



Zimbabwe Council of Churches

*2018 Harmonized Elections:
Prospects for democratic
transition in Zimbabwe*







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Contents

List Of Abbreviations	6
The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC)	7
Chapter 1 Introduction And Context	12
1.1 The Research Problem and Justification	14
1.2 Research Methodology and Strategy	15
1.2.1 Unit of Analysis	16
1.2.2 Sampling	16
1.2.2.1 Stage 1	16
1.2.2.2 Stage 2:	17
1.3 Data collection methods and instruments	17
1.3.1 Community Forum (CF)	17
1.3.2 Structured Interviews	17
1.3.3 Pilot survey and training of field staff	17
1.3.4 Data analysis	17
1.4 Research Outputs and Dissemination	18
1.4.1 Ecumenical Election Covenants	18
1.4.2 Research report and validation of findings	18
1.5 Ethical considerations for the research	18
1.6 Delimitation of the study	18
Chapter 2 Findings And Discussion	19
2.1 Registration Status	19
2.2 Registration Status by Gender	20
2.3 Registration Status by Residence	20
2.4 Registration Status by Highest Level of Education	20
2.5 Registration Status by Marital Status of respondent	20
2.6 Registration Status by Current Occupation	21
2.7 Registration Status by Religion	21
2.8 July 2013 harmonized elections – drivers and constraints	21
2.9 Citizens interest to participate in the 2018 Elections	22
2.10 Citizens perceptions on elections	24
2.11 Level of Trust to Key Institutions	26
2.12 Barriers to Voter Participation	27
2.14 Perceptions on the Climate Surrounding Elections	30
2.15 Government Commitment to Political Engagement	31
2.16 Confidence in Voter's Roll Accuracy and Completeness in Time for the Upcoming Elections	31
2.17 Political Engagement	32
2.18 Democracy and Governance	33
2.19 Access to Information on Voting and Biometric Voter Registration (BVR)	33
Chapter 3 Conclusions And Recommendations	35
References	38
Annexes	38
Visit our website www.zcc-eco.org	38

List of Tables

Table 2.1 Demographic characteristics	19
Table 2.2 Coverage of Community Forums	19
Table 2.3 Survey Coverage	19
Table 2.4: Registration Status by Province	20
Table 2.5: Registration Status by Gender	20
Table 2.6: Registration Status by Residence	20
Table 2.7: Registration Status by Highest Level of Education	20
Table 2.8: Registration Status by Marital Status of respondent	20
Table 2.9: Registration Status by Current Occupation	21
Table 2.10: Registration Status by Religion	21
Table 2.12 Citizens Perceptions about elections by province	25
Table 2.12: Opinion on which is a more serious threat to free and fair elections in Zimbabwe?	30
Table 2.14: Perceptions on the Electoral Process	32
Table 2.15: Democracy and Governance Issues	33

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Reasons for not voting in the July 2013 elections	21
Figure 2.2: Reasons for voting in the July 2013 elections	22
Figure 2.3: Levels of interest on citizens to participate in elections by current registration status	23
Figure 2.4: Levels of interest on citizens to participate in elections by age groups	23
Figure 2.5: Positive perceptions about Elections	25
Figure 2.6: Negative Perceptions about Elections	25
Figure 2.7: Perceptions about the Elections by Voter Registration Status	26
Figure 2.8: Levels of Trust with Selected key Institutions	27
Figure 2.9: Factors influencing decisions to participate in voting in the upcoming 2018 elections	27
Figure 2.10: Expectations on Violence, Intimidation and Unrest in the upcoming 2018 Elections	28
Figure 2.11: Perceived levels of Cheating and Fraud in the upcoming elections as a comparative of past elections	30
Figure 2.12: Perceptions about Rigging of Elections in Zimbabwe	30
Figure 2.13: Perceptions on the Secrecy of the Ballot in the Upcoming 2018 Elections.	31
Figure 2.14: Perceptions on the Climate Surrounding Elections	31
Figure 2.15: Level of Government Commitment to Free and Fair Elections	31
Figure 2.16: Levels of Confidence in Voter's Roll Accuracy and Completeness	32
Figure 2.18: Level of exposure to the BVR system registration	33
Figure 2.19: Types of media for BVR system exposure	33
Figure 2.20: Level of Confidence with the BVR system	34

List Of Abbreviations

AB	Afrobarometer
AIPPA	Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act
AU	African Union
BVR	Biometric Voter Registration
CF	Community Forum
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DCA	Danish Church Aid
EEC	Ecumenical Election Covenant
GoZ	Government of Zimbabwe
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NEEC	National Ecumenical Covenant
POSA	Public Order and Security Act
PoZ	Parliament of Zimbabwe
RAU	Research and Advocacy Unit
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UN	United Nation
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
ZCC	Zimbabwe Council of churches
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
ZESN	Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network
ZIMCODD	Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC)

The¹ Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) is a fellowship of churches that seek to contribute towards the achievement of a united, peaceful, just and prosperous Zimbabwe. It was formed in June 1964 in the then colonial Rhodesia as a protest movement drawing on biblical theological resources to speak out and stand against the subjugation of one race by another. Although the Council of churches did not always live up to the ideals of its calling, it has remained a true Christian witness for over 50 years. For example the Council: contributed to the early establishment of a robust health and education system; participated during the Lancaster House negotiations that paved the way for Independence after a protracted war; contributed to the post-war reconstruction processes after 1980; built leadership and other critical capacities of clergy and civic leaders; catalysed the development of key civic platforms such as the National Constitutional Assembly, Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development, Zimbabwe Election Support Network among others. In so doing, the ZCC contributed to nation building in pre and post independent Zimbabwe. In the last 20 years, the ZCC has had to address numerous challenges such as: the fragmentation of society caused by unresolved violent conflicts and hurts from the past; the general sense of mistrust prevalent in society, divisions within the church; the breakdown of the family structure and the inability of the church to speak with one voice.

The church has also had to contend with the growing apathy and disconnection from national processes; the failure of the entrenchment of Constitutionalism; the challenge of legitimacy of public institutions as a result of contested elections and the general public ignorance of citizen rights and responsibilities and lastly the inability of the church to integrate citizenship in their religious routines.

The ZCC has also had to address the deprivation of young people of basic life necessities and employment opportunities resulting from the breakdown of the national economy caused by amongst other things rampant corruption, lack of transparency in the extractive industry, absence of a clear national economic vision and the wrong prioritisation of allocation of national resources. Related to this was the church's failure to interpret these challenges and give adequate responses in light of its theological resources.

Vision

The ZCC envisions a united, peaceful, just and prosperous nation in which all Zimbabwean live under holistic salvation as according to John 10 v 10 I came that they may have life in its abundance.

Inspired by the scriptures and working through its member churches the ZCC seeks to contribute to a nation in which there is positive peace, the diversity of its people is celebrated, justice is delivered without fear or favour and in which every Zimbabwean has access to all resources for a dignified personal and communal wellbeing.

Mission

As a membership organisation the mission of the ZCC is 'to empower member churches to have an effective and sustainable Christian presence in Zimbabwe.'

Empowerment of member churches takes the form of membership that has capabilities to read its own context, identify challenges and opportunities and deploy critical and theologically informed responses for lasting solutions. This work of the church can only be effective as the church increasingly address the root and structural causes and not the symptoms of problems. This work is rendered sustainable by the church drawing mainly from locally generated resources, facilitating shared inter-generational sharing, enabling shared leadership between women and men. This work of the churches can only be called Christian if it draws from scripture, diverse Christian tradition and as it critically answers the pressing questions of the day.

Values

The Values of the ZCC derive from its vision: We aim to create a united, Peaceful, Just and Prosperous nation.

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 1 This information was extracted from the ZCC Strategy Document (2017-2020)

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Executive Summary

The Zimbabwe Council of churches (ZCC) has engaged in two significant processes meant to gather perceptions as well as aspirations of the population towards the forthcoming 2018 harmonised elections. Between March and April 2018, the ZCC through its member churches in all provinces and structures that cut across to the local church level, engaged in community-level dialogue to discuss hopes, aspirations and expectations for the 2018 elections. In the same spirit, the ZCC also commissioned a survey with the aim of capturing how voter behaviour and incentives to participate are defined within Zimbabwe. A total of 1607 respondents from Bulawayo and Midlands provinces were interviewed by trained enumerators (80) using an interviewer administered questionnaire whilst over 300 women, men and youth participated in the community forums which generated the Ecumenical Election Covenants (EEC). This was done through inquiring perceptions of how people perceive the broader political environment and understanding of the electoral cycle to determine the efficacy of citizen participation. From the nation-wide community forums and dialogues, the ZCC structures at all levels developed EEC that fed into the National Ecumenical Election Covenant (NEEC) which has since been presented to local, provincial and national political leadership, the media fraternity, traditional leaders, civil society organizations as well as the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC). At the core of the of the Ecumenical Election Covenants is the appeal to political parties, politicians, institutions, traditional leadership, the media and the general members of the population that we need a new way of doing our politics and political activities. It sets up moral standards expected from leaders, candidates and institutions to serve national interests and common good in a bid to restore the honour and dignity of national processes such as electoral processes.

The survey was designed to buttress the Ecumenical dialogues through a rigorous quantitative research. The questions in the survey were designed to capture key considerations and phenomena that shape voter behaviour and motivation to participate among respondents in Bulawayo and Midlands province. Variables of interest to the survey (marker variables) were as follows residence (rural, urban and peri-urban), gender (male and female), employment, education and age (youth 18- 40, Middle age 41- 65, elderly 66+). The perceptions in the survey find expression in the NEEC.

Citizen interest to participate in elections

The survey revealed that there is a surge in citizens' interest in this year's forthcoming elections in the two provinces. What is more encouraging is that the increase in citizen interest cuts across all residential areas from rural, peri-urban and urban areas. The urban areas have the biggest increase with a 25% increase from 52% in 2013 to 77% in 2018. The peri-urban category has the least increase compared to a 12% increase from 50% in 2013 to 62% in 2018. Registration as an indication of intention to vote corroborates the findings with 92% of participants living in rural areas confirming that they have registered to vote under the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) exercise. The urban areas also show a significant increase in number of people who had registered to vote at 79%. This trend has been observed elsewhere where urban electorate are trailing behind the rural electorate in terms of voter registration.

Results also show that there has been some tremendous increase in interest to vote by all age groups. However, the youth interests have been significant, rising from 26% in 2013 to 58% in 2018 elections (32% increment). However, a marginal increase of 12% was recorded for the middle-aged, whilst the elderly registered a decrease of 1%.

Of the two provinces in the survey, Midlands has the highest number of registered voters with 92% of the respondents having been registered under the BVR, while Bulawayo has 71% of the respondents registered to vote. These findings are consistent with the reports made available by the ZEC in the month of March. National outlooks show that the metropolitan provinces (Bulawayo and Harare) have the lowest number of registered voters as compared to the other eight provinces as compared to Bulawayo.

Drivers and Constraints to Voter Participation

Accountability is undergirded by the salience of the social contract between office bearers and the citizens that give them the mandate to govern and make decisions on their behalf. Eighty percent (80%) of the survey respondents stated that those whom they elect into parliament and public office soon lose touch with the very people that vote them into those positions. The research reveals that this long route of accountability has been broken, public office bearers have become estranged from the public they serve. Only 32% of the respondents said that they trust local and provincial authorities. This suggests that at the critical level of service delivery, there is very little conversations between rights holders and office bearers. The limited interaction between elected representatives affects basic service delivery and leaves people without recourse to hold their public officials accountable. As a result, 52% of the survey respondents felt that public officials are there to serve personal interest than the common good. churches through the EEC have made a direct call to political candidates to view public office as a call to service and a responsibility for the well-being of the people. The church calls for issue based politics and a move from politics of personalities that doesn't address the daily bread and butter issue.

The survey reveals a mixed picture with regard to what the citizens know about the efficacy of elections and what is the obtaining reality. Voters have positive perceptions and understanding of the utility of an election. Sixty seven percent (67%) acknowledged that elections are a way to choose among particular policies. A further 58% agreed with the notion that elections are a way to comment on the state of the country. Despite these encouraging positive perceptions about the elections respondents also held some negative perceptions about the elections with 69% viewing elections as a way to advance the interest of an ethnic, national or religious group. Fifty two percent (52%) of the respondents perceived that elections are a way to advance the interest of a social class. One way of explaining these mixed perceptions is that there is a difference between what people know about the efficacy of election as a democratic process through which citizens get a chance to decide which candidate would best

serve their interests by looking at the kind of policies and plans they put across and the reality. In this case, the respondents revealed that there is no coherence between election promises during campaigns and what they have practically witnessed after elections. The lived reality of the respondents is that elections have become a way of furthering the interests of a specific privileged group in the society

Confidence in the electoral process

There is a pattern emerging from the data which shows that confidence levels among people with regards to key players in electoral management like ZEC and the government itself are low. This has a direct bearing on how the electorate perceives the overall electoral climate and political environment. While the President and government have made pronouncements towards reassuring people of the government commitment to free and fair elections, the response from this survey suggests that ordinary citizens doubt the sincerity of the pronouncements. Only 42% of the respondents indicated that the government has taken significant steps to ensure that the elections are free, fair and credible. Fifty eight percent (58%) of the respondents indicated that the politicians always manipulate the electoral system to their advantage. The survey showed that the youths are less likely to trust the government than the elderly. Only 14% of the youths expressed that they had a great deal of trust in the government compared to 24% of the elders who answered in the affirmative to the same question. This can be explained by the fact that the lived experiences of the young people in this country has been only of unemployment and poor service delivery while the elderly might have lived at a time when the government performed its function well before the economic woes set in.

The EEC calls on the ZEC to discharge its duties impartially, in a manner that is transparent and inspires confidence in the electoral processes. This plea is supported by the survey finding in so far as the respondents revealed they have low levels of trust in the electoral body. Only 36% have confidence that the ZEC performs its functions independently, professionally and impartially. 59% of registered voters interviewed believe that ZEC works with certain parties and officials to rig results in different places around the country. Evidently, the ZEC has to discharge its duties transparently towards engendering trust and confidence of the electorate. This reinforces the perception that ZEC is partial to a certain political party.

The trust deficit is not only limited to national institutions; the respondents revealed that they have very little trust of regional bodies like Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) in comparison to international observers. Only 25% of the respondents felt that their confidence in the credibility of the elections would be boosted by the presence of SADC observers while 66% of the respondents felt that their confidence levels would be greatly increased by the presence of international observers. This is informed by the history of regional observers in the past elections. Their credibility has been tarnished as a result of perceptions of bias towards the ruling party. This finding is confirmed by the events of November 2017 when ordinary citizens took it upon themselves to travel to SADC summit in Botswana to plead with the regional body not to intervene in the transition. This is an indictment on the integrity of regional bodies as they are more and more seen as a network of ruling elites bent on self-preservation without the interest of the continent's citizens.

Barriers to participation

The value of political participation is defined by the level to which the citizens are convinced and confident that their participation actually has an impact on the governance and service delivery. Citizens actively participate in the political and civic process to the extent that they feel that their voice will make a difference. From the survey, it emerged that 65% of the respondents believe that their voices are of no impact to government operations. A further 60% is convinced that they have no say in what the government does. This may have a negative impact on voter behaviour and citizen participation in political processes in general.

