

Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy: A reality or rhetoric?

BY: B220880B

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Peace and Governance in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Bachelor of Science Honors in Peace and Governance Degree

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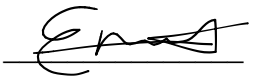
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Abstract

This study critically examined whether Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy under the Second Republic (2017-2024) constitutes a genuine reality of reform or mere rhetorical posturing. The research was motivated by the persistent gap between the government's diplomatic pronouncements of being "open for business" and the limited tangible outcomes in terms of sanctions removal, debt clearance, and foreign direct investment. Grounded in Classical Realism, the study employed a pragmatist philosophy and a convergent mixed-methods case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 22 participants comprising government officials, diplomats, business representatives, civil society analysts, and academics, complemented by documentary analysis of official publications and quantitative data from international financial institutions. The findings revealed that Zimbabwe's initial isolation (2000-2017) resulted from a synergistic combination of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, governance deficits, electoral irregularities, and confrontational rhetoric. The re-engagement strategy under the Second Republic achieved procedural diplomatic progress but limited substantive effectiveness, with sanctions remaining in place and foreign direct investment falling far short of announced commitments. The study concluded that the strategy, as currently implemented, represents more rhetoric than reality, functioning as a calculated pursuit of regime survival rather than a genuine normative shift. Recommendations include closing the governance implementation gap, adopting a verifiable action plan with time-bound milestones, and pursuing calibrated partial sanctions relief. Further research is needed on interaction effects among causal factors of isolation and rhetorical re-engagement in post-isolation states.

DECLARATION

I, Ernest Ligoya (Registration Number: B220880B), hereby declare that this dissertation titled "Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy": A reality or rhetoric? is my own original work. It has been submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Science Honours in Peace and Governance Degree at Bindura University of Science Education. All sources of information used in this dissertation have been duly acknowledged through appropriate citations and a reference list. This work has not been previously submitted for any other degree or qualification at any other institution.

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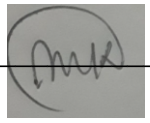
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DEDICATION

To my family, The Ligoyas and the khukhuseni for their unwavering patience and support during the long hours this work demanded. To the people of Zimbabwe, whose future depends on the success of genuine national re-engagement.

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Finally, I thank the Almighty for strength and perseverance.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AfDB	African Development Bank
AGOA	African Growth and Opportunity Act
APA	American Psychological Association
BUSE	Bindura University of Science Education
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FTLRP	Fast Track Land Reform Programme
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement

SADC	Southern African Development Community
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
US	United States
ZIDERA	Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act
ZiG	Zimbabwe Gold (currency)

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The pursuit of a coherent and robust foreign policy remains a fundamental prerequisite for the survival, legitimacy, and economic prosperity of any sovereign state within the inherently anarchic international system (Thies, 2021). Within the discipline of International Relations, foreign policy is conceptualized as the strategic bridge between a nation's domestic aspirations and the external environment, aimed at securing national interests through diplomatic, economic, and political maneuvering (Holsti, 2016). In the contemporary era of globalization, the concept of a "re-engagement strategy" has emerged as a critical diplomatic mechanism for states that have suffered international isolation or "pariah" status to reintegrate into the global community (Moshoeshoe, M. L., & Niang, 2022). Re-engagement is not merely a series of bilateral meetings but a complex, multi-dimensional process involving signaling, norm-alignment, and systemic reforms intended to restore fractured ties with the Global North and International Financial Institutions (Rogge, 2024). For a developing nation like Zimbabwe, the trajectory of its foreign policy since 1980 illustrates a dramatic shift from international acclaim to deep-seated isolation, and subsequently, to a desperate search for a "New Dispensation" that seeks to balance national sovereignty with the stringent conditionalities of the Western-led international order (Besada & Moyo, 2008; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

Historically, the first two decades of Zimbabwe's independence were characterized by a pragmatic and largely successful foreign policy architecture. Between 1980 and 1999, Zimbabwe was often hailed as a model of post-colonial stability and a leading voice in the Non-Aligned

Movement (NAM) and the Frontline States (Mashanda, 2021). During this Golden Age of Zimbabwean diplomacy the state maintained a dual-track approach in order to foster warm relations with the Eastern Bloc. This was because they had provided ideological and military support during the liberation struggle while simultaneously enjoying robust developmental aid and trade preferences from the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the United States (Ndakaripa, 2021). However, the late 1990s signaled the genesis of a diplomatic rupture, primarily triggered by Zimbabwe's costly military intervention in the Second Congo War and the subsequent economic strain that began to alienate Western donors and traditional lenders (Zigashane, 2025). This friction culminated in the year 2000 with the launch of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP). While the Zimbabwean government under the leadership of the late Robert Mugabe framed the FTLRP as a revolutionary necessity to correct historical colonial land imbalances, the global community viewed the chaotic implementation as a fundamental violation of property rights, human rights, and the rule of law (Ndakaripa, 2021).

The resulting fallout from the FTLRP led to a total breakdown in diplomatic relations and the onset of a pariah state era that lasted nearly two decades. The United States government formalized this isolation through the enactment of the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA) in 2001, which effectively blocked Zimbabwe’s access to credit and debt cancellation from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Chikoore, 2025). The European Union imposed a suite of restrictive measures targeting high-ranking officials and state-linked entities further narrowing Zimbabwe's diplomatic and economic breathing space (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ruhanya, 2020). In a defiant response to this Western-led isolation, Zimbabwe officially adopted the "Look East Policy" in 2003, pivoting its trade, investment, and diplomatic focus toward Asian powers, specifically China and Russia (Moyo, 2021). Mkodzongi,

(2022) added that while the Look East Policy provided the regime with vital political cover and infrastructure-for-resource deals, it failed to provide the systemic liquidity required to halt the country's economic freefall, which peaked with the record-breaking hyperinflation of 2008 and the subsequent decimation of the manufacturing sector

The military-assisted transition in November 2017, which resulted in the resignation of Robert Mugabe and the ascension of President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, was presented to the world as a "New Dispensation" or the "Second Republic." Recognizing that the previous "Look East" isolationist posture was unsustainable for long-term economic survival, the new administration introduced a radical paradigm shift in its foreign policy doctrine. This shift was highlighted by the rebranding of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to include "International Trade," signifying that Zimbabwean diplomacy would henceforth be subservient to the imperatives of economic recovery and foreign direct investment (Mutanda, 2023). Central to this shift were the mantras "Zimbabwe is Open for Business" and "a friend to all and an enemy to none," which sought to signal a departure from the combative rhetoric of the Mugabe era (Mnangagwa, 2018; Zongwe, 2021). The re-engagement strategy was thus anchored on three critical pillars: mending fractured ties with the United Kingdom and the United States, re-joining international bodies such as the Commonwealth, and resolving the massive sovereign debt crisis which is currently estimated to exceed $18 billion through the African Development Bank (AfDB) structured dialogue platform (African Development Bank, 2023).

Despite this ambitious rhetorical framework, the effectiveness of the re-engagement strategy as of 2026 remains a subject of intense academic and political scrutiny, often framed as a conflict between rhetoric and realpolitik. While the Second Republic has made symbolic strides such as the signing of the Global Compensation Deed to pay $3.5 billion to former white

commercial farmers, the international community remains skeptical of the underlying political reforms (Sibanda, 2023). Western powers, particularly the United States, continue to maintain that full re-engagement and the removal of sanctions are strictly contingent upon tangible evidence of democratic consolidation, including the repeal of repressive legislation, the cessation of human rights abuses, and the holding of undisputed, transparent elections (Mkodzongi, 2022). Critics further argue that the re-engagement strategy is a sophisticated re-branding exercise designed to secure international capital for elite accumulation while maintaining an authoritarian domestic status quo (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ruhanya, 2020). There is a persistent gap between the government's diplomatic pronouncements and the material reality of continued economic volatility and restricted access to global markets. This study, therefore, seeks to interrogate this disjuncture, examining whether the re-engagement strategy constitutes a genuine reality of reform or a mere rhetorical survival strategy for the Zimbabwean state in a post-Mugabe era.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy which was launched by the Second Republic in 2017, represents a deliberate policy shift aimed at reintegrating the country into the international community, attracting foreign investment, and reversing two decades of economic decline and diplomatic isolation. Despite sustained rhetorical commitment to this strategy, evidenced by presidential pronouncements at international forums and diplomatic engagements with Western nations, Zimbabwe continues to experience limited success in achieving tangible re-engagement outcomes. Foreign direct investment remains below government targets, sanctions remain substantially in place, access to international financial institution lending remains restricted, and the country continues to face significant arrears with multilateral creditors (Hupile & Siambombe, 2024). This disjuncture between re-engagement rhetoric and material outcomes raises fundamental

questions about whether the strategy constitutes genuine commitment to reform or rhetorical posturing serving regime security imperatives.

