



2023 Preliminary Short Term Observation Report on the Harmonized Elections in Zimbabwe

Major Highlights from 23 to 25 August 2023

Zimbabwe conducted Harmonised Elections to elect local government, members of parliament and president on 23 and 24 August 2023. This report outlines the preliminary observations made by the Institute for Young Women’s Development (IYWD), Alliance of Community Based Organisations (ACBOs) and the African Women Leaders Forum (AWLF) in the period 22 to 25 August 2023 across the ten provinces of Zimbabwe. The report used primary data collected during election observation and experiences of representatives of 27 community based organisations who observed elections in their areas of residence. Representatives of AWLF joined the observation teams in Zimbabwe and also conducted training on election observation in accordance with Zimbabwean laws and regional standards in the conduct of elections. In addition, updates from credible media sources and the [Zimbabwe Electoral Commission \(ZEC\)](#) updates on the election were used to triangulate the findings.

Summary of Findings

The report notes both negative and positive issues from the election observation. The findings are organised in two categories as Negative Practices and Positive Practices in the table below:

Negative practices/experiences	
Issue	Implications
<p>1. Politically motivated violence in Bindura</p> <p>An isolated case of arson was noted in Bindura district. The house of a Citizens Coalition for change (CCC) male aspiring councillor for Ward 12 was burnt in the early hours of the morning around 1am on 23 August. The alleged reports are that the house was petrol-bombed. The windows of the house were shattered and a three-month-old baby was injured. The baby was admitted at Bindura General Hospital.</p>	<p>Use of violence, intimidation and fear disenfranchises citizens and negatively influences the outcome of the election for those affected by the violence.</p>
<p>2. Opening times</p> <p>In most rural areas and smaller towns like Bindura, Shamva, Mutoko, most polling stations opened timely by 7am. Opening was delayed largely in urban polling stations in Harare and Bulawayo due to unavailability of ballot papers at the polling stations. ZEC noted that in Harare only 23 percent of the polling stations managed to open at 0700 hours. Isolated cases of delayed opening were noted in some rural areas owing to the same issue. For example in Harare South, Ward 12, local authority ballot papers had not been delivered as of</p>	<p>Delayed opening of polling stations disenfranchises voters who may have given up on waiting.</p> <p>Night hours’ voting increases vulnerability of young women,</p>

<p>1500 hours; Westlea Open Space in Harare West Constituency was opened after 2000 hours; Ngwengwe Primary School polling station in Bulawayo was also not yet open at 1300 hours; Wards 3, 7 and 10 of Marondera District opened after midnight as ballot papers were yet to arrive prior to this time; at Mwacheta Polling station B in ward 16 in Chipinge district ballot paper and the voters roll were yet to be received as at 1500 hours.</p> <p>ZEC noted that ballot papers were still being printed on the election day. This was contrary to their pre-election observers briefing where they updated that they were ready and prepared for the election.</p>	<p>women the elderly and Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) to domestic and politically motivated violence.</p> <p>Long waiting hours for pregnant women and nursing mothers who find it difficult to wait for such long hours. This leads to disenfranchisement of voters affecting women, persons with disabilities and the elderly who find it difficult to go back and forth</p> <p>ZEC's lack of transparency, and inability to professionally administer the election discredits the institution's ability to administer a free, fair and credible poll.</p>
<p>3. Missing Names of Candidates on the Ballot Paper</p> <p>Isolated cases of successfully nominated candidates missing on the ballot paper were noted. In Masvingo for example, the name of a Citizens Coalition for Change candidate for council Allan Moyo in Ward 10 was not on the ballot paper. The issue was noted and raised to the Presiding Officer after 67 voters had cast their votes but no further action was taken to rectify this.</p>	<p>Disenfranchises voters and successfully nominated candidates from being considered to represent their constituencies</p>
<p>4. Missing names of voters on voters' roll/Unorganized voters' roll</p> <p>Some voters' names were missing on the voters' roll despite having voter registration slips confirming their registration for example in Bindura South, Mbizo, Esigodini, Harare St John's polling station in Hunyani Constituency and St Mary's in Chitungwiza.</p> <p>Some names were haphazardly/incorrectly allocated to different polling stations resulting in members with the same residential addresses voting under different constituencies. For example in Harare West members of the same family ended up voting for different Members of Parliament in Mt Pleasant and Malbereign yet they stayed under one roof.</p>	<p>Disenfranchisement of voters as some of the prospective voters gave up and went home without voting.</p> <p>Disenfranchisement of voters as some may give up checking multiple polling stations with no help.</p> <p>Citizens' lack of confidence in ZEC's capacity in its current state to facilitate elections for representative democracy</p>