In addition, the respondents noted that violence, intimidation and electoral fraud could be barriers to free and voluntary participation of the ordinary citizens in the elections. 63% of the respondents observed that violence and electoral malpractice are a real threat to the credibility of the forthcoming elections. 54% of the respondents from the Midlands province are more fearful of the forthcoming election than respondents from Bulawayo Metropolitan province. This could be explained by the fact that Midlands province has more rural residents than urban and political violence in the country has been largely concentrated in rural areas compared to urban areas.





The media

Cognisant of the value of factual, relevant, balanced information for civic participation, the churches through the EEC have especially implored the media to '... faithfully, objectively and courageously bear witness to events good and bad as they occur in this volatile season'.² The survey noted that the media, in general, is the least trusted of all public institutions with the public media faring much worse than the private media. Only 27% of the participants had any trust in the public media, 3 percentage points below social media with 30% of respondents confirming they trusted social media to state media. The private media follows in sixth place from below with 43% of respondents professing trust in it. This gives voice to the call for urgent media reforms that will see the state media according equal airtime to all political parties, to be ethical and factual.

The church strongly believes that the season is ripe for a new form of politics, politics that is genuinely inspired by a desire to serve and promote the common good. Whilst a lot has been said about the hope of what the November experience³ embodies for Zimbabwe, there is still a lot to be done collectively towards ensuring that we entrench sustainable democracy in the country. The government while churning up a lot of attractive sound bites continues to show great hesitation towards significant electoral reforms. There is a sharp contrast between the political rhetoric and the lived realities and a more nuanced look at the electoral behavior, their motivations, incentives and fears of the forthcoming elections. To the citizen, it is a chance yet again at an ever-elusive transformation, a clean break with the toxic politics defined by patronage and client-list relationship. The elections hold the hope for a new era that will transform the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans for the better, improving socio-economic conditions and creating a more just society where citizens actively participate and hold office bearers accountable. However, for this hope to be realised, there is need for every citizen to fulfil his or her civic duty in a manner that is tolerant and forward-looking. Political candidates should be principled and informed more by the call to serve than personal ambition. The media to be open while ethical while public institutions should be impartial and stand guided by the law.

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 2 ZCC National Ecumenical Newsletter

3 The November experience denotes the downfall of the then President Robert Mugabe through a military assisted transition. The military assisted transition also gained widespread public support.

Chapter 1 Introduction And Context

The electoral history of Zimbabwe has been chequered, controversial and violent. Political participation by its citizens has been marred by coercion, apathy and at worst, indifference. 2018 elections are a defining moment in the history of the country. To many ordinary citizens and politicians alike a lot hangs in the balance. For the current administration, the forthcoming election is a battle for legitimacy sprucing up the 'tainted' image and an association with military hand. It is about demonstrating more to the international community than to the citizen that they have a legitimate mandate derived from a due electoral process where the citizens freely and fairly exercised their right to choose their leaders. For a considered number of the population, the forthcoming elections are decisive in that they hold the possibility of completing the transition from politics centred around personalities, patronage and clientelism to an era of issue based, competitive politics where democratic values are entrenched, and the return to macroeconomic stability.

The major question of this election season is to what extent are the elections going through the motions of democratic procedures for legitimisation rather than an opportunity for citizens to decide? A number of factors need to be critically appraised when trying to understand the reality of the 2018 elections. The ZCC has been engaging its members, both clergy and the laity through community-level dialogue forums to understand how citizens are experiencing the broad political environment in an effort to capture the hopes and aspirations for the nation in general and more specifically, in the forthcoming elections. What is emerging is that beyond political pronouncements it is of necessity that the voices and perspectives of the citizens are captured and surfaced. How are the citizens experiencing the current spaces? what are their daily lived realities and how do they interpret the political environment viz-a-viz their ability to freely participate in political processes? The discussion takes a more nuanced view of political participation and elections as one component in the gamut of political activities that the citizens engage in.

The 2018 elections come at the backdrop of a 'military assisted transition' of November 2017 that occasioned former President Mugabe's resignation and ushered in a new government. The events of November 2017 have had a mixed impact on the political participation of the citizens. In a sense, the events are the crystallisation of many years of political excess, total disdain and disregard of the sovereign will of the people and the overreach of patronage. For the ordinary citizen, the struggle for a dispensation that accords each citizen equal political freedoms, unencumbered participation and expanded freedoms date back to the 1990s. November 2017 thus represents the boiling point of a crisis. The full import of the intervention by the military is yet to be empirically researched and understood. Notwithstanding, there are indicators that can be picked and analysed to try and understand how this has impacted the repertoire of political participation in Zimbabwe. At one end, the positive excitement it generated and the seemingly temporal joining of forces for the collective good between the citizen and the military as exemplified by the 18 November march side by side with military tanks showed a rare opportunity for citizens directly challenge power. Critically the events sparked hope buoyed by the euphoria of the Saturday 17 November 2017.

On the other hand, the presence of heavy military artillery on the streets is not likely to recede in the memories of the citizen soon and this is pertinent to the political participation and the electoral cycle for 2018. While the events of November have to an extent endeared the military to the citizens, it has undeniably cast a dull shadow over the sovereignty of the people's will participate meaningfully in political processes. The onus is upon the authorities to clearly and unambiguously confirm the professional role of the military. Anything short militates against the free participation and exercise of their democratic right.

For the citizens, elections are an exercise of their right, the opportunity to directly influence how the future of the country will be shaped and deciding who to bestow with that mandate to make decisions on your behalf. The capacity to participate is mediated by a variety of factors that include access to information, freedom of association, protection from intimidation, manipulation, threats and violence, confidence in the electoral system. All these build up the political environment in which the citizen participates freely and well equipped in political processes.

Zimbabwe's past has been characterised by a heavy headedness, restricted political space, repression and disregard for basic political freedoms. This endured for decades and as such, it is not surprising that even in this dispensation people are still not confident in engaging in political activities and political conversations. The burden of demonstrating that there has been a meaningful departure from the ways of old rests squarely with the government and its apparatus. To his credit, the President is on record proclaiming that this is a new era and that "the voice of the people is the voice of God" stressing the supremacy of the will of the citizen. Through speeches ranging from his inaugural speech to submissions made at international platforms such as Davos the President has signalled good intentions which are yet to be buttressed by tangible action and steps. The President has spoken against political violence and called for tolerance. While this is laudable, the run-up to the election will serve as a test of the soundness of the President's commitment to non-violent elections.

The utterances contrast with the government's actions. While providing a veneer of departure from the past through public pronouncement, the government continues to drag its feet with regards to instituting concrete steps that would give weight to the words. The government has been accused of paying half-hearted interest towards aligning the electoral laws with the country's new Constitution that came into effect in 2013. The government through the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs is pushing for minimal reforms as opposed to broader radical reform of the electoral laws. In addition, the government has not made any significant move to review key pieces of legislations that have hindered full political participation by the citizens. Draconian laws such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) are still in force.

The AIPPA and POSA still stand in the way of the full enjoyment of political rights as enshrined in the Constitution under the Bill of Rights. The current state of affairs where the police have been observed not using the law as harshly as they applied it prior to November 2018 does not in itself level the political field for citizens to freely engage and associate. This current state presents a semblance of political accommodation and tolerance without meaningfully transforming the repressive laws and radically transforming the institutions that have hitherto been used to curtail civil liberties.

Political participation concerns itself with a repertoire of voluntary political activity that citizens engage in to try and influence government and political processes in the country. Political participation goes beyond counting the number of people who have taken part in any processes such as election, demonstrations or petitions. However, election-related activities still takes pre-eminence amidst a repertoire of political actions. In countries where the “political participation gap” is wide elections hypothetically provide this distinct opportunity for every citizen to take part.

What undergirds a sustainable democracy is an informed engaged and interested citizenry alive to the socio-economic and political issues of the day with sufficient space and capacity to participate in a repertoire of political activities. Civic participation is a duty and an act of stewardship. Being my brother’s keeper means recognising that we are collectively responsible for each other’s welfare and in turn electing a responsible leadership and government that is service oriented.



Zimbabwe remains a high-power distances society with people unable to relate to politicians and by extension government decisions and activities. This disjoint between how people relate to authority reinforces the participation gap. To understand how the participation gap in Zimbabwe manifests, there is need to pay closer attention to the quality of citizen participation. The quality of participation is determined by a number of factors such as the electorate’s capacity to make informed decisions, their capacity to interpret and make sense of the key electoral issues and policies beyond political party slogans and personalities. It further looks at how the political landscape is designed in a manner that limits ordinary citizens’ capacity to actively interrogate politicians and government authority. Access to reliable objective and relevant information (information as a resource), geographical location (the further one is from the centre, administrative office etc) levels of education and economic status all impact on the capacity of the citizen to actively participate in the political process as it also defines their worldview.

The naked forms of intimidation that had come to characterise Zimbabwe’s election seem to have faded into history. Post-November 2017 to this day, there has not been a recurrence of the brutal and violent campaigns of the early 2000s. While this is commendable, it is worthwhile to delve into the more subtle and calculated forms of intimidation that can easily escape the radar of electoral cycle monitoring. While the legal and normative framework approaches voter intimidation from what can be physically observed there is growing conviction that there are less visible subterranean ways of exerting pressure on the electorate to feel compelled to vote in a particular direction or not to vote at all. *Donsanto et al (2007)* observed that voter intimidation ‘... is amorphous and largely subjective in nature’. This, therefore, means that instead of starting off with predetermined indicators of intimidation, we work from the bottom up. It is imperative that the citizens be given the space to define what they understand to be intimidation tactics.

The 2014 South African General Elections, as well as the United States 2016 Presidential Elections, have brought to the fore multiple avenues through which undue pressure is exerted on the ordinary citizens with the intention of influencing their voting behaviour. The range of subtle acts include thinly veiled utterances, manipulation of economic vulnerability and anxieties (wide ranging from subtle threats to the informal sector to use of food parcels as an incentive), electoral operation practices that are aimed at frustrating the electorate, seemingly reckless utterances that are later dismissed but the effect would have been done through, deliberate misrepresentation and misinformation. At this juncture in Zimbabwe, the electorate is subconsciously alive to a narrative that conditions them to think and read the political reality in a way that makes it needless to use naked intimidation tactics. Activities such as the constant reference to the military could easily provide an atmosphere of intimidation. Furthermore, the practice of using state resources links one political party directly with the government in a way that makes it easy for malicious misrepresentation of facts for instances where a candidate can make a pronouncement to the effect that certain services available to the people will be withdrawn if they vote in a certain way. Other intimidation practices that have been observed in Zimbabwe this year include the request of serial numbers by community leaders and party functionaries. Such practice serves to cast doubt as to the sacredness of a secret ballot.

It is not enough to declare oneself as being independent, what matters is to be seen as being independent and purposefully work towards building trust with the citizens. As highlighted earlier, Zimbabwe comes from a chequered history of elections that have left such independent bodies like the ZEC conflicted and tainted. The public remains doubtful and skeptical as informed by history. To bridge this trust deficit the ZEC would do well to open up spaces of engagement with the public at all levels not only to communicate through the national level media but even to create local level initiatives that are closer to the people and allow for direct interaction between officials and the public. This way, the public would have the opportunity to question and test the transparency, credibility and accountability of ZEC.

The departure of Justice Rita Makarau in December 2017 as chairperson for ZEC presented an opportunity for the President to demonstrate goodwill and walk the talk of inclusivity and clean break the past. It was also an opportunity to rebuild public confidence in ZEC as an independent body through appointing someone of reputable stature who has a reputation for being impartial and fair in their conduct. While the constitution under Section 238 (1) vests powers solely in the hands of the President to appoint the ZEC Chairperson, it would not be beyond the President's discretionary powers to use the opportunity to demonstrate goodwill, transparency and openness by employing a more inclusive approach to selecting the new ZEC chairperson. This would have gone a long way towards engendering trust and building public and international confidence in the electoral body.

As it stands the lack of confidence in ZEC from both political parties and ordinary citizens as this research shows has the potential to influence voting behaviour as some voters might feel that the body is not credible enough to be trusted to manage a process that will reflect the will of the people.

Traditional media (print and broadcast) have been regarded over the years as the cornerstone and lifeblood of democratic processes. Press freedom and a free flow of information is a requirement of a democratic society. The media plays a critical role; a) to inform the citizens, b) give a platform to all political contenders and c) and provide an avenue through which the public can fact check and follow-up on political rhetoric and pronouncements. These functions are a key resource to the electorate and in order to meet the information needs of the electorate, the media has to apply itself critically, invested in providing accurate and verifiable information to the best of their abilities. For the media to objectively achieve these roles it has to be ethical, professional, balanced, free and non-biased committed to serving the public interest. The introduction of new media (social media sites, blogs and email) has further provided candidates and citizens with a wider platform to engage in open public debates informing and educating voters ultimately strengthening democracy.

1.1 The Research Problem and Justification

Although holding regular elections has been the most salient feature of Zimbabwe's attempts at democratization, over the years, the agendas of successive elections have regrettably failed to systematically prioritize and institutionalize citizens' particular interests and issues of concern. In essence, priority has been disproportionately directed at fulfilling the hardware and technical aspects of election management, albeit at the expense of the concerns of the electorate. Citizen's issues of concern in regard to the 2018 election have, thus far, been gleaned from media excerpts and partisan political ideology, which are notorious for exclusively determining election agendas in Zimbabwe. Unfortunately, these sources are poorly informed as they are not informed by verifiable research processes. As a people's project, elections thus far seem to have hit below citizens' expectations as they have been hi-jacked by partisan political interests. In a manner that corroborates this observation, the Bratton (2014:8) states that "Zimbabweans are only allowed to vote, but not to be citizens". Active citizenship denotes critical engagement with public policy issues by citizens, with the view to positively influence them. The assertion by Bratton (2014) is profound as it aptly captures the focus of this research: to foster a people-driven election agenda by stimulating active citizenship around elections.

The systematic disregard of citizen's interests and issues of concern in the current electoral agenda is tantamount to a reversal of the limited democratic strides which the country had garnered over the years. None of the political contenders for public office, for the 2018 electoral process, seem to have engaged in an objective public consultation process to establish what the electorate considers important prior to crafting their respective election strategies. As a result, elections have been religiously pursued while citizens' mistrust of public institutions and processes consistently remained embedded in the Zimbabwean society thereby weakening social cohesion and the integrity of the state in terms of state-society relations. It should be understood that democracy can only thrive where there is a semblance of mutual trust between citizens and duty bearers – for elections are themselves a people's project, yet the opposite is true in the Zimbabwean case.