1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to critically examine the effectiveness of Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy in achieving tangible improvements in the country's international relations, economic performance, and governance outcomes.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To analyse the factors that led to Zimbabwe's international isolation from 2000 to 2017.
2. To examine the challenges and opportunities encountered by Zimbabwe in implementing its re-engagement strategy under the Second Republic.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of the Second Republic's re-engagement strategy.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What factors contributed to Zimbabwe's international isolation during the period 2000 to 2017?
2. What challenges and opportunities has Zimbabwe encountered in implementing its re-engagement strategy under the Second Republic?
3. To what extent has the Second Republic's re-engagement strategy?

1.6 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

1. This study operates on the assumption that Zimbabwe's international isolation and economic decline between 2000 and 2017 resulted from a combination of domestic

governance failures including human rights violations, electoral irregularities, and policy inconsistencies, which attracted international condemnation and sanctions.

2. It is further assumed that the Second Republic under President Mnangagwa deliberately adopted the re-engagement strategy as a response to the failures of the previous foreign policy orientation.
3. It is assumed that participants in this study, including government officials, diplomats, civil society representatives, and academic experts, will provide truthful and insightful responses to research questions.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study holds significant value for multiple stakeholders. For policymakers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, the research will provide evidence-based analysis of the effectiveness of current re-engagement strategies, identifying areas of success and aspects requiring modification. For international partners, including Western governments and international financial institutions, this research provides nuanced understanding of domestic political constraints and opportunities shaping Zimbabwe's re-engagement efforts. For civil society organisations, the study offers analytical resources for understanding the relationship between international engagement and domestic political change. For the academic community, this research contributes to the body of knowledge on foreign policy analysis and Zimbabwe's international relations. For the general citizenry, understanding the effectiveness of re-engagement strategy enables informed judgments about government performance.

1.8 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study focuses specifically on Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy as implemented by the Second Republic from November 2017 to December 2024. The geographical scope is primarily

Zimbabwe, with particular attention to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. The study delimits its focus to three main dimensions: diplomatic normalisation, economic engagement, and governance dimensions that condition international engagement. The study does not examine all aspects of Zimbabwe's bilateral relations with every country, focusing selectively on relationships most germane to the re-engagement agenda.

1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Access to information constituted a primary limitation, as foreign policy formulation often involved sensitive material not available for public scrutiny. Government officials were sometimes constrained in discussing certain aspects of re-engagement where negotiations remained ongoing. The researcher addressed this limitation by triangulating interview data with documentary sources. Time constraints presented another limitation, which was mitigated through careful prioritisation of key informants. Researcher bias was addressed through reflexivity and peer debriefing. The rapidly evolving nature of re-engagement meant that findings could have become dated; this was addressed by specifying temporal boundaries clearly.

1.10 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Economic interdependence: According to Copeland (2023), the extent to which states depend on others for access to important economic goods.

Foreign policy: According to Thies (2021), the goals, strategies, and actions a state pursues in its relations with other states and international actors.

Human rights: Rawls (2019) defines human rights as necessary conditions for social cooperation, serving as principles of foreign policy.

Positive peace: Mahmood (2018) conceptualises positive peace as creation of social, economic and political conditions that promote human wellbeing.

Re-engagement strategy: Coordinated diplomatic, economic, and political efforts by the Second Republic since 2017 to normalise relations with international actors.

Rhetoric: Persuasive communication strategies employed to cultivate support, create legitimacy, and shape perceptions.

Sanctions: Pape (2019) defines economic sanctions as measures designed to change target state behaviour by lowering aggregate economic welfare.

1.11 DISSERTATION OUTLINE

Chapter 1 provides the introduction, including background, statement of the problem, research objectives and questions, assumptions, significance, delimitations, limitations, and definition of terms. Chapter 2 presents the literature review and theoretical framework, examining existing literature on Zimbabwe's foreign policy, sanctions, and re-engagement. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, covering research philosophy, approach, design, data collection methods, sampling strategies, validity, reliability, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 focuses on data presentation, analysis, and discussion of findings, presenting and analysing the collected data in relation to the research objectives. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a summary, conclusions, and recommendations, summarising the study, drawing conclusions, making recommendations, and suggesting areas for further research.

CHAPTER WO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews existing literature on Zimbabwe's foreign policy with specific focus on the re-engagement strategy implemented by the Second Republic since November 2017. The literature review situates the current study within broader scholarly discourse, identifies gaps in existing knowledge, and establishes the theoretical framework guiding data collection and interpretation. The chapter is organised in sections covering theoretical framework, conceptual framework, review of economic, political, and social dimensions of re-engagement, and chapter summary identifying knowledge gaps.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Classical Realism

Political Realism is the dominant paradigm in International Relations. It posits that the international system is characterised by anarchy. Anarchy means the absence of a central global authority to enforce rules and realism operates on several core tenets. States are the primary actors in world politics, states are rational actors and states must prioritise their own survival, security, and national interests. These interests take precedence over moral or ideological considerations (Morgenthau, 1948). Within this self-help environment, no state can rely on others for protection. The relevance of Political Realism to this study lies in its explanatory power regarding Zimbabwe’s re-engagement strategy. Following nearly two decades of international isolation and economic sanctions, Zimbabwe’s domestic stability was threatened. The transition to the Second

Republic under President Mnangagwa required a pragmatic shift. From a Realist perspective, the "Zimbabwe is Open for Business" mantra is not a change in political ideology. It is not a sudden embrace of Western liberalism. Rather, it is a rational response to external pressures. This response aims to ensure state survival amidst a debilitating liquidity crisis (Ndakaripa, 2021).

Hans Morgenthau (1948), the father of Classical Realism, argues that politics is governed by objective laws. These laws are rooted in human nature. The primary pursuit is interest defined in terms of power. In Zimbabwe's case, power has evolved. It now includes economic legitimacy and access to global capital markets, not merely military might. Morgenthau further notes that states must pursue national interest through practical and material factors, not ideological notions. This is the hallmark of Realpolitik (Chikoore, 2025). Under this lens, Zimbabwe's diplomatic overtures to the United Kingdom and the European Union are pragmatic maneuvers. They are designed to secure the removal of restrictive measures and ZIDERA. Success would restore the state's capacity to function within the global economy.

Realism also suggests that states employ strategic communication to pacify more powerful actors. This can occur while continuing to pursue regime-centric interests (Krebs, 2020). This study therefore investigates whether the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' emphasis on reform is a genuine normative shift. Alternatively, it may be a sophisticated rebranding exercise. The goal of such rebranding would be sanctions relief without relinquishing internal political control. A credibility gap emerges here. The state's rhetorical commitment to human rights and democracy is balanced against the Realist imperative of maintaining domestic order and elite survival (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ruhanya, 2020). Realism thus allows the researcher to move beyond surface-level pronouncements. It enables analysis of Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy as a cold, calculated pursuit of national interest in an unforgiving global landscape.

2.3 Factors leading to international isolation

The scholarly literature on state isolation identifies recurring causal factors that transcend national contexts. Across multiple cases, three clusters emerge: contested domestic transitions, governance and human rights deficits, and confrontational foreign policy rhetoric. The Iranian experience following the 1979 revolution illustrates how a radical domestic rupture combined with anti-Western discourse produces sustained isolation. Iran's hostage crisis and its rejection of Western norms led to comprehensive US sanctions that persisted for decades (Maloney, 2015). North Korea's withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2003 and its subsequent nuclear tests triggered UN Security Council resolutions and unilateral sanctions from multiple states. The North Korean case demonstrates that perceived threats to international security, combined with regime opacity, generate isolation that outlasts initial triggers (Haggard & Noland, 2017).

