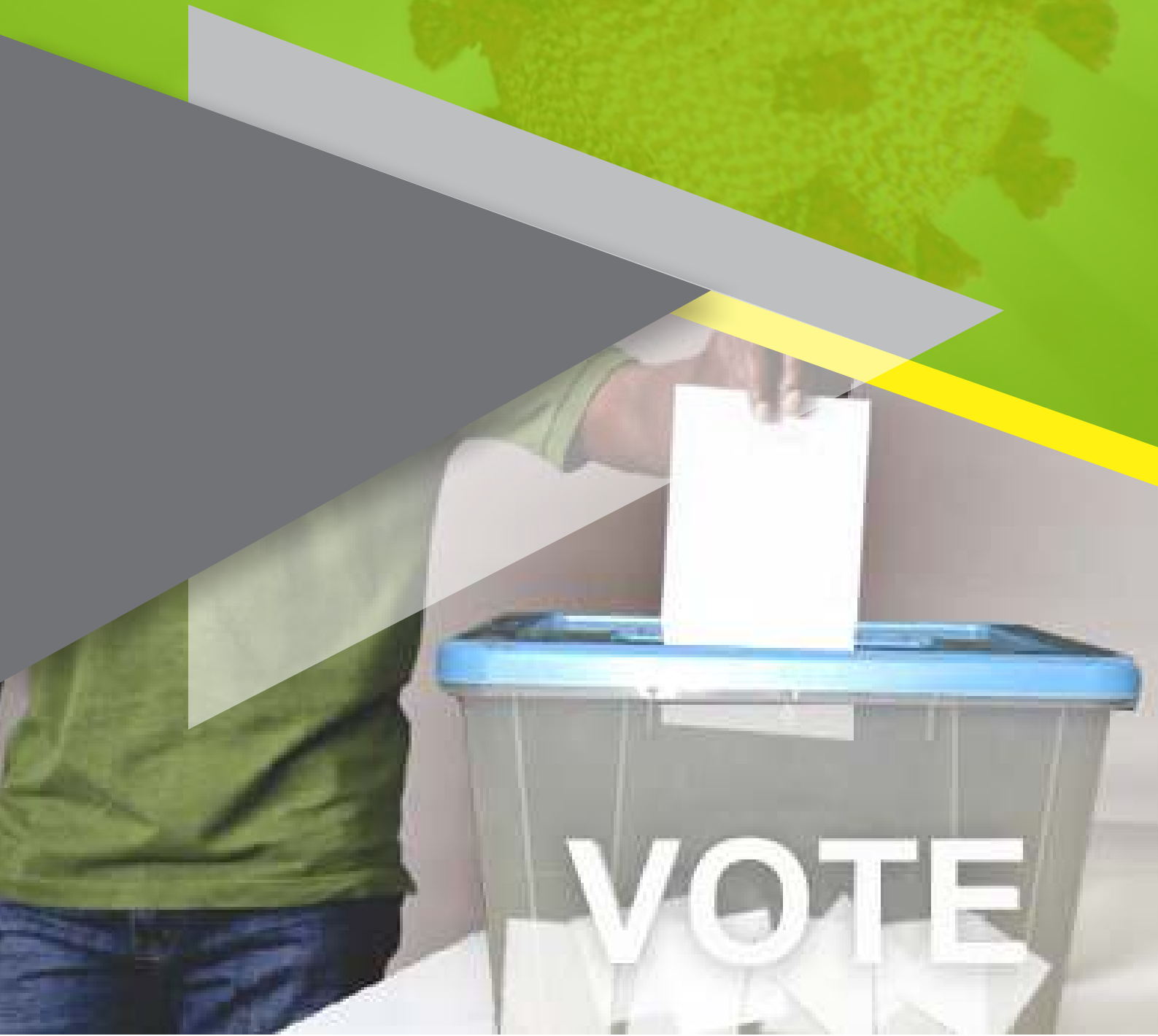




# How to Conduct Elections Amid COVID-19: Options for Zimbabwe

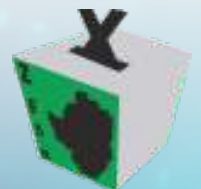


## Introduction

The world over, the outbreak of COVID-19 has had far reaching implications across many facets of life. Many countries have been forced to go on prolonged periods of lockdown interfering with the normal course of events. As a result, electoral processes have been rescheduled or postponed indefinitely in different countries across the globe. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), which had indefinitely suspended all electoral activities, has since issued a statement indicating it would resume activities that do not violate lockdown measures using skeletal staff. It was explicitly stated in the statement that electoral activities that require gatherings will remain suspended. The earlier suspension of all electoral activities led to the postponement of two local authority by-elections. In the National Assembly, two seats that fell vacant during the lockdown are yet to be filled.

