

# ***ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK***



## ***REPORT ON THE***



***BIKITA- WEST NATIONAL ASSEMBLY***

***BY-ELECTION***

***HELD ON 21 JANUARY 2017***

## Table of Contents

### **Contents**

<b>1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. BACKGROUND TO THE BY-ELECTION .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.1. The Observation Mission .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4. ELECTION CAMPAIGNS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>5. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5.1. Administration of the Elections .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5.2. Voter Education.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5.3. ZESN Observations during the voter education exercise.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5.4. Voter Registration .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>6. GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>6.1. Gender Equality and Special Needs Groups .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>7. ELECTION DAY OBSERVATIONS.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>9. RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>10. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>23</b>

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) is grateful and indebted to the member organisations and volunteers who made observation of the Bikita West by-election possible.

The ZESN Members assisted in the recruitment of the 33 volunteers who were deployed to the 11 Ward Collation Centres, Constituency Collation Centre and the two mobile observation teams. ZESN appreciates the volunteers who demonstrated considerable commitment and effort to observe electoral processes such as pre-electoral environment and preparations, nomination, voter registration and polling day processes. Without their commitment this and other reports by ZESN on the elections would not have been possible.

ZESN observers objectively reported on the processes and conducted themselves professionally throughout the Election Day. Their assessment of the by - election was informed by the Electoral Laws of Zimbabwe and a number of regional and international conventions and declarations which Zimbabwe is signatory to such as the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

ZESN observation was also guided by the GNDEM's Declaration of Global Principles for Nonpartisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations, and the Code of Conduct for Nonpartisan Citizen Election Observers.

ZESN commends the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) whose indispensable cooperation made our election observation successful. ZESN also applauds citizens of Bikita West Constituency for coming in their number to vote on elections day.

## ACRONYMS

ACHPR	African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights
AU	African Union
GLAA	General Laws Amendment Act
GNDEM	The Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
NCA	National Constitutional Assembly
PDZ	Progressive Democrats of Zimbabwe
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
ZESN	Zimbabwe Election Support Network
ZimPF	Zimbabwe People First

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 21 January 2017, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) conducted a National Assembly by-election in Bikita West Constituency. The by-election was necessitated by the incarceration of former ZANU PF Member of Parliament (MP) Mr Munyaradzi Kereke. The seat was declared vacant in accordance with Section 129(i) (i) of the Constitution which provides for the tenure of Members of Parliament.

Following the invitation by ZEC, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) deployed 33 observers comprising static (polling station and constituency collation centre based observers), and mobile observers. The election observation methodology employed allowed the Network to measure the by-election electoral processes' compliance with the Constitution and Electoral Laws to enable informed advocacy interventions for electoral reforms.

The pre-electoral environment was marred by numerous incidents of electoral malpractices which included intimidation of both the electoral contestants and voters. Vote buying was also another violation whose occurrence was rampant in the pre-election period. By September 2016, incidents of vote buying, intimidation were noted and reported on even in the media<sup>1</sup>. Four days before polling day the National Constitutional Assembly's candidate and his campaign manager were physically assaulted by suspected ZANU PF supporters<sup>2</sup>.

Traditional leaders openly campaigned for the ruling party in contravention of the Traditional Leaders Act which prohibits traditional leaders from canvassing or serving as an election agent or manager for any candidate, or nominate any candidate for any election.

Vibrant political campaigns were conducted by two of the six electoral contestants namely the ruling ZANU PF and ZimPF candidates while campaigns by the Progressive Democrats of Zimbabwe, National Constitutional Assembly, and the two Independent candidates were less visible throughout the campaign season. Electoral contestants canvassed for votes using mostly political rallies, campaign posters, and door to door visits. However the ruling party in addition used the practices that are deemed under the Electoral Act constitute vote buying. These

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.newspday.co.zw/2016/09/08/zhrc-blast-zanu-pf-partisan-food-aid-distribution/>

<sup>2</sup>

practices included provision of food aid which was reserved only for known party supporters and distributed using party structures. Such practices contributed to making the electoral playing field uneven.

Polling station based voter registration was conducted throughout the constituency, in accordance with the law. ZEC used two separate voters' rolls during this by-election as has become the custom. The main roll had 18,895 voters while the supplementary roll had 17,220 people bringing the total numbers of people eligible to cast their vote during the Bikita West by-election to 36,115 voters. The justification given by the Commission for this practice is that the Commission wanted to reduce the number of disenfranchised voters to a minimum. The perennial funding challenges faced by ZEC are in some ways compounded by the Commission's decision to expand the category of eligible voters to include voters who did not participate in the voter registration exercise for the Bikita West by-election. This decision alone resulted in almost doubling the number of ballot papers that ZEC procured for the by-election.

On Election Day, 100 percent of the polling stations where ZESN observed that ZEC officials successfully completed opening and setup procedures on time and voting proceeded without incident. Counting was reported to have taken place according to laid down procedures and results were displayed outside the polling stations. At all the ward and constituency collation centres, election agents agreed that the process had gone well and signed the results forms at the various counting centres and at the polling stations.

55 percent of the total voters in Bikita West were female though the ratio of assisted female voters is disproportionately high. There is therefore need for ZEC's voter education initiatives to deliberately target different categories of voters including women so as to increase their understanding voting processes.

**Recommendations:**

1. ZEC should put in place mechanisms and measures to reduce the number of redirected voters as in some instances voters are redirected to polling stations several kilometres away.
2. Political parties must put more effort into observing key electoral processes in order to enhance their ability to speak authoritatively on the administration of the elections.

