



The Nexus Between Mining and Violence Towards 2023 Elections



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
ACRONYMS	3
SECTION 1: PRELIMINARIES	5
1.1 Background of the Study	5
1.2 Purpose and scope of the study	10
1.3 Methodology	11
SECTION 2: FINDINGS	13
2.1 The Anatomy of Artisanal Mining Machete Gangs	13
2.2 Community Experiences with Machete Gangs	22
2.3 Use of Mining Resources During Elections	28
2.4 Gender Issues in Machete Violence	35
2.5 Mining, Human Rights Abuses, and Election Violence: The Nexus	39
2.6 Outlook Towards 2023 Election	44
SECTION 3: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	48
3.1 Recommendations	53
ANNEX 1: RESEARCH DESIGN	56
ANNEX 2: LIST OF DATA SOURCES	58

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study investigates and analyses the linkages between mining, human rights abuses, political and electoral violence in Zimbabwe.

Using a combination of desk research, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions, it explores in detail the phenomenon of machete gangs connected to artisanal mining in Bindura, Kadoma and Kwekwe. While artisanal and small-scale mining (ASSM) has provided significant socio-economic opportunities for communities, the emergence of machete gangs associated with gold rushes and how these have evolved over time has created a toxic situation. Machete gangs emerged initially as groups of artisanal miners, commonly referred to as makorokoza, fought for control and access of gold rush sites, but over time have taken on a rather complex character.

Evidence gathered in this research raises several red flags from the perspective of community safety and security, human rights, and prospects for a free and fair 2023 general election.

First, some of the mining activities are conducted with no respect for private property and public infrastructure and bringing in many socio-economic challenges.

Second, the extent of the violence and the brutal tactics used by gangs competing for control of the gold rush sites is traumatising to

communities. Gang wars quite often play out within communities and are continued in public spaces, like shopping centres and even public health facilities. Gangs at times target families and female partners of rivals for reprisals and indiscriminately attack residents.

Third, is the increased involvement of gangs in other violent crimes not directly related to illegal mining, like theft, robberies, murders, and rape inter alia.

Fourth, the justice system appears compromised to effectively deal with this due to endemic corruption and politicisation. Gangs are often linked to and enjoy protection from influential political figures and patrons.

Last, gangs have become a potent force for political violence and intimidation at the disposal of their political patrons. Towards 2023 elections they are likely to be a key instrument for violence and intimidation. The study points out some of the potential hotspots in this regard.

The report concludes with recommendations for human rights and election focused civil society and institutions managing elections.

ACRONYMS

ASGM	Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining
ASMers	Artisanal and Small-Scale Miners
ASSM	Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining
CCC	Citizens Coalition for Change
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CIO	Central Intelligence Organisation
CNRG	Centre for Natural Resource Governance
CSI	Corporate Social Investment
CSOT	Community Share Ownership Trust
DDYMC	Danangwe District Youth in Mining Youth in Mining Cooperative
EIA	Environment Impact Assessment
EMA	Environmental Management Agency
EMP	Environmental Management Plan
FGR	Fidelity Gold Refiners
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
MMMD	Ministry of Mines and Minerals Development
MP	Member of Parliament
NGBAZ	National Gold Buyers Association of Zimbabwe
NPRC	National Peace and Reconciliation Commission

PO	Prohibition Order
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZELA	Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association
ZMDC	Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation
ZMF	Zimbabwe Miners Federation
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police



01 SECTION 1: PRELIMINARIES

1.1 Background of the Study

Since the mid-1990s, Zimbabwe has seen a massive growth of artisanal and small-scale mining (ASSM). Generally, ASSM, encompassing gold panning, artisanal mining and small-scale mining though informal, was relatively peaceful. This presented an opportunity for increased access to the sector for the marginalised, especially women, in a country increasingly facing economic difficulties. The government started a program to both regulate the sector and utilise it for empowerment purposes.

In the 2000s the government still saw the sector as a vehicle for economic empowerment especially considering the growing economic difficulties and increasing unemployment. The mining sector has been haemorrhaging jobs, leading many into ASSM, the most informalised form of it. In Kwekwe, ZISCO Steel and some of the mines in the Midlands such as Gaika Gold Fields, Tiger Reef and Globe and Phoenix have shed thousands of jobs. A lot of these found themselves in the ASSM sector, and so did former farm workers who lost jobs after the fast-track land reform program. However, the ASSM sector did not only grow economically important, but it also became politically significant.

First the form of artisanal mining commonly referred to as chikorokoza took on new complex dimensions. A key feature of this was the phenomenon of gold rushes, targeting gold rich sites. This led to the emergence of nomadic artisanal miners, who would go around sniffing for potential gold rush sites to pounce on. Such sites would not exclude existing owner-operated small mines, nor old disused mines, if the site is rich in gold.

Second, ASSM landed itself to the developing populist authoritarian and patronage politics. It became an important vehicle for power retention and accumulation by the ruling elites.¹ The sector presented an opportunity to oil the patronage networks and enable ruling elite coercion by ensuring access and control.² It also presented a means for vote buying through populist policy pronouncements that promised unrestricted access to ASSM for general citizenry under the

1. See "The Political Economy of Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining in Central Zimbabwe", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 39: Number 4, 2013, pg. 921-936

2. *Ibid.*

rubric of economic empowerment. Towards elections, environmental and other legal requirements that would entail control of illegal mining were either relaxed or not enforced at all. This is most observable when one looks at gold rush patterns at Globe and Phoenix, Gaika Gold Fields and Chakari where authorities seem to tolerate gold rush towards elections.

In 2017 makorokoza invaded Gaika mine allegedly at the instigation of Zanu-PF politicians. However, by mid 2019, the army moved in to clear the mine of makorokoza following violent clashes among rival gangs.³ In May 2021 police in Kwekwe launched operation “Hatidi Ziguruguru/Asifuni Izigayo Zamatshe” (no hammer mills) to purge illegal miners after reports many miners were not selling to fidelity.⁴

By October 2022, less than a year before the 2023 election, machete gangs were wreaking havoc, notably committing all manner of crimes beyond illegal mining, in the Midlands according to media and police sources.⁵ The Midlands community newspapers reporting suggests a peak in illegal mining and criminality associated with machete gangs in 2022.⁶ This is also echoed by statements from the police. There is a pervasive sense of fear and helplessness among local communities. Gold rushes have a strong and direct linkage to increased cases of violence in ASM communities as they attract highly nomadic gangs and fortune seekers from different parts of the country along with feared machete gangs.⁷

3. The Midlands Observer, Friday 13 Dec 2019, p8

4. The Midlands Observer, Friday 14 May 2021, p2

5. The Times, 2-9 October 2022, p2

6. Machete gangs wreak havoc in Zhombe”, The Times, 28 January - 3 February 2022, p7

7. Kadoma FGD, 18 December 2022



Currently, mining, particularly gold, as expressed in the government's strategy to earn US\$12 billion from mining by 2023, is central to Zimbabwe's development outcomes - social, economic, political, and environmental. Suffice to say, the rear view shows that Zimbabwe has failed to leverage her diverse and rich mineral wealth to transform the lives of many Zimbabweans. This in part owes to the instrumentalization of the sector for the accumulation of not just wealth, but political power.

Certainly, there are strong connections between poor and exclusionary governance, high levels of corruption and human rights abuses, including machete gang violence, gender-based violence, and insecurity which are exploited by callous politicians, businessmen, and transboundary organised criminal gangs. An understanding of political violence and human rights abuses in Zimbabwe, including in the lead-up to elections, cannot be complete without examining the political-economic organization that underpins and sustains them. The ASGM sector is illustrative.



Generally, Zimbabwe is experiencing very high levels of political violence in the lead-up to the elections in 2023. Mining towns Kadoma, Kwekwe and Bindura have been singled out as hotspots. There is marked prominence and role of machete-wielding gangs that are behind the chaos in ASGM communities. The

machete-wielding gangs are also used as political violence machinery, presenting a double jeopardy to communities. Often these gangs clash among themselves, communities get caught in the crossfire or they in fact terrorize locals. Women and girls are targeted for physical and sexual violence. Research shows that these gangs are at times connected to political elites within Zanu-PF and the senior civil service and therefore enjoy a level of political protection.⁸

The organization and control of the mining sector, especially ASM is an important cog in the Zanu-PF power retention matrix. This includes the utilization of financial resources from the sector, distribution of claims and use of gangs for violence against rivals.

Given that the 2023 elections are around the corner, the importance of a well-grounded and analytical paper to inform mitigation measures against the expected escalation of violence and human

8. Showers Mawowa, "The Political Economy of Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining in Central Zimbabwe", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 39: Number 4, 2013, pg. 921-936; Mukasiri Sibanda, *OPINION Politics, dollars and criminals: Why violence is rising in Zimbabwe's small-scale mines*, accessed at <https://newswire.live/opinion-politics-dollars-and-criminals-why-violence-is-rising-in-zimbabwes-small-scale-mines/?fbclid=IwAR25w2BoGfYHz7WAqSqikhTyqBA1GuzHBuVDd4M0Ag026W53MxA3ETjXqg> on 8 December 2022.

rights abuses within the sector cannot be over-emphasized. Such an understanding is an important first step to forging pathways to a violent free election, and ultimately a peaceful and prosperous Zimbabwe cannot be overemphasized.

