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Tiivistelmä-Referat-Abstract Taking a critical stance toward the literature on democratisation in Africa, this qualitative analysis utilises empirical data on four general elections in Zimbabwe. Elections are approached by looking at their meaning for nation-building and state-building. The 1980 elections in Zimbabwe served to legitimise the transition to independence. The electorate voted according to the ethnic division, which allowed the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front), ZANU(PF), to monitor its regional support. Consolidation of government power led to political repression in the region of the main opposition party, the Zimbabwe African People's Union, ZAPU. The 1985 and 1990 elections reflected the way the government handled conflicts and showed how it learned to use legal and administrative means to hold power. Merging ZAPU with ZANU created a de facto one-party system. "State decay" with economic problems, corruption and concentration of power gave impetus to a new opposition party in 1990, while a large part of the urban voters abstained from voting. Urban apathy was exacerbated in the 1995/96 elections, when the opposition was weak. The ruling party has increasingly depended upon its support in the rural areas, which have become dependent on government aid. Although more vocal, interest groups used the 1990 elections to bargain with the government, rather than to support the opposition, and in 1995 exhibited cynicism toward the whole process. Yet civic groups have taken part in elections, not by competing in them but by working for their democratisation. This has served as compensation for democracy by providing the elite outside of the government an opportunity to criticise the way the leaders have been selected. It is argued that through this space civil society, interest groups and the competing parties have expressed nationhood and that in the context of state decay elections can have a potential to promote nation-building in spite of their undemocratic character.			
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