The voice of the people is the Voice of God: An analysis of religious metaphors in Zimbabwean election campaign speeches

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Abstract

This study examines the use of religious metaphors in Zimbabwe's 2018 and 2023 election campaigns, focusing on how ZANU PF, the MDC Alliance, and the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) leveraged Christian beliefs and values through strategic language to persuade voters. The analysis argues that it is not merely the choice of metaphors that matters, but how they are employed to achieve persuasive goals. Grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the study draws on campaign speeches and church addresses by presidential candidates. Findings reveal that both ruling and opposition parties used religious imagery to construct ideologies, frame identities, and influence public perception. These metaphors served as persuasive rhetorical tools, drawing on cultural and spiritual resonance to shape voter attitudes and portray candidates as divinely sanctioned leaders. The study highlights the broader implications of religious discourse in legitimizing political authority and influencing democratic engagement in highly religious societies.

Keywords: Metaphor, self-presentation, campaign rallies, political discourse, Christian beliefs

Introduction

The use of religious metaphors by Zimbabwean politicians and political parties as vehicles for manipulating, mobilizing, and persuading voters during election periods has been

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under-researched, despite the fact that an election is not just a single event but a complex process in which campaigning plays a central role. Campaigns play an important role in the catalytic relationship between election candidates and voters and enable candidates to motivate people to vote for them based on the values and issues they present for consideration (Seigle & Wahila, 2025). Thus, language is an important vehicle for communicating these values and issues. Politicians and political parties connect with the public through political discourse. The purpose of the discourse should be "to convince the recipient, awakening his/her intentions to support the politician and encourage his/her action, for example, to vote" (Polyakova et al., 2020, p.28). Democratic societies created political campaigns through which those competing for elective offices to govern society can present their manifestos and programmes of action to the people (Ikeke, 2021, p.1).

Literature Review

In Zimbabwe, political campaigns are more pronounced during an election period, and rallies and religious gatherings are the major spaces for interfacing with the public. A rally is "a public event at which speakers address an audience face-to-face for the ostensible purpose of politically mobilising it" (Paget et al., 2023, p. 239). Rallies are hubs of political activity punctuated with linguistic performative games. Using rallies as political spaces for thinking and talking about legitimacy, patriotism, power, and liberation, for example, through metaphors, to express the deep and surface meanings of these constructs, cannot be overemphasised. This suggests that metaphors can be used to either mask or reveal certain realities that may not be immediately apparent to audiences, enabling politicians to exert control over their audience (Kyeremeh et al.,2023). Kyeremeh et al. (2023) argue that in many cases, most of these audiences only cheer on the politician as a result of the oratory skills and the beauty of the rhetoric of the speech, without focusing on the hidden meanings, which are often masked by linguistic resources. Metaphors, thus, constitute the power that drives the oratory and persuasive force that sometimes ignites political violence or voter apathy.

The study reveals that Emmerson Mnangagwa and Constantino Chiwenga of the ruling ZANU PF and Nelson Chamisa of the opposition employed religious metaphors to communicate their ideologies and shape political identities during the 2018 and 2023 election campaigns. These metaphors functioned as persuasive and manipulative rhetorical devices rooted in Christian or quasi-Christian discourse. Drawing on Van Dijk's (2006) perspective, we view manipulation as the illegitimate use of discourse to influence others without their awareness. In political contexts, this involves deliberate, context-sensitive language choices aimed at controlling perceptions. As Oparinde et al. (2020, p. 3) note, manipulation rests on the manipulator's awareness and the audience's unawareness. Thus, the Zimbabwean campaign discourse reflects both persuasion and illegitimate mind control, marked by positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation.

This study explored how the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF), the Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDC Alliance), and the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) exploited citizens' Christian beliefs and values through tactful linguistic choices to persuade them to vote for their respective presidential candidates and parties during the 2018 and 2023 general elections in Zimbabwe. It is not just their choice of metaphors that was important, but how they used them to achieve their communicative goals. From this angle, the function of language is determined from the point of view of the listener and the speaker. The intention is to regulate the listener's behaviour. Halliday defined this as an instrumental function, while Jakobson called it rhetorical (Rabiah, 2012).