3. ZEC should devise voter education programmes that lure the youth to fully participate in electoral processes as the level of participation of youths in electoral processes remains low.
4. ZEC should invest in more comprehensive voter education programmes to improve voters understanding of key electoral requirements in order to reduce numbers of turned away and assisted voters.
5. Practical dispute resolution mechanisms must be put in place by ZEC and other key stakeholders to deal with the cases of electoral violence and intimidation. Enforceable sanctions must be introduced for political parties and candidates that violate the Political Parties' Code of Conduct.
6. The Government should facilitate the setting up of the Special Investigative Committee comprising the ZHRC and Special Police Liaison Officer whenever by-elections are proclaimed to expedite the investigation and prosecution of human rights and other violations during electoral periods.
7. During voter registration exercises, the ZEC should collect data on special needs groups and to enable them to adequately prepare for provisions such as braille ballots for voters with visual impairments to safeguard free choice for the special needs groups.
8. ZEC should adopt the open data policy to enhance trust and confidence in electoral processes such as results management, voter registration and provision of disaggregated data on gender, age and persons living with disabilities.
9. To enhance access to electoral processes by persons with visual impairment, ZEC should consider developing braille tactile folders for voter education as well as printing ballot papers in braille for the same category of voters.
10. To improve transparency ZEC should produce a single voters' roll which adheres to principles of voter registration. In addition eligibility should be limited to only voters who participate in voter registration exercises that are conducted for the by-elections.

## **2. BACKGROUND TO THE BY-ELECTION**

### **2.1. The Observation Mission**

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), as part of its observation of the 21 January 2017 National Assembly by-election, deployed 33 observers consisting of mobile and static observers. The static observers were deployed at ward collation centre, and other polling stations, whilst the mobile teams were roving around the Constituency assessing the political environment outside the polling stations. ZESN also deployed observers who were based at the Constituency Collating Centre to observe the results management and collation process.

The by-election was necessitated by the incarceration of former ZANU PF Member of Parliament (MP) Mr Munyaradzi Kereke. In accordance with Section 129(i)(i) of the Constitution which provides for the tenure of seat of an MP the seat was declared vacant. Specifically, in terms of section 129(1)(i) of the Constitution, the seat of member of Parliament for Bikita West became vacant by reason of member of Parliament having been convicted and sentenced to more than six months' imprisonment.

ZESN conducts its observation efforts in conformity with the Declaration of Global Principles for Citizen Election Observation and Monitoring which was launched at the United Nations on 3 April 2012 as well as the Principles for Election Management, Monitoring and Observation in the SADC Region (PEMMO). The findings and recommendations of this election observation are made in reference to the laws of Zimbabwe, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections as well as other regional and African election standards.

## **3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

The Constitution, Electoral Act, Statutory Instruments and Regulations form part of the Legal framework governing the conduct of by-elections. The Legal framework requires that set polling dates comply with both section 158(3) and 159 of the Constitution, and section 39 of the Electoral Act, both of which require voting in a by-election to be completed within 90 days



of the vacancy occurring. The Bikita West by-election was held within the prescribed 90-day deadline<sup>3</sup>.

#### 4. ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

The Bikita West by-election generated a tremendous amount of interest among political actors and parties. This is evident in that a record six candidates contested this by-election. Four of the six candidates were sponsored by political parties while two were independent. The names of the candidates were: Ms. Beauty Chabaya (Zanu-PF), Mr Kudakwashe Gopo (ZimPF), Mr Heya Shoko (Independent), Mr Maddock Chivasa (National Constitutional Assembly), Mr Terence Tanyaradzwa Makumbo (Progressive Democrats of Zimbabwe) and Mr Innocent Muzvimbiri (Independent).

Vibrant political campaigns were conducted by ZANU PF and Zim-PF candidates, despite the fact that six candidates contested. The campaigns for the other four candidates were less visible. High profile politicians from the ZANU-PF visited the Bikita West during the campaign season; these include both Vice Presidents of the Country as well as cabinet ministers. On the other hand the President of ZimPF also visited the Constituency to raise support for her candidate.

The most prominent forms of campaigns witnessed include rallies, door to door visits and use of posters. Community meetings chaired by village heads would also be turned to rallies as political messages from the ruling party would also be communicated at such meetings.

A number of factors may be considered to explain this phenomenon. Firstly ZANU-PF invested significant resources into the electoral campaign. Secondly the power of incumbency allowed the party unhindered access to public electronic and print media whose coverage of electoral contestants was skewed in favour of the ruling party's candidate at the expense of the other five candidates. Thirdly intimidation was also rife. ZESN observers received reports of threats of retributive violence of the nature witnessed in the 2008 election, if people voted for the opposition. An analysis of voting trends of past elections proves that intimidation is a potent

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<sup>3</sup> The President proclaimed the Bikita West By-election on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 2016. See Statutory Instrument 10 of 2016 (SI 2016-139).

‘weapon’ that can influence voting patterns. Fourthly ZANU PF was the most established political party among the four which contested this by election. ZANU PF had well-resourced party structures throughout the Constituency which is a critical ingredient of voter mobilization campaigns. However the advantage of incumbency and access to state resources make the playing field uneven because only the ruling party has this advantage.

Bikita West was one of the first districts in Masvingo to suffer retributive violence after voting for a Movement of Democratic Change candidate, Amos Mutongi, in June 2000. Mutongi however succumbed to cancer a few months into his victory. In the by-election that was held thereafter, Claudius Makova, who had polled 7,441 votes in 2000 against Mutongi’s 7,726, went on to get 12,993 in the by-election against Boniface Pakai’s 7,001. Again, the seat went back to the hands of the ruling party. These swings in voting patterns of Bikita West voters can be attributed to the violence, which is well documented, that ensued in the campaign season of the 2000 by-election for the same Constituency.

