

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



**ISSUE TWO – ZESN LONG TERM
OBSERVATION REPORT ON THE PRE-
ELECTION POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT
AND OBSERVATION OF KEY ELECTORAL
PROCESSES**

25 JULY 2018

Introduction

This report focuses on the period from 08 to 14 July 2018 and gives an update on ZESN findings from its Long Term Observers (LTOs) based in all the 210 constituencies around the country and from its core teams in Harare and Bulawayo.

ZEC operations over the reporting period

Over the reporting period, LTOs reported that local ZEC offices were mainly involved in the recruitment and training of polling staff. Reports also indicate that the ZEC was convening Multi - Party Liaison Committees (MPLCs) meetings at provincial level in accordance with the Electoral Act. However, ZESN observers were not allowed to attend the MPLC meetings.

Voter Education Campaigns

ZESN observed that voter education campaigns continued over the reporting period, focusing on the election date; polling station location; how to mark the ballot; secrecy of the vote; and making an informed choice. ZESN observed that in 55% of the constituencies voter education was ongoing while 33% of the LTOs reported that they did not observe any voter education, and 12% reported that voter education campaigns had not yet started in their constituencies. There were a total of 163 reports on voter education campaigns from 153 LTOs during this reporting period. Figure 1 below shows the numbers of reports confirming voter education campaigns by different players, namely, the ZEC; Civil Society Organisations (CSOs); Community Based Organisations (CBOs); and Faith Based organisations (FBOs).

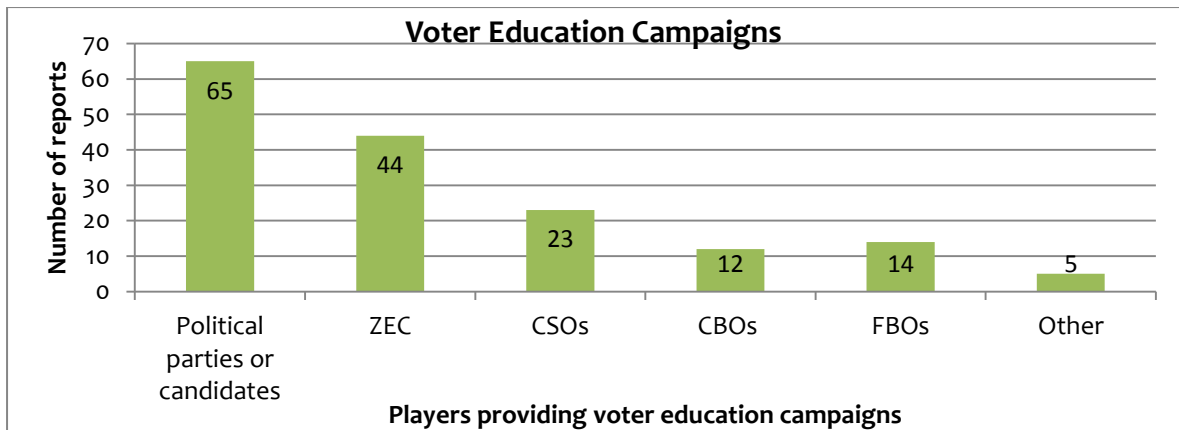


Figure 1: Reports confirming voter education campaigns by various players in the constituencies

As shown in the bar chart above, political parties and candidates are leading in voter education campaigns, followed by the ZEC. Commendably, 87% of LTOs who reported considered the voter education campaigns to be effective and 92% reported that the campaigns were reaching rural areas. Further, there were also significant efforts to reach women and persons with disabilities and to have information available in local languages.

Impartiality of the ZEC

According to reports by the LTOs, there continues to be a general downward trend in the confidence of electoral stakeholders and the electorate in general in the impartiality of ZEC. Figure 2 below illustrates how from the time the LTOs started reporting up to the last day of the reporting period for this report, the level of confidence stakeholders have in ZEC has decreased.

