

ZIMBABWE ELECTION SUPPORT NETWORK



Preliminary Statement on the Chegutu Urban Council Ward 2 Local Authority By-election

22 March 2020 – Harare – In line with its mission to promote democratic elections in Zimbabwe, ZESN observed the Chegutu Municipality Ward 2 local authority by-election held on 21 March 2020. The Chegutu Ward 2 seat fell vacant following the death of MDC Alliance councillor, Memory Banda in December 2019.

The Nomination Court sat on Thursday 8 February 2020 to receive nominations of prospective candidates to fill the vacancies. At the close of nomination, two candidates; the MDC Alliance's Machejera Rydes Tinokura and ZANU-PF's Mutongerwa Prosper were duly nominated to stand in the by-election.

Observation methodology

Pre-election observations were reported by ZESN observers who were deployed ahead of election day. On polling day ZESN deployed static observers to 2 polling stations and one observer was also present at the Ward Collation Centre.

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

This preliminary statement is based on reports received from the ZESN's observers.

Pre-elections observations

Both the MDC Alliance and ZANU-PF held peaceful campaigns ahead of the by-election. ZESN observers reported on the rallies that were held by MDC Alliance and ZANU-PF which were attended by their respective provincial leaders. In addition MDC Alliance carried out mobile campaigns encouraging people to vote and ZANU-PF on the other hand conducted door to door campaigns.

Polling day political environment

The political environment in the Ward was reported to be peaceful from morning until around 6 pm when Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Honourable Ziyambi Ziyambi is said to have passed by Madhatter Pre-school polling station in the company of former ZANU-PF Political Commissar Webster Shamu. ZESN observers reported having witnessed the Justice Minister reaching out to a ZANU-PF agent who was tracking polling proceedings outside the polling station. An altercation broke out with MDC Alliance agents and party supporters with the latter accusing ZANU-PF provincial leadership of trying to 'rig the election'. Tensions between the two political parties' supporters were reported to have been high during the day with supporters from both parties congregating within 300 meters of the polling station, at different intervals. This is in violation of provisions outlined under the Fourth Schedule of the Electoral Act which forbids campaigning on Election Day and also holding party activities within 300 meters of polling stations.

Set up and opening of polling stations

Prior to the setting up of polling stations, voters' rolls were displayed outside to enable the electorate to check their names, a good practice from ZEC that hypothetically serves to lessen the numbers of redirected and turned away voters on polling day. ZESN observers reported that polling stations opened on time with all the essential polling materials such as ballot boxes, ballot papers, indelible finger markers, voters' roll and the ZEC official stamp available at both polling stations.

Political parties' agents

Both ZANU-PF and MDC Alliance comprehensively deployed party agents to track the polling process at the two polling stations. ZANU-PF deployed female party agents at both polling stations, while MDC Alliance deployed two males and one female at Madhatter Pre-school polling station. At Rifle Range Tent polling station, MDC Alliance deployed one female and two male political party agents to monitor the polling process. ZESN commends the political parties for the comprehensive deployment of party agents as well as availing an opportunity to both women and men to monitor the voting process on polling day.

Polling officials

Both polling stations had 6 polling officers, the majority of whom were female. At Madhatter pre-school, five of the polling officials including the presiding officer were female and one male polling official, while at Rifle Range Tent polling station, there were three females and three male polling officials. This is commendable as it is important to ensure women participation in election administration among other processes.

Voting process and procedures

Polling procedures were duly followed in accordance with the law, for example checking voters' names on the voters' roll and checking their fingers for ink before they could be allowed to vote and ballot papers were stamped with an official ZEC stamp before being given to voters. However, in view of the topical global pandemic COVID-19, there were no preventative measures put in place for voters, polling officials, political party agents and observers, such as hand sanitizers or water and soap to wash hands. At Rifle Range polling station, one voter refused to place his finger on the table to get his finger marked with an indelible marker citing that it was unhealthy given the COVID-19 scare.

Assisted voters

Out of the 424 citizens that voted in this by-election, only three people were assisted to vote. One male who was visually impaired was assisted to vote at Madhatter Pre-school polling station. The visually impaired voter brought their own assistant. At Rifle Range Tent polling station, one elderly female and one visually impaired male also brought their own assistants to help them cast their vote.

Redirected and turned away voters

ZESN observed that most of the turned away voters were not on the voters' rolls as they were registered voters in other Wards. For example, by end of polling, about 6 people had been turned away because their names were not on the voters' roll. At Rifle Range Tent polling station 10 people were turned away due to various reasons, chief among them; presenting wrong identity particulars such as the driver's licences. At Madhatter Pre-school polling station, eight people were turned away for the same reason while two women were redirected from Rifle Range Tent polling station to Madhatter Pre-school polling station.

Voter turnout

Consistent with ZESN's observations on voter apathy in most by-elections, voter turnout was low in this by-election where the turnout was 43.96%.

By-elections results

MDC Alliance won in the Chegutu Ward 2 by-election and therefore retained the seat. The results of the by-election and of the 2018 harmonised elections are shown in table 1 below.

Table 1 Chegutu Urban Council Ward 2 elections results

2020 by-election				2018 harmonised elections			
Candidate	Sex	Party	Votes	Candidate	Sex	Party	Votes
Chinamira Charles	M	MDC Alliance	240	Banda Memory	F	MDC Alliance	416
Mtongerwa Prosper	M	ZANU-PF	184	Mtongerwa Prosper	M	ZANU-PF	248
				Madekwana Alex	M	PRC	86
				Moyo Phaniel	M	Independent	73
				Rufai Brian Tinashe	M	Independent	20
Valid Votes Cast			426	Valid Votes Cast			843
Votes Rejected			2	Votes Rejected			12
Total Votes Cast			424	Total Votes Cast			855
Voter Population			969	Voter Population			976
Percentage Poll			43.96%	Percentage Poll			87.60%

As shown in table 1 turnout was low at 43.96% in the Chegutu Ward 2 by-election. While the voter population declined by only seven people, the total votes cast declined by almost half between the 2018 harmonised elections and this by-election. Votes received by both parties decreased comparing the 2018 harmonised elections and the by-election. The by-election which was tightly contested, was won by MDC Alliance by a margin of 56 votes.

Conclusion

ZESN accentuates the significance of all elections and encourages voters to take part in electoral processes. Local authority elections are imperative in that, they are a platform for citizens to elect leaders responsible for service delivery in their relevant localities.

Recommendations

ZESN recommends the following, based on its observations:

- Perhaps ZEC should consider postponing by-elections in light of COVID-19 as a precautionary measure

- Alternatively, ZEC should institute preventative measures for voters, polling officials, political party agents and observers, such as hand sanitizers and masks during by-elections.
- Political parties should consider fielding female candidates to replace vacancies that arise from seats previously held by female candidates. This will ensure, at the very least, that the percentage of elected females does not decline during the course of the electoral cycle.
- ZEC, CSOs, and political parties should do more civic and voter education to encourage voters to vote in municipal by-elections.
- Political parties and their supporters should demonstrate restraint during campaigns and Election Day and desist from any actions that may enhance political tensions during electoral campaigns and polling.// Ends

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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