard, the chapter presents emerging themes and analyses them using the *Kairos* election theory.

6.1 Key Emerging Themes

The findings are informed by the following emerging themes under the proposed *Kairos* Elections Theory: *community engagement and outreach, ethical reflection, dialogue, national reconciliation and forgiveness, healing and non-violence, inclusivity, peace and stability, hope and national development*. These themes will be integrated into the *Kairos* elections theory and discussed within that framework. With this theory, the study hopes to contribute to new knowledge.



Fig 1: Key Emerging Themes of the Kairos Elections Theory

6.1.1 Community Engagement and Outreach

Community engagement and outreach entail ZHOCD's capacity to increase public knowledge about elections and electoral violence in Zimbabwe's grassroots communities. Formal and informal interviews with study participants indicated that many Zimbabweans have lost confidence in Zimbabwe's electoral processes, especially those living in rural areas, who are unaware of the socio-political and economic implications of elections. This view is further buttressed by Makenzie (2007) and Dube (2002), who state that elections for most grassroots communities are an occasion to convey their allegiance to individuals or political parties. This allegiance is rendered without concern for one's ability to deliver societal or economic needs. Interestingly, ZHOCD has been countered by Pro ZANU-PF affiliated groups like "Pastors for ED", as well as the formation of "Faith of the Nation Campaign (FoNC) meant to neutralize the work of the ZHOCD strategically through undermining the criticisms of the ZHOCD to the government.

Similarly, Davidson and Purohit (2004) confirm that electoral misconceptions vary depending on one's location, age group, and economic status, among other things.

In this regard, the data established in this study reflects that while voter intimidation happens elsewhere in Zimbabwe, the phenomenon is primarily evident in rural and farming areas, especially in grassroots communities among resettlement areas where land was parcelled out under the fast-tracked land reform program. Occupants of these areas are constantly reminded that their continued stay on the land depends solely on their allegiance to the ruling ZANU-PF party, the failure of which results in expulsion from the farms. Accordingly, the reviewed literature proves that several individuals, such as the office of traditional leaders, councillors and security forces, are often deployed to ensure loyalty and commitment to the ruling party, ZANU-PF. Some individual Christians, fearing for their lives, have fallen prey to this structure. The same is confirmed by Bakare, noting that historically, in most of these areas' individuals affiliated with the opposition politics are often treated with deep hatred, and they experience high levels of discrimination and victimisation. In addition, Bakare articulates that, besides physical violence, members of the opposition politics are denied access to government-initiated programs such as agriculture inputs, drought relief programs, and community development projects, among other forms of discrimination (Bakare, 2008, p.5).

Thus, the ZHOCD's *Kairos* Election is essential in raising awareness among the grassroots people, demystifying elements of voter intimidation and conscientizing citizens to exercise freedom to select candidates of their choice. This view calls us to explain our use of the word "*Kairos*" in this study, which refers to two Greek words for time: *chronos*, referring to chronology and sequential time; as well as the opportune time. *Kairos* here thus refers to the "fleeting rightness of time and place that creates the atmosphere for apt action, words or movement" (Mutuma, 2015). In this way, *Kairos* is informed by the growing trend of more and more citizens abstaining from participating in elections because of lack of confidence in the electoral systems and processes, religious reasons, and lack of access to voter education. Thus, it can be said that many Zimbabweans have since lost confidence in the country's electoral processes; people doubt the ZEC neutrality and its ability to deliver free and fair elections. Similarly, Bratton and Masunungure (2018) agree with the above, citing that ZEC has historically been accused of partiality and inconsistencies that deliberately favour the ruling ZANU-PF at the expense of opposition political parties.

In this view, previous elections have been highly contested, marred by inaccessibility to the voter's role, election rigging, and alarming cases of violence, intimidation, and sabotage. Given this, established data reveals that many citizens consider elections merely empty- rituals whose mission is not democratic but to legitimise ZANU-PF's rule. Because of the above, the findings established that most youths argue that they have not witnessed the essence of elections; on the contrary, elections have constantly destabilised society and continue dividing people. This is further worsened by the growing trend of violence accompanying elections and, therefore, discouraging the participation of people in the voting process.

Accordingly, the *Kairos* Elections theory empowers the ZHOCD to engage with the communities, encouraging individuals to exercise their constitutional rights and empowering citizens with an awareness of the electoral process and its significance to individual citizens and the nation. At the same time, the *Kairos* Elections theory seeks to engage with the ZEC and other relevant electoral bodies to exercise neutrality and ensure a level playing field for all participating candidates. Similarly, community engagement encourages grassroots people to desist from election-motivated violence. The data established suggests that most of the violence takes place within people of the

same community in which one is a victim while another is a perpetrator. In this view, community engagement is significant in making communities aware of the devastating effects of electoral violence. Thus, the *Kairos* Elections theory underscores that while elections come and go, the effects of electoral violence have always left deep-seated divisions among communities. These further impact community development as society is left broken and deeply divided. In this regard, meaningful efforts to alleviate electoral violence should engage in robust community engagement initiatives. Therefore, the *Kairos* elections theory, through the theme of community engagement, is essential in dealing with the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe.



Fig 2: Community Engagement and Outreach on Electoral Violence

Community engagement is also essential in encouraging the participation of various religious groups who abstain from electoral processes. The data established suggests that various religious groups such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses and other mushrooming white garment churches discourage their members from participating in electoral processes, citing that elections are full of violence and employ ungodly means to power. Such religious groups consider the entire institution of politics as inherently ‘dirty’, ‘irredeemably’ violent, and thus divorced from the fundamental pillars and ethos of religion such as peace, loving others and the sanctity of life. Therefore, in these

religious groups, members are discouraged from participating in any election activities lest they get contaminated and diverted from their religious calling.

Thus, under community engagement, the *Kairos* election demystifies religious misconceptions attached to the institution of election and advocates for the involvement and participation of religious groups in the electoral process to create a better community. Christianity shapes character, moulds one's views and directs one's thoughts and actions, leading to the establishment of God's kingdom.

On this basis, the ZHOCD has the power to influence the character and conduct of citizens during election seasons. Similarly, the research findings suggest that the ZHOCD is essential and functions as a 'playing ground' to educate and equip people to participate in different worldly organisations. These sentiments are further echoed by Verbar et al (1995, p.282), who argue that the Church is called to provide critical public skills, which will later give birth to a Godly socio-political environment. This way, the Church nurtures and inspires people to become better societal leaders. As seen from the above, it is apparent that the ZHOCD could play a distinctive role in the activities of the Zimbabwean communities and the social world. With this understanding, *Kairos's* election theory advocates for including all citizens in nation-building activities such as elections to create a peaceful society characterised by unity and stability. Thus, the *Kairos* Elections theory underscores the essence of community engagement and outreach in alleviating the problem of electoral violence.

6.1.2 Ethical Reflection

Ethical reflection in this study denotes ZHOCD's interface and interaction with the realities of human experiences associated with electoral violence. It is concerned with articulating and examining moral reasons and actions concerning humanity. In this study, moral reflection is used to describe ZHOCD's response to the socio-political experiences of Zimbabweans during election periods, analysing the role of politicians in inciting election-related violence.

Kairos Elections theory underscores that the role of the ZHOCD is to ensure that its core values and teachings are imparted and relayed to the public to inspire and establish a society that upholds

morality and ethics. In keeping with its purpose, the ZHOCD examines the socioeconomic and political struggles of the general populace. In doing this, the ZHOCD speaks against violence, oppression of the marginalised, and the segregation of the weak and the minority to bring social structures to accountability. In keeping with this understanding, CIM's concurs that:

The Church is strategically and essentially the prophetic voice for the voiceless, exerting strong ethics upon the state and supporting policies and programs deemed to be just while opposing those that are unjust and oppressive. In this respect, the Church should "not be the master of the state or the servant of the state, neither should it be the instrument of the state. It should not be the state's conscience, nor should the Church seek to dominate the state. On the contrary, the Church should continue to be the public face of God and the social conscience (CIM, 2006).

Considering the above, *Kairos* elections theory, through the theme of ethical reflection, demonstrates a prophetic quality by engaging with the tangible world, holding the world to account and denouncing injustice, corruption, and violation of human rights, questioning unjust socioeconomic practices that subject people to poverty and advocating for the end of oppression. Accordingly, *Kairos*'s election theory focuses on socioeconomic and political structures that subjugate people to poverty, interrogating the ethical motives of such structures and offering recommendations for proper ethical conduct where necessary. On this basis, *Kairos*'s elections theory is characterised by a comradely commitment to the life, cause, and struggle of the oppressed and the vulnerable. It exhibits a strong commitment and determination to ending historical inequality and social structures that subjugate people to poverty and oppression.

Given the above, *Kairos* elections underscore that the vicious cycle of electoral violence in Zimbabwe necessitates the commitment and active participation of the ZHOCD in questioning and condemning the use of violence, force, and intimidation during elections. The data collected establish that elections have been characterised by violence and disputes since its independence, through the turn of the Millennium into contemporary Zimbabwe. In this respect, electoral violence has seen the death of many, while others have been left nursing permanent injuries; still, some have been displaced (Diakonia, 2003, p.12). It can be inferred, therefore, that the deep-seated trend of such violence calls upon the ZHOCD, through ethical reflection, to question and bring to account politicians and political parties that are found guilty of such. The established data suggests that while the ZHOCD has historically spoken against the violent conduct of political parties during elections, it still falls short of clearly well-defined election electoral theology.

Accordingly, this study upholds *Kairos* elections theory as a ‘timely’ and appropriate theory that provides guidelines and a systemic response of the ZHOCD to the problem of electoral violence. Considering the above, it can be concluded that the *Kairos* elections theory, accompanied by an inclusive, well-defined structure that offers a holistic response and interaction with both victims and perpetrators of electoral violence, is appropriate for breaking the trend of electoral violence in Zimbabwe.

6.1.3 Dialogue

The theme of the dialogue is central to *Kairos* elections. It entails ZHOCD’s ability to bring Zimbabwe’s contending politicians and their supporters together, initiating a conversation between the perpetrators and the victims of violence to bring about a peaceful society in which differences are discussed, opinions shared, and compromises reached. Concurrently, the established data attests that Zimbabwe is still a highly polarised country that is divided along deeply ingrained lines between the opposition and mainstream politics, the rich and the poor, the Shona and the Ndebele tribe, the youth and the elders, the urban and rural populations, and the employed and the unemployed, among other divisions. Due to this, the country has become highly politicised and is marked by suspicion and loathing toward one another. Thus, precisely, this ideological and societal divide creates an environment conducive to electoral violence. This is so because the ground is already fertile for hatred, and people are already willing to hurt those who belong to a different stratum, while former victims are seeking an opportunity for vengeance.

In this view, electoral violence becomes a platform upon which the already divided nation finds a space to vent its resentment and anger towards the other. With this understanding, this established data solidly suggests that any efforts to address the problem of electoral violence must consider factors that have historically divided the people of Zimbabwe, such as the *Gukurahundi* genocide, operation Murambatsvina (clean-up cities) and the growing trend of electoral violence since the highly contested 2008 elections. The findings show that these long-term conflicts cannot be ignored in a meaningful dialogue as they contribute largely to the current problem of electoral violence in its manifestations. To this end, Martin Luther King Jnr once stated that a nation whose

foundation is laid on a shaky ground of hatred and mistrust could not be progressive (Meeks, 1993).

Based on the above, national dialogue is a peace-building tool that unites various stakeholders intending to discuss a particular subject objectively. It can be perceived as an inclusive, broad-based, and participatory platform for negotiation involving politicians, academics, youth, women, and civil society. This understanding is echoed by CCJP (1997), pointing out that dialogue can be formulated to discuss topics such as peace or significant political reforms in intricately divided conflict situations. It is imperative to note that dialogue typically occurs in environments where political and socioeconomic tensions are severe and extend beyond the boundaries of conventional security organisations, including the armed forces and police. To this end, the goals of national dialogue are tailored to the needs of the nation or society experiencing a conflict. This suggests that national dialogue can be a primary tool for long-term political transformations and peacebuilding beyond state security agencies' upholding of law and order.

The findings show that the ZHOCD strongly urged for national dialogue in *Zimbabwe We Want Document (ZWWD)*, noting that the country has been sharply divided along political lines, especially considering the always disputed statistics of the election results (ZWWD, 2006, p.3). According to the ZWWD, since the contentious 2008 elections, the incumbent ZANU-PF party has been narrowly winning in closely contested races against its primary rival, the MDC, now the CCC. Accordingly, *Kairos* elections theory argues that the violence and extreme contestations accompanying these elections further expose the extent to which the nation is sharply divided from the grassroots. The ZWWD thus clearly articulates that the nation cannot move forward without meaningful and genuine dialogue that engages every citizen, from the grassroots to the political elites. Established data show that national dialogue in Zimbabwe has not only become necessary to move the nation forward, but it has strategically become the only option available for unlocking economic fortunes and eliminating the deep hatred and violence that characterise the institution of general elections.

Given the above, the data established reinforces the theme of dialogue in the *Kairos* elections as imperative, appropriate, and timely for this study as it ensures that the above fragments of division

are mended to ensure a healthy, peaceful nation. The *Kairos* elections theory further suggests that the ZHOCD can develop a delegation modelled after the theory of *Kairos* elections and exhibit *Kairos* elections traits to ensure all the contested parties involved in electoral violence are brought into dialogue. This dialogue may include members of different political parties, the contending parties, and those involved in the dispute, beginning at the family level and working its way through the community level and up to national levels.

In this regard, the ZHOCD may facilitate the dialogue, with the responsibility to monitor the reaction or response of the two different political ideologies and ensure the objectives of the dialogues are achieved within a free and uncontested platform. To this end, *Kairos* elections theory insists that once the leading political players are engaged, violence at the grassroots level is objectively eliminated. From this perspective, the ZHOCD, along with representatives of the leading political players, can then easily conscientise their followers to desist from electoral violence. Given the above, it can be deduced that the gravity and the rapid spread of electoral violence in Zimbabwe necessitates an objective use of the *Kairos* elections theory, in which dialogue remains a significant theme.

6.1.4 National Reconciliation and Forgiveness

National reconciliation and forgiveness build upon the theme of dialogue, which entails repairing and restoring previously damaged relationships. Accordingly, it aims to address the previous disagreements and contestations by taking responsibility for the previous mistakes and acknowledging wrongdoing. Similarly, Bloomfield concurs that reconciliation is a multi-faceted process whose primary objectives include truth-telling, justice, forgiveness, and healing (Bloomfield, 2013, p.11). In like manner, Bloomfield cites that the central objective of reconciliation is, therefore, to find a way to co-exist alongside former enemies, to develop a degree of cooperation necessary to co-exist, so that people live better lives together than they would have done separately (Bloomfield, 2013, p.12). Established data from the literature shows that reconciliation aims to re-establish love and understanding between two or more parties who have become entangled. In this sense, for reconciliation to occur, the source of the disagreement must be honestly and earnestly reexamined to devise a sincere solution.