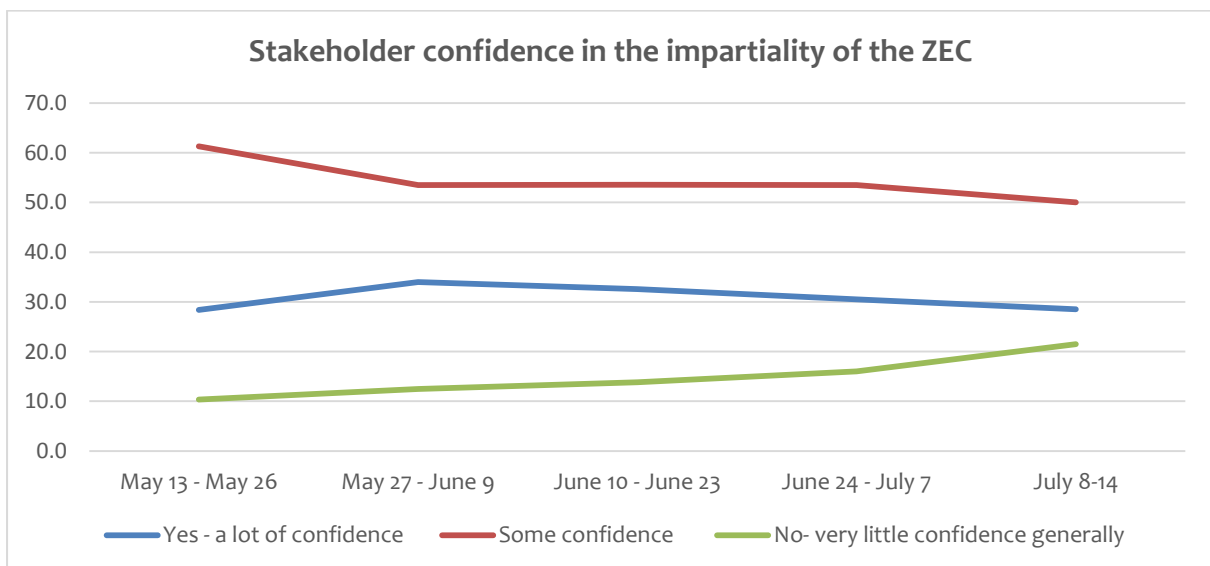


Fig 2: Percentages of the level of confidence that stakeholders had in the impartiality of ZEC over time

The decline in levels of confidence in the ZEC could be attributed to the dissatisfaction expressed by stakeholders who were invited to observe the designing and printing of the ballot paper amid concerns raised over the quality of the paper. In addition, the placement of the candidates on the ballot paper which puts the ZANU-PF presidential candidate as the first on the second column of candidates list is in violation of the law.¹ Although some political parties expressed concerns over these issues to the ZEC through the MPLCs, they did not seem to be satisfied with the explanations given. ZEC has also been more accessible at the District level than at the national (headquarters) level.

Political Party Campaigns

With the election date drawing closer, LTO reports confirmed active campaigns by political parties in constituencies. Figure 3 below shows the numbers of reports received from LTOs in relation to active campaigns by ZANU-PF; MDC Alliance; NPF; PRC; and other dominant parties.

