

Mashurugwi: A Manifestation of a Weakening Human Security Situation in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Human security has been observed by the United Nations as a framework for assisting countries to identify and address several cross-cutting challenges that impact the survival, livelihood, and dignity of people. Zimbabwe has experienced a myriad of challenges that have affected young people. Over the past decade, cases of death, murder, rape, and robberies have increased and small-scale gold miners, illegal miners, and gold panners have been singled out as some of the key culprits. The term Mashurugwi has been used as a derivate to refer to a group of young people from the Midlands Provincial district of Shurugwi accused of terrorizing communities around the country. This article interrogates the assumption that Mashurugwi is a terror group from the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. Using the human security framework, the article demonstrates how the murders, rape cases, and robberies experienced around the country are a product of the weakening human security situation in Zimbabwe. The article calls for the application of human security to advance comprehensive responses that address the multidimensional causes and consequences of complex challenges being experienced in Zimbabwe.

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1.0 Introduction

Human security has in the past been limited to international relations with a special focus on inter-state conflicts. The strengthening of collective security among regional and international bodies like the United Nations and the African Union respectively has seen a reduction in inter-state wars and conflicts. At the global level, conflicts between states are arbitrated by such organs as the United Nations and its agencies thereby preventing the possibility of wars between states. Recently, there has been an upsurge in intra-state conflicts which has prompted interest in redefining the notion of security to include human security (Hove, 2017).

The traditional understanding of security revolved around the use of the military in the protection of a nation's citizenry and resources. Modern conceptualizations of security have shifted to include every threat to human well-being. The United Nations General Assembly resolution 66/290 of 2012, defined human security as a method used in assisting states in identifying and addressing pervasive and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood, and dignity of their people. Specifically, the world body observed that,

For many people, today's world is an insecure place, full of threats on many fronts. Natural disasters, violent conflicts, persistent poverty, epidemics, and economic downturns impose hardships and undercut prospects for peace and stability as well as sustainable development. Such crises are complex, entailing multiple forms of human insecurity. When they overlap, they can grow exponentially, spilling into all aspects of people's lives, destroying entire communities, and crossing national borders (United Nations Trust Fund for human security, 2012).

Human security grew to prominence in the early 1990s, when states and international bodies realized that poverty and vulnerability cannot be achieved through a thematic approach to development. The concept utilizes an integrated methodology that acknowledges the linkages and interdependencies between development, human rights, and national security. The world body has singled out seven major human security threats identified as; economic security, food security, health security,

environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security (United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, 2012, p. 4)

Zimbabwe's human security record has deteriorated over the past two decades due to various factors. The scenario of the 2000 Fast Track Land Reform program which to some commentators justified the use of violence as a revolutionary weapon has been seen as a typical case of a need for strengthening the human security situation of the country. Armed with the slogan *Land is the economy and the economy is the land*, veterans of the war of liberation violently invaded farmland owned by white farmers. Government-backed the invasion with legislation to protect the new settlers (Chitsike, 2003).

Violence in Zimbabwe did not remain limited to land invasions only but extended to inter-party conflicts as political parties did not share a common view regarding the manner in which the government embarked on the land reform program. According to the Zimbabwe Human rights NGO Forum political violence report of February 2009, in the period between January 2008 to December 2008, there were, "6 politically motivated rape cases, 107 murders, 137 abductions, 1913 cases of assault, 19 cases of disappearances, 629 cases of displacements, 2532 violations on freedom of association and expression" (ZHR NGO Forum, 2009, p. 2)

Zimbabwe's current wave of criminal activities under the banner of violent machete-wielding gangs called *Mashurugwi*, demonstrates an increase in the country's human security threats. The term *Mashurugwi* is a derivative name given to machete-wielding gangs that went about terrorizing people during the 2018-2019 period. Their escapades included robbing people of their money, raping women, and children, and forcing people to flee their homelands in the mineral-rich provinces of the country. A concern on the deteriorating human security situation in the country was voiced by the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denomination (ZHOCD) in their pastoral letter titled *Deteriorating human security and economy in Zimbabwe* (ZHOCD, 2019). This cautionary statement was ignited by the observation that Zimbabwe's human security index shows a poor performance on all the seven forms of human security threats.