This study provides a gendered description of the human rights and political issues connected with Zimbabwe's violent mineral economy in the build-up to the 2023 elections.

It maps some of the key role players, links with previous patterns around elections and highlights risks for a free and fair election stemming from the emergence of violent gangs arising from illegal mining. It is based on three study areas, namely Bindura, Kadoma and Kwekwe.

1.2 Purpose and Scope of the Study

The study examines the linkages between mining, machete gang violence, political violence and the associated human rights abuses, threats and impacts on mining communities and what this means for the 2023 elections. The purpose is to draw conclusions and recommendations which can inform strategies for civil society actors.



Specific objectives of the study include:

- Document the lived realities and power dynamics in mining communities as a result of machete gangs.
- Analyse the use of mining resources during electoral campaigns and electoral periods.
- Determine the gender aspects of violence in mining communities and the role women in mining play in political violence.
- Establish the relationship between mining, gross human rights abuses, and political and electoral violence in mining communities in Zimbabwe.
- Examine if artisanal mining areas will be or are already hot spots of gross human rights abuses, electoral and /or political violence.
- Outline key recommendations to address and deflate the impacts of the use of mining resources in electoral and political violence in Zimbabwe.

1.3 Methodology

The study is based on a combination of desk research, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. 27 interviews and four focus groups were conducted with a wide range of stakeholders including artisanal miners, machete gang leaders, police, civil society, residents, leaders of political parties and public representatives over a two-week period in Bindura, Chegutu, Kwekwe, Kadoma and Gweru.



Due to the sensitivity of the research, we have kept our informants confidential. We have also edited out names of ruling party politicians and civil servants implicated in many of the claims. For example, instead of mentioning them by name, we simply state “senior ruling party politicians”. However, gang leaders hardly use their real names. In this case pseudonyms as provided by our sources have been retained in the report. While the sector is male dominated, we tried to capture the voices of women in our selection of informants.

Desk reviews covered academic research, published and unpublished, reports by civil society and mineral governance think tanks. In particular, the researchers went through piles of newspapers for period 2019 to date by local publications in Gweru and Kwekwe who more than any media cover these issues in detail. Considering the time constraint, the researchers were selective on who they target as key informants, for interviews and focus groups. Choice of informants was informed and guided by the gaps that needed to be filled and information that required further corroboration and triangulation from our desk reviews. Thematic coding and discourse analysis was employed for data analysis. Annexes 1 and 2 provide a detailed overview of the research questions, data sources and collection tools and the data collection plan respectively.



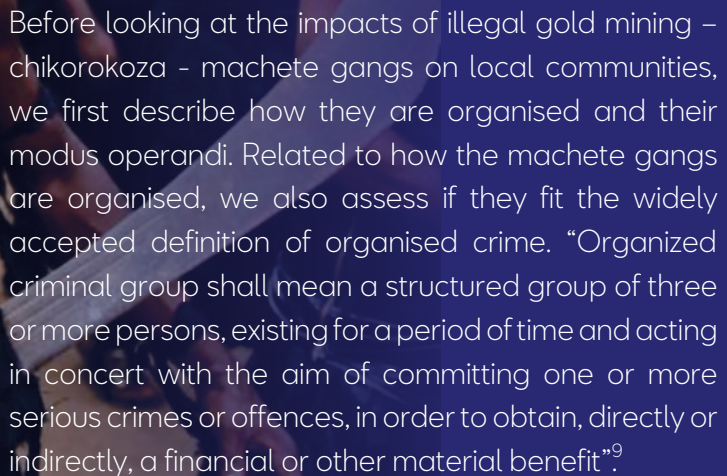
02 SECTION 2: FINDINGS

2.1 The Anatomy of Artisanal Mining Machete Gangs

The relationship between ASGM and communities is quite complicated. On one hand, ASGM spurs community spending that brings super incomes to both informal and formal traders. ASGMers spend big on luxury items like clothes, alcohol, and cars thus supporting local economic activity. Any slump in ASGM gold production impacts business activities quickly and negatively, with women largely involved in the informal sector feeling the most pinch. For example, the closure of the Danangwe District Youth in

Mining Cooperative (DDYMC) in Chegutu where roughly 4000 youth operated affected women who were earning income from buying gold ore in buckets (known as bhunga) from cash strapped ASMs. The women would take the ores to the mills for gold recovery.

Safety is a major concern, especially the crude language used that is laced with threats to instil fear when the violent ASGM gangs are buying goods and services in communities. It is a bittersweet experience, bringing money and trampling on peace and security in the community. The choices are limited because ASGM is a major economic activity in these areas, made more prominent with the collapse of large-scale mining and the formal economy – more unemployment.



Before looking at the impacts of illegal gold mining – chikorokoza – machete gangs on local communities, we first describe how they are organised and their modus operandi. Related to how the machete gangs are organised, we also assess if they fit the widely accepted definition of organised crime. “Organized criminal group shall mean a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offences, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit”⁹.

9. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime- UNODC

Characteristics of Organised Crime

- Perpetuity:** The criminal act must be on going beyond the lifespan of current members.
- Conspiracy:** There must be conspiracy by several people (plot, plan).
- Economic gain:** The criminal acts must be profit oriented. There is nothing personal.
- Hierarchical:** Organised crime groups are hierarchical in structure. Each group has a boss, advisors, crews, captains, soldiers who carry out the physical work and men with special skills.
- Restricted membership:** Not just anyone can join a group for security reasons.
- Monopoly:** Competitor Criminal groups are targets for elimination.
- Corruption:** Organized criminal groups believe in corruption to fix the Law enforcement, criminal justice and political system and anything that may expose them.
- Loyalty:** The criminal group members are sworn to secrecy and loyalty to the cause.

Gangs are many and vary in size, but some of them, as pointed out by the National Peace Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) have a national presence, operating in Midlands spreading out to Matebeleland and Mashonaland.¹⁰ This was triangulated by other informants, among others, the police, and some gang members.

Four main makorokoza gangs featured prominently during data collection namely:

- Mashurugwi,
- Zviketo,
- Maziga and
- Magrigamba.

As one informant rightly pointed out, “Not all machete wielding gangs embarking in violence are illegal miners - some are merely party youths”¹¹ or better still mere criminal gangs. There are indeed suggestions that prominent criminals may also be involved in mobilising gangs, for example in Mbizo.¹²

What our data however demonstrates unequivocally is that Makorokoza have become multiple agents of violence in illegal mining, political violence, commission of violent crimes and human rights abuses.

10. Commissioner Musanhu, quoted in The Times, August 30 - September 5, 2019, p7

11. Interview, Anonymous Councillor, Kwekwe, 18 December 2022

12. Ibid.



Mashurugwi

Mashurugwi also known as team “Barca” after Spanish football club Barcelona has a national presence. It is allegedly the biggest grouping and according to sources likely connected to some highly placed politicians. This group, it is said, conducts violence with impunity.¹³ The Mashurugwi name is to do with its origin or at least where most of its early members came from, the mining town of Shurugwi. It has evolved and the way it is constituted is now less to do with the place it associates itself with. “Shurugwi can rightly be viewed as the cradle of illegal gold mining, and these would indeed engage in machete fights over gold turf. however, the more generalised violence beyond turf wars is an evolution¹⁴ William Hungwe argues, Mashurugwi is now a stigmatisation that certain groups of artisanal miners now instrumentalise for their violent and criminal intent.¹⁵ Some names mentioned as part of the group’s leadership include Dagi (Douglas) Tsvangira “Demeo” (Shurugwi), one Gutsa (Bindura) and one Talent (Empress in Gokwe).¹⁶

13. Anonymous mukuru wengoro, Kadoma, 17 December 2022

14. The Times, 17-23 February 2020, p2

15. Ibid

16. Interview, Anonymous Mukuru Wengoro, 17 December 2022, also see Slymedia tv, Interview with 17-year-old Mushurugwi convict, 7 February 2022, <https://youtu.be/OdDGhz2Phbw>

Zviketo

This gang reportedly hails from Kwekwe. Due to time, we could not establish if there is a connection with the so-called Maketo brothers who until their arrest in July 2022 had allegedly conducted a string of robberies in Kwekwe's Mbizo township.¹⁷ At the time of our fieldwork, Zviketo were reportedly in an alliance with Team Barca/Mashurugwi.¹⁸

Maziga

This gang is said to originate from Kadoma and Gokwe. It is Mashurugwi's fiercest rival.¹⁹ The group, it is said, got its name from one Ziga who established himself as a well-known korokoza in Battle Fields area lying between Kadoma and Kwekwe. Ziga formed a formidable team by working with his rather large family and soon other illegal miners joined up with him for protection. Mazigas now run into thousands of makorokoza.²⁰

Magrigamba

The group is said to consist mainly of Tongas from the Binga area.²¹ Some of the descriptions of the gangs are almost mystic but capture the scotched earth violent modus operandi associated with the group. "Havakwiri mota (they don't use vehicles), vanoti chikafu tochiwanira muroad (we don't carry food, we will find it on the way), vakadzi tovawanira muroad (we will find women on the way)".²² A person named Jongos, feared for leaving a trail of destruction in Gwoke, burning houses and raping women is said to be the leader.²³

17. "Six Armed Robbers Nabbed", The Times, 18 - 24 July 2022, p2

18. Anonymous, mukuru wengoro, Chegutu, 17 December 2022

19. Chegutu ZRP Informant, 18, 2022, Anonymous Mukuru wengoro, 17 December 2022

20. Chegutu ZRP Informant, 18, 2022

21. Anonymous, mukuru wengoro, Chegutu, 17 December 2022

22. & 23. Ibid.

