

Political Will and Reformative Change Management within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service



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ABSTRACT

Political will is widely recognised as a critical determinant of successful public sector reform and institutional transformation. Within correctional systems undergoing transition from punitive incarceration toward rehabilitation-oriented correctional governance, political commitment significantly influences policy implementation, institutional legitimacy, resource allocation, organisational support, and reform sustainability. This paper examines the contribution of political will to the reformative change management process within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS). The findings reveal that political will contributes positively toward reformative change through legislative support, constitutional reform, leadership endorsement, and policy direction. However, political commitment remains inconsistently operationalised due to resource constraints, bureaucratic limitations, uneven implementation, and tensions between policy rhetoric and institutional practice. The paper concludes that sustainable reformative change within correctional institutions requires sustained political commitment, institutional accountability, resource investment, participatory governance, and policy consistency capable of translating reform rhetoric into operational transformation.

Keywords: political will, reformative change, correctional reform, Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service, organisational transformation, public sector reform, rehabilitation.

1. Introduction

Public sector reform remains one of the most significant governance challenges confronting contemporary states [1]. Within correctional systems, political will plays an especially important role because correctional reform often requires structural, legislative, cultural, and administrative transformation [2]. In Zimbabwe, the transformation of the ZPCS under the 2013 Constitution represented a major political and institutional shift toward rehabilitation-oriented correctional governance [3].

Political will therefore becomes central to understanding the successes and limitations of reformative change within correctional systems. Political commitment influences institutional priorities, resource allocation, policy continuity, stakeholder collaboration, organisational legitimacy, and reform sustainability [4].

Despite its importance, political will remains a complex and contested concept within public administration scholarship. Governments may symbolically endorse institutional reform while failing to provide adequate resources, operational support, or implementation mechanisms necessary for sustainable transformation [1].

This paper examines the contribution of political will to the reformative change management process within ZPCS. Drawing from empirical findings presented in Chapter Four and conclusions outlined in Chapter Five, the paper analyses how political commitment shapes institutional reform implementation, organisational culture transformation, leadership practices, and rehabilitation-oriented correctional governance.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Anchors

Political institutionalism argues that institutional reform depends significantly on political leadership, policy commitment, governance structures, and state capacity [5]. Political actors shape institutional priorities, legislative reform, resource distribution, and organisational accountability mechanisms. Public sector transformation therefore requires sustained political support capable of overcoming institutional inertia and bureaucratic resistance.

Organisational change theory emphasises the importance of leadership commitment during institutional transformation processes [6]. Systems theory conceptualises correctional institutions as operating within broader political, economic, social, and institutional environments [7]. Governance theory highlights the importance of policy coordination, accountability, stakeholder participation, and institutional collaboration in public sector reform processes [8].

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Institutional theory explains how organisational transformation is influenced by formal rules, institutional norms, and political expectations [9]. Correctional institutions historically associated with punitive governance systems may struggle to transition toward rehabilitation-oriented models without sustained political pressure and institutional incentives.

3. Methodology

A mixed-methods convergent parallel design was employed. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered across ZPCS facilities, with SEM used to assess the relationship between political will and reformative change outcomes. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews examining participant perceptions of political commitment, policy implementation, resource allocation, and reform sustainability. Thematic analysis and triangulation were applied to produce integrated findings.

4. Data Analysis

Moderation analysis was conducted to examine whether political will influences the strength of relationships between independent variables and reformative change. Qualitative thematic analysis identified themes including constitutional reform symbolism, resource allocation, policy-practice gaps, bureaucratic barriers, and political legitimacy. Triangulation integrated quantitative and qualitative findings to develop a comprehensive understanding of political will's contribution to correctional reform within ZPCS.

5. FINDINGS

Moderation Results

Hypothesis	Interaction	β	p-value	Decision
H7.1	Leadership $\times$ PW	0.120	***	Supported
H7.2	Employee Engagement $\times$ PW	0.108	0.005	Supported
H7.3	Stakeholder Engagement $\times$ PW	0.008	0.890	Not supported
H7.4	Training $\times$ PW	0.166	***	Supported
H7.5	Resistance $\times$ PW	-0.037	0.538	Not supported
H7.6	Technology $\times$ PW	0.015	0.539	Not supported

Source: Primary data

The results reveal that political will plays a **selective moderating role**. It significantly strengthens the relationships between: leadership and reformative change, employee engagement and reformative change and training and development and reformative change. This indicates that these variables become effective only when supported by strong political commitment. In contrast, political will does not moderate the effects of stakeholder engagement, resistance to change, or technology. This suggests that these factors operate independently of political influence.