Accordingly, the fundamentals of reconciliation and forgiveness are well articulated in an otherwise exquisite but never-realised address delivered shortly after independence by the late Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe:

If yesterday I fought you as an enemy, today you have become an ally with the same national interests, loyalty, rights, and duties as myself. If yesterday you hated me, today you cannot avoid the love that binds you to me and me to you (Hapanyengwi, 2013, p.23, Mlambo, 2004).

Given the above, *Kairos*' elections theory underscores that the theme of national reconciliation and forgiveness remains necessary in alleviating the problem of electoral violence. The established data suggests that unresolved conflicts have always characterised Zimbabwe. To this end, Zimbabwe acquired its independence through a protracted liberation struggle against the white settlers' government of Ian Smith. While not much is said about the actual statistics of Africans who died during this war of liberation, estimates place the number of deaths as high as 800 000, while 450 000 suffered various injuries (Hapanyengwi, 2013, p.23).

The above is further confirmed by Sachikonye (1990, p.92), who articulates that despite emerging from such a dark background, it was not long before the country once again plunged into an ethical conflict mainly affecting people of the Ndebele tribe. In this regard, human rights groups place the estimated deaths as high as 20,000 people from Matabeleland and parts of Midlands provinces, respectively (CCJP, 1997, p.3). The atrocities only came to a halt through the signing of the Unity Agreement in 1987 between ZANU and ZAPU. Currently, there has not been an official apology by the government, nor has there been meaningful and objective non-partisan interaction with the victims of the *Gukurahundi* genocide. Thus, the absence of the above continues to make reconciliation and forgiveness fruitless.

The findings further pointed out that while the above remains unresolved, the country found itself in yet another conflict around land disputes with the former white farmers. The conflict witnessed the seizure of white farmers' farms. The capture of the farms was soon accompanied by a massive migration of people to urban areas in search of opportunities after the former farm workers had lost their jobs. However, their efforts were met by another conflict known as 'operation clean up' "Murambatsvina", in which houses were demolished, leaving thousands of people without accommodation. In 2008, yet another conflict came to the centre stage. The 2008 electoral violence

resulted in the death of several opposition supporters, while others were brutally tortured and raped. The trend continued to the 2023 elections, where the violence took centre stage.

Considering the above, the research findings attest that unresolved conflicts have often created deep hatred toward those who hold different political, tribal, and social opinions. This cultivates the quest for vengeance, the main drive leading to electoral violence.

Considering the above, the *Kairos* elections theory reinforces that the theme of reconciliation and forgiveness remains an essential component of Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape; its long history of political and social polarisation demands genuine forgiveness and reconciliation. The research findings show that Zimbabwe has endured a painful history of racial, ethnic, political, and social violence, which has left the society profoundly divided and trapped in a series of unresolved conflicts. Accordingly, the *Kairos* elections theory emphasises the need for genuine and deliberate efforts towards reconciliation and forgiveness. In this regard, the theme of reconciliation and forgiveness endeavours to unite a much-divided nation, thus effectively ending the deep-seated hatred and anger constantly manifesting in electoral violence.

6.1.5 Healing and Reconciliation

The theme of healing and non-violence builds upon forgiveness and reconciliation. It denotes deliberate efforts to reach out to both the victims and the perpetrators of electoral violence. In this view, the research findings attest that despite the long history of electoral violence, there has not been a laid down procedure for the survivors of electoral violence to offer socio-emotional and psychological support, which ultimately leads to healing. The above is further echoed by ZCBC (2020, p.2), noting that there have not been government initiatives efforts, nor has there been a deliberate structure in the opposition politics that addresses the plight of electoral violence survivors. The findings prove that apart from posting on social media and complaining about ZANU-PF-sponsored violence, the opposition politics has not done much to either protect its own or make intentional efforts to offer counselling services and adequate support to its members, especially those in rural communities. In this view, survivors of electoral violence continue to witness the perpetrators walking free with no prosecution.

In this regard, society is characterised by deeply hurt individuals who still carry within them bitterness and resentment for the injustices they suffered previously. Accordingly, the *Kairos* Election theory argues that this subsequently breeds a readiness for retaliation, turning those who were formerly victims of violence into perpetrators of the same. Similarly, Miroslav Volf confirms that where there is no healing, there is the danger of repeating past mistakes.

In this view, the *Kairos* election theory is appropriate in that it entrusts the ZHOCD with the responsibility to initiate broad-based efforts towards healing the survivors of electoral violence, thus effectively doing away with resentment and vengeance. This engagement would involve holding awareness programs that reach out to the grassroots to bring both the victims and perpetrators together to discuss the effects of violence on society and the nation at large. This engagement process is expected to ultimately lead to the perpetrators taking responsibility for their actions and healing the victims.

In this view, the *Kairos* election theory underscores that the genuine realisation of wrongdoings effectively creates the notion of non-violence. This is further attested by Miroslav Volf, who cites that the key driving force towards violence is the failure to embrace those who belong to a different political and cultural ideology. In this regard, the ‘other’ is treated with hatred and is often perceived as threatening mainstream politics and culture (Volf, 1996, p.34). In like manner, the *Kairos* elections theory thus emphasises that to lessen the impulse for hatred and violence, it is necessary to ensure the healing of the victims by holding the perpetrators accountable. Thus, fostering a culture that values diversity of opinion effectively eradicates the notion of electoral violence.

6.1.6 Inclusivity

In the context of this study, Inclusivity denotes the idea that every citizen, regardless of their class, race, tribe, age, gender, ability, group, culture, and ethnicity, is rendered equal access to opportunities and resources, particularly those who are likely to be excluded such as those living with disabilities or those who belong to a minority group. The *Kairos* election’s theme of inclusion underscores that no voice should be left unheard, no one should be left behind, and no one should be subject to any form of exclusion (ZWWD, 2006, p.8). These sentiments are further echoed by

Cordenillo, who insists that, for sustainable democracy to be realised, every citizen should be allowed to participate in political processes and represent their interests and concerns (Cordenillo, 2017, p.2). This definition fits well in the context of this study. It shall be used to describe the inclusion of members of opposition politics into Zimbabwe's mainstream politics.

The research findings assert that Zimbabwe's politics has predominantly been exclusionary. Since 1980, ZANU-PF has firmly maintained a one-party state ideology. It has jealously safeguarded this agenda, deploying every effort to frustrate opposition politics, including capture and manipulation of state institutions, deployment of violence and other forms of coercion during elections to monopolise power. The same sentiment is echoed by Hofisi (2018, p.20), noting that in a typically competitive authoritarian style, the ZANU-PF-led government has repeatedly held elections but has ensured it wins everyone. Correspondingly, the established data suggests that the ZANU-PF has deployed various strategies to attack, persecute, weaken, and destroy its political opponents, critics, and dissenters violently and systemically (Hofisi, 2018, p.20, Kriger, 2005, p.2 and Lemon, 2009, p.4). In this way, established data show that the state has also captured, controlled, manipulated, and directed democratic institutions such as the electoral body, manipulating the voters' role, the voting process, counting of votes, transmission, and announcement of result.

In the context of the above, the *Kairos* election's theme of inclusion denotes the use of ZHOCD theology to encourage the politics of inclusion, in which all citizens are rendered the right to political affiliation and expression without further victimisation. It is worth noting that the ZHOCD has numerous times called the government of Zimbabwe to open the democratic space and ensure the inclusion of all political parties. The ZHOCD has also criticised the government's use of violence, coercion, and intimidation to secure people's support (ZHOCD, 2022, p.3). In the same way, ZCBC (2020, p.3) articulates that the rising call for demonstrations is an expression of the growing annoyance and aggravation caused by the circumstances that the majority of Zimbabweans experience.

This view is further attested by Miroslav Volf, who concurs that political affiliation, gender, racial as well and cultural differences, which subsequently create 'otherness', should be embraced and

utilised in a positive sense as they bring about variety and uniqueness (Volf, 1996, p.34). He criticises exclusionary structures where the other, particularly the vulnerable and the powerless, is taken advantage of, oppressed, subjugated, and condemned because they are different in political affiliation, race, origin, gender, ethnicity, and culture (Volf, 1996, p.35). He further states that,

In a world driven by power and control, the ‘other’ is considered as “filth that must be washed away... driven out and in most cases killed and shoved into mass grave”. The other is considered a threat that needs to be eliminated, excluded, and driven as far away as possible to ensure domination and control. This effectively creates the ‘them’ as opposed to ‘us’, which implicitly portrays “them” as the people that “we” are not, hence the need to exclude them (Volf, 1996, p.34).

Given the above, the *Kairos* theme of inclusion emphasises that electoral violence can only be eliminated if the country’s political space is conducive to including opposition politics. On this basis, Kairo’s elections theory makes a stronger case that the theme of inclusion is essential as it encourages the ZHOCD to engage with various political players, particularly those who exhibit politics of exclusion. In this regard, the *Kairos* election theory upholds the theme of inclusivity in eradicating the problem of electoral violence.

6.1.7 Peace and Stability

The theme of peace and stability is used in this study to describe the absence of violence, intimidation, and coercion during election periods in Zimbabwe. Rummel corroborates this understanding by characterising peace as a condition of fairness, equal power relations, and a state of law or civil governance (Rummel, 1976, p.2). Thus, the *Kairos* elections theory underpins that when elections are held in a free, fair, democratic, and peaceful manner, then it effectively contributes to the stability of the country (Kossler, 2008, p.8, Kriger, 2005, p.17, Lemon, 2007, p.15). This is echoed by Kapomba, (2018) who articulates that, Zimbabwe’s violent charged elections have often been followed by legitimacy crises in which the victims of violence who in most cases are members of opposition politics refuse to accept the election result and subsequently the one who is declared as the winner. Research findings show that Zimbabwe has been trapped in a trend of disputed elections whose results are further disputed and questioned not only by local citizens but also by some regional and international observer missions such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), African Union (AU), European Union (EU) and Commonwealth among other groups leading to a vicious legitimacy cycle (Kaaba, 2015, p.11, Juma and Brazaville, 2018, p.5). In this regard, electoral disputes and contestations have continued

to derail the country's hope for stability and thus reversing the country's efforts towards achieving peace.

Kruger (2005) echoes the above, citing that, following the departure of former President Robert Mugabe, many people hoped for peaceful and democratic elections, which would lead to peace and stability. However, it became apparent that this was not going to be realised as the government presided over highly disputed elections that were accompanied by alarming levels of violence. Zimbabwe is amid disputed elections that have left the country destabilised and divided.

Considering the above, Banana (1991, p.2) notes that the role of the Church is to bring about peace and justice, advocating for reconciliation of all men and women, bringing the society into union and fellowship with one another across religion, racial, tribal, cultural as well as political boundaries. Accordingly, Banana affirms that the Church's social mission is renewal, reassurance, and reaffirming fundamental human rights among the oppressed and the marginalised. In this respect, the Church's role in society remains prophetic for the betterment of the world. Thus, the Church is called upon to demonstrate concern for the poor, the marginalised and the downtrodden (Banana, 1991, p.2). Banana further reiterates that the prophetic role of the Church is to interpret the Christian gospel to victims of a hostile society, those who have been denied the development and legitimate enjoyment of the fruits of their being, stripped of their humanity, and reduced to levels of chattels, the prisoners of human infected pervasive poverty (Banana, 1980, p.135). In this case, Banana proved the gravity of an arrogant society. For him, the Church should not exclusively focus on convincing people that a peaceful life will be experienced in the next world. Instead, the Church must contribute to bringing the principles of the desired world here and now so that it is lived, experienced, and enjoyed by all (Banana, 1980, p.136).

Considering the above, the theme of peace and stability is appropriate for the *Kairos* elections theory. The ZHOCD can use it to bring about a turnaround of events in Zimbabwe's electoral and political landscape. Cornel West reiterates that the *Kairos* theory consists of human acts of justice and kindness that attend to the unjust sources of human hurt and misery. In this regard, Kairo's elections theory calls attention to the causes of unjustified suffering, unnecessary social misery,

and hatred. It brings to question personal and institutional evil, including the evil of being indifferent to personal and institutional evil (Cornel West in Tisdale, 2010, p.9).

Accordingly, the realisation of peace and stability will effectively create a conducive environment for prosperity and success. The theme of peace and stability should, however, not be understood as a standalone theme but should be read along with other *Kairos* elections themes highlighted in this chapter, appreciating the much ground covered by earlier themes. Thus, it is strategically placed almost at the end of the chapter to mark that it depends on earlier themes.

6.1.8 Hope and National Development

The last theme of the *Kairos* elections theory is hope and national development, and it builds upon other themes mentioned above. Hope in the context of this theme denotes one's ability to trust the system of governance with the assurance that their physical, social, economic, and political prosperity is guaranteed. It needs to be noted that electoral violence in Zimbabwe has had devastating effects both on the citizens and on the economy of the country. It can, therefore, be said that violent elections have destroyed the hope for the security of citizens, especially opposition party members and those who hold a different political opinion. The research findings suggest that hope for peaceful power transfer has significantly deteriorated among most. Many Zimbabweans, particularly the youth, live in abject poverty and hopeless situations, and they doubt the possibility of economic fortunes.

It is also worth noting that Zimbabwe is currently trapped in a series of economic struggles for over two decades. Lewanika (2018) concurs that the economic meltdown is further intertwined with the country's failure to hold peaceful elections. This has scared away regional and international investors as they take note of the politically and economically unstable ground. As a result, most citizens live in hopeless situations characterised by alarming unemployment rates, skyrocketing inflation and ever-rising poverty levels. In this regard, the *Kairos* elections theory underpins that the ZHOCD can be an agent of hope and national building through its engagement with political players and the citizens and its advocacy to end electoral violence, effectively setting the ground for national development.

Closely tied to hope is the notion of National development, which entails the construction or restructuring of a national identity using state power to foster unity amongst the people within a state for long-term political stability and viability (Bratton and Masunungure 2018, p.2). It involves the development of frameworks and policies for short-, medium- and long-term plans to foster unity, peace, prosperity, and security of lives and property (Bratton and Masunungure, 2018, p.2). It further advocates for an end to exclusionary systems and structures upholding the promotion of solidarity and integration among different political, ethnic and racial groups (Chakwawawa, 2019, p.3). The above is confirmed by Chintom (2017, p.1) citing that the process of national building is essential for forging political integration, especially in diverse societies and converging national energies and resources for social advancement and economic development. This definition is appropriate for this study as it underscores eradicating exclusionary socio-political structures as a prerequisite for national development. In the context of this study, national development entails the ability of the *Kairos* election theory of the ZHOCD to advocate for inclusionary politics that promote competitive elections, cultivating the ground for national development.

Considering the above, the *Kairos* elections theory underpins that the ZHOCD can be instrumental in initiating peace-building exercises for elite politicians and ordinary citizens, thus effectively cultivating the ground for hope and national development. In this respect, ZHOCD possesses theological apparatus such as its teachings on forgiveness, loving one's enemies and peacebuilding. These are undoubtedly instrumental in ending exclusionary politics, thus creating national peace and leading to the realisation of hope for the local citizens and regional and global investors, which results in nation building.