This paper seeks to present options for consideration if Zimbabwe is to continue with elections amid COVID-19. While borrowing from experiences in other countries, the paper remains cognizant of the need to recommend what is possibly feasible in the specific context of Zimbabwe. Insights from relevant literature such as the International IDEA's Managing Elections under the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Republic of Korea's Crucial Test and the Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria's Policy on Conducting Elections in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic, INEC Policy Number: 01/2020 of 21 May 2020, inform the paper. Electoral processes that have been affected by COVID-19 in Zimbabwe include voter registration; Civic and Voter Education (CVE); political parties' or candidates' campaigns; elections administration preparations and logistics; polling; election observation; and electoral law reform initiatives, including public hearings.

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## COVID-19 and Elections: An Overview of the Debate

<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/managing-elections-during-pandemic-republic-korea-crucial-test.pdf>

<https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/INEC-POLICY-ON-CONDUCTING-ELECTIONS-IN-COVID19.pdf>

The outbreak of COVID-19 has brought to the fore an important question that in many cases is about preeminence between two fundamentals, namely the protection of the people's health and the need to safeguard democracy. Countries find themselves confronted with the challenge to safeguard the people's health without eroding democracy. At best, a balance has to be struck between the two. There is real fear, especially in electoral authoritarian regimes that democracy will suffer on the pretext of protecting the health of the people. If applied in bad faith, COVID-19-related restrictions could weaken democracy and entrench authoritarian rule by preventing the participation of the people in different electoral processes, depending on how the processes are conducted in a given setting.

As part of measures to prevent the transmission of corona virus, lockdowns have been imposed with people compelled and encouraged to stay at home, numbers of people who can gather have been limited, social or physical distancing has become the norm, and the movement of people has been restricted. This has posed a challenge for a number of countries relating to different election-related processes. A review of countries' experiences would show variations in responses that are, in part, attributable to the extent of the application of technology in electoral processes, among other factors.

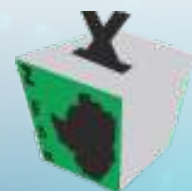
### An Overview of Country Experiences

There has not been uniformity in how countries have responded to COVID-19 relating to the conduct of elections. On the one hand, from 21 February to 3 June 2020, at least 64 countries and territories across the globe decided to postpone national and subnational elections, out of which at least 21 have postponed national elections and referendums. Apart from the national level, a number of countries have also postponed elections at local levels, some for indefinite time periods. On the other hand, at least 30 countries and territories have decided to hold national or subnational elections as originally planned despite concerns related to COVID-19, out of which at least 14 countries have held national elections or referendums and at least 11 countries and territories have both held and postponed national or subnational elections. In determining the right course of action for Zimbabwe, it should be taken into account that each country has to make a decision and proceed in a manner guided by its unique circumstances and realities. Feasibility is a principal consideration in recommending possible options for Zimbabwe if electoral processes are to continue.

<https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/global-overview-covid-19-impact-elections> (accessed 5 June 2020).

[https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/elections\\_postponed\\_due\\_to\\_covid-19.pdf](https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/elections_postponed_due_to_covid-19.pdf)

<https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/global-overview-covid-19-impact-elections> (accessed 5 June 2020).



## To continue with electoral processes or not

At the moment in Zimbabwe, indications are that the country is likely to continue with some electoral processes. The initially adopted official position to indefinitely suspend electoral processes has since changed. On 25 March 2020, the ZEC Chairperson, Justice Priscilla Chigumba, announced the indefinite suspension of electoral processes in the wake of the declaration of a national lockdown to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. Acknowledging that the decision made was necessary in light of the prevailing circumstances, Veritas concluded that the decision was not made in terms of any law and therefore ZEC probably acted unlawfully. On 19 May 2020, the Minister of Justice, Legal, and Parliamentary Affairs, Hon. Ziyambi Ziyambi, said that government did not have plans to indefinitely postpone the holding of by-elections which he asserted are a constitutional requirement such that a court challenge can be launched if they are not held as stipulated. In terms of the law, the next harmonized elections are constitutionally scheduled for 2023 but vacancies in the directly elected National Assembly seats and in local authorities have to be filled in through by-elections held within 90 days of the vacancy having arisen.