Research has shown that high levels of mistrust and disengagement from public institutions and processes by citizens are not only an antithesis of the intended outcomes of elections but also reflect a society's susceptibility to fragility. According to Booyen (2012), most respondents to opinion polls for the 2013 election chose not to declare their political preferences: 24% (Afrobarometer, 2012); 30% (International Republican Institute, 2012); 40% (Freedom House Survey, 2012). These results were corroborated by findings from a study on local elections from six cities in Zimbabwe that found a high level (50%) of disengagement of citizens from local governance, expressed in the survey as "undeclared" (We Pay You Deliver Consortium, 2017). This level of mistrust and disengagement is worrying, and illustrates the point that an increasing number of citizens have lost interest and confidence in elections. This implies that citizens have become alienated from their own project – elections. Although opinion polls have been held during and around elections in Zimbabwe, none of them have sufficiently elicited citizens' reasons for choosing not to declare political preferences, hence the hypothesis that citizens have concerns and questions which need to be understood and addressed prior to 2018 elections.

The 2018 electoral process has thus far been preoccupied with fulfilling normative-legal requirements, which, though important, have not revitalized the virtues of trust and ownership of process and outcomes by citizens. Citizens have generally responded to the sustained exclusion of their voice (from their own projects) by disengaging from public institutions and processes. There is therefore an urgent need for strategies aimed at stimulating and restoring active citizenship both in terms of people-to-people and state-citizen interface. To be effective, this process will necessarily have to be knowledge/evidenced-based. This is especially important given the democratic space accorded to Zimbabweans by the new political dispensation. Essentially, this transient democratic space occasioned by the new dispensation in Zimbabwe should be utilized to ensure that the will of the people prevails in the upcoming elections and that the country returns to effective democracy, hence the need to conduct research with the view to advance a knowledge-based, citizen-driven election agenda in 2018.

Indeed, the forthcoming elections are going to take place in the context of a new political dispensation which has thus far been characterized by progressive policy pronouncements on a number of important national issues including elections (Presidential Inauguration Speech, The Herald, 24 November 2017). However, it remains to be seen whether there is meaningful congruence between citizens' concerns and political party manifestos hence the need for research on the specific issues of concern for the electorate in relation to the forthcoming elections and the outstanding elements on the electoral reform agenda prior to the new political dispensation.

The Church is a critical stakeholder in the electoral process. For many in Zimbabwe, the Church is, indeed, a credible, impartial actor, capable of significantly contributing towards a value-based and people-driven plebiscite. Moreover, since independence 1980, the Church has participated in elections. However, the church's participation has largely been passive. This passive role could not allow the Church to meaningfully utilize its moral authority and social capital to influence the electoral agenda, save through mediation and a modicum of advocacy initiatives which were based on limited research evidence, if any. Whilst this normative role of the Church remains inevitable and important, the Church envisages a greater role in the 2018 elections. In that light, the ZCC commissioned an electoral research which sought to identify and explain the concerns of citizens; it sought answers to some of their questions regarding the 2018 election. However, unlike conventional opinion polls which have traditionally preoccupied themselves with predicting the likely winners or losers in an election, this research focused on mapping out citizens' issues of concern regarding the 2018 electoral process.

Through this research, the ZCC seeks to benchmark citizens' perspectives and aspirations around the 2018 elections. The research was principally conducted through existing Church structures and institutions.

Objective and Research Questions

The major objective of the research is: *to examine the drivers and constraints to citizen participation in the 2018 electoral process in Zimbabwe.*

Research Questions:

- I. What do you perceive as the major drivers of citizen participation in the 2018 electoral process?
- II. What do you perceive as the major constraints to citizen participation in the 2018 electoral process?

1.2 Research Methodology and Strategy

In order to address the stated research objective, the ZCC employed a qualitative research design partly owing to its ability to produce well-founded meaning from complex processes and contexts (Mason, 2002). Qualitative research is a systematic empirical inquiry into meaning that is based on an inductive mode, letting the data speak – it provides an insider perspective on a phenomenon (Ospina, 2004; Shank, 2002), in this case, citizens' concerns for the 2018 electoral process. Essentially, a qualitative research design is the most viable approach to collecting citizen's concerns and aspirations regarding the 2018 electoral process mainly because of its interpretivist inclination. However, in recognition of the relative utility of quantitative data on some aspects of the research, a survey was undertaken primarily to corroborate qualitative data and subsequently improve the overall quality of the research findings. Nevertheless, the predominant research design remained qualitative.

The choice of methodology for this study is a departure from conventional practice in that almost all major electoral researches in Zimbabwe have, thus far, employed purely quantitative research designs characterised by opinion polls. Although opinion polls have generated useful insights and debates regarding elections in Zimbabwe, policy makers and academics, have invari-



ably struggled to account for citizens' electoral choices and perspectives owing to the inherent limitations of a quantitative research tradition in explaining and exploring social phenomenon. Further, preliminary consultations by the ZCC Research Department have shown that the majority of citizens are concerned about improvement of quality of life as an outcome of elections regardless of the governing political party. Thus, the choice of research methodology for the present research has been influenced by the quest to accord prominence to citizens' agenda as compared to the exclusive preoccupation with addressing the concerns of political elites.

1.2.1 Unit of Analysis

A unit of analysis denotes rational decisions about the subject (the "who" or "what") of study (Trochim, 2006), as guided by the set research questions and objectives.

In that regard, a three-fold unit of analysis was employed in this research. The first unit of analysis was the community, which was engaged through community forums. The community, in this research, consisted of registered and non-registered members of ZCC member Churches from Bulawayo and Midlands provinces. The choice of type of community from which data was collected was influenced by the ease of engaging a familiar community of people on a seemingly politically sensitive issue (elections) that has been characterised by high levels of violence and voter apathy, at least for the 2018 elections. This is especially important given that the general environment in the country has increasingly become seized with election-driven political grandstanding and speculation since the beginning of the year. The second unit of analysis was the individual, both registered and unregistered. The individual person provided personal perspectives and experiences which were juxtaposed with those of the community in order to generate a rich data set from which conclusions were drawn.

1.2.2 Sampling

Although probability sampling is a preferred method of choice owing to its ability to produce findings that can be generalized to the larger population and with a known margin of error (Etikan and Bala, 2017), for the last decade, social scientists, medical and market researchers have been exploring means and ways of using non-probability sampling methods as alternatives in certain contexts (Groves 2006; Savage and Burrows, 2007). In this research, the election context in Zimbabwe, particularly the history of electoral violence and the significant percentage of "non-response" rates on certain survey questions for the 2013 election (as high as 40% for AB survey and 30% for the Freedom House survey of the same year), did warrant the consideration of alternative sampling approaches. In other words, probability sampling has been judged to be less valuable in this research mainly owing to the limitations of a purely quantitative approach which has been characterized by high levels of non-response rates. In light of this, the research employed a two-stage non-probability sampling approach consisting of purposive and convenience based sampling approaches. A purposive sample is a non-probability sample that is selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study (Etikan and Bala, 2017). The objective of the study requires a purposive sampling framework because the approach can allow for deliberate sampling of segments of the population that did not register to vote and those that did register.

On the other hand, convenience sampling method is a set of techniques in which respondents are selected by convenience: due to their proximity, availability, accessibility etcetera. It is a fast and easy method to use (Abrahams, 2010). This method was useful for selecting the actual respondents at community level especially given the time and resource constraints.

Below is an outline of the sampling stages which the research team followed:

1.2.2.1 Stage 1

A two-stage purposive sampling approach was employed to select one province (P1) with the highest voter registration figures and another province (P2) with the lowest voter registration figures, according to ZEC. Within P1, two constituencies with the highest and second highest registration figures were selected. Under P2, two constituencies with the lowest and second lowest registration figures were selected.

1.2.2.2 Stage 2:

At constituency level, the research team made use of ZCC member Churches¹ as conduits through which it accessed Church members and non-members for the study.

A total of 1607 respondents were interviewed: 786 males and 821 females

1.3 Data collection methods and instruments

The research employed the following data collection methods and tools:

1.3.1 Community Forum (CF)

Twelve (12) Community Forums (CFs) were held in order to collect data from the Church community in all the ten provinces of the country (See Table 2.2 for a breakdown of the specific areas where CFs were held). A CF is commonly known as a community dialogue meeting. However, this research report will concern itself mostly with data collected from Bulawayo and Midlands provinces except where there is need to demonstrate the existence and/or development of a wider pattern or trend in the data. Participants drawn from the women, men and youth chapters of ZCC member Churches in each province. The CFs employed an open form (Holloway and Todres, 2003), and were moderated by trained and experienced personnel familiar to the Church community in the respective areas. The participants (men, women and youth 18 years of age and above) were mobilized through the existing Church structures through a standardized communication message which was sent out to local chapter leaders.

Ten (10) CF moderators were identified and refreshed on how to facilitate community discussions. At least two senior moderators per CF were deployed along with two ZCC Assistant Officers as observers and minute takers. This team of moderators and other support staff took turns to facilitate CFs.

Local Churches hosted the CFs mainly because such venues were deemed naturally comfortable and convenient for participants. For each CF, a note taker captured key issues on a flip chart and displayed them at the venue of the meeting for all to see. After each CF, the leadership of the local chapter was requested to conduct further consultations and validation meetings with the wider membership of the local Churches and thereafter forward any additional submissions to the ZCC office in writing. Final submissions from these meetings were submitted to a ZCC Technical Team which consolidated the outputs into area/province specific EECs and subsequently into a National Ecumenical Election Covenant (NEEC).

1.3.2 Structured Interviews

Structured interviews were held with 1607 respondents using an interviewer administered questionnaire. The design of the questionnaire was largely informed by themes generated by the CF. Data was collected by 80 trained and experienced enumerators using a combination of printed questionnaires (for use in rural constituencies) and a cellphone-based data collection application called Magpi on which the questionnaire was uploaded. Magpi has been widely used for data collection by major research projects in Zimbabwe and beyond, and has been found to be relatively more efficient and effective than conventional data collection packages and tools.

1.3.3 Pilot survey and training of field staff

A pilot survey was held in Hatfield suburb (Harare) prior to the main survey to test the reliability, effectiveness, suitability and flow of the questionnaire and the interview process. A 15-member ZCC programs team was trained on both Magpi and questionnaire administration.

Eighty (80) enumerators were recruited from local Church structures and trained before undertaking data collection. Training content included research ethics, understanding your research context, sampling procedures, interviewing skills and data collection using the Magpi application, amongst other issues. Two senior ZCC staff members provided leadership during the data collection process.

1.3.4 Data analysis

Survey data collected using Magpi was converted into Excel spreadsheets and entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) templates for purposes of quantitative analysis. Data collected using printed questionnaires were also entered into excel spreadsheets and analyzed using SPSS. A five member team comprising two consultants, data entry clerks and three ZCC staff members undertook the data entry and analysis.

For qualitative data, the research team used thematic content analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) have, for a protracted period of time, advanced one of the most compelling arguments for the use of thematic analysis in social science research. Their major contribution has been the manner in which the two scholars have characterised the process of thematic data analysis in thematic analysis: 1) familiarising with data 2) generating initial codes 3) searching for themes 4) reviewing themes 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report. Although other scholars have tended to emphasize certain aspects of the analysis continuum and in some cases to re-order the process, the general framework for thematic analysis has remained somewhat entangled in the categorization provided by Braun and Clarke (2006).

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 1 At a local level, ZCC structures are comprised of Pastors Fraternal which are rooted in the communities; they facilitate all ZCC operations in their respective areas, under the leadership of Provincial Coordinators

1.4 Research Outputs and Dissemination

1.4.1 Ecumenical Election Covenants

The principal outputs for the research are the Ecumenical Election Covenants (EEC) which acted as tools for sustaining the momentum for a citizens' agenda for the 2018 elections and beyond.

1.4.2 Research report and validation of findings

The present report constitutes a key output of the research. Its launch will be followed by dialogues at community level in order to give effect and meaning to the findings and recommendations of the research.

1.5 Ethical considerations for the research

The following ethical norms were integrated into the data collection process including in the introductory part of the questionnaire:

- Informed consent
- Voluntary participation
- Confidentiality

1.6 Delimitation of the study

The primary focus of this research was to establish the drivers and constraints to citizen participation in the 2018 elections using a predominantly qualitative methodology supported by a rather limited electoral survey. While survey sampling was based on ZEC voter registration statistics of 28 February 2018, the final voters roll issued on 18 June 2018 did not significantly alter the trend reflected in the former. It should be noted that the ZCC does not seek to make far reaching generalizations from the research findings owing to the fact that the survey employed non-probability sampling methods. The research does not intend to serve as a national opinion poll.

Chapter 2 Findings And Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the findings of the research in light of the set objectives and research questions. The presentation and discussion is structured into several segments as guided by the research questions and objectives. Table 2.1 below provides the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents; Table 2.2 shows coverage of community forums (CF); Table 2.3 provides a highlight of the coverage of the survey.

Table 2.1 Demographic characteristics

Issue	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	786	49.0
Female	821	51.0
Religion		
Christian	1447	90.0
Muslim	10	0.6
Traditional African	45	2.8
None	88	5.5
Level of Education		
No Formal Education	42	2.6
Primary	113	7.0
Secondary	996	62.0
Diploma	233	14.5
University or Higher	209	12.6

Table 2.2 Coverage of Community Forums

Province	Venue of CF	Number of participants
Midlands	Gweru	18
	Zvishavane	41
	Kwekwe	19
Bulawayo		50

Table 2.3 Survey Coverage

Province	Constituency	Suburbs or Area	Number of Respondents	Number of Enumerators
Bulawayo	Bulawayo South	Newton West, Montrose, Bellevue, Barham Green, Belmont	220	11
Bulawayo	Magwegwe	Magwegwe North, Magwegwe West, New Magwegwe	571	19
Midlands	Mkoba	Mkoba 6, Mkoba 9, Mkoba 11, Mkoba 12, Mkoba 16, Mkoba 18, Mkoba 19, Mkoba 20	512	23
Midlands	Chiwundura	Mavuzhe, Gumbure, Gunde, Sundula, Nyabango, Bhauro, Muchakata, Masvori, Maguma, St Patricks	304	27

2.1 Registration Status

A total of 1607 respondents were interviewed in this study, of which the majority of respondents (82%) had registered to vote while a minority (18%) had not registered in the current Biometric Voter Registration System (BVR). Of the registered respondents, 92% were from Midlands province while 71% were from Bulawayo province – Table 2.4. The distribution of registered respondents between the two provinces aligns with the general national trend in which Bulawayo has the lowest number of registered voters while Midlands province has the highest. This research seeks to investigate the drivers and constraints to citizen participation in the 2018 elections.

2.6 Registration Status by Current Occupation

Ninety three percent (93%) of the people who reported to be registered under the current BVR system were formally employed, followed by 83% who were both self-employed and informally employed. 77% were students and 78% were not employed respectively. As a result, most of the participants who were not registered were students (23%) followed by those who were not employed (22%) – (Table 2.9).

Table 2.9: Registration Status by Current Occupation

Registration Status	What is your current occupation?					Total
	Student	Informally employed	Self employed	Formally employed	Not employed	
Registered under the current BVR system	77%	83%	83%	93%	78%	82%
Not registered under the current BVR system	23%	17%	17%	7%	22%	18%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

2.7 Registration Status by Religion

The majority (90%) of the participants reported to have been registered under the current BVR system were Muslims followed by 83% who were Christians (of which the study interviewed 10 Muslims and 1447 Christians). Sixty two percent (62%) of the respondents were none aligned to any religion thereby rendering this category the most unregistered. 27% of those participants who reported to be from the Traditional African religion were not registered under the current BVR system – (Table 2.10).

