



ZESN 2018 Harmonised Election –Preliminary Statement

Harare – 31 July 2018 – As part of its comprehensive effort to observe the 2018 Harmonised Elections, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) trained and deployed over 6,500 observers to every ward, constituency, district and province, of the country.

This Preliminary Statement is based on reports from a statistical sample of 750 polling stations to provide truly representative information on the conduct of voting and counting in near real time. As of this morning, 739 of 750 (99%) of these observers had reported in.

Today, ZESN is releasing its preliminary findings on voting and counting processes as observed on Election Day. ZESN is not making a final determination about the conduct of the 2018 Harmonised Elections yet, the elections are not yet over and the results tabulation process is still under way. ZESN continues to observe the process and will do so through its conclusion.

ZESN would like to emphasise that its observations are based on the entire electoral cycle approach which entails observing all electoral processes in the pre-election, Election Day and post-election phases. Therefore, ZESN's overall assessment of the 2018 Harmonised Elections will be based on the entire electoral cycle processes and not just Election Day.

Pre-Election Context

ZESN observed the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) process in which 2012 accredited observers were deployed to observe this exercise. In addition, ZESN also deployed Long-Term Observers (LTOs) in all 210 constituencies to observe key electoral processes in the run up to the election such as inspection of the provisional voters roll, nomination court processes, campaigns and the general pre-election environment. Furthermore, ZESN conducted an audit of Voters Roll.

Political Environment: ZESN found that the political environment was largely calm and peaceful. The ruling and opposition political parties were able to campaign freely across the country with the MDC Alliance and ZANU-PF holding the majority of rallies during the campaign period. However, a bombing incident occurred at the ZANU-PF rally at White City Stadium on 26 June at which two people were killed. ZESN also received widespread reports of people being asked to submit serial numbers on their voter registration slips during the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR), this undermined public confidence in the secrecy of the vote. In addition, some candidates continued to campaign during the cooling off period.

Civic and Voter Education: As a way to broadening the spectrum of voter education for the various electoral processes, ZEC invited stakeholders to input the civic and voter education strategy enabling more players to conduct voter education. This attributed to the increase in turnout for voter registration.

Role of Traditional Leaders: ZESN acknowledges the role that traditional leaders play in preserving our culture and being the custodians of our traditional values. However, ZESN LTOs reported incidents of traditional leaders openly canvassing support for the ruling party and

in some instances forcing people to attend ZANU PF campaign rallies. This was mainly enforced through threats that food aid would be stopped and support for local projects would be withdrawn if people don't vote for ZANU-PF.

Legal Framework: The 2018 Harmonised Elections took place under the Constitution adopted in 2013. An important reform is the change from ward-based to polling station-based voters roll which makes multiple voting more difficult. However, ZESN's legal analysis notes that the Electoral Act has yet to be fully harmonised with the Constitution. In particular, while the Constitution in Section 67 provides for the right to vote for every citizen, for the 2018 Harmonised Elections, the right was not extended to those in prisons, hospitals and those in the diaspora. Further, the role of the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs in the operations and decisions of ZEC impedes on the independence of the Commission.

Biometric Voter Registration (BVR): As per recommendations from the previous elections, ZESN welcomed the transference of the custody of the Voters Roll from the office of the Registrar General to the ZEC. This was accompanied by the introduction of the BVR and the polling station based voter registration system. Thus the ZEC compiled a new Voters Roll under the new polling station based system using BVR system amid renewed hope of a new current, accurate and comprehensive Voters Roll. The decision to employ BVR for the 2018 Harmonized Election introduced two important changes. First, it resulted in scrapping the discredited 2013 Voters Roll thereby eliminating deceased voters and inaccurate information about existing registrants. ZESN's analysis shows that approximately 2.7 million registrants on the 2013 Preliminary Voters Roll are not on the 2018 Voters Roll initially released by the ZEC. Secondly, the collection of biometric information such as photographs and fingerprints, would have made it easier to remove duplicate registrants from the Voters Roll and to prevent voter impersonation on Election Day. There were lower registration figures in Bulawayo and Harare in the four phases of the BVR Blitz, representing 34% of unregistered voters, showing signs of apathy. During the mop-up exercise, ZEC allocated significantly more BVR kits to the rural areas where there was high registration and only allocated 8% of the BVR kits to these metropolitan provinces.

