

Zimbabwe Election Support Network



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Promoting Democratic
Elections In Zimbabwe

Long Term Election Observation Update

2022 Update # 1

INTRODUCTION

In January 2022, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) announced that it would be conducting mobile voter registration exercises in February and April 2022. The first phase of the mobile voter registration exercise was conducted from the first to the 28th of February 2022. While the second phase is scheduled for 11-30 April 2022.

Zimbabwe Elections Support Network (ZESN) Long-Term Observers (LTOs) were on the ground monitoring electoral and political developments throughout the country. This report covers developments that occurred in the last two weeks of February 2022. ZESN hopes that the report will complement the information available for use in the development and reinforcement of strategies aimed at

safeguarding the health of citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic. Electoral developments within the reporting period are also highlighted and appropriate recommendations proffered for consideration by the different electoral stakeholders.

ELECTION PREPARATIONS BY ZEC

ZEC conducted the first phase of the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) exercise which primarily seeks to enroll as many eligible citizens as possible, on-to-the voter registers for the 210 National Assembly Constituencies ahead of the upcoming boundary delimitation process.

In line with Statutory Instrument (SI) 2 of 2022, by-elections are scheduled to take place in 28 National Assembly constituencies and 122 council seats. LTOs noted that in most constituencies and

wards where by-elections are scheduled to take place, election campaign materials such as posters were very visible.

POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

LTOs reported a surge in political campaign activities by political parties following the proclamation of the dates for the by-elections. ZANU-PF¹, CCC², MDC-Alliance³, ZAPU⁴ and Mthwakazi Republic party campaign teams were spotted conducting political campaigns during the reporting period.

Methods used by political parties to campaign include door to door visits, physical meetings, posters, social media and mobile roadshows and the use of public address systems such as hailers.

The campaigns have been marred by allegations of partisan conduct by traditional leaders, bussing of supporters to rallies and unjustly denying other parties access to public facilities.

In Chiredzi West and Chikomba Central ZANU-PF supporters were allegedly bussed

to rallies. In Gokwe Gumunyu, traditional leaders were allegedly mobilizing their subjects to attend ZANU-PF meetings. Opposition parties' access to public spaces for the purposes of campaigning were reportedly restricted. For instance, in Kambuzuma, CCC members were allegedly denied access to a community hall for their meeting.

Political parties were mostly encouraging their supporters to register ahead of the upcoming boundary delimitation process and the 2023 General Elections.

ENJOYMENT OF POLITICAL RIGHTS

The enjoyment of civil and political rights is sacrosanct for democracy. LTOs also followed the electoral and political developments with a keen interest in the enjoyment of political rights. On political rights, LTOs assessed access to media, freedom of speech, association and liberty to wear party regalia of choice.

LTO reports show inequality in the level of enjoyment of political rights. For example, reports received from Mwenezi West and

¹ The Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF)

² Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC)

³ The Movement for Democratic Change Alliance

⁴ The Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU)

Goromonzi South indicated that people were generally afraid to talk about politics and were attending some rallies out of fear of possible victimization if they did not attend. The latter was also reported in Murewa West.

In some instances, observers noted that even in Constituencies where the environment seemed calm, some members of the opposition seemed afraid to publicly put on their party regalia. In Wedza South, Gwanda South and Chivi Central constituencies people, especially members of the opposition parties, were generally afraid of wearing their party regalia fearing victimization or being barred from accessing public goods and services.

In Marondera Central, it was reported that one person had been attacked by suspected ZANU-PF youth for wearing a yellow t-shirt. Whilst in Muzarabani North, ZANU-PF Chairperson for Takaitanga district allegedly threatened some people for wearing anything yellow.

However, the situation was reported to be different in constituencies, such as Mberengwa West and Chegutu West where it was reported that people were

freely putting on political regalia of their choice and were not being compelled to attend gatherings of any political party.

VOTER EDUCATION

During the reporting period, ZEC was still conducting voter education for the BVR blitz with voter education for by-elections scheduled to commence from 12 to 16 March as per ZEC's roadmap.

To complement ZEC efforts, voter education was also conducted by multiple stakeholders including civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs). Voter educators using hailers, with posters and some moving around were spotted in various constituencies and wards. Instances, where voter educators addressed public meetings, were also reported.

Voter education messages were predominantly communicated through Shona and English. In constituencies around the Midlands province and the southern parts of the country, LTOs reported that Ndebele was also used. In some cases, for example in Mwenezi West and Gwanda Central voter educators were

using local dialects including Sisotho, Ndebele, Venda and Xitsonga (ChiChangani).

However, in other constituencies, local languages were not being adequately used. This was reportedly the case in Mberengwa West for example where English and Shona were being used without Ndebele being used as much in a constituency that has some Ndebele speaking people. The same was reported in Kariba where there are some Tonga speaking people.

Despite these concerted efforts to provide voter education, LTOs reported that voter education appeared insufficient.

VOTER REGISTRATION

In general, LTO reports indicated that voter registration turnout was low in constituencies around the country.

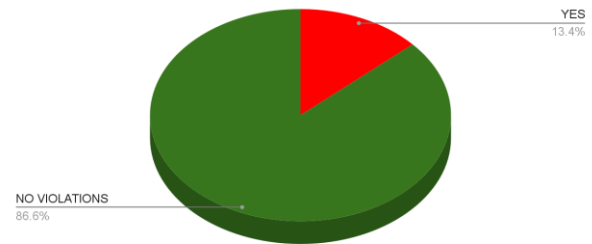
One of the main contributors to this reported low turnout by some prospective voters was lack of national identity documents.

ELECTORAL VIOLATIONS

Cases of electoral violations were minimal. Reports of electoral violations that were

captured include election-related violence, disruption of political gatherings or meetings and prevention of political parties from campaigning.

Electoral Violations



Cases of electoral violations were reported in both urban and rural constituencies such as Mudzi South, Kwekwe, Mberengwa West and Lupane West. The worst-case that was reported was the altercation between suspected ruling party supporters and those of the CCC party which resulted in the death of one person, at a CCC rally in Kwekwe.

MULTI-PARTY LIAISON COMMITTEES

The Electoral Act provides for the existence of Multi-Party Liaison Committees for managing conflict relating to or within the electoral processes. Multi-Party Liaison Committees are set up and chaired by ZEC at national, constituency,

and district levels. With increasing cases of violations, violence and restrictions Multi-party Liaison Committees are expected to meet and resolve such issues.

WOMEN AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Generally, women participation remained low. LTOs reported that ZEC voter education and registration teams comprised significant numbers of women. Women had roles as voter registration officials. LTOs also reported that the voter education exercises were mostly targeting women and youth however, save for ZEC all other stakeholders conducting voter education appeared to have seconded predominantly male voter educators.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings in this report ZESN recommends the following;

1. The Government should ensure that national identity documents are available to those that require them for various purposes including to register as voters.
2. The Government should ensure the equal enjoyment of civil and

political rights across the political divide.

3. Political parties desist from using hate speech and insightful language.
4. The intensification of voter education campaigns ahead of the second mobile registration exercise scheduled for April 2022.
5. Political parties commit to resolve low-level disputes using the Multi-Party Liaison Committees to ensure the effective and timely management of electoral conflicts.