As of 18 December 2022, Magrigamba were said to be in alliance with Maziga.

These are not the only groups. Neither do they command the allegiance and affiliations of all illegal miners. There are certainly individuals, and smaller gangs that act independently, or as sub-groupings. What is clear is that in almost all the cases, they are connected to a prominent and powerful political figure. Names of ruling party politicians and affiliated individuals are often linked to these gangs and their sub-groups, as buyers, sponsors or mbinga. Groups like El Shabab gang in Kwekwe is a notable example, while certain individuals started off as gold dealers and mining kingpins to become MPs, councilors and prominent within Zanu-PF. Some of these individuals lead in raising funds for the ruling party. “If they hear of a gold rush they send and protect their boys and even disperse whoever is there”²⁴ Moreover, we came across numerous reports of alleged involvement of serving and former state security personnel from the police, military and intelligence in the shadow hierarchy and membership of these gangs - which all serve to confirm that the violence is unmistakably an organised crime.

Mbinga

Mbinga refers to a leader of a group or syndicate of artisanal miners who operate as a group usually for protection and sharing of spoils. Other terms used interchangeably with Mbinga are “maburu” and “mbimbo”. They often use pseudonyms such as Jah Prayzah, Tiri, Bravo etc.²⁵

24. Anonymous, Journalist 1, 19 December 2022

25. Interview, anonymous, CID officer, 17 December 2022, Chegutu

Ngoro

Literally translated ox-drawn cart, refers to a group of miners working together under a mbimbo or mbinga. Ngoro is often built around blood relatives and close friends who form an inner circle, while homies form the second circle and other miners who join the group as the outer circle.

CASE

The Times (Gweru) story of 30 December - 19 January 2020 is illustrative. Ten gold panners belonging to the Maziga/Branco gang went and allegedly stole 60kg worth of gold at Cain Mavhimira's Mum's mine in Mutukani in Gokwe. Mavhimira mobilised his gang and managed to effect an arrest of 9 of the suspects. Subsequently, the Maziga gang mobilised 40 of its members including reinforcements from as far as Kadoma, armed with machetes, knives, axes, and knobkerries and attacked the ZRP's Zenda Nembudzia Base to rescue the arrested gang members.²⁶ Reportedly they were transported in two commuter omnibuses and two Nissan Caravans one of which was unregistered, suggesting high levels of coordination and the possible existence of a powerful patron. The police only managed to control the situation using live ammunition, injuring the gang leaders Gift Chimboora and Khumbulani Mahlangu in the process. The 40 gang members, who included 10 juveniles were arrested and in March 2020 sentenced to seven years imprisonment, five years for the

26. The Times 30 December 2019 - 19 January 2020, p1

juvenile.²⁷ Attacks on police and even killings of officers have been reported in other areas.²⁸

Gangs do not operate in one place, though they may stay longer and frequently return to a gold-rich site, as has been the case with Chakari, Gaika and Globe and Phoenix. Often, they follow newly discovered rich gold sites and move around with metal/gold detectors. Seven metal detectors were found in the vehicles of the Branco gang which attacked the Nembudziya Zenda police base in the case above.²⁹

Abuse is rife within and among these gangs. Videos trending on WhatsApp groups of rival gangs brandishing machetes and spears threatening each other or showing lifeless butchered bodies of rivals (researchers have seen footage). Violent tactics used against rivals include stabbing, beheading, chopping of hands (and victim bleeds to death) and electrocution among others.³⁰ Some of these tactics are synonymous with certain gangs, for example the Phalandaba gang with chopping of hands, “vekudimbura vanhu maoko” (those who chop hands).³¹ Gangs also fight over other things like girlfriends and cell phones.³² The actual number of cases is hard to ascertain because

27. See Harare-Metro, 20 March 2020 accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/HarareGossips/posts/gang-of-40-machete-thugs-who-raided-gokwe-police-post-sentenced-to-seven-years-e/2745363245561704/> on 5 February 2023.

28. ZRP informants Chegutu and Kwekwe, 18 & 16 December 2022

29. The Times 30 December 2019 - 19 January 2020, p3

30. ZRP Informant, Kadoma, 18 December 2022

31. Bindura, Korokoza informant, 22 December 2022

32. The Times, March 15 - 21, 2019, p3

some of the victims of the rival gangs are on the police wanted list and they prefer not to report cases of violence to the police. They avoid public hospitals when injured. Instead, they use private or home-based care to avoid need for a police report to be treated at public hospital.³³

2.2 Community Experiences with Machete Gangs

Our data shows that machete gangs are heavily involved in violent crimes, human rights abuses and increasingly political violence with huge consequences for residents in mining areas. Though organised primarily around artisanal mining, machete gangs by far get arrested and charged for violence, murder, robbery, theft, assault, and damage to property for which they tend to be recurring offenders, compared to illegal mining related offences.³⁴

In Chegutu district at the time of field work 40 - 50 artisanal miners were reported to be on police's wanted list, mostly for these kinds of crimes.³⁵ It may be that illegal mining is much more difficult to prove compared to other crimes, or is protected by corruption and patronage. This notwithstanding, it shows how artisanal mining has become a source of violent criminality. The impunity in illegal mining is extended to other crimes, thus endangering the safety and security of communities. Areas where artisanal mining is rife have become

33. FGDs Kadoma and Interview Kadoma, 19 December 2022

34. The Midlands Observer Friday 13 December 2019, p2, The MO Friday 3 September 2021, p2

35. Interview, ZRP Informant, 18 December 2022, Chegutu

synonymous with increased incidence of violent crimes.³⁶ The police are quoted regularly complaining about increasing rates of robberies and murders linked to chikorokoza and Machete gangs. ZRP expressed concern that a rising number of the murders are over what appears to be petty disagreements among makorokoza themselves or with ordinary residents.³⁷

Rival gangs take violent clashes from gold rush sites to local shopping centres, beerhalls, night clubs and other social spaces. Clashes may appear at the surface to be about petty beerhall disagreement,³⁸ but are in fact, a continuation of gold-digging rivalry.³⁹ In one bizarre incident in February 2019 four armed men reportedly stormed Kwekwe general hospital around midnight “looking for a patient whom they wanted to finish off”.⁴⁰ Commenting on the incident, the hospital’s Medical Superintendent Dr Patricia Mapanda is quoted as saying “We have been recording cases of murder, people invading our premises with dangerous weapons such as machetes, guns amongst others attacking and killing our patients. The police are quiet about these happenings, and they are taking no action though we have been reporting and calling for help, it’s like we no longer have security agencies”.⁴¹

36. see Midlands Observer Friday 14 January 2022, p2, “Four Criminals Nabbed”, and The Times, 27 June - 3 July 2022, p4, “Machete wielding gang robs bar lady”, *Ibid*.

37. “Upsurge in Murder Cases”, The Times, 25 April - 1 May 2022, p1

38. The Midlands Observer Friday 16 April 2021, p3

39. Interview with Anonymous Mukuru Wengoro, Interview Anonymous CID Chegutu, 17 December 2022, The Times, 19-25 September 2022, p10.

40. The Midlands Observer Friday 22 February 2019, p6.

41. *Ibid*

Gangs are disruptive to other legitimate mining activities, including small scale mines, some operated by women miners. Once a registered mine is found to be rich in gold, it becomes the epicentre of violence scramble by machete gangs.⁴² Largely, the intention of machete gangs is to derive economic gain, although cases of revenge cannot be discounted, and this shows further evidence of organised crime. Normally, the violent gangs are not willing to do the hard work associated with the development of mining shafts to access the gold ore-bearing rocks. At times, they use insider information once high-grade gold ores are found to force their way to enjoy the spoils by running shifts together with coerced owners of the mining pits.