The pre-electoral environment was marred by numerous incidents of electoral malpractices which included intimidation of the electoral contestants and voters, vote buying, and assault of one of the electoral contestants. A report<sup>4</sup> by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission in September 2016 unveiled incidents where ZANU PF members and some public servants were linked to partisan distribution of food, agricultural inputs and other forms of aid in the constituency.

ZESN received reports that the ruling party representatives at the village and ward level recorded serial numbers of voter registration slips and instructed prospective voters to report back after casting their votes confirming that they had voted for the ruling party representative. On Election Day ZESN mobile teams observed ruling party cadres ‘registering’ voters who had cast their votes at Domboshava Primary School in Bikita West’s Ward 11.

On 17 January (four days before the polling day) the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) candidate for Bikita West parliamentary by-election, Maddock Chivasa, and his election agent,

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2016/09/08/zhrc-blast-zanu-pf-partisan-food-aid-distribution/>

Thomas Mudzamiri were physically assaulted. This incident amongst other aforementioned malpractices was strongly condemned by ZESN.

*“As ZESN, we call all political parties campaigning in Bikita West to strongly condemn any form of violence and desist from assaulting and harassing people. We urge the Police and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission to investigate these incidents and bring all perpetrators to book”, said the Mrs Rindai Chipfunde Vava, ZESN Director.*



*The picture was taken one day after Maddock Chivasa and his Election Agent were physically assaulted.*

Partisan food distribution appears to be entrenched in Zimbabwe’s political culture. ZESN notes with concern that electoral contestants, in violation of the electoral code of conduct, are using food aid as tool to influence voting preferences during campaign seasons for all the by-elections that have been held since the 2013 harmonised elections. The situation is compounded by the fact that Zimbabwe is currently suffering from an El Nino induced drought which has affected over 26% of the population (2.4 million Zimbabweans). In

acknowledgement of the increased vulnerability of Zimbabweans during the 2015/16 rainfall season the Government declared a state of disaster.<sup>5</sup>



*Pic: Scores of people waiting for food distribution in the run-up to the election, at Duma Chiefs hall - ward 13*

The pictures above were taken on the 19th of January 2017 by a ZESN volunteer where ZANU PF was distributing maize to residents of ward 13.

The playing field for the electoral contestants was uneven. Traditional leaders openly campaigned for the ruling party; a practice which constitutes an offence as section 45(2) of the Traditional Leaders Act does not permit traditional leaders to canvass or serve as an election agent or manager for any candidate, or nominate any candidate, for election as state President, Members of Parliament or councillor in any local authority. In addition the traditional leaders are not supposed to be influenced by political affiliation in the discharge of their duties.

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<sup>5</sup> Declaration of State of Disaster: Press Statement : accessed on < <http://veritaszim.net/node/1598>

Media freedom is fundamental in promoting the political and civil rights and liberties enshrined in the Constitution of Zimbabwe. The media is expected to report objectively throughout the electoral cycle. However ZESN observed that public broadcaster and state media's coverage of the by-election was skewed in favour of the ruling party and its candidate at the expense of the other 5 electoral candidates, while In depth coverage of the Bikita West by-election was provided by one of the weekly newspapers.<sup>6</sup>

## 5. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

### 5.1. Administration of the Elections

Section 239 of the Constitution gives the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, the mandate to conduct and supervise elections and election related activities. However the capacity to deliver this mandate is negatively affected by the inability of Government to avail adequate resources timeously. Despite the perennial funding challenges that ZEC faces the commission continues to make commendable efforts to enfranchise voters. ZEC largely completed administrative and logistical preparations on time for the election; in particular distribution of election material to polling stations was on schedule.

### 5.2. Voter Education

Voter education is one the key elements of any electoral cycle. Voter education empowers all eligible citizens to make informed choices on who decides on their governance priorities. When well-conceived and adequately funded voter education programmes afford prospective voters accurate, comprehensible and adequate information upon which to make electoral choices.

ZEC conducted a series of voter education initiatives during the period leading to the by-election including; pre-nomination voter education (18-23 November 2016), voter education for voter registration and inspection (29 November -5 December 2016) and voter education for polling (12-17 January 2017)<sup>7</sup>.

In acknowledgement of the fact that Voter education is such a massive exercise whose success can be enhanced with the support of other electoral stakeholders, the ZEC invited Civil Society

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<sup>6</sup> TellZim is a weekly privately owned newspaper from Masvingo

<sup>7</sup> ZESN had not established the total number of prospective voters that ZEC reached during the Voter Education exercises at the time of writing the report.



Organisations (CSOs) to assist in conducting voter education. ZESN responded in the affirmative to this call but unfortunately, due to financial challenges was only able to participate in voter education for polling. ZESN participated in final two of the six days that voter education for polling exercise was conducted. ZESN was able to distribute 900 voter education flyers which were printed in Shona to prospective voters in Ward 13 at Nyika Growth Point, Ward 32 at Makotore Business Centre, Ward 30 and carried out office door to door at Bikita Minerals Admin office.

### **5.3. ZESN Observations during the voter education exercise**

*The ZESN voter education team observed the following:*

*Supplementary voters' roll:* responses from the citizens whom the ZESN team interacted with indicated that there was limited awareness of the fact that a supplementary voters roll would be used on polling day to facilitate voting by those who were registered in 2013 but were not able to register during the 16 voter registration exercise for the Bikita West By-election. The implication is that a significant number of prospective voters who belonged to this category may not have turned up to vote assuming they were deemed not registered, when in fact, they were eligible.

*Resource limitations:* ZEC teams appeared not have adequate voter education materials to share with prospective voters, for instance, the ZEC voter education team in Ward 30 had ran out of flyers on the 4th day of the exercise, when they met the ZESN team. ZESN offered 300 flyers for the ZEC team's use. The ability to share printed voter education materials makes a significant impact on the efficacy of voter education efforts hence ZESN implores the Government to ensure that adequate resources are invested in such important exercises.