In Singapore, the possibility of postponing elections was dismissed based on non-compliance with the Constitution. In Zimbabwe, scheduled local authority by-elections, such as the Chiredzi Rural District Council (RDC) ward 16 and Umzingwane RDC ward 14 by-elections slated for 4 April and 25 April 2020, respectively, were postponed indefinitely. In addition, following the recalling of some Movement for Democratic Change Alliance (MDC-A) Members of Parliament who were representing Dangamvura/Chikanga and Kuwadzana East constituencies, two vacancies were created in the National Assembly. On 5 June, the ZEC's Chief Elections Officer (CEO), Utoile Silaigwana, revealed that the Commission was crafting a policy that would outline comprehensive measures that may help safeguard the health of voters and ZEC who will participate in various electoral processes. The CEO explained that the Commission acceded that there was no explicit provision in the law which grants it powers to suspend or postpone elections, but the decision was made in the public interest to ensure the upholding of public safety and public health as envisioned in Section 86 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe. Silaigwana noted that it was impossible for ZEC to conduct free, fair and transparent elections which guaranteed the political rights envisioned in Section 67 of the Constitution against the background of concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic and the declarations made by the President.

Importantly, considerations for Zimbabwe in deciding on the preferable course of action should include stakeholders' views. This would be in line with the ZEC Strategic Plan of 2019-2024 which, in the words of the ZEC Chief Electoral Officer, is a road map that guides and motivates the Commission and a marker against which stakeholders can measure ZEC's performance. One of the priority areas in the strategy is stakeholder engagement which ZEC identified as key to the achievement of the strategic outcome of building the trust and confidence of stakeholders on the electoral process and contribute towards a level playing field. This followed the Commission's realisation from its own post-2018 harmonised elections SWOT analysis that one of its weaknesses was the lack of institutionalisation of stakeholder engagement as a result of which stakeholders, including political parties, do not express full confidence in ZEC. By ZEC's own acknowledgement in the strategic plan, electoral stakeholders play a key role in creating public confidence in the Commission and ensuring public support for its policies and programmes.

<https://www.veritaszim.net/node/4168>

<https://www.veritaszim.net/node/4168>

<https://www.newsday.co.zw/2020/05/well-not-defer-by-elections-ziyambi/>

<https://www.newsday.co.zw/2020/06/zec-suspends-elections/>

<https://www.sundaymail.co.zw/zec-considers-by-election-options>



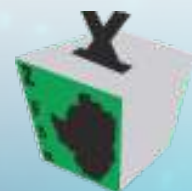
## To continue with electoral processes or not

Importantly, the SWOT analysis also identified mistrust among the political parties and lack of appreciation by stakeholders as a threat as this would lead to an unfavourable political environment for elections. To this end, ZEC committed to institutionalize stakeholder engagement and to develop an operational culture that makes it responsive to the needs of its stakeholders so as to ensure trust in the electoral process. Identified stakeholders include political parties, CSOs, FBOs and the media. The Commission's strategic initiative is the development of a stakeholders' engagement strategy with the performance indicator being continuous stakeholder engagement. There is therefore need for a consultative process; the more inclusive the consultations, the better. In addition to stakeholders identified in the strategic plan, ZEC could even consult voters as well.

While some CSOs had encouraged ZEC to consider postponing elections, other stakeholders, for example political parties, were not consulted before the initial decision to postpone was made. In Chile, a constitutional referendum was rescheduled following a broad political agreement among 15 political parties. An approval by two-thirds of parliamentarians was sought in a constitutional reform bill to bring into effect the new date for the plebiscite. In the Dominican Republic, elections were postponed in consultation with 22 political parties though there were differences on the new dates. For South Korea, International IDEA observes that 'in showing up to the polls in such large numbers, the voters of the Republic of Korea demonstrated a strong resolve in upholding their civic duty of voting, amid dire circumstances that forced them to put their health at risk to vote under a pandemic.' The uncertainty that initially prevailed in political and public debates, as to whether the National Assembly elections could be held or not as originally scheduled was—in time—curved by the successful containment of the virus, paving the way for the decision to go ahead. Elections could indeed continue in Zimbabwe as countries where COVID-19 has been more severe have gone ahead with elections. However, it must be underscored that permissible conditions need to be established.