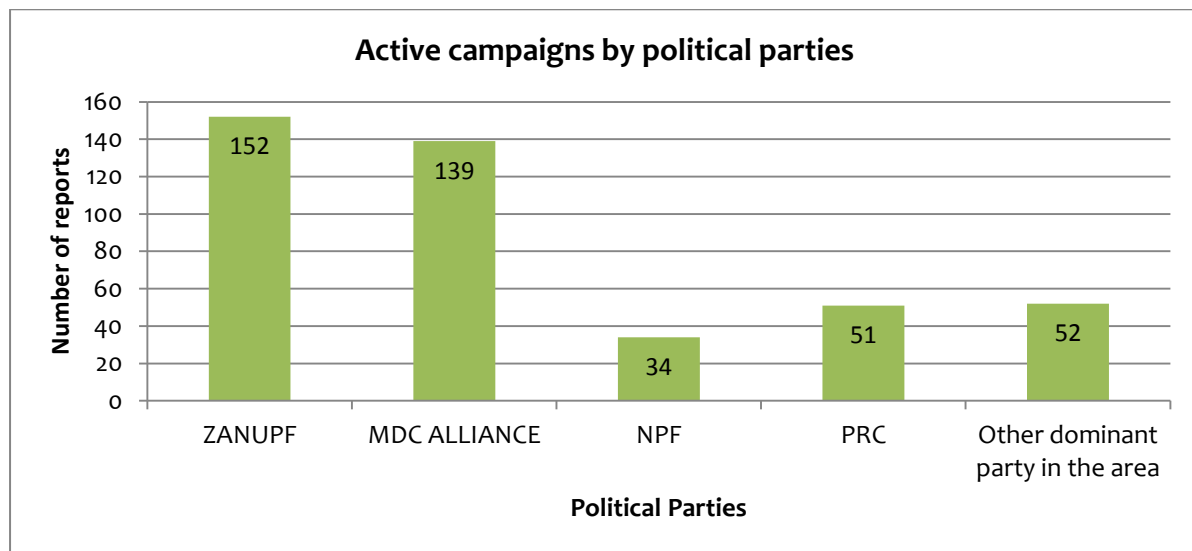


Figure 3: Reports confirming campaigns by political parties

¹ The Electoral Regulations of 2005 and Section 57(a) (1) of the Electoral Act state that candidates should appear in one column in alphabetical order.

Various means have been used for campaigning by political parties. The table below shows the numbers of reports received from ZESN LTOs on some of the types of campaigns used by political parties over the reporting period.

	Posters or banners on free sites	Posters on paid sites	Door to door	Meetings (less than 100 people)	Rallies (more than 100 people)	T-shirt, wristband, mazambia distribution	Sponsorship of sporting/cultural events	radio adverts
ZANU-PF	144	50	114	102	74	120	38	32
MDC Alliance	129	21	112	94	61	74	12	4
NPF	26	7	29	23	5	15	5	
PRC	39	4	37	25	6	16	2	
Other dominant party	50	6	35	25	5	20	3	1

This chart only shows campaigns that were witnessed by ZESN LTOs.

The data presented in the table above shows that ZANU-PF is leading in campaigning by all methods, followed by the MDC Alliance. The most commonly used means of campaigning by all political parties are posters or banners on free sites; door to door campaigns; meetings; rallies; and the distribution of party regalia (t-shirt; wristbands; and wrappers for women).

Reports indicate that small posters on unpaid sites and medium sized posters are the most popularly used. On 18 May 2018, close to the beginning of the campaign, ZESN LTOs counted posters in each constituency along a one kilometre stretch of road in urban areas and a two kilometres stretch of road in rural areas. Figure 4 below shows the numbers of posters counted for each political party.