6.2 Conclusion

To sum up, the chapter makes a strong case that the proposed *Kairos* election theory for the ZHOCD is instrumental in eliminating the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe's general elections. In this respect, the chapter sought to discuss how the *Kairos* election theory of the ZHOCD can be instrumental in eradicating the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe's general elections. Accordingly, the chapter presented key emerging themes from the established data and analysed them using the *Kairos* elections theory. The chapter upholds the *Kairos* elections

theory of the ZHOCD as appropriate in addressing the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. The chapter further discussed key emerging themes of the study, showing their suitability to the framework of the study.

In this respect, the chapter underscores the essence of community engagement and outreach, citing that electoral violence mostly takes place in grassroots communities; it is, therefore, appropriate for any quest to end electoral violence to consider reaching out to the grassroots people seriously, conscientise people of the effects of electoral violence to the community, society and the nation at large. The theme of community engagement and outreach pointed out that most grassroots people engage in electoral violence without an awareness of how this affects the credibility and legitimacy of the electoral process, thus affecting the country's regional and global standing. The theme also articulates that electoral violence has derailed economic growth, thus resulting in the escalation of unemployment levels, alarming inflation rates and growing levels of poverty. Accordingly, the *Kairos* election's theme of community engagement and outreach also reiterates the need to raise awareness around the essence of voting, voter education and the confidentiality of one's choice.

The chapter also discussed the significance of ethical reflection in addressing the problem of electoral violence. The theme of ethical reflection underpins that the ZHOCD can eliminate the problem of electoral violence by holding politicians accountable wherever there are cases of violence and human rights violations. In this regard, the *Kairos* election theory emphasises that the ZHOCD should be the voice for the masses against politicians who often incite citizens to engage in violence to advance their political millage. In this regard, the ZHOCD is expected to be the voice of 'morality', holding citizens and politicians accountable for election-motivated violence.

The chapter further discussed the essence of dialogue between political parties, citizens, and communities, pointing out that Zimbabwe has been trapped in a series of unresolved conflicts since independence in 1980. These conflicts have created a deeply divided nation characterised by hurt and the quest for vengeance. In this regard, electoral violence becomes an appropriate platform for the manifestation of anger and hatred towards the 'other'.

The theme of dialogue strategically sets the tone for national reconciliation and forgiveness in which the *Kairos* election theory articulates the need for the country to ensure reconciliation and forgiveness. The theme further pointed out that the ZHOCD is strategically stationed to facilitate genuine and broad-based national reconciliation and forgiveness. In this manner, the perpetrators of electoral violence are held responsible and accountable for their actions. This automatically leads to healing and non-violence, where the victims let go of their anger and resentment against the perpetrators, thus effectively putting a stop to the gruesome cycle of electoral violence.

The above themes lead to a politics of inclusiveness in which all political parties are treated with respect and dignity. At the same time, citizens are afforded a free democratic space to select leaders of their choice. This theme leads to hope and national development as citizens become aware of their security and properties. This creates a peaceful and stable nation conducive to growth and economic prosperity.

The chapter proposes the *Kairos* election theory as an appropriate theory of electoral violence. In this regard, the chapter upholds the themes of the *Kairos* elections theory as appropriate for alleviating the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe's general elections. The *Kairos* elections theory demonstrates a commitment to ending electoral violence by engaging with the tangible world, holding the world accountable, and denouncing injustice, corruption, and violation of human rights. It further questions unjust socioeconomic and political practices that subject people to poverty. In this respect, *Kairos* elections condemn socioeconomic and political structures that subject people to exclusionary politics in the form of electoral violence. Accordingly, the *Kairos* elections theory of the ZHOCD is characterised by a camaraderie commitment to the life, cause, and struggle brought about by electoral violence and desires to end this practice. It exhibits a strong commitment and determination to ending systemic historical inequality and exclusionary politics and social structures that subjugate people to poverty and oppression (Gutierrez 1973, p.156, Auret, 1992). The study, though it has not made explicit references to experiences in other parts of the world and its effects on international relations/ interaction to enhance hope and national development, it is done considering such experiences. The next chapter discusses the Church's mission and identity in general elections.

Chapter Seven

Theological Framework for Mitigating Electoral Violence in Zimbabwe

7. Introduction

The previous chapter presented the research findings, considering the data gathered from primary and secondary sources where key emerging themes of the *Kairos* election theory have been generated and outlined. The data gathered has been thoroughly analysed and interpreted in keeping with the study's primary and secondary research objectives. This chapter investigates how the study achieved the three research questions:

- *How has Kairos theology informed the historical context and current situation of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, and what specific role has the ZHOCD played in addressing this violence during general elections?*
- *In what ways can the ZHOCD utilize its theological foundations and teachings from Kairos theology to advocate for peace and mitigate electoral violence while also effectively engaging with local communities and political authorities?*
- *What insights can be gained from previous experiences of electoral violence in Zimbabwe that would shape a comprehensive theological framework for the ZHOCD to promote free, fair, and peaceful elections in the future?*

Given the above, the thrust of this chapter is to chart a roadmap for a comprehensive and sustainable model that guides the ZHOCD on general elections. The research findings of this study underscore that, notwithstanding its weaknesses, the ZHOCD, through its theological apparatus and resources, coupled with its perceived moral status and influence, can be instrumental in reducing the problem of election violence in Zimbabwe. However, the ZHOCD still needs to be equipped with relevant resources and support to adequately stand as a moral voice in the context of election violence. Accordingly, this chapter examines how the research findings satisfy the key and sub-research questions concerning the study's framework.

Secondly, the chapter provides an envisaged theological model that is sustainable for the ZHOCD during Zimbabwe's elections, including the requirement for pastoral leadership skills and resources in the context of election violence. Given the preceding, this chapter discusses the Church's Mission, Vision, and Identity in General Elections. The details of the procedure, collection, analysis, and interpretation of data are articulated in the methodology section in chapter 4 of the study. This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section discusses the mission of the Church, under which several aspects, such as speaking truth to power, transparent historians, indictment of empty worship, and concern for the poor, among other aspects, are discussed concerning the problem of electoral violence. The second section discusses the Church's identity in the context of electoral violence. The chapter discusses how much the Church can advocate for peaceful, democratic, and fair elections. At the end of the chapter, the theology of the ZHOCD in general elections and election violence is envisaged. The chapter's discussion mainly follows the study's second and third objectives. It seeks to suggest how the *Kairos* theory can be used to address the effects of election violence and disputes during general elections in Zimbabwe.

The study is anchored on the key research question: *What role has the Kairos theology of Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations played in mitigating the problem of electoral violence?* The findings of this research identified and herewith tabulate the following:

7.1 The Context in which the ZHOCD Operates

The findings of this research suggest that for ZHOCD to be instrumental in understanding and bringing notable contributions to the growing problem of electoral violence, there is a significant need for contextual analysis. This study denotes the need to critically understand the context within which the problem of electoral violence has emerged. In this regard, the theme of contextual analysis interrogates questions such as, *what are the key factors fuelling the spread of electoral violence? What parties are involved in electoral violence and disputes? What mechanisms have been in place to reduce the spread of electoral violence?*

Considering the above, the research study establishes that electoral violence in Zimbabwe emanates within the context of growing levels of poverty, economic meltdown and alarming unemployment levels. However, despite the above, political tensions have remained highly

charged with notable contestations between the ruling ZANU-PF party and the MDC. While evidence has shown that opposition political parties often play on the victim side of electoral violence, the research findings provide sufficient evidence to suggest that opposition political members, members of the Christian community, local community leaders, traditional leaders, members of the state security forces, the youths, women as well as members of the public service have all been implicated in Zimbabwe's electoral violence narrative.

Established data, therefore, suggests that the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe is deeply rooted in all facets of the country's life. However, the *Kairos* election theory suggests that, while several facets of the social stratum are as guilty as the politicians in cultivating the ground for electoral violence, an array of hope exists in the teachings and beliefs of the ZHOCD. However, this does not suggest that the ZHOCD is a perfect player in Zimbabwe's electoral violence narrative. On the contrary, the broader Church in Zimbabwe has historically contributed to the colonial agenda by exploiting local Zimbabweans and subjugating them to white colonial masters who invaded the country on the back of the Christian message and the Bible. On the other hand, similar churches helped to fight against the colonizer alongside the liberators in Zimbabwe.

However, the contextual analysis theme of the *Kairos* election theory inspires the ZHOCD to redeem its pastoral identity and prophetic mandate by prayerfully and honestly engaging with society in discussing possible solutions to the problem of electoral violence. In doing so, the findings suggest that considering the unpleasant role the mainline churches have played in Zimbabwe's political history, the ZHOCD should not approach the problem of electoral violence as a saviour of society. Instead, the findings firmly underscore that for ZHOCD to be trusted in the context of electoral violence, the Church needs to acknowledge its historical and current contribution to the problem of electoral violence.

It can be argued that the ZHOCD and the broader community of churches have often been implicated in power struggles, succession disputes and systemic contestations around the leadership roles of the Church itself. The findings show how churches that constitute the ZHOCD have physically fought over Church authority and resources. What the above stands to suggest is that the role of the ZHOCD in its effort to reduce the problem of electoral violence should always

be accompanied by the Church's admission that it is not a perfect institution, but it endeavours to bring along its celebrated theological teachings on peace, conflict resolution, dialogue and forgiveness. These teachings, as enshrined in the Bible, bring forward the possibility of a robust social conversation around the problem of electoral violence.

The findings further reveal that a conversational and not prescriptive approach. This makes it possible for the ZHOCD to discuss the societal views on the problem of electoral violence and whether they wish to see a better, peaceful and changed world. This further conveys everyone's views and suggestions, including grassroots communities. Given the above, the *Kairos* election theory proposes contextual analysis as a sustainable theme for ZHOCD in approaching the problem of electoral violence from the grassroots to the national level, with an awareness of the historical and contemporary problems associated with the institution of the Church. This creates an idea of ownership and responsibility from ordinary citizens, which lays the ground for non-violent and peaceful means of political power.

7.1.1 ZHOCD's Theological Framework on General Elections

The findings of this study suggest that one of the significant challenges in executing the ZHOCD's role in general elections is the lack of a well-defined theology of the ZHOCD, which guides it during General elections. This is in line with the second research sub-question of the study: *What role does the ZHOCD play in addressing the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe?* This, too, is in keeping with the third research sub-question: *How can the Kairos theory of the ZHOCD be used to address the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe?* From this perspective, this section of the study presents a proposed model that could be instrumental in ZHOCD's dealing with the problem of electoral violence during general elections. The research findings of this study suggest that the ZHOCD has a responsibility to "Preach the good news, advocate for peace and ensure the society lives in harmony". This mandate entails societal obligations that guarantee harmony, freedom, and peace to make life livable and enjoyable. In this sense, the research findings suggest that the ZHOCD's social responsibility is to be a cornerstone of the Christian message. This position is further attested by Lindberg, pointing out that preaching the gospel has some social repercussions (Lindberg, 2007). This results from the dramatic call for a paradigm transformation in all aspects of life, including the social lifestyle previously marked by greed,

jealousy, anger, and violence. In this regard, the Christian message calls would-be followers of Christ to radically shift their social lifestyle in exchange for the principles of a new society established and ordained by God.

In this way, the Christian message exhorts those who follow Christ to drastically alter their social lifestyle in favour of one governed by the laws of a new society created and decreed by God. A society characterised by peace, love, and unity. It is anticipated that this new perspective will continue to refute preconceived notions, resulting in repentance. The findings of this study confirm that the Bible makes it apparent that Jesus cares deeply about anything that impacts people's lives and welfare. In this regard, it can be attested that the proclamation of the Kingdom inevitably necessitates the rejection of all incompatibles, including institutionalised violence, destruction, political corruption, all forms of human exploitation, and the use of force (Tisdale 2010, p.11).

Thus, the findings underscore that ZHOCD is expected to speak honestly about its socio-political context and wrestle with societal struggles within the context of the Christian faith (Tisdale, 2010, p. 12). This makes the Christian faith relevant to its context, proclaiming meaningful words to individuals and cities, nations, and the world. In this sense, the Church:

Proclaims a message of God's hope to the world through the biblical vision, hope for a new day when people would turn their swords into ploughshares and their spears into farming implements, the hope of a new era when human beings will not be judged by skin colour, political affiliation, ethnicity, gender, social status, and economic standing. Hope for a time when diversity will not justify violence— when the wolf and the lamb will trust each other without fear or harm (Tisdale 2010, p.1).

Considering the above, the findings of this research show that while the ZHOCD has been involved in Zimbabwe's socio-political space, its operations still need to be equipped with an agreed-upon theological standpoint in general elections. The lack thereof has often made the ZHOCD reactionary and not proactive to the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. Also, the findings suggest that having a well-defined theological position on general elections helps the ZHOCD to measure its success, impact and influence in the country's political space. The proposed roadmap is comprised of the following themes:

7.2 Proposed Theological Themes for the ZHOCD

7.2.1 Theology of Truth Speaking

The findings of this research show that truth-speaking can serve as a profound theological model for ZHOCD in general elections. Truth speaking is hinged upon justice, integrity and morality of general elections. Therefore, the ZHOCD can employ this theological tool to ensure that the period leading to general elections is characterised by truth-telling. This eradicates the rhetoric of hatred, vengeance and retribution. Truth-speaking creates an environment conducive to morality and integrity during elections. Information gathered in this study shows that in most elections, Zimbabwe has deliberately ignored the essence of morality embedded in the concept of ubuntu (*Unhu*), which constitutes an African society's very foundations and identity.

Ubuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu (a human being is human through others) encapsulates the idea of human kindness and selflessness, mutuality and understanding, caring and connection, community and openness. Thus, truth speaking to politicians and citizens cultivates an environment conducive to justice, inclusivity, interdependence, unity in diversity and respect for others. This goes a long way in uniting a much-divided Zimbabwe's political landscape whose political trajectory has long been polarised. The findings of this study also suggest that truth-speaking is crucial in that it empowers the ZHOCD to remind both politicians and citizens of the volatility of the country's history from the colonial period through independence to contemporary Zimbabwe. In this regard, the ZHOCD can utilise truth-telling to remind Zimbabweans of our moral responsibilities and how it is necessary to break past the politics of violence and hatred and move towards embracing each other and uniting towards the shared vision.

The findings of this study also pointed out that speaking the truth, especially to those in power, will effectively dislodge the urge for violence and discourage the abuse of state security apparatus, the youths and other groups who have in the past been at the centre of electoral violence. The ZHOCD's theological teaching on truth speaking leads to dialogue, negotiation, forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. These are fundamental aspects necessary for building a newer version of elections in Zimbabwe. Even so, the findings of this study attest that truth-telling creates an environment characterised by genuineness, honesty and accountability. These are key in the

context of electoral violence because they uproot the very foundations of electoral violence, such as competition, selfish ambitions and greed.