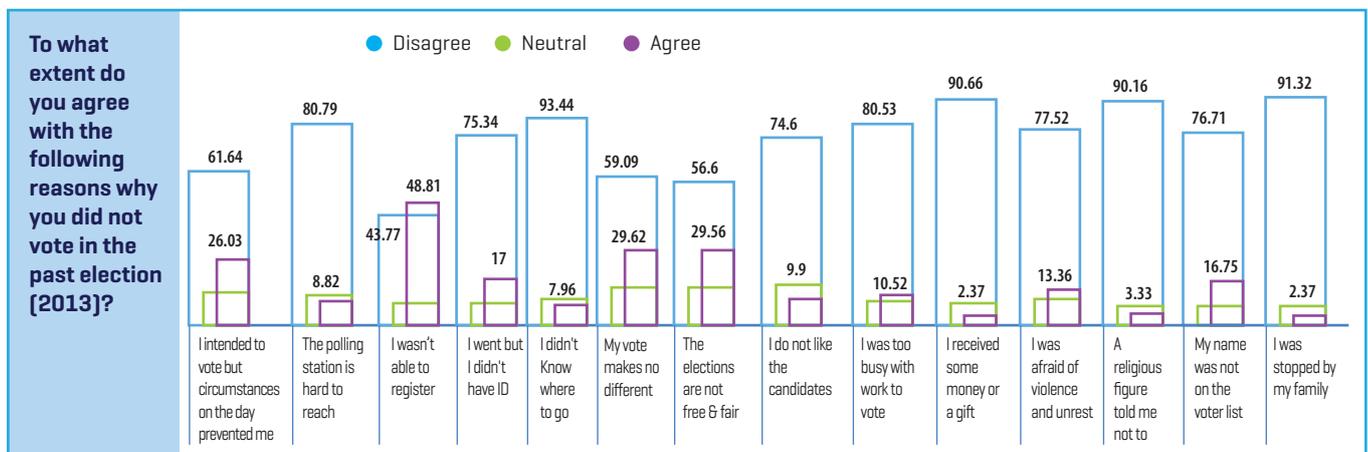
Table 2.10: Registration Status by Religion

Registration Status	What is your religion?				Total
	Traditional African religion	Muslim	None	Christian	
Registered under the current BVR system	73%	90%	62%	83%	82%
Not registered under the current BVR system	27%	10%	38%	17%	18%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

2.8 July 2013 harmonized elections – drivers and constraints

A retrospective gaze at citizens’ reasons for voting in the July 2013 harmonized elections may be instrumental to understanding the likely voting patterns for the 2018 harmonized elections. This study found that 49% of the respondents voted in the July 2013 elections. Eligible voters in 2013 failed to vote due to various reasons (Fig 2.1). However, chief among the reasons were that the individuals were not able to register to vote (49%). Some felt that the elections were not free and fair (30%) while others felt that their vote would not make a difference at all (30%). More than a quarter of the eligible voters intended to vote but failed to vote due to circumstances that prevailed on the day of voting (26%).

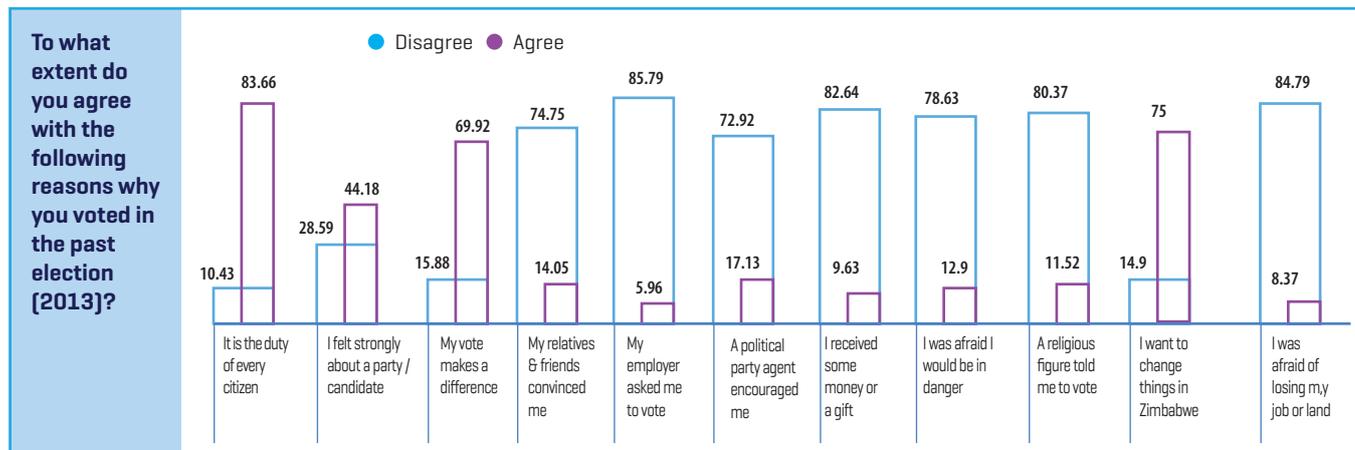
Figure 2.1: Reasons for not voting in the July 2013 elections



Citizens also had many reasons for voting in the July 2013 elections. The main drivers for voting in the July 2013 elections included that citizens felt that it was their duty to vote (84%). Some voted because they felt that they wanted to change things in Zimbabwe (75%). While others voted because they felt that their vote would make a difference. A significant number of respondents voted mainly because they felt strongly about a party or candidate (44%). Analysis of the registration status for

respondents in the present study indicate that the above drivers for voting are likely to be dominant amongst registered voters for the 2018 elections as compared to nonregistered eligible voters (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: Reasons for voting in the July 2013 elections



2.9 Citizens interest to participate in the 2018 Elections

Judging by the intensity of dialogue during the CFs that produced the EEC, as well as by the number of people who wanted to attend but could not as there was a ceiling in terms of number of participants, it is evident that there is high interest as well as concerns about the 2018 election amongst the Christian community. In this study, interest is defined as showing curiosity and/or concern in elections. In that regard, the Midlands EEC addressed numerous issues and actors ranging from the security forces, ZEC, fellow Christians, political parties and aspiring candidates. It also addressed specific technical and general issues to do with the election. The content generated by the EEC assisted in the identification of themes which in turn informed the design of the survey questionnaire.

To political parties, the EEC had the following to say:

“We request you to consider in your Manifestos, sound economic programmes...concrete plans to improve service delivery, empower women and girls, empower local and provincial governance structures through devolution; ...align laws with the constitution; we condemn all forms of violence; ...put in place mechanisms to ensure that primary elections will be conducted peacefully...; we condemn the politicization of public resources ...; ... equal access to media coverage...”

To security forces:

“we encourage you to take pride in the honorable conduct befitting a disciplined security force that is non-partisan and professional in executing its duties as mandated by the constitution”

To ZEC:

“we call for the establishment of a special tribunal designed to address all electoral challenges, disgruntlements and offences”

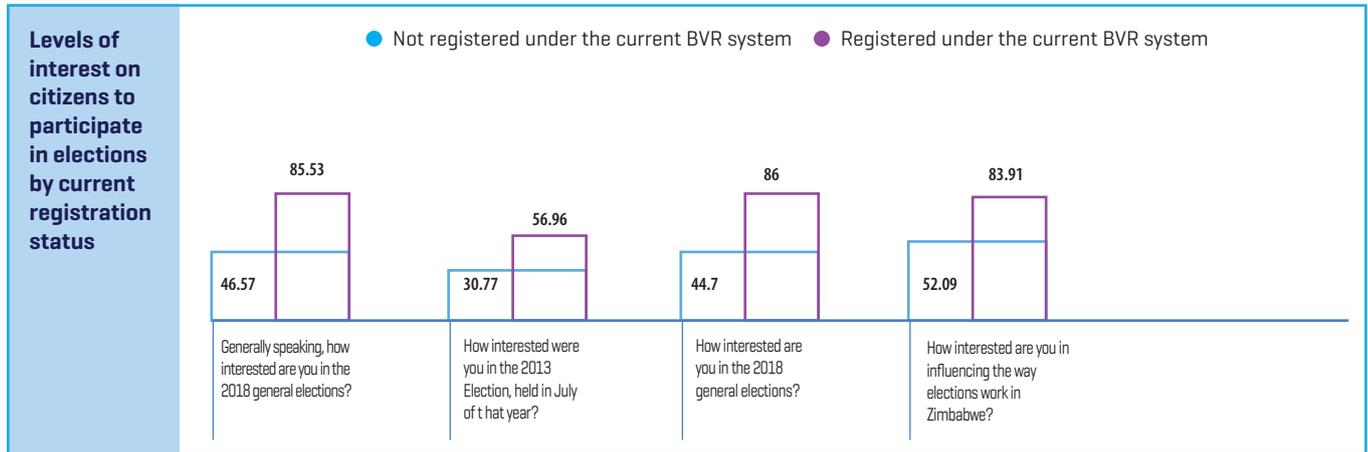
To fellow Christians:

“We expect that the Church will remain neutral at all times. Church premises must not be used as campaigning platforms but should remain as a place of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ”

A closer look at the themes emerging from the Midlands EEC suggests that the participants had a fairly clear understanding of the issues they felt required attention including by the Church. In particular, the level of freedom of expression demonstrated by women and girls at the community forums is testament to the suitability of the research methods employed as well as to change of political environment away from that of authoritarianism towards one characterized by increased enjoyment of political rights.

On the other hand, issues and responses raised through the survey largely corroborate with those of the EEC. In particular, the survey results confirmed that there has been a significant increase in interest in elections (48%) from the 2013 to 2018 elections by both registered (27%) and unregistered (21%) respondents – (Figure 2.3). It then follows that in terms of winning elections, viable political parties are likely to be those that invest in mobilizing citizens to register to vote rather than those that bank on the interest shown by throngs of unregistered voters, and those that will consider the aspirations of the electorate. In other words, only an increase in interest that is buttressed by registering to vote is bankable in this particular election, and Christians constitute a significant proportion of the voting public hence the value of understanding their hopes and aspirations. Any significant disconnect between interest in elections (by those eligible) and actual voter registration and between voter registration and actual voting deserves further investigation.

Figure 2.3: Levels of interest on citizens to participate in elections by current registration status



Survey results also show that there has been some tremendous increase in interest to vote by all age groups. In line with that, the Midlands EEC has called upon ZEC to continue conducting civic education which will be instrumental to sustaining citizen interest in the 2018 elections. However, the youth interest has been significant by rising from 26% in 2013 to 58% in 2018 elections (32% increment). A marginal increase of 12% was recorded for the middle aged whilst the elderly registered a decrease of 1% (Figure 2.4). This finding is consistent with the expectation that the youth should be encouraged to participate in national processes that affect their lives and with the fact that the youth are a major target group in most elections in Zimbabwe particularly by political parties. Globally, the United Nations (UN) recently adopted resolution 2250 in recognition of the need to ensure that the youth actively participate in all processes or decisions in a peace process.

Figure 2.4: Levels of interest on citizens to participate in elections by age groups

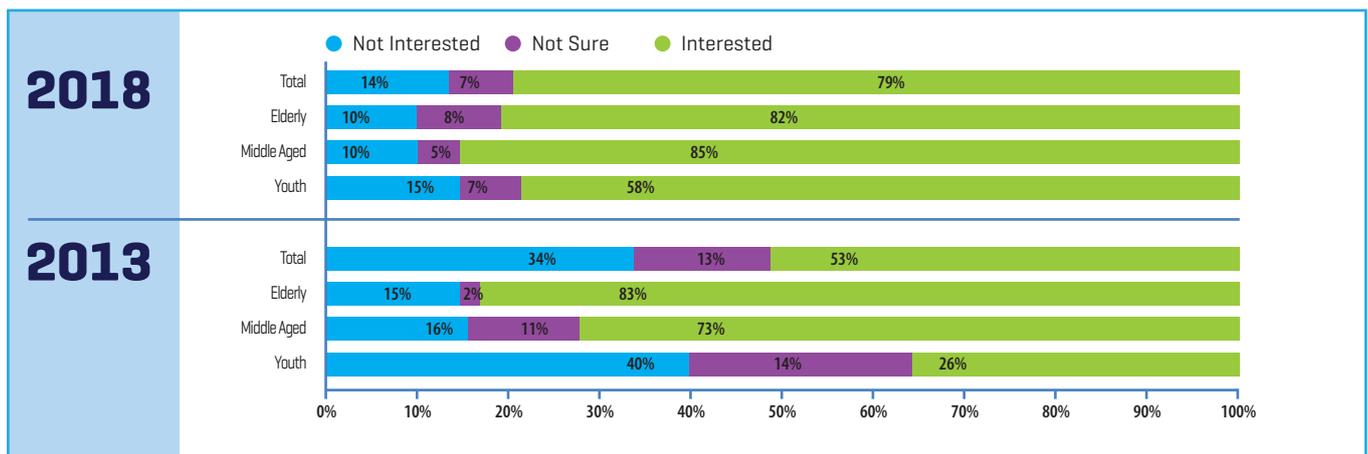


Table 2.11 below shows that the interest of female respondents in both the 2013 and 2018 elections increased from 51% to 80% respectively, while that of male respondents grew from 54% to 79%. Further, both genders (male: 79%; female: 78%) indicated significant increase in interest in wanting to influence the way elections work in Zimbabwe. Interest in changing the way elections work in Zimbabwe confirms the observation made in the EEC that citizens have certain aspects (policy & practice) of the election system that they would want changed. For instance, the Bulawayo EEC stated that polling stations should be announced in a timeous manner – perhaps this view is linked with the more general view that electoral reforms are a high priority if the 2018 elections are to be free, fair and credible.

Table 2.11 Citizen interest by gender

	Not interested		Not sure		Interested	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Generally speaking, how interested are you in the 2018 general elections?	13.62%	14.45%	6.56%	6.25%	79.82%	79.3%
How interested were you in the 2013 Election, held in July of that year?	35.52%	33.47%	13.75%	12.18%	50.73%	54.35%
How interested are you in the 2018 general elections?	13.27%	15.30%	7.47%	5.98%	79.25%	78.72%
How interested are you in influencing the way elections work in Zimbabwe?	18.50%	18.48%	3.21%	2.64%	78.28%	78.88%

While interest in the 2013 elections was generally lower (Midlands 54%; Bulawayo 50%), respondents from both provinces have shown significant increase in interest in 2018 elections - 85% and 72% respectively (Table 2.12). The relatively lower interest on the part of respondents from Bulawayo province somewhat confirms the fact that the province has the lowest voter registration turn out nationally at least by 28 February 2018. The reasons for this state of affairs could not have been more aptly captured than in the EEC, which explains that the people of Bulawayo province are lagging behind in many aspects of life as they are still affected by unresolved historical atrocities that have not been addressed for more than a decade now. Thus, their level of interest in "national" processes has invariably been relatively low. Although both provinces were affected by the Gukurahundi, Midlands province seem to have escaped this historical entrapment through the solace offered by a greater feeling of belonging to the nation of Zimbabwe than is generally felt among the people of Bulawayo. Another possible reason for the differences between the two provinces in terms of the effects of Gukurahundi could be that of relative intensity i.e. the scale of atrocities seem to have been more intense in Bulawayo as compared to Midlands province. Seventy percent (70%) of the respondents from Bulawayo confirms and compliments echoes by participants in the Bulawayo CF who expressed the desire to witness electoral reforms by ZEC and political parties. However, contrary to the assumption that citizens prefer to be actively engaged in processes that affect them, survey respondents from Bulawayo province registered relatively lower interest (70%, compared to 86% from Midlands) in influencing the way elections work in Zimbabwe, possibly confirming the assertion that voter apathy and general citizen disengagement from national processes in Bulawayo province had previously reached rock bottom levels such that even the energy to initiate or support change processes has significantly declined.

