



The curse of big men in Zimbabwe's post-independence politics: Mugabe left, but the curse remained!

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Abstract

The big man or big men phenomenon has been prevalent in most African States in the post-independent era. There has been debate on what constitutes a big man with no universal understanding on the concept. There are, however, characteristics of what could be a big man in political sense. While an understanding of the subject of enquiry is critical, interest in this article is mainly on describing and analysing manifestation of the big men phenomenon in Zimbabwean politics. Whilst a lot of attention will be on ZANU PF, which has been the ruling party since 1980 when the country got its independence, it is argued that the big men syndrome is equally entrenched in the opposition political parties. This is particularly true when one considers the aspect of evading accountability owing to the stature of the leader. It had been hoped that the departure of the late former President Robert Mugabe would see a new dispensation in which institutions and constitutions have higher regard than individual leaders of political parties or the country. Preliminary evidence from literature suggests that big men, who are considered a curse in this article, continue unabated. They manifest both in the running of the State as well as in political parties. The article seeks to contribute to the growing literature on the subject of enquiry by unpacking how the big men curse has played out both in the Mugabe and post-Mugabe eras.

Keywords: Big men; politics, personal rule; dictatorship, accountability, Africa, Zimbabwe