<p>5. Bussing of people to vote in polling stations in which they are not registered</p> <p>Reports of people being bussed from outside communities to vote in polling stations where they are not registered were noted. For example in Gwanda in Matebeleland South the Zanu-Pf Member of Parliament candidate, Fisani Moyo allegedly used buses branded as Brooklyn to transport people from Maphisa, an area located 66 kms away to vote in Gwanda. Further reports of bussing of voters were received from Masvingo, Ward 10 and Ruwa District.</p>	<p>Fraudulently electoral practices that negatively influence the election outcome for the benefit of specific individuals and political parties at the expense of citizen rights to choose their own leaders.</p>
<p>6. Non-functioning of the ZEC digital platform for voter inspection</p> <p>The ZEC digital platform that uses the USSD code *265# for voter inspection was not working.</p> <p>Connectivity was generally slow in most rural areas however use of digital technologies including the Citizen Platform where voters could check for their polling details continued before it was then halted.</p>	<p>Most people failed to access the ZEC mobile application that previously helped voters check their names on the voters' roll</p>
<p>7. Inclusion and participation of vulnerable groups</p> <p>Preferential treatment of the elderly, pregnant women, nursing mothers and Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) was noted in some polling stations including in Zvishavane in Midlands</p> <p>In other polling stations this was however not prioritised. For example in Goromonzi Mashonaland East and Luveve in Bulawayo. The long waiting resulted in some spending 3 to 4 hours in areas that opened on time. The situation was worse in areas that delayed opening and voting ended up taking more than 12 hours.</p>	<p>Not recognising the special needs of women, PWDs and , the elderly can disenfranchise them from participating</p> <p>Night hours' voting increases vulnerability of young women, women the elderly and Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) to domestic and politically motivated violence.</p> <p>Long waiting hours for pregnant women and nursing mothers who find it difficult to wait for such long hours. This leads to disenfranchisement of voters affecting women, persons with disabilities and the elderly who find it difficult to go back and forth</p>
<p>Misinformation and Disinformation</p> <p>The printing and distribution of flyers with the face and logo of the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) Presidential candidate</p>	

<p>instructing citizens not to go and vote in Harare and Bulawayo misled people.</p> <p>In rural areas and farming communities were misinformed that their vote will be known and threatened that they should only vote for the ruling party to avoid a repeat of 2008 (implying the 2008 political violence). For example in Zaka and Bindura districts and some of the speeches dated back to ruling party rallies in the month of August.</p>	<p>Disenfranchisement of voters by spreading false information with the intention to have the election benefit specific political parties/actors</p>
<p>8. Over-scrutiny of accredited observers</p> <p>Some of our accredited local observers were overly scrutinised and questioned before being allowed to observe the elections in some rural areas. For example in Mazowe South Constituency, Ward 33 Uzumba Constituency, Ward 14. The issues had to be resolved at the ZEC district command centres</p>	<p>Intimidation of local observers</p> <p>Undermines transparency of the electoral processes</p>
<p>9. Arrest and detention of Local Election Observers</p> <p>The arrest of 39 local election observers from the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and the Elections Resource Centre and Network (ERC) adds to a litany of electoral irregularities that go against the constitution.</p>	<p>The arrests intimidate and instil fear among voters, other civil society organisations and other participants of the electoral value chain to carry out their work. This goes against the principles of electoral transparency and accountability as provided for in the constitution and other regional instruments aimed at promoting democracy.</p>
<p>Notable Positive Practices/experiences</p>	
<p>1. Voter Turnout</p> <p>Nationwide voter turnout was overwhelming with youth and women voters having turned out in large numbers. Examples in Dangamvura in Manicaland and Mutoko in Mashonaland East, Bindura, Mazowe in Mashonaland East, Gokwe in Midlands Province were notable. Despite the late opening of polling stations in areas, missing and misplaced names on polling stations, some voters persisted in the search for their names across polling stations and endured the long waiting at polling stations.</p>	<p>The overwhelming showing up and resilience of the voters nationwide, demonstrated citizens' commitment to exercise their constitutional and democratic rights to vote and be voted despite the challenges faced.</p>
<p>2. Use of digital technologies for communication and real time updates</p>	<p>The use of digital technologies worked positively to provide evidence based reporting during the election.</p>

<p>The wider use of digital technologies nationwide, albeit connectivity issues especially in most remote parts of the country, contributed in exchange of experiences and information.</p>	<p>Use of technologies also played a central role in voter mobilisation to go out and vote and to patiently and persistently wait to exercise the citizens' rights to vote.</p>
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Conclusion and Recommendations:

From the observations, the IYWD, ACBOs and AWLF concluded that the elections fell short of meeting the standards of a credible, free and fair elections.

We recommend:

- The withdrawal of charges levelled against ZESN and ERC observers unjustly arrested as the country concludes its electoral counting and announcement of results
- Condemnation of the cases of violations including alleged cases of arson in Bindura, and calls the Zimbabwe republic police to investigate and bring perpetrators to book
- The government of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to uphold its constitution and to respect the will and voice of Zimbabwean voters by announcing the actual results of the election
- Conclude the electoral process and counting and announcing of votes peacefully and follow legally provided mechanisms in the aftermath of the election
- The government of Zimbabwe to focuses on implementing recommendations by different elections observation missions in the past and the current, and create socio-economic and political conditions that promote the civic and political duties of citizens in future democratic and electoral processes after the election