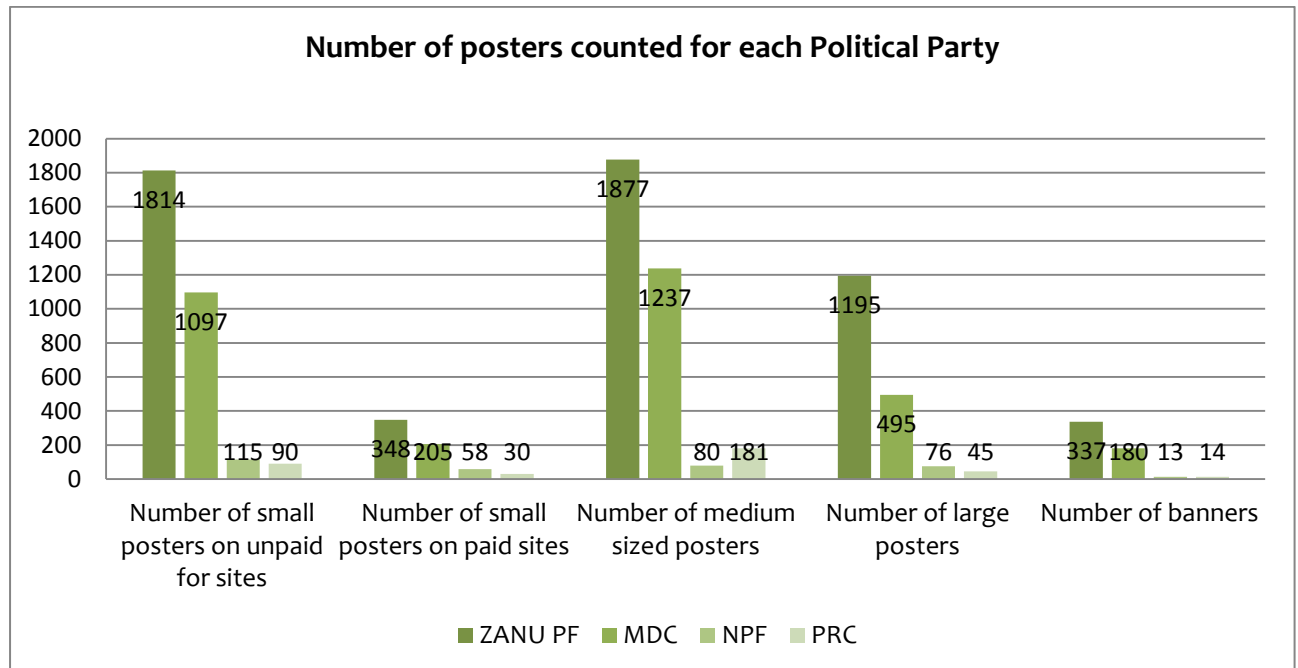


Figure 4: Numbers of posters counted for political parties

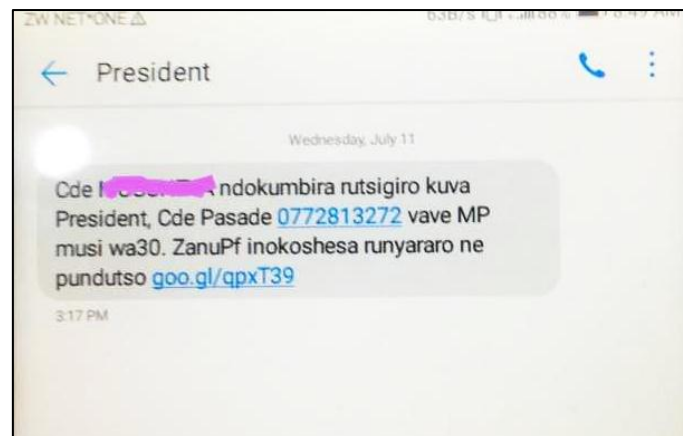
As figure 4 shows, ZANU-PF and the MDC Alliance have significantly higher numbers of posters than other contesting parties. Further, ZESN LTOs also observed that, apart from NPF which featured female candidates on 13% of their banners, female candidates only featured on 6% of the other contesting political parties’ posters and banners.

Rallies are the one of most common methods of campaigning, to date, ZESN LTOs have observed a total of 332 rallies held by political parties, about three quarters of which were in rural or remote areas. Of the 332 rallies, 196 were ZANU-PF rallies; 114 were held by the MDC Alliance; nine by the PRC; six by the NPF; and seven for other parties.

Commendably, the atmosphere at the rallies was reported as peaceful in 96% of the cases observed. However, there were a few reported instances where members of opposing parties sought to disrupt rallies. Also, in two reported incidents, ZANU-PF supporters were not at liberty to leave rallies midstream.

ZESN noted that some parties are dominant in only a few constituencies; for example, the ZIPP has been very visible in Kuwadzana where they have been distributing fliers. Independent candidates have also been visible with one addressing a rally in Caledonia, Goromonzi South Ward 8 while the independent candidate for Mt Pleasant held a meeting with women in the constituency.

Some inventive methods such as the donating of sanitary pads by ZANU-PF National Assembly candidate for Kuwadzana at Sifra Shopping Centre and a clean-up campaign by ZANU-PF youths have also been used. In addition, in a matter that stirred controversy, ZANU-PF was reported to have sent text messages to voters in an attempt to solicit votes. This was confirmed by a number of LTOs who also received such messages in which ZANU-PF was pleading with the electorate to vote for its presidential and National Assembly candidates, whose names and cell phone numbers were specified, further urging that ZANU-PF values peace and development. The picture below shows an example of the messages sent to the electorate.