Voters Roll: ZESN conducted an audit of the voters roll availed by ZEC to parties and observers on 18 June 2018 and found it to be an improvement over the 2013 Preliminary Voters Roll. The ZESN audit, revealed lower registration rates for urban and young voters compared to rural and older voters. The registration rate for rural areas was 83% while for urban areas it was 72%. Similarly for registrants aged between 18 and 32 the registration rate was 59% while for registrants 33 and older the registration rate was 100%. The ZEC failed to release the Preliminary Voters Roll or the Exclusion List making it impossible to assess the de-duplication process. However, the actual Final Voters Roll was only shared on 25 July 2018 when it was too late for proper analysis to be done on the roll.

Confidence in the ZEC: Justice Priscilla Chigumba was appointed Chair of the ZEC on 1 February 2018. ZESN noted initial positive engagements between ZEC and various electoral stakeholders but these gradually waned as the Election Day drew closer. Concerns remain about the independence of the ZEC amid executive interference in key electoral processes such as the Observer Accreditation Committee and the Logistics Committee. Concerns were raised by electoral stakeholders with regards to the design, printing and dispatch of the ballot papers, which was done without consultation. The ZEC did not permit meaningful observation of the production of ballot papers and did not allow for testing of the indelible ink. Insufficient clarity was provided before Election Day on the results tabulation procedures. In general, ZEC did not communicate effectively with stakeholders and the public especially information that was conveyed through social media by various ZEC officials.

Women's Participation: The constitution of Zimbabwe in line with regional and international best practices on gender issues mandates the State to promote gender balance in all spheres

of life. However, the Electoral Act is silent on the matter of women being equally represented in political spheres. ZESN noted that, for the 2018 harmonized elections, none of the contesting political parties attained 50-50 representation between males and females for the National Assembly elections. In fact, 91% and 90% of the candidates for the major contending parties, namely ZANU-PF and the MDC Alliance respectively, are male. There are 1,648 candidates vying for National assembly and only 237 are women. There was hate language on social media especially targeting female candidates and officials.

Media Environment: The elections are being held at a time the Constitution provides for freedom of expression and freedom of the media in Section 61. The media has been relatively free to operate without any hindrances. However, the media fell short of fair, equitable and balanced coverage of political players as this largely favoured established political parties, particularly ZANU PF. The nature of coverage has largely disadvantaged less established political parties who have not managed to get much media attention; and have failed to take up any offered advertising space to market their parties. 53% of all coverage in the election period was on ZANU PF, with 76% in the State-controlled print media and 48% on ZBC. While these challenges and concerns have been noted, there has been no observable attempt by ZEC to ensure that the media adheres to provisions in the Electoral Act and other regulations that provide for free, equitable and balanced coverage, despite the existence of a media monitoring committee.

State Resources: ZESN LTOs reported a significant number of incidents of ZANU-PF officials using state resources for campaign purposes. The most frequent types of abuse were: the distribution of food or agricultural inputs, the use of government vehicles and facilities for campaigning, and government officials speaking at campaign events.

Election Day

Opening of Polling Stations

At 99% of polling stations polling officials were present when ZESN observers arrived and 97% of polling stations opened by 7:15 am.

32% of sampled polling stations had 10 polling officials, 24% had nine (9) polling officials, 26% had eight (8) polling officials, and 16% had seven (7) or fewer polling officials. The average number of election officials at polling stations was 9 of whom 5 were women. In addition, 36% of polling stations had a female presiding officer.

100% of the polling stations had all essential polling materials such as ballot boxes, voting booths, ballot papers, ZEC stamp, exclusion list and voters rolls with voters' photographs – though a few polling stations (1%) were missing indelible ink for marking fingers.

At 100% of polling stations, ZANU-PF party agents were present, 95% of polling stations had a MDC-Alliance party agent present while the People's Rainbow Coalition party had party agents present at 38% of polling stations. In addition, 60% of polling stations had party agents from other political parties or for independent candidates present.

98% of polling stations were set up in a manner that allowed voters to mark their ballot papers in secret. Reports have also indicated that 91% of polling stations, where ZESN observed were easily accessible to everyone, including persons with physical disabilities. In addition, at 100% of polling stations the ballot boxes were shown to be empty before being closed and sealed.

The average number of registered voters per polling station was 564 and the average number of ballot papers issued per polling station was 512.

