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## **#ZimbabweanLivesMatter vs #ThisFlag: A comparative discourse analysis of two social media movements in Zimbabwe**

### ***Abstract***

*Zimbabwe's socio-political environment is characterized by political instability, rampant corruption and a general constitutional decay, in which oppressed citizens are restricted in their efforts to make their dissatisfaction heard (Sabao & Chikara, 2020). Under Robert Gabriel Mugabe's rule, citizen protest was often met with physical violence and intimidation tactics by the ruling party, a trend which has only continued under President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa's administration. Thus, a hesitancy to publicly protest has developed and continued, one that has only been exacerbated by the global COVID-19 pandemic. However, with the emergence of information and communications technology and the popularity of virtual networks such as Twitter, new forms of protest have emerged, forms centralised on interactive discourse. This study seeks to unpack this research problem by investigating two social media movements prolific under each administration, namely, #ThisFlag under the Mugabe administration and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter under the Mnangagwa administration. By presenting a comparative discourse analysis of the two campaigns, this study investigates the differences and similarities associated with campaign discourse, exploring the degree of continuity present across the two movements. Rather than examine the role social media played in each respective campaign, analysis of discourse provides an in-road to the key opinions, debates and concerns characteristic of the movements themselves. Notwithstanding this comparison, this study justifies that the success of digital activism is that it transcends geo-political borders and institutional constraints enforced by government, particularly as such constraints have continued despite the change in national leadership.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe's socio-political environment is characterised by political instability, rampant corruption and a general constitutional decay (Sabao & Chikara, 2020). Following the 1979 Lancaster House agreement – a ceasefire declaration ending the Rhodesian war/liberation struggle – and the country's first democratic elections in 1980, Robert Gabriel Mugabe's Zimbabwe African Nationalist Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party swept into power (Hammett, 2011). Despite the party's initial focus on promoting growth, equity and reconciliation, citizen unrest grew after two decades of unfulfilled policies and poor economic performance. Economic challenges such as the unavailability of essential goods and services, foreign exchange restrictions and rising unemployment led to socio-political discontent among many people in Zimbabwe and the formation of the party's most prominent political rival: the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The rise in political competition and the apparent shift in political space resulted in ZANU-PF turning to extra-legal tactics to curb opposition momentum and preserve the pre-millennium status quo. Consequently, polarisation gradually became a defining characteristic of Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape, with ZANU-PF mobilising specific discourses in a bid to 'legitimise' the violence and extra-legal tactics imposed. Under Mugabe's administration, and by presenting a partial view of Zimbabwe coalesced around calls for unity and patriotism, ZANU-PF's actions were attributed to the intolerance for dissent. The government, therefore, utilised discourses of unity and patriotism to mask their repressive actions, acting in the 'defence' of the nation. When confronted with conditions of vulnerability, leaders' concerns with control generally took precedence over either liberation or democracy, leading to increasingly authoritarian and exclusivist policies. According to Hammett (2011), the excessive use of state power demonstrated by ZANU-PF brings challenges to the process of democracy in Zimbabwe to the fore by highlighting intolerance of critique and dissent, discouragement of the development of a critically engaged citizenry, and disregard for human rights (Hammett, 2011). Hammett (2011) notes that such developments can be taken to demonstrate not only the insecurity of officials but also a kind of reinforcement of ZANU-PF's powerful presence.

Within this repressive political state, progressive civic action and counter-hegemonic campaigning were heavily restricted by the ruling political party through violent resistance and draconian laws, which directly diminished freedom of expression and freedom of assembly (Chitanana, 2020). Most notably, with polarisation gradually becoming a defining characteristic of Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape, there was a rise in contradictory discourse and narratives portrayed by opposing political parties. ZANU-PF recognised the role and value of the media in disseminating specific discourses and, therefore, in an effort to retain political control, utilised state-owned publications to convey specific government-aligned messages to the public in a unilateral manner. Control over media institutions, specifically, gives the government the power to influence the masses to adopt its ideologies. Regarding freedom of assembly, the government faced demonstrations after the price of bread doubled; riots in 1997 by war veterans due to poor conditions; a major civil strike in 1996; a mass stay-away in 1997 supported by 3.5 million workers; and food riots in 1998 over spiralling prices. Additionally, in 1992, ZimRights was established, an organisation that aimed to organise and mobilise citizens around political issues such as the repeal of the repressive legislature. In response, ZANU-PF created their own Constitutional Commission (CC), which sought to control public

outreach and draft a separate constitution (Hodgkinson, 2019). Thereafter, citizen protest was often met with physical violence and intimidation tactics by the ruling party, restricting in-person, grassroots protests significantly.

However, in 2017, Mugabe was removed from office by a military coup, with the presidency being assumed by then-vice President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa. In a 2018 general election, Mnangagwa was officially elected president. However, despite this 'change' in regime and promises of reform, economic progress and unity, the new president did not necessarily usher in a change of politics, but rather, authoritarian rule and violent actions inflicted on citizens have, in fact, continued. In this regard, scholars contend that despite the country's new political leaders claiming that a new politics had begun, opposition leaders promoted the narrative that Mnangagwa represented the past, and thus, a significant change could not be expected. ZANU-PF and, by association, Mnangagwa confirmed these suspicions through their violent crackdowns on protests. With the rise in protests in 2018 against election result delays, six people were killed by the military and police, and a harsh crackdown on opposition and civic activists soon followed. During the Mugabe regime, Dorman (2016) contends that this sort of response reaffirmed the lack of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, and consequently, counter-hegemonic discourse. However, with the similarity in the crackdown of protests, a continuation of repressive actions from Mugabe's regime, particularly with the hesitancy to publicly protest, was seen to have only continued under the Mnangagwa regime.

This study seeks to unpack this research problem by investigating alternative forms of activism that have emerged in response to the repressive socio-political climate in Zimbabwe. With the introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) and the growing popularity of virtual networks such as Facebook and Twitter, new forms of protest emerged through the form of digital activism. Coupled with the direct restriction of freedom of expression and assembly in Zimbabwe, ICTs have made it possible for discontented citizens to voice their grievances, opinions and counter-hegemonic discourses online. Accordingly, there has been a dramatic increase in the use of virtual networks as a form of digital activism where activists challenge the ruling political party through online campaigns. The success of online campaigns is largely due to online platforms functioning as a subaltern public sphere – a space where the constraints and surveillance of an authoritarian state are circumvented (Gukurume, 2017). As the socio-political space in Zimbabwe became increasingly restricted and the violence and intimidation tactics imposed on citizens accelerated, digital activism has arisen as both an important and increasingly valuable tool for protesting. Schradie (2018) suggests that as online processes become more salient in political action, digital technology resources become increasingly relevant for movements. Online-intense digital activism can lower participation costs, rendering collective action and resource mobilisation theories less relevant in favour of newer theories of mobilisation in the digital era (Schradie, 2018). What's more, digital activism has only been accelerated with the introduction of new forms of communication, specifically, social media platforms. The development of these interactive, horizontal networks of communication has created a space where discourse can be shared, communicated and challenged without fear of retaliation from political actors. According to Castells (2007), under these conditions, insurgent politics and social movements are able to intervene more decisively in the new communication space. Accordingly, protests have become more public than ever before, attributed to social media platform use (Chitanana, 2020).

Economic collapse, ZANU-PF's authoritarian rule and the continued repressive media space in Zimbabwe have accelerated social media movement usage, leading to the rise of social media movements in Zimbabwe and, notably,

two of the country's most prominent movements: the #ThisFlag movement and the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement. According to Chitanana (2019), the #ThisFlag social media movement can be considered one of the earliest forms of people-driven digital activism in Zimbabwe and is viewed to be the first time that online protests translated into offline collective action. Initially, the movement started with a video posted on Facebook by a Pastor, Evan Mawarire, on the country's 36<sup>th</sup> Independence Day – 18 April 2016. Mawarire's video addressed political and economic repression, serving as a plea for change in the country. What started out as a social media rant turned into a rallying cry for ordinary citizens, with Mawarire's video essentially kickstarting a large-scale social media movement. Correspondingly, with civic unrest continuing under Mnangagwa's leadership, the birth of the country's second large-scale social media movement was witnessed following the arrest of opposition party members in a May 2020 protest in Zimbabwe's capital, Harare. These two social media movements are considered to be the biggest to take place in Zimbabwe in terms of reach and participation. As such, a variety of research is available regarding each of these campaigns, with studies exploring the role social media played, the impacts on the broader socio-political environment and the effectiveness of each campaign. In terms of discourse analysis, several studies have been dedicated to exploring the dominant discourses of each campaign in pursuit of identifying the key drivers. However, these studies have typically been based on individual case studies, with the #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movements investigated in isolation. Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by providing a comparative discourse analysis of the two campaigns. In doing so, insight into the differences and/or similarities regarding discourse will be made clear, with an exploration as to the level of continuity present across each campaign and, correspondingly, each administration. The purpose of this study is not to identify the role social media played in each respective campaign but rather to explore the discourse associated with the hashtags used in each campaign. Whether or not each campaign translated into offline action or not is a separate study in itself. An investigation into discourse provides an in-road to the grievances and narratives associated with two different social media movements under two different administrations. However, despite any differences or similarities, this study justifies that the success of digital activism is that it transcends geo-political borders and institutional constraints enforced by the government, particularly as such constraints have continued despite the change in national leadership.

In examining discourse, this study is centred on three primary research questions:

- *What are the dominant discourses associated with the hashtags used in each social media campaign?*
- *Are there any differences or similarities between these discourses?*
- *What do these differences or similarities reflect about the repressive character of the Mugabe and Mnangagwa regimes?*

This study draws on the two primary theoretical foundations, namely, Comparative Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Elite Continuity Theory. According to Luke (1997, p. 54), CDA is defined as "the use of an ensemble of techniques for the study of textual practice and language use as social and cultural practices," emphasising how texts can be associated with social actions, meaningful and coherent instances of spoken and written language use. CDA focuses on how social relations, identity, knowledge and power are constructed through written and spoken texts. By examining the mode of text, in conjunction with the textual components of the message itself, an understanding of the social relations, knowledge, and intention can be achieved. Moreover, in pursuit of identifying the differences and similarities associated with each campaign, this study draws on features associated with the Elite Continuity Model,

employing a newly established model of Discourse Continuity to identify the extent to which continuity is present across movement discourse and what this reflects about each regime. Considering the aim of this study is to identify the dominant discourses evident across each campaign, examining the degree of continuity between such discourses and how this reflects the respective political regimes, the researcher created a new model to comprehensively analyse the research questions. As such, this study reveals that despite a change in political leadership, the similarities associated with social media movement discourse reflect distinct similarities regarding the socio-political environment in Zimbabwe. Despite the regime change, continuity in discourse shows evidence of continuity in repression.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### ZIMBABWEAN CONTEXT

#### POLITICAL BACKGROUND

According to Lauren Young (2019), Zimbabwe is characterised by a long history of repressive violence designed to reduce the political participation of opposition supporters. This repressive violence is seen to have roots in colonial violence, with Marker (2003) stating that intractable conflicts are found in many areas that were once colonised, with imperialist practices and policies - especially those concerning boundaries, ethnic rivalry, the uneven distribution of resources and human rights violations - and lack of good governance found at the heart of protracted problems. Following the 1979 Lancaster House agreement – a ceasefire declaration ending the Rhodesian war – and the country's first democratic elections in 1980, Robert Gabriel Mugabe's ZANU-PF party swept into power (Hammett, 2011). ZANU-PF's initial focus was to promote growth, equity and reconciliation and to consolidate a coalition of support framed by discourses of unity and nationalism. However, the transition from a militarised liberation movement to a democratic government led to politics of 'command' emerging strongly in the centralisation of control (Hammett, 2011). This led to the country's post-independence political space being extremely narrow, dominated by ZANU-PF as the ruling political party. Subsequently, this limited socio-political space proves to be a valuable point of inquiry in which further analysis provides sufficient background to this study.

An important source to this study is Dan Hodgkinson (2019), who, in a journal article titled, *The Mnangagwa Era? Periodisation and Politics in Zimbabwe* provides a comprehensive analysis of the circumstances leading to political polarisation in Zimbabwe. Hodgkinson (2019) posits that ZANU-PF's consolidation of its control over politics and the consequential political polarisation that occurred stems from union campaigns in the 1990s, reaffirmed by external bereavement in conjunction with internal dissatisfaction. The late 1980s and 1990s were complex years of flux in the aftermath of ZANU-PF's project of independence-era developmentalism. Despite initial ZANU-PF campaigns to establish a legacy of nationalism and unity, Hodgkinson (2019) notes that economic challenges concerning foreign exchange shortages, an overvalued currency and nationwide shortages of goods led to socio-political discontent among many people in Zimbabwe. Consequently, ZANU-PF faced demonstrations after the price of bread doubled; riots in 1997 by war veterans due to poor conditions; a major civil strike in 1996; a mass stay-away in 1997 supported by 3.5 million workers; and food riots in 1998 over spiralling prices (Hodgkinson, 2019). In addition to civil society disapproval, Hodgkinson (2019) posits that ZANU-PF was faced with internal discontent by party members such as Margaret Dongo. In response to ongoing civil unrest, new non-governmental organisations such as ZimRights –

founded in 1992 – emerged and began to organise and mobilise around political issues such as the repeal of the repressive legislature (Hodgkinson, 2019). It is out of these politically driven civic groups that the National Constitutive Assembly (NCA) emerged – an organisation focused on the establishment of a new constitution. According to Hodgkinson (2019), this widespread grassroots campaign initiated a discussion around a new constitution and led to the citizenry beginning to use the language of rights to articulate alternative ideas of nationhood. Recognising the danger of this, ZANU-PF formulated their own CC, which sought to control public outreach and draft a separate constitution (Hodgkinson, 2019). Hodgkinson (2019) acknowledges that it is through the NCA campaign and the associated ZANU-PF reactions that polarisation formed, leading to the emergence of a rival political party: the MDC.

Extending Hodgkinson's notion regarding the rise of the MDC due to political polarisation, Chitanana (2019) provides insight into the shifts in the political landscape following the formation of the MDC. Chitanana (2019) notes that after nearly 20 years of unfulfilled promises by the state, as well as significant economic underperformance due to government mismanagement, the rise of a secondary political party was evident: the MDC. In his article, *From Kubatana to #ThisFlag: Trajectories of digital activism in Zimbabwe*, Chitanana (2019) posits that the MDC comprises an amalgamation of civil society organisations, workers and students' unions, with the formation of the movement initiating a radical shift in the dynamic of political life in the country. Now, with two dominant political parties, opportunities for progressive civic action and counter-hegemonic campaigns and narratives were created. However, the rise in political competition, as seen by ZANU-PF, and the apparent shift in political space resulted in ZANU-PF turning to extra-legal tactics to curb opposition momentum and preserve the pre-millennium status quo. In his research, Chitanana (2019) recognises anti-establishment activism in Zimbabwe to have grown in the late 1980s, predominantly as a result of increasing disillusionment over pre-independence promises in the midst of rampant corruption. Accordingly, Chitanana (2019) offers a similar perspective to Hodgkinson (2019), identifying the role of disillusionment and discontent in influencing political polarisation.

Hodgkinson (2019) and Chitanana (2019) provide an insightful overview of the start of polarisation and the rise of the MDC party in Zimbabwe. However, further research undertaken by Lauren Young presents an alternative view, delving deeper into political violence and repression. In a journal article titled *The Polarisation of State Repression: Fear and Dissent Decisions in Zimbabwe*, Young (2019) suggests that there are two major periods of repression in Zimbabwe's history, each directed as a potential threat to ZANU-PF's power. According to Young (2019), the first period comprises an electoral challenge to ZANU-PF and the violent retaliation that commenced. Shortly after independence in 1980, ZANU-PF used its armed forces to brutally quash a potential insurgent and electoral challenge from the Ndebele minority group living in Matabeleland. Young (2019) notes that as many as 20,000 citizens were killed by the government during this period. Additionally, Young (2019) describes the second period of repression to culminate from the formation of the MDC party. Consistent with Hodgkinson's (2019) and Chitanana's (2019) notions, Young (2019) recognises how MDC grew out of the country's major trade union, gaining significant public support and opposing ZANU-PF ideologies. Shortly after the unexpected defeat of ZANU-PF's proposed constitution in a referendum – as noted by Hodgkinson (2019) in the formation of the CC – a new wave of violence against opposition supporters and organisers began, further polarising the political space. By narrowing down these two repressive events, Young (2019) brings attention to ZANU-PF's violent reactions to apparent dissent. However, Young (2019) further elaborates on the notion of polarisation, investigating how ZANU-PF utilised violence and

intimidation tactics to reaffirm their political position, which only further accelerated polarisation in the country. Specifically, Young (2019) emphasises the violence imposed on white farmers – who had been an important source of funding and mobilisation for the MDC during the referendum – as well as the intimidation prevalent during the 2008 election period. In her article, Young (2019) quotes an opposition supporter describing early acts of violence as “aimed at sending a message to all, there was both fear and revulsion, a warning to others, and a lesson that authorities can humiliate anyone.” Additionally, a civil society leader explained that this type of violence is a “tool of intimidation. By beating up people like Morgan Tsvangirai – MDC political leader and Presidential candidate -, they are sending the message that no one is safe. Once the word gets out into the rural areas that you are not safe, this will have an enormous impact (Young, 2019). Young’s (2019) analysis of the 2008 elections, where ZANU-PF essentially lost the Presidency to MDC, provides an explication of the “terror campaign launched with such scope and intensity” that ZANU-PF managed to retain power. According to Young (2019), the violence in 2008 set off a chain of events that ultimately resulted in ZANU-PF winning the 2013 election through a mix of popularity, vote buying and manipulation of electoral rules. Young’s (2019) investigation of the political space in Zimbabwe introduces the concept of repression, providing a critical background to how far ZANU-PF was willing to go to retain control.

Another valuable source informing this study is Daniel Hammett (2011), who, in a journal article titled *Resistance, Power and Geopolitics in Zimbabwe*, provides insight into the discourses mobilised by ZANU-PF in a bid to ‘legitimise’ the violence and extra-legal tactics imposed. Rather than provide an examination of the polarisation within Zimbabwe, Hammett (2011) provides insight into the excessive use of state power with regard to the strategy implemented by ZANU-PF. Specifically, Hammett (2011) posits that upon ZANU-PF’s draft constitution being rejected amid popular disillusionment with the state, the government responded by mobilising anti-imperial discourses, attacks on the judiciary and the rule of law, land- and factory invasions, and violence against opponents. What makes Hammett’s (2011) investigation different from that of Hodgkinson or Young is that he recognises the role that discourse played in ZANU-PF’s repression. Hammett (2011) states that the discourses mobilised to ‘legitimise’ repressive actions drew from anti-imperial/colonial rhetoric and the growing dominance of patriotic history and patriotic journalism to provide political interpretations of history and Zimbabwe. By presenting a partial view of Zimbabwe coalesced around calls for unity and patriotism, ZANU-PF’s actions were attributed to the intolerance for dissent. The government, therefore, utilised discourses of unity and patriotism to mask their repressive actions, acting in the ‘defence’ of the nation. Within Hammett’s (2011) interpretation, this message creates particular ideas of who belongs to the nation and what actions and rhetoric are both expected of and may be deployed against them – therefore warranting the violent actions imposed by ZANU-PF. Therefore, Hammett (2011) extends on Hodgkinson and Young’s notions of repression, acknowledging that when confronted with conditions of political crisis and vulnerability, leaders’ concerns with control take precedence over either liberation or democracy, leading to increasingly authoritarian and exclusivist policies. However, Hammett (2011) goes further to suggest that the excessive use of state power demonstrated by ZANU-PF brings challenges to the process of democracy in Zimbabwe to the fore by highlighting intolerance of critique and dissent, discouragement of the development of a critically engaged citizenry, and disregard for human rights (Hammett, 2011). Hammett (2011) notes that such developments can be taken to demonstrate not only the insecurity of officials but also, again, a kind of reinforcement of ZANU-PF’s powerful presence. ZANU-PF’s rule, according to Hammett (2011), can be argued to not only be a matter of elite control of state rule but also a matter of contested localities where rule is resisted, thwarted and subverted.

## MEDIA LAWS AND RELATIONS

With polarisation gradually becoming a defining characteristic of Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape, the rise in contradictory discourses and narratives portrayed by opposing political parties has been noted. As Hammett (2011) suggests, ZANU-PF used specific discourses to legitimise repressive actions. ZANU-PF recognised the role and value of the media in disseminating specific discourses and, therefore, in an effort to retain political control, utilised state-owned publications to convey specific government-aligned messages to the public in a unilateral manner.

Consequently, state-owned publications such as *The Herald* became entangled with state power, predominantly serving as a mouthpiece for the ruling establishment (Ntini & Mangeya, 2020). Such publications were and continue to be used to consolidate the power of the ruling government, pushing narratives that favour government objectives whilst minimising alternative narratives. However, with the rise of political opposition and the privately-owned media, the populace was awarded alternative narratives to that of the state-aligned ones (Ntini & Mangeya, 2020).

Independent media publications – free from government control – became increasingly important sources of interest as they attempted to offer alternative anti-propagandist perspectives to that of state-controlled media, demonstrating a constitutional right to freedom of expression in an increasingly trying media environment (Mazango, 2005).

Therefore, polarisation presented in the political sphere transpired into a polarised media space, reinforced through the distinct separation between the state-owned media – characterised by government alignment- and the privately-owned media – characterised by anti-government ideologies. Subsequently, an investigation into this polarised media landscape is essential in understanding the rise of political protesting and the dominant discourses present in modern-day social media movements.

According to (Chari, 2010), the press remains the predominant source of information for the majority of the population and consequently takes centre stage as a terrain for hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses. Zimbabwe's media environment continued to display a highly biased narrative, whereby injustice, corruption and government-aligned reporting of events were characteristic. The authoritarian government focused on media control so as to use these avenues of information to maximise their influence on the populace (Ndlovu, 2015). Considering this observation, an important source to this study is Everette Ndlovu (2015), who, in a journal article titled '*Three Waves of Media Repression in Zimbabwe*', investigated how the ruling political party utilised the media to consolidate its own power while promoting government-aligned narratives and ideology. In her extensive research, Ndlovu (2015) suggests that with the rise of the MDC and consequential polarised political space due to overt power differentials, control of major institutions – particularly those with power and infrastructure – was tightened by the political elite – ZANU-PF. Control over media institutions, specifically, gives the government the power to influence the masses to adopt its ideologies while restricting alternative narratives of the opposition. Subsequently, state-controlled media – regulated according to specific legal parameters instituted by the government – have played a pivotal role in supporting and maintaining the status quo, helping the government hold onto power by determining what information reaches the populace in a unidirectional way (Ndlovu, 2015). In addition to showing how media is used as a political tool, unilaterally disseminating tailored information that aligned with government-specific ideologies, Ndlovu (2015) notes that the government not only utilises state-owned media but limits the space for alternative discourse through the prevention of the emergence of divergent voices that might counter state hegemony. Through a state media monopoly, government attempts to control political discourse disseminated to the public. Accordingly, this article is an important source as it aids in investigating the state-dominated media environment. In pursuit of Ndlovu's explication of the

state-dominated media environment in Zimbabwe, Eric Mazango, in a journal article titled '*Media games and the shifting of spaces for political communication in Zimbabwe*,' further elaborates on the denial of alternative discourse through his substantial research regarding government media space domination. Mazango (2005) stipulates that by controlling a significant portion of the media market, the government has been able to effectively seize the space of public communication, despite this space earmarked for the sustaining and agenda setting of democratic discourse. Consequently, Mazango (2005) suggests that this media monopoly has enabled ruling political party communicators and political persuaders to restrict the opposition an opportunity to air contrary views and, not least, have painted them as enemies of the state. Naturally, controversial public debates on issues facing the country have been framed using rhetorical strategies that emphasise and prioritise policy goals and policy images consistent with the ZANU-PF manifesto whilst selectively highlighting the opposition's weaknesses (Mazango, 2005). Accordingly, state media has been used predominantly as a tool for government message dissemination, in which the direct restrictions of private media channels have only made this trend more effective (Mazango, 2005). The highly restricted media space in Zimbabwe, therefore, emerges as an ideal lens through which to analyse and interpret the politics of communication regulation in the country.

With the rise of the independent media in the late 1990s, the Zimbabwean population were not only offered an alternative source of information but information inconsistent with that of state media. Various scholars have contended that despite the restricted media environment in Zimbabwe, what remains of the private press continues to be vigorous and outspoken, occupying a role in challenging both state-controlled media and government (Mazango, 2005). An informative source to this study is Dumisani Moyo (2009), who, in a journal article titled '*Citizen journalism and the parallel market of information in Zimbabwe's 2008 election*,' provides insight into the role of the independent media in Zimbabwe. Specifically, Moyo (2009) suggests that independent publications have a role to play in challenging both the state-controlled media – through the provision of counter-hegemonic narratives – and the limitations placed on freedom of expression itself. As Andrew Butler (1997) contends, countries effectively governed through authoritarian regimes or full-blown dictatorships, such as Zimbabwe, more often display environments in which freedom of expression is not only poor but intentionally restricted by the government. In his article, Moyo (2009) synthesises the value of the privately-owned press in directly contradicting state-owned publications' narratives and subsequently providing alternative sources of information that counter state hegemony and usher in need for action that can potentially facilitate the introduction of a democratic process in the country, through dialogue and unhindered citizen participation (Ndlovu, 2015). Extending on Moyo's (2009) notion of challenging state media, Mendelson and Glenn (2000) provide further insight into the role of the private press in Zimbabwe. In a journal article titled '*Democracy Assistance and NGO strategies in post-communist societies*,' Mendelson and Glenn (2000) suggest that the independent press essentially act as a watchdog of potential abuses in political life. Throughout their research, Mendelson and Glenn (2000) contend that while state-owned publications emphasise and prioritise messages consistent with the ruling party manifesto, privately-owned publications provide criticism of political life, holding the government accountable through contradictory discourse. Consequently, the rise of the independent media in Zimbabwe presented significant challenges for ZANU-PF as they sort to retain control of the narratives portrayed to the public, injecting government-aligned ideologies in a unilateral way. These two papers provided sufficient insight into the rise of independent media and therefore, of alternative discourse. However, they failed to consider

government responses to the privately-owned press and the consequential actions intended to silence contradicting voices. Therefore, further analysis is required.