An example of the text messages that were being sent out to registered voters

Incidents against Female Candidates

During the reporting period, there were two threats against women candidates as opposed to six against male candidates. Figure 5 below shows the number of incidents directed at male and female candidates since the start of the campaign to give a full picture of the disproportionate level of the abuse.

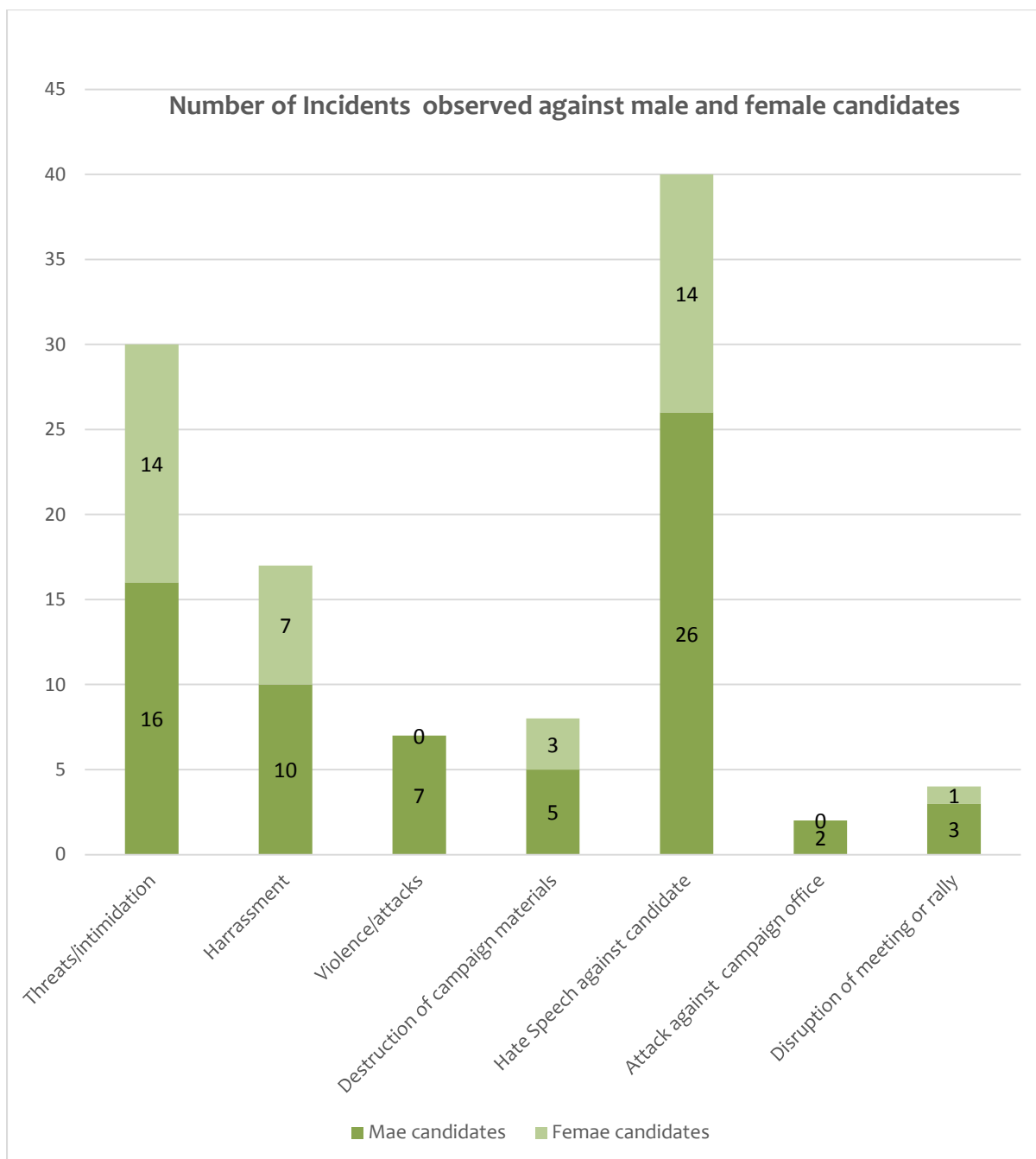


Figure 5: The number of incidents against male and female candidates since the start of the campaign