In many countries of the Global South, religion has often proved to be a fertile source of communicative content and strategies in political campaigns. Eze (2020, p. 3) defines

religion as "a spectrum of beliefs and principles that guide the relations between a people and a supreme being (divine) they perceive to be their maker. Such beliefs often elicit a set of dogma, rites and worship". However, the relationship between politicians and political parties' manipulative language and religion has not been widely studied, despite "the public religiosity of many leaders and activists" (Jeffery-Schwikkard, 2022, p.1078). This is true of Zimbabwe. Zimbabwean daily interactions are replete with religious expressions that serve communicative functions. The omnipotence of religious expressions suggests the preponderance and influence of religious values and beliefs in people's daily lives. This explains how religion influences language use as a communicative behaviour in political campaigns (Alsohaibani, 2017).

This study empirically examines the use of metaphors and their socio-pragmatic functions in communicating political messages, foregrounding religious ideologies and the motivation behind them to understand the role and influence of religious expressions on political mobilisation in Zimbabwe. This study focuses on Christian values and beliefs since the Zimbabwe Demographic Survey (2010), Chitando (2013) and Dodo et al. (2014) estimate allegiance to Christianity in the country at 78% while the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (2017) puts it at 84%. This makes Christians a politically significant population.

In Zimbabwe, speeches embellished with biblical rhetoric are often made in secular political gatherings by politicians and at religious gatherings by church leaders affiliated with particular political parties. Some church leaders see "the political as part of the religious life of the believer, … and they believe that they should be politically engaged" (Frahm-Arp, 2015, p.117). Frahm-Arp further argues that "at the same time, the churches are spaces in which the political motivations of the leaders have an influence on how members think about politics and even influence their voting behaviour and shape their self-understanding about politics" (p.117). Through sermons, these leaders influenced how some members thought or made political decisions. This paper does not analyse religious political rhetoric by church leaders.

In Zimbabwe's political and religious history, the intersection between clerical authority and political leadership is not new. Prominent figures such as Ndabaningi Sithole, founder of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), Bishop Abel Muzorewa of the United African National Council (UANC), and Canaan Banana, a Methodist minister and the country's first ceremonial president, exemplify nationalist elites who strategically employed Christian doctrines and symbolism for political mobilization. These individuals embodied a tradition of religious-political hybridity, leveraging Christian narratives to galvanize support during the liberation struggle and beyond. As Strohmayer (2019) notes, this elitist strand of Christianity evolved into a radical populist form by the 1970s, wherein biblical motifs were appropriated as metaphors for decolonization. This recontextualization allowed educated elites to repurpose Christianity as a distinctly African tool of resistance and mass mobilization (Strohmayer, 2019: 22).

In the contemporary era, Nelson Chamisa, leader of the MDC Alliance (later CCC), continues this tradition, albeit as a lay preacher rather than an ordained minister. While lacking formal pastoral office, Chamisa's theological knowledge and rhetorical use of Christian discourse in political settings reflect an intentional strategy to resonate with Zimbabwe's predominantly Christian electorate (Musoni, 2021). His example illustrates the continued relevance of religious language and symbolism in Zimbabwean political communication, further reinforcing the need to interrogate how Christian metaphors function as persuasive tools within political discourse.

Politicians go to church either as members, guests or speakers. The three roles allow them to engage congregations covertly or overtly for endorsement, especially in the run-up to elections. Such opportunities allow them to deploy religious rhetoric. Since independence in 1980, many churches have had moments of interacting with politicians from the ruling party, ZANU PF, and avoided openly entertaining opposition politicians for fear of attracting

accusations of working against the government. Some churches openly support and legitimize ZANU PF. The African Initiated Churches (AICs) and ZANU PF share a mutually beneficial relationship that can be traced back to the colonial era and their shared pursuit of the liberation of Africans from British rule (Musoni, 2019; Tarusarira & Humbe, 2022).

During the post-Mugabe era, AICs have endorsed ZANU PF leaders and allowed them to address gatherings of these churches, especially at annual congresses during election periods, to mobilise support because thousands of followers attend these events (Tarusarira & Humbe, 2022, p. 165). Musoni uses a marriage relation theory to describe the relationship between the AICs and ZANU PF and argues that it is rather difficult to determine whether the relationship can be called "true marriage or marriage of convenience" (Musoni, 2019, p.1). What is clear, however, is that ZANU PF has co-opted the AICs as a political tool and a fertile ground for mobilising support during elections. There is no evidence from the data that Nelson Chamisa and MDC or CCC either had overt support from any religious group or had access to their pulpit as a campaigning platform.