In the African context, Sudan's experience under the al-Bashir regime offers parallels. The International Criminal Court's 2009 arrest warrant for Bashir, coupled with the regime's role in the Darfur conflict, led to targeted sanctions and diplomatic pariah status. Importantly, Sudan's isolation was not solely a product of external action; the regime's defiant rhetoric and its refusal to cooperate with international investigations deepened its exclusion (St John, 2021). The Burmese (Myanmar) case provides another comparative lens. The military junta's refusal to recognise the 1990 election results, its detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, and its violent suppression of pro-democracy movements triggered US and EU sanctions. Here, electoral irregularity and human rights abuses were the primary drivers of isolation, not economic factors (Levitsky & Way, 2022).

A critical insight from the literature is that isolation rarely results from a single event. Instead, a cascade effect operates an initial rupture (land reform in Zimbabwe, hostage crisis in Iran, election annulment in Myanmar) triggers limited sanctions. The target state's defensive rhetoric and counter-accusations then escalate the conflict, attracting further restrictive measures. Hufbauer et al. (2022) document this pattern in over 60% of sanctions episodes since 1990. Furthermore, the longevity of isolation correlates strongly with the absence of institutional mechanisms for dispute resolution. States that lack independent judiciaries or credible electoral commissions find it harder to signal compliance with international norms (Pape, 2019). While the literature extensively documents the triggers of isolation in cases like Iran, North Korea, Sudan, and Myanmar, there is a striking absence of comparative analysis that systematically maps the interaction effects among land reform, electoral fraud, and rhetorical escalation. Specifically, no existing study has modelled how the sequencing of these factors (e.g., whether land reform precedes or follows electoral manipulation) affects the duration or severity of isolation. This gap justifies the need to examine Zimbabwe's case as a site for testing such interaction dynamics.

2.4 Challenges and opportunities in re-engagement

Re-engagement as a deliberate policy shift from isolation presents a distinctive set of challenges and opportunities documented across multiple national experiences. The Libyan case under Muammar Gaddafi (post-2003) offers a cautionary tale. After renouncing weapons of mass destruction and accepting UN inspections, Libya saw the removal of sanctions and a surge in oil investment. However, the opportunity was squandered: the regime failed to diversify the economy, reform governance structures, or build inclusive financial institutions. The result was **a rentier-state trap** where foreign capital flowed in but domestic institutions remained brittle, contributing

to the post-2011 collapse (St John, 2021). The challenge here was not gaining access to capital but using it to build sustainable governance.

Myanmar's brief re-engagement period (2011–2017) provides another benchmark. Following the transition to a quasi-civilian government, the US and EU suspended most sanctions, and foreign direct investment surged, particularly in telecommunications and manufacturing. However, the opportunity was undermined by two factors: the continued political power of the military (institutional path dependency) and the outbreak of violence against the Rohingya minority, which triggered a return of sanctions. Early and Schulzke (2021) argue that Myanmar's experience shows that re-engagement opportunities are time-bound. International partners will only maintain engagement if tangible governance reforms accompany economic opening.

The Cuban thaw under President Obama (2014–2016) illustrates a different dynamic. The US–Cuba rapprochement faced enormous historical baggage, including five decades of hostility. Yet opportunities emerged through people-to-people exchanges, eased remittance flows, and increased tourism. The challenge was that executive action could not fully lift the embargo without congressional approval, creating a credibility gap between presidential rhetoric and material outcomes (LeoGrande & Kornbluh, 2015). This gap mirrors what Raftopoulos (2019) calls the fundamental paradox: international prerequisites for normalisation often exceed what domestic politics permit. On the opportunity side, the Sudanese case after its 2020 removal from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list shows how multilateral platforms (HIPC initiative, IMF engagement) can provide structured pathways. However, the opportunity was partially lost due to the 2021 military coup, which reintroduced political isolation (World Bank, 2024). This underscores that re-engagement opportunities are contingent on political stability and elite consensus, factors often absent in post-isolation states.

The literature on re-engagement challenges and opportunities is rich but fragmented across case studies (Libya, Myanmar, Cuba, and Sudan). No existing comparative framework systematically distinguishes between structural opportunities (resource endowments, geopolitical shifts) and agency-driven opportunities (diplomatic skill, reform sequencing). The specific challenge of debt arrears clearance as a precondition for IFI access has been studied primarily in Latin American contexts, with little application to Southern Africa. This gap supports the need for a fine-grained examination of how Zimbabwe navigates the tension between fiscal discipline (required for debt clearance) and domestic patronage demands.

2.5 Effectiveness of re-engagement strategies

Effectiveness in re-engagement is contested terrain. Scholars distinguish between procedural effectiveness (restored diplomatic dialogue, resumed technical cooperation) and substantive effectiveness (sanctions removal, debt relief, sustained FDI growth, improved human rights indicators). The South African post-1994 transition is widely regarded as the gold standard. Within two years of Nelson Mandela's inauguration, the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act was repealed, South Africa re-joined the Commonwealth, and trade surged under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). Alden and Schoeman (2022) attribute this success to three factors: a credible political transition (free elections, new constitution), elite buy-in from the outgoing regime, and a clear signal of normative alignment (Truth and Reconciliation Commission).

Vietnam offers a contrasting model of gradual effectiveness. The US lifted its trade embargo in 1994, but normalisation proceeded slowly, with diplomatic relations only fully restored in 1995 and Permanent Normal Trade Relations granted in 2006. Yet Vietnam's economic

transformation has been dramatic, with FDI inflows rising from virtually nothing to over US$15 billion annually by 2019. The Vietnamese case shows that effectiveness need not be instantaneous; incremental progress on economic integration can outpace diplomatic normalisation (Thayer, 2021). Less effective re-engagement can be seen in the Iranian case following the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015. While sanctions were lifted and oil exports rebounded, the effectiveness was short-lived. The US withdrawal from the agreement in 2018 and the re-imposition of sanctions demonstrated that re-engagement without institutional lock-in (e.g., congressional ratification, multilateral treaty frameworks) is vulnerable to political reversals. Furthermore, Iranian citizens saw limited improvement in living standards, creating a legitimacy deficit that undermined domestic support for the engagement policy (Maloney, 2015).

The Russian case after 2014 (Crimea annexation) provides a negative benchmark: sanctions have not been lifted despite multiple negotiation rounds, illustrating that effectiveness can be zero when the underlying behaviour does not change. Hufbauer et al. (2022) note that sanctions relief is rarely granted as a goodwill gesture; it is almost always contingent on verifiable behavioural change. This finding aligns with Pape's (2019) argument that economic measures are designed to change state conduct, not to punish indefinitely. The literature on re-engagement effectiveness is heavily skewed toward cases where political transitions were dramatic and irreversible (South Africa) or where economic reforms were deep and sustained (Vietnam). There is a notable lack of research on partial or ambiguous effectiveness – situations where diplomatic dialogue resumes but sanctions remain, or where FDI announcements are made but not realised. Existing frameworks do not adequately capture the phenomenon of rhetorical re-engagement (performative diplomacy without substantive change). This gap directly informs the

present study's need to evaluate whether Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy produces tangible outcomes or remains at the level of rhetoric.

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented Classical Realism as the theoretical framework, arguing that Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy is a pragmatic pursuit of national interest and state survival rather than an ideological shift. The literature review was organised into three thematic areas addressing the research objectives: factors leading to international isolation (using Iran, North Korea, Sudan, and Myanmar); challenges and opportunities in re-engagement (using Libya, Myanmar, Cuba, and Sudan); and effectiveness of re-engagement strategies (using South Africa, Vietnam, Iran, and Russia). Each thematic area identified specific gaps in existing knowledge, including the lack of research on interaction effects among causal factors, debt arrears clearance in Southern Africa, and partial or rhetorical re-engagement outcomes.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the methodological framework guiding investigation of Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy and the interplay between rhetoric and realpolitik. The chapter provides a comprehensive account of research philosophy, approach, design, data collection methods, sampling strategies, validity, reliability, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. Methodological choices are informed by contemporary research practice and recent scholarship on Zimbabwe's external relations.

