



**Zimbabwe Election
Support Network** ■
Promoting Democratic
Elections In Zimbabwe

Press Statement

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT ON THE 22 OCTOBER 2022 SIX LOCAL AUTHORITY BY-ELECTIONS

Harare- 23 October 2022- In the spirit of promoting democratic elections in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) observed Local Authority by-elections on 22 October, 2022 in Buhera Rural District Council (RDC) Ward 24, Guruve RDC Ward 4, Insiza RDC Ward 4, Matobo RDC Ward 2, Mutare Municipality Ward 18 and Takawira RDC Ward 6. The by-elections in which the ruling party retained 5 out of 6 local authority seats were held against a background of violence which marred the electoral credibility of Ward 2 of Matobo RDC, Ward 4 of Insiza and Takawira Ward 6. The three Wards were heavily manned by the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) security details as part of efforts to maintain law and order given the toxic political tensions that were rife during the campaign period. A few instances of electoral malpractices were observed at Takawira where ZANU-PF is reported to have mounted a campaign desk within the vicinity of the polling station.

Legal Framework

The by-elections were held in accordance with Section 121 A of the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) following the passing on of Councillors Saimon Chingwidze (ZANU-PF) of Ward 24 Buhera RDC; Tom Moyo (ZANU-PF) of Ward 2 Matobo RDC, Kudakwashe Chisango (MDC-A) of Ward 18 Mutare Municipality; Lencio Kafungura (ZANU-PF) of Ward 4 Guruve RDC, Johannes Kohli (ZANU-PF) of Takawira Ward 6 RDC and Lawrence Maphosa (ZANU-PF) of Insiza Ward 4 RDC. The Nomination Court sat at the respective district offices on 7, 20 and 21 September 2022 to consider nominations for the by-elections.

Observation methodology

ZESN trained and deployed 15 static observers and four (4) mobile observers who were accredited by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) to observe the six (6) Local Authority by-elections. The observers were deployed to seventeen (17) polling stations in the six Wards a few days before polling to observe the electoral and political developments ahead of the

polls. 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 the Conduct of Democratic Elections as well as other regional and African election guidelines and principles. This preliminary statement is based on reports received from the ZESN observers.

Pre-election Observations

Campaigns to solicit votes commenced towards the end of September soon after the sitting of the Nomination Court. The by-elections were preceded by political and electoral violence in Matobo, Insiza and Takawira. Conflicts escalated in Matobo on Sunday 16 October 2022 leading to inter-party violent clashes, victimization, intimidation and hate-speech involving ZANU-PF and CCC members which left some of the two (2) parties' supporters injured, some hospitalized and property destroyed. ZESN reiterates its calls for political parties to foster peace and tolerance of divergent views in line with the dictates of Section 67 (2) of the Constitution which provides for fundamental rights including the right. Moreso, political and electoral-related violence as it undermines civil and political rights and affects citizens' right to compete in electoral processes without fear.

Polling day political environment

The political environment was reported to be calm and peaceful in Ward 18 Mutare Municipality, Guruve Ward 4 and Buhera Ward 24. A few disturbances were observed and reported by the observers in Matobo Ward 2 as well in Ward 6 Takawira RDC. A few hours after the commencement of polling at Sikhamaswe Primary School in Matobo Ward 2, ZANU-PF members reportedly mounted a desk with their party campaign materials less than 300 metres from the polling station. While the desk was later removed following the intervention of ZEC and the Police detailes manning the polling station, this was in violation of the Paragraph 7 (d); Electoral Code of Conduct for Political Parties and Candidates which prohibits political parties and candidates from campaigning or displaying campaign materials within a 300 metres radius of a polling station or counting centre.

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 the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) that supposedly serves to lessen the number of redirected and turned away voters on polling day. ZESN observers reported that in the seventeen (17) polling stations observed, they were opened on time with all the essential polling materials such as ballot boxes, ballot papers, indelible finger markers, voters' rolls and the ZEC official stamps available.

Political parties' agents

ZANU-PF and the Citizen Coalition for Change (CCC), contested in all the six (6) Local Authority by-elections and had observers in all the 17 polling stations where ZESN observed. The National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) fielded a candidate in Ward 18 of Mutare Municipality. At Area 16 Shopping Centre Tent, Joshua Dube Primary School and Nyamauru Primary School where ZESN observers were stationed, NCA had party agents. ZAPU contested in Ward 2 Matobo and had party agents at all four (4) polling stations in the Ward. ZESN commends political parties for fielding party agents as this allows them to track polling processes and their ability to make any interventions where necessary.

