

Zimbabwe Election Support Network



Long Term Observers' Post-Election Report

Introduction

Prior to the 2018 Harmonised election, ZESN released a number of statements and reports informed by its Long Term Observers (LTOs) who had been deployed to observe the political environment and key electoral processes during the pre-electoral, electoral and post electoral period. On Election Day, ZESN issued a pre-election assessment statement, mid-day statement, and a report on projections of presidential election results based on its Sample Based Observation methodology. ZESN LTOs have been observing the post-election environment processes in their respective constituencies and this report is based on post-election observations.

Confidence in ZEC Impartiality

ZESN LTOs continued to meet stakeholders in their respective constituencies to, among other things, verify incidents and assess the level of stakeholder confidence in the impartiality of ZEC. Figure 1 below graphically depicts the level of stakeholder confidence in the impartiality of the ZEC over a four month period (May-August 2018).

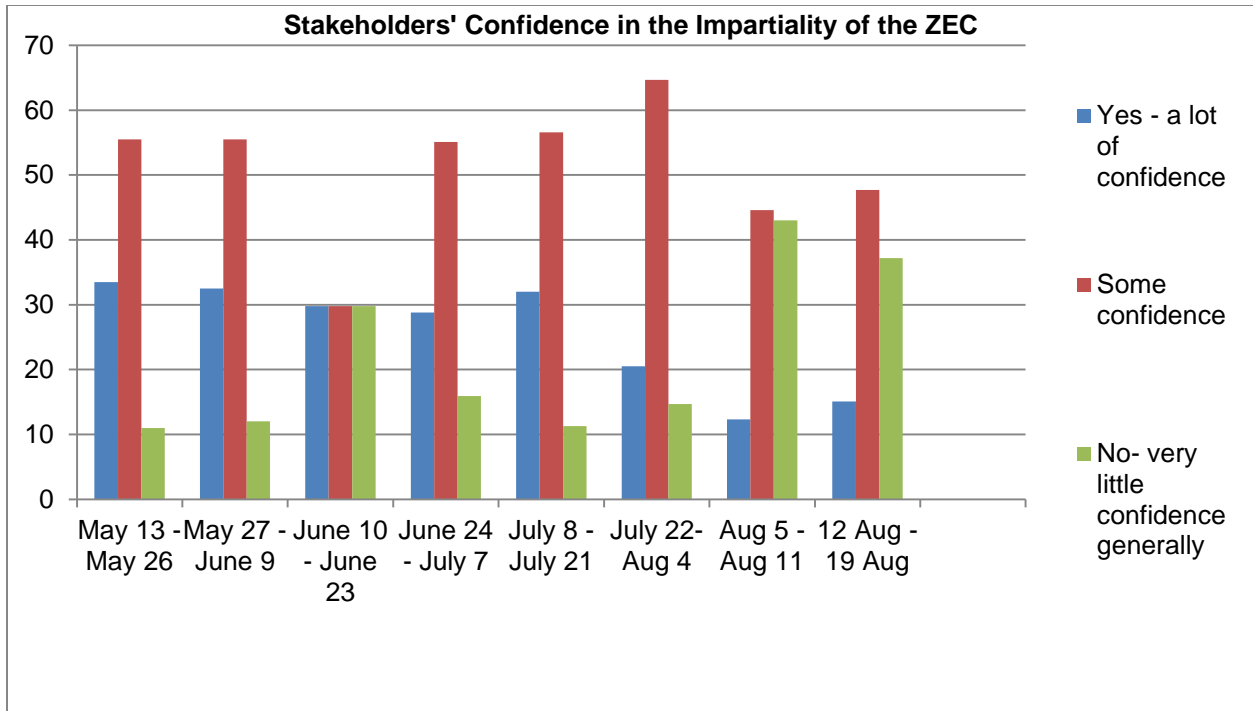


Figure 1: Confidence in ZEC impartiality

As shown in figure 1, closer to the election, there was an overall decline in confidence in the impartiality of ZEC. After the election, stakeholder confidence significantly declined, this can partly be attributed to perceptions fuelled by allegations by the leaders of the main opposition, the MDC Alliance, that the Commission manipulated poll results in favour of ZANU-PF.

Acceptance of Presidential and Parliamentary Election Results by Political Parties

The official Presidential results and some Parliamentary election results were disputed. The most prominent was the Presidential Election result where the main opposition political formation’s Presidential candidate disputed the Presidential election result and lodged a court application with the Constitutional Court to have the election results overturned. The election petition was dismissed by the Court with costs.

Further, there are several electoral petitions that are before the electoral court where the results of the parliamentary elections are being disputed. Some of the cases include: Gift Machokoto Konjana vs Dexter Nduna in which the petitioner is seeking the nullification of

the declaration by the Constituency Elections Officer of Dexter Nduna as the duly elected Member of the National Assembly for Chegutu West Constituency and have he himself declared as the duly elected Member of the National Assembly for the constituency. In the case of Canaan Matiashe vs Nokuthula Matsikenyere, the petitioner seeks, as redress, the of setting aside of the election of the latter as the Member of the National Assembly for Chimanimani West constituency, the declaration of the parliamentary seat for the constituency of Chimanimani West as vacant, and that the cost of the petition be borne by the respondent.