2.10 Citizens perceptions on elections

For purposes of this study, policies are statements of intent through which government seeks to deliver political goods to citizens; they are what government chooses to do or not to do. Participants at the Midlands CF clearly stated the imperative for political parties to ensure that their respective manifestos focus on marketing their ability and willingness to implement socio-economic policies that could address peoples' struggles for a better life and a promising future. This assertion is supported by survey findings which revealed that voters still have positive perceptions about elections, with a significant number acknowledging that elections are a way to choose among particular policies (67%). At provincial level, 60% of respondents from Bulawayo and 73% from Midlands province believed that elections are a way to choose between particular policies. In the same vein, 64% of female respondents from Bulawayo province held the same view compared to 70% of those from Midlands province. This relatively low score on the part of Bulawayo province in terms of recognizing the link between elections and policies and the associated lower score on gender perspectives on the same could be less of a capacity gap and more of a perception based on lived realities.

When there is no recognition of the role of elections in public policy, the result is often low participation in elections beginning with low voter registration and ultimately low voter turn-out on the day of voting. Also, this particular finding is consistent with the earlier observation that most respondents felt that members of parliament lose contact with the electorate soon after being elected thereby entrenching the disconnect between service delivery (policy processes) and elections. This partly explains why a greater number of respondents from Bulawayo province have not registered to vote. However, it is possible that these perceptions are underpinned by other socio-economic and political factors that are beyond the scope of this electoral study.

Participants in all the CFs held in Bulawayo metropolitan province, unlike those in Midlands province, raised unresolved historical atrocities (code named Gukurahundi)¹ as their main problem, and made the point that this issue is linked to their continued marginalization in socio-economic and political terms. Sentiments expressed during the CFs suggest that the continued failure to bring closure to these historical atrocities has entrenched a sense of inferiority and despair amongst affected communities. In a manner that confirms this reality, survey results have shown that respondents (52%) believe that elections are a way to hold the GoZ accountable for past actions. However, reference to past actions in this case could refer to past and other recent political conflicts. Fifty percent (50%) of female and 52% of male respondents hold a similar view. Responses by men and women on this matter do suggest that they shared the same experiences and views more generally.

A prominent view regarding elections amongst respondents is that they advance the interests of certain ethnic, religious or national groups – (Figure 2.6). The same trend is maintained on questions to do with elections and past history, and elections and social class. The findings suggest that these variables (ethnicity, social class and gender) are mutually constitutive albeit with different variations depending on province. Nevertheless, participants at CFs hinted confirmatory sentiments to the survey findings when they hinted on endemic feelings of exclusion and marginalization occasioned by the effects of Gukurahundi.

1 Gukurahundi denotes political disturbances which occurred in Matabeleland and Midlands Provinces of Zimbabwe in which more than 20 000 people are estimated to have been killed.

In a way, voting is an expression of the state of affairs in a given country; through elections, the public can express its views on who should govern, which views they expect to be respected by all electoral stakeholders. To that effect, participants at the Zvishavane CF expressed the desire to have their voice/views heard when they requested the security forces “to accept the outcome of the elections”. Correspondingly, survey respondents (58%) stated that participating in elections is a way to comment on the state of the nation. These findings support the general view that for the last two decades, Zimbabweans have had their right to freedom of expression and association seriously curtailed by the previous administration. This situation has led to the general lack of interest in national processes by certain sections of society. In response to these limitations, over the years, most Zimbabweans have had to resort to social media in a bid to enjoy their right to freedom of expression. Generally, citizens seem to hold mixed perceptions and or feelings about the 2018 elections.

Figure 2.5: Positive perceptions about Elections

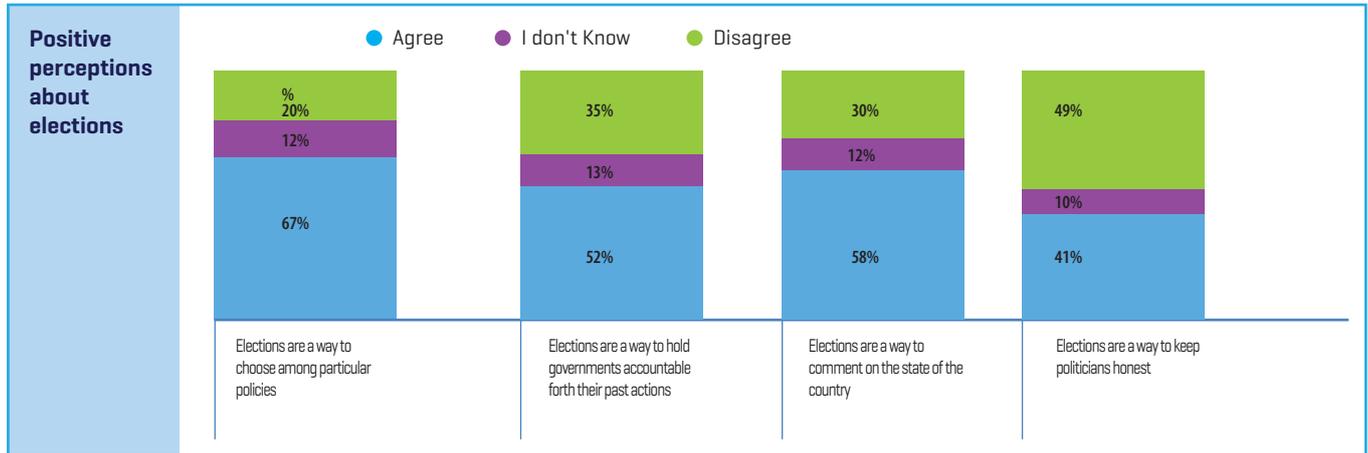


Figure 2.6: Negative Perceptions about Elections

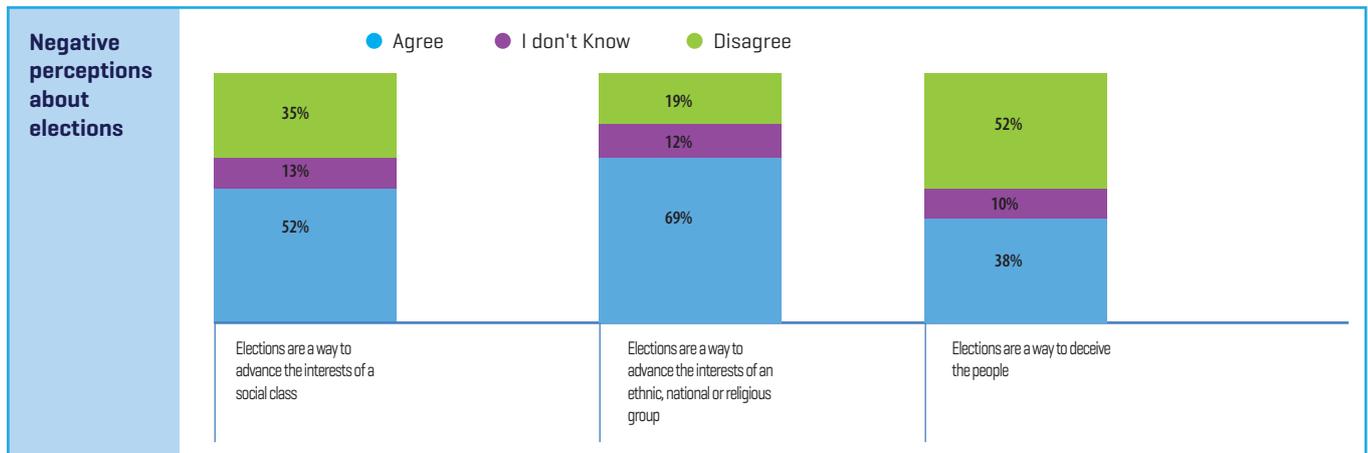


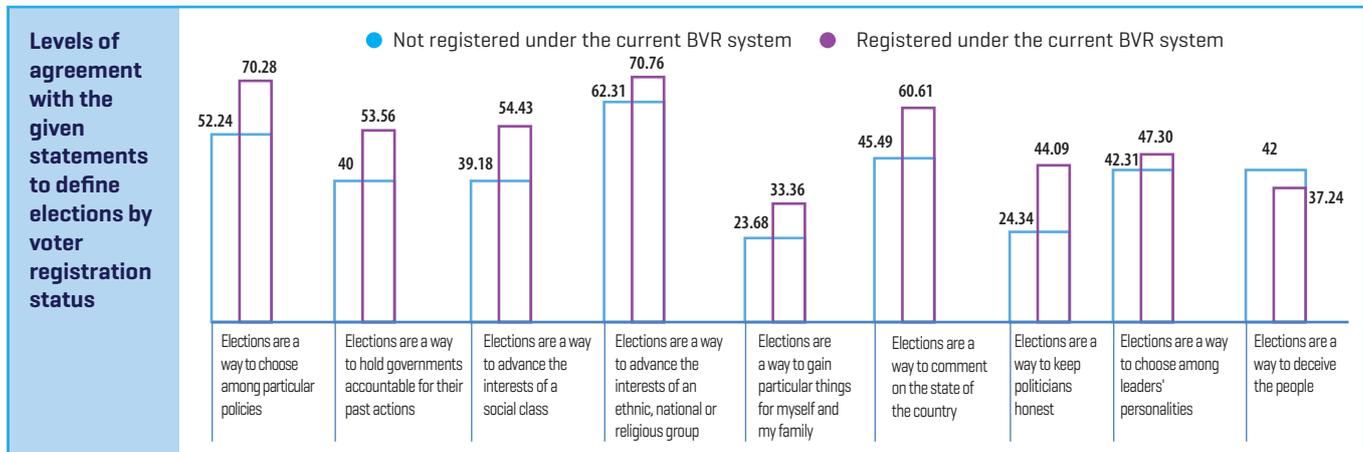
Table 2.12 Citizens Perceptions about elections by province

	Not interested		Not sure		Interested	
	Bulawayo	Midlands	Bulawayo	Midlands	Bulawayo	Midlands
Generally speaking, how interested are you in the 2018 general elections?	19.02%	8.95%	7.71%	4.97%	73.26%	86.09%
How interested were you in the 2013 Election, held in July of that year?	38.01%	31.27%	11.73%	14.29%	50.27%	54.44%
How interested are you in the 2018 general elections?	19.74%	9.10%	8.54%	5.49%	71.71%	85.42%
How interested are you in influencing the way elections work in Zimbabwe?	24.92%	12.65%	4.79%	1.45%	70.29%	85.91%

One way of explaining these mixed perceptions is that there is a difference between what people know about the efficacy of elections as a democratic process through which citizens get a chance to choose their leaders by looking at the kind of policies and plans they put across against the lived reality of citizens. In this case, the respondents revealed that there is a disjoint between the promise of an election and what they have seen happening after elections. The lived reality of the respondents seems to be that elections have become a way of furthering the interest of a specific privileged group in the society.

Unsurprisingly, both positive and negative perceptions are more pronounced amongst registered voters implying that even those who will vote in 2018 may not be fully confident about the electoral system. This is a question of trust rather than mere voter education. This trend cuts across all the questions on perceptions of the electorate on elections (Fig 2.7). Indeed, this finding is in line with the generalized levels of voter apathy amongst citizens in Zimbabwe. Research has shown that voter apathy and disengagement from national processes is attributable to successive repression and undermining of the citizens' voice in public policy processes in the country.

Figure 2.7: Perceptions about the Elections by Voter Registration Status



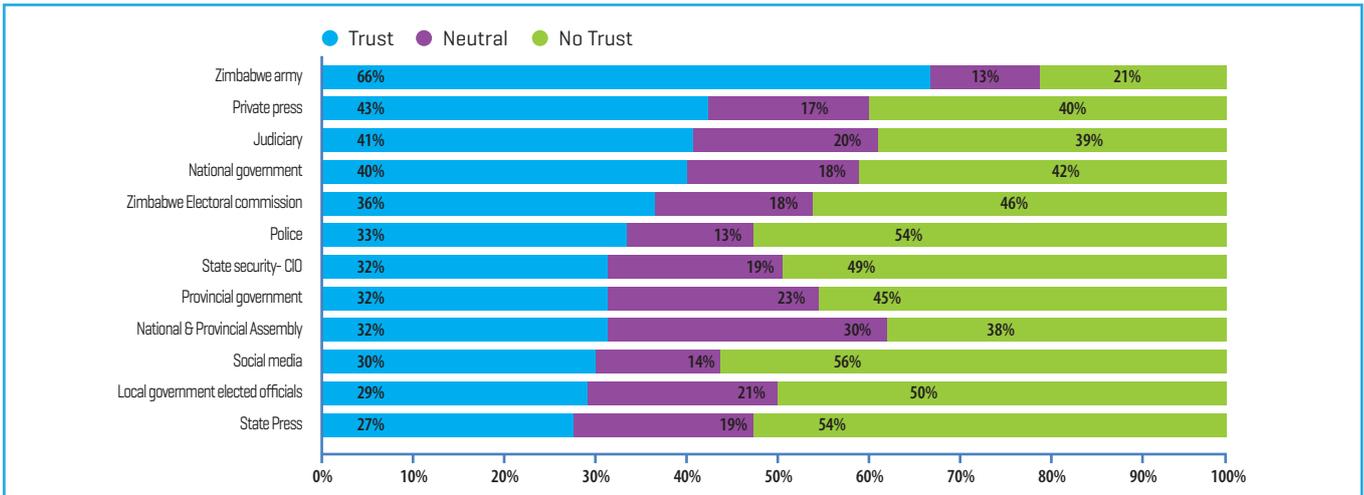
2.11 Level of Trust to Key Institutions

Related to citizen's perceptions on elections is the question of their trust in key institutions. While data collected from CFs did not seek to overtly identify the institutions which participants trust or do not trust, sentiments expressed in the EECs were indicative of their areas of interest and or concerns. They indicated areas where participants felt their trust had been or may be threatened. Nevertheless, survey data is more revealing and direct about the public's view on trust. Among the key institutions identified in this study, the army (66%), private press (43%) and the judiciary (41%) are the most trusted institutions (Figure 2.8). The state press (27%), local government elected officials (29%) and the social media (30%) were ranked the least trusted institutions. It is evident that a significant number of the electorate are not familiar with the activities of the National and Provincial Assembly as a significant number (30%) were not sure whether or not to trust this institution (Figure 2.8). Further disaggregation of the findings by province and gender indicates a consistently high level of trust of the military by respondents from both Midlands (65%) and Bulawayo (67%) and 66% for both genders. This is a major departure from established narrative about the relationship between the military and citizens in the two provinces mainly owing to unresolved historical atrocities mentioned above. This relatively higher level of trust in the army by the citizens may have been occasioned by the euphoria of the November 2017 events, which saw an unusual coalescence between citizens and the army against what was perceived to be the common enemy – former President of Zimbabwe, Mr. Robert Gabriel Mugabe.