Polling officials, Voting process and procedures

In the seventeen (17) polling stations that ZESN observed there were eight (8) polling officers, and the majority of the presiding officers were male. 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. Ballot papers were stamped with an official ZEC stamp before being issued to voters. In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, ZESN commends ZEC for putting in place preventative measures for voters, polling officials, political party agents and observers, such as hand sanitisers or water and soap to wash their hands as well as ensuring that voters properly wore masks before entering the polling station.

Assisted Voters

Observers reported that in all the polling stations visited or observed, there were assisted voters. For example, the highest number of assisted voters was recorded at Edwaleni Primary School in Insiza RDC where 36 people were assisted to vote out of 207 who voted. At Zvakare Primary School in Ward 24 Buhera 24 were assisted whilst at Mukwenya Primary School in Guruve Ward 4, 18 out of the 187 people were assisted. At Chimufombo Primary School in Guruve out of the registered voter population of 478, 280 turned out to vote, of these, 13 were assisted. Several reasons were cited for assistance, including poor eyesight and illiteracy. At Edwaleni, 36 were assisted out of 207 who voted. The majority of assisted voters were assisted by polling officials in the presence of the police.

Voter turnout

Highest voter turnout was recorded in Insiza where 62.45% of the voter population turned up to cast their vote. Buhera, Matobo and Takawira also had high voter turnouts of 52.4%, 57.93% and 58.5% respectively. At the close of polling, voter turnout remained significantly lower in Mutare Municipality ward 18 where only less than 20% turned up to vote. ZESN accentuates the significance of all elections and encourages voters to take part in all 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.

Redirected and turned away voters

The number of redirected numbers was particularly high at centres where there were more than one polling station for instance in Mutare Municipality Ward 18 at Joshua Dube Primary School A as well as at Dry Paddock in Matobo Ward 2. However, most of the redirected voters were not being recorded and were simply directed to the nearby polling stations.

Further, ZESN observers reported that some people were turned away for turning up without proper identification details or their names not being found on the voter's roll. At Muzokomba Primary School in Buhera RDC, ten (10) were turned away because their names could not be found in the voter's roll. At Edwaleni in Insiza, eight (8) voters were turned away.

By-Election Results

ZANU-PF won five (5) out of six (6) local authority seats that were being contested whilst CCC won in one (1) Ward. The table below shows the results of the by-elections.

Table 2. 22 October by-election results

22 October 2022 by-election					2018 harmonized elections			
	Candidate	Sex	Party	Votes	Candidate	Sex	Party	Votes
Buhera RDC Ward 24	Muzokomba Ernest	M	ZANU-PF	1265	Chisango Kudakwashe	M	ZANU-PF	1822
	Muzamba Joram	M	CCC	692	Mzamba Joram	M	MDC-A	1346
Guruve RDC Ward 4	Chiguma Stephen	M	ZANU-PF	1135	Kafungura Lencio	M	ZANU-PF	1634
	Kudyahakudadirwi Wonder Francis	M	CCC	114	Kudyaha-kudadirwi Wonder Francis	M	MDC-A	184
					Moyana Tinashe	M	PRC	24
Insiza RDC Ward 4	Dube Daniel	M	ZANU-PF	578	Maphosa Lawrence	M	ZANU-Pf	813

Conclusion and Recommendations

ZESN commends the voters who took time out to cast their vote during these by-elections to elect their preferred local authority candidates. While the pre-electoral and polling day political environment was relatively peaceful in all the six wards, ZESN strongly condemns the political tensions and violence that flared up in Ward 2 of Matobo, Insiza Ward 4 and Takawira Ward 6. As the country prepares for the 2023 harmonised elections, ZESN restates its concern on the violence and political tensions that occurred in some of these by-elections. The Network therefore proffers the following recommendations to improve the pre, polling and post electoral periods in future elections:

- The Network restates its calls for the police to investigate the incidents of violence and tensions that marred the pre and polling environment.
- Political party leaders must continue to call on their supporters to tolerant divergent political interests in a peaceful manner to ensure and respect the enjoyment of civil and political rights by all citizens enshrined in the Constitution and to enhance the credibility of elections in Zimbabwe.
- Political parties should encourage their supporters to observe electoral laws on campaigning and gathering within the vicinity of polling stations.
- The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) to educate political party leaders and their supporters to respect the civil and political rights, in particular freedom of association.
- There is a need for the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) to investigate, speak out against violence, facilitate dialogue among political parties and offer possible solutions in order to prevent conflicts and disputes arising in future electoral processes.
- ZEC and CSOs should do more civic and voter education to encourage voters to vote in local authority by-elections.//**ENDS**

FOR COMMENTS AND FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT

ZESN Chairperson: +263772234891

ZESN Acting Executive Director: +263772219462

zesn2011@zesn.net, info@zesn.net

Facebook: Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN)

Twitter handle:@ZESN1