The findings also suggest that by promoting the theology of truth-speaking as both a divine and cultural mandate, ZHOCD can empower individuals and communities to advocate for their rights while holding those promoting violence to account. This, too, can be particularly effective in mobilising Christians to engage and participate in the electoral process, ensuring their voices are heard and their influence felt. In this regard, ZHOCD can educate congregations and the general Christian populace about the essence of informed voting and the implications of election outcomes. The ZHOCD can inspire individuals and churches to seek and act upon the truth by formulating this education in a theological context. This creates an environment suitable for Christian witnessing to the community. By embodying the principles of truth and justice, ZHOCD can act as a witness to the broader community. This may involve prayer marches, public statements, social media campaigns or community gatherings that emphasise the need for peace and integrity in governance and electoral process. The notion of truth speaking also cultivates an environment suitable for prayer and spiritual support. In this regard, the information established in this study emphasises that encouraging prayerful reflection on the elections can lead individuals and communities to seek divine guidance in their electoral conduct and candidate selection. This reinforces the understanding that truth is not merely a political concept, but a deeply held value embedded in people's faith and culture.

Given the above, the ZHOCD can leverage these principles to encourage voters and political leaders to prioritise truth and accountability, fostering a culture that challenges corrupt and violent means to power. Thus, it can be said that by employing the theological model of truth speaking to power, the ZHOCD can influence Zimbabwe's electoral landscape by undoing the urge for violence while promoting a morally stable, more just and equitable society.

7.2.2 Theology of Historical Transparency

Many cultures possess various ways of covering up the mistakes derived from the past. This is so because the custodians of history or those in powerful positions do not want future generations to know about the inhuman treatment done to others in the past. Similarly, the findings of this

research show that it has become characteristically the trend for Zimbabwe to overlook unpleasant moments in the country's history. The belief is that unspoken evils of the past will soon be eroded from the nation's memory and, therefore, miraculously vanish from the historical record. In this view, the research findings suggest that, throughout the history of Zimbabwe, authorities have been heavy-handed in dealing with the Matabeleland genocide, the fast-tracked land reform program, the 2008 electoral violence, the brutalisation of MDC party members and the August 1, 2018, indiscriminate shooting of civilians by the army. The church during the *Gukurahundi*, especially the Roman Catholic Church, engaged the Lawyers for Human Rights to document the experiences of the people in Midlands and Matabeleland during the civil war (CCJP & LHR, 1997). In the Murambatsvina of 2005, many churches mobilized resources to help people whose homes and businesses had been destroyed, and so is the help that was given to farm workers due to the 2001-2003 fast-track land reform. In all, the ZHOCD and its constituent members have spoken during times of crisis including brutalization of opposition members and shooting of demonstrators. In this regard, it can be said that ZANU-PF has, over the years, tried to brush aside the gravity of electoral violence scenes and has instead pretended as if nothing happened. To make matters worse, the government never offered a public apology nor showed genuine commitment to addressing these violent acts. The Bible however, by precedence, what is known about the rulers is proof enough of what they can do in future. Paul to the Corinthians says he was trusted by them because, "You have already understood us in part" (2 Cor. 1:13).

For instance, the only time the Robert Mugabe regime indirectly admitted to the wrongs of *Gukurahundi* was on Joshua Nkomo's memorial service on July 2 2000, in which Robert Mugabe referred to the *Gukurahundi* genocide as a "moment of madness". However, this angered the Ndebele people, who felt Mugabe was opening new wounds (Brazaville, 2018, p.7). This, too, seems to suggest that the *Gukurahundi* massacres should be a forgotten history, a closed chapter.

The same can also be said about the victims of the 2008 electoral violence, where there has not been positive engagement and dialogue. The research findings point out that the survivors of this violence continue to watch their perpetrators walking scot-free as they continue to enjoy the protection of political bigwigs. This has, in turn, continued to rip the nation apart, bringing about politics of hatred, violence and vengeance. Currently, survivors of the violence remain ignored,

with authorities trying to brush away the gravity of this chapter of Zimbabwe's history. Like *Gukurahundi* before it, the 2008 brutalities and the 2018 indiscriminate shooting of civilians join a long list of Zimbabwe's forgotten history. Thus, it can be alluded that the Zimbabwean government has systematically brushed aside some sad chapters of the country's history, thus trying to bury the memories of the past alive.

From this perspective, the research findings affirm that the ZHOCD must call to memory and remind politicians and citizens of the unresolved past disputes that the nation cannot afford to ignore. The research findings further suggest that "an honest account of ourselves as human beings would require us to admit just how strong the impulse is to cover past mistakes" (Bembry, 2018, p.48). This aids in educating the younger generations about the mistakes that have been made in the past, perhaps to learn from them and prevent a recurrence. In this view, the research findings suggest that the ZHOCD stand as a transparent historian reminding both politicians and citizens of previous mistakes in the country's history, thus calling the nation to repentance, do good by seeking justice, shunning oppression of the marginalised, and desist from shedding innocent blood (Chitando, 2013).

In this context, the ZHOCD functions as a custodian of history, which people can look at, draw lessons from, and evoke memories of. The data gathered suggests that the ZHOCD should remain committed to truth-telling about the past and the collective history of violence, including electoral violence. This position is further echoed by Tocqueville, suggesting that:

The woof of time is every instant broken, and the track of generations effaced. Those who went before are soon forgotten, and of those who will come after, no one has any idea: man's interest is confined to those in close propinquity to himself.... In the end, Not only does the forgotten national history make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens, in the end, to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart. (Bembry 2018, p.59).

In this regard, evidence from the findings suggests that the ZHOCD needs to make strategic, deliberate efforts to bring to light the historical incidences of electoral violence and how it has affected individuals, society, and the nation, intending to draw lessons from previous mistakes and avoid recurrence. In this way, the research findings show that the ZHOCD needs to constantly

remind the government that the country will remain divided if the past, which has a bearing on the nation, is not resolved. In this respect, it can be deduced that the failure of the government to deal decisively with the perpetrators of electoral violence has been a contributing factor to the ever-rising cases of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. In this way, since the turn of the millennium, the ZANU-PF-led government has deliberately unleashed violence against the newly formed opposition parties, human rights activists and civil society.

However, since 2008, 2013, 2018, and the recently held 2023 elections, violence has continued to be a recurrent trend in Zimbabwe's election period. Essentially, the ZANU-PF-led government has not had a clear strategy to arrest the surge of electoral violence. Consequently, elections in Zimbabwe are known for intimidation, brutalisation, victimisation, and murder of opposition supporters. This trend can be traced back to the government's unwillingness to deal decisively with previous cases of electoral violence. Thus, the research findings affirm the need for the ZHOCD to be a transparent historian, constantly reminding the state of its responsibility to protect the citizens and ensure the rule of law and peace abides in the country's general elections.

7.2.3 Theology of Indictment Against Empty Worship

In this study, the theology of "indictment of empty worship" questions superficial religious practices that are not a true reflection of genuine faith, as stated in Matthew 15:8–9, "In vain do they worship Me." It questions the sincerity of mere Christian rituals devoid of heartfelt devotion and lacking the fundamentals of Christian ethos. In essence, the theology of indictment of empty worship calls for a deeper, socially transformative worship that engages both the heart and the mind, challenging Christians to seek authentic relationships with both the divine and society. At its core, it urges individuals and communities to move beyond empty traditions and cultivate a deeper spiritual life.

Given the above, the indictment of empty worship is utilised in this study to denote ZHOCD's ability to critique empty religious occasions and practices in which the state is not held accountable. However, the research findings of this study suggest that one of the significant problems faced by the ZHOCD in bringing about sanity and peaceful elections in Zimbabwe is that the Church itself is equally to blame for the growing levels of violence in Zimbabwe. Evidence

from this study proves that several churches in Zimbabwe are trapped in significant disputes that have escalated violence among Christian leaders. Churches often fight over property ownership, control and authority of church resources and political affiliation. In some cases, politically affiliated church leaders often create divisions and conflicts among congregants over political affiliation and ideologies by parceling gifts and opportunities from ZANU-PF to some members and depriving others. Thus, it can be argued that politically motivated violence has also permeated into the institution of the Church. This has made it difficult for the generality of the Christian populace to speak with one voice against the growing levels of electoral violence.

This comes amid a backdrop of Church capture where Christian leaders in Zimbabwe have been roped into partisan politics. In the same way, it can be attested that since independence in 1980, the ZANU-PF administration has aimed to use churches as a hunting field for political targets. Accordingly, the Mugabe-led government took purposeful, well-thought-out steps to ensnare the Church into partisan politics. This has seen the participation of church leaders in political-related gatherings such as the Mnangagwa-initiated National Day of Prayer, the anti-sanction march, and ZANU-PF political rallies. In this regard, data shows that Mugabe dressed in full *Vapostori* attire to entice their vote. Despite the above, information gathered in this study suggests that the ZHOCD must first address elements of violence evident within the broader Church, thus making the Church equipped to speak against empty worship, which does not address the grievances of the poor and the vulnerable.

7.2,4 Theology of Conformity and Adaptation

The research findings suggest that one of the main challenges faced by the Zimbabwean broader Church is that the institution of the Church has largely been diluted by the politicians and political ideologies of the day. The research findings show sufficient evidence to suggest that the economic woes hitting the country have left the Church exposed to manipulation and conformity. In this regard, it can be said that most Church leaders have deliberately sought to pursue political agendas that promote their relationship with ZANU-PF in exchange for material benefits. For instance, the research findings reveal ZANU-PF Christian-affiliated groups, such as Mnangagwa for Jesus, Vapostori for ED, Pastors for ED, Zionists for ED and Ruwadzano for ED, to mention but a few. Interestingly, most of these groups are constituted by ordained church leaders who always motivate

their congregants to support and ultimately vote for the ZANU-PF presidential candidate, arguing that God has ordained ZANU-PF to lead the people of Zimbabwe. This is usually followed by biblical passages or figures used to qualify the suitability of the ZANU-PF presidential candidate within Christian, biblical lenses.

However, what worries many is that church leaders have not spoken with one voice on the wrongs committed by the ZANU-PF administration. The same is echoed by Chimtom (2017), who states that in the president's face, the well-known social ills of political violence, human rights violations, corruption, and avarice have all gone unmentioned. Those who have attempted to communicate do so on paper or after leaving the president's immediate vicinity. Contrarily, data has shown that several prophets and Church leaders have lavishly praised President Mnangagwa in their speeches. President Mnangagwa, for instance, has been likened to the historical Moses, whose mission is to free the people of Zimbabwe. Such prophecies add forecasts of good things to prove God picked the ZANU-PF government to rule the country. The findings from this research also suggest that some church leaders have compromised their prophetic mission in exchange for material benefits, including government loans, farms, and mines, among other benefits. As beneficiaries of the same system, these church leaders consequently find it difficult to criticise the ZANUPF-led government. In this way, the findings of this study call upon ZHOCD leaders to demonstrate the fortitude to speak truth to power, condemning empty worship initiated and executed by politicians still accused of the country's struggles.

From this perspective, the findings suggest that the ZHOCD needs to stand opposed to empty worship practices that are divorced from the fundamentals of Christianity. Thus, the ZHOCD is expected to speak the truth against the evils being perpetrated by the government against the citizens. To this end, the findings suggest that, instead of the president calling the nation to a 'National Day of Prayer' for the economy and stability of the country, the ZHOCD is expected to call the government leaders to repentance against the violence unleashed on innocent citizens, against the disputes surrounding the electoral process from which people's ability to choose leaders of their choice is suppressed. Therefore, before getting into 'empty worship', the findings of this study inspire the ZHOCD to call the government to repent and obey the Godly principles of servant leadership and respect for citizens.

7.2.5 Theology of Concern for Electoral Integrity

Concern for electoral integrity, in line with Jesus' prayer in Mathew 6:10, "May your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven", is one of the essential pillars in addressing the problem of electoral violence. The findings of this study suggest that the ZHOCD needs to demonstrate its commitment to free, fair and non-violent elections in Zimbabwe. This comes amid a grossly polarised electoral system that has, over the years, incubated highly contested and violent elections. In this regard, the established data suggests that the ZHOCD creates an environment in which it interacts with both the politicians and members of the society to raise awareness of the effects of a contested, violent election on the country's economy and foreign policy. In this regard, the established data insists that the ZHOCD should constantly engage with the government, citing that the failure to hold peaceful, free, fair, and credible elections will continuously harm the country's economy, thus worsening the condition of the already poor citizens.

The research findings also show that the recently held elections testify to the widening gap between Zimbabwe and other regional countries in the Southern African Development Committee (SADC), the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU), among other groups. These observer mission groups have spoken, some for the first time, with one voice against Zimbabwe's failure to ensure the democratic electoral process (SADC, 2023; AU, 2023; EU, 2023 Observer Missions Reports). Accordingly, the SADC observer mission led by Chairperson Dr. Neves Mumba (Former Zambian and Vice-President), who represented His Excellency Hakainde Hichilema, the President of the Republic of Zambia, and the Chairperson of the SADC organ on Politics, Defence and security has, for the first time in the history of African electoral politics, pointed out that Zimbabwe's recently held elections were not held in a free, fair, and credible manner and that the ZEC went against its constitution and the constitution of Zimbabwe (SADC, 2023 Election observer Report). Accordingly, the report outlines that the electoral process was marred by confusion, voter intimidation, voter suppression and the deliberate sabotage of the city voters. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, despite having promised the nation and the whole world its preparedness to hold free and fair elections, presided over the worst electoral process in post-independence Zimbabwe.

The research findings attest that ZEC should have issued the voter's role in advance so that political parties could inspect it and correct it where necessary. This happened despite numerous requests by the opposition party CCC for its release as spelt out in its constitution. Furthermore, in what many citizens consider a deliberate act of voter sabotage and suppression of the urban vote, the ZEC did not provide ballot papers in most metropolitan areas, regarded as opposition CCC strongholds (Pindula News, 2023). In this respect, in most urban areas, polling stations only had ballot papers for twelve hours past the stipulated voting time in suburbs, such as Warren Park, Glenview, Budiro, Glen Norah, and Kambuzuma, among others (Zimlive, 2013). Other affected cities include Bulawayo Province, Mutare Province, and Manicaland Province, among many provinces traditionally known as CCC strongholds. In most areas, voting started at midnight, twelve hours later than the stipulated time.

The findings of this study further show that disgruntled citizens who had braved the chilly weather to cast their vote had to endure twelve more hours of just standing in long winding queues with no official communication or assurance from ZEC on what time the ballot paper was going to be availed. As such, several people abandoned the voting queues and returned home as the situation proved undemocratic and made it impossible for urban citizens to vote for leaders of their choice. As a result, many could not vote since voting started at midnight and was done overnight. However, critics believe that the absence of ballot paper in traditionally opposition CCC strongholds, while in contrast, all ZANU-PF strongholds, even those as far away from the command centre as possible, had the ballot paper as early as 7 a.m. was by no means coincidental but was, in fact, one of the many strategies where ZEC conspired with ZANU-PF to disenfranchise opposition voters.