[file:///C:/Users/D1/Downloads/Strategic%20Plan%202019-2024%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/D1/Downloads/Strategic%20Plan%202019-2024%20(2).pdf)

**In addition to stakeholders identified in the strategic plan, ZEC could even consult voters as well.**



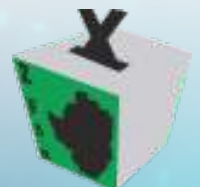
## I. Civic and Voter Education

Knowledge about basic rights and specific election-related information are indispensable for the conduct of elections that allow for the meaningful participation of the electorate. It is therefore imperative that Civic and Voter Education (CVE) is conducted throughout the electoral cycle. In many cases, traditional methods such as distributing printed Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials; addressing public gatherings; and door-to-door visits are utilized in CVE efforts. It is risky to conduct these activities, which may also violate laid down preventive measures, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This means ZEC and CSOs need to think of possible ways to safely continue with CVE.

### *Possible measures:*

- Engaging with health authorities to develop relevant messaging on COVID-19 and the electoral process;
- Designing effective messaging with COVID-19 content and changes to the electoral process;
- Disseminating CVE flyers, messages, jingles, video skits, still images and updates using social media;
- Conduct extensive grassroots enlightenment, using strategies that fully adhere to the COVID-19 prevention protocols;
- Sending out bulk CVE SMS on mobile numbers;
- Producing and sending CVE jingles on national, local, and community radios;
- Conducting CVE radio programmes and running CVE material on television;
- The use of hailers (mobile information caravan), instead of roadshows;
- Pasting posters on public transport and in public places such shops and health centres;
- Convey CVE messages by way of printing adverts on basic products that are used daily, for example face masks, bread, and mealie meal packets and probably even donations that are being distributed in relation to the pandemic;
- Include accessibility features and closed captioning during its online engagements in order to carry along persons with a disability;
- Create an online platform for accrediting media organizations and journalists who wish to take part in electoral activities.

<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/managing-elections-during-pandemic-republic-korea-crucial-test.pdf>



## ii. Political parties' or candidates' campaigns

Elections are about numbers. It is indisputably important for political parties or candidates in an election to canvass for votes. Electoral campaigns take many forms, most commonly organizing mass rallies and meetings where people gather to be addressed by political party officials or candidates as well as door-to-door soliciting. Often, posters and fliers, as well as regalia that includes t-shirts, hats and wrappers '*mazambia*' and food hand outs are also distributed at rallies or gatherings or through door-to-door visits, as part of efforts to canvass for support. Amid COVID-19, these activities increase the chances of the transmission of the virus. This suggests that political parties need to be innovative and possibly adopt methodologies that utilise ICTs in campaigning. Challenges notwithstanding, some of the methodologies might have their own advantages over the traditionally relied upon methods in terms of reach. For instance, youths who normally shy away from, and those who may not attend mass rallies, in fear of retribution could be reached via social media platforms.

### *Possible measures:*

- ZEC could encourage political parties to develop appropriate guidelines and regulations for conduct of party primaries that take into account the COVID-19 prevention protocols;
- ICTs could be used in campaigns. However, the possibility and utility of shifting to the application of online and digital technology such as video messages disseminated through social media platforms, augmented reality technology, and other mobile phone applications in the context of Zimbabwe would need to be considered in light of internet penetration and accessibility, the high costs of data bundles, and accessibility of smart phones to voters.
- Parties and candidates could campaign using text messages which can reach even those not on social media platforms or those without smart phones.
- The desirability of utilising traditional or mainstream media platforms such as radio (national and community stations), and television, would need to be considered in light of the associated inequality of access, bias, and associated monetary costs.
- Whereas in South Korea some political parties and candidates conducted volunteer COVID-19-related work, which involved cleaning neighborhoods in their constituencies and disinfecting the streets, the desirability of the same would need to be considered in Zimbabwe since more or less similar interventions on the eve of elections have historically raised concerns about vote buying. This has been exacerbated by inequalities in campaign funding and the benefits of incumbency.
- Campaign materials and information about parties' and candidates' platforms could be sent to voters through printed election-related information booklets distributed to households nationwide.