With the introduction of the private press, unsurprisingly, the government, in a bid to retain political and informative control over the public, unleashed a series of extra-legal tactics to both restrict and reduce the rise of contradicting narratives. Gicheru (2014) notes that in this regard, the government utilised its security agencies and wider justice system to silence opposing journalists – notably, through their arrest and sentencing. Considered to be 'dissidents,' these journalists allegedly posed a significant threat to the government and its media control system or at least appeared to post a threat. While representing a direct attack on press freedom, the government went one step further to establish and implement harsh media laws intended to suppress counter-narratives. Thus, these tactics both created and enforced a highly restrictive media space in Zimbabwe. According to Ndlovu (2015), Zimbabwe has displayed the dubious distinction of enjoying a continuous tradition of developing, implementing and perfecting legislation that restricted and sought to close down the democratic space. With regards to harsh media laws, scholars have suggested that the application of controversial statutes has significantly contributed to the restrictive media environment. Specifically, John Mpfu and Sylod Chimhenga (2013), in an article titled '*The impact of Zimbabwean media laws on the work of journalists and media organisations*, propose that the introduction of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) (2002), which states that "all mass media outlets must obtain a registration certificate from the Ministry of Information" (MISA, 2004), curtails the growth of alternative media to state-controlled media (Mpfu & Chimhenga, 2013). Specifically, Mpfu and Chimhenga (2013) suggest that the AIPPA grants the Ministry of Information too much authority, presenting the opportunity for abuse of power in which the control and intimidation over license holders – and those seeking licenses – has become prevalent. Consequently, the introduction of this statute has enabled ZANU-PF to deny those who do not affiliate or align with the ruling party licenses, resulting in a biased media environment (Mpfu & Chimhenga, 2013). Additional research undertaken by Tatenda Chitagu (2018) extends the impacts of the AIPPA, providing insight into these repressive media laws. In an article titled '*The Dangerous Games: Relations between Zimbabwe's independent media and ZANU-PF*, Zvodo (2002), as cited in Chitagu (2018, p. 4), describes the AIPPA to be "the most calculated and determined assault on Zimbabweans' constitutional liberties." Specifically, Chitagu (2018) draws attention to the notion of repressive in which the AIPPA, amongst other repressive laws, inflict. In addition to registration requirements with the Ministry of Information, Chitagu (2018) explains that the AIPPA additionally denies journalists access to public information from government departments and bans foreign companies and non-Zimbabwean individuals from owning shares in media houses. Consequently, the AIPPA prevents independent publications from attaining licenses as well as restricts the information accessed by independent journalists – critical for a free and fair press (Chitagu, 2018). What's more, Chitagu (2018) provides insight into information framing limitations initiated by the implemented Public Order and Security Act (POSA, 2002). According to Chitagu (2018), the implementation of the POSA, specifically Section 16, which criminalises communicating statements "prejudicial to the state and its interests, in the absence of reasonable grounds that they are not true," directly suppresses freedom of expression and prevents the emergence of a free media environment (MISA, 2004). By prescribing a jail term of up to one year to people who make statements "knowing or realising that there is a risk or possibility of engendering feelings of hostility towards, or cause hatred, contempt or ridicule of the President," the POSA – and subsequently, ZANU-PF -, forces people and publications to frame political messages with a specific pro-government perception. These sources provide valuable insight into the current

media environment in Zimbabwe by comprehensively describing implemented media laws and ongoing media relations within the country.

## MUGABE VS MNANGAGWA

Out of the 41 years since Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, Robert Gabriel Mugabe was President for 30 of those years. Initially elected Prime Minister in the country's 1980 elections, Mugabe became Zimbabwe's first executive president in 1987. According to Chitanana (2019), Mugabe's leadership in Zimbabwe descended from failed attempts to form a one-party state in the 1980s to a brutal authoritarian regime that used intimidation, propaganda and violence to retain power. With his removal from office by a military coup on 19 November 2017 - considered a decisive move by then-Vice President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa and Commander of the Zimbabwean Defence Forces Constantino Gubeva Chiwenga -, many people rejoiced at the end of Mugabe's ruinous tenure (Coltart, 2018). However, many scholars have proposed that despite a 'change' in the regime, a new President in office has not necessarily ushered in a change of politics or repressive tendencies, but rather, authoritarian rule and violent actions inflicted on citizens have, in fact, continued.

Having comprehensively investigated Zimbabwe's political landscape under Mugabe's role in previous sections, insight into the rise of Mnangagwa and literature regarding the continuation of one-party rule is necessary. According to Roger Southall (2017), Mnangagwa had been one of the principal architects of ZANU-PF's security state. With direct involvement in some of Zimbabwe's most brutal campaigns – Mnangagwa was considered the orchestrator of the Gukurahundi (the violent crackdown upon ZANU-PF's rival liberation movement, the Zimbabwe African People's Union and its support base in Matabeleland) and the militarised campaign against the opposition in the 2008 general election – Mnangagwa played a key role in ensuring that the security apparatus remained loyal to the interests of ZANU-PF (Southall, 2017). Therefore, despite using his inauguration speech to assert that as president, he would serve "all citizens, regardless of colour, creed, religion, tribe, totem or political affiliation," there appeared a wide consensus that he would remain loyal to the ruling party. Considering his rise to power, an important source to this study is Roger Southall (2017), who, in an article titled '*Bob's Out, the Croc's in: Continuity or Change in Zimbabwe?*' investigates elements of continuity apparent in Mnangagwa's 'new' regime. Initially, Mnangagwa pledged major political and economic reforms across the country, with specific promises to run a government characteristic of political diversity. However, these consisted of largely unfulfilled and empty promises as his first cabinet was specifically designed for ZANU-PF-aligned individuals. This way, Mnangagwa, like Mugabe, established control and power while re-asserting ZANU-PF's alliance – and control over – the military. Consequently, his cabinet selection – of which the majority were from his inner circle of friends and comrades - confirmed suspicions that ZANU-PF's power retention and authority would remain unchanged. Additionally, Southall (2017) suggests that the continuation, and even further influence, of security factors within government represented a continuation rather than a change in regime. Specifically, Mnangagwa's appointment of his two vice presidents – Chiwenga and Kembo Mohadi (Minister of State for National Security 2015 – 2017 and Minister of Defence, Security and War Veterans thereafter) - reinforced the influence of the military in politics. This article aids in an understanding of the continuation of the one-party state across the two regimes.

Further research undertaken by Dan Hodgkinson emphasises the continuation of violence across the two regimes. In a journal article titled '*The Mnangagwa Era? Periodisation and Politics in Zimbabwe*,' Hodgkinson (2019) provides

insight into the authoritarian and repressive realities of ZANU-PF's post-coup rule. Specifically, Hodgkinson (2019) contends that despite the country's new political leaders claiming that a new politics had begun, opposition leaders promoted the narrative that Mnangagwa represented the past. Hodgkinson (2019) notes that ZANU-PF and, by association, Mnangagwa confirmed these suspicions through their violent crackdown on protests. With the rise in protests in 2018 against the delaying of election results, six people were killed by the military and police, and a harsh crackdown on opposition and civic activists soon followed. Hodgkinson (2019) contends that this response represents a continuation of repressive actions from Mugabe's regime. What's more, Hodgkinson (2019) suggests that repressive realities were again demonstrated in January 2019, following a dramatic increase in fuel duty that raised the price by 250%. According to Hodgkinson (2019), the increase in fuel duty sparked an influx of protests across almost every major city in the country, leading to the government imposing a social media shutdown in a bid to quell the protests. Shut down for four days; social media could not be utilised to mobilise protests. What's more, police and military units were deployed country-wide – representing a major crackdown – resulting in 17 people being killed and 954 arrested – including protest organisers. Furthermore, ZANU-PF continued with another trend seen in the Mugabe era, specifically, the manipulation of electoral processes. In the Mugabe era, primary manipulation was seen through the changing of citizen eligibility to vote through the 2001 Citizens Act; gerrymandering through the 2005 Delimitation Commission; restricting observation from international parties in 2002; directly controlling the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC); and manipulating the Voters' Roll (Hodgkinson, 2019). Apart from the re-introduction of election observers, these trends continued in the Mnangagwa era and are still seen in Zimbabwe today. Accordingly, Hodgkinson (2019) acknowledges that viewing the shift in presidential office as offering some kind of fresh start was naïve, as a continuation, not change, was a dominant characteristic.

In pursuit of what has been described as the continuation of protest response, Hodgkinson (2019) provides further insight into continuities regarding ZANU-PF's use of coercive force. Specifically, Hodgkinson (2019) notes that again, just like in the 2008 election, where ZANU-PF delayed election results and unleashed a campaign of violence against opposition politicians and perceived supporters, the 2018 election saw a similar outcome. One of the key factors demonstrating continuity in protest and electoral violence was state security reactions to protests. Specifically, under Mnangagwa's regime in August 2018, January 2019, and August 2019, violent crackdowns of protests were seen. Consequently, as one of the men responsible for some of ZANU-PF's worst campaigns of violence over the last 40 years, Mnangagwa's rule seems set to be just as authoritarian, violent and unaccountable as Mugabe's as these events have shown (Hodgkinson, 2019).

## **THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The global COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented social, economic and political impacts across the globe. On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation recognised COVID-19 as a pandemic, largely attributed to the virus' rapid and uncontrollable transmission. As of 26 May 2021, global coronavirus statistics represented 168 million cases with 3.49 million deaths. However, the pandemic not only initiated a global health crisis but an economic and financial one, with scholars suggesting that the COVID-19 recession – which began in February 2020 – is the worst global economic crisis since the Great Depression. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (2020), despite the growing confidence that an end to the health pandemic is in sight, a viable vaccine will not halt the spread of economic damage, which will be felt long into the future, especially by the poorest and most

vulnerable. With the global economy contracting by a staggering 4.3% in 2020, developing countries such as Zimbabwe have been most at risk of experiencing poverty increases, financial instability, reduction in economic activity and productivity, and supply/demand disruptions across multiple sectors. With the pandemic causing unmitigated socioeconomic disruptions and the enforcement of nationwide restrictions deteriorating socioeconomic situations in developing countries, the rise in civil unrest and dissatisfaction has been identified. Therefore, an examination of the existing literature pertaining to the pandemic, lockdown restrictions, and technological solutions gaining momentum is necessary for informing this study as it provides a broad, contextual understanding of the rise in social media movements in Zimbabwe.

## BACKGROUND

An important source to this study regarding the background and rise of the COVID-19 pandemic is Desai & Patel (2020), who, in a journal article titled *'Stopping the Spread of COVID-19'*, provides insight into the disease, emphasising how its symptomatic diversity justifies its importance. In the article, Desai & Patel (2020) state that COVID-19 is a respiratory infection caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2. The virus was first discovered in Wuhan, China, and thereafter sparked a rapid global spread due to its highly transmissible nature. Spread through respiratory droplets, the virus led to a significant number of fatalities, hospitalisations, and infections. Fatal symptoms, coupled with its high transmission rate, made the virus a global emergency. In an article titled *'Multiple Drivers of the Role of COVID-19 Spread: The roles of climate, international mobility, and region-specific conditions'*, Kubota, Shiono, Kusumoto & Fujinuma (2020) suggest that the disease transmission geography of COVID-19 is highly heterogeneous. Accordingly, differences in transmission rates and outbreaks were seen in different countries across the world. Similarly, whereas some countries had outbreaks relatively earlier on and yet experienced moderate outbreaks, other countries experienced outbreaks at later stages with significant outbreaks. In their article, Kubota, Shiono, Kusumoto & Fujinuma (2020) stipulate that factors such as climate, international mobility, and region-specific conditions all represent potential drivers of the pandemic and, therefore, influence disease expansion. With some countries experiencing outbreaks early on, other countries were afforded the gift of time to prepare for their own outbreaks. However, due to the international transmission of the virus, Kubota, Shiono, Kusumoto & Fujinuma (2020) contend that transmission justified urgent global action. Accordingly, both papers provided critical insight into the pandemic while justifying the value of mitigation preparation.

In pursuit of what Kubota, Shiono, Kusumoto & Fujinuma (2020) describe as transmission geography, Richard Makurumidze (2020), in an article titled *'Coronavirus-19 disease: A case series of early suspected cases reported and the implications towards the response to the pandemic in Zimbabwe'*, suggests that Zimbabwe is among the countries that have been identified to be most at risk of the COVID-19 pandemic. In his analysis of the prevalence of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe, Makurumidze (2020) contends that Zimbabwe may struggle to withstand the pandemic due to its "weak health systems, emergency unpreparedness and inadequate response systems." Despite implementing measures, such as a country-wide lockdown, travel restrictions and a general slowdown of socioeconomic activity to help combat the spread of the pandemic, Makurumidze (2020) posits that Zimbabwe remains vulnerable. Dzinamarira *et al.* (2021) provide additional background to the pandemic in Zimbabwe, suggesting that despite showcasing fewer cases compared to other countries, the precise analysis of COVID-19 continues to be hindered by limited testing and reporting of cases. In a journal article titled *'Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Response in Zimbabwe: A call*

for urgent scale-up of testing to meet national capacity', Dzinamarira *et al.* (2021) contend that low testing capacity, in conjunction with the increased fear of stigma and discrimination deterring people from getting tested, has resulted in a significant lack of knowledge regarding the reach and impacts of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe (Dzinamarira *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, Dzinamarira *et al.* (2021) acknowledge existing barriers to widespread COVID-19 testing in Zimbabwe, which are seen to influence and contribute to the lack of knowledge regarding impacts. According to Dzinamarira *et al.* (2021), procurement and supply chain-related issues, health system funding-related issues, health worker-related issues, and quarantine facilities-related issues have all contributed to inadequate testing across the country. These sources provide relevant contextual background to the prevalence of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe. However, despite providing contextual information regarding the health sector, they fail to consider the implemented restrictions that hinder economic activity and, therefore, further analysis if necessary.

## LOCKDOWN RESTRICTIONS

Due to the high transmission rate of COVID-19 and the fact that asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic individuals may be contagious, many countries deployed community-wide 'lockdown' measures to reverse exponential epidemic growth trajectories (Haider *et al.*, 2020). These measures, although significantly reducing the spread of the virus, imposed economic challenges that scholars have argued dramatically impact developing nations, particularly those with a large informal sector and high levels of unemployment. Subsequently, government dissatisfaction and civil unrest were at an all-time high and, therefore, a valuable source of inquiry.

According to Haider *et al.* (2020), standard communicable disease control measures involving active case detection, contact tracing and selective isolation and quarantine may be insufficient to bring COVID-19 transmission under control, especially when infection rates are comparatively high. Subsequently, many countries implemented a series of lockdown measures intended to reduce social activity and significantly minimise transmission. In light of this, an important source to consider is Dzinamarira *et al.* (2021), as they provide insight into the various mitigation strategies implemented by the government of Zimbabwe. In their article, Dzinamarira *et al.* (2021) examine the prevalence of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe from the first identified case on 31 March 2020 in Victoria Falls. Thereafter, cases rose substantially, causing the government to implement mitigation measures country-wide. According to Dzinamarira *et al.* (2021), the government enforced a three-week Phase 4 (total) lockdown from the end of March to mid-April 2020, followed by a Phase 2 lockdown with relaxed restrictions. However, upon the relaxation of restrictions, transmission appeared to once again accelerate, resulting in an increase in lockdown restrictions on 23 July (Dzinamarira *et al.*, 2021). In addition to country-wide shutdowns, Dzinamarira *et al.* (2021) note that the government enforced mitigations strategies such as the increase in testing capacity and the training of health workers on COVID-19 patient care and increasing the number of quarantine and isolation centres through the authorisation of some private facilities. Subsequently, Dzinamarira *et al.* (2021) examination provide insight into the measures taken by the government to reduce transmission and combat the disease.

In line with Dzinamarira *et al.* (2021) description of the imposed measures in Zimbabwe, an important source to this study is Haider *et al.* (2020), who, in an article titled '*Lockdown measures in response to COVID-19 in nine sub-Saharan African countries*', take note of the lockdown measures enforced in Zimbabwe, positing that the country took a selective approach to restrictions with the formal sector being permitted to operate within specific trading hours whilst informal traders and markets were shut down. Notwithstanding the implemented three-week nationwide

shutdown in April 2020, the country made facial mask wearing mandatory in public places and enforced a national curfew. Additionally, Haider *et al.* (2020) bring attention to the degree of harm caused by the mitigation measures. According to Haider *et al.* (2020), the level of harm caused by lockdowns generally depends on the breadth, depth and length of the measures with additional factors such as the structure of the economy, pre-existing levels of poverty and financial security, the capacity of pre-existing social welfare services, levels of fear about the virus, public trust in government, the degree of social solidarity in society and the deployment of specific mitigation measures. Haider *et al.* (2020) contend that some measures actually helped increase COVID-19 transmission in the large and dense informal or semi-formal settlements. Notably, Zimbabwe's overcrowded and poorly managed quarantine centres essentially acted as hotspots of transmission (Haider et al., 2020). What's more, Haider *et al.* (2020) suggest that lockdown measures can also have negative political consequences with declared states of emergency in response to the pandemic granting governments extraordinary powers. According to Haider *et al.* (2020), these powers should be proportionate to the magnitude and nature of the threat faced by a country and should ideally be kept under constant review. Subsequently, this article aids in an understanding of measures imposed in Zimbabwe and the possible harm created.

## TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

In addition to mitigation measures enforced by the government, scholars have attributed changes in socioeconomic activities in which a shift to technological solutions has been noted. According to Brem, Viardot & Nylund (2021), the recent pandemic has improved people's ability to cope with epidemics and other crises through technological and social developments. Specifically, technologies have evolved as a result of the pandemic in which technologies may, in fact, be adopted for the long-term, having a longstanding influence beyond the COVID-19 calamity. An analysis of this move towards technological solutions is necessary in order to understand the impacts and utilisation of social media movements in Zimbabwe, particularly within a COVID-19 context.

Considering the shift to technological solutions, a valuable source for this study is Carolyn Evans (2020), who, in an article titled '*The coronavirus crisis and the technology sector*,' posits that the pandemic has created a profound shift in how people interact and economies' function. According to Evans (2020), policy mandates and fears of becoming injected or infecting others, in conjunction with enforced lockdowns, impelled populations to shelter at home and socially distance and otherwise reduce direct, in-person interactions with others. Consequently, a global digital transformation has taken place – with increases in e-commerce, video chat and connection via online platforms – which has only been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Evans (2020) provides insight into this transformation, suggesting that “we have seen two years-worth of digital transformation in two months.” Specifically, Evans (2020) examines the areas in which this transformation has taken place. In her article, Evans (2020) posits that the pandemic has created an immense shift in learning models from in-person to remote learning, with technology serving as a critical educational tool for many students and teachers. In addition to learning, Evans (2020) points out that the acceleration in digital transformation has been influenced by new forms of remote working. Notably, solutions have been created to reduce in-person employment, made possible by technology. Consequently, Evans (2020) states that increases in digital service utilisation and network trafficking have reflected higher levels of demand for technology products and services. Commensurate with this increase in demand, the technology sector has taken on an increasing role throughout the economy and society. Evans (2020) goes further to suggest that technology has played a critical

role in contributing to understanding and getting through the pandemic in new and unique ways. Specifically, Evans (2020) emphasises how mobility data has taken on higher prominence in at least two ways; in understanding the effect of the pandemic on the economy and as a tool available for tracing and contacting those potentially exposed to COVID-19 cases. By drawing attention to how technology has taken on a larger role in the wake of the pandemic, Evans' (2020) article presents a valuable background for the rise in digital activism throughout the pandemic. However, Evan's (2020) article additionally examines how the pandemic has accelerated the digital divide. Despite possessing valuable solutions, the acceleration in digital transformation also brings to light the inequalities both within and across countries. Subsequently, Evans (2020) suggests that not everyone has been able to participate equally in the changes enabled by technology during the pandemic – changes that may exacerbate the already-existing digital divide. Such disparities in access to technology – particularly in Africa – mean that the shift toward remote learning, working and performing other activities has impacted different groups very differently, with some much more likely to be left behind, often those who would potentially have the most to gain from access to digital tools (Evans, 2020). However, the digital transformation still remains an important source of inquiry, particularly regarding the shift towards digital forms of activism.

## **DIGITAL ACTIVISM**

### **BACKGROUND**

The current Zimbabwean political context, in conjunction with enforced lockdown restrictions, has brought to light alternative forms of activism that are argued to have prevailed against the restrictive media environment and the authoritarian government. As lockdown restrictions prevented mass gatherings and new forms of technology became prevalent in Zimbabwean society, new forms of digital activism emerged. The concept of digital activism, however, is not specific to recent events in Zimbabwe. But rather, it represents a field comprising a rich and, at the same time, the disparate body of knowledge with diverse epistemologies and focal points (Kaun & Uldam, 2017). Research into digital activism covers a variety of approaches, with sociological inquiries focusing on mobilisation and opportunity structures, while cultural studies emphasise the broader contexts in which digital activism occurs (Kaun & Uldam, 2017). Accordingly, there exists a multiplicity of activism, which this study aims to examine further.

In investigating a definition of digital activism, an important source to arise is Kaun & Uldam (2017), who suggest that there lies a major research gap on histories of digital activism beyond the dominant context of North America. In an article titled '*Digital Activism: After the hype*,' Kaun & Uldam (2017) investigate a definition of digital activism by drawing attention to various scholars' interpretations of the concept. Specifically, Kaun & Uldam (2017) take note of Athina Karatzogianni's (2015) understanding of the concept. Defining digital activism as political participation and protest organised in digital networks, Karatzogianni (2015) explores four waves of digital activism. She identifies the first wave as starting in 1994 with the Zapatista movement and anti-globalisation movement, including alternative media such as Indymedia; the second wave of digital activism stretching from 2001 to 2007 and was linked to anti-Iraq war mobilisations; the third wave took place after 2007 in which digital activism spread to the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and other countries beyond Europe and the United States, where it had initially originated; and lastly, the fourth wave took place between 2010 and 2013 and marked the mainstreaming of digital activism that is dominated by discussions of large-scale digital state surveillance unveiled by Wikileaks and Snowden

(Karatzogianni, 2015). Extending on Karatzogianni's (2015) waves of digital activism, Kaun & Uldam (2017) utilise Paolo Gerbaudo's (2017) understanding of the concept. Unlike Karatzogianni (2015), Gerbaudo (2017) distinguishes between two periods of digital activism, namely, a first wave in the mid-1990s, characterised by cyber-autonomism within the anti-globalisation movement, and a second wave in the 2010s, which alludes to cyber-populism as constituted within the mass mobilisations of Occupy, the movements of the squares, and the anti-austerity movements. By drawing attention to Karatzogianni's (2015) and Gerbaudo's (2017) historical understandings, Kaun & Uldam (2017) aim to define the concept. However, Kaun & Uldam (2017) suggest that while these periodisation's are insightful, they struggle to balance a focus on the evolving media technologies with ideological changes and the socio-political context within which digital activism evolves. Hence, it lacks media specificity in its historical analysis. Additionally, in their article, Kaun & Uldam (2017) suggest that current research regarding the historicity and practices of digital activism are dominated by either a strong focus on the *digital* – specifically technology with an emphasis on universal ways of using certain devices or infrastructures – or they foreground *activism*, thus losing sight of the specificities of protest media technologies. Therefore, Kaun & Uldam (2017) note that such approaches fail to address the significance of the interrelations between digital media, on the one hand, and political and civic culture, on the other hand. By providing insight into various periodisation's of digital media, Kaun & Uldam (2017) not only examine the historical progression and gradual utilisation of digital activism but promote the need for further analysis regarding digital media being used to shape possibilities for self-expression, political participation and activism.

Extending on the concept of digital activism, a valuable source to this study is Jen Schradie (2018), who, in an article titled '*The digital activism gap: How class and costs shape online collective action,*' emphasises the role and value of digital media in advancing activism. Specifically, Schradie (2018) suggests that as online processes become more salient in political action, digital technology resources become increasingly relevant for movements. In her research, Schradie (2018) emphasises that online-intense digital activism can lower participation costs, rendering collective action, collective action and resource mobilisation theories less relevant in favour of newer theories of mobilisation in the digital era. The suggestion is that reduced costs remove participation barriers to enable more people to do more organising with fewer resources. Despite not knowing if everyone has been able to harness these lowered participation costs, nor if and how any variation in these costs shapes online participation in social and political movements, Schradie (2018) argues that the internet has essentially levelled the playing field for groups with fewer resources and that online political participation is not necessarily associated with digital inequality. The contention is that more people can now participate than ever before because of the technology itself or its affordances. Additionally, Schradie (2018) suggests that with the advent of websites in the 1990s, scholars observed the Web's democratising affordances for social movements and then the proliferation of social media platforms in expanding the use of static one-to-many websites to more instantaneous and interactive many-to-many platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter (Schradie, 2018). Schradie (2018) suggests that both sets of digital tools are more democratic, not only because a social movement group can reach more people through digital technology than with printed flyers, for example, but also because more people can interact and respond online than in offline spaces. Therefore, Schradie (2018) proves a valuable source as she emphasises the advantages of digital activism in increasing political participation.

In pursuit of what Schradie (2018) describes as political participation, Suely Deslandes (2018) emphasises the potentiality of digital activism manifested in social networks for social participation and political decentralisation. In a journal article titled '*Digital activism and its contribution to political decentralisation,*' Deslandes (2018) examines

the role and value of digital activism as holding the broad capacity for aggregation, mass mobilisation and street performance, as well as possessing a complementary character to face-to-face activism. Notably, Deslandes (2018) examines digital activism as a tool, a means of expression and dissemination of existing social movements, or to allow the establishment of new social movements. In his article, Deslandes (2018) posits that the gain of the internet is, in the end, to increase the circulation of information. However, he claims that it does not replace the traditional mechanisms of participation. In other words, social networks allow, above all, greater dissemination of counter-hegemonic ideas and media, which broadens the scope of information and resources for decision making and choices, but he does not view digital activism as a replacement for offline activism. Additionally, Deslandes (2018) brings attention to the fact that access to information, which previously had no circulation in the dominant media, allows the elevation and qualification of the political debate, increasing the probability of social control over the use of public funds and political and management decisions concerning the implementation of solutions to the identified problems. Therefore, digital activism essentially facilitates an increase in access to information, justifying the value of the concept in the modern world.

## SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM

Many scholars have suggested that digital activism has only been accelerated with the introduction of new forms of communication, specifically, social media platforms. The development of these interactive, horizontal networks of communication has induced the rise of a new form of communication - mass-self communication - over the internet and wireless communication. According to Castells (2007), under these conditions, insurgent politics and social movements are able to intervene more decisively in the new communication space. Therefore, an examination of the utilisation and value of social media activism is necessary.

According to Chitanana (2019), a critical aspect of understanding digital activism is to interrogate the link between digital media and democratisation. Chitanana (2019) suggests that democracy and the media are mutually exclusive, with democracy hinging on media. New media technologies taking off across the world have been seen to play an increasingly valuable role in broadening the democratic space while driving the socio-political transformation of Africa. As new media technologies become increasingly important in democracies, offering a role beyond information dissemination, scholars have suggested the distinction between collective action – associated with collective identities within traditional organisations – and connective action – associated with personalised consumption of media. According to Chitanana (2019), social media can be conceptualised as an alternative counter-public sphere or a subaltern public sphere and alternative discourse space. Despite bringing attention to the possibility of clicktivism in social media activism – online actions such as signing petitions that are often seen as superficial actions done to satisfy individuals' sense of community responsibility rather than solve problems or incite change -, Chitanana (2019) suggests that these new forms of protest go beyond petitions and statements through the media and press conferences or litigation through the courts, but rather the streets have become the principal arena for the expression of opinions, further accelerated through the use of social media. Therefore, Chitanana (2019) contends that protests have become more public than ever before, attributed to social media platform use.