The thesis of this article is that the problem of *Mashurugwi* is one of lawlessness due to the deteriorating human security situation in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe held disputed elections in 2008 that led to the creation of the Government of National Unity in 2009.

Economically, the country went into recession after the Fast-Track Land Reform Program of 2000. Several companies stopped operations while the country was slapped with sanctions by the United States of America and the European Union for human rights abuses. Many young people found themselves jobless and politicians took advantage of the desperate situation for their political expediency. The collapse of the Zimbabwean economy, the skewed political terrain, rampant corruption among the leaders, and the lack of employment opportunities ignited a spate of lawlessness in the country.

Against this background, this article traces the challenges caused by the *Mashurugwi* in the context of human security. The article is organized as follows: the first part explains the human security situation in Zimbabwe in relation to the identity of the group code-named *Mashurugwi*. The second part evaluates citizens' responses to how the government responded to the case of *Mashurugwi* destabilizations. In the final section, the article provides perspectives on policy alternatives regarding the problem of *Mashurugwi*.

2.0 Background to the study: Informal mining in Zimbabwe

Informal gold and diamond mining and panning is not a new phenomenon in Zimbabwe as the existence of gold planners' pre-dates Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 by several centuries. The colonial administration through the Mines and Mineral Act of 1975 had strict rules regulating gold mining in the then Rhodesia³ as it was considered a preserve of the colonial elite and informal mining was taken as a threat to the environment. The richness of the natural endowments is reflected in the Zimbabwe Miners' Federation report, which says 95% of the mining licenses along the Great Dyke were held by big foreign conglomerates (Zimbabwe Miners Federation, 2009). These include companies like Zimbabwe Mining and Smelting Company, Zimbabwe Alloys, and Zimbabwe platinum. These companies continued to enjoy the mining monopoly years after independence signalling a colonial legacy (Mugandani, 2017).

At independence, Zimbabwe adopted a raft of policies aimed at empowering the previously marginalized populace. These policies included the Growth with Equity

³ Rhodesia was the colonial name of the current independent Zimbabwe. The change from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe took place at the country's independence from British rule in 1980.

policy of 1981, the Transitional National Development Plan 1981-1990, the Zimbabwe Program for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST), the Zimbabwe Millennium Economic and Recovery Program (MERP) 2000-2001, and the National Economic and Recovery Program (NERP) among others. Zimbabwe's economic situation started to change soon after Zimbabwe's adoption of the Structural Adjustment policies under the influence of the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the early 90s. As people lost their jobs due to the Bretton Woods institutions' austerity measures, many unemployed men and women turned to informal gold and diamond mining as alternative sources of livelihood (Rindayi, Chimonyo, Magure and Scott, 2014).

Bhebhe *et al.* (2013) estimate that by 2001, close to 350,000 small-scale miners were operating in Zimbabwe. Illegal gold miners were counted among the small-scale gold miners who were contributing more than 35% of gold export in Zimbabwe (Mukumbira, 2002). Over the years, Zimbabwe crafted several legislations that guide small-scale mining most of which are contained in the Amended Mines and Minerals Act, Chapter 21:05 of 1996. Due to the bureaucratic nature of acquiring a mining license, the costs associated with the formalization of mining, and the mobile nature of most small-scale miners, many of the informal small-scale gold miners operated without mining licenses thereby earning the title of 'illegal' miners.

The government tried to stop informal mining activities based on the logic of the negative impact it had on the environment and the limited contribution to the fiscus through tax evasion. Realizing the possible threats to the environment caused by informal gold mining, the government promulgated Statutory Instrument 275 of 1991, Regulations on Alluvial Gold Panning in Public Streams Act. This legal instrument gave rural district councils the authority to offer mining licenses to prospective small-scale miners. In 1993, through the assistance of the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Development, Zimbabwe adopted a decentralized mining policy strategy for informal miners under the name "Harare Guidelines on Small-Scale Mining." The guidelines were meant to formalize small-scale miners as a poverty alleviation strategy. Under this arrangement, small-scale miners got the funding support from German and Swedish Development Agencies (Spienegel, 2015).