Sometimes genuine ASMs are the ones that invite a powerful violent gang to work with them once they strike it rich for the sake of protection from other marauding violent gangs. If the genuine ASMs that are patient to sweat and take a risk to discover viable gold-bearing rocks refuse to work with violent gangs, they can be evicted from their pits or mines. Reaping where one has not sown is the order of the day. When genuine ASMs try to be secretive about their lucrative gold find, they are betrayed by their spending patterns that are hard to hide from the sniffing from the machete gangs. In such instances, violent gangs are not afraid of taking extreme measures like killing if ASMs that are suspected of spending big do not disclose their source of gold. The violent gangs can even take the gold ores or steal the gold making the ones that fight for access to prolific mining pits appear more decent.⁴³

42. Interviews Chegutu, Kadoma, and Bindura

43. FGD in Kadoma and Interviews in Kadoma, Chegutu and Bindura

When artisanal mining is not doing well like during the rainy season, gangs turn to other criminal activities, demanding services and goods without paying. Gokwe Town council warehouse on 24 May 2022 was robbed by 10 machete-wielding men. At Kamhororo Business Centre in Gokwe, shop owners have been victims to armed robberies, also Zvishavane has similar cases.⁴⁴ This has created an overall environment of fear in communities. In October 2019 over 500 households from Mtapá township in Gweru petitioned the area's member of parliament to see to it that artisanal miners are removed from the area.⁴⁵ The residents and businesses reported being terrorised by the artisanal miners. Other community concerns include environmental rights, access to livelihoods, right to property and gender-based violence.

Environmental concerns include several reports of contamination of water sources for Kwekwe and Gweru (high turbidity) due to unregulated mining downstream of Sebakwe River.⁴⁶ Impacts of



44. The Times, 15 - 21 August, 2022, p2

45. The Times, October 11-17, 2019, p3

46. Kwekwe Council's Director of works John Mhike quoted Midlands Observer Issue 15, 3 - 9 June 2022

climate change induced floods are suspected to be more severe, due to unregulated mining. Since the flash floods in early 2022 the Gweru council has reported water “suspicious sediments” at its water works, thus disrupting water supply.⁴⁷ As early as 2019 the Government had reportedly ordered Anglo Gold Processing to relocate due to its proximity to Sebakwe Dam.⁴⁸ This was after a report by EMA showed the mine was pegged 150 m from the dam. No timeline was given for the mine’s relocation and at the time of writing it could not be established whether the order had been followed.

Machete gangs, either by way of unregulated mining or violent activities disrupt communities’ right to livelihoods and commercial activity. The indiscriminate mining wherever gold is found in substantial quantities has no respect to people’s houses, roads, crop fields or guest houses.⁴⁹ Indirectly, the stigmatisation and association of towns like Shurugwi with machete violence is said to be frightening away investors.⁵⁰ In Chegutu a stand owner “pazvindege” (a piece of land with an abandoned aeroplane restaurant) has been unable to stop makorokoza, even with numerous police “interventions” for more than 10 years. In February 2019 president Mnangagwa called for cement to restore houses during an address at Zimbabwe Miners Federations inaugural meeting.

Not only have communities’ rights to property been violated, so have been cultural and religious rights. Churches and congregants have not been spared, robbed during worship services.⁵¹ Guest houses,

47. The Midlands Observer, Friday 13 Dec 2019, p8

48. The Midlands Observer, Friday 13 Dec 2019, p8

49. The Midlands Observer Friday 14 January 2022, p4

50. The Times, 17-23 February 2020, p2

51. The Times 30 December 2019 - 19 January 2020, p3

historical sites and graves have been desecrated. In 2022, a palace, now a guest house which housed queen Elizabeth when she visited Kwekwe was vandalised.⁵² Chiefs have complained about desecration of graves.⁵³

The activities of artisanal miners have had an impact on school infrastructure and disturbed children's schooling. The Globe and Phoenix Primary school infrastructure is on the verge of collapse due to multiple illegal gold tunnels dug underneath and destruction of other surface infrastructure.⁵⁴ 14 students at the primary school were injured in March 2023 when a classroom curved into a mining shaft.⁵⁵

During our fieldwork, efforts by education, district authorities, police, EMA and MMMD to remove the illegal miners were failing. Children of school going age are also sucked into artisanal mining and gangsterism. At Kwekwe High school, the community has expressed numerous concerns about high school kids' involvement with gangs and drugs such as mutoriro in Mbizo. One councillor alleged the drugs consumption is traceable to two youth bases being run by a Zanu-PF politician linked to the El Shabab gangs.⁵⁶ SlyTV has interviewed a Chikurubi inmate who was convicted for murder committed as a member of a machete gang when he was 17 years old.⁵⁷

52. The Times, 3-9 October, 2022, p2

53. "Chief Chirumhanzu accuses miners of desecrating graves", The Times, 7 - 13 March 2022, p3, Manuscript, "Heritage and Mashurugwi: The Footprint of Artisanal and Small-scale miners on Cultural Heritage in the Midlands Province, Zimbabwe", The Extractive Industries and Society.

54. Interview Anonymous Female Employee, Small Scale Mine in Kwekwe, 16 December 2022, "Gold Panner Wreak Havoc: Kwekwe School Faces Collapse", The Times, 20 - 26 June 2022, p1

55. <https://www.newsday.co.zw/local-news/article/200008881/updated-fourteen-pupils-injured-in-school-collapse>

56. Kwekwe, Councillor, 18 December 2022

57. Slymedia tv, Interview with 17-year-old Mushurugwi convict, 7 February 2022,

<https://youtu.be/OdDGhz2Phbw>

With communities increasingly feeling helpless and unprotected, there is risk of deterioration into vigilantism as people take matters into their own hands. Already one violent artisanal miner was left for dead after becoming violent at a beerhall in Mkoba, Gweru and the community beat him up.⁵⁸

In Bindura the community imposed a curfew after facing increased robberies, violence, and rape. It is alleged that the ASGM gangs were so daring to the extent that they would bathe openly at boreholes where the community, women especially, frequent to fetch water for domestic use. Working with local leadership of Zanu-PF, the community in Bindura evicted ASGMers that were not local from lodgings and their ASGM operating areas.⁵⁹ These actions, though commendable, create the risk of vigilantism. In an ideal set up, state law enforcement agencies should be taking the lead.

2.3 Use of Mining Resources During Elections

The sector is a source of patronage, “vote buying” and financing for elections. To maintain elite cohesion within the ruling party, control, and maintenance of access to opportunities in mining be it at formal or informal levels across the sector’s value chain is important. This is done corruptly and “legitimately”. Populist policy pronouncements, actions and relaxed enforcement of environmental and other

58. The Times, 5 - 11 September 2022, p8

59. Interviews in Bindura

regulations including huge promises of “economic empowerment” through mining often characterise election season. Being a key economic sector, mining also provides funding for electoral campaigning overtly and covertly.



Election financing includes for related activities like political violence, and here the sector provides a mechanism for rewarding and compelling machete gangs to participate in political violence.

Big mining companies it appears are pressured to conduct economic empowerment and Corporate Social Investment (CSI) initiatives by Zanu-PF politicians. There is a pattern. Community Share Ownership Trusts (CSOTs) largely associated with mining propped up the Zanu-PF campaign during the 2013 elections. The CSOTs were launched at a frenetic pace towards the 2013 elections as community empowerment vehicles with projects rolled out quickly such as clinics and schools to create an impression of equitable benefit sharing. After the 2013 elections, the momentum behind CSOTs was lost and their legal backing was stripped in 2018. It is worth mentioning that some big donations by diamond mining companies amounting to US\$50 million proved to be fake and even the former President, the late Mugabe was allegedly duped when he launched Marange-Zimunya CSOT. Other commitments lacked in detail like the legal status of the CSOT or the financing mechanisms for the community shares, perhaps deliberately so.

The transparency and accountability around negotiation, sealing and performance monitoring of mining deals is a big challenge in

Zimbabwe. This even though the Constitution, under section 315 (2) (c) requires an Act of Parliament to guide negotiation and performance of mining agreements to promote transparency, honesty, cost-effectiveness, and competitiveness.

Taking advantage of this loophole, the ruling party has been accused of abusing negotiation and performance monitoring of mining contracts to illicitly secure financing for its activities. It is alleged that in 2008, Anglo-American released claims in exchange for empowerment credits or a cash equivalent of US\$142 million was sold by the government of Zimbabwe for US\$100 million, the money was used to oil Zanu-PF's presidential rerun campaign at the height of economic malaise.⁶⁰

Marange diamonds allegedly financed Zanu-PF's 2013 electoral campaign.⁶¹ History repeated itself and it is highly probable that the same trick was used for the 2018 elections. Then, Zimplats released land to the government in June 2018, a month before the harmonised national elections. The platinum claims were quickly transferred to Karoo Resources in a murky deal.⁶² The Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG)'s report alleges that some of the undisclosed mining contracts contain financial commitment/donations clauses towards the ruling party.⁶³

60. "Swiss bank Credit Suisse's role in Zimbabwe's corrupt 2008 elections exposed" Daily Maverick, 22 February 2022. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-02-22-swiss-bank-credit-suisse-role-in-zimbabwes-corrupt-2008-elections-exposed/>

61. "Diamond revenues could be funding Zimbabwe election-rigging" Global Witness Press Release, 30 July 2013

62. "Resolution of Mining Lease Area and Mining Tenure Issues" ZIMPLATS ASX Announcement 06 June 2018, "Miner Tharisa PLC gets land Zimplats handed over to government" News24 15 June 2018, "Should We Celebrate the Govt-Zimplats Deal or Worry?" The Source, 8 June 2018

63. Zimbabwe's Disappearing God: Case of Mazowe and Penhalonga, Center for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG), 2022

Quite often, ruling party functionaries utilise the largesse from mining interests rather than the party's central pot to fund their own campaign. This places them at an enormous advantage compared to opposition competitors.