Political Environment

The political environment remained generally calm and peaceful over the reporting period. LTO reports indicate that political parties made efforts to promote peace in the electoral processes during their campaigns. For example, on 10 July, ZANU-PF and the MDC Alliance held a joint march in Zvishavane. A similar march was also held on 11 July in Gokwe Central constituency where representatives from ZANU-PF; ZIPP; and an

independent candidate from Gokwe Kana spoke. However, in some areas, these efforts were not successful. This was notably the case in Kwekwe CBD on 12 July where only ZANU-PF turned up for the march resulting in its subsequent cancellation.

On the other hand, ZESN received worrying reports of intimidation of voters. One such report was a case where on 14 July, in Chimanimani East Ward 10, the MDC Alliance candidate received death threats and had his mobile phone confiscated while carrying out door to door campaigning and was threatened with death unless he withdrew his candidature. The matter was reported to the police. In addition, following an MDC-Alliance rally in the area, on 15 July 2018 in Chipinge Central Ward 6, a kraal head who is a war veteran called a meeting at his homestead and interrogated opposition supporters threatening them for supporting the opposition. In the company of the kraal head were the councillor for the Ward and a ZANU-PF activist. The residents were further warned that torture camps had been setup and if the opposition won the election, they would be evicted from the area.

Instances of hate speech were also reported, for example, MDC Alliance supporters scolded the ZANU-PF's top leadership and the party as they sang their campaign songs along Nerupiri Chikomo road on 10 July in Gutu South Ward 30.

These cases are worrying particularly considering that the period leading up to the 30 July 2018 election had so far been relatively peaceful.

Tension Barometer

Observers reported that in 88% of constituencies observed, it was calm. However, vote buying and intimidation of the public continue to be major issues that are causing tensions. There were 14 reported incidents of attempted vote buying and nine reported cases of voters' intimidation over the reporting period. Reports sent by LTOs also continued to feature cases of the destruction of campaign materials for rival candidates. The picture below shows campaign posters torn in Harare Wards 42 and 43.



Destruction of campaign posters in Harare Wards 42 and 43

Misuse of Government Resources

ZANU-PF is benefiting from administrative resources that it is using for campaign purposes. Over the reporting period, LTOs noted 31 occasions where government vehicles were used for campaigning; 22 instances where government buildings or land being allowed for use by ZANU-PF while other parties could not use the same; 17 occasions where government owned staging or PA system was used; and the giving out of government food aid or equipment at 34 party events. In addition, government officials spoke at 30 ZANU-PF events campaigning for the party or party candidate while ZANU-PF candidates campaigned at 16 observed government held events. The misuse of government resources skews the playing field for political players.

Rights violations

Reports sent by ZESN LTOs continued to feature cases of the destruction of campaign materials. For example, posters for an independent candidate were defaced using paint at Kuwadzana Primary School while others were pulled down.

Recommendations

ZESN makes the following recommendations:

- The ZEC should enforce Sections 5 and 6 of the Electoral Code of Conduct for Political Parties and Candidates and other Stakeholders that prohibit the intimidation and the use of hateful language, amongst other violations.
- The ZEC should ensure that the public media provides equal coverage to all political parties contesting in the elections.
- Political players should desist from defacing and pulling down posters and campaign materials of other contesting parties.
- The ZEC at the national level should follow the example of the lower level offices in making all processes open and transparent for party agents and election observers. This includes immediate publication of tally procedures in time for observer and agent training.
- Local government should desist with immediate effect from distribution of aid at ZANU-PF rallies and putting government resources at the disposal of one party at the expense of other political parties.
- Action should be taken against traditional leaders who are involved in partisan politics and are being used to intimidate and threaten voters in their jurisdiction.
- The ZEC and other electoral stakeholders such as political parties and civic society organisations should intensify civic and voter education messaging especially around the secrecy of the vote. This will assist in mitigating the negative impact of threats and intimidation.
- ZEC should clarify the role of the police in elections so that their role is limited to maintenance of law and order and not be involved in electoral processes such as communicating and transmitting election results.