The formalization of small-scale mining led to conflicts between the Ministry of Finance as the authorizing ministry, the local government authority, and the Environmental Management Authority due to the damage it was making to the environment. These conflicts emerged when the government went on to enact several statutory instruments some of which were contradictory. The formalization of small-scale mining testified to the government's commitment to poverty alleviation resulting in several donor agencies coming on board to offer financial support (Masiya, Mlambo, and Mugoni, 2012). The cordial relationship between the government and small-scale gold miners was short-lived as the government struggling to contain the spiralling inflation in the aftermaths of the Land Reform Program of 2000, used the Gold Trade Act Chapter 21:03 in 2006 to direct all small-scale gold miners to sell their gold to Fidelity at a third of the international gold price. This instrument made riverbed gold panning illegal and took away local authority powers for giving licenses to small-scale gold miners. Consequently, all local authority licensed miners had to register with the central government to avoid being labelled illegal miners. It emerged that the bureaucratic process of registration and the depressed price at which Fidelity was buying gold, forced the small-scale miners back into illegal mining (Spienegel, 2015).

3.0 Research Methodology

The research approach used in gathering data for this article was qualitative using both primary and secondary data. A total of 32 participants took part in the research. Instruments used for collecting primary data included interviews with small scale miners, affected community members, and the traditional leadership in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe. The selection of respondents was done through a purposive sampling technique. Data were analyzed thematically. Secondary data was collected from journal articles, newspapers, internet articles, and books on human security.

4.0 Findings

A common perception among key informants is that the name *Mashurugwi* is an appellation given to machete-wielding gangs, sometimes confused with 'illegal' artisanal miners, who rob artisanal miners of their ore and sometimes leaving them dead. One key informant opined that the name came because of association with the rampant gold panning around the small mining town called Shurugwi in the Midlands

province of Zimbabwe. Shurugwi town, which is situated along the Great Dyke is rich in mineral deposits of different kinds with the bulk of them being Gold, Chrome, Platinum, and asbestos. The small town was known for harbouring illegal artisanal miners and licensed small-scale miners who ploughed the land in search of gold and chrome deposits. These Illegal miners who are not of a homogenous origin operated often as individuals and sometimes in groups for security reasons.

This supports research by Sivanda (2020), who makes a distinction between machete-wielding gangs, *Mashurugwi*, that are notorious for criminal activities, and small-scale artisanal miners. He argues that machete-wielding gangs are not miners but criminals who rob people of their gold, gold ore, money or dislocate other miners from their prolific gold sites. These criminals owe their motivation to the deteriorating human security situation in the country. Consequently, the use of the term *Mashurugwi* (as will be used in this article) was used to label these machete-wielding criminals.

According to the respondents, the term 'Illegal miners' is used to refer to small-scale miners who often invade and start mining operations in any disused mine or area that has gold deposits without mining licenses. These are often called *makorokoza*, a generic term for both illegal and licensed small-scale gold miners. They are distinguished from *Mashurugwi* by the fact that they carry out the actual mining and seldom rob others for gold. Illegal miners often clash with police as well as other artisanal miners with mining licenses whenever they illegally invade lucrative privately owned claims. Among the *makorokoza* are small-scale miners with mining claims. These often do not engage in criminal activities as they have their own claims. In trying to understand the nature and origins of this group, four conspiracy theories have been suggested by respondents which will be discussed below.

The first theory which gives identity to the group under study is that a group of illegal artisanal miners originally from Shurugwi are behind the lawlessness committed in all the provinces of Zimbabwe. A deeper analysis of this theory shows that Shurugwi though popular for its mineral deposits is not the only town that has experienced the problem of machete-wielding gangs but can be said to have been the most protuberant. Violence perpetrated by machete-wielding gangs came to prominence towards the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 due to reported criminal activities

most of which revolved around murders, rape cases, and assaults. According to this theory, any form of murder, rape, or assault perpetrated by *makorokoza* (illegal miners) suggest the presence of illegal miners' from Shurugwi.