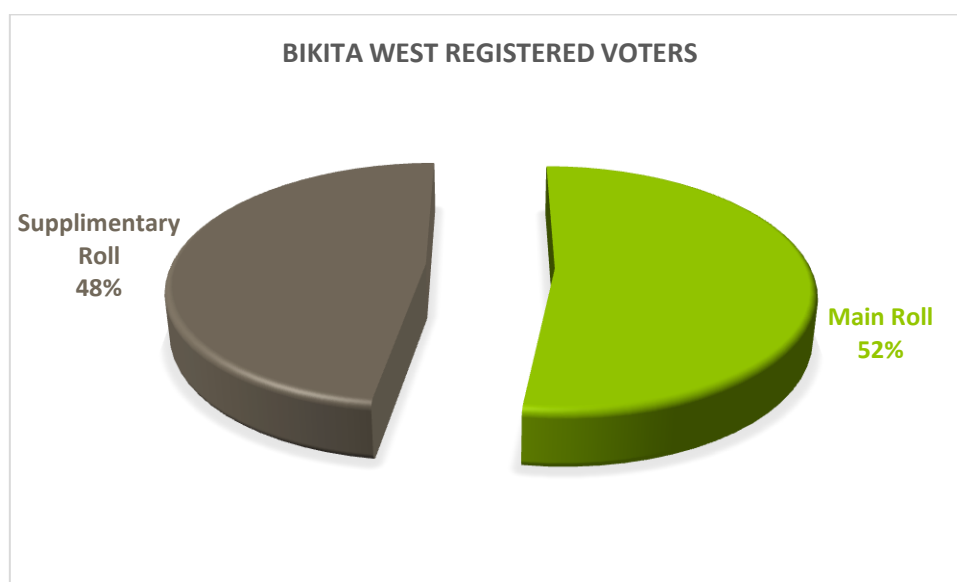
*Voter intimidation:* it was evident that prospective voters were afraid of being victimised as many were only comfortable receiving flyers once ZESN had explained that the content of the flyers was provided by the ZEC and that the ZESN team had been granted permission to conduct the exercise by the Commission itself.

#### 5.4. Voter Registration

Polling station based voter registration was conducted throughout the constituency, from 1-7 December 2016. At the end of the exercise 18,896 had turned up to register, this number constitutes the voters that were placed on the main voters roll. The supplementary roll, on the other hand, had 17,220 people bringing the total numbers of people eligible to cast their vote during the Bikita West by-election to 36,115 voters.

ZEC used two separate voters' rolls during this by-election as has become the custom. The justification given by the Commission for this practice is that the Commission wanted to reduce the number of disenfranchised voters to a minimum. However this message may not have reached a significant number of the target group as noted by ZESN's voter education team. The Commission's Chairperson is quoted in various media outlets talking about the number of registered voters in the main voters roll without mentioning the supplementary voter roll that was also eligible to vote<sup>8</sup>. The omission may have contributed to the creation of an impression that those in supplementary voter roll were not eligible to vote, which was not the case.

ZESN urges ZEC to consider using a single voters' roll in keeping with accepted international best practices which require the use of a single voters' roll which is complete and accurate.



<sup>8</sup> See article on <<http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/zimsit-m-58-polling-stations-for-bikita-west-by-election/>> and <<http://www.sundaynews.co.zw/58-polling-stations-for-bikita-west-by-election/>>

The perennial funding challenges faced by ZEC are in some ways compounded by the Commission's decision to expand the category of eligible voters to include voters who did not participate in the voter registration exercise for the Bikita West by-election. This decision alone resulted in almost doubling the number of ballot papers that ZEC procured for the by-election.

