



Making Schools Dignified Zones: A reflection on the impact of politically motivated violence on Education in Zimbabwe

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Learning [institutions ought to be havens for education](#), a thing that has proven to be difficult to achieve in Zimbabwe especially during elections. A reflection on studies done on the impact of violence on education reveal a myriad of consequences emanating from the abuse of schools through politically motivated violence. The effects are not only limited to attacks on teachers, and politicisation, militarisation of school but also [exposing students and pupils to violence](#).

According to a 2012 RAU report, the culture of violence in schools can be traced back to the colonial era when schools were used as [recruiting grounds for freedom fighters](#). The report notes that the trend of political violence has accentuated since 2000, schools, and teachers have often been the target of ZANU PF crackdown as they are perceived to be opinion leaders who advocate for change that threatens the ruling party's hegemony. At least 70 000 teachers have fled to neighbouring countries in a mass exodus instigated by [political violence which took place from 2000 to 2008](#). Rural areas are the hotspots of politically motivated violence against teachers in Zimbabwe. Violence affects teachers who play a key role in educating the children of the Zimbabwean [rural population which form the majority of ZANU PF supporters](#).

A Joint 2011 report by Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU) and Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) entitled, [Every School has a Story to Tell: A Study into Teacher's Experiences with Elections in Zimbabwe](#) reveals that teachers are often regarded with suspicion based on Political or Union affiliation. The report further notes that 54% of the teachers were attacked because they were suspected to be members or sympathised with the opposition party, 14% revealed attacks were because teachers were seen to be influential and accused of influencing people to vote for opposition parties while the remainder were witnessed because teachers were not actively [supporting ZANU PF or were members of PTUZ](#). Schools become unsafe for teachers when they are attacked wantonly, sometimes in front of young children and this results in them losing dignity.

Rural schools have suffered most during elections as schools are often turned into bases for political meetings. It is usually the primary schools that fall victim where young children are not as politically active as compared to [the students and young adults in tertiary institutions](#).

In extreme cases teachers are beaten in front of children, which has long lasting consequences on students who witness such politically motivated violence being meted out. This could engender a culture of violence in the student, or become a seedbed for [nurturing tolerance of violence](#). There are allegations that youth groups such as Chipangano, notorious for attacking perceived opposition supporters have a link to ZANU PF who distance themselves from such a vice, [but considerable anecdotal evidence suggests otherwise](#). The characteristics of the rowdy youths suggest they emanate from them being school dropouts most likely [victims of the 2000 to 2002 politically motivated violence](#). If the effects of violence can be felt ten years later then it might suggest exposure to violence could increase the propensity of violence among young people.

The effects on children are profound especially those who learn in rural schools. The concern about schools as places vulnerable to political violence has become an international concern with [the establishment of Global Campaign to Education Under Attack \(GCPEA\)](#). Children have been direct victims of violence or witnessed violence at school and also their family members being attacked. A 2013 RAU report underscores that 103 cases were identified in which children were direct victims of violence or witnessed violence, 89 cases where there was violence at school or against a teacher, and 254 cases were also found of children witnessing violence from home. This might have undesirable effects on the children who mostly stay in the areas which are exposed to violence, stress and intimidation. They live in an atmosphere of [fear and stress that is unfavourable to healthy child growth](#). The attack on teachers at schools has also witnessed mass exodus of teachers resulting in most of the rural schools being manned by temporary teachers who lack experience, in some cases [the results of students proved dismal with some schools recording zero percent pass rate](#).

John Dewey once said, 'Education is not preparation for life, education is life in itself'. In this regard there is a need to give our learning institutions the respect and dignity they deserve. Learning institutions must be declared zones of safety as such the government of Zimbabwe must immediately declare schools as zones of peace and as such enact laws that restrict and criminalise the use or occupation of [schools for political activities, especially during the electoral period](#). GCPEA list [Zimbabwe as one of the countries of concern](#). If

schools are to be safe, they have to be deprived of political meetings, schools have to be respected and dignified, as such our government has to criminalise the use of schools for political purposes.