Methodology

This qualitative study collected data from public speeches and utterances of presidential candidates during election campaign rallies and church gatherings in Zimbabwe. These speeches were gathered from recorded videos, transcripts, and media reports available in the public domain. The selection focused on instances where candidates employed religious metaphors and biblical allusions within their political rhetoric. Following Silverman's (2013) emphasis on qualitative research in exploring meaning and context, the data prioritized speeches that explicitly addressed political power struggles and voter mobilization, particularly those blending political messaging with religious language, reflecting Zimbabwe's socio-political and religious context.

This study explores how leaders of ZANU PF, MDC-ALLIANCE and the CCC used biblical metaphoric rhetorical devices for electioneering during Zimbabwe's 2018 and 2023 general elections. Data were obtained from ZANU PF, MDC-ALLIANCE and the CCC, that is, the ruling party and the biggest opposition in the country, with the MDC-ALLIANCE having metamorphosed into the CCC in 2022. The speeches and utterances of their presidential aspirants made during campaign rallies and or church gatherings were collated and analysed to find the forms and underlying meanings of religious metaphors they employed to persuade voters. The underlying meanings were interpreted to help understand the impact of biblical rhetoric on the political setting. The study was conducted between 2018 and 2023, the period which epitomises the first electioneering landscape in the post-Mugabe era, where the major contesting parties were represented by new presidential aspirants, both with public claims of Christian affiliation. The speeches and utterances were collected from newspapers and online sources.

CDA and CMT Frameworks

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as analytical frameworks. CDA, particularly Van Dijk's (2006) approach, examines how language manipulates thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours to reveal underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and social implications in political discourse (Wodak, 2007). The study uses CDA to decode hidden meanings behind religious metaphors in campaign speeches, situating them within their social, political, and historical contexts, and analyzing rhetorical strategies like framing and propaganda.

Complementing CDA, the study applies CMT to understand how religious metaphors shape political thought. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), metaphors are central to cognition, structuring how abstract ideas are understood by mapping one conceptual domain onto another. Far from mere rhetorical devices, metaphors organize knowledge, ground abstract language in physical experience, and reflect ideological perspectives (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Turner, 1989). This framework helps explain how politicians simplify complex political issues and present ideologies more persuasively and accessibly (Mehawesh, 2016).

Data Analysis

In this section, data extracted from the speeches and utterances of presidential aspirants during campaign rallies and church gatherings are presented and discussed. The underlying meanings are interpreted to help understand the impact of biblical rhetoric on the political setting. Chilton and Schäffner (2002, p. 5) define politics "as a struggle for power, between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it".

In doing this, communication relies on the language of metaphor. During election campaigns, it is not only what politicians say that delivers the message; it is how they say it (Otieno & Odinga, 2019, p. 63). Metaphor is one of the strategies used in political communication globally. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argue that a metaphor is a conceptual matter of thinking of one thing in terms of another. In the process, it creates images and representations. In the case of the political contest of power entrenchment and resistance, metaphors can either create positive images of the politician or assign absurd images of one's opponent (Wilson, 1990). Van Dijk (1997) supports this idea by stating that politicians often use metaphorical association to elicit positive self and negative other-presentation. Zimbabwe political campaign speeches are generally characterised by hate speech with 'us' vs 'them' expressions that "expose how inclusion (we/our) and exclusion (them/they) linguistic strategies associated with hate language could be used to divide a nation and thus precipitate violence along political party lines" (Otiena & Odinga 2019, p. 64). Metaphors which are analysed in this study are religious metaphors and biblical allusions.

Findings

God's Voice Metaphor in Zimbabwean Political Rhetoric

This paper examines how political rallies in Zimbabwe serve as platforms where politicians invoke religious rhetoric, particularly the Bible, to gain political leverage (Gunda, 2012, p. 34). In the 2018 and 2023 election campaigns, both President Emmerson Mnangagwa and opposition leader Nelson Chamisa employed religious metaphors to appeal to public sentiment (Chitando et al., 2023, p. 2). Mnangagwa repeatedly used the phrase, "the voice of the people is the voice of God", a paraphrase of the Latin Vox populi, Vox Dei (Rosillo-Lopez, 2017, cited in Enock, 2018, p.77), to justify both Mugabe's ouster in 2017 and his controversial electoral victory in 2018. While he did not quote scripture, the implication was that God had acted through popular will. Originally, *Vox populi, Vox Dei* suggested that public opinion held transformative power akin to divine will. In Mnangagwa's context, however, it became a tool of legitimation and potentially, suppression; framing dissent as defiance of God's ordained order. This usage contrasts starkly with the biblical narrative in 1 Samuel 8: 4 - 22, where God reluctantly grants the Israelites' demand for a king, acknowledging their will but rejecting it as divine. Thus, conflating God's voice with electoral outcomes misrepresents scripture and arguably manipulates religious belief for political dominance.