Extending on Chitanana's (2019) notion of social media acting as an alternative discourse space, Chibwe & Ureke (2016) investigate the internet's liberating potential, specifically regarding multiple-way communication structures. In an article titled *"Political gladiators' on Facebook in Zimbabwe: A discursive analysis of intra-ZANU-PF cyber wars;*

*Baba Jukwa versus Amai Jukwa*, Chibuwe & Ureke (2016) suggest that the internet provides room for multiple-way communication previously not envisaged with traditional media, and hence, broadens and makes the public sphere more representative. The internet, unlike traditional media, has the potential to democratise a public sphere which had become increasingly media-moderated, if not controlled. Drawing attention to internet communications structures, Chibuwe & Ureke (2016) posit that gatekeeping journalists and mass media seem to play a less important role as the proliferation of social media becomes prevalent. Subsequently, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter present more opportunities for free participation, providing the public with the opportunity to talk back, be heard, and participate in digital activism more freely. Compared to 'traditional' digital activism, social media activism provides more room for citizen journalism, in which ordinary citizens can simultaneously become producers and consumers or actors of content. Accordingly, Chibuwe & Ureke (2016) posit that social media activism is more democratic as the underlying basic structure of the internet treats all users and content similarly. However, Chibuwe & Ureke (2016) bring attention to the potential dangers of social media activism regarding the violation of journalistic ethics – due to an increase in citizen journalism – and anonymity, providing room for slander and defamation. According to Chibuwe & Ureke (2016), the openness and freedom of the internet can also be considered disruptive, lacking the moderating influence of more traditional channels of political discourse, and therefore, information has the potential to be false or deceptive. Accordingly, this article aids in understanding the value and sometimes danger of social media activism.

Furthermore, the role of social media activism as a complementary tool for offline action has been suggested. In an article titled *'Hashtag Activism as a Form of Political Action: A Qualitative Analysis of the #BringBackOurGirls Campaign in Nigerian, U.K., and U.S. Press'*, Ofori-Parku & Moscato (2018) suggest that activist activities conducted online – from protests to fundraising – are increasingly necessary and complementary to offline efforts. According to Ofori-Parku & Moscato (2018), activists, recognising the potential of social media for political change, are creating new resources and technology networks to organise and empower their communities. Thus, social media has essentially improved and strengthened the organisational aspect of activism.

## TWITTER ACTIVISM

While scholars have introduced and reaffirmed the role social media plays regarding both offline and digital activism, specific platforms have emerged as even more effective in their ability to coordinate, facilitate and drive protest discourse. Notably, Twitter owes largely to the platform's 'real-time' characteristic. Examining the rise of Twitter in social media activism, therefore, provides insight into how the platform can and has been used for activism and whether or not any challenges are associated with these forms of online protests.

In addition to deliberating the organisational features of social media, Ofori-Parku & Moscato (2018) posit that online activism enjoys a particularly unique diffusion on Twitter – a medium whose technology and protocols “foreground interaction, enabling a greatly expanded reach for critique and organisation among interlocutors.” In their research, Ofori-Parku & Moscato (2018) contend that activists are able to expand their reach via message clustering, modification, rebroadcasting, or replying within the context of more extensive conversations. Twitter's primary and most attractive features include the platform's short, targeted messages, whereby hashtag utilisation places participants directly in conversations surrounding particular topics. As such, Twitter improves protest discourse, increasing the interaction, direction and consumption of specific messages. Additionally, Twitter also facilitates the 'live tweeting' of events in real-time and at protest events, providing on-the-ground views, serving journalistic and publicity roles, and

helping garner attention from policy elites. Accordingly, Ofori-Parku & Moscato (2018) promote the effectiveness of Twitter as a discourse disseminator within offline and online protest movements.

In line with Ofori-Parku & Moscato's (2018) research, an article titled, '*News or Social Mobilization? An exploratory study about the role of Twitter in the Spanish indignados protests*' written by Ferré-Pavia & Garcia (2015) explores the informative capacities of Twitter, with the authors suggesting that online platforms, specifically Twitter, are undoubtedly useful tools for activists and social mobilisers with a specific purpose. Owing to the platform's ability to reach citizens massively by calling for demonstrations or concentrations, Twitter represents an important tool in activism. According to Ferré-Pavia & Garcia (2015), Twitter users are the most active news consumers due to the platform itself: the service has been described as an example of end-user innovation as users have embraced the technology and its affordances to develop conventions such as the use of hashtags and the @reply. Having analysed over 1,000 tweets covering the marches that occurred in Spain in July 2012, Ferré-Pavia & Garcia (2015) contend that Twitter's role as a distribution platform makes it an important tool in activism. Additionally, events in Morocco, Libya and Egypt since 2010, the Occupy Wall Street movement or the Spanish *indignados* and the current social protests against the conservative Spanish government emphasise the power of social networks, and particularly, the power of platforms of distribution of content, such as Twitter. As such, features of reach make Twitter an important asset in online activism.

Lindgren (2013) expands on the features of reach, exploring the potentials and limitations of social media as a tool for activists in a paper titled, '*The Potential and Limitations of Twitter Activism: Mapping the 2011 Libya Uprising*.' In his paper, Lindgren (2013) posits that Twitter has essentially deconstructed traditional forms of content production and consumption, building on Varnelis (2008) and Poster's (2009) notions that on Twitter, the relationship between centre and periphery has been dislocated or dissolved, to the point where one can no longer speak of any one node where the power over symbolic production is concentrated. Specifically, there has been a shift from elite production of culture and messages to a digital meaning-production by the masses, whereby consumers and producers of content and ideas melt into one and where power structures are overthrown. In this regard, platforms such as Twitter actually do play a defining role in activism as they distribute messages in an increasingly interactive manner. According to Lindgren (2013), platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have been used to spread important news that was crucial for the early stages of the Tunisian uprising while additionally playing a key role in how the uprising spread over into Egypt. Owing to the effectiveness of the platform in reaching a large audience, and introducing revolution cross-border, Twitter can and already has served as an important catalyst in activism. However, despite its effectiveness in distributing content, Lindgren (2013) suggests that owing to its structure as a media corporation, economic influencers need to be considered when exploring Twitter's distribution features. Notably, Lindgren (2013) posits that arguments about the liberating potential of new media had just as much to do with generating economic profit for private media corporations as they do with making the audience play a larger part in political processes. Specifically, Lindgren (2013) suggests that media corporations such as Twitter contribute largely to the shaping of opinions and consent in relation to the prevailing social institutions. What's more, political mobilisation, participation and activism through social media have also been said to promote a watered-down and non-engaged mode of 'slacktivism' or 'clicktivism,' where we are mistaking low threshold user behaviours for actual commitment and sacrifice (Lindgren, 2013).

However, this doesn't ignore the role Twitter has and continues to play in activism, with other scholars providing further insight into how the platform has advanced or improved activism.

Theocharis *et al.* (2014), for example, detail how the internet, and primarily Twitter, has influenced protest dynamics, with three key themes having been emphasised. Namely, changes in political mobilisation, changes in political organisation and coordination, and political conversation and distribution of information. According to Theocharis *et al.* (2014), with the internet transforming participation costs and the need for co-presence regarding activism, as well as the influx in new repertoires of participation emerging, a new model of flash mobilisation in which collective action is so inexpensive that short time and content investments by participants allow many individuals to participate quickly, leading to changes in political mobilisation. Secondly, the internet has altered dynamics by challenging the logic of collective action. With the rise of Twitter, the structure of traditional organisations has changed from strictly hierarchical institutional forms to more flexible, horizontal or hybrid types, while political processes have become increasingly decentralised, making it easier to contribute collective content. Finally, Theocharis *et al.* (2014) contend that Twitter is particularly important for conversations, allowing diverse and decentralised actors to engage in horizontal conversational practices. Now, viewers are exposed to a larger variety of viewpoints than before, which in turn further stimulates conversation. Overall, Theocharis *et al.* (2014) emphasise that Twitter has been a significant political communication tool with diverse functions for communication, conversation and information distribution.

As social media activism gains momentum in the political protest space, scholars have identified the use of hashtags as a form and facilitator of online activism. While hashtags have been used on a variety of social media platforms for years, their popularity can largely be attributed to Twitter, with the platform accelerating the use and effectiveness of hashtags as a collective agent for online discourse.

In investigating the role of hashtags in aiding online political protests, an important source to consider is Guobin Yang (2016), who, in an article titled '*Narrative Agency in Hashtag Activism: The Case of #BlackLivesMatter*,' provides a comprehensive analysis of hashtag activism by emphasising its narrative function. According to Yang (2016), hashtag activism refers to discursive protest on social media united through a hash tagged word, phrase, or sentence. An incident of hashtag activism takes place when large numbers of comments and retweets appear on social media in response to a hash tagged word, phrase or sentence. Because these comments and retweets consist of numerous personal stories and appear in temporal order, they assume a narrative form. According to Yang (2016), the narrative agency is thus central to hashtag activism. Furthermore, Yang (2016) highlights how the creation of a hashtag makes it easier for other users to search, link and interact with one another via the hash tagged word, facilitating increased participation in online political protests. According to Yang (2016), however, everyday hashtags do not usually evolve into contentious collective events online. Rather, Yang (2016) specifies that the most influential cases of hashtag activism, as opposed to routine hashtags, have a recognisable narrative form with a beginning, a crisis/conflict, and an end. Within this temporal framework, individuals contribute to the co-production of narratives by hash tagging their personal thoughts, emotions and stories (Yang, 2016). What's more, hashtags associated with social movements and socio-political change commonly contain verbs expressing a strong sense of action and force.; the actions are petitioning, demanding, appealing, and protesting; they express refusals, objections, and imperatives to take immediate action. Therefore, hashtags can encourage audience participation through narrative functions.

Furthermore, online social media research has demonstrated the role of digital networks in informing activists, diffusing political frameworks, decentralising leadership and decreasing the costs of participation. With the emergence of social media accelerating the use of digital activism in modern-day political protests, Rosemary Clark (2016) provides valuable insight into the role of hashtags in online activism. In a journal article titled “‘*Hope in a hashtag*’”: *the discursive activism of #WhyIStayed*,’ Clark (2016) examines the discursive nature of hashtag activism, emphasising how previous generations of activists relied on discursive tactics or tactics focused on communication – such as consciousness-raising circles, speak-outs and alternative press publications – whereas this generation's activism often takes place online and, at times, exclusively through social media platforms, leading to a heavier reliance on text-based interactions via social media. Clark (2016) utilises Akyel's (2014) definition of a hashtag as being “always already incomplete...a rhizomatic form that connects diverse texts, images and videos.” Accordingly, Clark (2016) argues that hashtag's narrative logic – its ability to produce and connect individual stories – fuels its political growth. In the initial stage, hashtags that express the outrage for gender justice are likely to invite online participation, while the escalation into online collective protest depends on the nature of interaction among multiple actors and their socio-political contexts (Clark, 2016). Despite focusing predominantly on hashtag feminism, Clark (2016) proves an invaluable source as she brings attention to the role of hashtags in online activism. Another aspect introduced by Clark (2016) is that digital media has provided marginalised activists and those working outside of formal institutions with a new, effective means of exposing their work and connecting with others. Digital media has provided access to visible platforms and wide audiences without necessitating membership within a formal organisation. Specifically, Clark emphasises the role of the hashtag in communicating information and personal experiences of domestically abused women. Through an analysis of the #WhyIStayed movement that took place online in 2014, Clark brings attention to how active audience participation increased the movement's ability to advance its definitional claims not only by drawing attention to the hashtag but also by visibly supporting the actors primarily responsible for constructing its counter-frame. Therefore, Clark (2016) proves to be a valuable informant to this study, specifically regarding the discursive nature and role of hashtags in online protests.

Moreover, Akpojivi (2019) suggests that activism that occurs in new media via hashtags has been active at drawing attention to specific issues. In a journal article titled ‘*We won't be silent anymore: Hashtag activism in Nigeria*,’ Akpojivi (2019) contends that new media is widely considered an alternative platform for people to challenge dominant discourses and promote alternative narratives. These media platforms enable freedom of expression, equality and democracy while offering alternative narratives to that of the state-owned and controlled mainstream media. However, with the emergence of counter-discourse and narratives in movements such as #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, #MenAreTrash and #ShePersisted, amongst others, media platforms have raised questions as to whether hashtags are reactionary or if they do indeed drive the transformation of a social media movement. Akpojivi (2019) posits that, clearly, social media technologies have enhanced offline activism by enabling people to form a collective identity and demand and press for societal change. Most often, this demand for change is reactionary as the technology is used to respond to either popular discourse or socioeconomic and cultural issues (Akpojivi U., 2019). For example, the #BlackLivesMatter movement on Twitter can be seen as a response to racial discrimination in the United States. Despite being seen as reactionary, the movement has expounded discourse which would have been silenced in the mainstream media (Akpojivi U., 2019). Therefore, without new media and the success of the hashtag, alternative ideas from the movement would not have been known.

## DIGITAL ACTIVISM IN AFRICA

According to Sebeelo (2021), the African political landscape, in particular, has become a site of contest where new digital technologies, especially social media, have significantly made inroads into an arena that was traditionally the preserve of traditional media. The rise in digital activism as we know it today can actually be traced to political protests in north Africa, where the so-called 'Twitter revolution' started.

### THE ARAB SPRING

The Arab Spring was a series of uprisings and anti-government protests that spread across the Arab world and north Africa. Recognized as one of the first times social media seems to have played a key role in activism, the Arab Spring or Twitter Revolution has redefined how social media can mobilize, alter and essentially transform protests worldwide.

Providing insight into the Arab Spring, Jamil (2022), in an article titled, *'Postulating the post-Arab Spring Dynamics of Social Media & Digital Journalism in the Middle East,'* explains that the movements associated with the Arab Spring broke out in at least six Arab countries in 2011, including Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain. Initially starting in Tunisia, when mass and violent demonstrations took place against the long authoritarian regimes, another movement subsequently broke out in the Middle East and North Africa region, with countries embracing activism. Aimed at introducing democracy and transforming both countries and the entire region economically, politically and socially, the uprisings represented a form of ripple effect across the region. According to Jamil (2022), the Arab Spring was quickly referred to as a 'social media revolution,' owing largely to the role social media played in activist activities and dialogue. Specifically, Jamil (2022) notes that social media allegedly helped Tunisia and Egypt spread their message to the west, toppling their dictators by organizing protests and rallies. Similarly, in Libya, social media helped incite a revolution and then became even more significant as a tool for information exchange rather than an offline protest mobilizer. Egypt's Facebook revolution, Tunisia's Twitter uprising, and Syria's YouTube uprising, among others, gained significant attention worldwide while "later aspired scholars to explore the potential of new media and technology in reshaping the region's politics, public's engagement in political processes, journalism practice and more broadly, media freedom (Jamil, 2022, p. 4).

Expanding on this notion, Comunello & Anzera (2012) build a conceptual framework for understanding the role social media played in the movements. According to Comunello & Anzera (2012), the uprising was triggered due to neo-patrimonial regimes, ones characteristic of the need to maintain high rewards for the 'sultan's' inner circle; the persistence of high levels of corruption, which essentially render bureaucracy and the economic structure ineffective; the need to allocate ever-increasing amounts of subsidies to cope with growing unemployment; the inability to generate positive economic growth; and the remarkable dependence on the security apparatus and armed forces. Comunello & Anzera (2012) contend that in environments such as this, it is not easy to organize an uprising or to mobilize people in person, with protesters having to challenge regimes in a skilful manner. Therefore, many people turned to social media to voice their opinions, engage in conversation and even mobilize offline action. The Arab Spring, therefore, was born. According to Comunello & Anzera (2012), the Arab Spring has received wide media coverage in western countries, with many commentators emphasizing the role social media played, defining the situation as a 'social media revolution.' While some scholars were quick to recognize the organizational and

informative aspects social media played in activism, others were warier, claiming that only a minority of people in the Arab countries had internet access and that social media served more of a role in identifying activists than organizing protests. Despite these concerns, the uprising and subsequent utilization of social media laid the foundation for other protests around the world to adopt social media in their efforts.

Many scholars have and continue to debate the role social media actually played in each of these protests, and while each country's uprising was triggered by different factors, offered different outcomes and essentially portrayed different roles in which social media played, online platforms were a defining aspect of every movement. Lindgren (2013) emphasizes this, explaining that while the demographics, as well as the patterns of protests, differed largely – the Tunisian protests resonated with the cause of the country's long-repressed labour movement, starting in rural areas; the Egypt uprisings were organized in urban settings by young cosmopolitans; while in Libya, armed rebels in the eastern provinces started the uprisings, stirring up decades-old conflicts between tribes and regions – social media was a key element in all of them. The Arab Spring movements did not only drive economic and political change in each respective country but actually triggered a new era of activism, one in which social media plays a particularly important role. Following the Arab Spring and subsequent Twitter revolution, many other protests around the world have not only adopted social media but have been largely centred around online platforms.

## SOUTH AFRICA

In the southern part of the African continent, a number of protests rallying around different issues have turned to social media. In South Africa, three notable movements started off as online movements, mobilizing participants and driving discourse that eventually ended in offline civic action. Namely, the #FeesMustFall movement; the #RhodesMustFall movement; and the #EndRapeCulture. Despite the multiplicity of movements across the country, for the purposes of this study, the three aforementioned social movements will be investigated.

According to Konik & Konik (2017), the #RhodesMustFall movement emerged in March 2015 with students protesting the presence of a statue of Cecil John Rhodes on campus grounds at the University of Cape Town (UCT). One month after the protests began, the statue was officially removed, and yet the movement only accelerated, with individuals targeting other colonial heritage monuments which they perceived as glorifying racial inequality. Expanding on Konik & Konik's (2017) examination, in a research paper titled, '*Twitter Activism and Youth in South Africa: The case of #RhodesMustFall*,' Bosch (2017) states that what started out as a student-led protest centred on the removal of the statue of British colonialist, Cecil John Rhodes, the campaign known as #RhodesMustFall led to a wider student-led political movement which calls for the widespread transformation of the university, including 'decolonizing' the curriculum, raising issues around the low numbers of senior black staff, and an awareness-raising campaign around artworks on campus which are seen by the movement to promote institutional racism. According to Bosch (2017), while the campaign was initially targeting the removal of the statue, it culminated in a general movement against institutionalized racism and for the Africanisation of the university curriculum while also serving as a central trigger for other movements such as the #FeesMustFall movement in 2015.

In line with Bosch's (2017) notion, according to Luescher, Loader & Mugume (2016), starting with #RhodesMustFall at UCT in March 2015 and culminating in the nationwide #FeesMustFall movement, student activism in South Africa has taken on characteristics of networked social movements as conceptualized with reference to the Arab Spring uprisings. Expanding on earlier propositions that the 2015 South African hashtag movement can be conceptualized as

an internet-age networked student movement, insofar as the use of internet-based communication by students, the movement itself signalled the advent of a new way of mobilizing and organizing student political power. Bosch (2017) recognizes this feature, identifying the #RhodesMustFall movement as a local campaign, taking place predominantly at the UCT, that triggered the #FeesMustFall campaign, a once-local movement turned national. For their part, Luescher, Loader & Mugume (2016) examine the #FeesMustFall protest at the University of the Free State (UFS), exploring how other South African university social movements that built on UCT's #RhodesMustFall established their own ideas and perceptions as to what 'must fall' in their respective contexts. In this regard, Luescher, Loader & Mugume (2016) provide insight into the onset of the #SteynMustFall protest at the UFS, positing that on March 25, 2015, the UFS Student Representative Council posted a statement on their official Facebook page calling for the removal of the statues of OFS President MT Steyn and State President CR Swart from the Bloemfontein campus. The associated Twitter hashtag, #SteynMustFall, bared similarities to the #RhodesMustFall movement, having essentially been built on the campaign itself. #SteynMustFall briefly became popular on Facebook and Twitter and was followed by an attempt to further conscientize and mobilize students offline with panel debates organized by the SRC. According to Luescher, Loader & Mugume (2016), #SteynMustFall was essentially a localized diffusion of #RhodesMustFall, albeit living itself out in practice in a very different way. Following the #RhodesMustFall movement and the various associated movements that accompanied it, the most prominent and arguably most far-reaching was the #FeesMustFall movement.

According to Olagunju, Franish & Wade (2022), the #FeesMustFall students' protest began in Higher Institutions of learning in South Africa and rapidly spread to other countries abroad. What started as a revolutionary cry among young students for an end to corporate education was spiralled by the use of hashtags. Olagunju, Franish & Wade (2022), in a paper, titled, *'Beyond #FeesMustFall: Understanding the inclusion role of social media during students' protests in South Africa,'* contend that social media was the avenue for the campaign to move from a local university protest to national grounds and then global, thereby generating political debate even outside the country. While other campaigns were largely based on individual challenges or concerns - #RhodesMustFall was centred on the call to remove the statue of Rhodes and #SteynMustFall, the statue of Steyn – the #FeesMustFall campaign was based on widespread and overarching challenges, specifically, the announcement of fee increases across South African universities. While the campaign initially started off with students' protesting the apparent increase, it quickly spread into a wider debate around free tertiary education. Notwithstanding the role social media played in the protest, Olagunju, Franish & Wade (2022), quoting Bosch (2017), focus on how the #FeesMustFall movement essentially followed other movements calling for specific factors and challenges 'to fall,' driving discourse on a local, national and eventually global basis.

The following year, another large-scale social media movement kicked off in South Africa under the hashtag #EndRapeCulture. Providing details into the culmination of the movement, Grouws (2018), in a paper titled, *'#EndRapeCulture Campaign in South Africa: Resisting sexual violence through protest and the politics of experience,'* explained that on April 22, 2016, South Africa woke up to the 'RU Reference List' – a list of 11 names of alleged rapists who were students at Rhodes University - published online. A number of women claimed that these men were well-known for their sexual violation of women students. However, no action had been taken against them, despite repeated complaints and reports to authorities. According to Grouws (2018), between January and December 2016 at Rhodes University, 21 women had been raped with no action taken by management against the perpetrators.

Following the release of the list, demands by protesters included a revision of university policies on gender-based violence, the appointment of a task team to investigate sexual violence, and that named students on the list vacate leadership positions (Gouws, 2018). When management failed to take action, two women students acted against one of the perpetrators, dragging him out of his room, spitting on them and assaulting him with empty water bottles. Both women were charged and found of kidnapping, assault, defamation and insubordination in the High Court and banned from completing their studies. This led to an outcry from activists working with gender-based violence and essentially triggered the #EndRapeCulture movement, accelerating its reach and participation levels. The widely used hashtag quickly turned into offline protest action, with a series of topless marches taking place, and according to Grouws (2018), the movement made extensive use of digital platforms.

Alternatively, a paper titled, *'These women are making a statement against rape, and yet the only thing y'all can focus on is 'Eww, they're naked': Exploring rape culture on Facebook in South Africa,'* by Orth, Andipatin & van Wyk (2021) explores rape culture discourse that emerged from the social media debates regarding the South African #EndRapeCulture protests. While Grouws (2018) investigates the start, culmination and purpose of the protest, Orth, Andipatin & van Wyk (2021) focus primarily on discourse. Specifically, Orth, Andipatin & van Wyk (2021) contend that students across South African universities launched the #EndRapeCulture campaign to express their frustration against university policies which served to perpetuate rape culture. The use of hashtag activism during the protest served to spark online public debates and mobilize support for the protests while reflecting an online counter-public and mirroring similar rape culture protests that occurred in other universities across the globe (Orth, Andipatin, & van Wyk, 2021). According to Orth, Andipatin & van Wyk (2021), in the #EndRapeCulture campaign, social media challenged the dominant narrative and brought new information to light that deconstructed dominant ways of framing reality and its associated binary categories. All three of these movements, and by association, the #SteynMustFall movement, brought about change in their own ways while introducing new discourse into the public sphere.

## NIGERIA

Like South Africa, Nigerian citizens quickly recognized the role social media could play in protest action. Africa's biggest country by population, Nigeria's political environment, has been a site of contest for years, with waves of protests encapsulating the nation. With the rise in popularity of social media, digital activism became increasingly utilized across the country, with notably online campaigns including the #EndSARS and #BringBackOurGirls protests.

Arguably, one of the most prominent social media movements to take place in Nigeria was the #BringBackOurGirls protests. With participation in the online movement by a number of A-list celebrities, including Kim Kardashian, Michelle Obama, Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson and Pope Francis, the #BringBackOurGirls campaign demonstrated the power of social media to advance a cause (Parkinson & Hinshaw, 2021). In a paper titled, *'I Won't be Silent Anymore: Hashtags activism in Nigeria,'* Akpojivi (2020) contends that although the #BringBackOurGirls movement was initially established to advocate for the release of 200 abducted schoolgirls by Boko Haram, the movement used the emerged platform of digital activism to challenge normative discourse about women and violence in Nigeria. According to Akpojivi (2020), the movement is argued to be at the forefront of advocating for social change towards women and girl children but producing counter-discourse which seeks to promote gender equality and safe education for girl children. In her paper, Akpojivi (2020) provides insight into the movement, detailing how the #BringBackOurGirls protests started due to the abduction of 270 female students from Chibok Secondary School in

Borno State on April 14 2014, by members of Boko Haram. Following the abduction, activists took to Twitter, utilizing the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls to advocate for government intervention and the safe return of the students. Akpojivi (2020) posits that the movement quickly became a global phenomenon when high-profile personalities such as Michelle Obama, David Cameron and Malala Yousafzai, among many others, tweeted and retweeted the hashtag. Citing Olson (2016), Akpojivi (2020) argues that activism based on hashtags has been effective in drawing attention to issues, and, within the #BringBackOurGirls movement, they have been able to draw global attention to issues of women's rights and education for girls in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, another large-scale and largely considered successful social media campaign in Nigeria were the #EndSARS protests in the year 2020. Exploring how Twitter was used to organize the #EndSARS protest in Nigeria as well as the extent to which Twitter promoted or degraded democracy through its support for enhancing freedom of expression and driving social protests, Akerele-Popoola, Azeez & Adeniyi (2022) provide key insight into the rise of the #EndSARS protests. According to Akerele-Popoola, Azeez & Adeniyi (2022), in the last ten years, Facebook and Twitter have served as primary tools of protest and social activism against governments' inaction in Nigeria. Twitter, in particular, has been used to "organize and execute social protests that included the 2012 #OccupyNigeria protest on the removal of fuel subsidy; the 2020 Special Anti-Robbery Squad Protest (#EndSARS); and the latest #LiftTwitterBan protest" (Akerele-Popoola, Azeez, & Adeniyi, 2022, p. 3). Speaking on the #EndSARS protest, Akerele-Popoola, Azeez & Adeniyi (2022) examine how the brutality of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) – a special department within the Nigerian police force created to fight serious crimes including armed robbery – initiated widespread physical and online protests in Nigeria. Akerele-Popoola, Azeez & Adeniyi (2022) describe an incident on October 3 2020, where a video was taken of members of SARS killing a young Nigerian motorist in Ughelo Delta state, shooting him, dropping his body by the roadside and driving off in the victim's car. The video, shared on Twitter, caused an outcry from citizens, with the arrest of the person responsible for the video – after the government stated that the video was fake – initiating large-scale protest action and the rise of the #EndSARS online protest. Ignorance by SARS and accusations of the video being false fuelled the protests even further. According to Akerele-Popoola, Azeez & Adeniyi (2022), citing George (2021), the video caused an immediate trigger that made the hashtags #EndSARS go viral on social media platforms which then resulted in the massive street protests to call for the dissolution of SARS and to end police brutality, injustice and maltreatment. While physical protests were taking place across the country, citizens also took to Twitter, using the platform to narrate their ordeals and motivations for participation in the protest. According to Akerele-Popoola, Azeez & Adeniyi (2022), the connective action of the protest was promoted by the contents shared by users, with the protest expanding globally, enjoying the participation of Nigerians both in-country and in the diaspora. Consequently, Akerele-Popoola, Azeez & Adeniyi (2022) contend that the success of the protest can be attributed to Twitter and the ability of the platform to coordinate the protest across the nation while amplifying the voices of the campaign globally. As a result of the effectiveness of Twitter in making the #EndSARS protest very potent and threatening to the authority of the Nigerian government, the government banned the use of Twitter on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2020. Despite this, at the height of the #EndSARS protests, SARS was, in fact, disbanded.