Given the above submissions, the findings of this study suggest that the ZHOCD should aggressively continue calling the government to accountability and advocate for the interest of the citizens first, to consider the plight of people experiencing poverty and to plead the case of the vulnerable, cognizant that how general elections are conducted has a direct bearing on the plight of people experiencing poverty and the oppressed citizens. Similarly, Bemby confirms that: We want to change the world and make it simpler for people to feed, clothe and shelter themselves as God intended. Moreover, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the

rights of the workers, the poor, and the destitute, the rights of the worthy and the unworthy poor. In other words, we can, to a certain extent, change; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a hurried world (Bembry, 2018, p.90).

In this sense, concern for electoral integrity as a pillar of ZHOCD's model for general elections denotes ZHOCD's advocacy for free, fair, and credible elections, which would allow the generality of powerless citizens to select leaders of their choice through peaceful and democratic means.

7.2.6 Theology of Concern for the Working People

The notion of elections and electoral violence is intrinsically intertwined with the experiences of the working people. On this basis, the research findings underscore how elections are conducted and how they significantly impact the lives and welfare of working people. As such, the theme emphasises the need for ZHOCD to continuously hold the government accountable and responsible for addressing the plight of the working people. The same sentiment is echoed by Sachikonye (1990, p.83) and attested by Bond (1999), stating that the plight of the workers in Zimbabwe continues to be a significant concern. In this way, many Zimbabwean workers have endured a long history of oppression and unfriendly working conditions. To situate the problem under discussion, a snapshot of the historical struggles of the workers is necessary. In this respect, the research findings of this study confirm that, during the colonial period, the Rhodesian government enacted draconian laws that sought to celebrate white supremacy while promoting the relegation of blacks to ordinary farm workers, mine workers and house help. Accordingly, Africans were denied their complete personhood. Though they constituted the majority, they were relegated to second-class citizens (Lemon, 1988, p.13). To demonstrate this, Africans were not afforded equal opportunities and resources; they always came after their white counterparts (Sithole and Makumbe, 1997, p.123). The same is echoed by the research findings that, in the workplace, an elderly African man continued to be called a 'boy', thus denying Africans their full personhood. Information from the literature review shows that these workers endured severe working conditions, worked long hours, and suffered extreme human rights abuse. However, they remained the least paid compared to their white counterparts.

Thus, upon independence, Zimbabwe was expected to iron out such discrepancies and bring sanity to workers' experiences. However, research findings show that at the turn of the millennium, when Zimbabwe's economy began to experience severe hardships, the condition of workers started to deteriorate, forcing workers unions in both the private and the public sectors to raise concern over the condition of the workers continuously. The situation culminated in a severe confrontation between the workers and their employers. Workers, particularly those working for the government, have continued to raise dissatisfaction over poor remuneration, incapacitation, and unfavourable working conditions.

The research findings show that most skilled workers have left the country in search of greener pastures while those who stayed resort to industrial action, which has crippled significant sectors such as the health and education sectors. However, the government mostly responded by sending police riots and the army to frustrate and disperse these protests. Those who organised the protests usually risked losing their jobs or faced lengthy jail terms. In this way, the *ZWWD* (2006) has called upon the government to seriously consider the plight of the workers and pay them accordingly. The plight of the workers remains unchanged mainly; most government workers currently struggle to afford essential commodities such as food, shelter and health as economic woes take a toll.

On the other hand, the research findings show that economic woes have seen escalating levels of unemployment as many companies shut down while others have downsized the number of workers. This has resulted in many citizens losing their jobs and being left with no option than turning to informal trading. Thus, many Zimbabweans survive on informal trading, selling items such as airtime, vegetables and second-hand clothes, popularly known as *mabhero*. Others survive on pirating unlicensed taxes, locally known as *mushika-shika*. Still, others earn a living through illegal touting, where they play cat-and-mouse games with the police.

Considering the above, the research findings suggest that the disgruntlement of the working people is an essential contributing factor to the problem of electoral violence. Most workers are concerned about electoral processes and results, hoping for a political turnaround. In some cases, workers constitute most of the electoral protesters and have often been met by police brutality. Therefore,

it can be said that ZHOCD's effort to address electoral violence is incomplete without addressing the plight of the working people. Thus, research findings motivate the ZHOCD to emphasise the conditions of workers suffering from electoral violence, poor governance and corruption. Research findings further indicate that electoral violence thrives on unemployment and that many graduates in Zimbabwe continue to engage in electoral violent activities as they find themselves unoccupied and unemployed. Thus, the established data suggests that the ZHOCD continuously engage with the government and political structures to ensure the working people are provided with a conducive environment to vote for leaders of their choice who will, in turn, consider the economic and social status of the working people.

7.2.7 Theology of Concern for Justice

The concern for justice is another critical pillar essential for ZHOCD's theology on general elections. The findings of the study show that Zimbabweans continue to suffer injustice, such as abuse of human rights, electoral violence, police brutality, closure of the democratic space and inability to register their unhappiness to the government. The findings further show that the absence of justice under the ZANU-PF-led government has effectively contributed to the problem of electoral violence. To this end, the ZHOCD has written numerous pastoral letters calling for the state to exercise justice for its citizens. However, this has not made any difference as growing injustices continue to be registered. In this regard, the research findings suggest that there is a need for the ZHOCD to explore other avenues, such as dialogue and prayer marches, in its engagement with the state over the rising cases of unfairness and citizens' insecurity, particularly during election season.

In this way, the research findings show that various existential problems militate against the realisation of justice in Zimbabwe. Firstly, the escalating levels of corruption have created a society that no longer considers what is right (ZWWO, 2006, p.5). In this way, people do what they can to make ends meet (ZHOCD, 2020, p.4). The law of the jungle has also been utilised in which self-centeredness becomes the norm over national interests. In this process, the poor, the powerless and the marginalised, often at the periphery of society, have suffered the results of societal contestations.

Secondly, the politicians of the day forget about the welfare of ordinary citizens. The same is attested by Diakonia (2003), who notes that low-income people are only remembered when politicians want their votes during elections. After the election, politicians become simply inaccessible and hence out of the reach of people experiencing poverty and the vulnerable, which leaves the vulnerable citizens neglected. Even so, the rising poverty levels in the country have increasingly made it difficult for the powerless to consider their rights and personhood. People with low incomes, therefore, have given in to some inhuman, exploitative living conditions such as electoral violence. On this basis, the study's research findings suggest that the mission of the ZHOCD is to motivate the Christian community to do what is right and ensure justice remains society's primary concern. Similarly, Tisdale (2010, p.24) affirms that,

It is only when the Church steps outside its comfort zone and begins to interact with the homeless, the sick, the outcast and the marginalised that the realities of injustice around the world become of concern. When the Church listens to their stories, witnesses their struggles, and glimpses their courage, faith and generosity amid all this, the Church becomes more aware of the systemic problems that contribute to their plight and, thus, the need to voice such concerns.

Given the above, the theme of justice is imperative to the cause of peaceful and fair elections in Zimbabwe because it provides the foundations of fairness and equality, which are critical ingredients of peace. By employing the theme of justice in the electoral roadmap, the ZHOCD defeats the roots of electoral violence, including greed, selfishness, and power-hungryness. Thus, the theme of justice creates a conducive environment for dialogue, interdependence, and reconciliation.

7.2.8 Theology of Courageous Risk

One of the fundamental pillars of the *Kairos* elections theory and the mission of the ZHOCD is the theme of courageous risk, and it denotes ZHOCD's ability to exhibit unwavering commitment and firmness in its engagement with the government over electoral violence. In this context, the research findings show that a call to Christian life is always a perilous path which costs one's comfort, attracting persecution, imprisonment and even death. However, every Christian's moral responsibility remains to develop the courage to stand for what is right, defend the weak, condemn evil, and advocate for peace. As a theme of general elections, courageous risk inspires individuals and communities to make courageous decisions to achieve peaceful elections. This could mean the

risk of choosing peace over violence, dialogue instead of confrontation, reconciliation over retribution, inclusion instead of exclusion, and embrace over hate. This, too, denotes the courage to speak out against electoral violence and advocate for nonviolence through grassroots campaigns, interfaith dialogue, and community-building efforts that promote understanding and reconciliation. By using the courageous risk theme, ZHOCD inspires individuals and communities to demonstrate fortitude in the struggle for non-violent elections. This serves as a call to action for individuals and communities to engage in non-violent practices during elections, thereby working towards a more peaceful and just society.

7.2.9 Theology of Hope and Social Transformation

Hope and Social transformation can be a powerful and sustainable theme for Zimbabwe's ZHOCD initiative against electoral violence. Information resulting from this study indicates that the long history of Zimbabwe's electoral violence, which can be traced back to the colonial period, has created doubt, confusion, and uncertainty among the general populace. Many still doubt the possibility of a free and fair election in Zimbabwe. At the same time, others are unsure if the very notion of election is ever necessary in Zimbabwe. Research findings further show how Zimbabwean elections are not at home with the fundamentals of democracy and the rule of law. As a result, many people, particularly the youth, have withdrawn their participation in the voting process, citing gross irregularities and disputes accompanying the country's elections. This has created a sizable number of citizens who no longer believe in the integrity and credibility of the country's elections. This is further worsened by the belief that ZANU-PF has captured arguably the most independent arms of the state, such as the security, the electoral commission and the judiciary. Over the years, these departments have been accused of showing partiality in favour of ZANU-PF.

Considering the above, the research findings of this study confirm that the theme of hope and social transformation cultivates an element of resilience, courage and positivity among the citizens. To this end, hope is imperative in inspiring individuals and communities to believe in the possibility of a violent, free electoral process. By sharing the possibility of community integration and harmony, the ZHOCD can foster an environment of hope for free, fair and credible elections. Even so, implementing individual and community awareness programs on the significance of a

peaceful electoral process can transform people's perspectives on general elections. Using Seminars, workshops and community outreach programs, ZHOCD can equip individuals and communities with the knowledge and skills to advocate for and engage in non-violent electoral practices, thus cultivating a positive environment for non-violent elections.

The established data shows that hope and Social Transformation enable the ZHOCD to engage in community-building exercises, which promote social transformation through interfaith collaborations and community mobilisation that bring together people from diverse social groups and political affiliations. This builds trust, eliminates hatred and cultivates a sense of a shared identity beyond political affiliation. Considering the above, it can be said that the theme of hope and social transformation remains essential in ZHOCD's efforts to engage with the problem of electoral violence. Through the theme of hope, the ZHOCD can motivate individuals and communities to participate in ending the scourge of electoral violence, thus fostering the idea of togetherness and unity among citizens of various political backgrounds.

7.3 Research Sub questions

To answer the critical research question mentioned earlier, the following sub-questions were considered to guide this study:

- [1.] How has *Kairos* theology informed the historical context and current situation of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, and what specific role has the ZHOCD played in addressing this violence during general elections?
- [2.] In what ways can the ZHOCD utilize its theological foundations and teachings from *Kairos* theology to advocate for peace and mitigate electoral violence, while also effectively engaging with local communities and political authorities?
- [3.] What insights can be gained from previous experiences of electoral violence in Zimbabwe that would shape a comprehensive theological framework for the ZHOCD to promote free, fair, and peaceful elections in the future?

7.3.1 The General Situation in Zimbabwe's Elections (Research Question (RQ) 3)

The findings of this study show that general elections in Zimbabwe have historically been marked by political tension and controversy, which also reflect the country's more profound

socioeconomic struggles. Established data from the literature review shows that, though Zimbabwe uses a multi-party system, its political scene from independence has primarily been dominated by the ZANU-PF. The signing of the Unity Agreement 1987 between the ZANU and ZAPU brought about the desire for a de facto one-party state. The turn of the millennium saw the rise of strong opposition in the form of the MDC, which brought about significant changes in Zimbabwe's political trajectory. Data established from the literature review and the research findings show that the rise of the MDC on the political scene has been met by significant internal divisions and allegations of suppression by the ruling ZANU-PF party.

Research findings further show that the prevalence of concerns about fairness, integrity, and transparency in the electoral process marks general elections in Zimbabwe. Local and international observers have raised concerns over voter registration, the conduct of the ZEC, and the involvement of security forces in the country's electoral processes. Established data has further shown allegations of voter suppression and intimidation, especially among Zimbabwe's rural communities. Similar allegations include electoral fraud, vote rigging and alarming levels of violence leading to scepticism over the credibility of the electoral process, thus creating a legitimacy crisis. The data from the literature review further reveals the interconnectedness of the election process and the country's economic performance. Evidence has shown that Zimbabwe has been grappling with severe poverty, dilapidation of infrastructure and economic stagnation.

Currently, the country is battling with worrisome hyperinflation, growing levels of unemployment, food security issues, and a rising unemployment rate. The research findings further reveal that these realities breed a complex environment for voters as the electorate loses hope in both the electoral process and economic realities. These have significantly impacted voter turnout, as many voters need more confidence in the election process. Even so, the controversy and disputes surrounding the country's election process have also affected international relations and participation on global platforms, scared away investors, and isolated the country from potential international relations. Thus, it can be said that the findings of this study indicate that Zimbabwe's general elections are defined by a complex interplay of political power struggles, growing concerns over electoral integrity, economic hardship, and the quest for democracy.

7.3.2 Exclusion of Dissenting Voices

The findings of this study also suggest that electoral violence in Zimbabwe is strongly motivated by exclusionary politics. Zimbabwe's political landscape is heavily characterised by severe hatred of the other and the desire to exclude those of different political opinions. This has effectively created the "us" against "them", in which those who do not belong to the privileged side of politics often suffer violence at the hands of those with power and wealth. Established data shows that in Zimbabwe, politics of exclusion manifests in various forms, including intimidation and violence against opposition party supporters, thus heightening tension and leading to confrontations.

Further, exclusionary politics in Zimbabwe uses the proximity to power as an opportunity to control state resources and opportunities such as jobs, contracts and social services. The research findings confirm that exclusionary politics has always shown selective allocation of state resources in favour of ZANU-PF supporters while fostering resentment among excluded communities. This has often led to protests and clashes during elections. Data from the literature review further affirms that exclusionary politics breeds societal polarisation, where dialogues and reconciliation are increasingly impossible. This has led to violent confrontations between members of different political affiliations.

Thus, it can be said that exclusionary politics breed a fertile environment for electoral violence by fostering resentment, fear and uncertainty among citizens of different political ideologies. The findings of this study suggest that addressing the above challenges demands comprehensive political reforms, inclusive governance and the strengthening of democratic institutions to ensure inclusivity.

7.3.3 Analysis of ZHOCD's Role in Zimbabwe's Electoral Violence (Research Question 2)

The research findings show that while there exists sufficient evidence to suggest ZHOCD's engagement with the problem of electoral violence, it is apparent that data from the literature confirm that the ZHOCD could do more to address the scourge of electoral violence and social decay witnessed during general elections in Zimbabwe. In this respect, many believe that the ZHOCD has not done enough to speak prophetically against electoral violence during election season. To this end, the ZHOCD has not explored other avenues to register its displeasure against

the growing cases of electoral violence and human rights abuse by the ZANU-PF-led government. Research findings show that ZHOCD has relied heavily on pastoral letters, which have not yielded significant results. In this regard, the *Kairos* elections theory motivates the ZHOCD to explore other communicative methods, such as peaceful demonstrations, prayer marches, community outreach, interfaith dialogue and public lectures that focus extensively on eliminating the problem of electoral violence, election rigging, voter suppression and voter intimidation, among other cases.