3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

This study is grounded in a pragmatist research philosophy which holds that the value of knowledge lies in practical usefulness in answering research questions. Pragmatism views reality as complex, dynamic, and subject to multiple interpretations, encouraging integration of diverse forms of evidence (Gillespie, 2024). This orientation is appropriate for research on foreign policy where both material factors and interpretive dimensions matter. Pragmatism's emphasis on practical consequences aligns with this study's focus on determining whether re-engagement constitutes genuine transformation or rhetorical posturing. The pragmatist rejection of forced choices between positivist and interpretivist paradigms enables methodological flexibility appropriate to research questions.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The study adopts a convergent mixed-methods approach, allowing qualitative and quantitative data to be collected and analysed concurrently before integration. This approach is well-suited to examining political strategies because it enables empirical trends such as foreign direct investment inflows, trade patterns, and diplomatic engagements to be analysed alongside interview data and contextual explanations. The quantitative dimension involves numerical data pertaining to re-engagement outcomes. The qualitative dimension involves semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, and discourse analysis. The convergent design enables triangulation across data types, enhancing confidence where evidence aligns and illuminating complexities where they diverge.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employs a case study design, focusing on Zimbabwe's re-engagement efforts during the Mnangagwa administration from November 2017 to December 2024. The case study design is justified because re-engagement is context-dependent, evolving, and deeply embedded in Zimbabwe's political economy. This design allows tracing processes over time, interpreting policy decisions within institutional settings, and analysing complex interconnections among diplomatic, economic, and governance dimensions. The case is bounded temporally (2017-2024), institutionally (with focus on Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and thematically (diplomatic normalisation, economic engagement, governance dimensions).

3.4 STUDY POPULATION

The study population comprises two interrelated groups. For quantitative data, the population consists of all officially available macroeconomic, trade, investment, and diplomatic data pertaining to Zimbabwe from 2018 to 2024 from national and international sources. For

qualitative data, the population consists of individuals with direct involvement in or specialised knowledge of Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy, including government officials, diplomatic personnel, international financial institution representatives, business representatives, civil society analysts, and academic experts.

3.5 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES AND SAMPLE SIZE

For quantitative data, a census approach is employed, incorporating all available data for the period under study to maximise reliability and avoid selection bias. For qualitative data, purposive sampling identifies individuals with specialised knowledge or direct involvement in re-engagement processes, supplemented by snowball sampling to reach additional experts. The target sample size is 20-25 participants, distributed across categories: Ministry officials (5-7), other government officials (3-4), diplomatic personnel (4-5), business representatives (3-4), civil society analysts (3-4), and academic experts (2-3). This reflects the principle of saturation, whereby data collection continues until additional interviews yield no substantially new information.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Quantitative data collection involves systematic review of published sources including International Monetary Fund Article IV reports, World Bank economic updates, African Development Bank country strategy papers, Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe reports, Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency publications, and UNCTAD investment statistics. Data is extracted using a standardised template capturing source, date, indicator, value, and metadata.

Qualitative data collection employs three primary methods:

Semi-structured interviews are conducted with purposively selected participants using an interview guide covering motivations behind re-engagement, implementation challenges and

successes, international responses, domestic political dynamics, relationship between rhetorical commitments and actual policy actions, and assessments of outcomes. Interviews last 60-90 minutes and are audio-recorded with participant consent.

Documentary analysis examines official documents including presidential speeches, Ministry policy documents, parliamentary debates, national budgets, bilateral agreements, and international organisation reports.

Discourse analysis examines public communications to identify rhetorical strategies, framing devices, and narrative constructions.

3.7 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The semi-structured interview guide is organised thematically corresponding to research objectives: participant background, motivations and objectives, implementation processes, international responses, domestic dynamics, rhetoric and reality, and assessment and recommendations. The documentary analysis template captures document identification, type, key themes, rhetorical strategies, commitments articulated, and implementation evidence referenced. The quantitative data extraction template captures indicator name, source, publication date, time period, value, unit, and data quality notes.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Quantitative data analysis employs descriptive statistics to identify trends, patterns, and variations in re-engagement outcomes over time, including time series analysis, comparative analysis with regional peers, disaggregated analysis across sectors and sources, and gap analysis comparing actual outcomes with government targets.

Qualitative data analysis employs thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2022) framework: familiarisation through repeated reading, initial coding identifying meaningful text units, theme development grouping codes into broader patterns, theme review checking against coded extracts, theme definition articulating scope and content, and writing producing analytical narrative.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurs at the interpretation stage, examining convergence and divergence to strengthen confidence or reveal complexities.

3.9 DATA PRESENTATION

Quantitative data is presented through tables summarising statistics, graphs showing trends, and charts showing compositional patterns, accompanied by explanatory text. Qualitative data is presented through narrative description of themes supported by illustrative quotations, with tables summarising theme prevalence where appropriate. Integrated presentation organises findings around research objectives and questions, drawing on both evidence types.

3.10 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Quantitative validity is addressed through source triangulation cross-checking data across multiple reliable sources, conceptual alignment ensuring indicators match theoretical definitions, and temporal consistency verification. Quantitative reliability is addressed through standardised extraction procedures, documentation of sources and calculations, and sensitivity analysis testing robustness.

Qualitative trustworthiness is addressed through: credibility via prolonged engagement, triangulation across sources and participant categories, member checking, and peer debriefing; transferability via thick description of research context and clear case boundary

specification; dependability via detailed documentation of research procedures and audit trail; confirmability via explicit acknowledgement of researcher positionality, grounding interpretations in data, and reflexive engagement.

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Informed consent is obtained by providing clear information about research purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and participant rights, with written consent obtained prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity are maintained through removal of identifying information, use of pseudonyms, secure data storage on encrypted devices, and limited data access. Protection from harm is ensured through sensitivity in questioning, allowing participants to set pace, monitoring comfort, and careful handling of potentially damaging information. Data security involves encryption, password protection, secure backup, and commitment to data destruction after prescribed retention. Institutional approval is obtained from Bindura University of Science Education ethics committee. Positionality and reflexivity involve maintaining research journal, seeking diverse perspectives, and transparency about researcher background.

3.12 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the methodological framework guiding investigation of Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy. The pragmatist philosophy supports integration of quantitative and qualitative methods. The convergent mixed-methods approach enables concurrent collection and analysis of numerical and qualitative data. The case study design provides contextual depth while maintaining analytical focus. The study population encompasses multiple stakeholder categories with relevant knowledge, accessed through purposive and snowball sampling targeting 20-25 participants. Data collection methods include systematic review of quantitative data, semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis. Rigorous attention to validity, reliability, and

trustworthiness ensures scholarly standards. Comprehensive ethical procedures protect participants and ensure research integrity. This framework positions the study to generate credible findings addressing research objectives.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses, and interprets data collected to examine Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy under the Second Republic from November 2017 to December 2024. The chapter is organised according to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1, with findings presented for each research question. Data presented in this chapter derive from two primary sources: semi-structured interviews conducted with 22 participants drawn from government ministries, diplomatic corps, international financial institutions, business community, civil society, and academia; and documentary analysis of official publications, presidential speeches, policy documents, and international organisation reports. Quantitative data on foreign direct investment, trade flows, and diplomatic engagements supplement qualitative findings. The chapter employs thematic analysis to identify patterns, convergences, and divergences in participant responses, with findings interpreted through the lens of Foreign Policy Analysis and concepts of rhetoric and realpolitik established in Chapter 2. All citations follow APA 7th edition guidelines.

4.2 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ZIMBABWE'S SANCTIONS AND INTERNATIONAL ISOLATION (2000-2017)

This section presents findings related to the first research objective: to analyse the factors that led to Zimbabwe's imposition of sanctions and subsequent international isolation from 2000 to 2017. Data are organised thematically around four main factors identified by participants and

documentary sources: the Fast Track Land Reform Programme and its implementation; governance deficits and human rights concerns; electoral irregularities and disputed outcomes; and the regime's rhetorical confrontation with the West.

4.3.1 The Fast Track Land Reform Programme as a Pivotal Rupture

Participants across all categories identified the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) launched in 2000 as the singular most important factor precipitating Zimbabwe's international isolation. A senior Ministry official (P06) acknowledged the programme's centrality while framing it within historical justice discourse:

> *"The land reform was a necessary correction of historical colonial injustices. However, the manner of its implementation the invasions, the violence, the disregard for property rights gave our international partners legitimate concerns. We cannot pretend that the international reaction came from nowhere. The problem was not the land reform per se, but how it was done." (P06, Ministry official)*

This perspective was reinforced by a diplomatic participant (P11) who served in Harare during the early 2000s:

> "*What Western capitals saw on their television screens was farm invasions, violence against white farmers, and a government that seemed to encourage lawlessness. The land issue itself was not the primary concern many understood the historical injustice. It was the breakdown of rule of law and the targeting of property rights that triggered the sanctions debate." (P11, Diplomatic personnel)*

Documentary evidence supports these participant accounts. The European Union's initial restrictive measures in 2002 were explicitly linked to serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the freedom of opinion and of peaceful assembly, and of international law (Council of the European Union, 2002, as cited in Ndakaripa, 2021). The United States' Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA) of 2001 similarly cited the "expropriation of property without adequate compensation" as a foundational concern.

