



ZESN URGES YOUTH TO EFFECTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) has implored youth to actively participate in electoral processes in line with Section 67 of the Zimbabwean Constitution ahead of the 2023 harmonized elections. ZESN Chairperson Andrew Makoni made the call while commemorating this year's edition of the National Youth Day which falls on the 21st of February. The National Youth Day was established to recognize youths and their contributions to different areas in the country comes at a time when the country is preparing for the 2023 harmonized elections.

"Whilst the youth are an important demographic group in the country constituting 67.7% of the total population, their participation and representation in key governance processes remains low due to lower voter registration and low turnout during polling," said Makoni. He added that, "ZESN thus, implores youths to exercise their constitutional rights through taking part in continuous voter registration as well as participate in various electoral processes peacefully."

ZESN Executive Director Rindai Vava welcomed the institutionalisation of the youth quota in the National Assembly saying, *"the move enhances their participation in democratic governance processes as this is something that youth had been lobbying for since 2017."* She however called on the government and political parties to employ the 25% threshold as outlined in the National Youth Policy, to ensure representation of youth in all public office and leadership positions from the village, ward, and council to the National level.

"Perhaps, the Ministry of Justice, Parliamentary and Legal Affairs and ZEC should consider lowering nomination fees for youth to enable them contest in elections as candidates," said Vava.



Vava bemoaned youth participation in political and electoral violence which has a negative effect on their political, economic and social inclusion. Youth are often coerced by the political leadership to play a role limited only to mobilising, channelling youthful political participation and in some cases perpetrating acts of violence to further their political leaders' interests. On the other hand, the youth have also been victims of political violence, hence there is a need to foster peace, conflict management and tolerance of divergent views ahead of the 2023 plebiscite.

"Youth should foster peace and not allow themselves to be used to cause violence in the coming elections, uproot vices such as drug and alcohol abuse and the abuse of social media that threaten their existence as responsible citizens, limiting their full participation and positive influence in the electoral processes," urged Vava.

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LET'S TALK ABOUT ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

Section 155 (1) (a) (d) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe provides that Elections, which must be held regularly, and referendums must be **peaceful**, free and fair and must be **free from violence** and other electoral malpractices.

Q: What is Electoral Violence?

A: Electoral violence is targeted violence that occurs during the electoral cycle against election officials, voters, observers, candidates, journalists, electoral campaign equipment, vehicles, offices, polling stations to influence electoral conduct and outcomes.

Q: How does electoral violence manifest?

A: Violence can manifest as physical or other forms of aggression including coercion, intimidation, harassment, hate speech, cyberbullying, sexual, murders and injury between rival supporters among others.

Q: Which phase of the electoral cycle does violence occur?

A: Violence occurs throughout the electoral cycle e.g during Voter Registration, Political Campaigning, Nomination, Polling Day, Voting, Results Announcement and Post-Election period among others.

Q: How does violence affect electoral processes?

A: It affects the credibility of elections as it disenfranchises women, men, persons with disabilities and youth and effects will be democratic deficit due to fear and trauma to participate in elections leading to voter apathy. Violence can also delay, disrupt and derail a poll and influence electoral outcomes.

Q: What must be done to reduce instances of violence in elections?

A: There is need to monitor, come up with methodologies to mitigate electoral related violence and encourage peace by all stakeholders.

Civil Society, Faith Based and Community Based Organizations - can conduct peacebuilding initiatives, constitutional literacy awareness on the civil and political rights.

The National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) - must investigate, speak out against violence, uncover the causes behind a conflict, assist all victims of the conflict, facilitate dialogue among political parties, communities, organisations and other groups, and offer possible solutions to prevent conflicts and disputes arising in the future.

The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission - must ensure that electoral processes are managed effectively to the expectations of key stakeholders and the electorate.

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) - must promote, protect, support and enforce the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by Zimbabwean citizens through receiving complaints and investigating cases of electoral violence.

Political Parties - must educate their supporters on observing and promoting good electoral practices such as conflict management and tolerance of divergent views.

The Judiciary - must provide a timeous dispute resolution mechanism, increasing accountability of actors in participating or managing electoral processes.

Accurate and objective reportage on electoral processes and systems is needed from **The Media** without proliferating hate speech as it can fuel polarized views that may incite tensions, accelerate and magnify conflicts.

Traditional Leaders: have a critical role to play in reducing violence influenced by values and beliefs that normalise violence. They must settle domestic and cultural disputes that arise within their areas. They must promote culturally sensitive and positive behaviours.

Women, youth and People with Disabilities - must be empowered to urgently respond and to seek redress where their human rights are violated and demand justice and protection as equal citizens of society. Must also provide peer to peer education on the importance of peaceful coexistence and political tolerance.

Zimbabwe Republic Police - must uphold the rule of law and investigate cases of electoral violence and bring the perpetrators to book.

Everyone should be free to engage in electoral processes as electoral workers; voters; candidates; observers and campaign **freely and peacefully**. Let us **foster peace** before, during and after the elections! **VOTE IN PEACE**





POLITICAL PARTIES SPEAK ON UPCOMING ELECTIONS

ZIMBABWE will this year hold its harmonized elections on a date that will be proclaimed by the President where most political parties will participate in the race for vacancies in the Presidium, National Assembly and local authority.

Some political parties said, while they were prepared for the upcoming elections, they will be contesting under protest citing unfavourable electoral playing field which they said favours the ruling party.