This theory while strong on association fails to provide credible evidence that every case of rape, murder, or assault by any person deemed illegal miner suggests the presence of people from Shurugwi. It must be noted that the nature of the criminal activities committed by *makorokoza* in Shurugwi slightly deviates from those recorded outside the district. Most of the murders recorded among the illegal miners in Shurugwi were directly related to mining activities. Often, illegal miners in Shurugwi committed crimes of economic nature associated with gold mining, prostitution, or drunkenness. Seldom did the miners commit crimes against members of the community as alleged to the *Mashurugwi*.

When one compares the nature of criminal activities perpetrated by illegal miners in Shurugwi with those reported throughout the provinces, there appears a slight difference. In Bindura, the criminal activities of murders, rape cases, and assaults were not directly related to *chikorokoza* (Sithole 2020). Perpetrators may have been illegal miners but committed crimes against community members suggesting a new breed of robbers outside the normal *chikorokoza* (Chirisa, 2020). Machete-wielding gangs were reported in all provinces putting to question whether all these gangs originate from Shurugwi. Consequently, most participants in this study believed crimes committed outside Shurugwi had nothing to do with illegal miners from Shurugwi but were criminal acts perpetrated by people pretending to be Shurugwi small-scale gold miners.

The second theory is that *Mashurugwi* is a product of the ruling party's youth empowerment policy. This theory is based on several media stories that point towards the various youths' programs that the government implemented to empower youths as guided by the National Youth Policy, the Youth Council Act Chapter 25:19, and the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act of 2008. However, the letter and spirit of these policies does not discriminate based on political affiliation. Some, participants had a feeling that the policies are partisan since they are led and implemented by individuals affiliated with the ruling party (Chitumba, 2019).

According to this theory, politicians have always engaged the youths in their election campaigns since 2000 and promised them several benefits including mining claims and protection against rival claimants. Consequently, many young people rallied behind candidates who promises such deliverables. This explains why some sections of the population mistakenly believed that *Mashurugwi* is a political project originating from the Midlands province (Tinh, 2020).

This theory sounds credible if taken from the context that lawlessness among illegal artisanal miners and the community in most parts of the country went unabated for several years and in most cases, it took place where the miners professed their allegiance to certain politicians. However, the theory lacks scientific and empirical evidence on why politicians would influence criminals to commit acts of rape, murder, and robbery outside the election period. Criminal activities perpetrated by the so-called *Mashurugwi* do not show discrimination based on affiliation to any political party. Secondly, it must be asserted that empowerment policies are government policies and not party policies and hence youth empowerment cannot be associated with party politics. This is not to deny that politicians can abuse government policy for their political advantage through false promises

The third theory common among local media is called the Third Force theory. This theory holds the opinion that there is a clandestine force responsible for a surge in violence that is neither affiliated to the ruling party or opposition, and whose objective is to tarnish the ruling party. This Third Force is believed to be the force behind the organization of the various criminal activities in the name of *Mashurugwi* as a way of creating antagonism between the people and the Second Republic. This is demonstrated by their use of the term *Mashurugwi* which has strong linkages to the birthplace of several politicians and government officials.

According to this theory, illegal artisanal miners from Shurugwi have been unleashed throughout the country to terrorise people and cow them into supporting the ruling party as a way to tarnish the party and its leadership. In the process, the gangs use all sorts of criminal activities from rape, robbery and murder targeting those perceived to be against the current regime. The theory also bases its arguments on the lack of urgency by the government that characterized the initial years when the

problem started. The government only deployed the military to the affected areas months after the group had inflicted massive damage to the community.

The Third Force Theory is grounded on the existing polarized economic landscape in Zimbabwe. Since 2018, there was a feeling that some politicians under the banner of Generation 40⁴ (G40) were intent on sabotaging the efforts of the Second Republic (Raftopolous, 2019). Proponents of this theory are of the opinion that, some politicians in their efforts to tarnish the new government, came up with the idea of *Mashurugwi*. However, the proponents of the theory cannot separate crimes related to *Chikorokoza* from the general lawlessness caused by the so-called *Mashurugwi*.

