
ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



Preliminary Statement on the Chiredzi Rural District Council Ward 12 By-election

26 October 2019 – The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) deployed observers at the two polling stations and the Ward Collation Centre in the Chiredzi Rural District Council Ward 12 by-election. The by-election was held in accordance with Section 121A of the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) following the resignation of the previous councillor, Cllr Andrew Ndebele, of the ZANU-PF party who was elected in the July 31 2018 harmonised elections. The Nomination Court sat on Wednesday 25 September 2019 to consider applications from prospective candidates to fill the local authority seat vacancy. At the close of nomination, two candidates were duly nominated; Mazhata John of the MDC Alliance and Rukanda Arnold of ZANU-PF.

There were two polling stations in the by-election, namely Farm 26 Church and Zhou Primary School. This preliminary statement is based on reports received from ZESN observers.

Observation methodology

ZESN deployed observers at all the two polling stations and the Ward Collation Centre which was based at Zhou primary School in the Chiredzi Rural District Council Ward 12 by-election. The observers' reports were guided by checklists designed to enable them to capture information relating to the entire polling process, including opening, voting or polling, counting, and tabulation in a standard manner.

Electoral campaigns and political parties' activities

The most prominent activities reported for the by-election were door to door campaigns by both candidates.

Political environment

The pre-election, as well as Election Day, environment was reported to be peaceful. No incidents were observed and reported.

Displaying of the voters' roll outside polling stations

It is commendable that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission displayed the voters roll outside polling stations three days before polling day. This helps minimise chances of voters turning up to vote when their names are not on the voters' roll or turning up at the wrong polling station as they can check their names before election day.

Set up and opening of polling stations

ZESN observers reported that both polling stations opened on time with all essential polling materials including ballot boxes, ballot papers, indelible finger markers, voters' roll, the ZEC official stamp, available.

Voting process and procedures

ZESN observers had reported that voting went well, with all polling procedures duly followed.

Party agents

It is commendable that election agents for both parties were present at both polling stations. This affords political parties first hand observation of the polling process and assists parties to raise credible objections whenever they have them as well as appraising themselves of the extent to which the conduct of the by-election adheres to set procedure and guidelines.

Assisted voters

Overall, the number of assisted voters in the by-election was not high. Only two were assisted to vote at Farm 26 Church polling station while seven were assisted at Zhou Primary School polling station. Some of the assisted voters were visually impaired while the others were elderly voters. Voting by persons needing assistance was handled in accordance with the law. For instance, at Zhou Primary School polling station where the highest number of assisted voters was recorded, six of the seven assisted brought their own person to help them. The other person did not and in that instance, two polling officials and a police officer witnessed the Presiding Officer assisting the voter.

Turned away and redirected voters

The ZESN observer based at Zhou Primary School polling station observed seven voters who were turned away. Three of them did not have the appropriate identification documents and four were not on the voters' roll. The ZESN observer at Farm 26 Church did not witness any voters being turned away at that polling station. There were however five voters who were redirected at Farm 26 Church polling station. This was despite the displaying of the voters' roll outside the polling stations three days before polling, as already noted.

Voter turnout

Though higher than recorded in some by-elections, the turnout in the by-election was unsatisfactory. The 60.75% overall turnout was lower than 89.93% recorded for the same Ward in the 2018 harmonised elections.

Election results

The by-election was won by ZANUPF. The results of the by-election are presented in the table below.

2019 by-election				2018 harmonised elections			
Candidate	Party	Sex	Votes	Candidate	Party	Sex	Votes
Rukanda Arnold	ZANU-PF	M	159	Ndebele Andrew	ZANU-PF	M	148
Mazhata John	MDC Alliance	M	26	Mazhata John	MDC Alliance	M	87
Valid votes cast			159	Valid votes cast			235
Rejected votes			2	Rejected votes			6
Total votes cast			161	Total votes cast			241
Voter population			265	Voter population			268
Percentage poll			60.75%	Percentage poll			89.93%

Analysis of the results

The total number of registered voters for the Ward decreased by three from 268 in the harmonised elections to 265 in the by-election. The total number of votes cast decreased by 80 between the 2018 harmonised elections and the by-election. Votes received by ZANU-PF in the by-election increased by 11 from the votes it got for the Ward in the harmonised elections. By contrast, the MDC's votes decreased by 61.

Conclusion

ZESN commends the political parties that contested this by-election for campaigning peacefully and for fielding party agents comprehensively.

Recommendations

- Civil society organisations should provide continue supporting civic and voter education initiatives, emphasising the importance of voting in by-elections.
- ZEC should do more to inform the electorate about the displaying of the voters' roll and encourage them to check their names before Election Day.
- Political parties should do more to encourage the participation of women as electoral candidates.

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