## iii. Elections administration

A lot of preparatory work goes into election administration by the Elections Management Body (EMB). Included are processes such as administering processes of voter registration and voters' roll inspection; ballot paper printing; and training of polling officials. The materials to be used for polling also have to be delivered to different polling stations across the country ahead of the Election Day. In Zimbabwe where there is no electronic voting, voters have to physically turn up at polling stations in order to be able to cast their vote, increasing exposure to COVID-19.

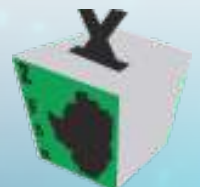
If elections are to continue, the ZEC would need to take all the necessary steps to ensure that protective measures are adopted at every stage in all election-related processes. International IDEA notes that one condition for effectively managing elections amid the COVID-19 pandemic relates to the level and types of means and resources available to create a safe voting environment (including financial resources, infrastructures, assets, supplies, technology, communication means, as well as human resources, know-how, capacities, codified and informal rules and practices, among others), and their sufficient and swift availability to the EMB so that it could timely adopt and implement all necessary extraordinary measures. Below are considerations that ZEC would need to make relating to different electoral processes:

### (a) Voter registration

In Zimbabwe, the process for one to register as a voter requires that they physically turn up at a registration centre. Not only will people be exposed to COVID-19 by meeting with others but they may touch surfaces and share stationery in the process of registration. With the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) process in particular, the capturing of features such as fingers exposes people to COVID-19 virus where several registrants may use one kit which is not properly sanitized or disinfected. South Africa had to suspend the process of voter registration because of the risk involved amid COVID-19.

#### *Possible measures:*

- Mandatory use of face masks for registrants, ZEC officials, party agents; security personnel, and observers involved in the registration process;
- Ensuring maintenance of safe distancing on queues as well as during the registration process;
- Having registrants and ZEC officials sanitizing their hands using alcohol-based sanitisers provided by the EMB;
- Using disinfectants and cotton wool to clean registration kits after the fingerprint of each voter is read.





## (b) Voters' roll inspection

Similar to the registration process, in some cases people have to physically visit inspection centers to check their names on the voters' roll after registration. This exposes people to, and increases chances of the transmission of, the corona virus.

### *Possible measures:*

- ZEC could continue with the use of facilities to check registration status via text messages or an internet platform (online portal) introduced ahead of the 2018 harmonized elections.
- Voters should be able to interact with the ZEC using virtual platforms such as chat facility on the ZEC website in instances where there is need to correct their registration details. Data and user verification methods need to be devised to ensure that such facilities are not abused by unscrupulous persons.

## ( c ) Recruitment and Training

To ensure the efficient and effective administration of elections, EMB personnel needs to be trained. But bringing people to one venue for training is risky amid COVID-19.

### *Possible measures:*

- All training resources such as the manual for election officials could be reviewed to include COVID-19 content and consequent changes to election procedures approved by the Commission. Soft copies of these materials would be shared with trainees prior to training to reduce face to face contacts and also enhance learning;
- Trainers could receive refresher courses on COVID-19 to improve their ability to deliver new content and handle COVID-19 emergencies during training;
- COVID-19 prevention protocols shall inform the choice of training venues. Considerations such as sufficient size to comply with the physical distancing rule and adequate ventilation will be paramount;
- Combining small groups of face to face and online trainings;
- Where the face to face trainings are held, ensuring the necessary COVID-19 prevention protocols shall strictly apply (limiting numbers of trainers and participants, ensuring the mandatory use of face masks, sanitizing of hands, and maintaining of safe distance during trainings);
- Posting training videos on Youtube, official website or other like platforms from where trainees can access them.



## (d) Deployment

The deployment of officials poses risks of the spreading of COVID-19 if care is not taken, for example where many of them have to use the same vehicle.

### *Possible measures:*

- The necessary number of vehicles should be allocated such that only a few people will use one vehicle and that allows for those on board to maintain safe distancing.
- There should also be mandatory use of face masks and to undertake all necessary preventive measures by those on board.

## (e) Candidates' nomination

To contest in elections, candidates need to be nominated. The process involves nomination courts sitting to receive papers from aspiring candidates. This poses risks in a context of COVID-19.