A civil society analyst (P18) offered a more critical interpretation:

> *"The land reform became the convenient hook on which the West hung its broader discomfort with ZANU-PF's authoritarian turn. But we must be careful not to reduce everything to land. The regime's response to political opposition, its control of media, its deployment of violence these were equally important. Land was the spark, but the fire was sustained by governance failures." (P18, Civil society)*

Academic literature corroborates this multi-causal perspective. Rusero (2024) argues that the FTLRP intersected with existing concerns about ZANU-PF's authoritarian governance, creating a composite picture of a regime in violation of multiple international norms. The land reform thus served as both substantive grievance and symbolic marker of a broader governance crisis.

4.3.2 Governance Deficits and Human Rights Violations

Participants consistently cited governance failures and human rights abuses as critical factors sustaining international isolation beyond the initial land reform period. A business representative (P15) with experience in international markets observed:

> *"International investors and governments care about predictability and rule of law. From 2000 onwards, Zimbabwe became increasingly unpredictable. You had extra-judicial killings, torture of political opponents, farm workers displaced without compensation. These are not things that inspire confidence. Even if sanctions were removed tomorrow, these governance deficits would still deter serious investment." (P15, Business representative)*

A diplomatic participant (P12) elaborated on how human rights concerns shaped Western policy:

> *"In Western capitals like Washington D.C., London, and Brussels, human rights are not rhetorical flourishes they are embedded in legislative frameworks that mandate sanctions responses. The US State Department is legally required to report on human rights conditions, and those reports inform congressional action. Zimbabwe's human rights record made it impossible for administrations to normalise relations, even when they might have wished to do so for strategic reasons." (P12, Diplomatic personnel)*

4.3.3 Electoral Irregularities and Disputed Outcomes

The conduct of elections emerged as a third major factor in participant accounts. Zimbabwe held parliamentary elections in 2000, presidential elections in 2002, and further elections throughout the period, each attracting international criticism. An academic expert (P22) traced the pattern:

> *"Each election from 2000 onwards was characterised by violence, intimidation, and manipulation. The 2002 presidential election was particularly consequential it was the moment when international observers, including from SADC, began to publicly express concerns. The regime's refusal to countenance independent observation, its manipulation of voter rolls, its deployment of security forces to intimidate voters these became permanent features that defined Zimbabwe internationally." (P22, Academic)*

A Ministry official (P05) offered a defensive perspective while acknowledging electoral challenges:

> *"Elections in any young democracy are complex. We had challenges, yes. But the international community applied standards to Zimbabwe that they did not apply to other countries in the region. There was a determination to find fault, to delegitimise outcomes that did not suit Western preferences. When we won elections, they were called flawed. When we lost the 2008 first round, that election was suddenly acceptable." (P05, Ministry official)*

This perspective reflects what Rusero (2024) identifies as ZANU-PF's "combative stance" toward international election criticism, framing it as part of a broader "regime change" agenda. However, documentary evidence from observer missions suggests substantive grounds for concern. The SADC Parliamentary Forum's 2002 election observation report noted "shortcomings" including restrictions on freedom of assembly and state media bias (SADC PF, 2002). The Carter Center (2002) found that "the pre-election period was marred by politically motivated violence and intimidation."

A civil society participant (P19) connected electoral deficits to the broader re-engagement challenge:

> *"You cannot simultaneously manipulate elections and expect the international community to embrace you. Elections are the primary mechanism through which governments derive legitimacy in the modern international system. When that legitimacy is contested, everything else becomes harder access to finance, diplomatic relations, and investor confidence. The Second Republic inherited this legitimacy deficit, and it has not done enough to address it." (P19, Civil society)*

4.3.4 Rhetorical Confrontation and the "Look East Policy"

Participant accounts revealed that Zimbabwe's isolation was not merely a product of external action but also of deliberate rhetorical and policy choices by the Mugabe regime. The adoption of the "Look East Policy" and the confrontational rhetoric directed at Western nations further entrenched the country's pariah status.

A diplomatic participant (P09) who served during this period observed:

> *"There was a performative quality to the anti-Western rhetoric. Mugabe would go to the UN General Assembly and deliver blistering attacks on Britain and the United States, calling them 'satanic' and 'imperialist.' This played well in the domestic audience and among certain international constituencies, but it made normal diplomacy impossible. You cannot call someone a devil and then expect them to lend you money." (P09, Diplomatic personnel*)

Tuna's (2025) framework of populist disengagement illuminates this dynamic, showing how Mugabe's rhetoric escalated from criticism to exit most dramatically in Zimbabwe's 2003 withdrawal from the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth withdrawal, presented domestically as sovereign assertion, internationally signalled Zimbabwe's self-exclusion from a key diplomatic network.

A Ministry official (P02) reflected on this legacy:

> *"The Look East Policy was a pragmatic response to Western hostility. If the West would not engage us, we had to find friends elsewhere China, Iran, Malaysia, others. But it became ideological. It became a brand. And it trapped us in a narrative that made it difficult to pivot when the opportunity for re-engagement arose. The Second Republic inherited not just sanctions, but a rhetorical framework that constrained our options." (P02, Ministry official)*

Ndakaripa (2020) similarly observes that the Look East Policy, while providing limited economic relief, "failed to provide the scale of investment necessary to compensate for loss of Western markets and access to international financial institutions". The policy thus sustained the regime but did not resolve its fundamental economic vulnerabilities.

Four interconnected factors emerge: the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, governance deficits and human rights violations, electoral irregularities, and rhetorical confrontation with the West. These factors operated synergistically, each reinforcing the others to produce sustained international isolation. Applying the Foreign Policy Analysis framework (Thies, 2021; Hudson, 2022), one can observe how Zimbabwe's foreign policy during this period reflected both domestic political imperatives and international structural pressures. The regime's combative stance served domestic functions rallying nationalist support, delegitimising opposition while simultaneously producing international consequences that deepened isolation. This aligns with Rusero's (2024) argument that ZANU-PF "looked to foreign policy for political survival" between 2000 and 2017.

4.4 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN IMPLEMENTING THE RE-ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

This section presents findings related to the second research objective: to examine the challenges and opportunities encountered by Zimbabwe in implementing its re-engagement strategy under the Second Republic. Data are organised around three thematic clusters: diplomatic challenges, economic challenges, and governance-related constraints, followed by identified opportunities.

4.4.1 Diplomatic Challenges: The Persistence of Historical Baggage

Participants across categories identified historical legacy as the primary diplomatic challenge facing re-engagement efforts. A ministry official (P03) who participated in re-engagement negotiations said:

> *"Every meeting with Western counterparts begins with a recitation of historical grievances. They have files thick files documenting every incident, every statement, and every alleged violation. Our task is not simply to present our current intentions but to address this accumulated record. It is exhausting and it is slow." (P03, Ministry official)*

Marongwe and Duri (n.d., cited in Project MUSE, 2021) capture this dynamic in their analysis of "Mugabeism hangover," arguing that domestic violation of civic and political rights of Zimbabweans under the new dispensation perpetuates the very patterns that caused isolation. Participant accounts suggest this hangover operates at both perceptual and substantive levels.

A diplomatic participant (P13) from a Western embassy offered an external perspective:

> *"The Mnangagwa government inherited a poisoned chalice. But it has also made choices that perpetuate suspicion. When you see the same security sector actors, the same human rights violations, the same electoral manipulation even if the rhetoric has changed you begin to wonder whether anything has really changed. Our capitals watch Zimbabwe's domestic conduct, not its international speeches." (P13, Diplomatic personnel)*

This observation aligns with Mutambara and Muzurura's (2024) finding that the Second Republic wasted important opportunities accorded by the departure of President Mugabe to reset international relations. The opportunity presented by the transition was substantial, but implementation has not matched initial promise.