Human Rights Violations

ZESN continues to observe the political environment beyond the Election Day. Over the reporting period, LTOs reported on incidents of human rights violations in their constituencies. However, in most cases, LTOs could not identify the perpetrators of the violations. Where it could be established, ZANU PF supporters and the military were identified as the main perpetrators. Where unofficial curfews¹ were reported, LTOs reported that there was general apprehension in their respective constituencies as soldiers were indiscriminately beating up people. For instance, in Dzivarasekwa, Chitungwiza, and Kuwadzana constituencies in Harare Province, there were reports of soldiers going into nightclubs asking patrons to leave and randomly beating up people found on the streets on the nights of 1 and 2 August.

LTOs also made efforts to verify social media reports of human rights abuses in their constituencies. Intimidation was reported in 19% of constituencies, although reported incidents dropped to some extent over time. In Maware village, Makonde constituency ward 9 in Mashonaland West province, there were threats of a follow up exercise to determine who voted for the MDC Alliance. Figure 4 below indicates the percentages of constituencies where human rights abuses had been reported by 11 and 19 August 2018.

¹ An unofficial curfew as defined by those who interacted with ZESN LTOs is a situation whereby there is no officially announced and gazetted curfew but residents of an area know from experience that walking around in their area beyond some stipulated time (1800hrs in this case) would result in beatings or harassment by State security operatives (from soldiers in this case).