Chamisa, a self-declared Pentecostal pastor, countered with his faith-infused slogan *#GodIsInIt* (Chitando et al., 2023, p.1). Unlike Mnangagwa, Chamisa's religious language emerged from a position of political vulnerability. Representing MDC–Alliance in 2018 and CCC in 2023, Chamisa contested elections under conditions favouring ZANU PF, including an unreformed electoral framework, state media control, vote buying, political violence, and financial asymmetry (Muqayi, 2018; Mutambudzi, 2015). Chamisa's invocation of God sought to inspire hope among the marginalized and challenge the legitimacy of ZANU PF's dominance (Nenjerama, 2022). Drawing from Psalms 44:6, he adopted the chorus *"Handina bakatwa, uta nemiseve! Ndofamba naJesu, Jesu chete!"* ("I have no sword or arrows of war; I walk with Jesus alone"), transforming it into a rally anthem promoting nonviolence and resilience. Though criticized for lacking a tangible political strategy, Chamisa's religious rhetoric resonated with faith-based supporters and projected a moral challenge to the political status quo.

David and Goliath Metaphor in Zimbabwean Politics

The "David and Goliath" metaphor was employed by both Vice President Chiwenga and opposition leader Chamisa to frame the power dynamics between ZANU PF and CCC. Originating from the Bible, the metaphor encapsulates resistance against overwhelming odds, with ZANU PF cast as Goliath—powerful, well-resourced, and militarized—and CCC as the underdog - David.

At a rally in Kwekwe (27 February 2022), Chiwenga declared, *"Takakura saGoriyati"* ("We are as big as Goliath"), using the diminutive morpheme */-ka-/* to belittle CCC as a "little" and powerless party. His use of the metaphor functioned as self-praise, a rhetorical act that highlights one's strength for public impression (Dayter, 2016, p.65) —intended to project ZANU PF's dominance while ideologically demeaning the opposition. Viewed through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this language shapes public opinion and reinforces socio-political hierarchies, suggesting that resistance to ZANU PF is futile.

In contrast, Chamisa invoked the same metaphor differently during a July 2018 rally in Mahusekwa: "This is a David against Goliath. David is just a shepherd boy. I am not afraid of the giant." His reference to David, small, humble, yet courageous, framed CCC's struggle as morally grounded and hopeful, despite lacking resources. This humility-based persuasion, rooted in rational and emotional appeal, contrasted with Chiwenga's dominance-based rhetoric. Chamisa's line "just a shepherd boy" invoked vulnerability and faith, aligning with biblical victory narratives (Wenden, 2005, p. 99) and echoing the psychological appeal of underdog resilience (D'Errico, 2020). The metaphor thus revealed opposing campaign strategies: ZANU PF showcasing might and entitlement; CCC using humility to connect with a disenfranchised electorate. CDA scholars (Farzana et al., 2020) argue that such metaphors help politicians mask their ambitions under moral narratives to win public trust.

Light and Darkness Metaphor
Light and Darkness Metaphor in Chamisa's Campaign Rhetoric
Chamisa's use of the light vs. darkness metaphor in his 2023 campaign speeches served to construct a persuasive "us vs. them" narrative, aligning with van Dijk's (1993) principle of positive self-representation and negative othering. Rooted in biblical tradition, this archetypal dichotomy, widely present across cultures (Zemszal, 2018, p.229), positions Chamisa and his party as agents of hope (light) and casts ZANU PF as harbingers of suffering (darkness).

At his campaign launch in Gweru (July 2023), Chamisa stated: "This campaign is not about a political party. This campaign is about choosing between light and darkness." The metaphor reinforced moral urgency, recasting the electoral choice as a battle of values rather than partisan politics. As Zemszal (2018, p. 230) notes, light connotes positivity and survival, while darkness often symbolizes evil and regression. Thus, without explicitly naming ZANU PF, Chamisa invited voters to associate them with the ongoing socioeconomic hardships in Zimbabwe. Metaphors like this, according to Lakoff and Johnson (2003, p.19), cannot be understood apart from lived experience. Chamisa leveraged this connection, drawing from citizens' struggles under ZANU PF rule to subtly manipulate voter sentiment. From a CDA perspective, this is a strategic appeal to shared suffering masked as shared interest (Memon et al., 2014). By tapping into emotional and moral evaluations through evocative imagery, Chamisa shaped the political landscape as a choice between despair and deliverance.