## UGANDA

In Uganda, social media has become a key asset in activism and politics, with citizens using the internet to engage, mobilize and organize. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube have and continue to be

used by everyday Ugandans in digital activism in different forms (Kakungulu-Mayambala & Rukundo, 2019). Like other countries across the world, protesters in Uganda quickly recognized the effectiveness of social media in disseminating information, mobilizing offline action and challenging hegemonic discourse perpetuated by the government. Investigating digital activism in Uganda, a study titled, *'Digital Activism and Free Expression in Uganda,'* by Kakungulu-Mayambala & Rukundo (2019) provides key insight into how social media has been used in political protests in the country. Rather than provide a case study analysis of social media movements in Uganda, Kakungulu-Mayambala & Rukundo (2019) examine digital activism utilization on a broader scale. Kakungulu-Mayambala & Rukundo (2019) emphasize that tools such as social media are undoubtedly altering the way in which activism is carried out, especially in countries like Uganda, where social media is popular. In their paper, Kakungulu-Mayambala & Rukundo (2019) contend that social media's effectiveness in modern-day politics revolves around the platform's information-sharing features. While traditional means of receiving news included radio, today, anyone with an internet-abled telephone will regularly receive news shared or passed on. Social media, therefore, has bridged the gap between the political elite and the common man, as many can now communicate with individuals in high political office via social media platforms (Kakungulu-Mayambala & Rukundo, 2019). In Uganda, this trend is particularly common, with Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni, rated as Africa's most conversational world leader in 2014, with 95% of his tweets being responses to followers (Kakungulu-Mayambala & Rukundo, 2019). While social media has been used to bring positive change in Uganda – in 2016, for example, supporters of opposition leader, Dr Kiiza Besigye, were brutally attacked by the police while people recorded the incident and uploaded it online. As a result, the attackers were charged with assault – platforms have alternatively been used to monitor the public closely. In May 2013, for example, the security minister announced the creation of a social media monitoring centre to 'weed out those who use the platform to damage the government and people's reputations' (Kakungulu-Mayambala & Rukundo, 2019). However, Kakungulu-Mayambala & Rukundo (2019, p. 170) emphasize that despite attempts to control public discourse, the effectiveness of social media in Uganda is that it "enables government critics and political activists to broaden their message without fear of traditional forms of censorship which target mainstream media houses." For example, when radio and television stations were warned by the regulator, the Uganda Communications Commission, not to host the popular opposition Robert Kyagulanyi, he simply took to Facebook, where he nonchalantly continued sharing his message (Kakungulu-Mayambala & Rukundo, 2019). Therefore, the power of social media in political protests comes down to its ability to disseminate discourse freely and without oppression, thus, increasing its popularity across both Africa and the world.

## **DIGITAL ACTIVISM IN ZIMBABWE**

### **BACKGROUND**

With the emergence of social media platforms presenting new and alternative methods of political protesting, and the ongoing restrictive media space limiting the spread of counter-hegemonic narratives, an investigation into digital activism in the Zimbabwean context is necessary.

Considering the rapid increase in social media use within Zimbabwe and the gradual reduction in technology costs, a relevant source to this study is Chitanana (2019), who provides insight into the role of social media in Zimbabwean political protests. According to Chitanana (2019), following the rise of social media movements in 2016 and 2017,

despite monopolistic control over mainstream media institutions, the government of Zimbabwe has faced fierce contradiction and opposition from digital activists. While research into the impacts of digital technologies in Africa has predominantly focused on the practicality of these technologies within movements – particularly with regards to economic activities, resource mobilization and spearheading citizen-driven news and information - Chitanana (2019) contends that social media has additionally offered a broader and more inclusive domain for Zimbabweans. Despite the state's violent response to protests and the evidential slow democratic transition within Zimbabwe, social media movements are gradually beginning to challenge the status quo. Social media technologies have provided citizens with a voice to challenge the government, as well as enabling citizens to self-organize outside traditional political party confines or structure offline movements. Subsequently, online activism has and continues to play a critical role in notifying the international community about political violence and corruption, electoral misconduct and state mismanagement while at the same time ensuring alternative messages, inspiring people to speak out, and even going as far to organize people with regards to offline action. Chitanana (2019) proposes that while the emergent Zimbabwean digital activist groups have yet to cause the Arab Spring-type of 'revolution', they have made some significant impact in challenging the state and in redefining political discourse. Subsequently, this article aids in providing an understanding of digital activism in Zimbabwe.

Moreover, Chibuwe & Ureke (2016) provide a further understanding of digital activism in Zimbabwe, suggesting that social media has been hailed as liberating in contexts of political repression. In their research, Chibuwe & Ureke (2016) contend that online media have made it possible for privately motivated individuals to challenge the public agenda. The internet's emergence, therefore, can be viewed as having liberated the public sphere due to the sometimes-anonymous nature of its communication; enabled free and equal debate among citizens, which, it was argued, would enhance participatory democracy; and decentralized the media environment in Zimbabwe – traditional media are largely top-down in which political intervention has created a biased environment (Chibuwe & Ureke, 2016). Accordingly, the internet's content, produced by citizens, is less affected by the biases, whims, and market demands which constrain traditional media. Therefore, social media has enabled people to challenge the status quo, with participants able to provide alternative narratives to that state-aligned ones.

Meanwhile, a recent increase in the rate of internet access and ICT devices in Zimbabwe has led to a surge in social media use by the citizenry (Moyo C., 2019). Economic collapse, ZANU-PF's authoritarian rule, and the continued repressive media space in Zimbabwe has accelerated social media movement usage. According to Moyo (2019), social movements are forms of collective action that emerge in response to situations of inequality, oppression and/or unmet social, political, economic or cultural demands. Subsequently, scholars have argued that the prevailing political environment and related factors, amidst growing digital technology platform growth in Zimbabwe, necessitated existing activist groups' to shift towards the appropriation of available technologies in order to circumvent a narrowing civic space and to challenge the status quo (Chitanana, 2019). In line with this statement, a relevant source to consider is Tenford Chitanana (2019), who contends that Zimbabwe's repressive political space accelerated the use of social media platforms. According to Chitanana (2019), collective action is not independent of space and time. It emerges out of its specific context as a product of historical, political, social and economic factors. As evident in Zimbabwe, both small- and large-scale social movements have been largely centred and influenced by broader economic and political events. These include the 2000s land reform; the 2005 Operation Murambastvina; national elections; the 2009 Global Political Agreement; the creation of the constitution; the abduction of Itai Dzamara, the

introduction of bond notes; and finally, the fuel price increase in 2019 (Chitanana, 2019). In a way, political repression is not only seen as a continuous characteristic in Zimbabwe but a defining factor of the 20-year history of digital activism in the country. These repressive environments have influenced the adoption and adaption of various types of digital media platforms. On the other hand, digital technologies have served as enablers of anonymity – a critical factor enabling the confrontation of the violent regime. Subsequently, Chitanana (2019) posits that internet and mobile phone affordances have enabled social media movements to play a key information dissemination role in a country where media was less plural and heavily regulated. Additionally, Chitanana (2019) contends that in the era of the internet, online movements have not only mobilized but motivated users to challenge the government, with movements' influence slowly becoming significantly effective in offline spaces as well. Social media has created a platform for shared citizenship, helping like-minded groups form loose coalitions and networks to share discontent, create counter-narratives and protest against the state. According to Chitanana (2019), these connections transcend spatial boundaries and have spawned offspring protests, bringing together a different following and, in some cases, a different repertoire of actions.

In pursuit of what Chitanana (2019) describes as political repression influencing the rise of digital activism, in an article titled, '*Social Media and Elections in Zimbabwe: Twitter War between pro-ZANU-PF and pro-MDC-A netizens*,' Chibuwe (2020) contends that the growth of the digital public sphere has largely been influenced by the repressive nature of Zimbabwean politics. According to Chibuwe (2020), traditional media, as communication platforms, play a crucial role in politics as they provide a platform where political players can engage with citizens, interact amongst themselves in a battle for the minds of citizens, and be used to rig public opinion. Politicians seek to use the media to influence the citizenry. Therefore, within this context, Chibuwe (2020) recognizes the rise of new media, characterized by mass self-communication and horizontal channels of communication. Unlike legacy media, Chibuwe (2020) states that new media is interactive, where audiences become producer-consumers. Consequently, Twitter can essentially be deemed an ideal public sphere, and social media comprises a positive impact on democracy in Zimbabwe. In addition to expanding the democratic space, Chibuwe (2020) contends that new media has enabled Zimbabweans to share abuses, corruption, and electoral malpractices. Specifically, Chibuwe (2020, p. 21) states that social media and online forums are characterized by "free expression and fearless political debate", unavailable in traditional media forms. Essentially, social media platforms have not only enabled civil society, interest groups, governments, political parties and candidates to deploy social media in electoral processes but have also enabled citizens to actively take part in the electoral process. Therefore, Chibuwe (2020) acknowledges how the use of social media in Zimbabwean politics is accelerating due to increased recognition of its value by various stakeholders. The July 2018 Zimbabwean national election, for example, was characterized by heavy usage of social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook for purposes of campaigning, with discourse largely being disseminated through these platforms. Extending on this notion, Chibuwe (2020) contends that repressive governments across Africa have been alarmed by the potential of social media to enable effective mobilization of the citizenry against despotism. In response to the increasing popularity of social media for challenging hegemonic narratives, the Zimbabwean government enacted interception laws, threats to block and the actual blocking of social media platforms, and in extreme cases – as was evident in January 2019 – total internet blockades (Chibuwe A., 2020). Chibuwe (2020) states that these reactions, in conjunction with ZANU-PF's and government officials' presence on social media platforms, show that they do indeed believe that social media are key platforms for political communication.

## ZIMBABWEAN SOCIAL MEDIA MOVEMENTS

## #THISFLAG

According to Chitanana (2019), the #ThisFlag social media movement can be considered one of the earliest forms of people-driven digital activism movements in Zimbabwe. It is viewed to be the first time that online protests translated into offline collective action. Essentially, #ThisFlag can be considered an accidental protest movement: what started off as a social media rant about leadership crisis and runaway corruption on Zimbabwe's 36<sup>th</sup> Independence commemoration day in April 2016 inadvertently became a unifying call for ordinary citizens to challenge the government. The sheer scale of this movement, therefore, makes it an interesting point of inquiry into the dominant discourses associated with Zimbabwean social media movements.

In examining the rise of the #ThisFlag social media movement in Zimbabwe, Susanna Sacks (2020) provides valuable insight into the social media movement, claiming that experiences shared using the hashtag #ThisFlag essentially transcended the original video post and elevated the declaration of dissatisfaction of Zimbabwean Pastor Evan Mawarire into an entire movement. According to Sacks (2020), on April 20, 2016, Mawarire posted a video on Facebook titled, "*A Lament for Zimbabwe.*" In the video, Mawarire reimagined the symbolism of the Zimbabwean national flag, which he wore around his shoulders, criticizing the state of the country under then President Robert Mugabe and calling for citizen action against Mugabe. The video rapidly gained significant attention from both citizens and those living in the diaspora, and "within just a week, it had approximately 100,000 views and shares" (Sacks, 2020, p. 240). In addition to providing insight into the start of the campaign, Sacks (2020) suggests that its popularity and rapid growth were attributed to the fact that online users began to respond and share their own personal experiences. Such experiences were linked through the hashtag #ThisFlag, enabling increased connection amongst users and the growth of a social media movement in itself. However, Sacks (2020) contends that these shared experiences began to dominate the conversation above Mawarire's original post, and within a year, over seven hundred videos tagged #ThisFlag had been published on YouTube. According to Sacks (2020, p. 241), "the hashtag offered a rhetoric of affiliation, connecting previous protesters against corruption, inflation, and fuel prices." Subsequently, users' direct action, culminating in a series of protests and a national boycott in July 2016, brought the rhetoric of Mawarire's original video to the ground, while the social media strategies of the protesters carried it far beyond the borders of the nation. However, Sacks (2020) goes further to investigate the accumulation of the offline movement, having transcended the online campaign. Upon recognizing the potential of both the hashtag and the online movement itself in June/July 2016, Mawarire called for a two-day national strike in Zimbabwe. According to Sacks (2020), during this time, Twitter and YouTube operated as 'frontstage' advertising platforms, and WhatsApp functioned as a 'backstage' organizing platform.

Furthermore, another important source to consider is Jesse Oberdorf (2017), who, in a dissertation titled '*Inspiring the Citizen to be Bold: Framing theory and the rise and decline of the #ThisFlag-movement in Zimbabwe,*' suggests that the #ThisFlag movement was able to move the 'normal Zimbabwean' to speak out and stand up against the regime that caused Zimbabweans to be so careful about the words they would normally choose. In Oberdorf's (2017) research, he posits that after Mawarire's video on Facebook, which consisted of a rant developed out of frustration for not being able to pay his children's school fees, Mawarire unwittingly founded a social movement that would soon be known to the world as #ThisFlag. After the video had gone viral on social media, Oberdorf (2017, p. 2) states that

Mawarire headed a social media campaign, "urging Zimbabweans to publicly wear their flag and speak up against their government, using the #ThisFlag hashtag." Oberdorf (2017) contends that this action mobilized citizens to identify and speak out against corruption, injustice and poverty, using the Zimbabwean flag as their identifying symbol. Oberdorf (2017) focuses on the mobilizing efforts of social media compared to the online campaign itself, recognizing the value of social media in aiding in-person protests. Additionally, Oberdorf (2017) provides insight into the factors influencing the rise of the movement, with a specific focus on the repressive socio-political environment. According to Oberdorf (2017), the rise of the #ThisFlag movement is predominantly influenced by the repressive state through which it emerged. Oberdorf (2017) contends that at the root of Zimbabwe's crisis is a corrupt political elite that is desperate to cling on to power, using force and repression as their main resources (Coltart, 2018). Consequently, the repressive state has forced contentious action to be re-thought, re-organized and in some cases, re-discovered. Therefore, Oberdorf (2017) claims that #ThisFlag serves as an example through which new methods – social media platforms – are able to include and mobilize social groups that have previously been politically inactive and indifferent.

### #ZIMBABWEANLIVESMATTER

According to Betty Mubandizi (2020), the issues in Zimbabwe are multi-faceted: they cut across several sectors, administrative regimes and political ideologies. Under Robert Mugabe's rule, citizen protest was often met with physical violence and intimidation tactics by the ruling party – evident in the 2016 shutdown and arrest of Mawarire after the online social media campaign #ThisFlag. However, despite a change in leadership with Emmerson Mnangagwa's administration - elected in 2018 - this trend has not only continued but accelerated. As citizens move to online platforms in a bid to protest their dissatisfaction with the state and avoid the imposed physical violence associated with in-person protesting, platforms such as Twitter have become increasingly important as avenues for counter-hegemonic discourse. Arguably, the two most prominent and effective social media campaigns have been the #ThisFlag movement – under Mugabe's administration - and the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement – under the Mnangagwa administration. Having already discussed the former, this study will now examine the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign in order to understand the dominant discourses associated with the movement.

The #ZimbabweanLivesMatter online campaign did not only occur under a different Presidential regime but throughout the global COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in different influencing factors within which the campaign emerged. In providing a backdrop to the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter online campaign, a relevant source is Mawere (2020), who, in an article titled, *'Unmasking other dangerous pandemics within the COVID-19 lockdown,'* provides insight into the events leading to the rise of the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign. According to Mawere (2020), the rise of the campaign can be attributed to an opposition protest in May 2020 - specifically, the in-person protests by and consequential arrest of MDC Alliance (MDC-A) members in Warren Park D Harare. After a flash demonstration in Harare aimed at protesting "the state's failure to provide care and sustenance for the disadvantaged and vulnerable during the COVID-19 lockdown", Zimbabwean police arrested Joana Mamombe, Cecilia Chimhiri, and Netsai Marova, who had been part of the demonstration (Mawere, 2020, p. 170). A statement published by the state-owned newspaper, *The Herald*, stated that the women were accused of breaking the rules and regulations of the lockdown. According to Mawere (2020), it was the events after the arrest that caused outrage, specifically, their alleged disappearance. After two days, the three women had been found dumped on the outskirts of Bindura – 120km from

Harare – beaten up and having been sexually harassed. Despite original statements of arrest, the police then proceeded to deny arresting the women. According to Mawere (2020), with the Zimbabwean state having a history of abducting and torturing oppositional voices, in conjunction with earlier statements of arrest, the event sparked outrage across the country. In his article, Mawere (2020) details the dangerous pandemics regarding state repression, gender violence, toxic and patriarchal nation-building projects and many forms of physical, structural and symbolic violence. Despite focusing on the abovementioned incident, Mawere (2020) provides a backdrop to the events leading up to the start of the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter online campaign.

Extending on Mawere's (2020) contextual background, an article by the Africa Research Bulletin (2020) examines the events influencing the start of the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign. In addition to the MDC-A protest in May, the Africa Research Bulletin (2020) suggests that the campaign was a result of the planned 31<sup>st</sup> July protests and the exposed multi-million-dollar government corruption scandal by prominent journalist Hopewell Chin'ono. According to the Bulletin (2020), opposition politician, Jacob Ngarivhume, had called for in-person demonstrations on July 31, leading to his arrest. Additionally, Chin'ono, upon uncovering the 'Covidgate' scandal – involving the mismanagement of funds and coronavirus supplies – was also arrested, accused not of exposing corruption "but of using his social media accounts to incite Zimbabweans to violently overthrow the government" (2020, p. 1). Thereafter, the Zimbabwean government, army and police launched a harsh lockdown of all activities throughout the country, attributed to the pandemic. The Bulletin (2020) states that police checkpoints and roadblocks were set up leading into the capital, and movement was heavily restricted – despite a lack of changes regarding COVID-19 cases and deaths. According to the Bulletin (2020), these two events, and specifically the arrest of these two prominent figures, resulted in the rise of the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign. With offline collective action heavily restricted, protesters took to social media, and thus, the global #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign emerged.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

As this study aims to provide a comparative discourse analysis of the two Zimbabwean social media movements, further analysis regarding CDA is necessary. Allan Luke (1997), in an article titled *'Theory and practice in critical discourse analysis,'* provides insight into CDA, positing that the theory is a contemporary approach to the study of language and discourses in social institutions and that the principal unit for analysis for CDA is the *text*. Defining CDA as "the use of an ensemble of techniques for the study of textual practice and language use as social and cultural practices," Luke (1997) emphasizes how texts can be taken to be social actions, meaningful and coherent instances of spoken and written language use. Specifically, Luke (1997) considers specific types or genres of text to serve conventional social uses and functions – business letters feature discourses of finance, tabloid news feature discourse of romance and sexuality, and multimodal visual texts feature discourses of entertainment. Accordingly, this observation highlights how the mode of text influences the message. In his examination of the theory, Luke (1997) suggests that CDA focuses on how social relations, identity, knowledge and power are constructed through written and spoken texts. By examining the mode of text, in conjunction with the textual components of the message itself, an understanding of the social relations, knowledge, and intention can be achieved.

Moreover, David Harper (2006) introduces the concept of Foucauldian discourse, in which analysts are more concerned with the macro level of interaction of discourse. In an article titled *'Discourse Analysis,'* Harper (2006) states that by using this approach within CDA, researchers focus on how texts are located in historical and institutional contexts and how language "makes new sectors of reality thinkable and practicable" (Rose, 1990). According to Harper (2006), researchers using this approach view ways of talking as more than just words but consider them embedded in sets of power relations supported by institutions. Subsequently, Foucauldian discourse analysts often produce historical analyses of how certain discourses have developed. Additionally, Harper (2006) points out possible limitations to CDA. Notably, Harper (2006) suggests that quantitative researchers who used large sample sizes which aim to be representative of the population at large may criticize CDA because of their relatively small samples. Additionally, Harper (2006) notes that CDA is not a simple technique that can be mechanistically learned and applied. Rather, the unstructured method of analysis requires time, with methods unlikely to be replicated. However, as this study focuses on a specific research field, the two social media protests in Zimbabwe, these limitations appear irrelevant.

## ELITE CONTINUITY MODEL

In addition to theories on discourse analysis, this study seeks to investigate similarities or differences regarding campaign discourse in order to understand how these similarities or differences reflect the repressive character of both the Mugabe and Mnangagwa regimes. As a such, insight into theories that examine transition and continuity is necessary. To this effect, scholars have proposed the elite continuity model, a theory based on descriptions and explanations of power relationships in contemporary society. Considering this approach, an important source to consider is Winston Mano (2016), who, in an article titled *'The State and Public Broadcasting: Continuity and Change in Zimbabwe,'* provides insight into the elite continuity model stipulating that the theory focuses on continuity in transitions. According to Mano (2016), the model examines the amount of and extent to which continuity is present in structures and personnel across a specific transition. Throughout the article, Mano (2016) suggests that there exist several factors that influence elite continuity, and therefore, these factors can be used to determine the presence of the model in a specific context. Such components of transitions include the lack of a clean break in the organization of political life; the lack of linkages between political transformation and marketization of society; continuity in both institutions and personnel between the old regime and the new; how media institutions that emerge from transitions are strongly influenced by the political elite; and the interplay of economic and political influence central to the functioning of the system (Mano, 2016). According to Mano (2016), scholars are able to judge the presence of elite continuity in systems by comparing such systems to the proposed factors.

Furthermore, research undertaken by Colin Sparks (2009) extends the elite continuity model. In an article titled *'South African Media in Transition,'* Sparks (2009) explicates that elite continuity theory displays the following seven components: the transition from dictatorship to democracy can take a number of forms; there is considerable continuity in both institutions and personnel between the old regime and the new; the shift towards a market economy is a political process, with the award of favourable opportunities being closely connected to political power; the media institutions that emerged from the transition are strongly influenced by the political elite; that previous revolutions transformed the ways in which countries were governed; the main dynamic of the revolutions was that the old elite transformed itself from one that rested upon the collective ownership of state property to one that rests on private

property, acquired formally or informally through the exercise of political power; and the degree of democratization is secondary in this model (Sparks, 2009). Sparks (2009) view of elite continuity model aligns with Mano's (2016) closely but goes further to incorporate the exercise of political power. Therefore, both papers prove particularly relevant and important in informing this study.

While the elite continuity model has been predominantly used to examine transitions in political power, the model has rarely been used to examine transitions regarding discourse. Typically, research regarding political transition and discourse has been separated into two distinct fields: elite continuity and elite discourse. While the former seeks to examine the degree of continuity in transitions within political spheres, the latter examines how language and communication define, mediate and legitimize class privilege (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2018). Rather than explore continuity in discourse across case studies, the Elite Discourse model is more concerned with how language and communication are used to position people as elite or non-elite and with discourse about elite status and discourse of elites. Arguably the closest model used to examine continuity in discourse across studies is the Topic Continuity model, established by Talmy Givón. However, the model focuses on the cross-linguistic hierarchy of natural language, examining continuity across languages rather than discourse across movements. Therefore, the model is more effective in linguistic studies rather than in media and politics. As such, this study employs a new model, the Discourse Continuity Model, utilizing features of the Elite Continuity Model and applying them to discourse studies. By applying analytical features of the lack of a clean break in the organization of political life; continuity in both institutions and personnel between the old regime and the new; and the degree of democratization as secondary - characteristic of both Mano (2016)'s and Sparks (2009) understanding of the Elite Continuity Model - to discourse, this study offers a new way of examining the degree of continuity in political influenced discourse.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **APPROACHES**

As this study focuses on discourse analysis, the exploration warrants qualitative methods of analysis rooted in the interpretivist paradigm. According to Alharahsheh & Pius (2020), the interpretivism paradigm emerged out of the critique of the positivist paradigm - a philosophical approach that focuses on pure data as well as facts without being influenced by the interpretation of human bias. Unlike positivism, which tends to prioritise scientific data capable of logical or mathematical proof, the interpretivism paradigm is more concerned with in-depth variables and factors related to a context, considering humans as different from physical phenomena as they create more in-depth and subjective meanings (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Interpretivism differs from positivism in that it aims to include richness regarding insight gathered rather than attempting to provide definite and universal laws that can be generalised and applicable to everyone regardless of some key variables and factors (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Accordingly, research rooted in the interpretivism paradigm considers social reality, context, and experiential aspects of being both significant and influencing factors of research. What's more, this approach emphasises subjectivity, assuming that reality is subjective and can differ between individuals. The significance of this paradigm is that it aims to provide more depth to research, investigating both commonalities and meaning. In his review of the paradigm, Goldkuhl (2012) proposes that the core idea of interpretivism is to work with the subjective meanings already prevalent in the social world; that is, to acknowledge their existence, reconstruct them, understand them, to avoid

distorting them, and to use them as building blocks in theorising. As Alharahsheh & Pius (2020) contend, the interpretivist paradigm enables researchers to treat the context of the research and its situations as unique, supporting more topic- and context-based research compared to generalisation. Consequently, this study falls under the interpretivist paradigm as it thoroughly investigates and compares two specific social phenomena within a specific context, the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter and #ThisFlag social media movements. By investigating the dominant discourses associated with the two social media movements, this study provides an acknowledgement, understanding, and analysis of the subjective meanings in Zimbabwean social media. Accordingly, this research is deeply rooted in the interpretivist paradigm as the objective is not a generalisation of findings but the identification of the dominant discourses of two prominent social media movements in Zimbabwe.