### *Possible measures:*

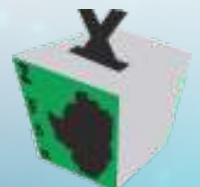
- Using appropriate technology to receive the particulars of polling agents from political parties;
- Publishing the particulars of candidates online and pasting in hard copies at nomination court venues;
- Where aspiring candidates and ZEC officials meet face to face, ensure physical distancing requirements are adhered to, frequent sanitization of hands, take body temperature readings using infra-red thermometers, and enforce the mandatory use of face masks, sanitisers and that all precautionary measures as advised by the health professionals are undertaken.

## (f) Accreditation of Observers

The process of accrediting observers requires that they physically visit accreditation centres where they interact with ZEC's registration officers. This as well is risky amid COVID-19.

### *Possible measures:*

- Observer accreditation process should be done online;
- Reduce the number of accredited observer groups based on past performance and compliance with Commission's guidelines for election observation;
- Virtual meetings to brief accredited observers and key electoral stakeholders on electoral processes and new guidelines or procedures necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

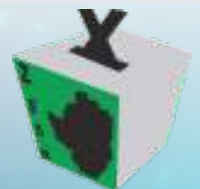


## (g) Polling

To cast their ballots, voters need to physically turn up at polling stations. As a result, voters may be exposed to COVID-19 in queues and as they interact with other people and share stationery.

### *Possible measures:*

- Having a health professional stationed at every polling station.
- Body temperature screening by the health professional for voters in the voting queue and isolation of those with temperature reading outside the normal range;
- Disinfecting polling stations before, during and after polling;
- Considering mandatory COVID-19 testing for ZEC staff before and after deployment for elections;
- Ensuring polling officials have Personal Protective Equipment (PPE);
- Mandatory use of face masks by all involved in the voting process at polling stations;
- Regular sanitization of hands by election administration staff using alcohol-based sanitisers;
- Having voters sanitise their hands or wash their them with soap and running water;
- Ensuring safe distancing inside and out of polling stations, including by indicating using signs and marks strategically placed throughout the voting premises;
- Regularly disinfecting voting compartments, ballot stamps and other election materials;
- Staggering voting times;
- Limiting the number of people in the same room at a given time;
- Allowing voters who are under COVID-19 self-isolation to vote at polling stations after the closing of polling stations for all other voters, with strict protective measures adhered to on the part of both the voters and election administration officers;
- Developing and widely disseminating way ahead of election days a Code of Conduct for Voters detailing information on voting amid COVID-19;
- If a person shows symptoms of COVID-19 at a polling station, they must be isolated from other persons at the venue; the local COVID-19 rapid response team must be alerted; and, if the affected person is an election official, the local ZEC offices should be notified;
- Ensuring the layout of polling stations complies with distancing requirements;
- Introducing a two-tier queuing system at polling stations where voters will be brought into the voting area periodically to prevent overcrowding;
- Using tags and twines to ensure crowd control and maintenance of social distance;
- In order to accommodate additional activities in setting up polling stations due to COVID-19, polls could now commence at 8.30 am and close earlier;
- Prior to the commencement of polls, the Presiding Officer or ZEC officers could read out loudly to voters the contents of the Code of Conduct for Voters;
- Having voters temporarily lower or remove their mask to facilitate their identification;
- Disinfecting and carefully packing materials used during voting and hygienically packaging or disposing used PPE at the close of polls;
- Ensuring safe distancing amongst all in collation centres;
- Police officers, media representatives, and election observers would be governed by safety measures similar to those that apply to voters and EMB personnel.



For purposes of future elections, Zimbabwe could consider having provisions for early voting as in the case of South Korea which already had progressive legal and procedural provisions to facilitate inclusion and participation of voters in its electoral framework, including early and remote voting provisions. In South Korea, early voting measures allowed any voter to cast their ballot in-person at any polling station in the country without prior registration while advance voting by mail enabled special categories of vulnerable voters to post their vote. These were just adjusted to suit the extraordinary challenges posed by COVID-19. Importantly, the EMB had previous experience and proven administrative, procedural and operational capacities to implement them. ZEC would need to work on building trust and confidence in stakeholders as well as ensure high levels of transparency and openness in respect of early voting if this is adopted in Zimbabwe.