Metaphor of Demonic Spirit

Both Mnangagwa and Chamisa, on different occasions, used the metaphor of a demonic spirit to refer to their political opponents and the exorcism as "coded gestures" (Dube, 2012, p.356). What Dube (2012) implies by 'coded gestures', which we agree with, is that exorcism should be understood in symbolic terms. The act has greater meaning beyond the term's literal meaning (Horsley, 2001). Mnangagwa specifically refers to the 'legion' demons (Mark 5: 9). Speaking at a campaign rally in Masvingo in July 2023, Mnangagwa said:

> *Hatifi takabvuma kuti zvimbwasungata zvitonge nyika ino. Inofanira kutongwa nevaridzi. Zimbabwe is a unitary state. Kana paine anenge abatwa nemweya wekubvarura, kupatsanura Zimbabwe, mweya waRigiyoni. Ukapindwa nemweya waRigiyoni Jesu anoti pinda mvura unonyura ufire ikoko* (We will never agree that puppets rule this nation. It should be ruled by its owners. Zimbabwe is a unitary state. If there is anyone who will have been possessed by a spirit of tearing, dividing Zimbabwe, the spirit of Legion [sic]. If Legion's spirit possesses you, Jesus commands you to go into the water and drown so you die there).

First, Mnangagwa referred to the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20), Chapter 1.1, which describes the Republic of Zimbabwe as a unitary state. This gave his statement the legal backing since the National Constitution is the supreme law of the land. His statement expressed the political myths of national unity in a "… unitary state" and opposition political parties as "*zvimbwasungata*" (Western puppets). Politically, socially and economically, Zimbabwe is in crisis. In such a situation, "every form of social organisation", according to Aning and Nsiah (2012, p.68), "requires narratives to give it meaning and to provide a reason for being". Sala argues that "[p]olitical authority is no different and has a narrative that frames who should govern, why, how, and over whom". Aning and Nsiah (2012, p. 69) define a political myth as "a story or set of stories that legitimises not only political authority but the state itself".

From Mnangagwa's perspective, anyone who challenges authority or endangers national unity is likened to the Gerasene demoniac encountered by Jesus in Mark 5:9. In the story, the demons identify themselves as legions. Legion was the Roman troops who invaded villages, enslaved people, burnt homes, confiscated agricultural products and left behind havoc and destruction. Since the possessor 'legion' is symbolic of the Roman army, the possessed 'man' needs to be seen as symbolic of a society "possessed by the demon of imperial violence" (Horsley, 2001, p.142). Jesus brings restoration to the "man". However, Mnangagwa misinterpreted, perhaps intentionally, the intended outcome of the exorcism, implying that Jesus commanded the 'man' to drown and die in the water. The misinterpretation could be a deliberate way of legitimising violence towards and purging of the opposition represented in the speech as *zvimbwasungata*, and enemies of the state. According to Bhatia (2008, p.210),

labelling an out-group as the "enemy" serves the purpose of determining the missile's target and creates stability, oneness of vision and unity of purpose.

Chamisa overtly and provocatively referred to a ZANU PF demon lingering at the CCC rally. He said: *Kwazisaiwo dhimoni reZANU riri pano. Torinyaradza nezita raJesu* (May you also greet this ZANU demon that is right here. We exorcise it in Jesus' name) (Gweru rally, 17 July 2023). Although Chamisa's belief in demons could be understandable from his Pentecostal background and affiliation, reference to the presence of a ZANU PF demon at an opposition rally could metaphorically be interpreted as a "coded protest" (Dube, 2012) against the oppressive and unpleasant socio-political and economic situation caused by ZANU PF (mis)governance. This means that Chamisa could be using what the American anthropologist James Scott called a "hidden transcript" to refer to strategies that people in oppressive situations use to express their discontent. If this demon hypothesis is valid, then exorcism (*kunyaradza*) refers to "how the oppressed taunt and reject the oppressive situation" (Dube, 2012, p. 353). The taunting and rejection predict the desired electoral outcome of defeating ZANU PF. However, had the opponent taken such taunting literally, violence could have ensued.