More specifically, the researcher made use of qualitative methods concerning content analysis in order to provide a condensed view of the dominant topics associated with the two social media movements. According to Tilley (2019), qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world to support the deep exploration of individuals' and communities' experiences. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. More specifically, qualitative research aims to address questions concerned with developing an understanding of the meaning and experience dimensions of human lives and social worlds. Following the interpretivist approach regarding subjectivity, qualitative methods aim to give privilege to the perspectives of research participants and to illuminate the subjective meanings, actions and context of those being researched. Accordingly, this study employs qualitative methods as the intention is to merely observe, investigate, and understand the subjective meanings of hashtag users associated with the two social media campaigns. In pursuit of subjectivity, and in their research of qualitative techniques, Fossey *et al.* (2002) suggest that qualitative research questions focus chiefly on three areas: language as a means to explore processes of communication and patterns of interaction within particular social groups; description and interpretation of subjective meanings attributed to situations and actions; and theory-building through discovering patterns and connections in qualitative data. Using this approach as a base for data collection and analysis, this study provides an in-depth interpretation of patterns of interaction regarding Zimbabwe's two social media campaigns, building theory and discovering patterns.

However, qualitative research extends across multiple different research focuses, which all utilise vastly different approaches to data collection and analysis. The objective of this study is clear: to comparatively analyse the dominant discourses evident in each social media campaign so as to identify the level of continuity or lack thereof in discourse between the two campaigns. With the primary analytical field comprising discourse on social media, the utilisation of qualitative content analysis is the most suitable method. According to Hsieh & Shannon (2005), content analysis is a flexible method for analysing text data and is described as the scientific study of the content of communication. The development of content analysis as a full-fledged scientific method took place during World War II when the U.S. government sponsored a project under the directorship of Harold Lasswell to evaluate enemy propaganda (Roberts, 2015). Due to the project's success, the method quickly spread to other disciplines, gaining popularity, particularly among social science researchers. Content analysis was initially used within quantitative research studies with the objective of systemically analysing data and generalising findings (Roberts, 2015). However, as qualitative researchers began recognising the value of the method, the research technique began to incorporate elements of subjectivity, context and understanding rather than quantitative methods of measuring variables. Accordingly,

qualitative researchers using content analysis prioritise subjective meanings drawn out of specific contexts with the intention to understand rather than replicate (Roberts, 2015). In seeking an in-depth understanding of the two social media movements in Zimbabwe and the dominant discourses pertaining to these movements, this study utilises qualitative content analysis techniques. By placing emphasis on the subjective meanings of dominant topics used by hashtag users associated with each of the campaigns, this study provides an understanding of the dominant discourses, relying heavily on the context through which the discourses are formed.

Furthermore, in their research on qualitative content analysis, Hsieh & Shannon (2005) contend that there are three predominant methods of approaching qualitative content analysis, namely, a conventional approach, a directed approach, and a summative approach. While each approach broadly falls under the same research method, they each possess distinct characteristics that vary depending on the type of study conducted. Firstly, the conventional approach, widely used when the aim is to describe a phenomenon, typically applies to studies in which existing theory or research literature is limited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The approach avoids preconceived categories but rather allows researchers to immerse themselves in the data to allow new insights to emerge. Accordingly, the conventional approach focuses predominantly on data collection using interviews, whereby open-ended questions are the focus. Comparatively, a directed approach to content analysis relies on existing theory or literature and yet recognises that such theory remains incomplete or would benefit from further description (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Therefore, this approach aims to validate or extend a theoretical framework or theory conceptually. The researcher using a directed approach, would use existing theory to focus the research questions, identifying key concepts or variables according to predetermined coding categories. Compared to the conventional approach, this approach is based solely on the theory through which the study emerges. Lastly, Hsieh & Shannon (2005) suggest a summative approach to content analysis, whereby the analysis starts with identifying and quantifying certain words or content in text with the purpose of understanding the contextual use of the words or content. Focused not on inferring meaning but rather on exploring usage, the summative approach goes beyond mere word counts, including latent content analysis to interpret the content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Accordingly, as this study comprises the analysis of tweets and posts using the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter and #ThisFlag hashtags, a summative approach is the most suitable. Specifically, using the summative approach, the researcher begins the analysis with searches for occurrences of the identified words. The researcher aims to identify the level of frequency through which a specific word or topic was referred to. By utilising this approach, a study can provide a detailed understanding of the dominant topics associated with a specific theme – such as a hashtag. This study, therefore, makes use of a summative approach within qualitative content analysis, diving into the frequency of words or topics so as to provide an effective analysis of the dominant discourses associated with each hashtag. Utilising qualitative content analysis techniques rooted in the interpretivist paradigm with allow the researcher to prioritise subjectivity and context when approaching data collection regarding the topic.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

Research regarding qualitative data collection methods predominantly focuses on more traditional methods of collection, including interviews, focus groups and observation. However, with the rise in new technologies, other forms of data collection have emerged and deserve attention. Notably, observational data collection regarding multimedia materials has become a common trend in social media research. As the objective of this study is to identify the dominant discourses associated with two social media movements in Zimbabwe, the researcher employed

observational data collection methods, comparatively analysing a selection of posts that used the hashtags associated with the two Zimbabwean social media movements - #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter. While traditional forms, including interviews and surveys, represent useful tools for qualitative analysis, such methods provide subjective and meaning-oriented views. Specifically, utilising these methods would focus more on the purpose of the movements and the intentions of participants rather than an observational analysis of discourse. Considering that the purpose of this study is not to determine the purpose of the movement, the role of social media or whether or not the movements' succeeded, but rather to identify discourses published under the relevant hashtags' parameters, comparative discourse methods were used.

The choice of these two social media movements was attributed to a variety of factors, of which the primary is the two campaigns' popularity and reach. According to an article by ELM Magazine (2020), regardless of the challenges of converting social media-spared campaigns into real action, the country has been seeing a rise in powerful social media campaigns since 2013 – and #ThisFlag was one of them. With Mawarire's video going viral on Facebook and thousands of Zimbabweans both in the country and diaspora joining the movement with their own videos and utilisation of the hashtag, #ThisFlag became one of the most effective online movements in Zimbabwe at the time. In addition to its significant online presence, due to its long-term nature and far-reaching offline impacts through the physical protest in 2016, the #ThisFlag movement was seen as the greatest anti-government protest in the country since the late 1990s. This was evident with the successful national shutdown, as well as the number of citizens who protested outside the Harare Magistrates Court in solidarity with the movement's founder, Mawarire. This level of online and offline action reaffirms both the power of the movement and its value as a modern form of protest, warranting further investigation in this study.

Moreover, the event sparked a rise in other social media campaigns, with the most notable taking place in July 2020 - #ZimbabweanLivesMatter. According to ELM Magazine (2020), the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign, like the #ThisFlag campaign, was one of the most popular and broadly noted campaigns in Zimbabwe, having been fashioned after the far-reaching #BlackLivesMatter campaign at the time. At the height of its popularity, #ZimbabweanLivesMatter was the number one trending topic on Twitter, leading to the participation of several celebrity figures from all around the world. On 3 August 2020, #ZimbabweanLivesMatter had garnered almost 300,000 tweets, with the hashtag only starting days before. Machirori (2020, p. 2) notes that this "moment of collective online action was reminiscent of the #ThisFlag movement of 2016." As the movement gained momentum in the 'Twittersphere', it saw the active online participation by several notable celebrities, including rapper AKA, Ice Cube, and actress Thandie Newton, as well as reports by western media outlets including the Guardian and the BBC. The externalisation of the hashtag created significant momentum and visibility, positioning the movement as one of the country's most influential online campaigns (Machirori, 2020). Additionally, Machirori (2020) provides insight into a range of intersecting factors which made the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign the viral success that it was. Firstly, she suggests that, similar to the #ThisFlag movement, it presented itself as a non-partisan and citizen-oriented mass action, something crucial to ensuring uptake by the average Zimbabwean Twitter user (Machirori, 2020). Secondly, the hashtag's utilisation by figures who held both local credibility and international social currency, such as journalist Hopewell Chin'ono, were pivotal to the movement's sustained virality and reach (Machirori, 2020). Finally, the movement served as a convening point for Zimbabweans on Twitter, those living both in and out of the country. Accordingly, the campaign's prominence in both internal and external spheres, as well as its inclusivity regarding

citizens who would not normally take part in physical protests, warrant it as an ideal form of inquiry into the Zimbabwean social media movement field. Machirori (2020) argues that despite the differences between the two campaigns, with #This Flag being more locally focused while #ZimbabweanLivesMatter holding more of an external global mission, both movements were the country's most impactful social media campaigns. In many ways, the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign mirrors its predecessor, #ThisFlag. Consequently, the two movement's similarities and differences make them both valuable sources, warranting further investigation.

With the focus being on a comparative discourse analysis of the dominant topics associated with the two campaigns, this study constitutes a sample of social media posts taken from the two movement's most widely used social media platform – Twitter. Despite the relatively low internet penetration rate in Zimbabwe, a digital report by Simon Kemp (2021) states that there were 1.3 million social media users in Zimbabwe in January 2021, with the number increasing by 320,000 alone between 2020 and 2021. This factor, in conjunction with the fact that the #ThisFlag movement started with an online video by Mawarire, led to the platforms' appeal as an ideal source of inquiry. Similar to #ThisFlag's start on social media, the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign also started on an online social media platform. Despite the hashtag trending across multiple social media channels, Twitter hosted the most interaction regarding both campaigns. The platform is also one of the most popular social media sites worldwide, particularly regarding the political and economic conversation, as well as events. According to Statista (2021), Twitter currently ranks as one of the leading social networks worldwide based on active users. As of the fourth quarter of 2020, Twitter had 192 million monetizable daily active users worldwide. Despite contending with heavyweights such as Instagram and Snapchat, the platform has become increasingly prominent during events, with hashtags and live tweeting being used by consumers to engage with others (Statista, 2021). Accordingly, the platform's popularity in politics and events warrants it as an ideal source for further investigation.

Furthermore, the researcher made use of non-probability sampling methods when collecting posts that used the hashtags #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter. According to Etikan, Musa & Alkassim (2016), unlike probability sampling, in which every participant has an equal probability of being selected to form the population, in non-probability sampling, randomisation is not important in selecting a sample from the population of interest. Rather, subjective methods are used to decide which elements are included in the sample. As this study utilised subjectivity when selecting the sample, most notably through the hashtags selected and the timeframe chosen, non-probability sampling is the most suitable method. Additionally, as it is unlikely that the entire sample of posts using the hashtags is attainable due to the multi-platform nature of the social media movements, non-probability sampling is more suitable. With the hashtags to be analysed having already been identified - #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter - this study made use of purposive sampling in its data collection.

Purposive sampling, also known as judgemental or selective sampling, relies on the judgement of the researcher when it comes to selecting units of analysis (Rai, 2015). A form of non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample is taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria, purposive techniques include the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. According to Rai (2015), the method is typically used in qualitative research to identify and select the information-rich cases for the most proper utilisation of available resources. This often involves the identification and selection of individuals or groups of individuals that are proficient and well-informed about a phenomenon of interest. With regards to social

media analyses, as is the case with this study, the identification or selection of participants concerns particular characteristics. Specifically, this study made use of purposive sampling techniques as the researcher had a specific participant group – those participating in the relevant social media movements. In this context, probability sampling would be ineffective, as the complete scope of the number of participants is unknown and unattainable. Accordingly, the study utilised purposive sampling across four levels of the data collection process. Notably, the researcher selected the social media movements to be analysed; the platform through which the data will be collected, Twitter; the hashtags used by social media campaign participants - #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter; and the type of content produced by participants, original posts and tweets.

Moreover, this study made use of homogeneous sampling as a form of purposive sampling. According to Etikan, Musa & Alkassim (2016), this form of sampling focuses on candidates who share similar traits or specific characteristics. The idea is to focus on this precise similarity and how it relates to the topic being researched (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Accordingly, as this study focuses on two social media campaigns in Zimbabwe, those who were participating in the campaigns online were identified as participants. The common characteristic shared, therefore, was the participation in each movement and the utilisation of the associated hashtags. Additionally, Rai (2015) notes that homogeneous sampling is often chosen when the research question that is being addressed is specific to the characteristics of the particular group of interest, which is subsequently examined in detail. The primary research question in this study comprises the dominant discourses evident in each social media campaign, the similarities and differences between these discourses, and the role that social media played accordingly. With the question specifically addressing those partaking in the online movements, and the discourses used when posting about the movements, homogeneous sampling arises as the best method to analyse these discourses.

In analysing the two relevant social media hashtags, the researcher allocated a specific sample timeframe within the data collection. Due to both of the social media movements' ongoing popularity and hashtag utilisation since their inception in 2016 and 2020, respectively, a broad analysis of all the participants would be too large a data sample. For example, as of 6 August 2020, the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter hashtag had garnered over 300,000 tweets. Accordingly, the researcher narrowed down the data collection timeframe, using popularity and relevance factors to determine the timeframe. Using a timeframe of one week surrounding the respective social media movements' creation, the researcher effectively narrowed down a timeframe to reflect both a suitable quantity and adequate quality. With regards to the #ThisFlag movement, the researcher made use of a timeframe between 6 July 2016 and 13 July 2016 – the week over which the social media movement's hashtag became popular. Correspondingly, the researcher made use of a timeframe between 27 July 2020 and 3 August 2020 for the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter social media movement – the week in which the movement was formed. This timeframe not only ensured a sufficient quantity of data was collected but that the utilisation of the relevant hashtags was at its highest.

After having identified both the sample and timeframe, the researcher proceeded to download the data set from Twitter. As a social media platform with over 400 million users worldwide, Twitter has placed emphasis on 'privacy and control' whereby protecting and defending the privacy of people online has been built into the core DNA of the company (Twitter, 2022). Accordingly, the platform's application programming interface (API) does not permit users to download historical tweets – tweets posted prior to a week before the current date. The program “prohibits the use of Twitter data in any way that would be inconsistent with people's reasonable expectations of privacy” (Twitter,

2022). However, the platform does offer access to Twitter API to programmatically retrieve and analyse data. Through three different access levels – namely, essential (basic access), elevated (extended access); and academic research (advanced access) – individuals can both download and analyse Twitter data. For the purpose of this study, the researcher applied for the academic research developer account, as this level allowed "access to even more data and advanced search endpoints" (Twitter, 2022). Specifically, researchers using this level have access to 10 million tweets per month, access to full-archive search and full-archive Tweets counts, and access to advanced search operators (Twitter, 2022). The value of this account is that the researcher has full access to historical tweets, enabling the aforementioned data sample and timeline to be retrieved. Accordingly, the researcher applied for an academic research account and, after approval, was able to access the tweets within the specified timeframe.

Having set up the academic research account, the researcher created a project within which the data would be downloaded and stored. The project was separated into two sections and labelled according to each hashtag - #ZimbabweanLivesMatter and #ThisFlag. Thereafter, the researcher input the specified timeframe of each study into the account and the program downloaded all tweets using each hashtag and within each timeframe into the project. The data collected throughout the timeframe for #ThisFlag revealed 30,000 tweets, and for #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, 100,000 tweets. Thereafter, the tweets were downloaded onto two excel spreadsheets for analysis.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher separated the data analysis process into two stages, namely, primary and secondary, in order to comprehensively analyse both the dominant discourses associated with each campaign and the similarities and/or differences between the two campaigns. The primary analysis, therefore, made use of qualitative content analysis in order to provide a broad overview of the data and relevant concepts. Within the primary analysis, the researcher made use of the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12 pro.

According to Azeem & Salfi (2012), the size of data collected by qualitative research methods is extremely large compared to traditional quantitative data collections, with organising and analysing the data proving to be rather problematic. Therefore, with the introduction of new technologies, software analysis tools were brought to the market, enabling researchers to analyse large amounts of data in a relatively short space of time. Accordingly, due to the size of the two datasets associated with this study – 30,000 tweets and 100,000 tweets, respectively -the researcher made use of NVivo 12 pro. Using NVivo – a software program used for qualitative and mixed methods research, specifically for the analysis of an unstructured text such as social media – the researcher was able to analyse the abovementioned dataset (University, 2022). According to Sotiriadou, Brouwers & Le (2014), NVivo has emerged as the most used software package, helping a researcher manage and organise data while facilitating the analysis of data, identification of themes, and the development of conclusions. NVivo has significantly shortened the time taken to analyse textual data while improving the process altogether. Extending on Sotiriadou, Brouwers & Le's (2014)'s understanding of the program, Dollah, Abduh & Rosmaladewi (2017) stipulate that NVivo has a number of benefits, including efficiency in time, transparency, and multiplicity; the ability to capture mixed data including quantitative and qualitative; and accommodating a rich and large amount of data. What's more, the program covers a range of types of text, including word documents, PDFs, videos, spreadsheets, and social media. Specifically, it is the application's ability to process social media text that makes it such an important program, particularly within this study.

For this study, the researcher uploaded each dataset (excel spreadsheet of each hashtag) to NVivo, creating a separate project for each. This way, the researcher could categorise and summarise each project and its data without interference from the other. Rather than rely on predetermined themes and categories to identify the dominant discourses, the researcher made use of inductive methods of analysing the dominant themes. As an approach that primarily uses detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts and themes, the inductive approach was more appropriate, largely due to the fact that the researcher was unaware of what the dominant discourses could be and did not want to assume without reviewing the data (Azungah, 2018). Accordingly, the inductive approach allowed the researcher to identify themes clearly.

For the inductive analysis, the researcher utilised the word frequency query option on NVivo, whereby the application runs a query to determine the top words utilised across the dataset. For this study, the researcher investigated the top five words frequented across the dataset as this not only provided an adequate sample but would cover a range of discourses. NVivo allows the researcher to group the word search according to exact matches, with stemmed words, with synonyms, with specialisations, or with generalisations. Exact matches would provide specific words without deviating from the word itself; stemmed words would provide words across multiple tenses (talk, talking, talks); synonyms would provide words similar to the searched word (talk, speak); specialisations would provide the word within the same specialisation (talk, speak, discuss); and generalisations would provide a broader conceptualisation (talk, communicate,). The method of grouping relies on the preciseness of the search required. As this study analyses the dominant discourses associated with each campaign, the researcher utilised the synonym method – whereby words were grouped according to similar words. For example, the word 'talk' was associated with other similar words, including 'discuss' and/or 'speak' – to identify the top 100 most frequently used words throughout the data set. This way, the researcher was able to determine common discourses without relying on specific words.

However, as tweets often contained slang versions of words and abbreviations (gvt instead of government), the researcher went one step further, using substantive coding to group the already determined categories according to the top five categories of words. Substantive coding is a method involving reading through the entire text with the purpose of identifying core concepts and impressions (Holton, 2010). By reading through the top 100 words, the researcher then utilised thematic coding - a form of analysis that involves the recording of text based on a common theme or idea – the researcher was able to determine the common discourse themes associated with each hashtag (Given, 2008). For example, by grouping specific dominant words such as 'Zimbabwe, Zim, and country,' the researcher specified the dominant discourses, removing the risk of repetition. From these groups, the researcher selected the top five that emerged and, from their analysis, was able to determine the dominant discourses associated with each of the hashtags. Thereafter, the secondary stage of analysis occurred.

Within the secondary stage, the researcher comparatively analysed the top five dominant discourses associated with each hashtag. Firstly, the researcher identified the top five discourses, showcasing them graphically so as to provide clear insight into both the similarities and differences associated with each campaign. This initial step in the analysis provided a 'face value' review of the dominant discourses. However, in order to provide further detail as to why these discourses were similar and/or different, the researcher went one step further to apply relevant theoretical frameworks to the data. Firstly, the researcher applied social movement theory, identifying how deprivation theory and new social movement theory relate and inform the study. Secondly, the researcher applied CDA, allowing a detailed review of the

discourses and their relationship. By reviewing the similarities and/or differences associated with the textual elements of the data, as well as the broader, macro level of the data, the researcher provided a comparative discourse analysis of the dominant discourses. Finally, as this study aims to provide clarity as to whether or not discourse prevails despite the change in national leadership, the researcher applied the established Discourse Continuity Model, derived from elements of the Elite Continuity Model, to the data.

## LIMITATIONS

Throughout the study, the researcher encountered a variety of challenges. Firstly, as this study is rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, limitations concerning subjectivity arose, whereby outcomes relied heavily on the researcher's own interpretation (Pham, 2018). Therefore, throughout the data collection and analysis, the researcher had to make a concerted effort to remain as objective as possible. Specifically, to mitigate any chance of bias, the researcher employed objective means of data collection – by utilising the word frequency query on NVivo, the researcher had no control over which tweets were being analysed, but rather the entire sample was reviewed, ensuring objectivity across the analytical process. Additionally, by using inductive methods of analysis, the researcher relied on a reading of the text before categorising themes. This way, the researcher relied on the text to inform the outcome rather than assuming results. Objectivity was also ensured through the researcher's choice of sample. By setting a specific timeframe by which the tweets would be collected – a week for both social media campaigns – the researcher ensured both campaigns covered the same timeframe.

Additionally, one of the primary challenges concerning data collection involved coding. Twitter's API and restrictions regarding downloading historical tweets made it difficult for the researcher to both access and download the data. Once approved for the academic research account, access was permitted, but due to the researcher's lack of knowledge regarding coding – which was required to download the tweets – she had to seek assistance from a colleague working as a software engineer. However, this removed any chance of bias as the colleague downloaded all tweets on behalf of the researcher, enabling objectivity across the sample.

Moreover, concerning data analysis, limitations regarding the text arose. Specifically, as the data comprised social media text, the tweets contained slang words, misspellings, and emojis. Therefore, this not only complicated the analysis process but created the opportunity for tweets to be left out completely – as the analysis software does not identify these elements. However, this was mitigated through the type of word frequency query used. Specifically, NVivo allows the researcher to group the word search according to exact matches, with stemmed words, synonyms, specialisations, or generalisations. This way, the software programme would be able to identify these elements, grouping the tweets accordingly. Despite the number of limitations that arose out of the study, by employing objective methods of analysis and utilising qualitative software, the researcher was able to adequately address the limitations.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### FINDINGS

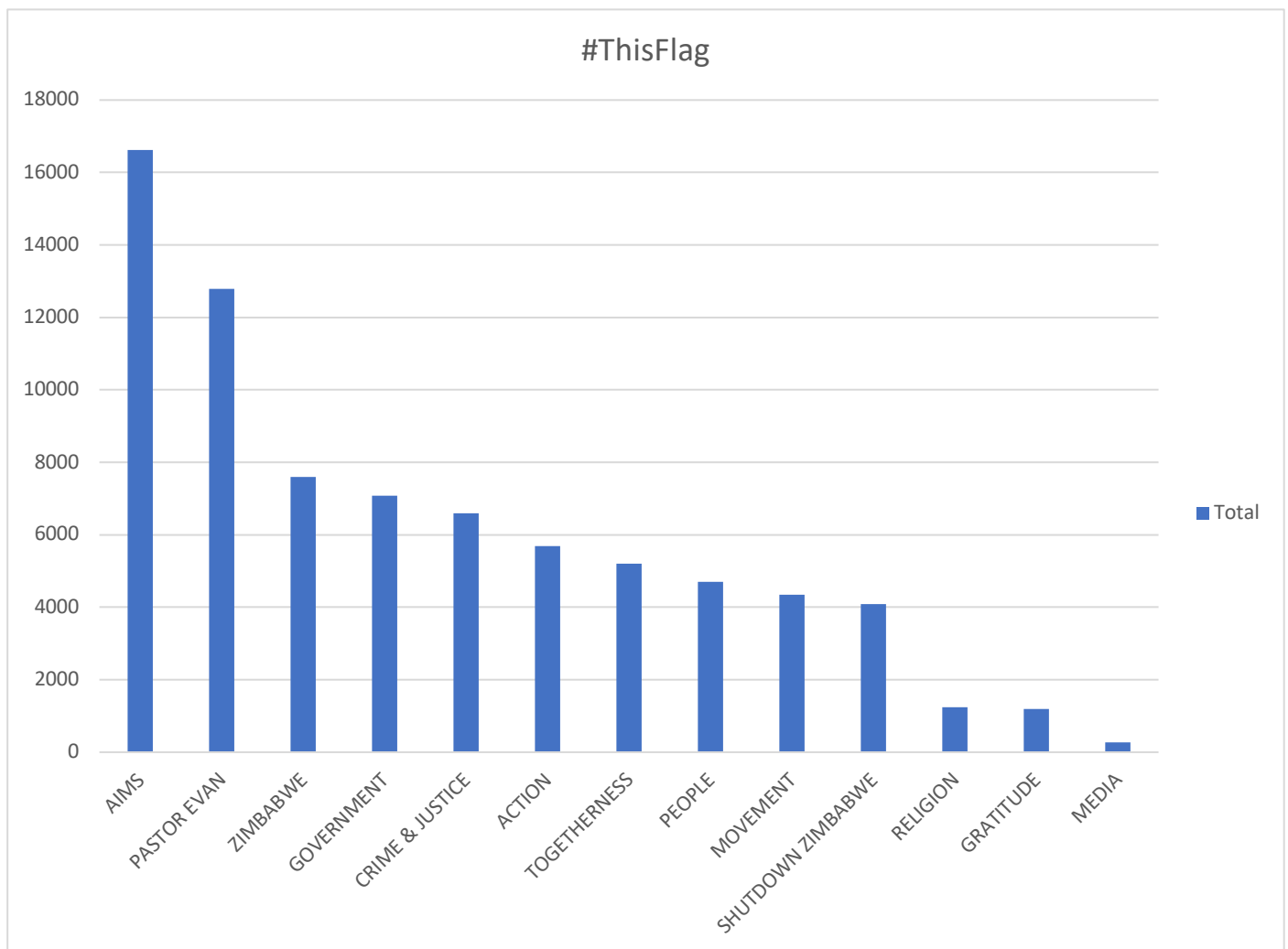
#### #THISFLAG



The primary analysis utilised the word frequency query on NVivo Pro 7 to identify the common words across both social media campaigns. By separating each campaign into its own project, the researcher was able to analyse the dominant discourses associated with each and thereafter compare these discourses.