In the same vein, the research findings show that some of the widely asked questions are whether the ZHOCD has adequately been able to stand with the survivors of electoral violence. Has ZHOCD adequately spoken truth to power against violence? On this basis, established data reflects that while the ZHOCD has, over the years, spoken out against electoral violence, it has not been willing to push too hard towards the cause of peace and justice, especially within the context of General Elections. Similarly, research findings reveal that the discord within the body of the broader Church makes it almost impossible for the Church to speak in a single voice against electoral violence and injustice. In this regard, the Zimbabwean Church is deeply divided and demonstrates an unwillingness to work beyond denominational differences in the face of electoral violence.

Thus, some church leaders contradict, rebuke, and sometimes dismiss what the ZHOCD would have termed the 'church's position' on general elections. Thus, it can be alluded that sharp differences, disagreements, hatred, and enmity exist within the broader Church. This dilutes the Church's commitment to reducing electoral violence. For example, the members of Vapostori insist on their love and support for ZANU-PF in every way and have not demonstrated the willingness to join hands with other Christian groups in the struggle for electoral violence.

To this end, it can be argued that, in post-independent Zimbabwe, the broader Church's theology and social teachings have become irrelevant and impractical in the face of mounting national problems, to the extent that the Church returned to 'private piety and ecclesiastical ghettos' while the state celebrated violence. From this perspective, research findings motivate the broader Church to redeem its prophetic place in the public space by addressing issues of national interest, such as

electoral violence, human rights, democracy and equality. In doing so, the Church becomes influential in calling and advocating for peaceful elections and social stability: *How can Kairos' theology of the ZHOCD be used to address the problems of electoral?* (Research Question (RQ) 3

7.4 The Identity of the ZHOCD in Electoral Violence and General Elections

Data from the literature review suggests that scholars agree that the ZHOCD is not actively involved in electoral violence and other electoral-related controversies. However, the findings show that the ZHOCD is comprised of members living in a toxic and politically charged environment. In this regard, research findings further point out that statistics show that many church leaders, such as elders, deacons, and, in some cases, Pastors, have also been entrusted with leadership positions in the community. Some occupy political positions in ZANU-PF, while others are in CCC structures. For instance, some church elders are also war veterans and liberation fighters. At the same time, some have served the ZANU-PF government in politically captured offices such as the army, judiciary, or police. The same is also true for opposition party members.

Given the preceding, the research findings of this study state that while this variety in ZHOCD membership is expected to be celebrated as it makes it easier for the Church's influence to be felt in the circular social and political structures, the reality has told a different story. The findings suggest that leaders in Church and political structures leave their Christian beliefs and teachings behind when taking political positions. Thus, many find it impossible to disassociate themselves from their political party practices, such as electoral violence. Thus, it can be said that many Christian leaders find it hard to disregard what their party considers gallantry and patriotic.

Considering the preceding, the established data from the literature review suggests that many church leaders and Christians generally feel more obliged to uphold party propaganda than they would with Christian standards. Thus, when a situation of choice presents itself, many prioritise allegiance to a political party more than the Christian ethos. On the other hand, research findings show that some ZHOCD members never demonstrated a mindset renewal upon conversion to Christianity. In this way, some became church members by association, not by conversion, as evidenced by their deep desire to pursue political evils such as electoral violence, assault, abduction, torture, intimidation and, in some cases, murder of political opponents.

It, therefore, does not go without notice that during election season, most ZHOCD leaders and members miss church programs while attending political rallies and bases. Given the above, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Christians, too, are not excluded from the scourge of electoral violence, voter intimidation and voter suppression. Thus, it can be said that ZHOCD membership is equally part of the problem as it is a solution to the cause of electoral violence. In some cases, ZHOCD Christian members are known as critical perpetrators of electoral violence; evidence from research findings attests that church leaders have been accused of deploying party youths to discipline their fellow church members for belonging to a different political ideology.

Thus, church leaders and their members are not neutral players in the country's political struggles. This way, ZHOCD's integrity and identity in general elections have been scrutinised. Many now doubt its neutrality in its quest to stand as an agent of peace and honesty between the ZANU-PF and CCC.

Similarly, research findings suggest that the neutrality of the ZHOCD is also heavily affected by the nature of donors who support its initiatives in peace and nonviolence. In this way, the ZHOCD comprises churches, most of whom derive financial support from Western countries, most of whom are ZANU-PF's main rivals and have political interests in Zimbabwe. Thus, the ZANU-PF government has struggled to separate the prophetic voice of the ZHOCD from the interests of Western countries that financially support its programs.

Given the above, it can be deduced that the ZHOCD's identity in general elections is not to uphold the status quo or to topple it through violent means. On the contrary, the ZHOCD's mission is to provide an intentional witness of the gospel that opposes unjust socio-political practices that subject people to violence and inhuman treatment. ZHOCD's mission in general elections is to critique beneficiaries of the unjust status quo and to bring about a just and equal society. Thus, it can be said that the ZHOCD's role in general elections is to be a neutral voice of reason. The findings suggest that the ZHOCD can contribute towards peace-building exercises, morality, and community leadership and actively promote justice, reconciliation, and citizens' well-being.

7.5 Towards an Envisaged Theology of the ZHOCD in General Elections

This section contains information related to the third research question: How can *Kairos*'s theology of the ZHOCD be used to address electoral violence during general elections in Zimbabwe? The research findings suggest that the ZHOCD can be instrumental in addressing this problem.

Given the above research question, the following findings are hereby tabulated:

7.5.1 Pastoral Care and Social Integration

The findings of this study reveal that pastoral care and social integration can be practical tools that ZHOCD can utilise as sustainable theological tools for general elections and electoral violence. In this respect, the findings suggest that pastoral care offers a holistic approach to addressing the problem of electoral violence. It provides social, emotional, and spiritual support both to survivors and perpetrators of electoral violence. In this respect, ZHOCD can provide counselling services, support groups, and community dialogue where fears and experiences of electoral violence are shared and discussed, effectively creating a conducive environment for healing and possible reconciliation.

In the same way, the research findings show that Zimbabwe is a deeply divided nation whose citizens are divided along political affiliation, ethnicity, tribalism, regionalism, and socioeconomic status. All these socio-political facets create an environment that is ripe for violence, hate and vengeance. Therefore, it can be argued that the existing trend of electoral violence manifests a multilayered crisis and deeply seated division among Zimbabweans. With this background in mind, social integration fosters unity, cultivates unity in diversity and creates an environment fertile for dialogue. This helps break down the long history of electoral violence, thus reducing the likelihood of future electoral violence outbreaks.

Similarly, the research findings outline that pastoral care and social integration offer a sustainable model for peaceful elections. By publicly denouncing violence in elections, ZHOCD can motivate its members and congregations to imitate similar attitudes, thus creating a community of peace. Even so, the theme of pastoral care and social integration can be utilised by the ZHOCD to incorporate prayer and reflection, focusing on peace, unity and mutuality. Thus, the ZHOCD can

create platforms for community prayer for peace during election seasons. This, too, creates positive steps towards dialogue and reconciliation. Given the above, it can be said that by combining pastoral care and social integration as a sustainable theme for ZHOCD's electoral roadmap, ZHOCD can formulate a comprehensive and holistic approach to the problem of electoral violence. This, too, creates an environment that promotes healing, mutuality and social integration, which contributes significantly to peaceful elections.

7.5.2 Nonviolence and Peace Advocacy

The study's research findings suggest that the depth within which the problem of electoral violence is seated requires a holistic approach from all communities, including social institutions such as the ZHOCD. Therefore, the research findings suggest that the ZHOCD must be an essential, reliable and impartial player in Zimbabwe's electoral discourse. In this regard, the findings show that the ZHOCD has the potential to champion peace, promote nonviolence, and ensure healing and reconciliation among grassroots communities. Therefore, it can be argued that by consistently condemning electoral violence and urging its membership and the general populace to shun politics of hatred and retribution, the ZHOCD can change the country's electoral narrative, leading to dialogue, conflict resolution and reconciliation. The research findings insist that while the ZHOCD has often been found wanting and unprepared to resolve the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, it remains a fact that the organisation still commands much influence in Zimbabwe's social demographics.

Thus, its influence cannot be downplayed in addressing the problem of electoral violence.

7.5.3 Morality and Community mobilisation

The research findings show that the ZHOCD can employ its Christian teachings on unity and nonviolence, which then cultivates the ground for non-violent elections. The research findings show that the ZHOCD is closely connected to people's beliefs and morals and, therefore, is well-placed to impact the behaviour and conduct of people during elections. The research findings further confirm that the ZHOCD is often viewed as a moral authority within the Zimbabwean society, providing good morals and ethical guidance, discouraging injustice and violence while promoting compassion, human dignity, constitutionalism, the rule of law and democracy. Thus, it

can be said that if these resources are well utilised, the ZHOCD can contribute significantly to addressing the problem of electoral violence.

Furthermore, the research findings suggest that the ZHOCD can mediate electoral violence cases by facilitating dialogue between conflicting groups and fostering negotiation and reconciliation. In this regard, the ZHOCD can contribute significantly to healing the existing elements of hatred and division among communities, thus de-escalating the problem of electoral violence. Further, the findings show that the ZHOCD can serve as a refuge for survivors of electoral violence, offering emotional and spiritual support, including pastoral care and counselling, thus cultivating the ground for healing.

7.5.4 Justice and Inclusivity

The research findings show that the ZHOCD can be a powerful witness against the growing injustices and abuses experienced during election season. By documenting the cases of violence nationwide, the ZHOCD can have established data on the occurrence of electoral violence, which can then be used as a reference in speaking out against violent acts of electoral violence, coercion and electoral fraud. In doing so, the ZHOCD contributes significantly to accountability and transparency. Further, the findings prove that the ZHOCD can promote inclusivity by representing and ensuring that marginalised communities are heard and respected. This includes promoting the involvement and participation of women, youth and minority groups in the electoral process. Through inclusivity, the ZHOCD can encourage diversity, where individuals with different political standpoints are no longer victimised and persecuted but celebrated, embraced and respected for their political views. By so doing, the ZHOCD dislodges the foundations of electoral violence, contributing significantly to peaceful elections.

7.5.5 Hope and Collaboration

The research findings reveal that the ZHOCD can serve as a source of hope and encouragement to communities facing the evils of electoral violence. Thus, the ZHOCD can encourage such communities to the possibility of peaceful elections, giving them hope to participate in future election processes peacefully. Thereby fostering a sense of purpose in a society characterised by peace and justice. Information from the research findings also established that the ZHOCD could

collaborate with non-governmental organisations, community groups, and other stakeholders to address the causes of electoral violence and chart a way forward based on strategies that are anchored on peace and stability. At the same time, the findings suggest that ZHOCD should maintain its identity and remain resolute in its purpose by offering teachings and prayers for peace, healing and unity during elections. These contribute to strengthening communitarian bonds and affirm a commitment to non-violent elections. Given the above, it can thus be said that the ZHOCD's identity in electoral violence should be characterised by peacebuilding, moral guidance, and community leadership, as well as by promoting justice, reconciliation, and the well-being of citizens.

7.6 Conclusion

The chapter discusses its two main pillars: the Church's Mission and Identity in General Elections. The research findings show that the ZHOCD's model and motivation for prophetic witness should be derived from biblical principles and guidelines. The chapter further discussed the *missio ecclesia* (church mission) extensively. Some marks of a prophetic church include speaking truth to power on behalf of ordinary people against the abuse of power by those in authority. Other marks of the Church's mission discussed include concern for the poor and the marginalised, concern for justice, indictment of empty worship, the courage to take risks, and concern for the working class. These pillars of the ZHOCD's mission have been discussed within the Zimbabwean Church (the ZHOCD) context. In this regard, the research findings attest that while the ZHOCD has historically done tremendous work in representing the mission of the Church, more still needs to be done to exhaust various engagement platforms from which the Church can engage with the state. On this basis, the chapter underscores that the traditional communication method of pastoral letters needs to be accompanied by other practical actions such as peaceful demonstrations, prayer walks, public lectures, and other methods that conscientise both the state and citizens on the need to exhibit peace and democracy during election seasons.

The chapter further discussed the Church's vision and noted that the Church's vision takes after the ministry and life of Jesus Christ. In this view, the ZHOCD continuously seeks to restore the dignity and democracy of ordinary citizens, which has long been taken away from them by political leaders. The chapter noted that the voice of ordinary citizens continues to be suppressed by

powerful politicians as they continue to seek political interests over the welfare of the people. In such times, the ZHOCD is expected to stand firmly with the voiceless and loudly condemn the injustices of the day. The chapter also noted that there is a need for the whole Christian fraternity to unite against the scourge of electoral violence and disputed elections. When the entire church body speaks with a single voice, it sends a clear message of disgruntlement to the authorities. This forces political authorities to address the citizens' plight and welfare.

Lastly, the chapter discussed the identity of the ZHOCD in the context of General elections. The chapter highlighted that the ZHOCD's identity remains a fundamental component of its strategies and response to the problems of electoral violence and electoral disputes. However, the chapter notes that, while maintaining its identity, the ZHOCD needs to push hard to engage with the government over electoral violence. The chapter further calls for the ZHOCD to be proactive rather than reactive on issues of electoral violence. The chapter concludes that the ZHOCD remains better placed to bring about peaceful and violence-free elections in Zimbabwe. This is derived from the ZHOCD's previous contributions that led to the formation of the Government of National Unity. This development brought about political stability and economic fortune for the nation, a highly celebrated achievement. The next chapter provides a summary and conclusion of the study.

Chapter Eight

Summary of the Study and Final Conclusions

8. Introduction

The previous chapters sought to aid the study in response to the key research questions and the study's objectives. In this respect, the chapter provided the mission and identity of the ZHOCD in the context of general elections. This chapter provides a summary of the study and draws conclusions. Accordingly, the chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section revisits the aim, research questions, objectives, overview approach and organisation of the study. The second section presents a summary of the overview of the chapters, highlighting some of the key findings and arguments formulating these chapters. The third section presents new knowledge, suggestions for further research, and some concluding remarks.

8.1 The Aim, Research Questions and Objectives

The study explored the role of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denomination's (ZHOCD) *Kairos* Theology on General Elections. Specifically, in this study, I sought to understand the contribution of the ZHOCD to the growing problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. In achieving this aim, the study hoped to contribute to understanding the influence of the ZHOCD in mitigating the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. The central assumption motivating this study is that the ZHOCD could be instrumental in addressing the trend of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, given its theological and moral place in the majority. This also influenced the research problem of this study. In a nutshell, the research problem of the study stated that Zimbabwe's elections have historically been marked by violence, intimidation, coercion, and, in some cases, deaths of mostly opposition party members. In this regard, Zimbabwe's elections have contributed immensely to the deep-seated hatred as well as growing division in the country. In this way, electoral violence has not only affected the country's social system but has had devastating effects on the country's economy. Thus, Zimbabwe's failure to hold free, fair, and credible elections has scared away investors and has escalated loss of confidence among the business fraternity, which

in turn translates to a multidimensional problem including electoral violence, poverty, unemployment, inflation, economic meltdown and growing human rights abuse.