The Exodus Metaphor

Generations of Christians in Zimbabwe are familiar with and have been captivated by the biblical story of the children of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Conscious of this, Chamisa appropriated this narrative and used the Exodus metaphor as a paradigm of hope for the suffering people of Zimbabwe. Like most liberation theologians, Chamisa knows that many African Christians are preoccupied with deliverance from existential dilemmas and evil spirits. "The idea of deliverance is the commonest theme in the hymns, prayers and catechisms of the indigenous African churches" (Nwadialor & Nweke, 2013, p.3). The nature of the African [Zimbabwean] experience of injustice and socioeconomic deprivation calls for a theology of liberation. Gutierres (1974, p. 307) posits that liberation theology attempts to reflect on the experiences and meaning of the faith based on the commitment to abolish injustice and build a new society. Speaking at a rally in the Midlands city of Gweru on 17 July 2023, Chamisa said,

> *Farao wakanga achifunga kuti watigonaka. Rwendo rweExodus urwu. Farao anenge achiti tasvika pagungwa dzvuku asingazive kuti tinoyambuka pakaoma. Farao haagoni kubva pasina ruoko rune simba. Tinosimba neshoko. Tinopinda nokunamata* (Pharaoh thought he had defeated us. Our mission is like the Biblical Exodus. Pharaoh thought that we had reached the Red Sea, not knowing that we were to cross on dry land. Pharaoh cannot release us without force. The word strengthens us. We shall cross through prayer).

The shared knowledge of the biblical Exodus story between Chamisa and his audience helped to understand Mnangagwa as the Pharaoh and the referent of */-ti-/* (us), in '*wakatigona*', as the people, in the Zimbabwean story. Chamisa deliberately gave the impression of Pharaoh's voluntary hardening of his heart and omitted the reference to God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart, raised by the biblical narrative, perhaps to aggravate the blame of Mnangagwa for the people's plight. In the Exodus account, the oppressed people had no power to free themselves from the powerful Pharaoh or cross the Red Sea on dry ground, but a superior (divine) power helped them. While Chamisa's interpretation casts Mnangagwa as one who opposes God's purposes for a "New Great Zimbabwe," and presents himself as a modern-day Moses with God depicted as "one who cares for and liberates the downtrodden and oppressed" (Mathews, 1991, p. 20), this framing tends to downplay the people's agency in effecting change through their vote. Chamisa said:

Ari kuzotirwira ndiye muridzi wenyaya. Kana achinge ati tinopinda chero munhu akaramba sei iyeye anozarura maghedhe kana ati tipinde tinopinda chete (He who is going to fight for us is the owner of the story. If He says we will get in, but someone refuses, He will open gates if he wants us to enter. If he says we will get in, we will definitely do so).

Emphasis on the power of divine intervention in "*Muridzi wenyaya*" implies the liberator, *"Iye anozarura maghedhe"* means one who facilitates the win and on God's will, "*kana ati tipinde tinopinda chete*" meaning If it is His will, we shall win despite any impediments, points to Chamisa's political naivety and theological propaganda that could have potentially caused voter apathy. The word '*magedhe'* (gates) that alludes to access to political power derives from the metaphorical sense of the convention in ancient Israel where a dead person was said to pass through the gates of death/sheol (Job 38: 17; Psalms 107: 18 and Isaiah 38:10). The use of this metaphor reflects Chamisa's awareness of the nefarious gatekeeping acts associated with electoral injustice but persuades his audience to play their part and have faith in God, the ultimate judge. This motif resonates with the '#GodIsInIt' metaphor discussed earlier. The weakness of a faith-based approach to electoral contestation is the need for more realisation that faith alone cannot guarantee free and fair elections. Hence, this attitude set the ground for the rejection of election results by the opposition.

Conclusion

This research highlights how Zimbabwean political leaders strategically use religious metaphors to shape ideology, influence voter perception, and assert moral authority. Both ZANU PF and opposition parties (MDC Alliance and CCC) employ religious imagery to construct persuasive narratives, frame opponents, and legitimise their platforms. These metaphors serve as manipulative and persuasive tools, tapping into the electorate's cultural and spiritual values. Ultimately, religious metaphors function as sloganeering devices, deeply embedded in Zimbabwean political discourse, reflecting contested claims about divine will and popular sovereignty.

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