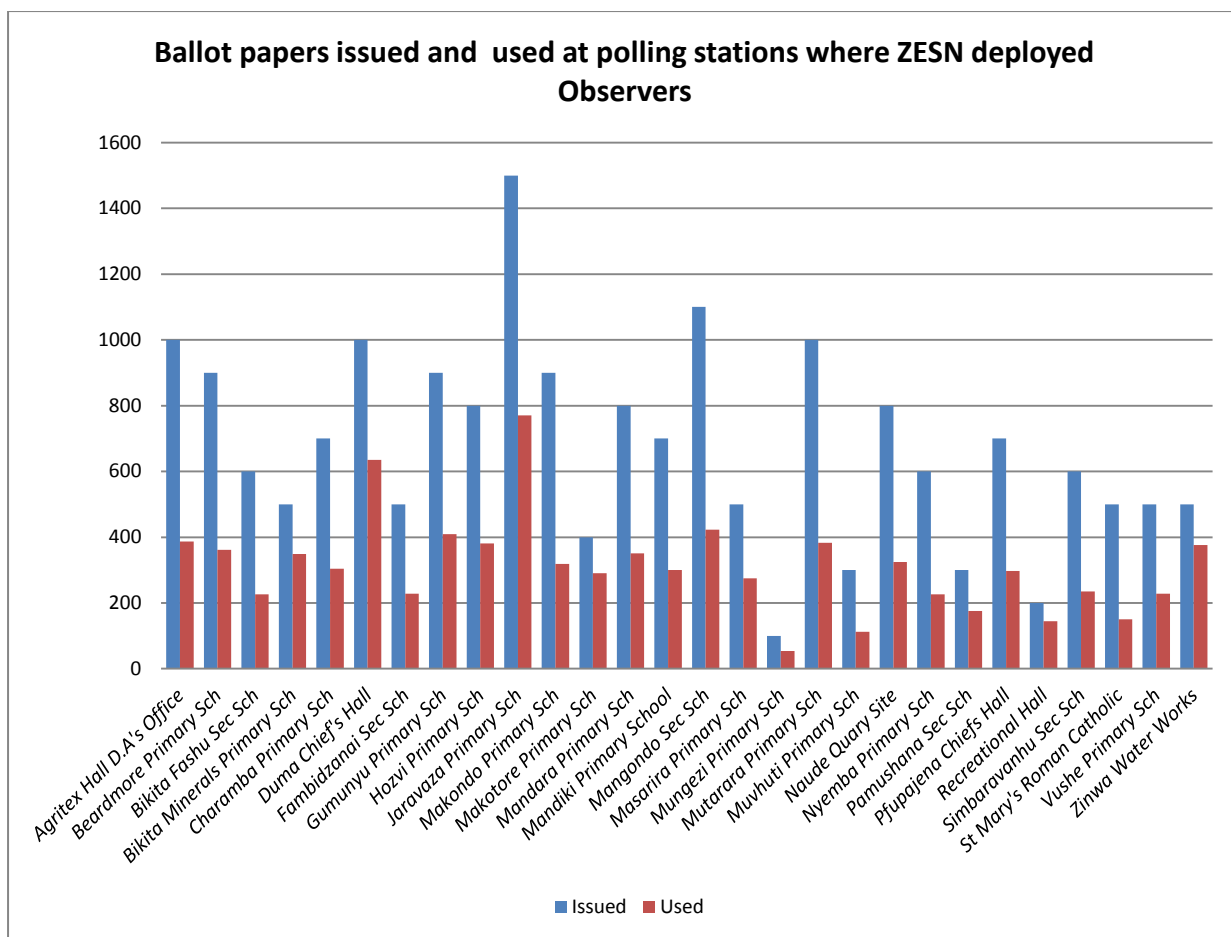
18,900 ballot papers were issued at the 25 polling stations where ZESN deployed static observers, however only 8,717 (46%) were used. The large number of unused ballot papers is largely caused by the decision by ZEC to expand the category of eligible voters to include persons who were registered in the same constituency in 2013. In addition, ZEC should widely publicise the number of ballot papers that are printed so as to demonstrate that the Commission is adhering to the internationally accepted standard of not printing ballot papers that exceed 5-10% of registered voters<sup>9</sup>.

The trend in 2015 and 2016 by-elections has been that voters who do not turn up during the voter registration exercise did not turn up on voting day as well. This observation is supported by the fact that the numbers of people who cast their votes during the by-elections closely matches those who participate in the voter registration exercises for those specific by-elections. Hence ZEC needs to consider limiting the eligible voters to only those who register during the by-elections. This is the category of voters that is likely to turn up on polling day.

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<sup>9</sup> AUEOM Report on the 2013 Harmonised Elections in Zimbabwe





## 6. GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

### 6.1. Gender Equality and Special Needs Groups

Active participation of women, youth, civil society organisations and marginalised groups in the electoral process constitutes a critical element for the deepening of democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe. Therefore ZESN urges the ZEC to avail statistics that would help stakeholders deepen their understanding of women and men's participation in electoral processes. This information which ZEC is already collecting needs to be shared with electoral stakeholders using inexpensive means such as posting the information on the ZEC website. ZESN also noted that the by-election contestation was dominated by male candidates and this trend is also observed at national level where only 34 percent of the House of Assembly representatives are women. Thus whilst the majority of voters are women, the proportion of women seeking political leadership positions is still proportionately very low. The Bikita West By-election is the first National Assembly by-election since 2013 to have a winning female candidate.

## 7. ELECTION DAY OBSERVATIONS

### Turned Away Voters

There were significant numbers of turned away voters owing to various reasons including voters turning up at the wrong polling stations and bringing wrong identity documents such as drivers' licences and not appearing on the voters' rolls. High numbers of turned away voters were observed at Duma Chief Hall and at Jaravaza Primary School where 28 and 26 voters were turned away respectively.

