



**ZIMBABWE ELECTION
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FACT SHEET

POLLING PROCESSES

Introduction

The polling process continues to be a key area in the electoral cycle which is negatively affected by several disputes and election related conflict. The polling process herein refers to election procedures that occur in and around a polling station including opening, voting, counting and results transmission procedures. Most election petitions which were filed before the electoral courts in the past pre-dominantly pointed out suspected electoral fraud, maladministration or malpractices related to the polling process. Relatedly, most reports from both domestic and international observers to the July 2018 elections in Zimbabwe commonly identified several challenges linked to polling processes which require review and improvements to enhance the credibility of elections. This fact sheet highlights the key challenges and recommendations for reforms around the polling process.

Challenges to polling processes in Zimbabwe

- The assisted voters' facility is prone to abuse and has weak deterrent measures
- Voters are at times turned away or re-directed due to weak polling station identification and publicity
- There are a number of inconsistencies in application of procedures by election personnel which is indicative of inadequate training
- A number of polling sites are unsuitable with some having inadequate lighting or water
- Inefficiency during voting due to large numbers of voters assigned to a polling station
- Non-compliance with regulations for ballot paper design by the electoral commission
- ZEC's weak consultations with electoral stakeholders during designing of ballot papers.
- Lack of clarity and distinction of ballot papers
- Lack of transparency in instances where the electoral commission makes a decision to change originally presented election results which may arise due to mathematical or other human errors. Security of the ballot is weak and observers have less access to meaningfully track the storage and movement of ballots
- Postal voting does not guarantee voters' free choice. It is weak in terms of ensuring secrecy of the ballot
- Postal voting system remains opaque and lacks mechanisms for meaningful observation
- Procedures for transmission, tabulation and announcement of results are less publicized and are not open to scrutiny
- Counting procedures are tedious and laden with too much paper work
- Results management system is weak and vulnerable to manipulation during transmission of results

Recommendations

- The Electoral Act must be revised to introduce measures aimed at preventing the misuse of assisted voting facility by specifying penalties for those found to be abusing the facility.
- ZEC training of polling officials must be strengthened and lengthened to ensure consistency in application of procedures.

The legal framework should ensure that polling stations are accessible, that there is accurate recording of ballots and that the secrecy of the ballot is guaranteed. (International IDEA, 2002)

- Improve the polling station identification methods including posting of voter rolls outside every polling station and upscale publicity in instances where new polling stations established towards polling day.
- Minimize delays at polling stations during voting and further reducing the maximum number of voters per each polling station from the current 1000 to about 700 per each polling station.
- ZEC must improve access to basic facilities like water, lighting and ablution facilities at all polluting sites.
- To enhance citizen confidence while lessening perceptions of bias on ballot paper design, ZEC must strictly adhere to the legal and regulatory framework which insist on names of presidential candidates to appear in a single column and arranged alphabetically.
- In designing ballots ZEC must prioritize wider consultation and transparent conduct with electoral stakeholders, which lessens suspicion of bias.
- The security of the ballots from printing, distribution to polling stations and on Election Day should be reviewed by providing this process in the Electoral Regulations and allow for meaningful observation by contestants and accredited election observers.
- The Electoral Regulations must be reviewed to bring clarity to the procedure and lessen scope of abuse of the assisted voter's facility.
- To minimize the number of assisted voters ZEC should consider conducting targeted voter education for and use of braille ballot papers for persons with disabilities.
- ZEC must clearly outline the procedure, publicize timelines and processes of completing postal ballots.
- ZEC should enhance mechanisms for observers to scrutinize the postal voting process adequately.
- The procedures for casting and counting postal votes should be reviewed to guarantee the voter's free choice, the secrecy of the vote and ensure efficiency.
- The counting procedures should be reviewed so as to introduce measures aimed at streamlining counting, collation and tabulation processes in order to reduce redundancy, volume of paperwork and minimize human errors.
- Any changes to results, necessitated by mathematical errors or other legitimate causes, should be made in the presence of election agents and observers.

The legal framework should ensure that all votes are counted and tabulated accurately, equally, fairly and transparently. (International IDEA, 2002)

- The ZEC should adopt and publicize transparent procedures for the transmission, tabulation, and announcement of results, e.g. in the form of a Regulation and elaborating detailed procedures in the Election Manual.
- ZEC should invest in an electronic results transmission system that has the capability to transmit results from each polling station directly to the nation results collations centre in real-time.

Conclusion

- Challenges in the polling process largely emanate from electoral regulations which are not clear on key polling procedures, thereby leaving their interpretation and application to the discretion of polling officials.
- Most of the challenges are administrative issues which can be resolved through a ZEC initiated review of the electoral regulations, a task which is under the purview of ZEC.

Key Recommendation

Election authorities should prioritize a major review of the current Electoral Regulations, following extensive consultation with electoral stakeholders. This review must be guided by the compelling need to stem disputes which emanate from some vague, ambiguous or unclear provisions in the regulatory framework which often leave interpretation to the discretion of polling officials. In seeking improvements to the regulatory framework, ZEC must also endeavor to adopt international best practices for polling aimed at improving accessibility, accuracy and secrecy of the ballot.

References

ZESN; Harmonized Elections Report, 2018

ZESN; Compendium of Election Observers Recommendations, 2019