This theory lacks substance due to lack of evidence on the identity and origin of the so-called third force that has remained anonymous. It was based on assumptions and guesses which in a polarized situation like Zimbabwe can take various forms. Second, the existence of the third force could not be established empirically. Perpetrators of the various criminal offenses in different parts of the country could have brought to the surface the hand behind the activities.

The fourth theory opines that *Mashurugwi* is a manifestation of the decline in the human security situation of the country. This is an academic theory that brings together the first two theories discussed above as part of multiple factors behind the *Mashurugwi* menace. The central thesis of this theory which this article subscribes to, is that *Mashurugwi* is a derivative appellation given to criminals who are taking advantage of the lack of coordinated approach by the government's youth empowerment program among small-scale mining. It further argues that the recent lawlessness exuded by illegal artisanal miners is a product of a perceived deteriorating economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security in Zimbabwe. Consequently, the so-called *Mashurugwi* represent criminals with links to illegal artisanal mining who are taking advantage of the weakening human security situation to commit various acts of lawlessness.

⁴ Generation 40 was a name given to young politicians during the reign of Robert Mugabe as president who were accused of trying to usurp political power from the old politicians. These included politicians like the Jonathan Moyo, Saviour Kasukuwere, Grace Mugave (Wife of Robert Mugabe) and Patrick Zhuwao.

5.0 Discussions

There is a thin line between human insecurity in Zimbabwe and the lawlessness exuded by *Mashurugwi*. This section highlights how the menace of *Mashurugwi* can be explained using the United Nations human security framework.

5.1 Economic Security

According to the UNDP Human Development Report of 1994, economic insecurity is defined by persistent poverty and unemployment. Zimbabwe's persistent poverty and unemployment can be historically traced to the Western influence on government policies chief among them being the adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment program in the 90s (Mpofu and Chimhenga, 2016), corruption, the polarised political environment (Hove 2017), and the impacts of the Western sanctions brought upon the country in the aftermath of the Fast Track Land Reform Program (Matondi, 2012).

Zimbabwe's unemployment rate has generated several theories. The Zimbabwean statistical office suggests that the country's unemployment rate is around 4.9% while some analysts are of the opinion that it hovers around 85% (Dodo, 2012). According to the latter view, all informal traders including illegal miners are not counted among the unemployed. While analysts might not agree on the method to measure Zimbabwe's unemployment rate, there is a consensus that the manufacturing sector in Zimbabwe has collapsed, and that formal employment is limited to the civil service and a few companies.

Against this background, illegal mining as a form of poverty alleviation and employment creation has grown tremendously. The policy inconsistencies on small-scale mining (Nest 2017), the raids carried out by the uniformed forces (Chirisa, 2020), and the corruption associated with gaining mining licenses (Bonga, Chiminya and Mudzingiri, 2015), are among the drivers of Zimbabwe's economic insecurity that drives the illegal miners and criminals to defy government directives and engage in acts of lawlessness.

5.2 Food security

Zimbabwe's food security situation has worsened during the past two decades. In March 2020, nearly 4.3 million people in Zimbabwe survived on food assistance (USAID, 2020). According to World Food Summit (1996), food security is a situation

that exists when all people, always, have physical, social and economic *access to sufficient, safe and nutritious foods* that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for a healthy life. Zimbabwe's food security situation has been compromised by corruption among the leaders responsible for government agricultural programs, the persistent draughts due to climate change, and the lack of proper agricultural technology. This has forced the country to rely on emergency food appeals from the international world.

In the Zimbabwe Humanitarian Appeal Revision made between February 2020 and April 2020 and signed by President Mnangagwa, Zimbabwe needed 469.7 million United States dollars to feed 5.1 people in need of food assistance. The appeal that was jointly signed by the United Nations Resident Coordinator acknowledged that Zimbabwe's food supply gap stood at 900 000 tons (UN Humanitarian Country Team, 2020). Zimbabwe was rated amongst the hungriest nations in the world by the World Food Program when it reported that a total of 5.5 million people in Zimbabwe needed food assistance during the period of January to April 2020 (Chingono 2020).