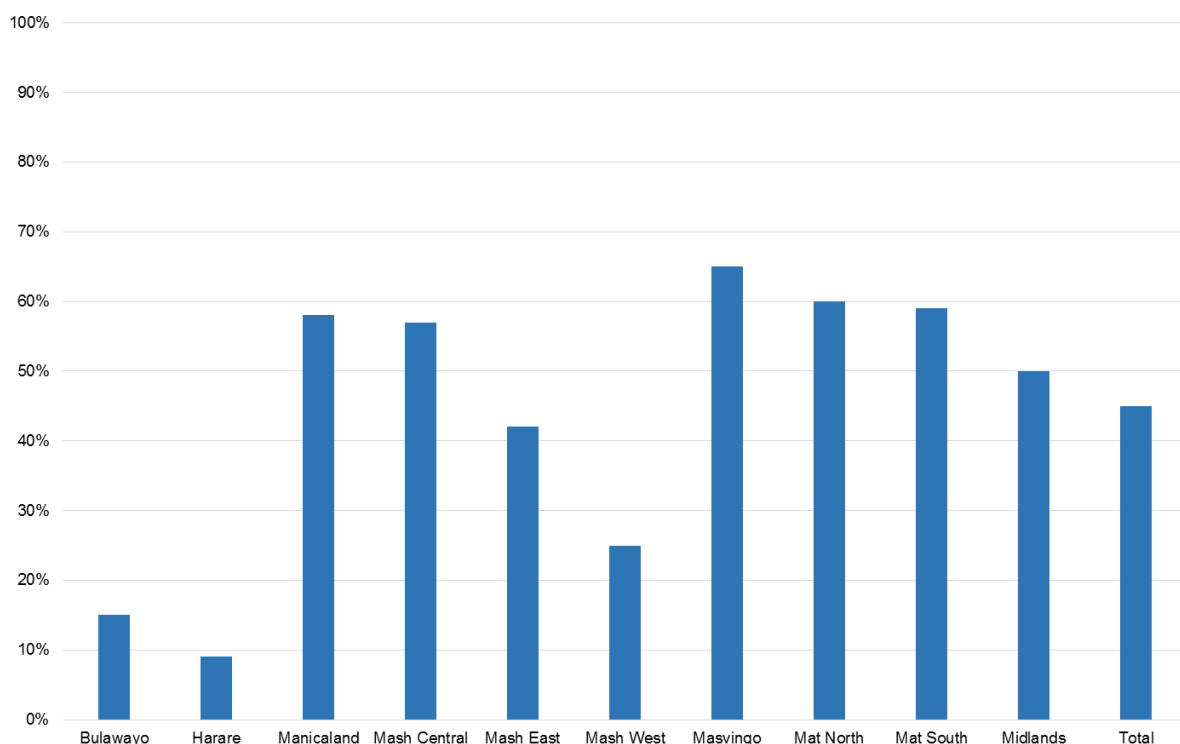
Voting

At 100% of polling stations all voters' names were checked against the voters roll and fingers were checked for indelible ink before being permitted to vote. At 84% of polling stations all voters had a finger marked with indelible ink before voting. At 100% of polling stations all presidential ballot papers were stamped with the ZEC stamp before being issued.

At 6 % of polling stations many people (26 or more) were turned away and not permitted to vote. This was by far most common in Harare where at 19% of polling stations many people were turned away and not permitted to vote.