In the light of the above, the following objectives were sought to be achieved:

- *To analyze the historical context and current dynamics of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, focusing on how Kairos theology has influenced the strategies and actions of the ZHOCD in addressing this issue during general elections.*
- *To explore the ways in which the ZHOCD can leverage its theological principles and Kairos theology teachings to promote non-violence, engage local communities, and foster dialogue with political authorities to effectively mitigate electoral violence.*
- *To identify and assess previous experiences of electoral violence in Zimbabwe in order to develop a comprehensive theological framework that the ZHOCD can use to advocate for and ensure free, fair, and peaceful elections in the future.*

8.2 Overview Approach to the Study

The study followed a four-phase approach. In the first phase, I provided a general introduction to the study. In this regard, I discussed the study's background, the problem statement, the key research question, the study's objectives, the study, the motivation of the study, and the introductory information.

In the second phase, I discussed two main themes that formulated chapters two and three: Understanding the Global, Regional and Local History of Elections. Under this theme, I explored the phenomenon of elections globally, regionally and locally. This was done to set the stage for the problem under investigation, thus exposing the origin, expansions and significance of the concept of elections. On this basis, the study explored the rationale behind elections, citing that, under normal circumstances, elections are expected to bring about a peaceful way of power transfer and a democratic way of selecting leaders for public offices such as politics. In this respect, the chapter underscores that, in most cases, however, elections have been accompanied by violence, intimidation and coercion, defeating the very essence of an election. In chapter three, I introduced Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) as an ecumenical body comprised of four Christian bodies whose sole purpose is to offer a Christian perspective on national issues such as

democracy, equality, the rule of law, social justice, end of all forms of violence including electoral violence and human rights. Chapter three also discussed the historical contribution of the Zimbabwean Church and the continued work of the ZHOCD in the context of electoral violence.

In the third phase, I discussed the methodology of the study. I provided the data-collecting methods and techniques, citing how the data will be interpreted and translated. I also discussed the theoretical framework of the study, under which I underscored that public theology is a *Kairos* theory and thus appropriate for the study of electoral violence.

In the fourth phase, I explored the *ZWWD*, *The March is not Ended*, and the Elections *We want* theological documents of the ZHOCD, which were issued in response to growing anger, confusion, poverty, and electoral violence across the country. The primary data for the study was drawn from these documents.

8.3 Chapter Summary

In *Chapter One*, I unpacked the main components of a research proposal. In this regard, I discussed the background of the study in which I stated the historical status of Zimbabwe's elections. On this basis, I discussed electoral violence and its increasing occurrence in the history and development of Zimbabwe's democracy. In this same chapter, I also discussed the statement of the problem, key research questions and sub-questions, the objectives of the study and the motivation of the study. Considering this, I cited that the study has been motivated by various personal and academic factors. Overall, the chapter extensively unpacked the problem of electoral violence, citing its socio-economic and political impact on the country and how it has immensely contributed to the growing levels of poverty, economic struggles, and political instability. In this manner, I indicated how the study was worth undertaking, citing that few academic publications exist on the contribution of the ZHOCD to societal struggles such as electoral violence.

In *Chapter Two*, I discussed the history of the country Zimbabwe, paying particular attention to its election history. I further explored the global, regional, and local historical developments related to the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. The study acknowledges that electoral violence has been one of the salient features of most African countries. In this regard, the chapter articulates

that most African countries have on several occasions, resisted the idea of multi-party politics and have thus utilised any apparatus available to thwart would-be opposition parties. In this regard, the chapter offered a history of Zimbabwe and the unfolding history of the country's election history. The chapter indicates that electoral violence can be traced back to the country's independence in 1980. The chapter articulated that electoral violence became one of the reasons for signing a unity agreement between ZANU and ZAPU, effectively creating a de facto one-party state. The desire to protect the one-party state ideology has led to growing levels of electoral violence against opposition politics as the government generally considered them a threat to the one-party state ideology. The chapter traces the periods of intense electoral violence under which members of the opposition politics were severely persecuted, tortured, and victimised. The chapter attests that electoral violence has occurred chiefly between the two main political parties, the ZANU-PF and the MDC.

In most cases, the opposition MDC has been the victim. At the same time, the ruling ZANU-PF has continued to enjoy as well as abuse its proximity to the state apparatus to unleash violence on members of opposition politics. The chapter underscored the need for the ZHOCD's theology to mitigate the electoral violence problem.

In *Chapter 3*, I introduce the ZHOCD, discussing its vision, mission and membership. In this regard, I explored each ecumenical body that forms the ZHOCD, indicating its suitability in the ZHOCD membership. Thus, the chapter discusses the origin and works of each member of the ZHOCD. The chapter further discussed the role of the ZHOCD in the general election, reinforcing that the Church in Zimbabwe has always sided with the struggling masses. In this regard, the chapter acknowledged the various efforts by the Church to bring about a peaceful, democratic, and equal society from the colonial period into independence through the turn of the millennium to contemporary Zimbabwe. In this regard, the chapter presents the major concerns of the ZHOCD and its general mission in Zimbabwe. In this way, the various works of ZHOCD since its inception in 2006 were discussed. Among other things, the chapter upholds the prophetic voice of the ZHOCD in the face of a hostile political environment which did not accommodate different political views. However, the chapter also states that in most cases, this has often been met with hatred by the ruling ZANU-PF government.

Chapter 4 defines research methodology, indicating its significance in research. In this regard, key terms such as research methodology and qualitative research methods have been defined and discussed concerning the problem under investigation. The chapter further endorses literature-based, sometimes called desktop research, as an appropriate data collection and analysis method for this study. The fundamental components of the literature-based method have been adequately discussed in keeping with the research problem, the key research question, and the objectives. In this regard, the chapter discussed the methodology used in this research under the theoretical framework of public theology. The chapter describes and shows how the study was carried out and how the processes are justified. As such, the chapter upholds literature-based research, sometimes called the Desktop research method, as an appropriate method for this research, highlighting its thrust and relevance to this study. The chapter also discusses data-gathering procedures, analysis, and interpretation.

Chapter 4 also provided the lens within which the problem of electoral violence and the *Kairos* theology of the ZHOCD intersect. In this regard, I discussed public theology as the theoretical framework for this study. Accordingly, the chapter comprehensively examines public theology, exploring its origins, aims, and relevance as a theory for general elections and the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe. Theoretical framework in qualitative research has been discussed, offering a thorough discussion of public theology, detailing its nature and historical context. The chapter further qualifies public theology as a *Kairos* theology. In this regard, the chapter argues that the existence of essential commonalities between public theology and *Kairos* theology merits academic consideration and warrants attention in this study. This chapter contends that *Kairos* theology is a public theology, as indicated by the openness of both theologies to humanitarian struggles. As a result, the two terms have been used interchangeably in exploring the role of the ZHOCD's *Kairos* Theology on General Elections.

Chapter 5 focused on the presentation of data from ZHOCD documents; in this respect, the chapter discusses key theological documents of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD), such as the *Zimbabwe We Want Document (ZWWD)*, popularly known as the National Vision Discussion Document (NVDD) or the *ZWWD* Document. In this way, the chapter unpacks

the fundamental pillars of the *ZWWD* document, discussing its impact on Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape. Similarly, critical pastoral letters issued at essential historical epochs of Zimbabwe's history were utilised and discussed, with the data being presented. These include *The March is not Ended*, Pastoral letters on Elections and Electoral violence, and Pastoral letters on Peace, Diversity and Nation Building. However, the chapter also presented areas in which the ZHOCD has failed to be a proactive voice of the Church in addressing the problem of electoral violence.

Chapter 6 discusses the proposed theory of *Kairos* elections as a sustainable theory for Zimbabwe's general elections. The chapter argues that the ZHOCD can improve its advocacy and engagement with Zimbabwe's electoral space through the highlighted pillars of *Kairos* elections theory. To this end, the chapter suggests a gap in the literature pointing to the need for a sustainable theory for ZHOCD to govern Zimbabwe's elections. Thus, the chapter focused on presenting data on how the *Kairos* theory can be instrumental in eliminating the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, in keeping with the critical research question: *What role has the Kairos theology of Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations played in mitigating the problem of electoral violence?* The chapter further presented the data collected in line with the following research sub-questions:

[1.] *How has Kairos theology informed the historical context and current situation of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, and what specific role has the ZHOCD played in addressing this violence during general elections?*

[2.] *In what ways can the ZHOCD utilize its theological foundations and teachings from Kairos theology to advocate for peace and mitigate electoral violence, while also effectively engaging with local communities and political authorities?*

[3.] *What insights can be gained from previous experiences of electoral violence in Zimbabwe that would shape a comprehensive theological framework for the ZHOCD to promote free, fair, and peaceful elections in the future?*

In this regard, the chapter presents emerging themes and analyses them using the *Kairos* election theory. Thus, the chapter presented compelling evidence that the *Kairos* election theory is essential in resolving the issue of electoral violence in Zimbabwe's general elections. Accordingly, the

chapter unfolded in conformity to the key research question, the research sub-questions and the last objective of the study. In this respect, the chapter sought to discuss how the *Kairos* election theory of the ZHOCD can be instrumental in eradicating the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe's general elections. Accordingly, the chapter presented key emerging themes from the established data and analysed them using the *Kairos* elections theory. The chapter upholds the *Kairos* elections theory of the ZHOCD as appropriate in addressing the problem of electoral violence in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 7 presents the last set of findings from the data and thus seeks to explore the Church's mission, its relationships with society at large, and its identity in general elections. On this basis, the chapter pointed out that Christian principles, as exhibited in the Bible, should serve as the foundation for the ZHOCD's model and inspiration for the prophetic mission of the Church. In this view, the chapter extensively discussed the mission of the Church or *missio Ekklesis*. The chapter also presented a proposed theological roadmap for the ZHOCD on general elections, including speaking truth to power and being a voice for ordinary people, which are suggested as fundamental aspects of the *Kairos* elections theory. As suggested by the *Kairos* elections theory, other marks of the ZHOCD's mission include concern for the poor and the marginalised, justice, indictment of empty worship, courage to take risks, and concern for the working class.

Chapter 8 provides a summary of the study and concluding remarks indicating the study's contribution to the body of knowledge and presenting areas for further research.

Overall, the study has noted that while the Zimbabwean Church, through the ZHOCD, has made tremendous contributions to realising peaceful and credible elections, more still needs to be done to curb the cycle of electoral violence and disputed elections. In this regard, the study insists that unless the entire Christian fraternity speaks with one voice against disputed, controversial electoral processes, the government will remain unmoved by the Church's voice as politicians continue to capitalise on the Church's inability to be one. In this way, the study urges the ZHOCD to create a broader, more interdenominational platform on which all Christian denominations are welcome and participate in the cause for peaceful and democratic elections.

The findings from established data suggest that pastors and church leaders must thoroughly understand elections and the Church's role. In this regard, the findings suggest that in most churches, a strong focus exists on the afterlife while neglecting the Church's social role in the present world. In this regard, the study established that while Christianity is built upon the reality that real life will be enjoyed uninterruptedly in heaven, it remains a fact that the same Church is called upon to make this world a better place for future generations (Tutu, 1994). In this respect, Jesus, through his ministry, demonstrated that not only had he come to convert the world to the realities of the Christian teachings, but he also proved to have come to make the will of God exhibited on earth as it is in heaven. Thus, the ZHOCD plays a midwifery role in incubating the Christian vision and ultimately transforming the vision into reality (Tutu, 1994; Chitando, 2013). Given the above submissions, the study hereby tabulates new knowledge and suggestions for further research.

8.4 The ZHOCD and Electoral Violence

The study suggests that the ZHOCD continues to pursue the cause of justice and the achievement of peaceful, democratic elections and respect for human dignity. However, in this role, the ZHOCD is expected to demonstrate the highest form of integrity as spelt out in the Christian Bible and demonstrated by Biblical prophetic figures (Chitando, 2013). In this vein, the study proposes that the ZHOCD condemns electoral violence but remains apolitical in establishing justice and peace. In this view, the study established that the involvement of church leaders in partisan politics negatively impacts the prophetic function of the Church. Thus, church leaders are expected to desist from public proclamations that show their political affiliation.

Based on this, the research recommends that ZHOCD implement a code of ethics that establishes guidelines for clergy members' interaction with the general population (Dombo, 2014). Similarly, the study proposes that ZHOCD constantly monitors the behaviour of church leaders who happen to have political positions. In essence, those in church leadership are expected to demonstrate an awareness and commitment to uphold the Christian ethos enshrined in the Bible. Thus, they need to demonstrate an endeavour to live up to the standard put down and exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. In this way, Christian leaders with political appointments are expected to influence the political world with their Christian teachings, not vice versa. The famous Christian

passage, ‘salt of the earth and light of the world,’ entails the inseparable character of Christian principles in interacting with the world.

The study also proposes that the ZHOCD continuously protects the Church’s integrity by guarding against infiltration by political entities. Similarly, the ZHOCD is expected to prevent addressing partisan gatherings unless it represents the Church on national interest issues, such as electoral violence, constitutionalism, human dignity, and poverty (Chitando, 2013). In this regard, the study underscores that Churches that espouse interests in both circular partisan politics and church theology have often been found guilty of compromising their Christian integrity and the Church’s values for earthly political power and loyalty (Chitando, 2013). Therefore, Christians are called upon to resist political propaganda opposing the Church’s ethos.

Furthermore, the study suggested that the ZHOCD widens its prophetic function and broadens its approaches in dealing with oppressive socio-political structures that deny citizens their full humanity. In this regard, the ZHOCD is expected to deploy various communication methods in its quest for nonviolence, reconciliation, Christian love, and prosperity for all.

8.5 Theological Training Institutions and Curriculum Change

The study also suggests that ZHOCD theological training institutions start offering a robust, well-encompassed curriculum that empowers the clergy to conceptualise the cause of nonviolence and peace. On this basis, theological training institutions are called to do away with colonial theological apparatus inherited from colonial systems (Edwin, 2018). The colonial theology justified the oppression of the weak and the subsequent weaponisation of the Christian Bible to pacify the oppressed (Bhebhe, 1988). In this vein, there is a dire need for a theological shift if the Church is to empower its pastors on the prophetic ministry of the Church within the context of a corrupt world. In this regard, many clergy members demonstrate an unpolished awareness of the Church’s mission worldwide (Dombo, 2014). The mainstream teaching inherited from the missionary theological curriculum has produced clergy members who lean mainly toward mainstream evangelism, which is more heavenward in its approach and leaves behind the physical concerns of the Christian gospel as demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus.