### Redirected Voters

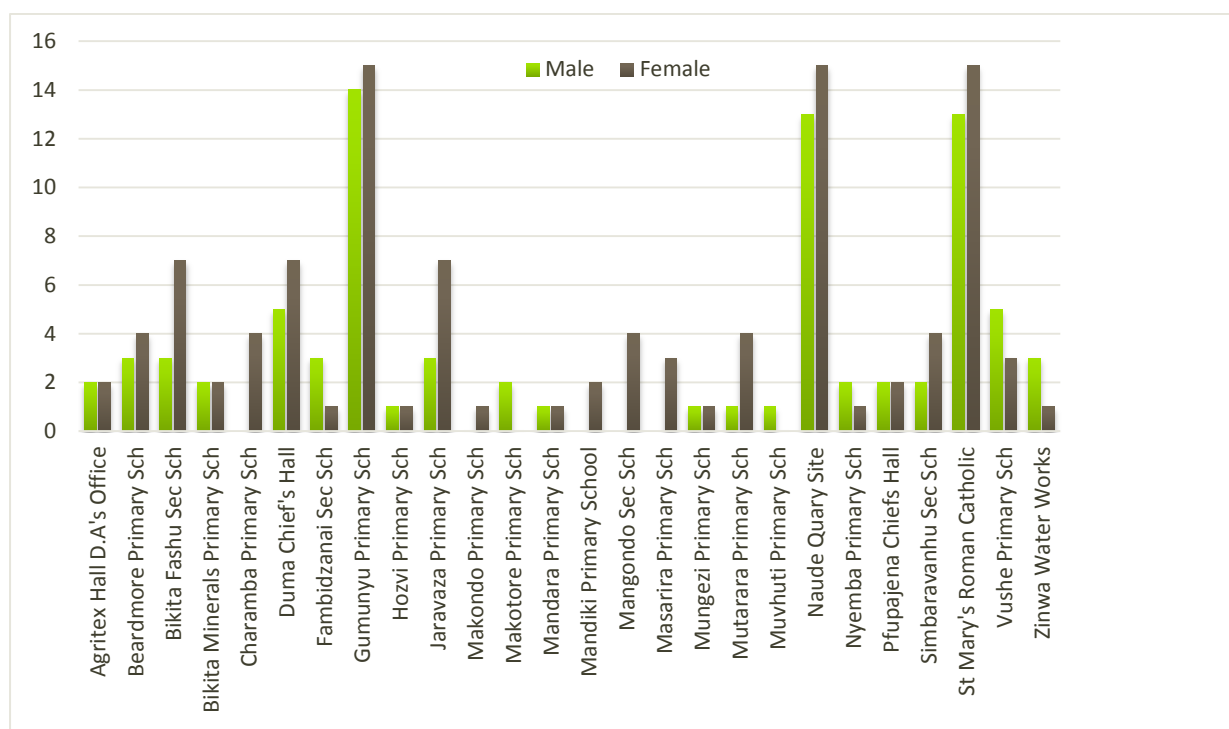
ZESN observed that as in previous by-elections voters who turned up at the wrong polling stations were redirected to other polling stations. Worryingly, some of the voters were redirected to polling stations that were very far from where they had turned up. For instance at Chikukutu Primary School in Ward 12 two voters were redirected to Bikita minerals which is approximately 18 km away from Chikukutu Primary School. In addition, 3 voters were redirected from Nyemba Primary to Fambidzanai Secondary School a distance of about 13km away. ZESN notes that redirecting voters over such long distances may result in their disenfranchisement and urges ZEC to enhance publicity of the new polling stations based voter registration and voting system to avoid the turning away and redirecting of voters. ZESN urges ZEC to adhere to the policy of establishing polling stations that are within 5 kilometre radius of each other<sup>10</sup>.



*Pic: Polling stations signage was clear in most areas that ZESN mobile teams visited*

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.sundaymail.co.zw/much-ignorance-about-electoral-processes/>

## Number of re-directed voters at polling stations where ZESN had static observers



## Voter intimidation / Electoral irregularities

ZESN observed that the campaign period in Bikita West Constituency was characterised by political tension, threats to life, physical violence, partisan food distribution, vote buying, abuse of the provisions for assisted voters and intimidation by traditional leaders. On Election Day ZESN received reports of voters being instructed to 'register' with their village head and party structures before and after casting their votes. In the run up to the by-election, the NCA candidate Mr Maddock Chivasa was attacked by suspected ZANU PF supporters. More cases of electoral irregularities and incidents were reported by observers in wards 9, 10, 11, 5 and 32. It is imperative for ZEC, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) and the Police to investigate the reports and take relevant action against the offenders.

## Polling Procedures and Conduct of ZEC Polling Staff

ZESN observer reports showed that all polling stations successfully completed setup and opening procedures on time. In addition, observer reports revealed that at 100% of polling stations where ZESN had observers all the required voting materials such as ballot boxes, ballot papers, ZEC official stamp, indelible ink marker pens and the voters roll were available at the

time of opening. Everywhere ZESN observed there were adequate polling personnel with an average of six (6) officials at each polling station. ZESN commends ZEC for the professional conduct and adherence to procedures and regulations throughout Election Day.