There are instances where Zanu-Pf politicians out of the largesse from gold mining have been able to buy votes and wrestle constituencies and wards long held by the opposition. National Gold Buyers Association of Zimbabwe (NGBAZ) Chairperson Scott Sakupwanya, a member of Zanu-PF's fundraising committee,⁶⁴ is said to be an example. He managed to wrestle the Ward 21 Councillor seat in Mabvuku Harare in March 2022. That seat has been a preserve for the opposition since 2000. Scott it is alleged, had delivered, through his company Better Brands, slightly more than seven tonnes of gold to Fidelity Gold Refiners (FGR) in the prior year with an estimated value of US\$460 million.⁶⁵



64. Ibid.

65. "Zimbabwe Government incentives behind record gold deliveries, say Sakupwanya, Bulawayo24, 25 January 2022, accessed on <https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-national-byo-220727.html> on 20 January 2023.

Considering the gold incentive scheme introduced in 2021 by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe to stifle illicit gold market and rake in more gold to the formal market, Scott could have been well resourced for his campaign.⁶⁶ For every 20 kgs of gold delivered, a 5% incentive applies.⁶⁷ Scott has been contesting for the same councillor seat without success since 2013. What tipped the scale this time around is the massive and brazen vote buying manifesting through truckloads of food hampers for the electorate. Even on the day of elections, voters were given chicken and chips from a popular fast-food restaurant after the vote. While money played a key factor, the influence of other factors like massive voter apathy and the internal conflict within the opposition cannot be ignored.⁶⁸

Mabvuku is an interesting case study for mining revenue and election funding. Apart from Scott, Mr Godwills Masimirembwa the former chairperson of the Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation (ZMDC), a state-owned entity that had a 50% stake in all but one diamond mining companies operating in Marange was an aspiring MP for Mabvuku constituency on a Zanu-PF ticket in 2013. His campaign was well-resourced even though it failed. It is not surprising that the entanglement of mining and elections continued the trend in 2018 and is most likely to continue for the 2023 elections because of the increased country's dependence on mining. In any case, Zanu-PF will be represented by Scott Sakupwanya.

66. "Zimbabwe Government incentives behind record gold deliveries, say Sakupwanya, Bulawayo24, 25 January 2022, accessed on <https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-national-byo-220727.html> on 20 January 2023.

67. See "Fidelity target 40 tonnes of gold", in Business Times: Redefining Business, access at <https://businesstimes.co.zw/fidelity-targets-40-tonnes-of-gold/> on 2 February 2023.

68. <https://greatdykenews24.co.zw/gold-buyers-association-chairman-wins-council-seat-in-by-election/> 2018 CSI projects in the mining sector and ZANU-PF campaign <https://www.pressreader.com/zimbabwe/chronicle-zimbabwe/20180523/282119227204959>



USD\$12 Billion Mining Sector earnings in 2023

The government launched an ambitious 5-year plan to grow the mining sector earnings to US\$12 billion in 2023, up from US\$2.7 billion earned in 2017.⁶⁹ While this is commendable from a developmental point of view, it is important to observe how such initiatives oil the ruling party's patronage machine by creating enough spoils for elites to share and therefore maintain coercion. During interviews sources pointed out that miners, whether involved in politics or not, are happy to finance activities of the party to protect their interests. Some ruling party politicians see their continued accumulation in the sector as intricately tied to power retention, and vice versa.

Parties do approach big mining corporates, small scale miners, artisanal miners, buyers and other players in the industry for funding of party activities. It is said that requests targeted at corporates are made at the highest levels. It is common for party leadership at district and ward levels to approach small scale miners and artisanal miners to support once off activities like a rally or committee meetings. The opaque way this is conducted raises questions about transparency and risks for corruption. Parties also ask and use the infrastructure of mining companies like stadiums and schools. Of course, as one would expect, it is easier for the ruling party to secure these compared to opposition parties, so this raises questions about an even playing field. It also raises questions about coercion as some actors in the sector feel coerced to donate fearing reprisals. ASSM who do not support or

69. "Zimbabwe Government incentives behind record gold deliveries, say Sakupwanya, Bulawayo24, 25 January 2022, accessed on <https://bulawayo24.com/index-id-news-sc-national-byo-220727.html> on 20 January 2023.

attend rallies have been threatened with expulsion or withdrawal of claims. Sponsors and buyers may not necessarily be Zanu-PF, but they play along for expedience and protection.

While on paper, one must fulfil all the legal requirements to undertake mining activities, the political risks loom larger than legal compliance risks (interview with a miner in Bindura). For miners to operate legally, a mining permit, environment impact assessment (EIA) certificate or Environmental Management Plan (EMP) are some of the basic requirements. But the compliance officers from the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development (MMMD), Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), and Environmental Management Agency (EMA), among others, have their hands tied when the political card of Zanu-PF is played. It is common to find most ASMs wearing Zanu-PF t-shirts with Mnangagwa's face, a signal that party protection is vital.⁷⁰ Even opposition members that are involved in ASGM wear Zanu-PF regalia to protect their interests.⁷¹

Moreover, mining is a vital source of government revenue. Mining contributed roughly 76 cents for every dollar generated from export earnings in 2022.⁷² Overall, mining exports generated US\$5.6 billion with gold accounting for 43.7% of the total mining export earnings. Mining is also a significant pull for Foreign Direct Investment, and in 2021, around US\$700 million in lithium assets acquisition deals largely by the Chinese were sealed.⁷³

70. Observations by the researchers in Kadoma, Chegutu, Kwekwe, and Bindura."

71. Interview with an informal trader in Chegutu, 19 December 2022

72. "The mining sector export earnings accounted for 75.8% of the total export earnings in 2022" RBZ Monetary Policy Statement February 2023, page 68

73. "Taking Stock: Zimbabwe's US 700 million lithium deals" NewZWire, May 11, 2022

The high demand of green energy minerals has added a new dimension to ASM in Zimbabwe with lithium discoveries in Mberengwa fuelling rushes by thousands of ASM.⁷⁴

2.4 Gender Issues in Machete Violence

Artisanal miners and machete gangs are predominantly men, but a significant proportion of consequences are borne by women and girls. Women are impacted as miners, participants in the value chain and the mining socio-economic echo-system and their relational proximity to gang members. The researchers did not come across evidence of direct women involvement in machete violence. Their role is rather an indirect one, either as partners helping to cover up partner's crimes or for playing certain support roles in the gold and criminal value chain and offering support services like grinding gold (kugiga) catering and sex work. This often comes at a huge cost to the women. A journalist in an interview reported meeting "...a woman at Chikurubi maximum prison convicted of not reporting her boyfriend".⁷⁵ Some women are held hostage in abusive situations fearing reprisals by a machete partner if they decide to leave or report criminality. "Once the woman receives money, she loses her freedom".⁷⁶

74. <https://www.herald.co.zw/president-reopens-eureka-gold-mine-%E2%80%A2delta-gold-pours-in-60m-%E2%80%A2operation-to-create-400-jobs/>

75. Anonymous Journalist 1, 19 December 2022

76. Ibid

Women are at times collateral damage in gang wars. It is common for rival gangs to target female partners and family members of rivals for revenge and intimidation.⁷⁷ Indiscriminate violence is meted out on bystanders, community members, family members, friends or female partners when the target rival is not found, “to send the message that you can run but you cannot hide (Interviews Kadoma and Chegutu interviews). The murder of Judith Ruzive, a street food vendor in Zvishavane is an example. She was killed by an artisanal miner in what seemed like a revenge killing after he tried without success to find the man who had attacked him at a nightclub.⁷⁸

Women are also political collateral. Women who aspire to take leadership positions in politics are easily threatened by their male rivalries through violent ASGM gangs.⁷⁹ They are easily elbowed out from lucrative opportunities for gold. In Chegutu, at Danangwe Development Youth Cooperative (DDYC) that housed over 4000 ASMers, women cashed in by buying buckets of gold ores from cash strapped ASMers, and subsequently taking the ore for processing and gold recovery (Interview from an informal trader). DDYC is now closed.