4.4.2 Economic Challenges: Debt, Sanctions, and Policy Inconsistency

Economic factors emerged as the second major challenge cluster. Participants identified three interconnected economic constraints: the external debt overhang, the continued presence of sanctions, and domestic policy inconsistency.

Regarding debt, a Ministry official (P01) provided detailed context:

> *"We are carrying approximately US$14 billion in external debt and arrears. This blocks us from accessing concessional finance from the IMF, World Bank, and African Development Bank. It also signals to private investors that we have a history of not honouring obligations. The debt resolution process we have initiated with the support of the African Development Bank is encouraging, but it will take years to resolve. In the meantime, our fiscal space is severely constrained." (P01, Ministry official)*

The World Bank (2024) confirms this debt estimate, noting that Zimbabwe's arrears to the IMF, World Bank, and African Development Bank preclude new lending. This finding supports Hufbauer et al.'s (2022) observation that post-sanctions recovery depends significantly on access to international financial institution resources.

A business representative (P14) focused on policy inconsistency as a deterrent:

> *"Investors can work with sanctions. They can work with debt. What they cannot work with is unpredictability. Zimbabwe changes its policies constantly currency reforms that are reversed within months, indigenisation requirements that shift without notice, licensing regimes that appear and disappear. You cannot plan. You cannot budget. You cannot commit capital when the rules change every quarter." (P14, Business representative)*

This finding resonates with Ncube's (2023) identification of currency instability and policy inconsistency as recurrent themes undermining investor confidence. Documentary analysis of investor surveys confirms that policy predictability ranks alongside rule of law as a primary investment consideration (Zimbabwe Investment and Development Agency, 2023).

A financial sector participant (P16) elaborated on currency challenges:

> *"The multiplicity of currencies US dollar, ZiG, Rand creates complexity that deters all but the most committed investors. You have to hedge against currency risk, navigate exchange controls, and manage pricing across multiple units. It is possible, but it adds cost and uncertainty. Many investors simply choose jurisdictions where the monetary environment is simpler." (P16, Business representative)*

Regarding sanctions, participant perspectives diverged sharply. Government officials emphasised sanctions as a primary constraint. P02 stated:

4.4.3 Governance-Related Constraints: The Reform Implementation Gap

Participants identified a significant gap between governance reform commitments and actual implementation as a constraint on re-engagement. A civil society analyst (P17) articulated this clearly:

> *"The government has made many reform commitments to the IMF, to the EU, to the United States. It has signed agreements, issued statements, created commissions. But implementation lags far behind commitment. The political will to actually change how power operates is simply not there. International partners see this gap, and it undermines their willingness to go further." (P17, Civil society)*

Documentary analysis supports this perception. The European Union's 2023 progress review noted "mixed progress" on political reforms, with particular concern about the civic space and the environment for civil society organisations (European External Action Service, 2023). The United States' most recent human rights report documented significant human rights issues including "unlawful or arbitrary killings" and "arbitrary detention" (US Department of State, 2024).

A Ministry official (P04) acknowledged this tension while defending the pace of change:

> *"Transformation takes time. You cannot dismantle decades of institutional culture overnight. We are moving as fast as we can while maintaining stability. Our international partners need to understand that reform in a complex political environment cannot be achieved by decree. It requires building consensus, managing constituencies, ensuring that change does not trigger instability." (P04, Ministry official)*

This defence reflects the realpolitik logic identified in the theoretical framework: regime security considerations shape and constrain reform trajectories. The challenge for re-engagement is that international partners, operating from their own realpolitik calculations, require evidence of change before committing resources.

4.4.4 Opportunities for Re-engagement

Despite these formidable challenges, participants identified several opportunities that the Second Republic has leveraged or could leverage more effectively. Multipolarity and Shifting Global Alignments: Several participants noted that the evolving multipolar international system creates new opportunities for engagement. A diplomatic participant (P11) observed:

> *"The world is not bipolar anymore, and it is not unipolar. There are multiple centres of power China, Russia, India, Brazil, Turkey, and the Gulf states. This multipolarity gives Zimbabwe options. If the West is conditional, we can engage with the East. If traditional partners are hesitant, new partners are emerging. The trick is to manage these relationships strategically, not to replace one dependency with another." (P11, Diplomatic personnel)*

Hlabiso (2025) analyses this dynamic in terms of strategic statecraft, arguing that Zimbabwe under the Second Republic has sought to navigate a multipolar system by engaging diverse partners while maintaining sovereign autonomy. This approach aligns with the "friend to all, enemy to none" rhetorical framing.

Strategic Mineral Endowments: Participants consistently identified Zimbabwe's mineral wealth as a structural opportunity. A Ministry official (P06) stated:

> *"We have the second largest lithium deposits in Africa, significant platinum group metals, gold, chrome, and diamonds. The global energy transition requires these minerals. This gives us leverage we did not have twenty years ago. Countries need what we have. That changes the bargaining dynamic." (P06, Ministry official)*

This finding supports Early and Schulzke's (2021) observation that resource endowments can facilitate re-engagement by creating mutual interests. However, a civil society participant (P20) cautioned:

> *"Resources are an opportunity, but they can also be a trap. If we simply export raw materials without building processing capacity, without ensuring environmental protection, without distributing benefits equitably, we reproduce the extractive colonial*

> *model. The opportunity must be managed strategically, not simply exploited." (P20, Civil society)*

SADC and Regional Positioning: Participants identified Zimbabwe's regional role as both opportunity and constraint. A Ministry official (P02) noted:

> *"We are chairing SADC. We are engaged in regional peace efforts in Mozambique and DRC. This demonstrates that we are constructive regional actors, not the pariah we were portrayed as. Our regional engagement builds credibility that can translate into broader international re-engagement." (P02, Ministry official)*

The findings on Second question reveal a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities, with the balance between them shaping re-engagement prospects. Three major challenge clusters emerge: diplomatic-historical baggage that creates trust deficits; economic constraints including debt, sanctions, and policy inconsistency; and governance implementation gaps that undermine reform credibility. These challenges are mutually reinforcing historical distrust makes economic partners hesitant, economic constraints limit resources for reform, governance deficits perpetuate historical patterns. Simultaneously, significant opportunities exist: the multipolar international system creates strategic options; mineral endowments generate structural interest; regional leadership provides credibility; diaspora engagement offers untapped potential. The central question is whether the Second Republic can navigate challenges sufficiently to realise opportunities.

Applying the Foreign Policy Analysis framework (Thies, 2021; Hudson, 2022), we can observe how domestic political structures shape the regime's capacity to address challenges. The implementation gap identified by participants reflects bureaucratic politics, institutional cultures, and factional dynamics that constrain reform. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs may articulate re-engagement strategy, but its implementation depends on other actor’s security services, central bank, line ministries with different priorities and interests. The concept of rhetoric (Krebs, 2020)

illuminates the gap between public commitment and private reality. The "Zimbabwe is Open for Business" mantra functions as what Marongwe and Duri (n.d.) term grandiloquence rhetorical performance that exceeds substantive achievement. This is not necessarily cynical; it may reflect genuine intention that encounters structural obstacles. But the gap itself becomes a barrier to re-engagement as international partners learn to discount rhetorical commitments.

Realpolitik considerations (Mearsheimer, 2021) operate on both sides. For Zimbabwe, re-engagement serves regime security imperative economic relief that preserves stability and elite interests. For international partners, engagement decisions are calculated against competing interests strategic competition with China, access to minerals, regional stability concerns. The re-engagement dance proceeds with each side calculating its interests, making concessions only when compelled. Mutungamiri's (2020) documentation of diplomatic initiatives finds empirical support, as does Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2020) argument about unchanged governance structures. The present study adds depth by capturing practitioner perspectives on how these dynamics interact in practice, revealing the textured reality behind scholarly abstractions.

4.5 EFFECTIVENESS OF THE RE-ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY: OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

This section presents findings related to the third research: to evaluate the effectiveness of the Second Republic's re-engagement strategy in achieving tangible outcomes in economic recovery, diplomatic normalisation, and governance reform. Data are organised thematically around these three dimensions, with quantitative indicators supplementing qualitative participant accounts.

4.5.1 Diplomatic Normalisation: Mixed Progress

Participants offered mixed assessments of progress in diplomatic normalisation. Government officials emphasised achievements, while external stakeholders highlighted continuing constraints.