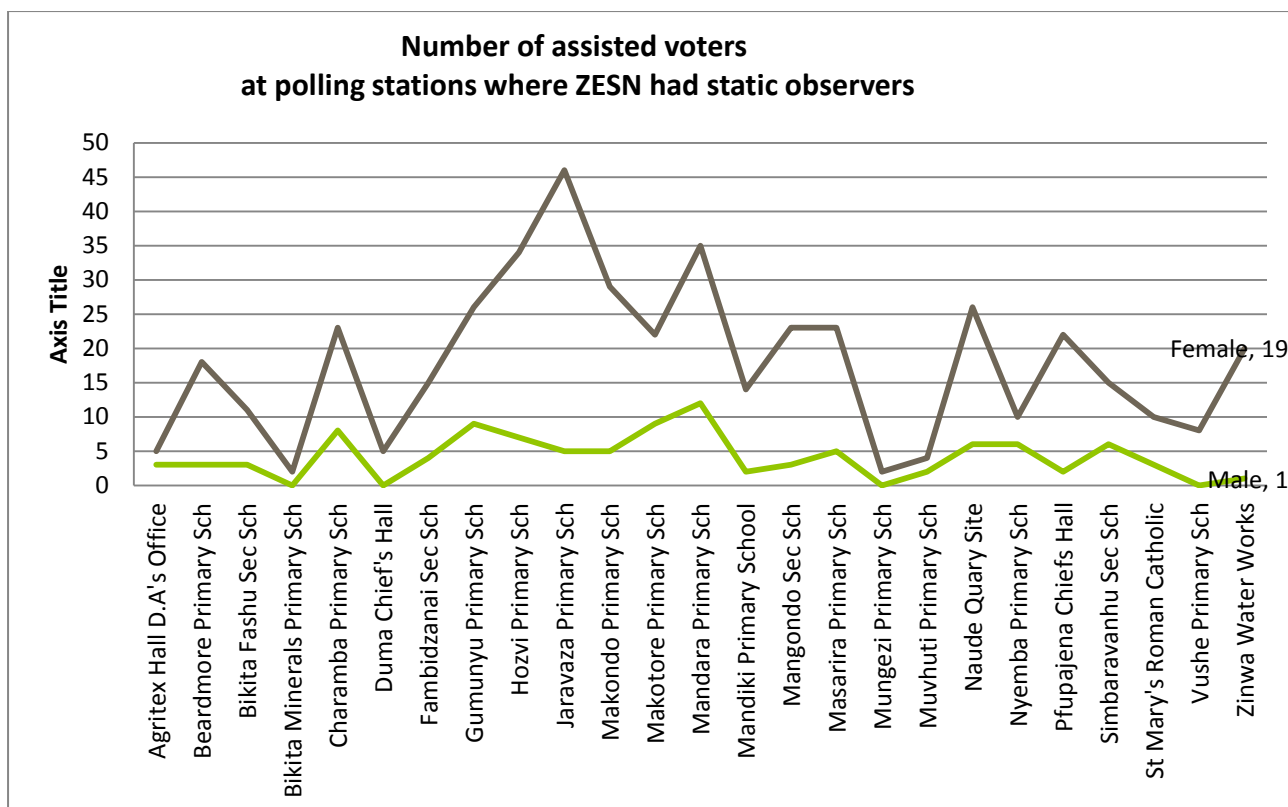
### **Voting and Counting**

ZESN observer reports show that voting went on smoothly at all the polling stations. At all polling stations, counting took place according to procedures and results were displayed outside the polling stations. At all the ward and constituency collation Centres where ZESN observed, party agents who were present agreed that the process had gone well and signed the V11 form.

### **Assisted voters**

Reports from ZESN observers revealed that there were significant numbers of assisted voters recorded during the by-elections mostly of illiterate and elderly voters. However some assisted voters were of a relatively young age. The unusually high number of assisted illiterate voters is inconsistent with Zimbabwe's high literacy rates and may be an indication of the levels of intimidation especially in rural constituencies.

Of the 25 polling stations where ZESN deployed static observers, Jaravaza Primary School had the highest number of assisted voters. 89% of those assisted at the same polling station were women.



It is important to note that although 55 percent of the total voters in Bikita West were female, the ratio of female assisted voters was disproportionately high. There is therefore need for ZEC's voter education initiatives to deliberately target different categories of voters including women so as to increase their understanding of the voting processes.

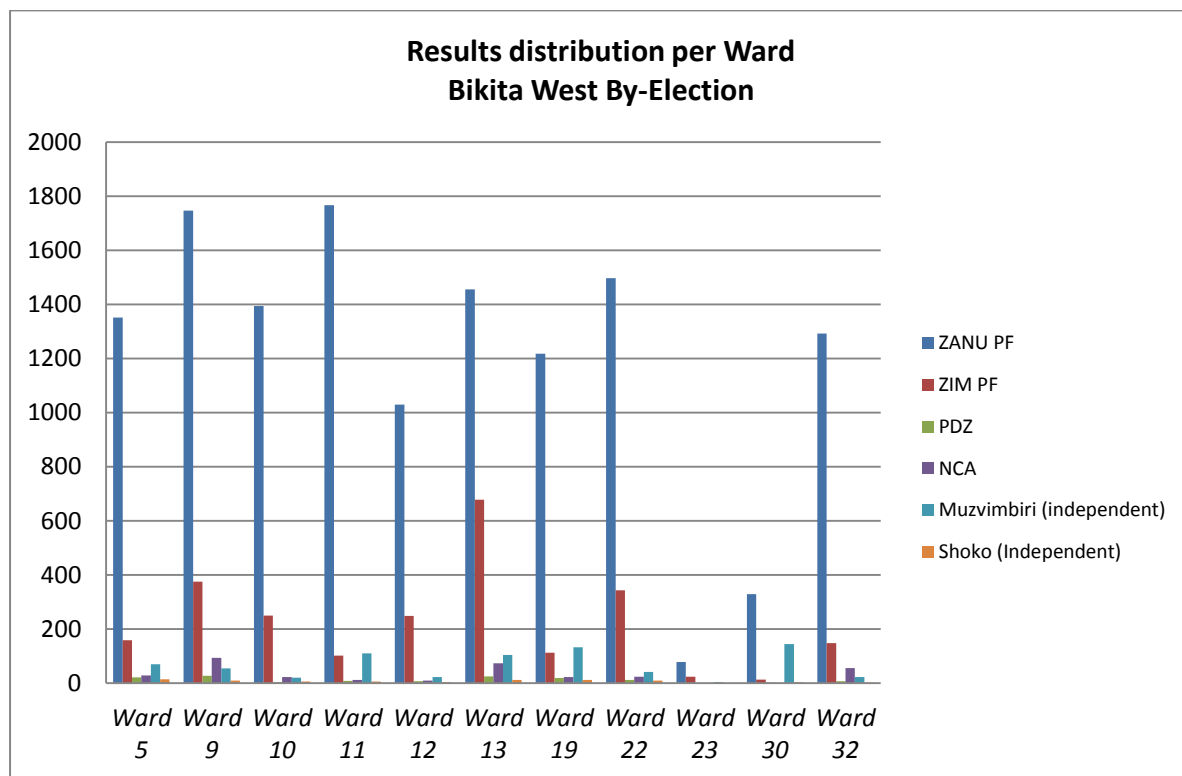
### Turnout

ZESN observed long queues in the morning with the majority of the voters being women. For instance, at Mupamaonde Primary School in ward 22 of the 301 that had voted by 4PM 206 were women while 95 were men and at Makondo primary 224 women had voted as compared to 88 men.