**Women are collateral
damage in gang wars and
political collateral.**

77. Chegutu Mukuru Ngoro, ZRP Informant, 18 December 2022

78. The Times, March 15 - 21, 2019, p2

79. Kadoma interview with a Korokoza, 20 December 2022.



Rape is common crime in mining communities where machete gangs operate and is largely underreported due to fear of victimisation. During stakeholder consultations, the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission received reports about a gang of gold panners in Midlands which goes about “...raping and forcing young girls into marriages”, [Commissioner Musanhu, quoted in *The Times*, August 30 - September 5, 2019, p7]. Partners of rivals or ordinary community members also get targeted. They “...can just grab a woman and say to the man she is now ours... with a bit of respect they can throw money at you [the male partner]”, and it does not matter whether the woman likes it or not”.⁸⁰

The proliferation of sex work in mining areas further exposes women to abuse by machete gangs. Machete gangs at times demand services without paying. Rejection by commercial sex workers is something that is hard to take by Machete gangs and they do not hesitate sometimes to have forced and unprotected sex. Another

80. Anonymous Journalist 1, 19 December 2022

excuse for forced sex used by violent ASGM gangs is that when they are broke, they accuse commercial sex workers of being gold diggers because they once associated when they had cash and now shunned when broke.⁸¹ It is common for machete rape victims to withdraw charges.⁸²

Cases of teenage pregnancies along with statutory rape are seemingly rife in ASGM communities.⁸³ ASMs lure underage school-going girls with money, and food and sometimes introduce them to hard drugs and alcohol.⁸⁴ Parents are not helping the situation because they push the girls to go and sell goods to ASMs to widen the income stream presenting opportunities for unscrupulous ASMs to sexually entice the girls. The circle becomes vicious, the girls are spoiled with cash and then attract other poor girls to join them if they want to escape from poverty.⁸⁵ In Kadoma, Rimuka, for example, it was alleged that a significant number of underage girls are commercial sex workers, and they are affected by alcohol and drug abuse. These under-aged girls are subjected to the abusive behaviours of some ASMs such as sexual harassment, unsafe sex, and rape thus exposure to STIs and HIV.⁸⁶

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is also rife as female partners are physically assaulted and even killed on the accusation of infidelity among other things.⁸⁷ This often takes place when the male partner

81. Kadoma, Chegutu and Bindura interviews

82. Anonymous Interview, Kadoma ZRP

83. Kadoma, Chegutu, and Bindura interviews

84. Kadoma interview with Artisanal miner, 19 December 2022

85. Chegutu and Kadoma interviews.

86. Kadoma Interview, Anonymous Journalist 1, 19 December 2022

87. Interview with anonymous, Councillor Kwekwe, 18 December 2022

returns after a period of long absence either due to illegal mining trips or brief incarceration. Some of the abuses have happened while perpetrators are on bail due to other charges.

2.5 Mining, Human Rights Abuses, and Election Violence: The Nexus

The research confirmed the alleged links between mining, chikorokoza, ASSM, and human rights abuses and increasingly, political violence. Machete gang violence emerged initially from competition over access to rich gold sites, but this has since expanded to take on multiple dimensions, including criminality and political violence. There is a heightened risk that mining linked machete gangs may be instrumentalised for violent political acts leading up to elections. Gangs are emboldened by a sense of protection by their sponsors who often are powerful politicians.⁸⁸

Generally, police are careful to act against makorokoza who are connected to powerful politicians as they first must get clearance. In the event of arrests sponsors call police ordering their release “vapfanha vangu” (these are my guys), bribe the police to secure release, provide lawyers and pay for bail among other things. For this reason, it is said, “makorokoza” tend to be very loyal to their sponsors. They are the so-called God fathers. Name dropping to intimidate police and avoid arrest is also common even where an actual link does not exist.

88. Interview with anonymous, Journalist 1, 19 December 2022

Machete gangs appear well resourced, meaning they can be quickly deployed for whatever purpose. ASGM gangs are very nomadic, using their own and hired cars, they can quickly converge from different corners of the country, and the survival of the fittest mode of operating imports violence where gold rushes occur.⁸⁹ Gold rushes are directly related to violence in areas where ASM is concentrated and an envelope of peace and security happens when gold productivity falls while conversely, the community spending suffers a knock.⁹⁰

Rival gangs may also want to take advantage of elections to hide their revenge activities and edge out competition by labelling each other as opposition members.⁹¹ There is a greater likelihood that the same perpetrators of violence can be used to carry out violence during 2023 to improve the longevity of their immunity in ASGM.⁹²

Mashonaland Central is basically a no-go area for the opposition, a declaration by one Zanu-PF member within the provincial leadership⁹³ hence the opposition cannot freely participate in ASGM. In Chegutu, opposition members can work side by side with Zanu-PF members for ASGM in the town and peri-urban areas, but away from the towns, it is a no-go area. It is normal for ASMers who support the opposition party to wear Zanu-PF regalia when mining as a risk mitigation action. Once one is identified as a member of the opposition, they are quarantined from getting any government support like loans meant for ASGM.⁹⁴ Some ASMers may refuse to play to the gallery and even stand up to

89. FDG in Kadoma and interview in Chegutu

90. FDG in Kadoma

91. Chegutu interview

92. Interview in Bindura

93. Bindura Interview

94. Interview in Chegutu and Kadoma

Zanu-PF linked gangs, as has happened in Kwekwe's Amaveni township. Though some view this as a deterrent, it may heighten tensions and make violent clashes likelier and deadlier.

Community safety, well-being and dignity are severely compromised. As pointed out above, when the ore is stolen, a gang that has lost out or hired is used to track the perpetrators. With gold processing being done at homes in some places because of the convenience offered by small hammer mills, the violence is exported to communities. Sometimes it is not about where the ore is processed, by community members with links to violent gangs that are accused of stealing the ore or beating a rivalry gang, it could be family, close relatives, friends, or linked commercial sex workers are attacked to either share information on the whereabouts or to exact indirect revenge.⁹⁵

Local communities sometimes are forced to suffer in silence as they are threatened with violent gangs if they report to the police when they are victimised. If they are complainants or court witnesses, they can be threatened by the violent gangs to withdraw their case or disappear when they are witnesses.⁹⁶ "In Chegutu a lot of people were beaten indiscriminately by a gang of Makorokoza, but we were surprised there were no reports to the police. Witnesses are threatened. There are many cases where victims withdraw."⁹⁷

95. Interviews Chegutu, Kadoma and Bindura

96. Interview Kadoma

97. ZRP informant, Chegutu, 18 December, 2022

There is a feeling of helplessness as some violent gang leaders are known and they boast of connections with powerful politicians. Each time they are arrested, they are released either by the police through the alleged intervention of their political protectors.⁹⁸

The role of the security services, the police, army, and the central intelligence officers (CIOs) both serving and retired is quite complex when it comes to maintaining law, peace and order. It is alleged police and military officers quickly rush to restore order when gold rushes occur and use the opportunity to camouflage their illicit mining activities. They become the gatekeepers, giving access to gold mining syndicates for a fee and at times they are also involved as partners in the mining syndicates. Some police and military officers who would have been sacked for various offenses have joined hands with violent ASGM gangs to earn a livelihood.⁹⁹ In Kadoma, there are reliable security services offered by retired police officers to ASGM sites that are keen to fend off disruption of their operations by ASGM violent gangs. This private security group is feared by ASGM gangs as it is armed with guns.¹⁰⁰

In some constituencies, machete gangs have been hired to disrupt rallies of rivals.¹⁰¹ Makorokoza are not after politics but money so involvement in politics is only at the behest of a political patron.¹⁰² In Kwekwe for example, it is alleged that the former Minister of State in the President's Office responsible for National Security Owen "Mudha" Ncube is using the so called El Shabab group of makorokoza

98. FGD in Kadoma and Interviews Kadoma and Chegutu

99. FGD in Kadoma, Interviews in Chegutu, Kadoma, and Bindura.

100. Anonymous Interviews with Security Officer in Kadoma, 18 December 2022

101. Anonymous, Journalist 19 December 2022

102. Ibid.

as foot soldiers for political violence. It is further alleged that he was part of the group before becoming MP.¹⁰³ The murder of CCC supporter Mbongeni Ncube at a rally on 27 February 2022 is indicative of the potential instrumentalisation of artisanal mining gangs for election violence. The arrested attackers were said to be Zanu-PF youth and members of a machete gang linked to “Mudha”. In less than two months they were released each on \$10 000 bail.¹⁰⁴ Two of them it is alleged have pending murder and attempted murder charges.¹⁰⁵ There is no guessing how they all afforded the bail money. Not long after their release there were reports that they were harassing and threatening key state witnesses.¹⁰⁶ Compare this with opposition MP Job Sikhala who has been in jail for more than a year on charges of inciting violence.

Zanu-PF sees makorokoza playing a key role towards 2023 elections. According to an opposition leader in Kwekwe, Makorokoza for ED was reportedly planned for mid December 2022 as part of the ED 2023 election campaign. It is now common that whenever there is a rally or other Zanu-PF event/program they call makorokoza. If they don't come, they are threatened with a ban for digging for gold. Mudha, it is alleged, operates two youth bases in Mbizo, at “Kwamaiguru and Kujese”, that are used to intimidate and mete out violence against political opposition. These youth are also involved in illegal mining and have been accused of using drugs by an opposition politician.¹⁰⁷ She argues that the same people are involved in political, electoral and gold rush violence.