However, despite the general increase in interest in the forthcoming election, citizens' rather limited level of trust of the national government (Bulawayo, 42%; Midlands, 41%) and judiciary (Bulawayo, 41%; Midlands, 35%) as the primary administrators for the 2018 election is a concern – it may be a suggestion that the citizenry is not fully confident about 2018 elections but is taking chances with the new administration. Gender disaggregated findings do confirm this development, showing that 42% of female and 28% of male respondents hold the same view that national government cannot be fully trusted. The higher levels of mistrust of government by women suggest that their experiences of government policy and practice are different from those of men, which in turn implies that gender sensitivity should be prioritized in public policy processes, beyond the numbers.

The low ranking of state media in terms of respondents' trust in this study is testament to the mistrust of national government (Figure 2.8). Gender dimensions on respondents' views also confirm this trend in which state media is largely mistrusted - 42% of both male and female respondents. According to respondents, local government elected officials are one of the least trusted (Bulawayo, 27%; Midlands, 30%) in Zimbabwe, perhaps owing to the perception of widespread corruption which is linked to poor service delivery across the country. In the main, the scourge of mistrust is largely attributable to the country's chequered electoral history characterized by violence and other electoral malpractices.

Figure 2.8: Levels of Trust with Selected key Institutions



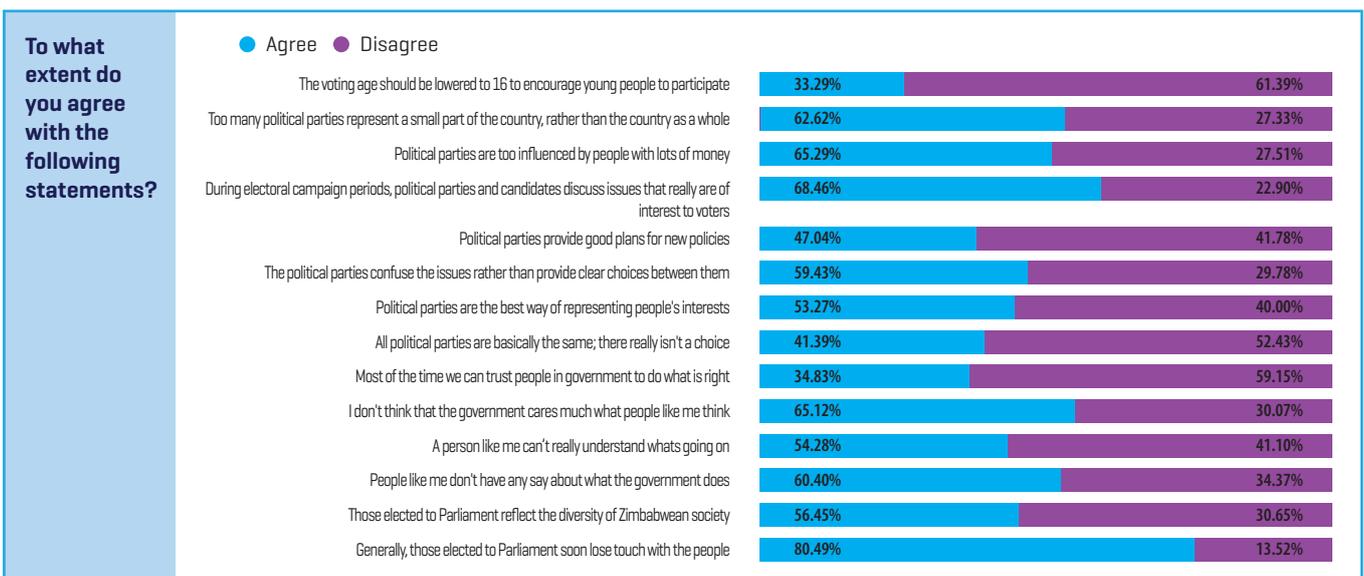
2.12 Barriers to Voter Participation

“We request you not to field candidates who do not ordinarily reside in Zvishavane. We will not be pleased with candidates who contest in Zvishavane only to relocate to other towns soon after receiving the mandate to occupy a parliamentary seat in any of the Zvishavane constituency”. (Source: Zvishavane EEC)

The above sentiments are corroborated by survey respondents who also strongly felt that those elected into parliament soon lose touch with the people (80%). Both men and women who responded to the questionnaire actively held this view – 81% and 80%, respectively. This is despite the fact that respondents acknowledged that during electoral campaign periods, political parties and candidates discuss issues that really are of interest to voters (68%) – (Figure 2.9). On this issue, 69% of male and 68% of female respondents hold the same view. A sustained disconnection between political pronouncements during election campaigns and actual service delivery thereafter may have contributed to entrenched distrust of and disengagement from political processes.

Fifty nine (59%) of respondents think that most of the time people in government cannot be trusted to do the right thing while 65% are of the view that government does not care about their views nor do they have a say over what government does (60%). Such a trend partly explains why citizens’ trust of key government institutions in general has been on a downward spiral for the past two decades. At a provincial level, there has not been a significant difference between respondents’ perspectives/views on barriers to voter participation with 79% of respondents from Bulawayo and 81% from Midlands province reporting that members of parliament soon lose touch with the people soon after winning elections.

Figure 2.9: Factors influencing decisions to participate in voting in the upcoming 2018 elections



A significant proportion of the electorate felt that political parties are too influenced by people with lots of money (65%), with both male and female respondents scoring exactly the same percentage. Disaggregation of findings by province confirmed this trend: 68% in Bulawayo and 63% in Midlands. Further, respondents (65%) felt that government does not care what the general

populace thinks. On this matter, out of the total segment of respondents from Bulawayo and Midlands provinces, the majority (66% and 63% respectively), held similar views. Inferences from these results suggest that ordinary citizens view political parties and political participation as an elitist enterprise thus confirming the earlier view that elections advance the interest of a particular social class or ethnic group. These findings point to the impact of authoritarian tendencies by the Mugabe administration and to the possibility that ordinary citizens may have resultantly concluded that their views are not valued in national processes hence the low voter registration and low levels of interest by some constituencies particularly Bulawayo Metropolitan Province.

This scenario has resulted in further fragmentation of society and to the scourge of impunity and the attendant problems of corruption and general social decay. A significant number of the electorate is of the opinion that Churches (61%) and the educational system (56%) are not playing an active role in educating citizens about the benefits of voting and political participation. Views expressed during EEC dialogue forums corroborate the observation that the Church has slackened on promoting political participation and voting, yet nearly 80% of the population pays allegiance to it. Equally important and yet invisible in promoting political participation in Zimbabwe is the education system mostly due to a history of political repression and politically motivated limitations on political right which have not spared the education sector including members of the academia.

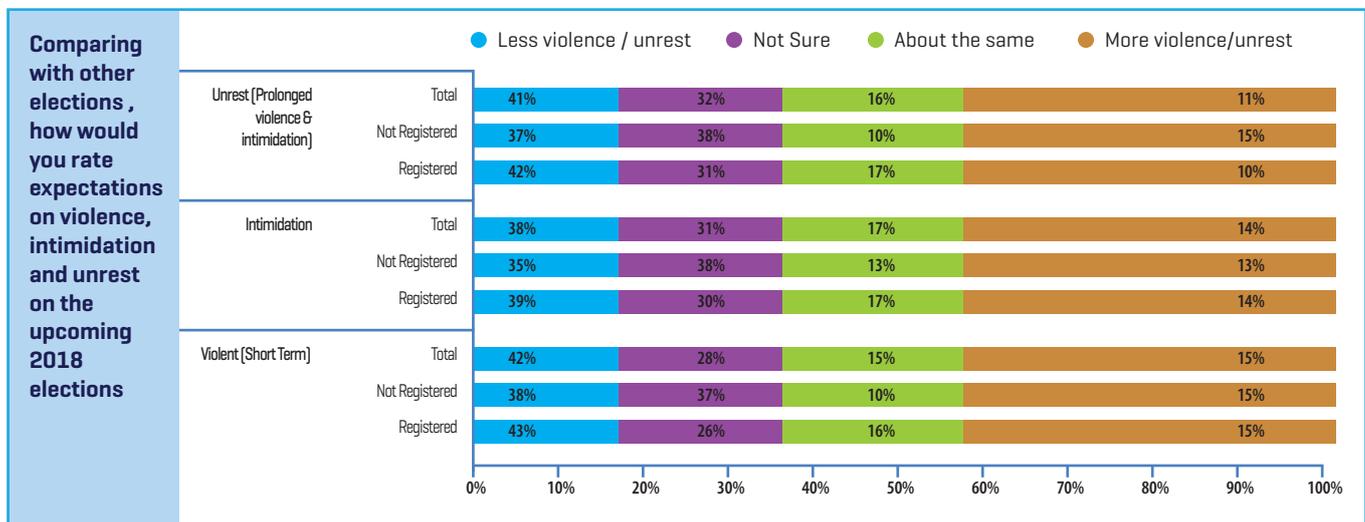
2.13 Electoral Violence, Corruption and Fraud

The research found out that respondents are expecting the upcoming elections to be less violent compared to previous elections and this is more pronounced among registered voters (43%). Unregistered voters seem not to be confident about the political environment and this could be an indicator of their current registration status (Figure 2.10). Although questions around trust of key institutions such as national government, judiciary and state media elicited mostly negative responses, citizens expect less violence in the coming election possibly as a result of government’s attempt to accord citizens some level of freedom of speech and to create a relatively more tolerant electoral environment than in the previous elections. However, freedom of speech and political tolerance are entitlements which every Zimbabwean should rightfully enjoy.

Findings show that 54% of respondents from Bulawayo province expect less violence in 2018 elections than in the previous elections, compared to 30% from Midlands province. Correspondingly, 50% and 27% of respondents from Bulawayo and Midlands provinces, respectively, are expecting less intimidation in the 2018 election. A similar trend is evident concerning the likelihood of unrest (prolonged violence) in the two provinces. However, what is not clear is why a significant number of respondents from Bulawayo province have not registered to vote despite acknowledgement of improvements in the electoral environment. Moreover, the same respondents have not expressed a significant interest in influencing how elections work in Zimbabwe.

Although Midlands province recorded the highest voter registration numbers nationally, respondents in this study revealed that citizens thereof have the highest concerns/fears about the likely prevalence of fear and intimidation during the 2018 election. This explains why the respondents expressed a desire to influence how elections work in Zimbabwe. This finding is revealing considering that the majority of respondents from the province were from a rural constituency which the ruling party considered to be its stronghold. The finding confirms the fact that although levels of interest in the 2018 election is generally high across all age groups and genders, mixed perceptions about the election still persist amongst citizens. In particular, gender disaggregation of responses on all questions to do with electoral violence, fraud and corruption revealed no major trend or differences of views between male and female respondents except that more men felt that there will be less violence, intimidation and unrest. Otherwise responses were fairly distributed across both positive and negative response categories such as agree, disagree and do not know. This finding confirms the conclusion that citizens have mixed perceptions and feelings about the 2018 election and as such it would be in the best interest of the country and its people for the coming elections to held in a free, fair and credible election.

Figure 2.10: Expectations on Violence, Intimidation and Unrest in the upcoming 2018 Elections



Regarding opinions on which is a more serious threat to free and fair elections in Zimbabwe, registered (34%) and unregistered (29%) respondents perceived violence and or intimidation as the more serious threat to free and fair elections while an equally significant segment of registered (22%) and unregistered respondents (29%) professed ignorance about which is a more seri-

Our
vote
is our
voice

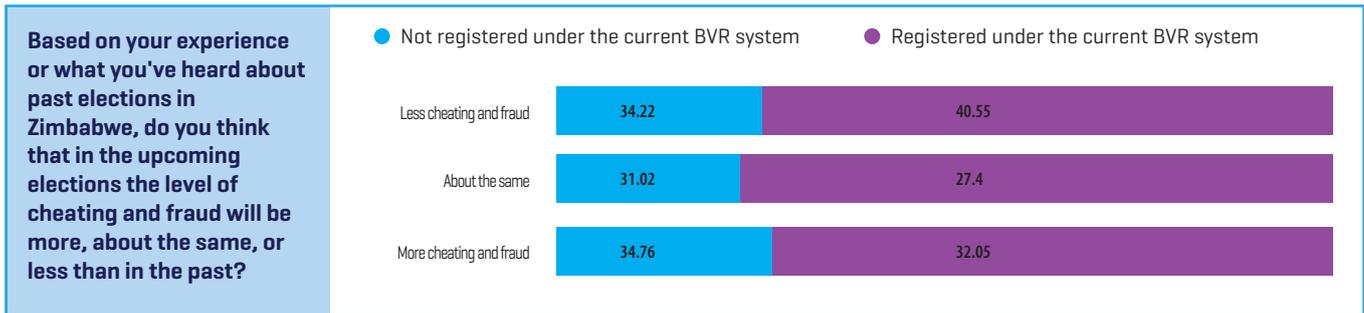


ous threat to free and fair elections in Zimbabwe – (Table 2.12). This finding again confirms the voter’s dilemma of intending to vote against a feeling of some level of concerns/discomfort or dissatisfaction about the process of the 2018 electoral process. Interestingly, 34% and 41% of registered and unregistered respondents respectively still think that there is likely to be less cheating and fraud in the 2018 elections compared to past elections (Figure 2.11).

Table 2.12: Opinion on which is a more serious threat to free and fair elections in Zimbabwe?

