

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



Preliminary Statement on the Cowdray Park Ward 28 local authority by-election

31 March 2019 – Bulawayo - As part of its comprehensive efforts to observe the local authority by-election in Ward 28 of Bulawayo's Cowdray Park, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) deployed 37 polling station based observers and a ward collation centre observer. In addition, ZESN had two mobile teams assessing the political environment outside the polling stations.

Observation Methodology

The findings and recommendations of this preliminary statement are made in reference to the Electoral Laws of Zimbabwe, the Revised Southern African Development Community (SADC) Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections as well as other regional and African election guidelines and principles.

ZESN's observation of the by-election included the deployment of two long term observers to observe the pre-election political environment during the campaign period. This preliminary statement is based on reports received from the ZESN's short term and long term observers.

Set up and opening of polling stations

All polling stations in the by election were set up in accordance with laid out procedures, and designed to ensure that voters could mark their ballots in secrecy. Observers reported that all the polling stations opened on time and had started processing voters by 7:30 AM. Essential voting materials such as ballot boxes, ballot papers, ZEC stamp, indelible marker ink, biometric voters' roll with pictures were reported to be present at all polling stations. However, ZESN observers reported that unlike during the 2018 harmonised elections and by elections held thereafter, the polling stations were not equipped with voting booths to cater for persons with physical handicaps such as wheelchair users and voters of short stature.

Voting process and procedures

Observers reported that the voting process in the local authority by-election proceeded smoothly at all polling stations with procedures such as showing ballot boxes to be empty, checking voters' names against the voters roll, examining voters' fingers for indelible ink and applying the ink being duly followed. In addition, observers reported that all voters were required to present identification documents before voting with

those having defaced or invalid identification such as driver's licences and expired passports being turned away.

Redirected and turned away voters

ZESN has observed that whereas there were high numbers of voters redirected to other polling stations, there were fewer turned away and assisted voters in the by-election. The high number of redirected voters can be attributed to some voting centres having more than one polling station and the addition of new polling stations by ZEC. For instance, by the close of polling at Cowdray Park bus terminus tent A, 70 voters were redirected to other polling stations, at Mhlanthini A Primary 40 were redirected, and at Hlalani Kuhle Phetsheya 2, 29 voters were redirected while 23 were redirected at Mkhithika Thebe Primary C. ZESN is concerned by the high number of redirected voters some of whom were not able to proceed to the polling stations they were redirected to. For future elections, ZESN urges ZEC to ensure that there is adequate signage to direct voters to their appropriate polling stations. ZEC should also post the voters' roll outside the polling stations to enable voters to check their names first. In addition, the Commission should ensure that voter education covers information on location of polling stations for specific polling areas especially in areas where new polling stations are added.

Election agents

Contesting political parties and candidates are allowed three polling agents on Election Day, one inside the polling station and two outside the polling station. Of the 18 contesting political parties and independent candidates, ZESN observed that the following political parties deployed the most number of agents, ZANU PF, MDC Alliance, MDC-T, ZEFF, ZAPU and MRP. It is commendable that the political parties and candidates invested in the deployment of agents as this enables them to authoritatively comment on the polling processes. ZESN therefore calls upon political contestants to seriously consider comprehensive deployment of election agents in all elections.

Political environment

The pre-electoral and election day political environment was generally calm and peaceful; this is commendable given the large number of electoral contestants and the high stakes in the by-election. There were however allegations of intimidation, vote buying and incidents of defacing of campaign materials and civic and voter education posters during the pre-election period.

Voter turnout

Generally, the voter turnout was observed to be low in the by-election, for instance, ZESN observed short queues in the morning but these had mostly disappeared by midday. Youth turnout was particularly low when compared to other age groups. Of the 23,257 registered voters only 4,369 voted on election day representing a voter turnout percentage of 18.8%. This is a significant decrease from the 2018 harmonised elections where 18,477 votes were cast representing 79.29% of the registered voters.

Counting and results collation

At all polling stations, ZESN observers were permitted to observe counting and results collation. ZESN observed that closing and counting procedures were duly followed including checking the seals on ballot boxes, requesting election agents to sign V11 forms and posting results outside polling stations.

Election Results Table

	Name of Candidate	Political Party	Number of votes received
1.	Dube Enoch	Independent	27
2.	Dube Mejury	UDA	58
3.	Gumbo Florah	MDC T	133
4.	Mashayanyika Albert	NCA	12
5.	Mloyi Nomagugu	MDC Alliance	1,229
6.	Mujuru Kidwell	ZANU PF	1,899
7.	Mukucha George	Independent	18
8.	Mushauri Godfrey	Independent	18
9.	Ncube Amon	Independent	23
10.	Ncube Nkosinothando	Independent	24
11.	Ncube Polite	ZEFF	84
12.	Ndhlovu Collet	MDC Alliance	221
13.	Ndlovu Nokuthula	ZAPU	133
14.	Ngwenya Nicholas	ZIPP	72
15.	Nkala Nkosentsha	Independent	85
16.	Nyoni Nkosikona	MRP	206
17.	Nzima Buhle	NPF	22
18.	Tshabangu Stanley	Independent	87
19.	Total valid votes Cast		4,351
20.	Rejected votes		18
21.	Total votes cast		4,369

Source: ZEC

Analysis of the results

The ZANU PF candidate Kidwell Mujuru was duly elected as the Councillor of Ward 28 of Cowdray Park having garnered 1,899 votes. The seat was previously won by the MDC Alliance during the 2018 harmonised elections. The Alliance fielded two candidates in the by-election who polled a combined tally of 1,450 votes. The other political parties and candidates polled a total of 1002 votes. In the 2018 harmonised election, the MDC Alliance and ZANU PF candidates received 8514 and 3,632 votes respectively.

Recommendations

1. ZEC should provide adequate signage to direct voters to their appropriate polling stations and ensure that voter education covers information on location of polling stations for specific polling areas especially where new polling stations are added.
2. Copies of the voters roll should be posted outside polling stations to enable voters to check their names first before proceeding into the polling station.
3. ZESN calls upon political contestants to ensure comprehensive deployment of election agents in all elections.
4. ZESN urges ZEC to ensure that for all elections, polling stations are equipped with voting booths to cater for people with disabilities especially those on wheelchairs and voters of short stature.
5. ZEC should enforce the political parties' code of conduct to deter instances of intimidation and defacing of campaign materials.
6. ZEC, political parties and civic society organisations must ensure that voter education encourages the electorate to participate in by-elections.

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

ZESN Chairperson Andrew Makoni: +263772234891

ZESN National Director Rindai Chipfunde Vava: +263712 415 902

Email: info@zesn.net

Facebook: ZESN1 Twitter: @ZESN1

Website: www.zesn.org.zw