To avert the impact of food insecurity, several professionals left the country in search of employment outside the borders. It is estimated that Zimbabwe's brain drain stands at around 4 million with most of these being productive ages (Gumbo 2020). Young people with limited academic skills who failed to make it to the international world found illegal mining as the most feasible alternative for augmenting household food security. While the government through its land reform program tried to parcel out pieces of land to interested candidates, the perennial droughts and lack of farming inputs daunted the country's dream of being food secure. In Zimbabwe, the mining sector underpins Zimbabwe's growth prospects and Illegal mining remains the most lucrative alternative source of income. Where it fails, illegal miners and other individuals join in committing criminal activities which earned them the title of *Mashurugwi*.

5.3 Health security

Zimbabwe's health sector deteriorated since the second decade after independence due to a myriad of reasons (Khameer, 2018). The country failed to retain its health professionals most of who fled into the diaspora leaving the country with a lean workforce inadequate for the health demands of the country. On several occasions,

the existing workforce has complained of low salaries, lack of drugs, and poor working conditions

Health security implies protection against deadly infectious diseases, unsafe food, malnutrition, lack of access to basic health care (UNFTNH 2006). In Zimbabwe, many people no longer trust the government's health delivery system as most hospitals are operating at minimal levels (Dzirutwe 2019). Access to private medical care has become the preserve of the few elites. People are now resorting to traditional medicine for respite (Madamombe, 2006, Moyo, 2019). Health insecurity increases when citizens feel overburdened by infectious diseases, malnutrition, and the absence of basic health care. Criminal activities emerge as a way of raising income to mitigate against health insecurity.

5.4 Environmental security

Illegal mining is the major cause for environmental degradation, resource depletion, natural disasters, and pollution. Wherever, illegal miners operate, they leave behind craters filled with stagnant mercury-polluted waters, mounds of sand, and fallen trees (Chiwanga 2018). Motivated by the desire to eke out a living, the miners leave open pits which are a danger to people and animals, water sources which are polluted, and riverbeds open to siltation. It is estimated that there are close to 400 000 illegal miners operating in Zimbabwe (Dalu, Wasserman, and Dalu, 2017). Their illegality implies that they do not take into consideration the necessary environmental protection law and policies.

The Lack of consistent policies guiding environmental protection is the cause of these challenges. The government introduces youth empowerment programs that allow small-scale miners to operate sometimes without a mining license. Some analysts are of the opinion that illegal miners corruptly collude with law enforcement officers in their operations to avoid prosecution (Spiegel 2015). According to this school of thought, securing protection for criminal activities from law enforcement agents comes as an incentive for lawlessness among illegal miners. According to GAN Anticorruption Portal (2016), the police suffer from poor working conditions, a lack of training, a shortage of resources, and low salaries leading to their failure to contain the challenge posed by these criminals.

5.5 Personal security

Personal security encompasses protection against physical violence, crime, terrorism, domestic violence, and child labour. Violence among small-scale miners occurs regularly and these often went unreported. For example, in November 2019, the Zimbabwe Peace Project recorded 105 deaths from machete-wielding gangs in the mining town of Kadoma alone (ZPP, 2019). Where such incidences are reported, it is claimed that the police often take it as a common crime among machete-wielding gangs. Illegal miners have a culture of violence which is cemented by inadequate law enforcement (Sivanda 2020). Sometimes, law enforcement agents fail to meet the demands for small acts of violence among illegal miners as these happen daily. According to Masiwa (2019), the culture of violence does not have limits and sometimes ends up being committed against innocent members of the community in the form of robbery, rape, or murder.

Personal insecurity often leads to defence consciousness. Inadequate legal provision for dealing with violent conflicts among illegal miners means people must protect themselves against possible attacks. For illegal miners, the machete has proven to be the best weapon for defence. However, possession of a defence weapon sometimes compels someone to initiate a conflict leading to murder or fatalities. This is how machetes became the defining weapon of *Mashurugwi*. Upon realizing how machete wielding often leads to violence, the government banned them in January 2020. The ban followed the revelation by the police that machete-wielding gangs were now being hired by individuals to terrorise people (Matendere 2020).