Quantitative findings also indicate a positive relationship between political commitment and reform implementation, suggesting that government support and policy direction strengthen institutional transformation efforts. The qualitative findings demonstrate that participants recognise the importance of constitutional reform and political leadership in facilitating correctional transformation. The transition from Zimbabwe Prison Service to ZPCS was widely perceived as symbolising political commitment toward rehabilitation-oriented correctional governance. Qualitative findings also reveal that political leadership contributed to increased institutional focus on rehabilitation, offender reintegration, vocational training, and inmate welfare.

However, significant tensions between political rhetoric and operational implementation were identified. Participants frequently reported that while reform policies exist, practical institutional support remains inconsistent due to resource shortages, infrastructural limitations, and weak implementation systems.

The triangulated findings conclude that political will within ZPCS is visible at symbolic and policy levels but insufficiently institutionalised operationally. Reform initiatives are perceived as partially implemented or inconsistently sustained. Resource dependency further reveals that rehabilitation programmes frequently depend on external stakeholder support due to inadequate institutional funding, suggesting that political commitment has not translated into sufficient resource investment for comprehensive correctional reform.

6. Discussion

The findings reveal a critical symbolic-operational gap between political endorsement and operational reform implementation within ZPCS. Political institutionalism predicts that institutional transformation requires not only political declaration but also sustained governance mechanisms capable of operationalising policy commitments through resource allocation, institutional accountability, and administrative coordination. The ZPCS context demonstrates the limitations of constitutional symbolism without complementary operational support systems.

The persistence of bureaucratic rigidity and administrative procedural delays despite political endorsement of reform reflects institutional theory's explanation of how entrenched organisational structures may resist change even where political will formally exists. Sustainable reform therefore requires political will to extend beyond legislative and constitutional reform toward transforming bureaucratic systems, accountability mechanisms, and institutional incentive structures.

The positive relationship between political will and reformative change confirms that political commitment, even where imperfectly operationalised, contributes meaningfully to institutional legitimacy, reform visibility, and organisational momentum. Political endorsement creates institutional space for reform discourse and signals broader societal expectations regarding correctional transformation.

7. Policy Recommendations

First, government leadership should strengthen long-term institutional commitment toward rehabilitation-oriented correctional governance through consistent policy implementation and dedicated resource allocation. Political commitment must extend beyond symbolic constitutional reform toward sustained operational support.

Second, policymakers should allocate adequate financial resources toward rehabilitation infrastructure, staff development, healthcare services, digital systems, and reintegration programmes to address the resource gap constraining reform implementation.

Third, institutional accountability systems should be strengthened through monitoring and evaluation frameworks capable of assessing reform implementation and operational effectiveness, ensuring that political commitments translate into measurable institutional outcomes.

Fourth, collaborative governance structures should be strengthened to integrate partnerships among correctional institutions, communities, educational institutions, civil society organisations, and development partners in support of rehabilitation-oriented reform.

Fifth, bureaucratic reform should be prioritised to reduce administrative barriers, improve institutional agility, and enable faster operationalisation of reform policies. Procedural flexibility will strengthen the capacity of institutional leadership to implement reform vision effectively.

8. Conclusion

This paper examined the contribution of political will to the reformative change management process within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service. The findings demonstrate that political commitment contributes positively toward institutional reform through constitutional transformation, policy direction, leadership endorsement, and rehabilitation-oriented correctional discourse. However, political will within ZPCS remains inconsistently operationalised due to resource limitations, bureaucratic constraints, uneven implementation systems, and tensions between reform rhetoric and institutional practice.

Sustainable correctional transformation requires political will to evolve from symbolic endorsement toward a sustained governance process capable of supporting institutional accountability, resource investment, organisational learning, and rehabilitation-oriented correctional management. The success of reformative change within Zimbabwe's correctional system ultimately depends on the extent to which political leadership can translate constitutional reform commitment into operational institutional transformation through consistent governance, resource investment, and participatory institutional support.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service or any government institution. This paper is intended for academic and policy discourse purposes only.

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