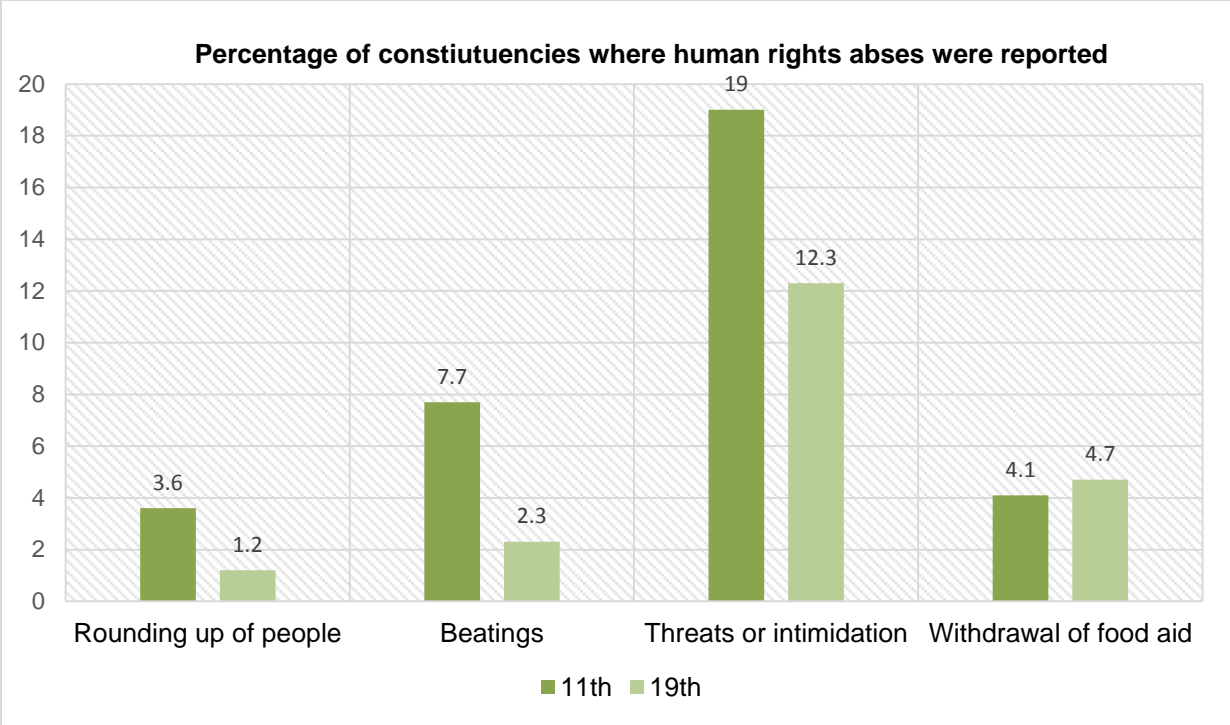


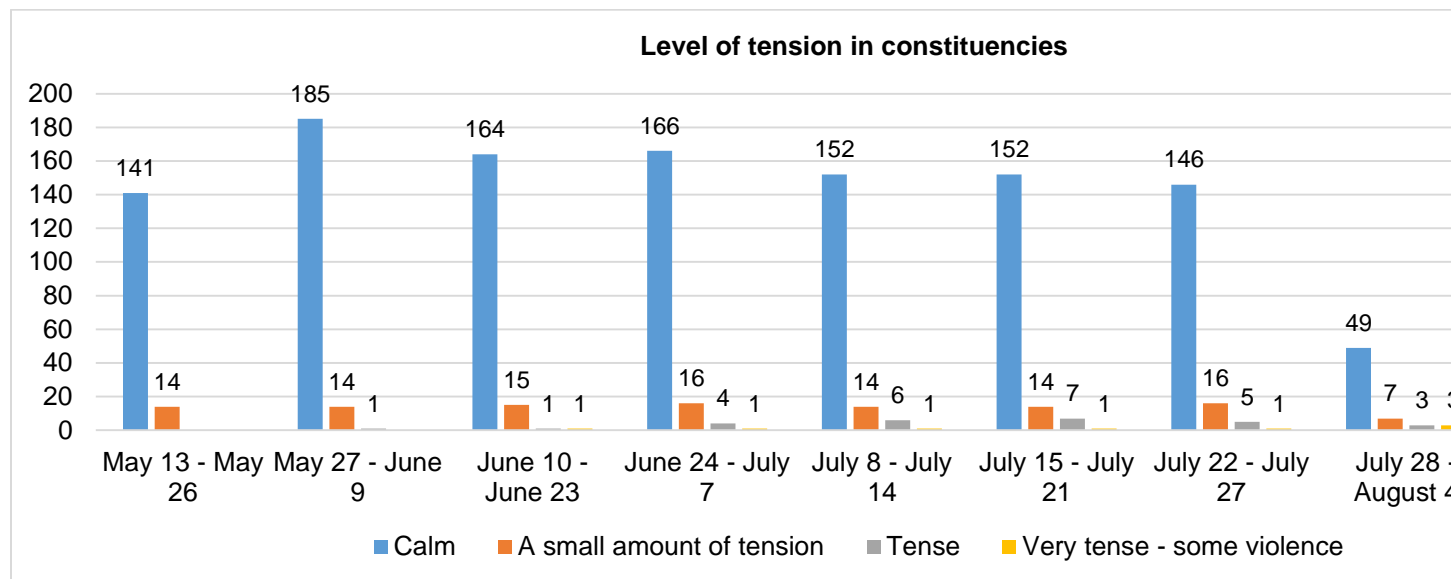
Figure 4: Percentages of constituencies where human rights abuses were reported

As the graph shows, reports on all incidents, except the withdrawal of food aid, dropped between 11 and 19 August 2018. Given that elections are a process, there is need to ensure that the post-election environment is free from irregularities that compromise the quality of the 2018 election and are inimical to the development of a democratic culture.

ZESN urges institutions supporting democracy and enjoyment of fundamental human rights namely the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission to thoroughly investigate the reports of political retribution to ensure that in this post-election period, human rights are upheld and respected. In addition, the Commission of Inquiry into the 1 August 2018 violence, which was appointed on 29 August, must conduct widespread consultations with key stakeholders to ensure that its findings and recommendations are inclusive.

Political environment

ZESN has so far received reports on the level of tension in the constituencies from mid-May, before the election, up to 19 August 2018. Figure 5 below shows the number of reports that were received on the level of tension in the constituencies.



In general, the environment in the constituencies has been calm. As shown in the graph above, tensions escalated during the period when elections were held and results were announced. However, the environment in the reporting period was marred by the events of August 1, 2018 where violent clashes between civilians and security forces led to fatalities and casualties.

Mainstream and online Media coverage of electoral issues

The polarisation that played out in the run up to the election, in both the mainstream and online media, has persisted in the post-election period. Instances of the unbalanced, biased and polarised reports were clearly visible in coverage of the post-election violence that rocked Harare on 1 August. Whereas the media castigated and condemned the heavy-handed response by the security forces, the public media put the blame squarely on the opposition for conducting the protests.

Social media played a critical role in gathering and disseminating electoral information in this election having been employed by political parties, civic society and the electoral management body in voter education and mobilisation. The efficacy of social media was, however plagued by the proliferation of numerous fake user accounts that generated fake news, instigated hate speech and targeted abuse at perceived opponents in both political parties and civil society organisations.

Recommendations:

- i. **Political Parties:** Leaders of the various political parties and political formations should continue calling for peace and tolerance of divergent political opinions in the post-electoral period.
- ii. **The Government:** should ensure that the Commission of inquiry into the events of August 1, 2018 is not hindered in its work and the Commission's findings are made public.
- iii. **The Electoral Commission:** should convene a meeting with an array of electoral stakeholders to jointly review the electoral processes undertaken during the electoral cycle for the 2018 Harmonised Elections.
- iv. **The Electoral Commission and Government should make** public pronouncements against political retribution, discrimination on food aid, and other politically motivated human rights violations.
- v. **The media:** must thrive to maintain objectivity, balance and impartial reporting in its coverage of electoral issues and political parties.
- vi. **The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and the Zimbabwe Republic Police** should collaborate in monitoring and investigating human rights abuses in general and specifically those that are politically motivated. Perpetrators of such violations should be arrested and prosecuted without fear or favour.