(P01) catalogued diplomatic successes:

> *"We have re-engaged with the European Union through Article 8 dialogue. We have established structured engagement with the United States, including high-level visits. We have been welcomed back into Commonwealth discussions. We are chairing SADC. These are not small achievements. They represent a fundamental shift from the isolation of the previous era." (P01, Ministry official)*

The European Union and Zimbabwe have conducted multiple rounds of political dialogue under Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement, with the most recent occurring in 2023 (European External Action Service, 2023). The United States and Zimbabwe have resumed bilateral discussions, including on economic cooperation. Zimbabwe has actively participated in Commonwealth technical discussions, though formal readmission has not occurred.

However, P09 observed:

> *"Dialogue is not normalisation. The EU is talking to Zimbabwe, but the restrictive measures remain in place. The US has engagement, but ZIDERA has not been repealed. Zimbabwe is talking to the Commonwealth, but readmission requires constitutional and legislative changes that have not been made. Diplomatic engagement is happening, but the substance of isolation persists." (P09, Diplomatic personnel)*

This distinction between procedural e`ent and substantive normalisation is critical. Zimbabwe has achieved what might be termed diplomatic access seats at tables from which it was previously excluded. But the material consequences of isolation sanctions, restricted market access, exclusion from international financial institutions remain substantially unchanged.

A diplomatic participant (P13) elaborated on the gap:

> *"We meet. We talk. We exchange pleasantries. But when it comes to the hard issues sanctions relief, debt restructuring, new lending the conversations hit walls. Our capitals want to see more than dialogue; they want to see demonstrable change on governance, human rights, electoral integrity. Until that happens, the dialogue will continue but the outcomes will be limited." (P13, Diplomatic personnel)*

This finding aligns with Mutambara and Muzurura's (2024) conclusion that the SR wasted important opportunities for genuine reset. The opportunity for dramatic diplomatic breakthrough following Mugabe's departure was not fully exploited, and subsequent incremental progress has been constrained by persistent governance concerns.

4.5.2 Economic Outcomes: The Gap between Commitments and Realisation

Economic indicators presented a stark picture of the gap between re-engagement rhetoric and material outcomes.

A Ministry official (P06) acknowledged the investment challenge:

> *"We announced investment commitments exceeding US$30 billion since 2018. But we know that commitments are not the same as actual inflows. The gap between what is announced and what materialises is a source of frustration for us and for our international partners. We are working on aftercare, on addressing the barriers that prevent commitments from becoming reality." (P06, Ministry official)*

Marongwe and Duri (n.d.) capture this dynamic in their chapter Mega Deals or Pie in the Sky, documenting how official news agencies raised hope through "positive, if not inflated, reporting" of deals that subsequently failed to materialise . Their analysis of the US$8.7 billion in deals announced by April 2018 few of which came to fruition exemplifies the pattern participants described.

A business representative (P14) offered an investor perspective on the implementation gap:

> *"When ministers announce billion-dollar deals at investment conferences, it creates headlines. But investors do not commit capital based on headlines. They commit based on due diligence, on risk assessment, on feasibility studies. Many of these announced*

> *deals were never subjected to serious scrutiny. They were memoranda of understanding, expressions of interest, sometimes just handshakes. Turning them into actual investment requires months or years of work, and many do not survive that process." (P14, Business representative)*

The African Development Bank's role as facilitator of the debt resolution process was noted by multiple participants as a positive development. P01 (Ministry) stated:

> *"The AfDB's Structured Dialogue Platform has brought creditors and debtors together in a constructive process. We have made progress on the analytical work, on understanding the dimensions of the debt challenge. The next phase actual negotiation of arrears clearance will be more difficult, but the foundation is being laid." (P01, Ministry official)*

This reveal a pattern of mixed and uneven outcomes across the three dimensions examined. Diplomatic normalisation has achieved procedural progress dialogue, engagement, participation but substantive isolation (sanctions, market restrictions, IFI exclusion) persists. Economic outcomes show a persistent gap between announced commitments and actual investment, with debt and policy inconsistency as binding constraints. Governance reform has been limited, with legislative changes failing to translate into transformed practice. This pattern supports the characterisation of re-engagement as a strategy that has achieved rhetorical and procedural success but limited material transformation. The "Zimbabwe is Open for Business" mantra has successfully signalled intent and generated diplomatic access. But the realpolitik calculation of international partners that substantive engagement requires evidence of changed behaviour has not been satisfied.

Applying the Foreign Policy Analysis framework, we can observe how domestic political structures constrain the regime's capacity to deliver the reforms international partners require. The security sector's continued political role, the party's reliance on control mechanisms, the elite interests vested in the status quo these factors create powerful inertia against fundamental change. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs may articulate re-engagement strategy, but its implementation

depends on actors whose interests lie in preserving existing arrangements. The concept of rhetoric (Krebs, 2020) illuminates the performative dimensions of re-engagement. The "friend to all, enemy to none" formulation, the investment conferences, the diplomatic visits these constitute what might be termed re-engagement theatre: performances designed to cultivate perceptions of change while minimising actual disruption to domestic power structures. This is not necessarily cynical; it may reflect genuine tension between international and domestic imperatives. But the gap between performance and substance has itself become a barrier to deeper engagement, as international partners learn to discount rhetorical commitments. Realpolitik considerations operate on both sides. For Zimbabwe, the re-engagement strategy serves regime security imperatives securing economic relief that preserves stability and elite interests. For international partners, the calculus involves balancing competing interests: strategic competition with China, access to minerals, regional stability, and normative commitments to human rights and democracy. The limited progress to date suggests that, from their perspective, the costs of deeper engagement (legitimising an unreformed regime) currently outweigh the benefits (economic opportunities, strategic access).

Chigora and Duri's (2019) conceptualisation of re-engagement as encompassing diplomatic, economic, and political dimensions is supported, as is their implicit suggestion that these dimensions may progress unevenly. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2020) argument about unchanged governance structures finds empirical support. Raftopoulos's (2019) fundamental paradox captures the central tension the findings reveal. What the present study adds is granularity the specific mechanisms through which the paradox operates, the practitioner perspectives on implementation challenges, the quantitative indicators that reveal the gap between rhetoric and reality. The findings

suggest that re-engagement, as currently configured, is unlikely to achieve the transformational outcomes its rhetoric promises without more fundamental changes in domestic governance.

4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter addressed three research questions through 22 interviews and documentary analysis. The first question examined factors behind Zimbabwe's isolation from 2000 to 2017. The findings showed that land reform together with human rights deficits electoral irregularities and confrontational rhetoric produced sustained isolation. The second question explored challenges and opportunities in the Second Republic's re-engagement strategy. Diplomatic distrust economic constraints and a governance implementation gap emerged as major challenges while mineral endowments and multipolar alignments provided key opportunities. The third question evaluated the effectiveness of re-engagement. The results were mixed: procedural diplomatic dialogue increased but substantive economic and governance transformation remained limited. This gap between performative rhetoric and realpolitik realities defines the current state of Zimbabwe's re-engagement

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study on Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy under the Second Republic (2017–2024). The chapter synthesises the key findings from the preceding chapters, focusing on the factors that led to Zimbabwe's international isolation between 2000 and 2017, the challenges and opportunities encountered during the implementation of the re-engagement strategy, and the overall effectiveness of that strategy. The chapter draws conclusions based on the research questions and the empirical evidence gathered from 22 interviews and documentary analysis. It then offers evidence-based recommendations for different stakeholders and identifies areas for further research.

5.2 Summary of the Study

This dissertation examined whether Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy under President Mnangagwa's Second Republic constitutes a genuine reality of reform or mere rhetorical posturing. The research was motivated by the persistent gap between the government's diplomatic pronouncements ("Zimbabwe is Open for Business", "a friend to all, enemy to none") and the limited tangible outcomes in terms of sanctions removal, debt clearance, foreign direct investment, and governance reform.

Chapter 1 introduced the background, statement of the problem, research objectives, and research questions. The study aimed to: (1) analyse the factors that led to Zimbabwe's international

isolation from 2000 to 2017; (2) examine the challenges and opportunities encountered in implementing the re-engagement strategy; and (3) evaluate the effectiveness of that strategy. The chapter also outlined the assumptions, significance, delimitations, limitations, and key terms.