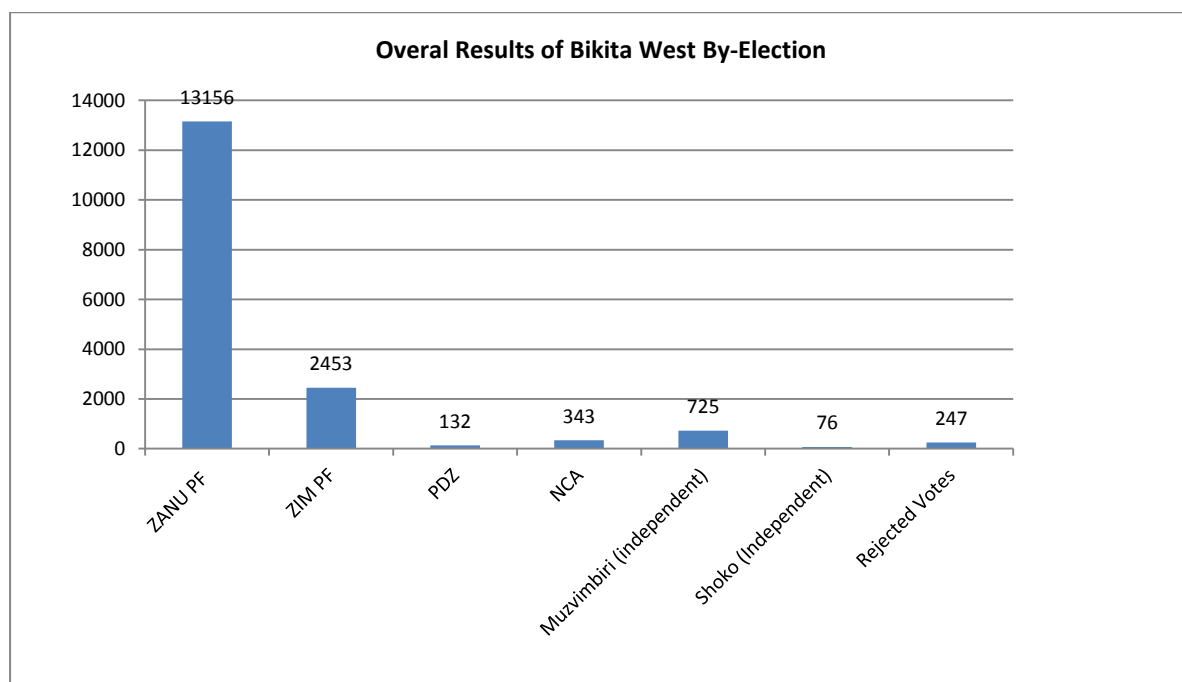
### Election Agents

ZESN observer reports showed that of the six contesting candidates only the ZANU PF, Zimbabwe People First and Independent candidates deployed election agents comprehensively while the other contestants had a limited number of election agents at polling stations. The inability to comprehensively deploy agents limits the capacity of political parties and candidates to authoritatively speak on electoral processes.

## 8. BY-ELECTION RESULTS



ZANU PF was highly dominant in all the wards claiming more than 70 percent of the total votes with the exception of Ward 13 where ZIM PF claimed 31.8 leaving ZANU PF to claim 68.2 percent. The ZANU PF Ward dominance was pronounced in the final results as shown below.



The winning ZANU PF candidate got 13 156 votes, which makes up 77% of the total votes. The runner-up, representing the new kid on the block, former Vice President Joice Mujuru's Zimbabwe People First (ZimPF) was a distant second with 2 453 votes, less than 15% of the votes.

Altogether, the opposition candidates got just 3,729 votes. These votes are less than 30% of the ZANU PF candidate's votes and just 22% of the total votes.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ZEC should put in place mechanisms and measures to reduce the number of redirected voters as in some instances voters are redirected to polling stations several kilometres away.
2. Political parties must put more effort into observing key electoral processes in order to enhance their ability to speak authoritatively on the running of the elections.
3. ZEC should devise voter education programmes that lure the youth to fully participate in electoral processes as the level of participation of youths in electoral processes remains low.
4. ZEC should invest in more comprehensive voter education programmes to improve voters understanding of key electoral requirements in order to reduce numbers of turned away and assisted voters.
5. Practical dispute resolution mechanisms must be put in place by ZEC and other key stakeholders to deal with the cases of electoral violence and intimidation. Enforceable sanctions must be introduced for political parties and candidates that violate the Political Parties' Code of Conduct.
6. During voter registration exercises, the ZEC should collect data on special needs groups and to enable them to adequately prepare for provisions such as braille ballots for voters with visual impairments to safeguard free choice for the special needs groups.

7. The Government should facilitate the setting up of the Special Investigative Committee comprising the ZHRC and Special Police Liaison Officer whenever by-elections are proclaimed to expedite the investigation and prosecution of human rights and other violations during electoral periods.
8. ZEC should adopt the open data policy to enhance trust and confidence in electoral processes such as results management, voter registration and provision of disaggregated data on gender, age and persons living with disabilities.
9. To enhance access to electoral processes by persons with visual impairment, ZEC should consider developing braille tactile folders for voter education as well as printing ballot papers in braille for the same category of voters.
10. To improve transparency ZEC should produce a single voters' roll which adheres to principles of voter registration. In addition eligibility should be limited to only voters who participate in voter registration exercises that are conducted for the by-elections.

## 10. CONCLUSION

The Bikita West by-election generated significant interest among political actors as evidenced by the record number of candidates that contested the by-election. However analysis of the nature of the electoral contest revealed that the only serious contenders for the seat were the ZANU PF and ZimPF candidates, whose election campaigns were most visible. The playing field remains uneven with the ruling party benefiting from the advantages that incumbency provides, unbalanced media coverage by the government owned print and electronic media. Some Traditional Leaders continued campaigning for the ruling party in contravention of the Traditional leaders Act and the special investigative Committee was not set up for this by-election. Intra-party discontentment continued within the opposition ranks in the aftermath of the Bikita West by election the Masvingo Provincial Coordinator for the ZIM PF party resigned. It would appear that the opposition needs to review and improve their strategies as the 2018 Elections approach.