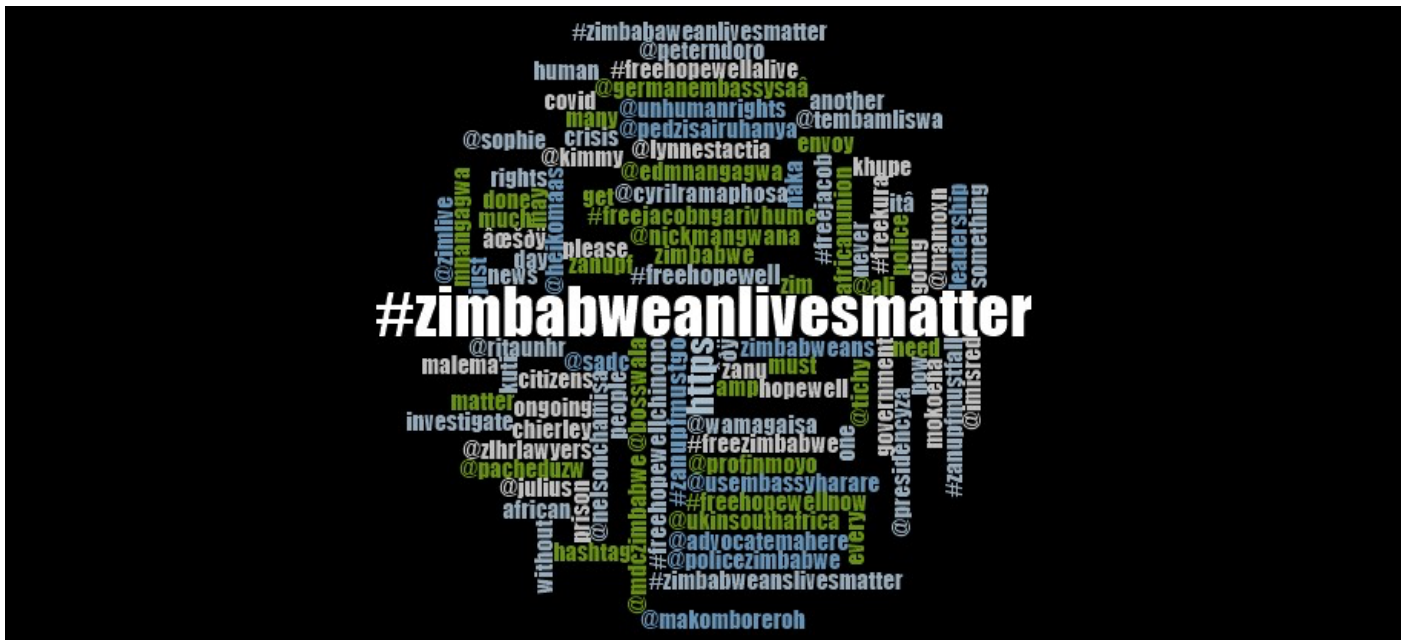
Through an analysis of the most frequent words associated with the #ThisFlag campaign, the researcher identified the top 60 words associated with the campaign. These words were as follows: Zimbabwe, Zim, country, Africa, Harare, #freepastorevan, @pastorevanlive, Evan, mawarire, pastor, video, #pastorevan, leader, #zimshutdown2016, shutdownzimbabwe, #shutdownzim, citizens, Zimbabweans, people, zimbos, #twimbos, Mugabe, Zanu, government, power, govt, make, now, must, going, get, take, consider, need, please, look, know, let, may, never, support, one, solidarity, together, arrest, police, just, lawyers, violence, god, pray, movement, stand, peaceful, freedom, revolution, social, thank, proud and media. Thereafter, using inductive coding, the researcher grouped these words according to categories. This form of coding comprises substantive, as the categories were determined after a thorough reading of the text. During this method of coding, the researcher identified thirteen categories. Namely: aims, Pastor Evan, Zimbabwe, government, crime & justice, action, togetherness, people, movement, shutdown Zimbabwe, religion, gratitude, and media. The aims category comprised words involving a purpose or objective. These words included get, take, consider, need, please, look, know, let, may and never. The total number of words identified in this category was 16,624. The Pastor Evan category comprised words involving the pastor and his associated names. These words included #freepastorevan, @pastorevanlive, Evan, mawarire, pastor, video, #pastorevan and leader. The total number of words identified in this category was 12,786. The Zimbabwe category featured words that involved the country and its associated names. These words included Zimbabwe, Zim, country, Africa and Harare. The total number of words identified in this category was 7,592. The government category comprised words that referred to the President or political party. These words included Mugabe, Zanu, government, power, govt, and make – an overarching term used

that refers to the constitution or establishment. The total number of words identified in this category was 7,075. The crime & justice category comprised words associated with the police, arresting or court procedures. These words included arrest, police, just, lawyers and violence. The total number of words in this category was 6,596. The action category comprised words associated with doing something. These words included now, must and going. The total number of words in this category was 5,688. The togetherness category comprised words associated with unity and support. These words included support, one, together and solidarity. The total number of words in this category was 5,208. The people category comprised words associated with the citizens of Zimbabwe. The words included citizens, Zimbabweans, people, zimbos and #twimbos. The total number of words in this category was 4,699. The movement category comprised words associated with the movement itself. These words included movement, stand, peaceful, freedom, revolution and social. The total number of words in this category was 4,339. The shutdown Zimbabwe category comprised words associated with stopping activity in the country. These words included #zimshutdown2016, shutdownzimbabwe, and #shutdownzim. The total number of words in this category was 4,094. The religion category comprised words associated with god or religion. These words included god and pray. The total number of words in this category was 1,236. The gratitude category comprised words associated with giving thanks. These words included thank and proud. The total number of words in this category was 1,193. Finally, the media category comprised words associated with the media. These words included media, and the total number of words was 270.



Thereafter, the researcher identified the top five categories used in the #ThisFlag movement: namely, aims (16,624), Pastor Evan (12,786), Zimbabwe (7,592), government (7,075) and crime & justice (6,596). Accordingly, the dominant discourses associated with the #ThisFlag social media campaign were these five categories.

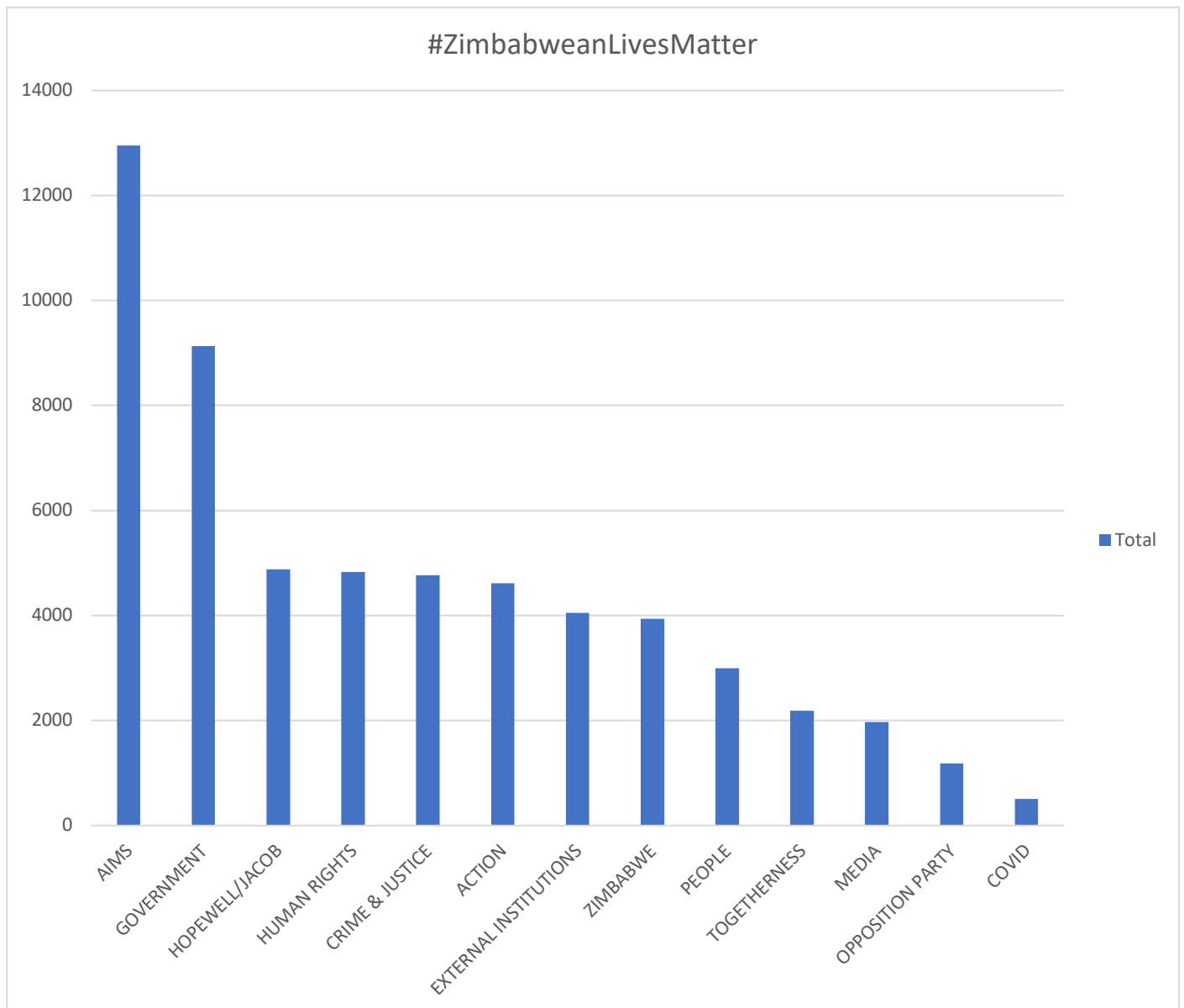
## #ZIMBABWEANLIVESMATTER



Through an analysis of the most frequent words associated with the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign, the researcher identified the top 60 words associated with the campaign. These words were as follows: get, need, ongoing, much, consider, good, always, please, just, police, investigate, prison, @policezimbabwe, crime, going, now, must, rights, @unhumanrights, human, #zanupfmustgo, government, zanu, zanupf, @egmnangagwa, #zanupfmustfall, Mnangagwa, power, leadership, Zimbabwe, #freezimbabwe, zim, one, #freehopewell, #freehopwellchinono, Hopewell, #freehopewellnow, #freehopewelllive, #freejacob, Jacob, people, Zimbabweans, citizens, many, crisis, covid, news, matter, hashtag, africaunion, @cyrilramaphosa, @usembassyharare, Africa, @sadc, @ukinsouthafrica, @germanembassy, envoy, @mdczimbabwe, @advocatamahere, and @nelsonchamisa. Thereafter, using inductive coding, the researcher grouped these words according to categories. This form of coding comprises substantive, as the categories were determined after a thorough reading of the text. During this method of coding, the researcher identified thirteen categories. Namely: aims, government, Hopewell/Jacob, human rights, crime & justice, action, external institutions, Zimbabwe, people, togetherness, media, opposition party and covid.

The aims category comprised words associated with wanting, feeling or needing. These words included get, need, ongoing, much, consider, good, always and please. The total number of words in this category was 12,948. The government category comprised words associated with the President or ruling political party. The total number of words in this category was 9,133. The Hopewell/Jacob category comprised words associated with the two individuals at the forefront of the movement – Hopewell and Jacob. These words included #freehopewell, #freehopwellchinono, Hopewell, #freehopewellnow, #freehopewelllive, #freejacob and Jacob. The total number of words in this category was 4,876. The human rights category comprised words associated with human rights. These words included rights, @unhumanrights and human. The total number of words in this category was 4,832. The crime & justice category comprised words associated with the police, arresting or court procedures. These words included just, police,

investigate, prison, @policezimbabwe and crime. The total number of words in this category was 4,767. The action category comprised words associated with doing something. These words included going, must and now. The total number of words in this category was 4,610. The external institutions' category comprised words associated with external institutions with jurisdiction in Zimbabwe. These words included africaunion, @cyrilramaphosa, @usembassyharare, Africa, @sadc, @ukinsouthafrica, @germanembassy and envoy. The total number of words in this category was 4,047. The Zimbabwe category comprised words associated with the country. These words included Zimbabwe, #freezimbabwe and zim. The total number of words in this category was 3,935. The people category comprised words associated with the citizens of Zimbabwe. These words included people, Zimbabweans, citizens and many others. The total number of words in this category was 3,000. The togetherness category comprised words associated with unity. These words included one. The total number of words in this category was 2,183. The media category comprised words associated with news and media. These words included news, matter and hashtag. The total number of words in this category was 1,967. The opposition party category comprised words associated with the opposition political party – MDC. These words included @mdczimbabwe, @advocatemahere, and @nelsonchamisa. The total number of words in this category was 1,179. Finally, the covid category comprised words associated with the crisis and covid. These words included crisis and covid. The total number of words in this category was 503.

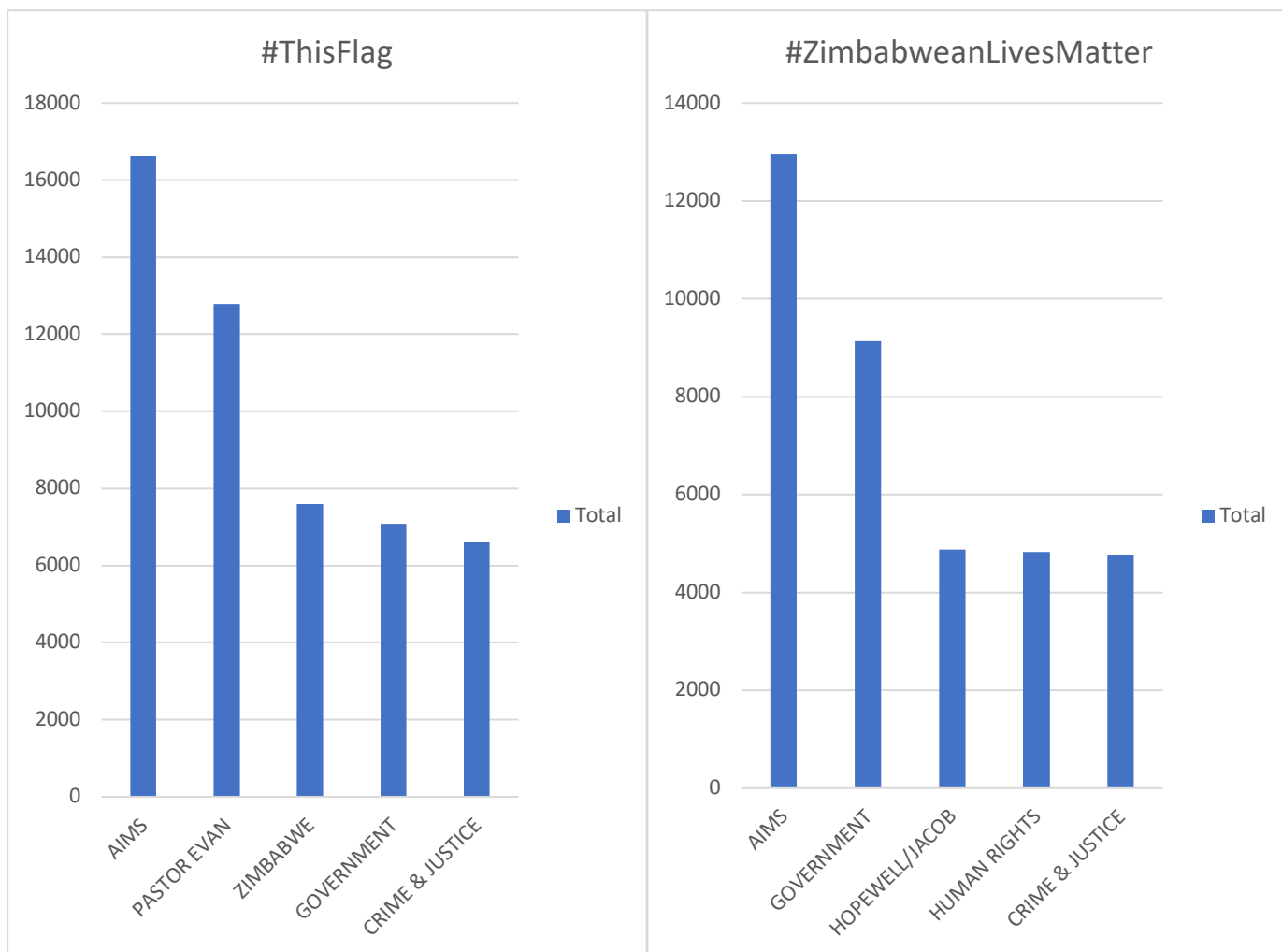


Thereafter, the researcher identified the top five categories used in the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement: namely, aims (12,948); government (9,133); Hopewell/Jacob (4,876); human rights (4,832); and crime & justice (4,767). Accordingly, the dominant discourses associated with the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter social media campaign were these five categories.

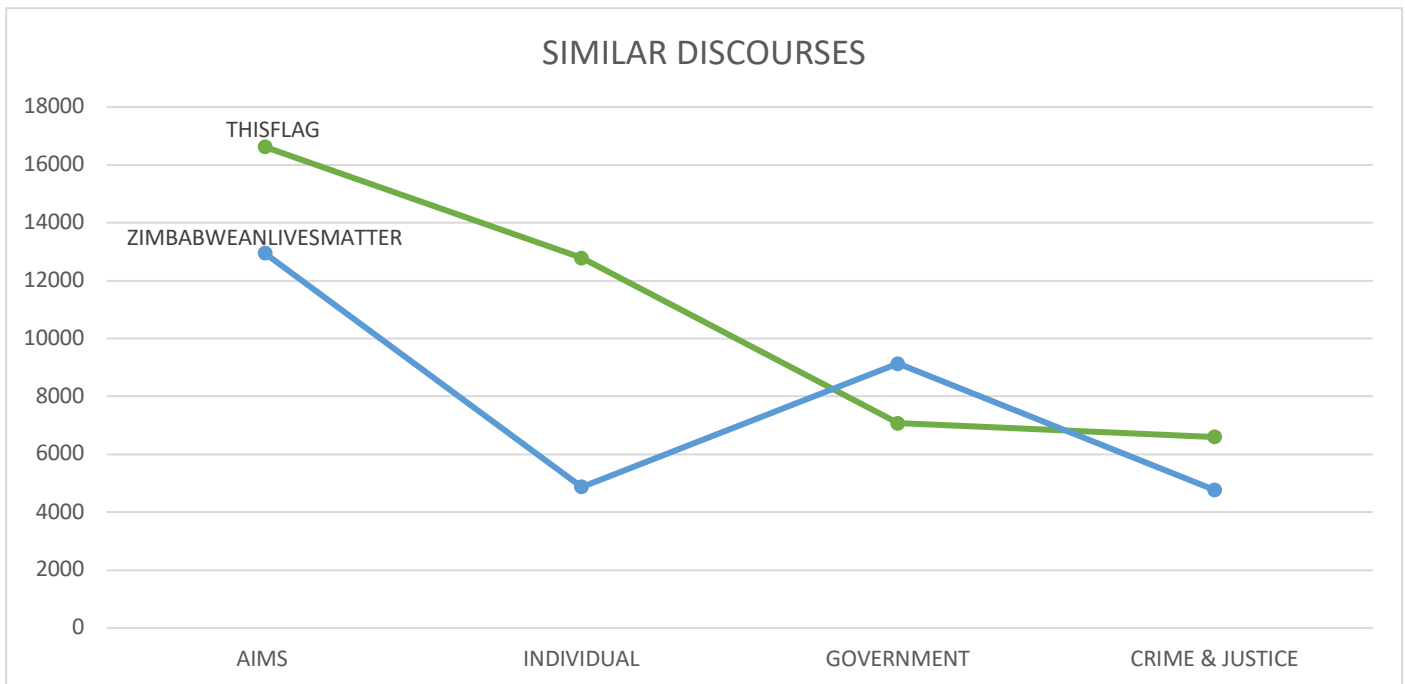
## DISCUSSION

### DOMINANT DISCOURSE COMPARISON

The dominant discourses to emerge out of the #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter social media movements were aims, Pastor Evan, Zimbabwe, government, and crime & justice; and aims, government, Hopewell/Jacob, human rights and crime & justice, respectively.



Of these dominant discourses, four were similar or the same, as demonstrated below:



The similar discourses included aims; the campaign leaders – Pastor Evan and Hopewell/Jacob -; government; and crime & justice. Representing 80% similarity, these discourses demonstrated a commonality between the two social media campaigns. However, two of the dominant discourses were different. The third dominant theme for the #ThisFlag movement was Zimbabwe, whereas the fourth dominant theme for #ZimbabweanLivesMatter was human rights. In order to provide a more in-depth analysis of these themes, the application of theory was provided, whereby the researcher used Critical Discourse Analysis, Social Movement Theory, and the Discourse Continuity Model to determine the dominant discourses associated with each campaign.

## THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

In the secondary stage of analysis, dominant discourses associated with each campaign revealed similarities and differences between the two movements – four discourses were similar, whereas one was different. In order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the dominant discourses, the researcher reviewed each similar discourse, as well as the different discourses, applying methods of CDA. Thereafter, by applying new social movement theory and the Discourse continuity model, the researcher provided a comparative analysis of the dominant discourses and what these similarities or differences reflected about the respective regimes.

### *CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS*

The researcher applied Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which provides an interdisciplinary analytic approach and a flexible metalanguage for the sociological analysis of texts and discourses (Luke, 1997). By analysing texts closely, CDA takes text as social action, meaningful and coherent, while bringing to light the broader socio-political context in which the text is derived. Notably, CDA places power, cultural practices, and social relations at the centre of the text, recognising the influential relationship between text and context. Accordingly, as this study aims to provide insight into the dominant discourses associated with Zimbabwe's two primary social media campaigns, the role social media played in these campaigns; and the key socio-political events that both informed and influenced these campaigns, CDA is the most effective method of analysis. This study applies Luke (1997)'s understanding of CDA, employing

tools of textual analysis to determine the differences and similarities between the two social media campaigns. According to Luke (1997), CDA employs interdisciplinary techniques of text analysis to look at how texts construct representations of the world, social identities, and social relationships. With the principal unit of analysis for CDA comprising text, Luke (1997) states that specific tools can be applied to sufficiently analyse the elements of the text itself. Specifically, by analysing both the technical aspects of the text and the contextual aspects, researchers can not only determine specific elements evident in the text but provide insight into the broader socio-political context in which the text exists. According to Luke (1997), CDA focused on sentence and word-level analysis, drawing analytic methods from systemic functional linguistics. The technical aspects of a text do not only reveal the structure and intention of the text itself but represent particular selective views of the world, emphasise social relations, and reveal the wider context in which the text is based. Therefore, by analysing the language elements and tone of a text, researchers can identify the functionality of the text. What's more, by analysing the contextual elements of a text, researchers can reveal how texts construct representations of the world, social identities, and social relationships (Luke, 1997). An examination of the narrative of the text, actors involved, and Conflict evident will not only place the text in a broader socio-political context but will provide an understanding of how the text and context influence each other.

## AIMS

The primary discourse evident in both the #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaigns was aims. This category comprises any tweet focused on attaining, acquiring, getting, taking, needing, hoping or pleading for something. Keywords in this category included get, need, please, may and take. This category was dominant in both campaigns, revealing 16,624 instances in the #ThisFlag campaign and 12,948 in the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign. By analysing the technical elements of the text in this category, the researcher revealed the functionality of the text. Firstly, regarding language, various similarities were revealed between the #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaigns. Tweets in this category utilised action words, whereby the author aimed to achieve something. Diction consisted of taking, pleading or gaining. For example, #ThisFlag comprised tweets such as "*@Wamagaisa @i\_sibanda @GKMwa Perth Australia, we will take the country back. #ThisFlag*"; "*@giggz83 @3rdforcezw @zimpeoplefirst #ThisFlag Citizens will bring them to order. No nonsense anymore*"; and "*May we should somehow get #ThisFlag to the rural areas kwacho. Everyone has relatives kumusha, let's educate vamwe vedu.*" Action words within these tweets included take, bring and get, emphasising urgency and a willingness to do something. Correspondingly, #ZimbabweanLivesMatter tweets also showed the predominant use of action words, with the aims category comprising the need or ambition to do something. For example, this campaign featured tweets such as "*We need this because #ZimbabweanLivesMatter*"; "*@SibandaSibbs We are united more than ever as a Shona today I stand with all citizens of this beautiful country and say #IamNdebeleToo #ZimbabweanLivesMatter we refuse to be divided never again*"; and "*Weekly reminder to @LAZARUSCHAKWERA @SKChilima and @EisenhowerMkaka that we ask you to stand officially in solidarity with our Zimbabwean brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe who are getting tortured, abducted and murdered by #ZANUPF.*" Action words within these tweets included need, refuse, stand, and ask. Showing commonality between these discourses, both campaigns emphasised action and attaining something.

Additionally, analysis of technical elements regarding tone revealed similar trends across both campaigns. Within the aims category for #ThisFlag, two themes emerged. Firstly, tweets in this category were demanding, evident in tweets

such as *“We don’t want any response from a corrupt party they must pack and go,” “We want women thriving not dying in labour,”* and *“I want a Zimbabwe that is rich.”* The demanding tone emphasises both the urgency and seriousness of the tweets. Similarly, #ZimbabweanLivesMatter also showed evidence of a demanding tone, evident in tweets such as *“We need this because #ZimbabweanLivesMatter,”* and *“We refuse to be divided.”* Secondly, both campaigns had pleading tones as a dominant theme, with tweets pleading with, begging or asking. For #ThisFlag, this was evident in tweets such as *“@CNN #ThisFlag CNN please get involved with this story,” “Someone please tell me just how much these police officers are paid to do such horrendous acts? Shameful #ThisFlag,”* and *“This is all because of Mugabe #HumanRights bring back our Zimbabweans please don’t Kill Them #ThisFlag.”* Additionally, in the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement, this was evident in tweets such as *“Please stay indoors tomorrow from 09:30 to 16:30”;* *“@hwendec Honorable Hwende, please don’t forget to put #ZimbabweanLivesMatter”;* and *“Sunday morning blessings to all who believe in #ZimbabweanLivesMatter. Please let’s continue praying for those incarcerated for their political beliefs.”* With words associated with pleading used 403 times and 507 times, respectively, this tone emerged as a dominant one.