103. Interview Judith, 18 December 2022

104. CCC Kwekwe Murder Suspects Granted Bail, The Times, 11 - 17 April, 2022

105. “Five in Court for CCC Rally murder”, The Times, 7 - 13, March 2022, p6

106. Nehanda Radio, 4 April 2022 <https://nehandaradio.com/2022/04/04/suspects-in-murder-of-ccc-activist-threaten-to-kill-deceaseds-sister/>. 107. Kwekwe, Councillor, 18 December 2022

2.6 Outlook Towards 2023 Election

The evidence presented above shows that mining areas where artisanal mining is rife, pose certain risks for human rights and a free election. The machete gang violence initially restricted to gold rushes is now a community wide phenomenon.¹⁰⁸ We established those clashes between gangs spill over to other social spaces, creating an environment of fear. Ordinary residents and in particular family members and female partners become collateral. Gangs are also increasingly associated with criminal activities like murder, robberies and rape. The scope of the study did not allow us sufficient resources and time to investigate whether there are those who are criminals in the first instance adopting machete gangs modus operandi. It is possible, but it is unequivocal that machete gangs are doubling into multiple violent crimes. But it does not end there.

Increasingly, machete gangs are being instrumentalised for political objectives. However, it is not a one-way street. Machete gangs also instrumentalise political affiliations for impunity and access.

“
***Gangs are increasingly
associated with criminal
activities like murder,
robberies and rape.***
”

108. Interviews Kadoma, Chegutu, and Bindura

By scanning through media reportage on machete gang violence since 2018, we noticed what seems like an escalation in 2022. While it is not clear cut that this is to do with 2023 elections, it follows a pattern over the years. Enforcement tends to be relaxed toward elections. What is most worrying this time however is the signs of instrumentalisation of machete gangs occurring between and within political parties to deal with opponents.¹⁰⁹ Zanu-PF for example has openly attempted to organise around makorokozas, not least the Makorokoza for ED campaign. The political role of makorokoza cum machete gangs in Kwekwe is becoming too clear to deny. Our informants within police, civil society and machete gangs all agree, with the hypothesis that political violence linked to machete gangs is likely to increase towards elections.¹¹⁰

To compound matters, police appear ill equipped to deal with these levels of violence. Poorly paid, less motivated, underfunded.¹¹¹ They lack resources, cars, fuel, personnel, and other equipment. One police informant observed, “I shudder to think what will happen if we are attacked - especially since some of the people involved are ex-police, ex-army and ex-prison officers”.¹¹² Midlands provincial spokesperson Emmanuel Mahoko was cited in the Midlands Observer as calling for divine intervention in the wake of murders in the region.¹¹³ And the problem is bigger than the police.

Corruption is a festering problem in the whole value chain of the justice system and the problem is bigger than security services.

109. Interviews Kadoma & Bindura

110. ZRP informants, 18 December 2022

111. FGDs Kadoma, Interviews in Kadoma, Chegutu, and Bindura

112. ZRP informant, Chegutu, 18 December 2022

113. The Midlands Observer, Friday 16 April 2021, p3

Prosecutors and magistrates are easily prone to bribery, hence some prominent machete gang leaders are arrested and released quickly on bail or through the influence of money, politicians and top public officials that are involved in ASGM.¹¹⁴ Further, the nature of the involvement of the police, the army, and the CIO in ASGM complicates their role in curbing machete gangs. In fact, most sources claimed that some personnel in the security sector work closely with the violent gangs to earn illicit income from ASGM.¹¹⁵ Also pressure from politically powerful figures and seniors to release those arrested for gold smuggling are common.

There is enough to suggest that political will could make a difference. Where law enforcement agencies have conducted operations, levels of gang violence do decline, for example in Kwekwe in Feb 2019.¹¹⁶ Decisive action followed an address by president Mnangagwa at a ZMF inaugural annual meeting during which he reportedly declared war on machete gangs in November 2019. “If you are found with a machete you are going to jail. That must come to an end...”¹¹⁷ Within a month, police in the Midlands province issued and started enforcing prohibition orders (POs) banning the carrying of weapons used by gangs and complemented this with roadblocks and searches.¹¹⁸ There was also increased deployment in hotspots.¹¹⁹ This was accompanied by a ban on bail for those charged with machete violence. Within eight months in a nationwide operation “No to Anarchy by Artisanal miners” police had arrested over 5000 people in connection with illegal

114. Interview Kadoma, 19 December 2022

115. Interviews Kadoma and Chegutu

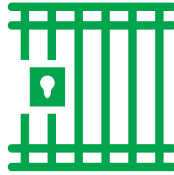
116. The Midlands Observer, Friday 1 February 2019, p6

117. The Midlands Observer, Friday 8 November 2019, p1

118. Statement of provincial spokesperson (The Times, March 15 - 21, 2019, p2, The Midlands Observer. Friday 13 December 2019, p2, The Times, December 20 - 26, 2019, p3

119. The Times, December 13-19, 2019, p1

mining, 3471 of these for possessing dangerous weapons and 1549 for illegal mining.¹²⁰ However these interventions tend to be ad hoc, discretionary upon the executive and therefore short lived. Closer to elections such vigorous enforcement is usually absent.



5000

People arrested in connection with illegal mining.



This PO was issued in the Midlands Observer on Friday 13th of December 2019, a month after President Mnangagwa issued the warning to machete gangs.

On its part, the NPRC as part of its peacebuilding has been holding multi-stakeholder consultations and their provincial chapters have been engaging on the topic of machete gang violence. NPRC has been attempting a whole of society approach which includes government, civil society, miners, traditional leaders and healers.¹²¹ This is commendable but requires coordination and support from other government agencies and political parties.

120. Ibid.

121. The Times, August 30 - September 5, 2019, p7 and The Times, July 5 - 11, 2019, p2



03

SECTION 3: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Machete gangs in ASGM communities are many and they vary in their sizes. It sounds scary to admit machete gang violence in ASGM communities has all the attributes of organised crime in Zimbabwe. Even with the death or arrest of the leaders or members, there are violent traits that are sustained and can be deemed a going concern just like in the business sector. If one gang is heavily defeated, as the case with the Mazinga which allegedly originated from Gokwe, they can retreat, lay low, regroup, recover and plot to regain their lost status. The desire to eliminate rivalry gangs is clear.

It is a dog-eat-dog affair and survival of the fittest is the order of the day. Video messages are frequently sent to sound an alarm to targeted gangs containing gory images of mutilated bodies of victims or brandishing weapons to show they are ready to revenge.

Machete gangs are hierarchical with known leaders that even government officers like the EMA negotiate with to get access with zero harm in areas that are controlled by machete gangs. Backing the shadow machete gangs are powerful politicians and security officers that provides a shield against enforcement of the law by police officers. Prominent gold buyers also provide machete gangs with different kinds of support like transport, food, alcohol, and legal aid. In turn, the machete gangs prove their loyalty by guaranteeing the supply of gold particularly during gold rushes. Both active and fired police and military officers are allegedly entangled with machete gangs as they work together to guarantee access to highly profitable gold pits during gold rushes.

They conspire, plot or plan to carry out violence to maximise their economic gain through gaining easy access to rewarding mining pits, protection of some ASSM, and stealing ore. The machete gangs clearly identify with their leader, a sign of strong loyalty. Evidence shows a clear correlation between increased violence by machete gangs and gold rushes. However, it is important to note that machete gang violence is not only driven by economic gains, but they are also entangled in politics and readily threaten to carry out violence posing threats to the electoral process at local, provincial, and national electoral processes. Although opposition parties are implicated in the use of machete gang violence purportedly for “defence”, evidence



“
Evidence shows a clear correlation between increased violence by machete gangs and gold rushes.
”



suggests that Zanu-PF has a near monopoly concerning the control or significant influence on machete gangs in ASGM communities.

**“
The involvement of machete gangs in both AGM
and political violence implies that organised
crime is not the only risk but the worrying
emergence of terrorism financing traits.
”**

The link between mining, especially ASGM with resources to support political campaign is quite strong. It is not surprising that key gold actors in the supply chains, miners, custom millers, buyers and leaders of ASSM associations are mainly members of Zanu-PF with varying influential positions at local, district, provincial and national level. Scott Sakupwanya who has emerged as the main gold buyer from ASGM is enjoying windfall revenue from an overly generous gold delivery incentive scheme which makes it easy to re-channel some of the proceeds to support Zanu-PF. Allegedly, Scott could have gained roughly US\$27 million and US\$68 million in 2021 and 2022 respectively by delivering slightly above 7 and 18 tonnes of gold to FGR.¹²²

With such bountiful and steady flow of income, tellingly, Scott is one of the team leaders overseeing fundraising for Zanu-PF's campaign targeting the 2023 harmonised elections. Beyond ASGM support, large scale corporate social investments, donations or brown envelopes linked with opaque mining deals are also critical sources of income that are helping to oil Zanu-PF's campaign machinery. For

122. See, <https://miningzimbabwe.com/scott-firm-delivers-14t-of-gold/>

instance, the release of valuable mining claims in the platinum sector and their immediate parcelling to a new investor could have provided significant resources to Zanu-PF in 2008 and 2018 elections. Marange diamonds allegedly played a key role in the 2013 elections. The high demand of lithium globally because of pressure to shift from dirty to clean energy coupled with Zimbabwe's high lithium potential and huge investment flows into the sector makes it a new addition to the matrix of mining and electoral financing. While government enforcement of ASGM tend to lax towards elections, the opposite was experienced in lithium rushes experienced in Mberengwa and Mutuko towards the end of 2022.