#### iv. Election observers and observation efforts

<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/managing-elections-during-pandemic-republic-korea-crucial-test.pdf>

Subjecting elections to observation, most importantly by neutral observers, helps deter possible malpractices and enhance public confidence in electoral processes. Election observation includes processes such as the recruitment of observers, training or briefing, deployment, actual observation, and disbanding.

##### (a) Training

Observers' training or briefing may entail bringing people together which would be risky.

##### *Possible measures:*

- Putting on face masks and maintaining safe distancing in travelling to training venue;
- Consider having participants and trainers tested for COVID-19;
- Having people sanitizing their hands and putting on face masks, and maintaining physical distance during training;
- Whether trained online or otherwise, observers could commit to follow health guidelines as part of their Code of Conduct or Observer Pledge;
- As might be necessary, conducting more intensive trainings for observers face to face in compliance with the country's COVID-19 preventative measures. In such cases, multiple meetings could be held with a few people rather than large training sessions.

##### (b) Deployment

The deployment of observers is likely to be riskier if, by virtue of distance they have to travel to get to their station of deployment, they have to use in groups some mode of transport.

##### *Possible measures:*

- Provide transport so that observers do not need to resort to using public transport.
- Observers follow the provided health guidelines provided by ZEC or the designated health professional at polling stations on Election Day.
- Ensuring that the observers have face masks, sanitisers and maintain physical distancing whilst on board.



## ( c ) Observation

The actual observation itself exposes observers at and around polling stations to COVID-19. .

### *Possible measures:*

- Watch out for possible social media misinformation and disinformation around COVID-19 and attempts to induce voter confusion, social cleavages, and gender-based and other bigotry that might affect elections. Watch out for possible disenfranchise potential voters;
- Ensuring observers follow guidelines given by the presiding officer or election officers to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at polling stations on Election Day.
- Organisation deploying observers will have to provide face masks for use by the observers.

## v. Advocacy for electoral reform

Advocacy efforts often involve meeting different stakeholders to deliberate, influence, and exert pressure on issues of interest. Organising physical platforms that bring people to gather together increases exposure to COVID-19.

### *Possible measures:*

- Advocacy engagements with policy makers, key electoral stakeholders including citizens could continue using ICTs such as virtual or webinar platforms. As noted earlier, challenges related to the use of ICTs in Zimbabwe would generally include network challenges or poor connectivity; the high cost of data bundles for poor sections of the society; and electricity challenges as a result of which marginalised and remote parts of the country may not be reachable.

## vi. Electoral law reform process

Strides had been made before the COVID-19 pandemic struck with regards to the process of electoral law reform. CSOs had engaged Parliament, the ZEC, and other stakeholders on the subject of electoral law reform. The engagements had culminated in the submission by CSOs to Parliament of a proposed Electoral Law Bill for consideration in the ongoing process of aligning the Electoral Act with the Constitution and a petition submitted by ZESN in December 2018. The momentum was however interrupted by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and attendant measures aimed and preventing its spread such as the suspension of Parliament's activities, including public hearings. On public hearings, Minister Ziyambi Ziyambi indicated that administrative measures were being put in place to ensure MPs and committees visit the public and conduct public hearings under very strict safety regulations and the law as pronounced by the President.

### *Possible measures:*

- Continuing with public hearings adhering to limits on gatherings and other stipulated health protocols.
- Utilizing phone-in radio programmes to get citizens' feedback.

<https://www.newsday.co.zw/2020/05/well-not-defer-by-elections-ziyambi/>



## Conclusion and Recommendations

COVID-19 has affected the normal course of events globally. Electoral processes have been rescheduled or postponed indefinitely in some countries while they have proceeded as planned in other countries. In Zimbabwe today, indications are that electoral processes that do not require gatherings could continue. There are vacancies in the National Assembly and in local authorities and it is still unclear if by-elections will be held to fill them. ZESN proposes that electoral processes continue under stringent conditions in line with COVID-19 transmission prevention measures. For a start, innovative ways of working around the electoral cycle with minimum face to face interactions should be piloted. ZEC should engage key electoral stakeholders to solicit views and enhance on issues of trust, confidence building among other key administrative reforms. Policies should be formulated to guide all electoral stakeholders and the ZEC in conducting electoral and interfacing with electoral processes in the safest possible way during the COVID era.

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