Citizens Coalitions for Change (CCC) deputy national spokesperson Felix Mafa Sibanda said they were also praying for peaceful, free and fair elections

"We are more than prepared to participate in the general elections this year. However there are problems and issues that we wish them to be ironed out before the general elections like dealing with violence, availing of the voters' roll, and employment of personnel from various security sector departments in key ZEC positions among others," Mafa-Sibanda said.

Mafa-Sibanda said they were also having challenges with voter registration saying the ZEC registration centres were not accessible. *"We have problems with the ZEC offices which are very far away. It's very difficult to transport people to register. But we are encouraging everybody to exercise their constitutional right to register to vote. We are also not happy because the Diasporas have been denied their birth right to vote. This is unjust," he said.*

MDC Alliance presidential spokesperson Lloyd Damba also raised similar concerns saying Zimbabwe was headed for a disputed election.



"The ground is tilted very much in favour of ZANU-PF. ZEC is highly compromised and we are alive to that fact. Look at the last delimitation report which is based on temporary results of the census," Damba said.

"Look how everybody has disagreed with the report including the Commissioners themselves. Never in the history of this country has there been confusion on a delimitation report, to the extent of the State President (Emmerson Mnangagwa) presenting his views on the same."

However, ZANU-PF national spokesperson Christopher Mutsvangwa said the opposition were running scared of electoral defeat. He said the ruling party was banking on the rural vote.

"We are very confident that the rural vote will carry us through since the majority of Zimbabweans live in rural areas. They have been the back-bone of the party's support and I believe that if we carry out a substantive voter registration exercise with the rural population, we will be assured of another victory," Mutsvangwa said.

According to Mutsvangwa, opposition parties were headed for defeat because they did not have structures.

"Our structures are historical and we are working very hard on our structures so that they can go to vote. So, we are so confident that we are going to win because other parties don't have structures."

He added: *"We will keep our rural strongholds and increase the vote there. We shall devour chances of urban vote from MDC. So our margin will be much wider than the last election."*

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ZIM HEADS FOR ELECTIONS WITH A DISPUTED DELIMITATION EXERCISE

ZIMBABWE may be headed for an election with a disputed delimitation exercise after the final delimitation report was gazetted by President Emmerson Mnangagwa on February 20, 2023. Zimbabwe Electoral Commission Justice Priscilla Chigumba, indicated that the gazettement of the Report means that the delimitation exercise is over in terms of the law.

However, many CSOs and political analysts have poked holes into the delimitation report citing a number of irregularities and also raised concerns that the Commission may have applied a wrong formula to redraw electoral boundaries. Political analysts have also raised concerns over gerrymandering.

According to Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ziyambi Ziyambi, the total number of registered voters was divided by 210 constituencies resulting in a national average of 27 640 voters per constituency.

Ziyambi said a 20% variance from the national average was then determined resulting in a maximum registered voter threshold of 33 169 voters and a minimum of 22 112 voters.

Section 161(6) of the Constitution states that in delimiting constituencies, ZEC need to ensure that “no constituency may have more than 20% more or fewer registered voters than other such constituencies”.

Concerns have been raised that the formula which was applied by ZEC led to a situation where some constituencies ended up having more than 20% more or lesser registered voters than others.

In order to avert dispute delimitation exercises in the future, ZESN reiterated its calls for Parliament to enact Delimitation Regulations to guide delimitation exercises.

“ZEC must develop Delimitation Regulations and submit these to Parliament for debate so that several issues not covered in the Constitution are comprehensively provided for and addressed. In future, ZEC must hold the delimitation exercise guided by final census reports, not the preliminary reports, which are yet to be validated. The Constitution does not explicitly require ZEC to use census data, but states that the delimitation must occur 'as soon as possible after a population census,'” said ZESN.

Project Vote 263 Executive Director Youngerson Matete accused ZEC of failing to consult other stakeholders before conducting the delimitation exercise.

“First and foremost, we need to underline that this report was done on the background of ZEC refusing to furnish stakeholders with an auditable and verifiable voters' roll so we can't authenticate or verify the figures given,” Matete said.

Election Resource Centre (ERC) Programs Manager Solomon Bobosibunu said the formula used distorted voter thresholds per constituency.

“That's a challenge because you can't say at national level, you are using this threshold and at provincial you are using something different,” Bobosibunu said.

ZEC disclosed that the voter population within each province was divided by the number of existing constituencies in the respective province.

Political scientist Phillan Zamchiya raised concerns surrounding gerrymandering in the way the delimitation exercise was conducted. In an analysis titled Seven Highlights from Zimbabwe's 2022 Draft Delimitation Report.

“In terms of 'smart' gerrymandering, ZEC has not bothered to create a significant number of new constituencies in areas where ZANU-PF has a chance to win possibly to manage opposition noise and out of political praxis borne out of the realisation that the current configuration of constituencies heavily favours the ruling party.” Wrote Zamchiya. In his analysis titled Seven Highlights from Zimbabwe's 2022 Draft Delimitation Report.

The last delimitation exercise was conducted in 2007 in preparation of the 2008 harmonised elections. ZEC Chairperson Justice Priscilla Chigumba, indicated that Zimbabwe's next harmonised elections are likely to be held between July 26 and August 24. This means that the electoral boundaries set in the final delimitation report gazetted by President Mnangagwa will be applied in the forthcoming general elections and subsequent elections that may be conducted in Zimbabwe in the next ten years.



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