Furthermore, by analysing the contextual elements of the category in each campaign, the researcher revealed how texts construct representations of the world, social identities, and social relationships (Luke, 1997). Firstly, through an analysis of the narrative of the discourse in each campaign – what tweets are generally about -similarities and differences were revealed. For #ThisFlag, discourse narratives comprised what the movement is about and what people hope to achieve. This is evident in tweets such as *“You can’t rig the economy ZanuPF! Reform or resign before you get removed by citizens,”* and *“We will do all we can to bring down #Mugabe.”* The narrative primarily consisted of achieving something. Similarly, discourse narratives within the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement covered similar themes, with tweets focused on action and achieving something. Notable examples include *“We can stop them together with the younger generation that doesn’t care anymore about divisive stories about Mzilikazi and such tribal wars,”* and *“I stand with all citizens of this beautiful country and say #IamNdebeleToo #ZimbabweanLivesMatter we refuse to be divided never again.”* Secondly, by examining the actors present across both campaigns, wider social relations can be revealed. Notably, both campaigns comprise similar actors – ZanuPF, the government, and the Zimbabwean citizenry. Within the aims category of the #ThisFlag movement, the text is being directed towards and involves ZanuPF and Mugabe, evident in tweets such as *“You can’t rig the economy ZanuPF”* and *“ZANU will try to push us into fighting a political war.”* Correspondingly, within the aims category of the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement, text is also being directed towards and involves the government and ruling political party. This is evident in tweets such as *“ZANUPF has always been dangerous”* and *“The ship has gone out of control now, it’s high time they do a good thing by just resigning.”* Additionally, another key actor evident in both campaigns are the citizens of Zimbabwe. For #ThisFlag, this is evident in tweets such as *“citizens will bring them to order”* and *“#humanrights bring back our Zimbabweans please don’t kill them!”* Correspondingly, for #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, this is evident in tweets such as *“I stand with all citizens of this beautiful country”* and *“we ask you to stand in solidarity with our Zimbabwean brothers and sisters.”* Accordingly, the two primary actors identified in both social media campaigns were the government and the citizens, providing insight into the broader socio-political context in which the campaigns are rooted. Having these two actors as recurring themes, both social media campaigns insinuate that there lies a larger problem within both the social and political space in Zimbabwe. By examining contextual elements of Conflict, this problem can either be confirmed or rejected. Accordingly, in both social media campaigns, an analysis

of Conflict evident within the tweets emphasised the political unrest and unstable relations between the primary actors - the government and the citizens. There are a number of instances where Conflict is present in both campaigns. Firstly, in the #ThisFlag campaign, tweets such as “*can someone tell me just how much these police officers are paid to do such horrendous acts?*” “*Check ZRP brutality, CIO kidnappings, chiadzwa massacres #ThisFlag,*” and “*Citizens know this, ZANU will try to push us into fighting a political war in which they wrote/are writing the rules. Resist This.*” Show evidence of Conflict. This is also the case in the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign, in tweets such as “*they won’t get away with genocide this time,*” “*I’m shocked by the human rights abuse ongoing in Zimbabwe,*” and “*we ask you to stand officially in solidarity with our Zimbabwean brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe who are getting tortured, abducted and murdered by #ZANUPF.*” Through an analysis of the text, the words used, and the social relations evident between actors, it was made evident that the aims category comprised predominantly of action words, with demanding and pleading tones, whereby key actors, including the government and citizens, were in Conflict.

### CAMPAIGN LEADERS/INDIVIDUALS

Another dominant discourse to emerge out of both campaigns was the campaign 'leader' himself. Both social media campaigns comprised either someone who was considered to have started the movement or an individual who was placed at the head of the movement. For the #ThisFlag campaign, this individual was Pastor Evan Mawarire, and for the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign, this was both Hopewell Chin'ono and Jacob Ngarivhume. These individuals comprised a top theme in each campaign, with Pastor Evan having been mentioned 12,786 times and Hopewell/Jacob mentioned 4,876 times. By analysing the textual elements of these two discourses, an understanding of the functionality of the text can be provided. Firstly, the language in this category is predominantly centred around the relevant individuals. For the #ThisFlag movement, diction comprised heavily of positive descriptions. This is evident in tweets such as “*Zimbabwe pastor becomes a local superhero in populist #thisflag fight against Mugabe regime: A Christian pastor...*,” “*Captain Zimbabwe! #thisflag #PastorEvan,*” and “*#ThisFlag leader flees Zimbabwe, seek asylum in the US.*” Key descriptive words include ‘*Captain Zimbabwe,*’ “*#ThisFlag leader,*” “*local superhero,*” and “*accidental activist.*” Similarly, the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign also centred around individuals. However, rather than descriptive words, the language in this campaign consisted predominantly of emotive words associated with the arrest of Hopewell and Jacob. This is evident in tweets such as “*My heart bleeds for Hopewell, am really touched by what Zanupf is doing to this man. If you are a Zanupf supporter and see nothing wrong with this uri wa Satan chete! #FreeHopewellChinono #ZimbabweanLivesMatter,*” “*My heart is breaking for Hopewell and Jacob #ZimbabweanLivesMatter,*” and “*Prayers up for Hopewell and Jacob. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter.*” Key emotive words include “*bleed,*” “*breaking,*” and “*prayer.*” Unlike #ThisFlag, #ZimbabweanLivesMatter language is centred around the event and not the person. #ThisFlag focuses on the individual and who they are – Pastor Evan as a hero and leader – whereas #ZimbabweanLivesMatter focuses on what is happening to the individual and the effects thereof – “*we are sleeping in comfort but Jacob, Hopewell and others are not,*” with people being “*touched by what Zanupf is doing to*” this man. Accordingly, despite similarities regarding the topic discussed, the language revealed differences in discourse.

Secondly, by analysing the tone of the discourses, insight into the attitude of the discourses is revealed. Like the language elements, the tone of each campaign's tweets within this category was also different. Notably, tweets within the #ThisFlag campaign in this category were largely positive. The tone appeared optimistic, celebratory, and hopeful.

This is evident in tweets such as "*Pastor Evan freed!!!!#FreePastorEvan #ThisFlag #ShutDownZim,*" "*Thank You Lord Jesus for answering our prayers and freeing #PastorEvan #ThisFlag,*" "*A wonderfully brave and fascinating man. BBC News - Zimbabwe's pastor 'hero': #ThisFlag preacher,*" and "*Zimbabwe pastor becomes a local superhero in populist #thisflag fight against Mugabe regime: A Christian pastor...*" Tweets about the Pastor were positive, celebrating his freedom and his hero persona. However, the tone across #ZimbabweanLivesMatter's tweets within this category was different. Rather than convey optimism and celebration, the tone was negative, sad, and almost defeated. This is evident in tweets such as "*My heart bleeds for Hopewell, am really touched by what Zanupf is doing to this man. If you are a Zanupf supporter and see nothing wrong with this uri wa Satan chete! #FreeHopewellChinono #ZimbabweanLivesMatter,*" "*We're sleeping in comfort, but Jacob, Hopewell and countless others are not. Let's continue the work he started,*" and "*Thank you @Wamagaisa for the update. I will celebrate one Jacob and Hopewell are released #FreeHopewell #FreeJacob #ZimbabweanLivesMatter.*" Accordingly, despite the tone being optimistic and celebratory in the #ThisFlag movement, it is largely pessimistic and sad in the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement.

Moreover, by analysing the contextual elements of the category in each campaign, the researcher revealed how texts construct representations of the world, social identities, and social relationships (Luke, 1997). Firstly, through an analysis of the narrative of each campaign, similarities and differences were revealed. For both social media campaigns, the tweets in this category were primarily centred around the respective individuals, with narratives largely focusing on the arrest and release of the individuals. For #ThisFlag, narratives comprised of "*Pastor Evan freed!!!!#FreePastorEvan #ThisFlag #ShutDownZim,*" "*#thisflag does anyone know if Pastor Evan is safe and okay?*" and "*@chidzhazenberry he was arrested for inciting violence as he was the leader of the #ThisFlag movement. His arrest was problematic.*" Correspondingly, narratives for the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement comprised of "*Free Hopewell #ZimbabweanLivesMatter #FreeHopewell,*" "*Thank you @Wamagaisa for the update. I will celebrate one Jacob and Hopewell are released #FreeHopewell #FreeJacob #ZimbabweanLivesMatter,*" and "*It is both a travesty of justice& a crime against humanity 2shackle @daddyhope in leg irons4 doing his job. Being a journalist is not a crime. Meanwhile, the real criminals who looted COVID-19 funds are sleeping peacefully in their homes. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter #FreeHopewellNow.*" However, for the #ThisFlag movement, the narrative of the tweets additionally comprises Pastor Evan as a hero, with tweets being centred around his role in the campaign and his persona. For example, tweets include "*Zimbabwe pastor becomes local superhero in populist #thisflag fight against Mugabe regime: A Christian pastor...*," "*Captain Zimbabwe! #thisflag #PastorEvan,*" and "*A wonderfully brave and fascinating man. BBC News - Zimbabwe's pastor 'hero': #ThisFlag preacher.*" On the other hand, the narratives in this category for the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement centre largely on the broader context, with tweets incorporating insight into what is happening in Zimbabwe with respect to the individuals – Hopewell and Jacob. For example, tweets include "*Zanupf is a terrorist organisation!! You cannot torture, abduct, imprison citizens! #ZanupfMustGo #ZimbabweanLivesMatter #edmustgo #FreeHopewell #FreeJacobNgarivhume #FreeKurauone,*" "*Journalists matter, they are the voice of the society, reporting and recording both the good and bad of our times #ZimbabweanLivesMatter #FreeHopewellChinono #FreeJacobNgarivhume #FreeAllTheActivists #FreeZimbabwe #ZanupfMustGo,*" and "*Awake now 04:18 am, busy planning for the day's work. Our economy is biting, so never waste any second doing nothing. #FreeHopewellNow #ZanupfMustGo #ZimbabweanLivesMatter.*" Subsequently, while #ThisFlag focuses more strongly on the individual, #ZimbabweanLivesMatter focuses on the context in relation

to the individual. When analysing the actors present in both campaign categories, they correspond across both campaigns. Specifically, both campaigns feature an individual, or two, as the leader or protagonist and the government or ZANU-PF as the antagonist. For the #ThisFlag movement, the protagonist is Pastor Evan, evident in tweets such as "Captain Zimbabwe! #thisflag #PastorEvan," whereas the antagonist is the regime, evident in tweets such as "Is it true that the regime is at it again #ThisFlag #FreePastorEvan." Similarly, for the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement, the protagonist is both Hopewell and Jacob, as evident in tweets such as "We're sleeping in comfort, but Jacob, Hopewell and countless others are not. Let's continue the work he started," whereas ZANU-PF, like #ThisFlag, is the antagonist, evident in tweets such as "Zanupf is a terrorist organisation!! You cannot torture, abduct, imprison citizens!

#ZanupfMustGo #ZimbabweanLivesMatter #edmustgo #FreeHopewell #FreeJacobNgarivhume #FreeKuruone."

Consequently, with the presence of these actors evident, Conflict has been made apparent within this category. Having both a protagonist and antagonist both identifies and reaffirms Conflict between the movement – represented through the individuals – and the government – represented through the ruling political party or regime. Conflict is evident in tweets such as "*Zimbabwe pastor becomes local superhero in populist #thisflag fight against Mugabe regime: A Christian pastor...*," in #ThisFlag, and "*My heart bleeds for Hopewell, am really touched by what Zanupf is doing to this man. If you are a Zanupf supporter and see nothing wrong with this uri wa Satan chete! #FreeHopewellChinono #ZimbabweanLivesMatter,*" in #ZimbabweanLivesMatter. Through an analysis of both the textual and contextual elements, it was made clear that the campaign leader category for #ThisFlag comprised predominantly of positive descriptions of the individual, with the tone largely optimistic and celebratory, whereas #ZimbabweanLivesMatter consisted predominantly of emotive words in relation to the individuals, with the tone largely negative and sad. Additionally, while both narratives centred around the individuals, their arrest and release, the narrative of #ThisFlag focus more strongly on the individual while #ZimbabweanLivesMatter focuses on the context in relation to the individual. However, both campaigns featured similar actors, with the protagonist being the campaign leader and the antagonist being the government or ruling political party, featuring Conflict within both campaigns.

## GOVERNMENT

Moreover, the government emerged as a dominant discourse in both campaigns, representing 7,075 words for #ThisFlag and 9,133 words for #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, and reaffirming the political nature of the campaigns. Through an analysis of the textual elements in this category, insight into how the government, President or ruling political party was perceived and the attitude of campaigners is identified. For the #ThisFlag campaign, Mugabe was the President, while for the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign, Mnangagwa was the President. Notably, by analysing the language utilised in both campaigns, specifically the terms used to describe or refer to the government, an understanding of the functionality of the text is provided. Firstly, the language utilised in both campaigns largely consisted of negative descriptions of what the government does, whereby terms used to describe the government and their actions were hostile and unfavourable. In #ThisFlag, this is evident in tweets such as "*Mugabe is like a well-fed man who starves his own woman and kids. #beatthepot #ThisFlag,*" and "*@thembanimpofu51 Will the people make it to 2018. There is no food, you asshole! Mugabe steals elections. #ThisFlag @AmBlujay @TrevorNcube.*" Descriptive words include "starves" and "steals." Correspondingly, in #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, this is evident in tweets such as "*@ZANUPF\_Official @AUC\_MoussaFaki And they would NOT ignore a Zanu-PF evil regime oppressing citizens in their own country #ZanupfMustGo #ZimbabweanLivesMatter*" and "*@ZANUPF\_Official @AUC\_MoussaFaki What has that to do with the abuse we suffer under your evil organisation? People have no medication while Ed and his*

family are stealing donated COVID funds, and you boost the guts to come here and vomit this rubbish. Your time will come! #ZimbabweanLivesMatter." Descriptive words include "oppressing" and "stealing." Additionally, the tone evident in both campaigns corresponds the language used, representing hostility and anger. For #ThisFlag, this is evident in tweets such as "@ProfJNMoyo @\_\_tamuka\_ Moyo the difference is that citizens in Zimbabwe are tired of Zanu PF and its gang of thieves. #thisflag," and "#Zvemadhisinyongoro #ThisFlag yaramba We have tolerated Mugabe's corrupt govt for too long #beta." For #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, this is also evident in tweets such as "@flintbedrock This intense level of physical and psychological abuse perpetrated by the ZanuPF Government on innocent people is demonic and devilish. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter @BBCAfrica @hrw @CyrilRamaphosa @usembassyharare," and "ZanuPF cares more about dead people than living citizens who are asking for very reasonable things! Why should we talk about a statue of nehanda instead of addressing the plight of the people???" #ZimbabweanLivesMatter." Similarly, both campaigns demonstrate anger, sadness, and a condemnatory tone.

Meanwhile, by examining the contextual elements of the government category text, the narratives, actors, and any conflict present can be identified. Through an analysis of the narratives of both campaigns, it is evident that both #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter tweets address the government in the same way. Both narratives centre around the unacceptable and damaging actions of the government and how the government has treated citizens. For #ThisFlag, this is revealed through tweets such as "Mugabe is like a well-fed man who starves his own woman and kids. #beatthepot #ThisFlag" and "Mugabe steals elections." Correspondingly, this narrative is revealed in #ZimbabweanLivesMatter through tweets such as "@flintbedrock. This intense level of physical and psychological abuse perpetrated by the ZanuPF Government on innocent people is demonic and devilish. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter @BBCAfrica @hrw @CyrilRamaphosa @usembassyharare" and "@ScorpioSting1 @Brythreesixty Sadly true ðŸ”", we have been robbed of a PRESENT by a corrupt and incompetent ZanuPf. If we don't act now, we be robbed of a FUTURE too #ZanuPfMustFall #ZimbabweanLivesMatter." Accordingly, narratives centred around the violence and abuse of the government are present in both campaigns. What's more, by examining the actors, evidence of Conflict between the actors is identified. Notably, for #ThisFlag, two actors emerge – the government and the citizenry. This is evident in tweets where othering through "they," "them," "us" or "we" is evident. For example, "Citizens know this, ZANU will try to push us into fighting a political war in which they wrote/are writing the rules. Resist This. #ThisFlag," and "This current crop of leaders was voted into power by our grandparents, now my son is abt to inherit his great grandparents' leaders #thisFlag." Similarly, two actors emerge out of the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement, the government or ZANU-PF and the citizenry. Like #ThisFlag, this is also evident in tweets such as "Together we are a great nation. We must not allow ZANU PF to divide us," "With Zanu Pf everyone else is wrong and everyone has become an enemy. Blade Nzimande once said .... #ZimbabweanLivesMatter," and "@MmusiMaimane @NicolaWatson13 @BBCAfrica They are the last evil remnants in SADC region, suffocating citizens and making them poor so that they buy votes and remain in power at all costs, they kill, rape and injure anyone who dares to challenge them #ZimbabweanLivesMatter." Having two distinct actors and the heavy use of othering also identifies and reinforces Conflict. For example, #ThisFlag incorporates elements that give light to the relationship between the actors. In #ThisFlag, this relationship is unstable and conflictual, evident in tweets such as "@ProfJNMoyo @\_\_tamuka\_ Moyo the difference is that citizens in Zimbabwe are tired of Zanu PF and its gang of thieves. #thisflag" and "#Zvemadhisinyongoro #ThisFlag yaramba We have tolerated Mugabe's corrupt govt for too long #beta." With citizens being "tired of" and "tolerating" the government, Conflict emerges between the actors.

Similarly, #ZimbabweanLivesMatter shows evidence of Conflict through the way the actors treat and address each other. For example, tweets such as "*@ZANUPF\_Official @AUC\_MoussaFaki And they would NOT ignore a Zanu-PF evil regime oppressing citizens in their own country #ZanupfMustGo #ZimbabweanLivesMatter*" and "*@ZANUPF\_Official @AUC\_MoussaFaki What has that to do with the abuse we suffer under your evil organisation? People have no medication while Ed and his family are stealing donated COVID funds, and you boost the guts to come here and vomit this rubbish. Your time will come! #ZimbabweanLivesMatter.*" Conflict is evident through the way the government “oppresses” and “abuses” the citizens. Therefore, in the government category for both campaigns, a language largely consisted of negative descriptions of what the government does, whereby terms used to describe the government, and their actions were hostile and unfavourable with the tone used also representing hostility and anger. Additionally, an analysis of the contextual elements reveals that the narratives of both campaigns centred around the unacceptable and damaging actions of the government and how the government has treated citizens, with the government and the citizenry emerging as actors in Conflict with each other.

## CRIME & JUSTICE

Finally, the last similar dominant discourse evident across both campaigns was crime & justice. This category incorporated any mention of the police, arrests, violence or the courts and lawyers. Evident in both campaigns – 6,596 times in #ThisFlag and 4,767 in #ZimbabweanLivesMatter), as a dominant discourse, this category emphasised the socio-political environment that informed the text, providing insight into the relationship between the police/government and the citizenry, and reaffirming the conflict present in the country. Accordingly, through an analysis of the textual elements, like the other categories, the functionality of the text can be investigated. Firstly, an analysis of the language used in the #ThisFlag movement revealed action words conveying violence and intimidation. This is evident in tweets describing the actions of the police, for example, "*Be angry Citizens. U deserve better. THEY mock us. THEY Beat / Abduct us. THEY steal from & arrest us. THEY say we are treasonous. #ThisFlag*" and "*About 20 children from Burombo flats in #Bulawayo are reported to sick. Police teargassed the flats last week. #ThisFlag.*" Words used included “beat, abduct, steal, arrest, teargassed.” In addition to conveying a conflictual relationship, these words emphasise the violence experienced by citizens from the police. Similarly, diction used in the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement also conveys violence, with words largely incorporating action words. This is evident in tweets such as "*@PacheduZW. So essentially, she is threatening him with prison..... again this regime is petty. Fix your house if you don't want people to condemn it, don't fix to kill the populace. We all feel that way!!!! #ZanupfMustGo #Zimbabweanlivesmatter*" and "*@PoliceZimbabwe @nickmangwana what is this you say there is no crisis in Zimbabwe explain this @PoliceZimbabwe do your job please we can't have these criminals doing this to women and children while you are doing nothing but arresting innocent people #ZimbabweanLivesMatter.*" Words used include “threatening, kill,” and “arresting.” Accordingly, the language conveys themes of violence and unrest. Moreover, the tone represented in both campaigns also conveys themes of violence as well as despair and anger. For #ThisFlag, this is evident in tweets such as "*Be angry Citizens. U deserve better. THEY mock us. THEY Beat / Abduct us. THEY steal from & arrest us. THEY say we are treasonous. #ThisFlag*" and "*@PastorEvanLive if the regime takes you again, it will be all zimbos need to revolt with violence. #thisFlag.*" The tone is revealed through words such as “be angry” and “revolt.” Correspondingly, #ZimbabweanLivesMatter also conveys tones of anger and despair, evident in tweets such as "*@PacheduZW So essentially she is threatening him with prison..... again this regime is petty. Fix your house if you don't want people to condemn it don't fix it to kill the populace. We all feel that way!!!!*"

#ZanupfMustGo #Zimbabweanlivesmatter" and "@cobbo3 *The Zimbabwe people are prisoners in their own country. There is a crisis in the country #ZimbabweanLivesMatter.*" In this example, the tone is conveyed through textual elements such as exclamation marks – *"we all feel that way!!!!* – as well as discussions about a *"crisis"* and being *"prisoners in our own country."* Accordingly, both language and tone reflect violence, unrest, and anger.

Furthermore, through an analysis of the contextual elements, researchers can better understand the broader socio-political context that informs the text. Notably, by examining the narratives of both campaigns, the attitude and intention of the text can be revealed. Across both the #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaigns, the narrative coincides, incorporating discussions on police actions and the wider political situation in Zimbabwe in relation to crime and justice. Specifically, this is evident in #ThisFlag's tweets such as *"Police on a mission to intimidate and abuse. They can't hide anymore. #Zimbabwe #ZRP #blooddiamonds #thisflag"* and *"Brutalise one, you brutalise all! Vendors, teachers, nurses, lawyers. All #OneNation #NoCitizenLeftBehind #ThisFlag."* Descriptions of police actions include how they *"brutalise"* and *"intimidate."* Similarly, this narrative corresponds with the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign, evident in tweets such as *"@Higgs\_Njomane @kimmy\_chierley @DMwonzora This photo says a lot about our police force, walking past a dead body without even feeling anything, cry my beloved Zimbabwe. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter"* and *"@cobbo3 The Zimbabwe people are prisoners in their own country. There is a crisis in the country #ZimbabweanLivesMatter."* The narratives, therefore, centre largely around police brutalising and intimidating, walking past dead bodies without reacting, and the wider crisis in the country. In line with the crisis, two sets of actors emerge out of both campaigns in the crime & justice category. Firstly, the police, government and ruling political party emerge as one actor, while the citizens of the country emerge as the second actor. Like other discourses and categories, this is evident through the use of othering, whereby 'they, them, us,' and 'we' are utilised. For #ThisFlag, this is evident in tweets such as *"THEY mock us. THEY Beat / Abduct us. THEY steal from & arrest us. THEY say we are treasonous. #ThisFlag"* and *"Police on a mission to intimidate and abuse. They can't hide anymore. #Zimbabwe #ZRP #blooddiamonds #thisflag."* Similarly, othering is evident in #ZimbabweanLivesMatter in tweets such as *"We are not a tuck-shop, we are not a puppet of our liberators, we are not a bunch of useless strangers to our land. We are the rightful owners of #Zimbabwe. We have the right to speak because #ZimbabweanLivesMatter"* and *"@mbuso\_ndebele5 @advocatemahere There are not our, our government, police and army serve us not zanupf, as far as I am concerned, they are zanupf's #ZimbabweanLivesMatter #FreeZimbabwe #ZanupfMustGo."* Through the use of othering, the two sets of actors are defined. Finally, an analysis of the conflict present sheds light on the broader socio-political context, whereby Conflict between the two sets of actors is noted through social relations in tweets. For #ThisFlag, this is evident in tweets such as *"@chidzhazenberry he was arrested for inciting violence as he was the leader of the #ThisFlag movement. His arrest was problematic"* and *"Brutalise one, you brutalise all! Vendors, teachers, nurses, lawyers. All. #OneNation #NoCitizenLeftBehind #ThisFlag."* The campaign leader's arrest, coupled with the police and government brutalising the population, emphasises the conflict present in the country. Additionally, this is also evident in the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement in tweets such as *"Guys ndati Zimbabwe is now a CRIME SCENE we need help! Because..... #ZimbabweanLivesMatter"* and *"@Mamoxn @nickmangwana @PoliceZimbabwe We heard this before. We were told police and army uniforms were stolen. In any case, it means you have failed, how is it possible that you fail to protect citizens. Chamunogona is to abduct citizens in their homes. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter."* Accordingly, with the country being referred to as a *"crime scene"* and the police failing to protect citizens, abducting them in their homes, Conflict

is emphasised in the country. In conclusion, in the crime & justice category for both campaigns, an analysis of the textual elements showed language used comprised action words that conveyed violence from police, with the tone of the tweets largely consisting of hostility and anger. Correspondingly, the contextual elements showed narratives that centred around police brutalising and intimidating, as well as the broader crisis in the country, with Conflict evident between the two sets of actors - the police and government and the population of Zimbabwe.

## ZIMBABWE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

However, despite the similar discourses, one discourse was different. For #ThisFlag, the final dominant discourse was Zimbabwe, whereas, for #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, it was human rights. Accordingly, each campaign had slightly different discourses associated with the social media movements. By analysing the two-differing categories, insight into objectives and primary discourses are provided.

Representing the third most dominant discourse, the Zimbabwe category or discourse showed 7,592 instances throughout the campaign. The category consisted of any mention of Zimbabwe, the country, Zim, nation or Harare – the capital city. By analysing the textual elements, the functionality of the text is revealed. Firstly, through an examination of the language used, the use of descriptive words is evident when referring to what is happening in the country. For example, tweets such as *“I don’t understand why my daddy had to send me to college to study economics. Our country ain’t got no economy! #ThisFlag”* and *“Look no further than Harare, my friend. Check ZRP brutality, CIO kidnappings, Chiadzwa massacres #ThisFlag.”* Language used to describe the situation in the country includes *“no economy, ZRP brutality, kidnappings and massacres.”* When referring to the country, diction used includes *“struggles, abusive and long-ruling #Mugabe regime, and no media freedom,”* evident in the following tweets: *“@ChidMash Africa is in my Loins Chido. It’s hard not to be directly affected by its struggles. I Love Zimbabwe! I Love My Africa #thisflag,”* *“In #Zimbabwe, the abusive and long-ruling #Mugabe regime is on the ropes, but much work remains to be done #ThisFlag,”* and *“This is a pity. I spoke to this lady while on the ground in Harare. No media freedom in Zimbabwe #ThisFlag #BeatThePot.”* Additionally, the tone conveyed in these tweets resembles dissatisfaction, sadness and defeat. For example, words such as *“pity, brutality, massacres, struggles, and abuse”* all resemble an unsatisfied tone. Accordingly, the textual elements throughout this discourse reveal negative descriptive words and an unsatisfactory, sad tone.

Moreover, an analysis of the contextual elements of the text in this category reveals country-centric narratives comprising an unstable socio-economic state. Narratives centre around the ongoings in the country, the lack of freedom and unrest. This is evident in tweets such as *“I don’t understand why my daddy had to send me to college to study economics. Our country ain’t got no economy! #ThisFlag”* and *“This is a pity. I spoke to this lady while on the ground in Harare. No media freedom in Zimbabwe #ThisFlag #BeatThePot.”* Additionally, the narratives centre around love for the country, whereby themes of patriotism and nationalism are conveyed. For example, tweets incorporate the following: *“For there is hope for a tree, If it is cut down, that it will sprout again. Job14:7. There is Hope for A Great Zimbabwe #ThisFlag”* and *“@ChidMash Africa is in my Loins Chido. It’s hard not to be directly affected by its struggles. I Love Zimbabwe! I Love My Africa #thisflag.”* Furthermore, through an analysis of the tweets, two sets of actors emerge – the government, police force and President, and the citizenry. This is evident in tweets such as *“Look no further than Harare, my friend. Check ZRP brutality, CIO kidnappings, Chiadzwa massacres #ThisFlag”* and *“In #Zimbabwe, the abusive and long-ruling #Mugabe regime is on the ropes, but much work remains*

to be done #ThisFlag.” The presence of these actors indicates Conflict, however subtle. For example, Conflict emerges between the police and Zimbabwean citizens through the “ZRP brutality, CIO kidnappings, Chiadzwa massacres” as well as between the government and citizens, evident through the description of the “dictatorship” in tweets such as “First General rule of any good dictatorship pay the military in time.. #ThisFlag #ZimbabweShutdown #Harare.” Accordingly, like the other dominant discourse in the #ThisFlag movement, the Zimbabwe discourse comprised narratives centred around the ongoings in the country, the lack of freedom and unrest, with Conflict between two sets of actors evident – namely, the government and police force and the Zimbabwean population.