Registration Status	Violence or Intimidation	Malpractices or fraud	About the same	I don't know	Total
Registered	33.7%	29.7%	14.8%	21.8%	100.0%
Not registered	28.5%	25.4%	17.3%	28.8%	100.0%
Total	32.8%	28.9%	15.3%	23.0%	100.0%

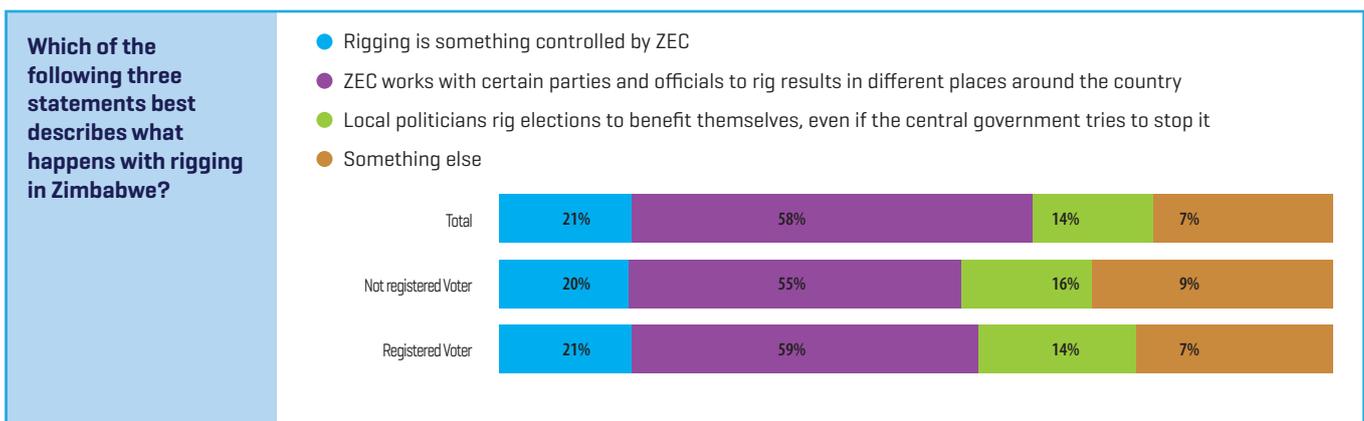
Figure 2.11: Perceived levels of Cheating and Fraud in the upcoming elections as a comparative of past elections



A significant proportion of citizens suspect that the electoral process in Zimbabwe is sometimes rigged. Both registered (59%) and unregistered (55%) respondents in this study perceived that much of the rigging is done by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) working in cahoots with certain political parties and officials. Forty seven percent (47%) of respondents from Bulawayo and 49% from Midlands’s province hold a similar view about rigging whilst 47% and 49% of female and male respondents, respectively, also hold the same view. Perceptions of rigging by local politicians were insignificant in this study (less than 20% for both registered and unregistered respondents and far less than 15% for both provinces as well as for male and female respondents) – (Figure 2.12) – confirming the fact that rigging, if it happens, is a high level phenomenon.

Therefore, 2018 elections provide a unique opportunity for the country to establish a lasting foundation for sustainable democracy by delivering a free, fair and credible election which would resultantly rejuvenate citizens’ trust of electoral processes in particular and national government in general. It is a proven fact that mutual trust between the governed authorities and the governing is instrumental in nation-building.²

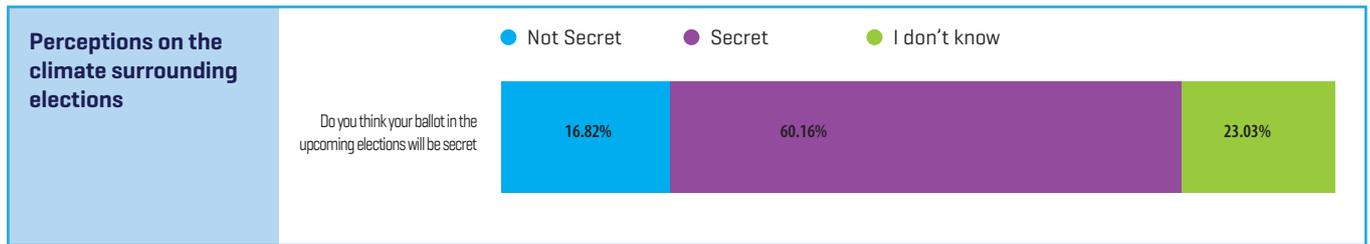
Figure 2.12: Perceptions about Rigging of Elections in Zimbabwe



2.14 Perceptions on the Climate Surrounding Elections

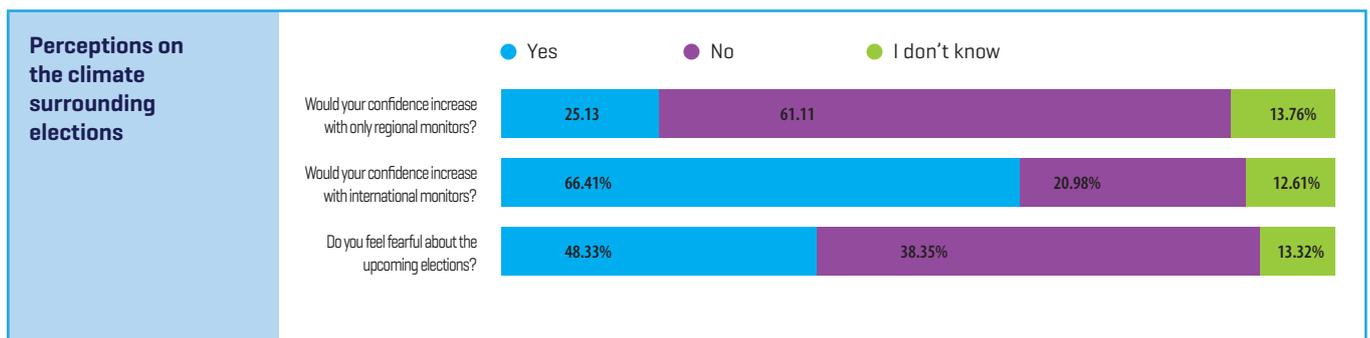
About 69% of respondents felt that the ballot in the 2018 elections will be secret whilst others felt that it was not going to be secret (17%). However, the remaining twenty three percent (23%) alluded that they do not know anything about the issue – (Figure 2.13). Male and female respondents recorded almost the same score – 60%.

Figure 2.13: Perceptions on the Secrecy of the Ballot in the Upcoming 2018 Elections.



Forty eight percent (48%) of the respondents reported that they are fearful about the 2018 elections. Further to earlier revelations regarding the prevalence of fear of intimidation and violence amongst respondents from Midlands, the majority of the respondents (54%) from that province are more fearful of 2018 elections than those from Bulawayo (43%). Fifty one percent (51%) of females (compared to 56% of males) reported being fearful of the coming election. Thus, fear still remains a key factor in this election despite the general improvement in the election environment. On determinants of confidence levels regarding the election, 66% of the respondents alluded that their confidence would increase with international observers. Citizens (25%) feel that having regional monitors alone will do little to increase their confidence - (Figure 2.14). Gender disaggregated findings on this matter confirm a similar trend of more trust for international as compared to regional observers. The involvement of external observers especially international observers (beyond AU and SADC) will thus improve the credibility and integrity of election outcomes. While the research tools used in this study were not designed to solicit for reasons why they have lost confidence in regional observers, it could be safely inferred that citizens feel that observers from inter-governmental agencies are less effective in discharging their mandates. On the other hand, international observers generally fare well in sticking to international principles of election observation. However, it is an established principle that in any election, external observers should allow local stakeholders and citizens to determine the credibility and legitimacy of election outcomes.

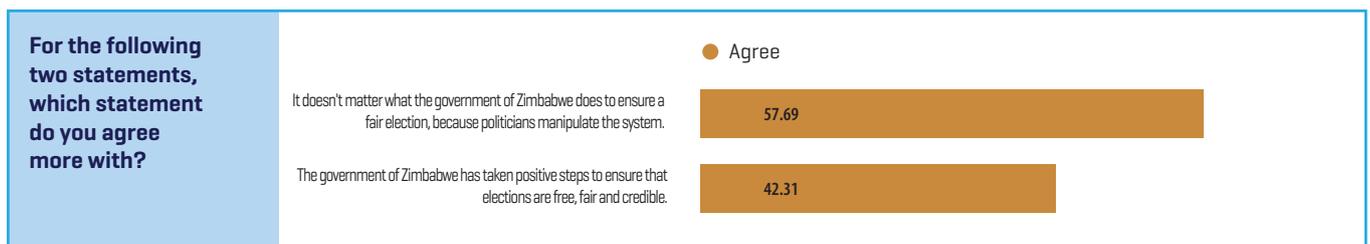
Figure 2.14: Perceptions on the Climate Surrounding Elections



2.15 Government Commitment to Political Engagement

Respondents (58%) reported that it does not matter what the GoZ does to ensure a free and fair election because politicians manipulate the system. However, results reported elsewhere in this report indicated that politicians conspire with ZEC to manipulate the electoral system. Manipulation of the system by politicians is also linked to the growing suspicion that ZEC and some political parties and officials work together to rig elections. Despite the high risk of political manipulation, forty two percent (42%) of the respondents hold that the GoZ has taken positive steps to ensure that elections are free, fair and credible (Figure 2.15). The findings further affirm the mixed feelings of confidence and despair amongst citizens regarding the 2018 election.

Figure 2.15: Level of Government Commitment to Free and Fair Elections

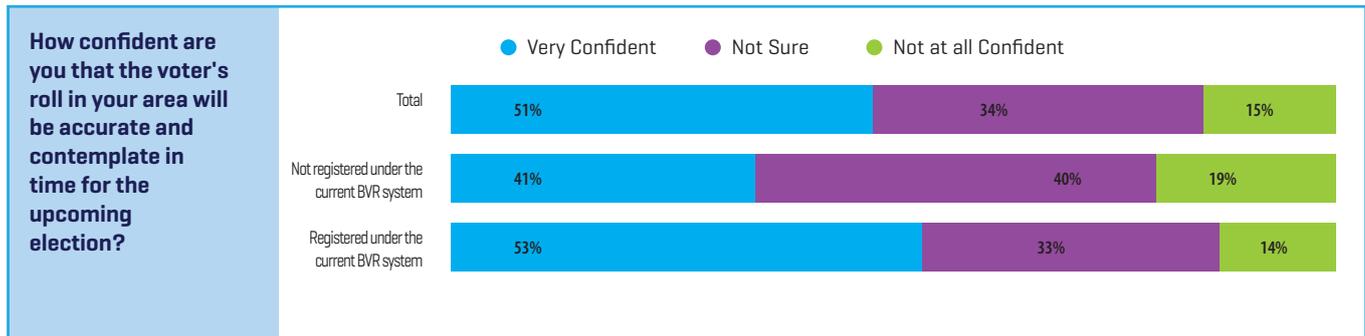


2.16 Confidence in Voter's Roll Accuracy and Completeness in Time for the Upcoming Elections

The majority of the electorate (51%) expressed confidence that the voters roll will be accurate and complete in time for the 2018 elections. The confidence is correspondingly higher among the registered voters as compared to the nonregistered eligible

voters (Figure 2.16) and also amongst male and female respondents. It is possible that this confidence arises from the positive steps that government has reportedly taken to ensure elections are free, fair and credible (Figure 2.15).

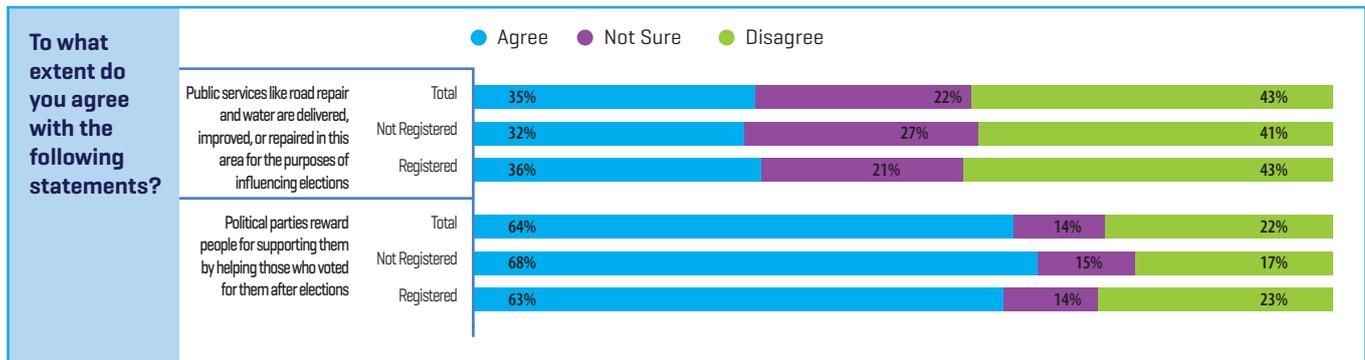
Figure 2.16: Levels of Confidence in Voter's Roll Accuracy and Completeness



2.17 Political Engagement

The majority of the respondents (64%) in the present study reported that public services like road repair and water are mostly delivered, improved, or repaired in their areas for purposes of influencing elections. A study on local government elections by We Pay You Deliver Consortium (2017), funded by the Danish Christian Aid, found that local authority elections are not accorded ample significance during harmonized elections resulting in persistent poor service delivery in most cities and towns in Zimbabwe. This observation is compounded by the general lack of effective mechanisms for ensuring accountability in Zimbabwe which has seen some candidates being re-elected despite having performed badly in their previous terms of office – in service delivery terms. Moreover, the majority of the electorate alluded that political parties do not actually reward people for supporting them by helping those who voted for them after elections (43%) – (Figure 2.17).

Figure 2.17: Levels of Confidence in Voter's Roll Accuracy and Completeness



There is a significant proportion of both registered (50%) and nonregistered voters (53%) who perceive that cheating in the counting of the ballots is a possibility. Furthermore, a significant proportion of registered voters (53%) think that officials alter results after the ballots have been counted – (Table 2.14).

Table 2.14: Perceptions on the Electoral Process

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	Non registered voters	Registered voters
Certain candidates prevented from running for office	32.94%	39.08%
Authorities have the means to know how I voted	23.32%	23.01%
Some names may be deliberately missing on the electoral voters' roll at the polling station	44.88%	47.32%
People may be prevented from voting	27.41%	30.94%
Some officials may stuff ballot boxes	36.36%	39.36%
People voting more than once	27.77%	31.66%
Cheating in counting the ballots	53.63%	50.13%
Employers influencing the voting choices of employees.	35.29%	41.69%
Officials altering the results after the ballots have been counted	46.81%	53.09%
Officials withholding results after the ballots have been counted.	46.11%	47.34%

2.18 Democracy and Governance

When asked to rank the performance of the country in terms of democracy and governance, the country scored below 50% across on all facets of good governance suggesting a generalized trend of poor governance and the resultant poor social contract. Therefore, while there is huge interest in this election, as well as an improved election environment compared to previous elections, it is incontrovertible that there are outstanding electoral reform issues that are instrumental for democracy in Zimbabwe. The finding corroborates the rankings by global governance outfits in which the country has consistently maintained a position below the first half of the 54 African countries that are usually monitored. Respondents (23%) believe that people are not free to criticize the government without fear, and this is a clear limitation on the people’s freedom of speech.

The study was also interested in understanding the views of citizens in regard to Zimbabwe’s election system particularly the harmonization of local authority, parliamentary and Presidential elections. In that regard, 31% of registered and 27% of non-registered voters felt that elections should be harmonized - (Table 2.15). However, previous research by the We Pay You Deliver Consortium (2017) established that the electorate tends to fail to prioritize local authority elections when elections are harmonized.

