



Summary of Issues

The administration of elections involves many processes such as voter registration, voting procedures, ballot counting and verifying the results.¹ Administration failures result in electoral mismanagement leading to loss of confidence, credibility and trust in elections. More often, Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) are assisted by election observers to identify and address administrative weaknesses in the electoral process.

Equally, the harmonised elections held in July 2018 in Zimbabwe also benefitted from the observer reports which highlighted fourteen recommendations on election administration. The key issues targeted by the recommendations included²:

- ♦ Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC)'s independence is compromised by executive interference;
- ♦ In the absence of free access to election data to everyone and transparency, the electoral process did not adequately inspire stakeholder and public confidence leading to conflicts and suspicions (e.g. ballot paper designing and printing).
- ♦ There was weak stakeholder engagement resulting from failure by the ZEC to provide critical information on all stages of the process in readily accessible form;
- ♦ The observer accreditation process was complicated and costly because of the fees charged and the requirement for physical presence at accreditation centres;
- ♦ The Multi-party Liaison Committees (MPLCs) did not sufficiently address tensions and disputes;

Country Experiences and Good Practices

While effective election administration remains an aspiration, experience in other countries shows that there are some good practices that can be learned. The key issue in democratic elections is credibility and transparency of the processes. These are guaranteed when an independent institution to administer the elections is established. The simplest way to promote independence against executive interference, decision and action in an EMB is to create a legal framework that guarantee the EMB independence. For instance, in Costa Rica, the EMB's independence is protected by the constitution and it is placed at the same level as other branches of government. The EMB is also funded directly by treasury³. To limit executive interference, EMBs may be represented by the Speaker of Parliament in all its matters, including the budget as is the case in Namibia⁴.

To enhance transparency, EMBs should commit to the principle that election data should be freely and easily available for anyone to access, use and share. Open and easy access of election data benefits electoral processes in that everyone can follow and understand the process, improve transparency and trust in elections. Burkina Faso's election processes benefit from this principle.

EMBs are expected to facilitate close cooperation with stakeholders to ensure their support for the process and strengthen their confidence. Legal frameworks in Indonesia, for example, require the EMB to communicate with stakeholders throughout the election process.

¹ *The Oxford Handbook of Electoral Systems*

² *ZESN Petition to Parliament on Electoral Law Reform*, 3 December 2018; *ZESN Report on the 30th of July 2018 Elections*; *ZESN Compendium of Recommendations*,

³ ACE elections encyclopedia, 'Primary elections', in *Parties and Candidates*, 2012 available at www.aceproject.org.

⁴ Forum Report, *Principles for Independent and Sustainable Election Management: International Standards for Electoral Management*, 2012.

Charging observer accreditation fees is now uncommon in many countries, and the process is simplified in countries like Kenya so that there are minimal costs and no delays in awarding accreditation.

Cooperation between EMBs and political parties is desirable to manage inter-party conflicts and disputes. In Southern Africa, political party liaison committees are common and meet at the national, provincial and local levels to address election disputes⁵.

Conclusion and Key Recommendations

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and other observer reports highlighted the weak points in the administration of elections. Fortunately, a compendium of Election Observer Recommendations developed by ZESN after the elections highlights these issues.

To enhance credibility and trust in elections, the key recommendation in the category of election administration centre on the need to strengthen ZEC's independence, improve transparency, and strengthen its communication strategy, stakeholder engagement and cooperation at all stages of the process. This entails:

1. Amending the Electoral Act in line with Section 235 of the Constitution to strengthen ZEC's independence;
2. The ZEC's should always update, and provide citizens with, information and election data in an easily accessible form;
3. The ZEC should strengthen its communication approaches to allow for better engagement and consultation with all stakeholders and citizens throughout the electoral process;
4. The ZEC should facilitate easier accreditation process by eliminating the accreditation fees and a requirement for observers to physically present themselves at accreditation centres; and
5. Government should provide a legal basis for the MPLCs to be a permanent feature of the electoral process by introducing a new provision in the Electoral Act. The new provision should

establish a specific timeline for MPLCs to regularly meet at national, provincial and local levels.

References

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⁵ ACE elections encyclopedia, 'Role of EMBs in Inter-party Dialogue', 2012 available at www.aceproject.org



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