5.6 Community security

Mashurugwi menace became prominent late 2019 and early 2020 after they took their violence from within the small-scale mining to the wider community. Various atrocities were recorded including the killing of a police officer in Kadoma in January 2020 (Sivanda 2020). In December 2019 and January 2020, the media was awash with reports of murders, rape cases, hackings, robberies, and assaults all attributed to *Mashurugwi* (Tinh, 2020). The atrocities were reported mostly in Kwekwe, Shurugwi, Kadoma, Mazowe, Bindura, Gwanda, and some parts of Matabeleland. Fear gripped the communities and most rural people started to have nightmares. The fact that the gangs were called *Mashurugwi*, their activities started to gain political

and tribal connotations. The *Mashurugwi* took advantage of the political polarization and the slow reaction by the law enforcement agents. This increased community insecurity.

5.7 Political security

Political security entails the promotion of freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of movement, and respect for human rights. Zimbabwe's political environment has always been highly polarized. Instead of assessing *Mashurugwi* as acts of criminality, many people appealed to tribal politics (Tinhu 2020). The lack of political security creates anarchy as individuals aligned to powerful politician abuse and oppress those not politically connected. In its bid to promote youth empowerment, the Second Republic offered small-scale miners the opportunity for improving their livelihoods. However, the policy was interpreted by some to imply protection against criminal activities leading to the abuse of privileges. This in turn increased the political insecurity of members of the community especially those who did not share the same political affiliation.

5.8 Government policy on *Mashurugwi*

Mashurugwi as a criminal group is not condoned at law. While the government has policies on small-scale miners and allowed some illegal mining to proceed unabated, the violence, rape, and murders committed by *Mashurugwi* remain illegal. Many people questioned the laxity with which the government responded to the menace created by the gang. Reports of their criminal activities were rampant in the media, but it took long for the government to move in to stop the menace. To gain the confidence of the community, reported cases of criminal activities should be investigated and perpetrators arrested without fear or favour.

The experience of the *Mashurugwi* atrocities was disturbing among the communities. Several calls were made by the community for law enforcement agents' intervention in the problems of *Mashurugwi*. It was only in January 2020, that the police and the army moved in to stop the menace through raids and issued a prohibition order against the possession of machetes in terms of section 14 (1) of the Public Order and Security Act Chapter 11:17. The prohibition covered "weapons such as catapults, machetes, axes, knobkerries, swords, knives, spears and daggers and is effective for the next three months" (Matendere 2020). The police had to engage the army in

quelling the menace in accordance with the law which allows the Police Commissioner to seek army backup in the event of overwhelming cases. The government intervention through the Act managed to quell the *Mashurugwi* problem. This proved that the government has the capacity to improve the human security situation in Zimbabwe.

6.0 Conclusion

This article has noted that *Mashurugwi* is a gang of criminals that emerged out of the weakening human security situation in Zimbabwe. The government's use of law enforcement agencies to curb lawlessness of *Mashurugwi* appears to be an attempt to treat the symptoms only while the real problem remains. Zimbabwe needs to improve its human security through improvements in economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. Economic security calls on the government to improve access to income-generating economic activities like employment and small-scale businesses for youth people. Personal security invites the government to protect individuals against political violence, crime, or lawlessness that militates against human dignity. Food security demands the government to initiate programs that ensure access to adequate and nutritious food for everybody. Health security implies access to quality and affordable health care for everyone in the country. Political security invites the government to provide protection against politically motivated violence and the creation of national dialogue among political parties. Last, community security calls for the government to make available social services and the protection of the country's cultural heritage.

The use of the military in preventing criminal activities is provided for in the country's law but has the weakness of possible militarization of civilian rule. Experience has shown that the intervention of the military in civilian rule breeds militarization of government in contradistinction with democratic principles of governance.

Mashurugwi cannot be eliminated by enacting stiffer laws. Laws have been in existence ever since, but in the absence of the promotion of human security, the impoverished populace will undermine them. This article affirms its thesis that, only by addressing the human security threats to people's well-being will the problems like the *Mashurugwi* be eliminated.

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