Community experiences with machete gangs is clouded by fear, insecurity, and lack of peace. While informal and formal traders record bumper earnings during gold rushes, this is overshadowed by the increased incidence of machete violence at the mining pits that is also exported to shopping and leisure centres and residential areas. At the receiving end of this violence have been women, girls, children, and ordinary members of the community whose socio-economic life is disrupted with little to no recourse. The sheer scale of violence and its victims is hard to measure because official records, to a larger extent, do not tell the significant story of what is happening on the ground. Some of the victims are on the ZRP wanted list, they are afraid of handing themselves over to the police when reporting their cases. They even evade public hospitals that require a police clearance to treat victims of violence by using illicit private care or home-based care facilities. Also, victims who may not be on the ZRP's wanted listed are threatened by machete gangs to deter them from reporting their victimisation to the police, or to withdraw their cases. Court witnesses

are not spared too. The political backing of the machete gangs makes them the untouchables and the community members feel helpless together with some law enforcement officers.

3.1 Recommendations

For Non-State Actors

- Election monitoring and observation should pay particular attention to artisanal mining areas as potential hotspots. Stakeholders involved in the management of elections should jointly consider risk mitigating strategies. This includes the inter-party dialogue mechanism.
- Efforts by CSOs and other stakeholders to bring sustainable peace, promote human rights and responsible gold supply chains should intentionally involve gang leaders, traditional healers, chiefs, kingpins, networks and prominent syndicates and buyers.
- Organisations like ZELA have been calling for specialised environmental courts. This should be seriously considered.
- A robust monitoring plan of politically exposed persons involved in artisanal and small-scale gold mining is needed to gain a grounded and compelling knowledge of how gold is used to undermines democracy during elections.
- Cases of teenage pregnancies present solid evidence for statutory rape. They must be recorded, investigated and perpetrators arrested to stop the vicious and contagious crime against the girl child.
- Civil society organisations should consider developing tools for the documentation of machete gangs related human rights violations,

especially gender base violations. Researchers on this report found systematic data to be a challenge in this regard.

- There is need for decisive political leadership to stem gangs. By instrumentalising these gangs, the ruling party is riding on a tiger. These may become boulder, get out of control, and challenge the state as seen by attacks on the police.
- Zanu PF leadership must walk an extra mile to inspire public confidence that the party does not tolerate those that are name dropping or abusing their relationships to organise violence for maximising their gains from ASGM.

For State Actors

- The state should strengthen local peace building structures to among other things mediate between rival machete gangs to stop the perpetual vicious cycles of violence that are motivated by revenge and monopolistic tendencies of controlling access to rewarding gold mining pits.
- MMMD should consider approaches to artisanal mining which place more ownership and control in the hands of local communities. Since violence is led mostly by outsiders with little social and cultural accountability to the local population this might reduce conflict. For example, in Mberengwa a WhatsApp group of hundreds of locals interested in lithium mining is characterised by group solidarity and explores means to ensure the resource contributes to local economic development.
- Civil servants involved in the entire justice delivery system must be well paid and receive regular training on ethics to shun bribes that are used by machete gangs and their sponsors to defeat the law. Allegedly active members from the security sector – ZRP and ZNA

work with machete gangs to control access when gold rushes occur. The prosecutors and magistrates allegedly have a price, and this has led to known gang leaders get acquitted by the courts.

- Cases of teenage pregnancies present solid evidence for statutory rape. They must be recorded, investigated and perpetrators arrested to stop the vicious and contagious crime against the girl child.
- Law enforcement agencies must appreciate the gravity of violence in ASGM communities as they are dealing with organised criminal gangs that have known hierarchies, motivated to gain economically, are an on-going concern or perpetual operations, corrupt, who believe in survival of the fittest and politically well connected.
- Aspiring female candidates in all ASGM communities for local, district, provincial and national elections deserve greater protection, they must be encouraged to report on victimisation and have unwavering support from the disciplinary procedures of political parties.
- The entire criminal justice system needs reform to ensure institutions act effectively and impartially and to restore public confidence. Communities are now afraid of reporting cases of victimisation and violence because the perpetrators walk free boasting that they are the untouchables.
- Such reforms should include effective witness protection programs for victims of sexual based violence and other crimes.
- ZRP should development and strengthen community policing. The scourge of criminality associated with machete gangs and artisanal mining; political violence requires a whole of society policing strategy.

ANNEX 1: RESEARCH DESIGN

Key Question	Research	Sub-question(s)	Data Sources	Data Method	Stakeholders/Informants	Method(s) of Analysis
What is the historical nexus between politics, mining, HR abuses, violence, and elections in Zimbabwe?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the HR and political situation in the build-up to 2023 Zimbabwe elections? Are there observable historical patterns of violence and HR abuses around election period in mining areas? 	Academic articles NGO reports	Desk review	N/A	Political Economy Analysis (PE) Discourse analysis Thematic coding
How are the Machete gangs impacting the lives realities of mining communities?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are the machete gangs organized? Who is behind them? What is the purpose for their establishment? What is the relationship between the gangs and local community? How do they relate to the local power structures? Both formal and informal? How have they effected community, economic activities, informal trading, livelihoods, safety, and security? 	NGO reports Media Informants	Desk review In-depth interviews	Community members Local leaders Gang members Political Parties Local journalists Police	Political Economy Analysis Discourse analysis Thematic coding Triangulation
In what ways if any, are mining resources being used during election periods?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is mining providing funding for electoral campaigns? Is through formal or informal channels? Who has been getting mining claims in the build-up to elections and why? 	Key informants Media Local journalists	In-depth interviews	Political parties Civil society	Political Economy Analysis Discourse analysis Thematic coding Triangulation
What are the gender aspects of violence in mining communities and the role women in mining play in political violence?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are women affected by the machete gang violence? Is there an increase in GBV linked to gangs and forth coming elections? Beyond the gangs, what other forms of violence do women experience linked to ASM and elections? Are women involved only as victims or perpetrators as well? 	Key informants Media Local journalists	In-depth interviews	Community members Local leaders Gang members Political Parties Local journalists Police	Political Economy Analysis Discourse analysis Thematic coding Triangulation
What is the relationship between mining, gross		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there an upsurge in violence, GBV etc., in areas where ASM is highly concentrated? How 	Reports Key informants	Desk review In-depth interviews	NGOs, Experts Community members	Political Economy Analysis

<p>human rights abuses, and political violence in mining communities in Zimbabwe?</p>	<p>does this compare to other times and other surrounding non-mining areas? Can this be attributed to the 2023 elections? Who is involved? How is this resourced? How is violence affecting the civic, political, social, environmental, and cultural rights of communities?¹²³</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<p>Media Local journalists</p>	<p>Desk review In-depth interviews</p>	<p>Local leaders Gang members Political Parties Local journalists Police</p>	<p>Discourse analysis Thematic coding Triangulation</p>
<p>Examine if artisanal mining areas will be or are already hot spots of gross human rights abuses, electoral and/or political violence</p>	<p>Is there a trend of a spike in violence by machete gangs during election especially 2013, 2018 and the recent by elections Are you confident, less confident, or not sure that machete gang violence will increase in mining communities during elections, and why What measures are in place to curb machete gang violence and are there special preparations to curb machete gang violence during elections?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<p>Key informants Media Local journalists Academic articles</p>	<p>Desk review In-depth interviews</p>	<p>Community members Local leaders Gang members Political Parties Local journalists Police</p>	<p>Political Economy Analysis Discourse analysis Thematic coding Triangulation</p>

123. This can be further broken down as follows: What is the relationship between machete gang violence and the rights of communities to say no to mining? How is machete gang violence impacting on environmental management in the community? Is there freedom to associate with any party in artisanal and small-scale mining community. The assessment will cover Environmental, Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (EESCRs).

ANNEX 2:

LIST OF DATA SOURCES

Key Desk Sources

- Journal articles
- NGO Reports
- Newspaper Reports

Key Informants

Harare

CSOs (ZELA, CNRG, ZPP), Experts, Ministry of mines, Gender commission

Bindura

Police, Artisanal miners, Gang member, Community members (gender balanced), CBO, Women in Mining, Political parties and their youth formations (ZANU-PF, CCC, MDC)

Kwekwe

Police, Artisanal miners, Gang member, Community members, Journalist (Midlands Observer) Women in Mining, CBO, Political parties (ZANU-PF, CCC, MDC)

Kadoma

Police, Artisanal miners, Gang member, Community members, CBO, Women in Mining, Political parties [ZANU-PF, CCC, MDC]

Gweru

Journalist (The Times Gweru)