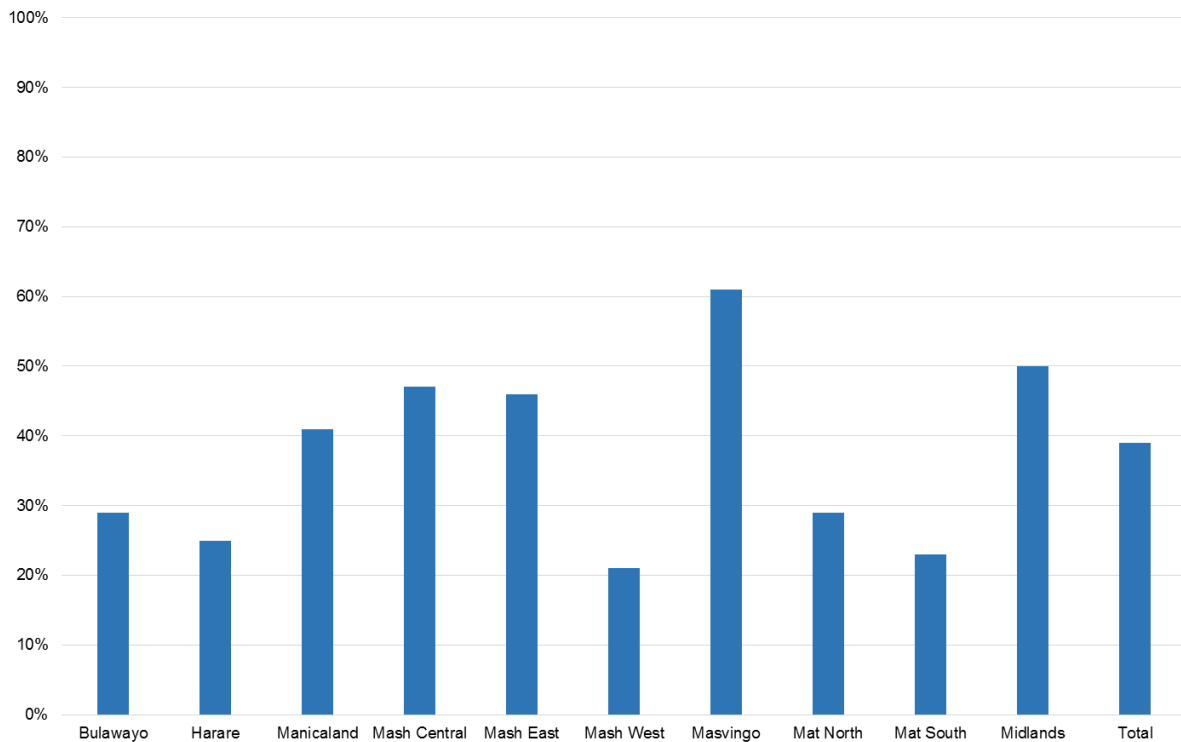
At 45% of polling stations many people (26 or more) were assisted to vote. For Manicaland, Mashonaland Central, Masvingo, Matabeleland North, and Matabeleland South provinces the percent of polling stations with many assisted voters (26 or more) was over 50%. At 39% of polling stations most assisted voters were aided by a person of their own choosing while at 58% of polling stations most assisted voters were aided by the presiding officer. For Bulawayo, Harare, Mashonaland West, Matabeleland North, and Matabeleland South at less than 30% of polling stations were most assisted voters aided by a person of their choosing.

Percent of Polling Stations where Many (26 or More) Voters were Assisted to Vote



Source: Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN)

Percent of Polling Stations where Assisted Voters were Mainly Aided by a Person of their Choosing



Source: Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN)

At 3% of polling stations there was campaigning nearby and unauthorised persons were present in the polling station. At 2% of polling stations there were incidents of intimidation, harassment or violence of which half targeted women. Similarly, at 2% of polling stations someone attempt to disrupt voting.

At 97% of polling stations disabled persons, the elderly, and pregnant/nursing women were allowed to go to the front of the queue and vote without waiting. At 95% of polling stations everyone in the queue at 7:00pm was given an opportunity to vote. However, the time taken to process voters was adversely affected by poor lighting in a significant number of polling stations.

Counting

ZESN observers were permitted to observe counting at 100% of polling stations. At 99% of polling stations the seals on the presidential ballot box were intact when counting commenced. At 3% of polling stations, a MDC Alliance party agent requested a recount of the Presidential ballot paper, while at 2% of polling stations, a ZANU PF party agent requested such a recount. At 97% and 99% of polling stations respectively MDC Alliance and ZANU-PF party agents signed the presidential results form. At 93% of polling stations all party agents present were given a copy of the presidential results form. At most polling stations the presidential results were posted immediately after counting finished. Presidential results were posted less frequently for Bulawayo and Matabeleland North province than other provinces.

Conclusion

Based on reports from ZESN observers, turnout for the 2018 harmonised elections will be over 80% and this in part due to a new voters roll that eliminated deceased and ineligible persons as well as enthusiasm on the part of the voters. ZESN commends the people of Zimbabwe for turning out in large numbers to exercise their democratic right.

As noted, the tabulation of results is underway and ZESN continues to observe the process. ZESN encourages the ZEC to release polling station results in a timely manner to increase transparency and enhance confidence in the tabulation and collation processes.

As appropriate ZESN will issue additional statements on the process, including on the tabulation of results. ZESN calls on all Zimbabweans to remain calm as election results are announced.

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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