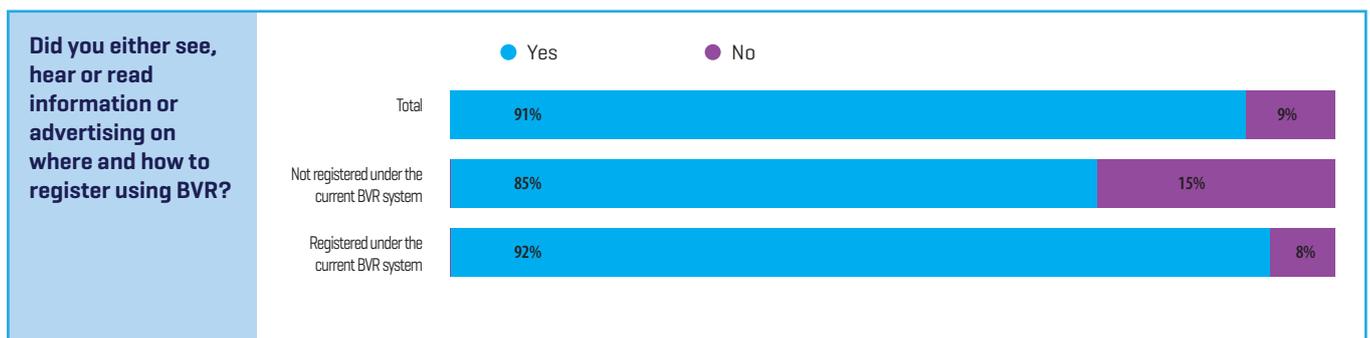
Table 2.15: Democracy and Governance Issues

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	Non registered voters	Registered voters
Zimbabwe’s citizens have the power to influence the policies and actions of the government	32.94%	39.08%
People are free to criticize the government without fear	23.32%	23.01%
People can join any political party or organization they wish	44.88%	47.32%
Women should be voted into power	27.41%	30.94%
Independent candidates should be voted for	36.36%	39.36%
Elections should not be harmonized	27.77%	31.66%

2.19 Access to Information on Voting and Biometric Voter Registration (BVR)

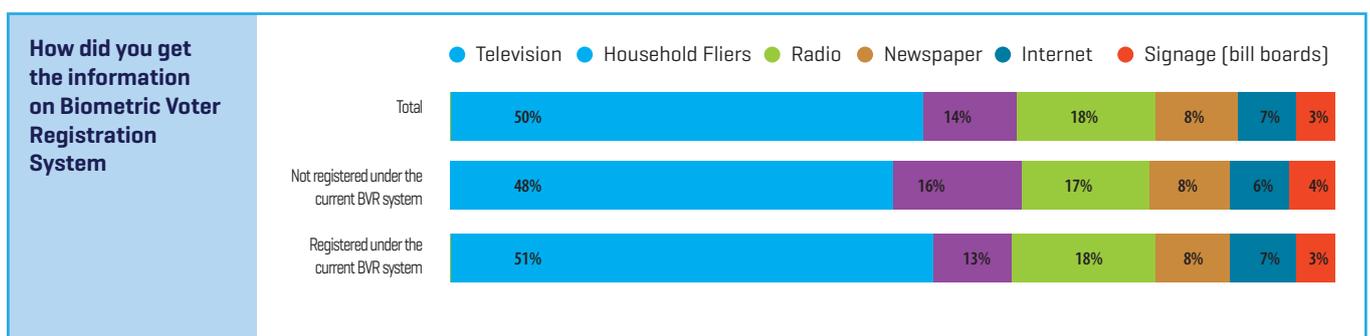
The majority of respondents (91%) acknowledged that they heard or read information or advertising on where and how to register using BVR – (Figure 2.18). However, although the majority of the respondents in both provinces have reported good access to information about BVR and the voting process, according to ZEC, Bulawayo Metropolitan Province has the lowest voter registration nationally (ZEC, 2018). Future research should investigate the disconnect between high access to information and low interest in registering to vote in the case of respondents from Bulawayo province.

Figure 2.18: Level of exposure to the BVR system registration



The study revealed that the majority of the respondents were exposed to information through television (50%) whilst radio and household fliers accounted for 18% and 14% respectively (Figure 2.19).

Figure 2.19: Types of media for BVR system exposure



A key question asked to respondents pertained to their levels of confidence on the BVR. In response, most respondents (63%) – both registered and unregistered – reported that they are confident about the BVR system. This finding is contrary to popular perception that a growing proportion of the population has misgivings about the system. Perhaps the high level of confidence could be attributed to increased access to information and publicity about BVR as well as the fact that citizens made of the system during voter registration.

Figure 2.20: Level of Confidence with the BVR system



Chapter 3 Conclusions And Recommendations

This chapter outlines the key conclusions and recommendations of the study as they relate to the set research objectives/questions.

Summary of findings

Citizen Interest to participate in elections

- The study revealed that there has been a significant increase in interest in elections (48%) from the 2013 to 2018 elections by both registered (27%) and unregistered (21%) respondents
- While interest in the 2013 elections was generally lower (Midlands 54%; Bulawayo 50%), respondents from both provinces have shown significant increase in interest in the 2018 elections - 85% and 71% respectively.
- Results also show that there has been some tremendous increase in interest to vote by all age groups. However, the youth interests have been significant by rising from 26% in 2013 to 58% in 2018 elections (28% increment)
- Findings show that the interest of female respondents in both the 2013 and 2018 elections increased from 51% to 80% respectively, while that of male respondents grew from 54% to 79%. Further, both genders (male: 79%; females: 79%) indicated significant increase in interest in wanting to influence the way elections work in Zimbabwe.
- Contrary to expectation, respondents from Bulawayo province registered relatively lower interest (70%, compared to 86% from Midlands) in changing the way elections work in Zimbabwe

From the foregoing, it is evident that the 2018 harmonized elections have attracted huge interests from across all demographic, gender and other social groups and across all geographical areas in Zimbabwe. The international community too has not been spared from observing the elections. As a precious and yet a delicate resource, this spurt in citizen interests in elections will either make or break the future of Zimbabwe, hence the earlier assertion that the country has, through this election, an opportunity to establish solid foundations for democracy, peace and development. Therefore, the key question that remains unanswered is whether or not political parties, ZEC and other electoral stakeholders are prepared to facilitate and/or accept the will of the people.

Citizen Perceptions on elections

There were both negative and positive perceptions on elections amongst respondents:

- The majority of respondents acknowledge that elections are a way to choose among particular policies (67%). About 64% of female respondents from Bulawayo province held the same view compared to 70% of those from Midlands province.
- Results have shown that respondents (52%) believe that elections are a way to hold government accountable for past actions. Fifty percent (50%) of females and 52% of male respondents hold a similar view.
- There is also a considerable view amongst respondents (58%) that participating in elections is a way to comment on the state of the nation
- Respondents revealed that there is a disjoint between the promise of an election and what they have seen happening after elections. The lived reality of the respondents seems to be that elections have become a way of furthering the interest of a specific privileged group in the society.

Although interest in the 2018 election is generally high, the findings of this study show a strong orientation towards mixed perceptions and feelings on the part of citizens. Both provinces have shown the same general orientation. However, this trend has been worsened by the fact that Bulawayo and Midlands provinces are characterised by mixed ethnic-composition of Ndebele and Shona speaking people. Each of these ethnic groups has its own particular experience and view about national processes including elections.

Policy Recommendations

Political parties and other electoral stakeholders should embrace principles of inclusivity, non-violence and conflict sensitivity before, during and after elections, in the interest of peace and the aspirations of the citizenry. Inclusivity partly implies that divisive politics should be done away with e.g. the politicization of identity.

National stakeholders including the Church should begin to set their minds on the post-election period while participating in the election. One particular urgent matter is the beginning of a national envisioning process which will aim at articulating a cohesive national vision based on three strategic pillars, namely; peace and reconciliation, economic recovery and constitutionalism. This is important as citizens' interests in elections will most likely spill over to other national processes, hence the need to develop an inclusive and nationally owned strategy for nation building.

Policy Recommendations

Political parties should focus their campaigns on demonstrating their respective policy capabilities particularly on service delivery issues. The campaigns should be viewed and experienced as competition of ideas on how the country can move forward on political, social and economic fronts.

Political parties, civil society and relevant government ministries and institutions should focus on dissemination of standardized, accurate and timely information about the electoral process including the BVR system and the actual voting process in order to eliminate negative perceptions about elections.

Citizen trust in key institutions

- Among the key institutions identified in this study, the army (66%), private press (43%) and the judiciary (41%) are the most trusted institutions. The state press (27%), local government elected officials (29%) and the social media (30%) were ranked the least trusted institutions.
- Further disaggregation of the findings by province and gender indicates a consistently high level of trust of the military by respondents from both Midlands (65%) and Bulawayo (67%) and 66% for both genders. This relatively higher level of trust in the army by the citizens may have been occasioned by the euphoria of the events of 18 November 2018.
- Despite the general increase in interest in the forthcoming election, citizens' mistrust of the national government (Bulawayo, 42%; Midlands, 41%) and judiciary (Bulawayo, 41%; Midlands, 35%) as the primary administrators for the 2018 election is worrying – it may be a suggestion that the citizenry is not fully confident about 2018 elections but is taking chances with the new administration. Gender disaggregated findings confirm this development, showing that 42% of female and 28% of male respondents hold the same view that national government cannot be fully trusted.
- Gender dimensions on respondents' views also confirms the observation that state media is largely mistrusted - 42% of both male and female respondents.

Policy Recommendations

The new government which will come into office following the holding of elections should prioritise and promote the alignment of laws with the constitution and entrenchment of the spirit of constitutionalism. As such, all institutions of the state as well as private actors should abide by the law, and parliament should ensure the constitution is fully implemented and protected .

Trust is earned and not asked for. Therefore, government and all political parties should consistently pursue people-centred policies and be consistent in doing so. The attainment of trust should begin with ensuring that the high interest in the 2018 elections is both sustained and supported with improved service delivery in a just and progressive manner.

Barriers to citizen participation

- The electorate strongly felt that those elected to parliament soon lose touch with the people (80%). Both men and women who responded to the questionnaire actively held this view – 81% and 80%, respectively. This is despite the fact that respondents acknowledged that during electoral campaign periods, political parties and candidates discuss issues that really are of interest to voters (68%). On this issue, 69% of male and 68% of female respondents held the same view.
- About 59% of respondents think that most of the time people in government cannot be trusted to do the right thing while 65% are of the view that government does not care about their views nor do they have a say over what government does (60%).
- A significant proportion of the electorate felt that political parties are too influenced by people with lots of money (65%), with both male and female respondents scoring exactly the same percentage. Disaggregation of findings by province confirmed this trend: 68% in Bulawayo and 63% in Midlands. Further, respondents (65%) felt that government does not care what the general populace thinks. On this matter, out of the total segment of respondents from Bulawayo and Midlands provinces, the majority (66% and 63% respectively), held similar views.
- A significant number of the electorate is of the opinion that Churches (61%) and the educational system (56%) are not playing an active role in educating citizens about the benefits of voting and political participation.

Policy Recommendations

The gap between elected officials and the electorate should be drastically minimised to avoid the entrenchment of mistrust and disengagement from political/national processes by citizens. This intervention should be supported by consistent public education on the role of public officials, by civil society organizations.

Active citizen participation should be placed high up on government agenda as it is the central feature of a democratic society. Citizen participation is the core element of a nation-building process; it enables effective national ownership of processes by citizens with government providing a suitable environment and leadership.

The Church should amplify its role in the public space by developing capable leadership and rolling out processes to empower the Church to be a champion of democracy, peace and development.

Education curriculum at all levels should embrace the requirement for peace and justice in society, at all times.

Electoral Violence Corruption and Fraud

- Respondents expect the upcoming elections to be less violent compared to previous elections and this is more pronounced among registered voters (43%). Findings show that 54% of respondents from Bulawayo province expect less violence in 2018 elections than in the previous elections, compared to 30% from Midlands province. Correspondingly, 50% and 27% of respondents from Bulawayo and Midlands provinces, respectively, are expecting less intimidation in the 2018 election
- Regarding opinions on which is a more serious threat to free and fair elections in Zimbabwe, registered (34%) and unregistered (30%) respondents perceive violence and or intimidation as the more serious threat to free and fair elections while an equally significant segment of registered (22%) and unregistered respondents (29%) professed ignorance about which is a more serious threat to free and fair elections in Zimbabwe
- A significant proportion of citizens suspect that the electoral process in Zimbabwe is sometimes rigged. Both registered (59%) and unregistered (55%) respondents in this study perceive that much of the rigging is done by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) working in cahoots with certain political parties and officials. Forty seven percent (47%) of respondents from Bulawayo and 49% from Midlands's province hold a similar view about rigging whilst 47% and 49% of female and male respondents, respectively, also hold the same view
- About 69% of respondents felt that the ballot in the 2018 elections will be secret whilst others felt that it was not going to be secret (17%). However, the remaining twenty three percent (14%) alluded that they do not know anything about the issue. Male and female respondents recorded almost the same score – 60%.

Policy Recommendations

As a supposedly impartial stakeholder, the church should consider making widely available, expanding and institutionalizing its conflict mediation mechanisms, ensuring that it has both a local and national reach.

The institution of traditional leaders, the church and other relevant institutions should continue to promote and protect positive societal values and ethics and to advance social cohesion as the bed rock for a just, peaceful and prosperous body polity.

The church, in its ecumenical stature, should invariably participate in elections including by setting the agenda for peace and by observing the elections and subsequently asserting its voice on the election outcome.

Government's Commitment to political engagement

- Respondents (58%) reported that it does not matter what the GoZ does to ensure a free and fair election because politicians manipulate the system
- Despite the high risk of political manipulation, forty two percent (42%) of the respondents hold that the Government of Zimbabwe GoZ has taken positive steps to ensure that elections are free, fair and credible
- The majority of the electorate (51%) expressed confidence that the voters roll will be accurate and complete in time for the 2018 elections.
- The majority of the respondents (64%) in the present study reported that public services like road repair and water are mostly delivered, improved, or repaired in their areas for purposes of influencing elections.
- There is a significant proportion of both registered (50%) and nonregistered voters (53%) who perceive that cheating in the counting of the ballots is a possibility. Also, a significant proportion of registered voters (53%) think that officials alter results after the ballots have been counted

Policy Recommendations

The Parliament of Zimbabwe (PoZ) should cultivate the ethos of citizen participation in the whole of government and give prominency to it both through legislative and policy arrangements. Active citizenship, dialogue and engagement will go a long way in addressing the challenges of social fragmentation and general mistrust between public officials and citizens.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should compliment efforts by the PoZ in pushing for systematic operationalization of citizen participation and engagement as a key determinant of the success and or failure of government programmes and policies.

Democracy and good governance

- When respondents were asked to rank the performance of the country in terms of democracy and governance, it scored below 50% across all facets of good governance suggesting a generalized trend of poor governance and the resultant poor social contract.
- 31% of registered and 27% of nonregistered voters felt that harmonization of elections is helpful and acceptable
- The majority of respondents (91%) acknowledged that they heard or read information or advertising on where and how to register using BVR
- In response, most respondents (63%) reported that they are confident about the BVR system

Policy Recommendations

The GoZ should consider embracing an institutional transformation agenda in the post election era, targeting most public institutions.

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Annexes

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Colorful posters or notices pinned to the brick wall in the background.

Our
vote
is our
voice



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