8.5.1 Theological Integration and Dialogue

The main challenge of the Zimbabwean Church has been its failure to stand united on national issues. The national Church has failed to demonstrate unity in the fundamental aspects of the Christian faith (Zakeyo, 2012). In this vein, the study emphasised the need for the Zimbabwean Church to demonstrate a commitment and willingness to speak with one voice on national issues such as electoral violence, poverty, democracy, and poor governance (Zakeyo, 2012). The study established that the prophetic efforts of the ZHOCD are constantly shot down and condemned by fellow clergymen who happen to be aligned with the ruling ZANU-PF party. This has, in turn, diluted and compromised the Church's prophetic voice, as the Church herself is not united.

Therefore, it is suggested that the ZHOCD initiates theological integration efforts inspired by the spirit of ecumenism to ensure an undivided voice of the Church.

Based on the above, constant communication across the clergy is missing, thus widening the ecumenical gap under the veil of denominationalism. Thus, the widening gap among the clergy has given birth to a lack of, or absence of, meaningful engagement on national issues, making it continuously impossible for the Church to condemn the injustices and violence of the state against the citizens. In addition to the above, the study recommends that the ZHOCD engage with other religious groups, such as Islam, African Traditional Religions, and other religions, to foster a religious platform that represents the religious views of citizens. Such an all-encompassing, groundbreaking initiative is essential if the ZHOCD is to confront the injustices of the state meaningfully (Antonio, 2014). While it is a fact that Christianity commands most of Zimbabwe's populace, Islam and other religions still command a significant percentage, hence worthy of attention. This has been implemented in Malawi's Public Affairs Committee (P.A.C), which brings together church leaders, Muslim Imams, civil leaders, and political parties to discuss issues of national interest (Bamgbose, 2012). However, it is necessary to indicate that forming such a platform demands religious maturity and much religious tolerance where no group considers itself superior to the other. In the Malawian context, the P.A.C spokespersons are bishops and Imams. Thus: P.A.C. has made a significant impact and has historically engaged successfully with politicians to stop undemocratic abuse of power.

8.5.2 Healing, Reconciliation and Peace

The ZHOCD needs to establish a non-political platform that ensures healing and reconciliation. Zimbabwe has, since independence in 1980, experienced traumatic experiences that have left the society deeply divided along political, racial, tribal, and gender lines, as witnessed in the *Gukurahundi*, the land reform and the turn of millennium political contestations between ZANU-PF and MDC, have all had debilitating effects not only on the economy but also on the society leaving behind a trail of division and deep-seated hatred in the society (Chitando & Togarasei, 2008). In this regard, it is suggested that the ZHOCD establish a robust, active, and engaging platform to bring about dialogue, healing, and reconciliation among the citizens.

The findings of this study suggest that electoral violence reflects buried, unresolved political conflicts and hatred wounds (Antonio, 2014). Thus, efforts by politicians are yet to yield meaningful results as politicians lack impartiality and sincerity. The formation of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission is one such example, and it has yet to achieve the purpose for which it was formed (Antonio, 2014). In this regard, the ZHOCD derives a mandate from the Christian Bible to ensure healing and reconciliation. On this basis, the study established that the ZHOCD cannot address the scourge of electoral violence on the surface when the seeds of the same are deeply rooted as far back as the 1980s (Dorman, 2005). In this vein, it is suggested that the ZHOCD objectively traces the roots of the problem if the Church is to uproot the scourge of electoral violence successfully.

8.5.3 To Ensure Healthy Communication with Congregants

The findings suggest that ZHOCD strategises robust communication methods, ensuring the Church's voice, vision, and decisions have reached the grassroots. In this respect, the study noted that the ZHOCD's pastoral letters lack the input of ordinary, grassroots church members primarily at society's periphery (Chitando, 2011). While the pastoral letters mostly uphold the cause of justice and the consideration of the marginalised, there does not seem to be an interaction between the first-hand experiences of the poor and the ZHOCD itself. This is further worsened by the grammatical and academic nature of the pastoral letters that have remained mainly for the elite and the educated rather than for the marginalised social groups.

A more explicit example of this is the *ZWWD* Document, an essential church voice in Zimbabwe's *Kairos* moment. However, the document was not translated into local languages such as Shona, Ndebele, or Tonga (Masengwe, 2008). In essence, society's illiterate groups remain to discover the document. Thus, the ZHOCD needs to ensure that communication is derived from and represents the voices of those on the margins of society.

Given the above, ZHOCD must strategise its communication mechanisms to ensure the congregants know about its prophetic efforts. The study established that most congregants are continuously in the dark regarding the Church's engagement with the state. In most cases, uninformed congregants have been found condemning the Church for its passivity and quietness in the face of gross human rights violations when, in fact, the church leaders issued a pastoral letter on the subject.

8.5.4 Honesty and Neutrality of the Church

The study suggests that the ZHOCD needs to firmly resist the temptation of partiality and partisanship on national issues (Kaulemu, 2006). In this regard, the temptation of ZHOCD in the context of state-sanctioned violence is to side with CCC and opposition politics, who seem to be on the receiving end of state-sanctioned violence. Thus, the Church needs to guard against partiality and stand as the moral conscience of society (Zakeyo, 2012). Similarly, it is expected that ZHOCD remains resolute in its vision of truth-telling and resists political infiltration, which would weaken her prophetic voice. In this regard, it is suggested that the ZHOCD formulates a theology of peace whose template is made known to the nation. On the other hand, the Church should continue to condemn electoral violence while holding perpetrators to account.

8.6 Towards a Dialogical Forum between ZHOCD and State

The dysfunctional and disjointed relationship between the ZHOCD and the state necessitates the formation of a conducive platform for dialogue and interaction between the Church and the state (Dombo, 2014). This helps place the ZHOCD and the state simultaneously regarding humanitarian needs. In this regard, Martin Luther King Junior, at the height of racism and the struggle for equality and justice in the United States, noted that "*humanity hates each other because they fear each other; they fear each other because they do not know each other, and they do not know each*

other because they do not communicate with each other, and they do not communicate with each other because they are separated from each other” (Martin, et al., 1962).

In this regard, the lack of constructive communication between the state and the ZHOCD on issues of governance has, over the years, created elements of mistrust and suspicion in which politicians doubt the sincerity of the Church’s prophetic voice, arguing that the ZHOCD is being used as an instrument of neo-colonialism by the Western countries. In this regard, Martin Luther King Junior attests that a community that does not thrive on trust and communication is on the verge of destruction emanating from hatred.

In this way, the study recommends that the ZHOCD engage the state to form a neutral, non-partisan platform where church leaders and politicians interact, exchanging notes on governance, justice, end of violence, democracy, and poverty, among other national ills. This platform is hoped to discuss ways in which the state and the ZHOCD can complement each other in improving people’s lives. This cultivates a culture of trust anchored on accountability, responsibility, and servanthood. It further eradicates the current situation in which the only platform where the Church and the state interact is through media. This has, in turn, deepened the hatred and suspicion between the Church and the state, resulting in a war of words between the two entities.

8.6.1 Appointment of a Chaplaincy Office in Parliament

The widening gap between the ZHOCD’s vision and that of the state regarding humanitarian issues has characterised church-state relations since independence in 1980 (Kaulemu, 2016).

This emanates from the absence of the ZHOCD in forming laws in parliament. In this regard, a complementary relationship between the ZHOCD and the state is expected to give birth to appointing a ZHOCD representative in parliament (Zakeyo, 2012). This contact person will then be responsible for bridging the gap between the state and the Church. The chaplaincy office will also be responsible for the spirituality of the parliament and parliamentarians, offering counselling and uniting the different members of the political divide in parliament. In this way, the Church’s prophetic voice is present in discussing and formulating the country’s laws.

8.6.2 Research Gap on Electoral Violence in Zimbabwe

The study has discussed the problems of electoral violence in new democracies like Zimbabwe and herein tabulates some gaps in the literature requiring further study. These include the disaggregation of actors, institutions, the determinants of stakes, and interactions with other forms of violent conflict.

The study has explored the motivations for electoral violence and its short- and long-term impacts. This has called for the engagement of formal and informal institutions to analyse, document, and recommend measures to address the challenges at both national and sub-national levels.

Interactions have provided insights into how institutional factors condition the occurrence and escalation of electoral violence. Some factors influence the stakes in elections and how they affect the likelihood of violence, for instance, how particular identity groups are represented in Zimbabwe. It needs to be understood that electoral violence has been interconnected with other forms of violent conflict. To adequately study this phenomenon in Zimbabwe, there is a need to explore methodologies used to cover electoral violence research, such as ethnographics, survey vignettes and experiments. Addressing these research gaps and employing varied approaches contributes towards advancing knowledge on electoral violence.

8.7 Areas for Future Research on Electoral Violence in Zimbabwe

This study shows that there is still a significant research gap in understanding the spatial dimensions, long-term consequences, and policy implications of conflict and electoral violence in Zimbabwe. Existing studies have primarily focused on how opposition parties and their followers have been violated by ZANU-PF, neglecting the experiences of rural and urban supporters and the role of media, including social media, in perpetuating threats and intimidation during elections.

Furthermore, the gender impacts of electoral violence in private spaces have not been adequately examined. It is essential to understand how electoral violence affects different genders and the consequences it has within private spheres. Short-term effects on dealing with electoral violence is reduction of pain and suffering as well as increased participation during elections. Long-term effects on individuals, including trust, threat perceptions, dissent, and negative emotions, have yet

to be thoroughly explored. Historical cases could be investigated using panel survey data to examine lasting effects and uncover the structural causes of election-related violence.

Given the cyclic nature of elections, electoral violence has implications for policy formulation. The predictability of electoral violence offers opportunities for electoral assistance programs aimed at preventing and mitigating such violence. However, addressing the root causes of electoral violence requires short-term and long-term efforts. While targeted prevention measures can help prevent severe forms of violence, lasting change necessitates broader societal transformations encompassing social, economic, and political inclusion.

To advance knowledge in this field, it is suggested that future research delve into the spatial dimensions of conflict beyond traditional distinctions. It should also explore the long-term consequences of electoral violence and examine the structural causes that contribute to its occurrence. In parallel, policy efforts should combine short-term interventions with broader societal changes to effectively prevent and mitigate electoral violence. By addressing these research gaps and implementing comprehensive policies, it is possible to promote peaceful and inclusive electoral processes in Zimbabwe and beyond.

8.8 Final Conclusions

The study has established that while the problem of electoral violence is prevalent in Zimbabwe's general elections, the ZHOCD can contribute significantly to minimise this problem by utilising its theological resources to ensure morality and inclusivity during elections. The above is built upon the fact that, notwithstanding its weaknesses, the ZHOCD can offer applicable teachings in ensuring dialogue, mediation, forgiveness, conflict resolution, peace, inclusivity, hope, and justice. Throughout the study, the findings show that the ZHOCD can be instrumental in offering both emotional and spiritual support to the survivors of electoral violence. In this regard, the ZHOCD can offer awareness against electoral violence, especially to grassroots people, bringing both victims and perpetrators of electoral violence together and educating them on the effects of electoral violence on communities and, most importantly, on the nation at large. In doing so, the ZHOCD contributes to ensuring the integrity of the general election, emphasising electoral transparency, integrity and credibility.

The research findings further attest that the ZHOCD can also contribute to reducing the problem of electoral violence by participating in voter education and engagement. As reflected in the findings, the growing levels of electoral violence have negatively impacted the participation of most people, especially the youth, women and other marginalised social groups. The ZHOCD can motivate such individuals and communities to participate in the election process by registering to vote and voting peacefully, thus increasing participation rates. Similarly, data has shown that the ZHOCD can reduce the rising problem of electoral violence by getting involved in policy formulation through the office of chaplain; this offers the ZHOCD a platform to submit recommendations on areas that need improvement based on its established findings for instance, robust training for officials or effective communication with stakeholders. To achieve this, the study notes that the ZHOCD faces challenges and limitations ranging from lack of resources to fear of political interference. To cater for this, the study, in keeping with the research findings, proposed a theological roadmap that can assist the ZHOCD in the context of the general elections.

The key pillars of this theological roadmap include pastoral care and social integration, under which the ZHOCD is essential in offering pastoral care to both the victims and perpetrators of electoral violence. This cultivates the ground for dialogue and forgiveness, effectively dislodging the urge for vengeance and retribution. The study further proposes the theme of Nonviolence and Peace Advocacy, under which the ZHOCD motivates its Christian membership and the generality of the populace to desist from acts of electoral violence. In doing so, the ZHOCD introduces a theology of peaceful conflict resolution and management where it engages with grassroots people to address the root causes of violence, ultimately leading to the peaceful resolution of electoral disputes. This also applies to political players who often engage in acts of violence.

The study also suggests the pillar of morality and community mobilisation, wherein the ZHOCD actively motivates citizens to exercise good morals and understand the concepts of ubuntu during elections. This leads to interdependence, justice, and inclusivity, which are critical pillars in addressing the problem of electoral violence. The pillars of justice and inclusivity ultimately lead to the achievement of hope for peaceful, democratic elections where political differences are celebrated, individual uniqueness is appreciated, and each person's skill is utilised. This creates a

collaborative theology of general elections. The study's findings show that the ZHOCD can be essential to Zimbabwe's electoral trajectory.

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CERTIFICATE OF LANGUAGE EDITING

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**An Exploration of the Role of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denomination's
Kairos Theology on General Elections.**

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy In the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa.

By

PRIVILEGE YESAYA

Student number: 222130074

Has been edited for language by Babalwa Nchekwube, Language Editor. Neither
the research content nor the author's intentions were altered. The Language
Editor guarantees the quality of the English Language in this paper. The
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7 September 2023

Rev Priviledge Yesaya
University of Kwazulu Natal
South Africa

Dear Rev Yesaya.

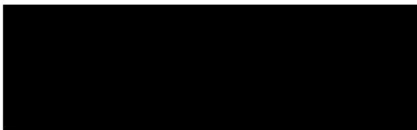
Ref: Permission to conduct research with the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations

Reference is made to the above request to conduct research for your PhD program with the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations.

We are informing you that permission to conduct research with the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations has been granted. You are requested to work within the stated parameters of your study and comply with the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations regulations and standards.

We also request that you share a copy of your findings upon completing your studies.

Yours Sincerely,



Rev Wilfred ~~Dimingu~~

General Secretary.

10.4 Ethical Clearance



Rev Priviledge Yesaya (222130074)
School Of Rel Phil & Classics
Pietermaritzburg

08/11/2023

Dear Rev Priviledge Yesaya,

Original application number: 00022919

Project title: An Exploration of the Role of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations Kairos Theology on General Elections.

Exemption from Ethics Review

In response to your application received on _____, your school has indicated that the protocol has been granted **EXEMPTION FROM ETHICS REVIEW**.

Any alteration/s to the exempted research protocol, e.g., Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through an amendment/modification prior to its implementation. The original exemption number must be cited.

For any changes that could result in potential risk, an ethics application including the proposed amendments must be submitted to the relevant UKZN Research Ethics Committee. The original exemption number must be cited.


In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE:

Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours sincerely,


Prof Herbert Moyo
Academic Leader Research
School Of Rel Phil & Classics