Chapter 2 reviewed existing literature and established the theoretical framework of Classical Realism, drawing on Hans Morgenthau's concepts of national interest, state survival, and realpolitik. The literature review was organised into three thematic areas corresponding to the research objectives, using case studies from Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Myanmar, Libya, Cuba, South Africa, Vietnam, and Russia. Each thematic area identified specific gaps, including the lack of research on interaction effects among causal factors of isolation, debt arrears clearance in Southern Africa, and partial or rhetorical re-engagement outcomes.

Chapter 3 presented the research methodology. The study adopted a pragmatist philosophy and a convergent mixed-methods approach, using a case study design focused on Zimbabwe from November 2017 to December 2024. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 22 participants (government officials, diplomats, business representatives, civil society analysts, and academics), documentary analysis, and quantitative data from international financial institutions. Thematic analysis was employed for qualitative data, and descriptive statistics for quantitative data. Ethical considerations, validity, reliability, and trustworthiness were addressed.

Chapter 4 presented, analysed, and interpreted the findings. Regarding the first research question, the study found that Zimbabwe's isolation resulted from four interconnected factors: the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (implemented with violence and disregard for property rights), governance deficits and human rights violations, electoral irregularities, and the regime's confrontational rhetoric (including the "Look East Policy"). Regarding the second question, the

major challenges included diplomatic-historical baggage (a "Mugabeism hangover"), economic constraints (external debt of approximately US$14 billion, policy inconsistency, currency multiplicity), and a governance implementation gap (promises of reform not matched by action). Opportunities included a multipolar international system, strategic mineral endowments (lithium, platinum), and regional positioning within SADC. Regarding the third question, the effectiveness of re-engagement was mixed: procedural diplomatic dialogue increased (EU Article 8 dialogue, Commonwealth technical discussions, SADC chair), but substantive outcomes remained limited sanctions were not lifted, ZIDERA remained in place, debt arrears persisted, and foreign direct investment fell far short of announced commitments. The gap between performative rhetoric and realpolitik realities defined the current state of Zimbabwe's re-engagement.

5.3 Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn in relation to each research objective.

5.3.1 Factors leading to international isolation (2000–2017)

The study concludes that Zimbabwe's international isolation was not the result of a single event but a synergistic combination of domestic governance failures and confrontational foreign policy choices. The Fast Track Land Reform Programme acted as the initial rupture, but it was the regime's violent implementation, its rejection of rule-of-law principles, and its sustained human rights abuses that turned limited Western concern into comprehensive sanctions (ZIDERA, EU restrictive measures). Electoral irregularities and the regime's rhetorical escalation – including the withdrawal from the Commonwealth and the "Look East" pivot deepened the isolation. These factors operated in a cascade, each reinforcing the others. The study therefore concludes that the

Mugabe regime's combative stance served domestic political survival but produced long-term international pariah status.

5.3.2 Challenges and opportunities in re-engagement

The study concludes that the Second Republic inherited a poisoned diplomatic and economic legacy. The primary challenge is a deep trust deficit: Western capitals (Washington, London, Brussels) do not believe that rhetorical commitments to reform have translated into genuine behavioural change. Economic challenges particularly the external debt overhang, policy inconsistency (frequent currency changes, unpredictable indigenisation rules), and the continued presence of sanctions constrain meaningful re-engagement. The governance implementation gap, where reform promises are not followed by action, further erodes credibility. However, the study also concludes that significant opportunities exist. The multipolar international system allows Zimbabwe to diversify its partnerships beyond the West. The country's strategic mineral resources (lithium, platinum) create structural interest from global investors. Regional leadership within SADC provides a platform for incremental credibility-building. The central conclusion is that opportunities will remain unrealised unless the governance implementation gap is closed.

5.3.3 Effectiveness of the re-engagement strategy

The study concludes that Zimbabwe's re-engagement strategy has achieved procedural effectiveness but limited substantive effectiveness. Procedurally, the Second Republic has successfully restored diplomatic dialogue with the European Union, the United States, and the Commonwealth. Zimbabwe is no longer a complete pariah; it participates in technical discussions and holds high-level meetings. Substantively, however, sanctions remain in place, ZIDERA has not been repealed, access to IMF and World Bank concessional finance remains blocked, and the country's debt arrears (approximately US$14 billion) are unresolved. Foreign direct investment

inflows are far below the US$30 billion in announced commitments. Governance reforms (electoral integrity, human rights protection, rule of law) have not met international expectations. The study therefore concludes that the re-engagement strategy, as currently implemented, is more rhetoric than reality. It functions as a sophisticated rebranding exercise that secures diplomatic access but does not deliver the material transformation needed for full reintegration into the global economy. This conclusion aligns with the Classical Realist framework: the strategy is a calculated pursuit of regime survival, not a genuine normative shift.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made for different stakeholders.

5.4.1 To the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

1. The Ministry should move beyond high-level presidential rhetoric and develop a verifiable action plan with specific, time-bound milestones for governance reforms. This plan should be made public to build international credibility.

2. The Ministry should establish a dedicated re-engagement monitoring unit that tracks progress on sanctions relief, debt clearance, and investment realisation, and publishes annual progress reports.

3. Diplomatic training should be enhanced to equip officials with negotiation skills that address historical grievances constructively, rather than resorting to defensive counter-accusations.

5.4.2 To the Government of Zimbabwe (Cabinet and Parliament)

1. The government must close the governance implementation gap by enacting and, crucially, enforcing legislation that guarantees electoral integrity, protects human rights, and ensures the independence of the judiciary. Symbolic commissions without power are insufficient.

2. Policy consistency is essential for investor confidence. The government should adopt and adhere to a stable currency framework and refrain from frequent, unpredictable changes to indigenisation and licensing regulations.

3. The government should accelerate the Arrears Clearance and Debt Resolution Strategy through the African Development Bank's Structured Dialogue Platform, prioritising transparency and fiscal discipline even when this conflicts with short-term patronage demands.

5.4.3 To International Partners (Western Governments, EU, US, IFIs)

1. International partners should recognise that incremental progress deserves calibrated recognition. Rather than maintaining a binary "sanctions or no sanctions" approach, they could offer partial sanctions relief (e.g., removal of travel bans, technical assistance) in exchange for specific, verified reform steps.

2. The EU and US should provide technical support for debt clearance and governance reform, including independent electoral observation and judicial strengthening, while maintaining clear conditionality.

3. International partners should engage more directly with civil society and local communities to verify reform claims, rather than relying solely on government reporting.

5.4.4 To Civil Society Organisations

1. CSOs should continue to produce independent shadow reports on human rights and governance, but also propose constructive, evidence-based reform roadmaps that the government can realistically adopt.

2. CSOs should facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogues that bring together government officials, diplomats, business representatives, and community leaders to build consensus on re-engagement priorities.

5.4.5 To the Academic and Research Community

1. Researchers should conduct comparative studies of re-engagement in other post-isolation states (e.g., Sudan, Myanmar, Iran) to identify transferable lessons for Zimbabwe.

2. More institutional-level research is needed on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, examining bureaucratic constraints that hinder reform implementation.

5.5 Areas for Further Study

This study has identified several gaps that warrant further research.

1. **Interaction effects among causal factors of isolation** – Future research should model how the sequencing of land reform, electoral manipulation, and rhetorical escalation affects the duration and severity of sanctions, using comparative case studies across multiple African states.

2. **Debt arrears clearance in Southern Africa** – A comparative analysis of debt resolution mechanisms in countries such as Zimbabwe, Sudan, and Somalia could identify best

practices and pitfalls for navigating the tension between fiscal discipline and domestic patronage.

3. **Rhetorical re-engagement and performative diplomacy** – Further studies are needed to develop a robust analytical framework for distinguishing between genuine normative shifts and rhetorical posturing, possibly using discourse analysis of presidential speeches and diplomatic communiqués over time.

4. **The role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade** – An institutional ethnography or in-depth bureaucratic politics study would reveal how internal dynamics, resource constraints, and inter-ministerial rivalries shape re-engagement outcomes.

5. **The effectiveness of partial sanctions relief** – As international partners consider calibrated approaches, research should examine case studies where partial relief was granted (e.g., Myanmar, Cuba) to identify conditions under which such measures incentivise further reform.

6. **Gender dimensions of re-engagement** – The present study did not disaggregate findings by gender. Future research could examine how re-engagement policies and economic recovery affect women, particularly in the informal agricultural and cross-border trading sectors.

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