Meanwhile, the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement comprised a dominant discourse on human rights, whereby the discourses featured 4,832 times throughout the campaign. Representing the fourth dominant, the discourse consisted of any mention of rights, laws, humanity, or humanitarianism. By analysing the textual elements, the functionality of the text is revealed. Firstly, through an examination of the language used, descriptive words associated with human rights were revealed. Notably, tweets such as “With Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops joining a long list of Gvt critics over human rights abuses, is the Mnangagwa regime teetering on the brink of collapse? #ZimbabweanLivesMatter @PacheduZW @zimlive @ZimRightsLIVE @ZLHRLawyers @zccinzim @IMBISA @SADC\_News @AUC\_MoussaFaki @SAGovnews” and “No to human rights violations!!! #ZimbabweanLivesMatter” emphasised negative descriptions associated with human rights in the country. Namely, words such as “abuses” and “violations.” Additionally, when examining the tone conveyed throughout the discourse, tweets revealed a demanding tone. Specifically, this is evident in tweets such as “@spannerbanner12 @MoFA\_ZW @HMAMelanieR @MinisterSBMoyo No cost at all. Its FREE! Stop human rights violations. Allow citizens their constitutional right to protest. Freedom of expression/assembly. Stop arbitrary arrests and persecutions. Prisoners to exercise their rights. Fight corruption. Genuine Reforms. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter” and “No to human rights violations!!! #ZimbabweanLivesMatter.” The use of command words such as “no to” and “stop” convey a demanding tone throughout the tweets. Accordingly, the textual analysis revealed negative descriptive words associated with human rights, as well as evidence of a demanding tone used throughout.

Additionally, by analysing the contextual elements of the discourse, insight into the broader socio-political context is provided, whereby narratives, actors and Conflict reveal social relations. Throughout the discourse, the narrative appears to be split into two categories, namely, narrative directed toward the government and ruling party and narrative directed towards external institutions. Firstly, tweets directed toward the government centre around a narrative that is demanding them to stop human rights abuses. Examples include “@spannerbanner12 @MoFA\_ZW @HMAMelanieR @MinisterSBMoyo No cost at all. Its FREE! Stop human rights violations. Allow citizens their constitutional right to protest. Freedom of expression/assembly. Stop arbitrary arrests and persecutions. Prisoners to exercise their rights. Fight corruption. Genuine Reforms. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter” and “No to human rights violations!!! #ZimbabweanLivesMatter.” Meanwhile, tweets directed at external organisations comprise narratives around asking for help and informing. Examples include “Hi @tichy\_e @\_AfricanUnion @SADC\_News @usembassyharare @RitaUNHR @ukinsouthafrica @CyrilRamaphosa @HeikoMaas @GermanEmbassySA I’m shocked by the human rights abuse ongoing in Zimbabwe. Will you raise this with the @UNHumanRights and ask them to investigate? #ZimbabweanLivesMatter” and “This man is power.....Our Morning is bright we will be on @sabc news giving light to this cause #ZimbabweanLivesMatter @eNCA @UNHumanRights @Sophie\_Mokoena @peterndoro.” By directing tweets toward the African Union, the UN Embassy, the South African President, and

SADC, the narrative comprises demanding change and informing external entities about the goings on. Subsequently, two actors emerge out of this discourse, namely, the government and the citizenry. Tweets such as “@spannerbanner12 @MoFA\_ZW @HMAMelanieR @MinisterSBMoyo No cost at all. Its FREE! Stop human rights violations. Allow citizens their constitutional right to protest. Freedom of expression/assembly. Stop arbitrary arrests and persecutions. Prisoners to exercise their rights. Fight corruption. Genuine Reforms. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter.” However, most of the tweets do not explicitly state the secondary actor, with text targeted at an unknown source. For example, tweets such as “No to human rights violations!!! #ZimbabweanLivesMatter,” simply state no, without stating who should stop. Finally, with the presence of actors, Conflict has emerged between the government and the population, whereby human rights violations are being committed without accountability. This is evident in tweets such as “@spannerbanner12 @MoFA\_ZW @HMAMelanieR @MinisterSBMoyo No cost at all. Its FREE! Stop human rights violations. Allow citizens their constitutional right to protest. Freedom of expression/assembly. Stop arbitrary arrests and persecutions. Prisoners to exercise their rights. Fight corruption. Genuine Reforms. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter” and “.... the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference said the country was suffering from "a multi-layered crisis", including economic collapse, deepening poverty, corruption and human rights abuses. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter.” Conflict is, therefore, evident in the country through discourse centred around human rights abuses, corruption, and persecutions. Accordingly, the human rights discourse in the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign utilises negative descriptive words associated with human rights, as well as evidence of a demanding tone, narratives centred around human rights abuses, directed towards the government and ruling party as well as towards external institutions, and the presence of Conflict between two actors – the government and the citizenry.

By conducting a critical discourse analysis of both the similar and different dominant discourses, an in-depth understanding of the text itself, as well as the broader socio-political factors influencing the text, is revealed. Firstly, the textual analysis of the two campaigns revealed language centred around action, description and emotion. Regarding action, in both the aims and crime & justice categories of both campaigns, diction largely comprised of action words such as take, refuse, stand, as well as threaten, kill, and arrest. Action words associated with the general population were optimistic, whereas those associated with the government, police or ruling political party were negative. Regarding descriptions, these differed across the discourses. Notably, the only instance of positive descriptions were those associated with Pastor Evan in #ThisFlag. Other than this, the government, Zimbabwe and human rights discourses all comprised negative descriptions. For example, descriptions included oppressive, stealing, struggling, abusive, and violations. Finally, only one instance of emotive words was identified. For #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, the individual category used emotive words in relation to the individuals, such as bleeding and breaking. Accordingly, both the #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaigns featured significant similarities regarding language. Correspondingly, regarding tone, the campaigns also featured similarities. Three of the discourses featured tones conveying hostility and anger – government, crime & justice and Zimbabwe – as well as the campaign leader discourse for #ZimbabweanLivesMatter. While the campaign leader discourse for #ThisFlag featured celebratory tones, the remaining two discourses featured demanding and pleading tones. Accordingly, similarities across these discourses centred around hostility and anger, emphasising broader social relations from which the campaigns derived.

Meanwhile, the contextual analysis revealed significant similarities, particularly regarding narrative, actors and Conflict. Across both campaigns and their dominant discourses, the primary narrative elements comprised actions of

the government and police and what is happening in the country in terms of unrest and human rights abuses. This was evident across the government, crime & justice, Zimbabwe, and human rights discourses. Additionally, while the aims discourse centred around what the movement is about and what participants hope to achieve – similar for both campaigns – the campaign leader discourse revealed distinct differences. Specifically, despite both narratives being centred around the individuals, their arrest and release, the narrative of #ThisFlag focused more strongly on the individual while #ZimbabweanLivesMatter on the context in relation to the individual. The most significant similarity between the two campaigns was the actors and evidence of Conflict. Across all discourses for both #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, two sets of actors were present – the government, police and ruling political party, and the citizens. Textual elements coupled with contextual elements regarding narrative emphasise the conflict present between these actors. Subsequently, despite reflecting different eras in Zimbabwe's political space, distinct similarities were present across both campaigns. Notably, discourses insinuating police brutality, citizen arrest, corruption, and an overall constitutional decay were evident across both campaigns. Therefore, both #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter possess distinct similarities, reflecting similar socio-political contexts and the continuity of discourse.

### *DISCOURSE CONTINUITY MODEL*

Having identified the dominant discourses as well as similarities and differences associated with the two social media movements' discourses, examining the discourses using the Discourse Continuity Model will uncover elements of continuity between the two movements. By applying features from Mano's (2016)'s and Sparks (2009) understanding of the Elite Continuity Model - a model which examines the amount of and extent to which continuity is present in structures and personnel across a specific transition - to the dominant discourses, this study determines evidence of continuity across the two campaigns, while making a case for how this reflects the different political regimes within which the movements emerged.

According to Mano (2016), several factors can determine the presence of continuity, including the lack of a clean break in the organisation of political life; the lack of linkages between political transformation and the marketisation of society; continuity in both institutions and personnel between the old regime and the new; how media institutions that emerge from transitions are strongly influenced by the political elite; and the interplay of economic and political influence central to the functioning of the system. Correspondingly, Sparks (2009) considers similar factors such as the transition from dictatorship to democracy can take a number of forms; there is considerable continuity in both institutions and personnel between the old regime and the new; the shift towards a market economy is a political process, with the award of favourable opportunities being closely connected to political power; the media institutions that emerged from the transition are strongly influenced by the political elite; that previous revolutions transformed the ways in which countries were governed; the main dynamic of the revolutions was that the old elite transformed itself from one that rested upon the collective ownership of state property to one that rests on private property, acquired formally or informally through the exercise of political power; and the degree of democratisation is secondary. As these factors correspond, the researcher applied factors from each theory. Notably, this study investigated the lack of a clean break in the organisation of political life, continuity in both institutions and personnel between the old regime and the new; and the degree of democratisation is secondary.

Firstly, when examining the degree of continuity in discourse across two different social media movements, the exploration of the lack of a clean break in the organisation of political life provides insight into the differences and/or similarities of the campaign discourse and how this reflects on the respective regimes. In the Elite Continuity Model, the lack of a clean break would constitute anything from the same ruling political party to the same type of government in place to a similar structure of government itself. By applying this feature to discourse analysis, evidence of a lack of a clean break emerges, specifically through the fact that dominant discourses regarding government followed similar narratives, language, and Conflict. The lack of a clean break in the organisation of political life is seen through the continuity in power regarding the ruling political party – ZANU-PF -; and the continuity in government discourse - “@ProfJNMoyo @\_\_tamuka\_ Moyo the difference is that citizens in Zimbabwe are tired of Zanu PF and its gang of thieves. #thisflag” and “we have been robbed of a PRESENT by a corrupt and incompetent ZanuPf.” This trend is reinforced through government emerging as a dominant discourse in both campaigns, representing 7,075 words for #ThisFlag and 9,133 words for #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, and reaffirming the political nature of the campaigns. Additionally, the lack of a clean break is shown through both #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter tweets addressing the government in the same way. Both narratives centre around the unacceptable and damaging actions of the government and how the government has treated citizens. For #ThisFlag, this is revealed through tweets such as “Mugabe is like a well-fed man who starves his own woman and kids. #beatthepot #ThisFlag” and “Mugabe steals elections,” while for #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, through tweets such as “@flintbedrock This intense level of physical and psychological abuse perpetrated by the ZanuPF Government on innocent people is demonic and devilish. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter @BBCAfrica @hrw @CyrilRamaphosa @usembassyharare” and “@ScorpioSting1 @Brythreesixty Sadly true ðŸ””, we have been robbed of a PRESENT by a corrupt and incompetent ZanuPf. If we don't act now, we be robbed of a FUTURE too #ZanuPfMustFall #ZimbabweanLivesMatter.” Accordingly, considering transitional elements of the lack of a clean break in the organisation of political life, discourse continuity exists as determined by the two prominent social media movements.

As such, continuity in discourse reflects a strong degree of continuity across the two regimes. At the time of the #ThisFlag movement, under President Robert Mugabe's rule, a supposedly democratic government was in place, with ZANU-PF as the ruling political party. In reality, many considered the political conditions to be largely authoritarianism, with Mugabe “*ruling with an iron fist*”, according to a tweet. According to Chitanana (2019), Mugabe's leadership in Zimbabwe comprised a brutal authoritarian regime that used intimidation, propaganda and violence to retain power. With his removal from office by a military coup on 19 November 2017, many people rejoiced at the end of Mugabe's ruinous tenure (Coltart, 2018). However, many scholars have proposed that despite a 'change' in the regime, a new President in office has not necessarily ushered in a change of politics or repressive tendencies, but rather, authoritarian rule and violent actions inflicted on citizens have, in fact, continued. By examining the degree of continuity in discourse associated with the two social media campaigns that took place under each regime, continuity in political repression and a lack of a clean break is, therefore, reinforced. Similar narratives and discourse regarding the failures of the government, oppression of the ruling political party and maltreatment of citizens by the government and state forces demonstrate similarities between the two regimes, as is evident with the abovementioned examples. Therefore, despite a change in political leadership, continuity is present across campaign discourse and socio-political context.

Secondly, Mano (2016) posits that elite continuity is determined by continuity in personnel or institutions between the old regime and the new. In this regard, by applying this feature to discourse, analysing the government-controlled institutions – such as the police force – throughout the text provides insight into whether or not continuity is present. Notably, in the context of the #ThisFlag movement, the police were considered to be aligned with the government rather than acting as a separate entity. Accordingly, the government frequently used the police to arrest dissidents. This is evident in tweets such as *"Be angry, Citizens. U deserve better. THEY mock us. THEY Beat / Abduct us. THEY steal from & arrest us. They say we are treasonous. #ThisFlag"* – by using ‘they,’ the tweets group the government and police under one umbrella term. Correspondingly, in the context of the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaign, this trend has only continued, evident in tweets such as *"@mbuso\_ndebele5 @advocatemahere There are not our, our government, police and army serve us not zanupf, as far as I am concerned, they are zanupf's #ZimbabweanLivesMatter #FreeZimbabwe #ZanupfMustGo."* Continuity regarding the amalgamation of the police force and government demonstrates how there is continuity in institutions between the old regime and the new. Meanwhile, another trend has continued regarding the police. Specifically, the actions of police align between the old and new regime, whereby the police “abuse, threaten and arrest.” This is evident in tweets associated with #ThisFlag such as *"Police on a mission to intimidate and abuse. They can't hide anymore. #Zimbabwe #ZRP #blooddiamonds #thisflag,"* and tweets associated with #ZimbabweanLivesMatter such as *"you are doing nothing but arresting innocent people #ZimbabweanLivesMatter."* Dorman (2016) contends that the continuance of police brutality and control represents a continuation of repressive actions from Mugabe’s regime. Subsequently, as discourse regarding the actions of the government's institutions has not changed over the transition, there is evidence that discourse continuity is present, and this reflects a degree of continuity between the old regime and the new.

Finally, derived from Sparks (2009) understanding of elite continuity, in examining discourse continuity, the degree of democratisation as being secondary will determine continuity. Notably, in the #ThisFlag movement, discourse is centred around the lack of democracy in Zimbabwe. This is evident in tweets such as *"#Zvemadhisinyongoro #ThisFlag yaramba We have tolerated Mugabe's corrupt govt for too long #beta."* Similarly, in the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter social media movement, tweets such as *"@ZANUPF\_Official @AUC\_MoussaFaki And they would NOT ignore a Zanu-PF evil regime oppressing citizens in their own country #ZanupfMustGo #ZimbabweanLivesMatter,"* emphasise lack of democracy. Additionally, with similarities regarding the dominant discourses of crime & justice, continuity is evident across the two campaigns. As such, this continuity reflects continuity between the old regime and the new. Despite claiming to be a democratic government, Mugabe's regime aligned more closely to an authoritarian-type government, in which the socio-political landscape was characterised by political instability, rampant corruption and general constitutional decay, in which oppressed citizens were restricted in their efforts to make their dissatisfaction heard (Sabao & Chikara, 2020). This was made evident through the dominant discourses of Zimbabwe, government and crime & justice. Similarly, this level of democratisation in politics only continued in Mnangagwa’s regime, with the state representing repression, corruption, and instability. According to Hodgkinson (2019), Mnangagwa’s rule seems set to be just as authoritarian, violent and unaccountable as Mugabe’s. This notion is also evident in dominant discourses of government, human rights and crime & justice. Accordingly, evident through the continuity in discourse between the two campaigns, there exists a level of continuity and similarity between the Mugabe regime and the Mnangagwa regime, as is reflected through the application of features of the Elite Continuity Model to discourse analysis.

## CONCLUSION

Titled '*#ZimbabweanLivesMatter vs #ThisFlag: A comparative discourse analysis of two social media movements in Zimbabwe*,' the purpose of this study was to identify the dominant discourses associated with two prominent social media movements in Zimbabwe, exploring any similarities or differences between these discourses and what these reflect about the Mugabe and Mnangagwa regimes. For its part, the study succeeded in doing just that, providing a detailed analysis of discourse and making a strong case for continuity present using a new model, Discourse Continuity Model, which the researcher established herself.

The study made use of a summative approach within qualitative content analysis, diving into the frequency of words or topics so as to provide an effective analysis of the dominant discourses associated with each campaign. Utilising qualitative content analysis techniques rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, the researcher prioritised subjectivity and context when approaching data collection regarding the topic. Notably, the researcher analysed the dominant discourses pertaining to two impactful social media campaigns in Zimbabwe. The researcher comparatively analysed a selection of posts that used the hashtags associated with the two Zimbabwean social media movements - #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter – on Twitter. The choice of this platform was largely attributed to its popularity in politics and events, the fact that the platform hosted the most interaction regarding both campaigns, as well as its increasing prominence as a social media platform. With the hashtags to be analysed having already been identified - #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter -this study made use of purposive sampling in its data collection.

Additionally, the study made use of homogeneous sampling as a form of purposive sampling. As this study focuses on two social media campaigns in Zimbabwe, those who were participating in the campaigns online were identified as participants. The common characteristic shared, therefore, was the participation in each movement and the utilisation of the associated hashtags. In analysing the two relevant social media hashtags, the researcher allocated a specific sample timeframe within the data collection - between 6 July 2016 and 13 July 2016 for #ThisFlag and between 27 July 2020 and 3 August 2020 for #ZimbabweanLivesMatter. This timeframe not only ensured a sufficient quantity of data was collected but that the utilisation of the relevant hashtags was at their highest. After having identified both the sample and timeframe, the researcher proceeded to download the data set from Twitter. Due to the platform's API not permitting users to download historical tweets, the researcher applied for an academic research account and, after approval, was able to access the tweets within the specified timeframe. Having set up the academic research account, the researcher created a project within which the data would be downloaded and stored. The project was separated into two sections and labelled according to each hashtag - #ZimbabweanLivesMatter and #ThisFlag. Thereafter, the researcher input the specified timeframe of each study into the account and the program downloaded all tweets using each hashtag and within each timeframe into the project. The data collected throughout the timeframe for #ThisFlag revealed 30,000 tweets, and for #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, 100,000 tweets. Thereafter, the tweets were downloaded onto two excel spreadsheets for analysis.

The researcher separated the data analysis process into two stages, namely, primary and secondary, in order to comprehensively analyse both the dominant discourses associated with each campaign and the similarities and/or differences between the two campaigns. The primary analysis utilised the word frequency query on NVivo Pro 7 to identify the common words across both social media campaigns. By separating each campaign into its own project, the

researcher was able to analyse the dominant discourses associated with each and thereafter compare these discourses. Through an analysis of the most frequent words associated with both the #ThisFlag and the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaigns, the researcher identified the top 60 words associated with each campaign. Thereafter, using inductive coding, the researcher grouped these words according to categories. During this method of substantive coding, the researcher identified thirteen categories for each campaign. The researcher then identified the top five categories used in the #ThisFlag movement: namely, aims (16,624), Pastor Evan (12,786), Zimbabwe (7,592), government (7,075) and crime & justice (6,596), as well as the top five categories in the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movement, namely: aims (12,948); government (9,133); Hopewell/Jacob (4,876); human rights (4,832); and crime & justice (4,767). Accordingly, the dominant discourses associated with each social media campaign comprised these five categories. The dominant discourses to emerge out of the #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter social media movements were aims, Pastor Evan, Zimbabwe, government, and crime & justice; and aims, government, Hopewell/Jacob, human rights and crime & justice, respectively. Of these dominant discourses, four were similar or the same, while one was different. The similar discourse included aims; the campaign leaders – Pastor Evan and Hopewell/Jacob -; government; and crime & justice. Representing 80% similarity, these discourses demonstrated a commonality between the two social media campaigns. However, two of the dominant discourses were different. The third dominant theme for the #ThisFlag movement was Zimbabwe, whereas the fourth dominant theme for #ZimbabweanLivesMatter was human rights.

In order to provide a more in-depth analysis of these themes, the application of theory was provided, whereby the researcher used CDA and the Discourse Continuity Model to determine the dominant discourses associated with each campaign and what this reflected about the respective regimes. Firstly, the researcher applied CDA, analysing texts according to their textual and contextual elements. This way, the researcher was able to define the similarities and differences in discourse between the campaigns. By conducting a CDA of both the similar and different dominant discourses, an in-depth understanding of the text itself, as well as the broader socio-political factors influencing the text, is revealed. Firstly, the textual analysis of the two campaigns revealed language centred around action, description and emotion. Regarding action, in both the aims and crime & justice categories of both campaigns, diction largely comprised of action words such as take, refuse, stand, as well as threaten, kill, and arrest. Action words associated with the general population were optimistic, whereas those associated with the government, police or ruling political party were negative. Regarding descriptions, these differed across the discourses. Notably, the only instance of positive descriptions were those associated with Pastor Evan in #ThisFlag. Other than this, the government, Zimbabwe and human rights discourses all comprised negative descriptions. For example, descriptions included oppressive, stealing, struggling, abusive, and violations. Finally, only one instance of emotive words was identified. For #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, the individual category used emotive words in relation to the individuals, such as bleeding and breaking. Accordingly, both the #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter campaigns featured significant similarities regarding language. Correspondingly, regarding tone, the campaigns also featured similarities. Three of the discourses featured tones conveying hostility and anger – government, crime & justice and Zimbabwe – as well as the campaign leader discourse for #ZimbabweanLivesMatter. While the campaign leader discourse for #ThisFlag featured celebratory tones, the remaining two discourses featured demanding and pleading tones. Accordingly, similarities across these discourses centred around hostility and anger, emphasising broader social relations from which the campaigns derived.

Meanwhile, the contextual analysis revealed significant similarities, particularly regarding narrative, actors and Conflict. Across both campaigns and their dominant discourses, the primary narrative elements comprised actions of the government and police and what is happening in the country in terms of unrest and human rights abuses. This was evident across the government, crime & justice, Zimbabwe, and human rights discourses. Additionally, while the aims discourse centred around what the movement is about and what participants hope to achieve – similar for both campaigns – the campaign leader discourse revealed distinct differences. Specifically, despite both narratives being centred around the individuals, their arrest and release, the narrative of #ThisFlag focused more strongly on the individual while #ZimbabweanLivesMatter on the context in relation to the individual. The most significant similarity between the two campaigns was the actors and evidence of Conflict. Across all discourses for both #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, two sets of actors were present – the government, police and ruling political party, and the citizens. Textual elements coupled with contextual elements regarding narrative emphasise the conflict present between these actors. Therefore, despite reflecting two separate social media movements, both #ThisFlag and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter possess distinct similarities, reflecting similar socio-political contexts and the continuity of discourse.

Secondly, having identified the dominant discourses as well as similarities and differences associated with the two social media movements' discourses, examining the discourses using the Discourse Continuity Model will uncover elements of continuity between the two movements. By applying features from Mano's (2016)'s and Sparks (2009) understanding of the Elite Continuity Model - a model which examines the amount of and extent to which continuity is present in structures and personnel across a specific transition - to the dominant discourses, this study determines evidence of continuity across the two campaigns, while making a case for how this reflects the different political regimes within which the movements emerged. The study investigated the lack of a clean break in the organisation of political life, continuity in both institutions and personnel between the old regime and the new, and the degree of democratisation is secondary. Considering transitional elements of the lack of a clean break in the organisation of political life, elite continuity exists as determined by the two prominent social media movements. This is evident through dominant discourses regarding government following similar narratives, language, and Conflict and reflects the lack of a clean break in the organisation of political life as is seen through the continuity in power regarding the ruling political party – ZANU-PF - and the continuity in government discourse. Additionally, the study determined that discourse continuity is present due to the continuity in personnel or institutions between the old regime and the new. Specifically, continuity regarding the amalgamation of the police force and government demonstrates how there is continuity in institutions between the old regime and the new as well as the actions of police align between the old and new regime, whereby the police “abuse, threaten and arrest.” This is evident in tweets associated with #ThisFlag such as “*Police on a mission to intimidate and abuse. They can't hide anymore. #Zimbabwe #ZRP #blooddiamonds #thisflag,*” and tweets associated with #ZimbabweanLivesMatter such as “*you are doing nothing but arresting innocent people #ZimbabweanLivesMatter.*” Subsequently, as the actions of the government's institutions have not changed over the transition, there is evidence that continuity is present across the two regimes. Finally, continuity can be examined with regards to the degree of democratisation, evident in dominant discourses such as government and crime & justice. As such, this reflects that Mugabe's regime aligned more closely to an authoritarian-type government, in which the socio-political landscape was characterised by political instability, rampant corruption and general constitutional decay, a trend which only continued into Mnangagwa's era. Therefore, due to the continuation in

government structure, as well as in the abuses, violations, and overall repression of the regime itself, discourse continuity is present and reflect continuity between the old regime and the new.

In conclusion, this study successfully identified the dominant discourses associated with the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter and #ThisFlag social media movements, demonstrating significant similarities between these discourses. With only one incident of difference in discourse, the researcher hypothesises that despite reflecting two separate movements, both the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter and #ThisFlag campaigns were starkly similar, with discourse largely centred around similar attributes – namely, police brutality, lack of democracy, government oppression, human rights violations and Zimbabwe’s restrictive socio-political environment. What’s more, the researcher found that there was a high level of continuity present across the two campaigns, both in discourse as well as in the reflection of the broader socio-political context. Examining discourse associated with two prominent social media campaigns prevalent under two different regimes in Zimbabwe enabled a deeper understanding of the regimes themselves. As such, the researcher hypothesises that, due to high levels of continuity in campaign discourse, this reflected a high level of continuity across the two regimes. Thus, despite reflecting different eras in Zimbabwe’s political space, distinct similarities were present across both campaigns. Notably, discourses insinuating police brutality, citizen arrest, corruption, and an overall constitutional decay were evident under both the Mugabe and Mnangagwa regimes. With the differences being relatively minor, the researcher hypothesises that despite the change in leadership, political instability and repression of citizens remains commonplace in Zimbabwe.

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