

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



UPDATE 3 – ZESN LTO REPORT ON THE PRE-ELECTION POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT AND OBSERVATION OF KEY ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN MUTOKO NORTH

20 November 2018

Introduction

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) continues to observe the pre-election environment and key electoral processes in Mutoko North constituency ahead of the by-election set for Saturday 24 November 2018. This Long Term Observers' (LTOs) report covers the period from 28 October to 10 November 2018.

ZEC Preparations

ZEC preparations in the run up to the by-election are reported to be on course. For instance, LTOs reported that by 10 November, the ZEC Constituency office and Ward offices had been opened.

Voter Education

During the period under review, ZESN carried out CVE activities in the Constituency such as distribution of voter education materials and training of Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) on civic and voter education. In addition, LTOs reported that ZEC, Faith Based Organisations (FBOs), Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and political parties were conducting Voter Education (VE) on the election date and polling station location using the local language. Voter education efforts by FBOs mainly targeted women and youth while political parties also targeted women, youth, and illiterate voters. For instance, in Ward 2 a local CBO, Youth Initiatives Mutoko organised sports tournaments where the electorate were urged to participate peacefully in the by-election and distributed materials such as t-shirts and flyers.



ZEC Voter education posters are visible throughout the Constituency. This poster was posted on a tree in Ward 5 by a ZEC voter education team.

Political Party Campaigns

Reports received from LTOs indicate that while both ZANU-PF and MDC Alliance are visibly campaigning, the former is actively campaigning more than the latter. This is particularly so as it relates to the holding of party campaign rallies. Over the reporting period, LTOs reported on more than 10 rallies held by ZANU-PF in different wards. Any analysis of the report and previous electoral trends seem to indicate that the constituency is a ZANU-PF stronghold where other political parties find it difficult to openly campaign, particularly as it relates to the holding rallies. ZESN did not receive any report of an MDC Alliance or NCA rally in the constituency over the reporting period. Campaigns by the MDC Alliance have mainly been through door-to-door visits, vehicle parades and posters on free (unpaid for) sites.



The MDC Alliance has made use of vehicles to conduct campaigns around the Constituency.

The table below shows places and dates of some of the reported ZANU-PF rallies and meetings:

Date	Ward	Village/Place	Estimated number of attendees
28 October	2	Chindega Primary School	
29 October	6	Tsiga Kubasa Village, Chiutsi Township Hall	
30 October	7	Nyamuzuwe Village	Over 200 people
30 October	12	Chitekwe Community Hall	
30 October	8	Bondamakara Village	83 people
2 November	12	Chikondoma Township	About 600 people
2 November	10	Nyamakope Township	56 people
3 November	8	Botsanzira Village	About 90 people
3 November	6	Dandara	About 75 people
9 November	11	Nyamutsahuni Branch	About 145 people
10 November	7	Nyamuzuwe Village	Over 300 people

On 2 November, ZANU-PF held a rally at Chikondoma Stadium in Ward 12. The rally was attended by some of the party's central members such as Sydney Sekeramayi, Biggie Matiza, Mable Chinomona, and Engelbert Rugeje, among others. The party addressed the issue of increases in prices of basic commodities and gave an opportunity to the outgoing MP for Mutoko North Mable Chinomona to bid the constituency farewell. The rally which was held without incidents of violence or disruption was attended by an estimated 500 people mostly women.

While all the rallies were reported to have been held in a relatively peaceful environment, a few incidents of worrying remarks were reported. For example, at a rally held on 3 November 2018 in Dandara Village, Mutoko North Ward 6, one speaker reportedly said “*Nzvimbo ino nyangwe zvikadzi haitongwe neMDC*” (come what may, this area will never be governed by the MDC). The constituency was also declared a ‘no go area for the opposition at some ZANU-PF rallies. The war veterans were identified as the main perpetrators of intimidation. At a meeting held by ZANU-PF on 30 October at Chitekwe Community Hall in Ward 12, intentions were expressed to follow up on the MDC Alliance team that was said to be holding a meeting at Madziwa Township during the night and giving money to supporters.

Apart from rallies, campaigns were also done through the use of posters or banners on free sites; door to door campaigns; meetings (less than 100 people); rallies (more than 100 people); t-shirts; wristbands; and wrappers for women (*mazambira*). While both the MDC Alliance and ZANU-PF have visibly used some or all of these methods, the NCA has reportedly used none. Given that there has not been a report on any campaign activities by the NCA, the election will essentially be a race between the MDC Alliance and ZANU-PF.

Over the reporting period, with the exception of Wards 8 and Ward 12 where government vehicles were said to have been used for campaigning by ZANU-PF, there were no reported cases of the abuse of State resources.



Campaign posters belonging to the ZANU PF and MDC Alliance candidates

Rights and Freedoms

ZESN received reports of the violations of rights and freedoms suffered by the electorate over the reporting period. These include violations of the freedom of assembly, association, and speech.

Freedom of Assembly

Long Term Observers reported on cases where people were forced to attend ZANU-PF rallies. This was reported in Wards 4, 6, and 12. In some cases, while people were not necessarily forced to attend rallies, they would opt to attend without being compelled as they feared victimization.

Freedom of Speech

In general, people were not free to speak about politics in the constituency. Reports to that effect were received from wards 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12. In particular, people were not at liberty to say anything negative about the ruling party or anything positive about the opposition for fear of victimization by ZANU-PF supporters.

Freedom of Association

It was reported, for example in Wards 6 and 12, that people were not free to wear their respective party regalia. In Ward 4, people were cautioned that they risked losing their property if they voted for an opposition party. People also choose to associate with the ruling party so that they do not risk losing out on aid that is deliberately politicized. As observed in the run up to the 30 July 2018 Harmonised elections, food aid is being distributed along partisan lines. At a rally held on 3 November 2018 in Botsanzira Village, those who would vote for the MDC Alliance were cautioned that they risked losing their lives. It was also reported that those seen participating in activities of the MDC Alliance would not get any benefits from government programmes. At the same rally, it was reported that a speaker warned that blood would be spilt if people were to vote for the opposition which was blamed for the suffering that people are currently going through.

Conclusion

ZESN continues to observe developments and electoral processes in the run up to the 24 November by-election. Furthermore, the Network will deploy observers on Election Day to track all the electoral processes including counting and results tabulation.