

Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN)



Pre-election Update No. 5

Introduction

The Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) continues to observe the pre-election period for the harmonized polls on March 29, 2008. Pre-election observation is critical for the promotion of free and fair elections as it demonstrates whether the electoral playing field is even or uneven. In the event it is uneven, systematic observation would ascertain in whose favour the electoral environment is tilted. ZESN has deployed 210 trained long-term observers in all of the country's House of Assembly constituencies to observe electoral related activities. This report covers the period from the 6th to the 29th of February 2008.

Methodology

The report is based on primary and secondary data collected by the Network. Primary data was collected from reports submitted by long-term observers in the constituencies and ZESN secretariat. It is also based on secondary data from media reports the print and electronic media. Feedback from community workshops conducted countrywide was also an indispensable source of information.

Voters' Roll Inspection and Voter Registration

Voter registration and the inspection of the voters roll began on the 2nd of February 2008. Initially it was scheduled to end on the 7th of February but was extended to the 14th of February 2008. A number of challenges were faced during inspection and registration processes. In some provinces, the absence of adequate material was experienced as people wishing to register were turned away as stationery was not available at the inspection centres.

In Harare, some people that registered as voters were not given registration slips and were asked to collect these from ZEC Head Offices in Harare. This proved restrictive as some people could not travel from their respective residential areas to town due to economic constraints. This greatly compromised their chances of voting since these people would be unable to vote without these slips in the event that their names do not appear on the voters' roll on election day. People wishing to register in Mount Darwin South were advised to come back to register on the 13th of February as the registration receipt book was not available. Such practices make a mockery of the idea of bringing inspection and registration process to the people if beneficiaries are expected to make long trips to collect their registration slips.

Proof of residence continued to be a problematic requirement for some prospective voters. It was noted that this presented a particular challenge to the youth, as a number failed to register on these grounds. In Guruve South, ZANU PF supporters that were sitting at the inspection and registration centres are reported to have denied young people access to these centres, on the assertion that they were MDC supporters.

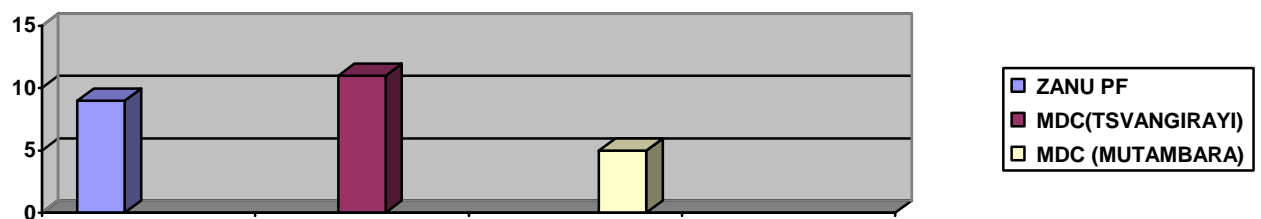
Primary elections

Primary elections were held for most constituencies in the country's ten provinces. However, MDC (Tsvangirai) decided did not conduct primary elections in constituencies where there were sitting MPs except for Mabvuku - Tafara and Budiriro constituencies in Harare.

Primary elections for both parties were highly contested. In the Chivi-Mwenezi senatorial seat, Josaya Hungwe and Samuel Mumbengegwi locked horns in a re-run after Mumbengegwi had contested the initial primary election result. Hungwe, however, emerged victorious from the re-run.

The primaries particularly in the ZANU PF camp, were marred by violence and allegations of fraud. In Chinhoyi, Hurungwe Central and Kadoma Central, supporters of contesting candidates physically clashed. This appears to be a lack of political tolerance manifesting in the violent clashes, some of which were also noted at the nomination courts on the 15th of February 2008.

Failure by participants to accept primary election results led to constituencies such as Makoni West, Masvingo and Masvingo Central fielding two ZANU PF ticket. Such a scenario was not unique to ZANU PF as MDC (Tsvangirayi) and MDC (Mutambara) also had more than one candidate nominated for the same constituency. Inability to conduct primary elections in a transparent manner demonstrated a dire deficit of intra-party democracy. The graph below shows the number of constituencies where the two formations of the MDC and ZANU PF have dual candidates.



In some constituencies, such as Chimanimani West, and Gutu South, incumbents had ruled out the need for a primary election, since they were available and ready to represent the people. It is interesting to note that provinces such as Mashonaland East, Manicaland and Mashonaland Central ZANU PF had a handful of constituencies where primary elections were not conducted because candidates were uncontested.

Nomination Court results

The Nomination Court sat on 14 February 2008 and ZEC has since published the results. According to the published results, Zanu-PF fielded 217 candidates in the 210 House of Assembly constituencies. They managed to field candidates in all but two of the published 208 constituencies. The nomination results for Glen View North and Muzarabani South are not appearing on the official results schedule that ZEC released. The report also shows that Zanu-PF failed to field candidates in the Mtoko North and Mkoba House of Assembly constituencies. The list of also shows that, apart from failing to field candidates in two the constituencies, Zanu-PF has nine constituencies where they fielded more than one candidate. They nominated two candidates for each of Sunningdale, Makoni North, Makoni West, Chivi North, Gutu South, Masvingo Central, Zaka Central, Mtoko East and Gutu West while three candidates from Zanu-PF are battling it out in Glen View South.

The results also show that the MDC Tsvngirai faction managed to field 200 House of Assembly candidates while failing to field candidates in 17 constituencies namely: Chitungwiza North, Harare

West, Makoni North, Dangamvura-Chikanga, Murehwa West, Mtoko East, Chakari, Masvingo Central, Mwenezi West, Zaka North, Tsholotsho North, Tsholotsho South, Gwanda South, Gwanda North, Matobo South and Chirumanzu-Zibagwe. The formation also has double entries in 11 constituencies: Chirumanzu, Gweru Urban, Vungu, Shurugwi North, Zvishabane-Runde Zvishavane-Ngezi, Mtoko North, Shamva North, Marondera West, Murehwa North and Glen View South. While the MDC Tsvangirai's failure to field a candidate in Tsholotsho North could be explained in light of the agreement that the formation entered into with former minister of information, Professor Jonathan Moyo who is the outgoing MP for the area, there are no clear explanations as to why the faction could not field candidates in the other areas.

A run-down through the names of the MDC Mutambara faction vying for election in the constituencies that the MDC Tsvangirai faction failed to field candidates unravels names familiar with the Tsvangirai faction like Fidelis Mhashu (Chitungwiza) being entered on the database under MDC Mutambara. If such cases are proven to be mistakes on the part of ZEC, then one would wonder whether the electoral management body could rectify the mistakes before ballot papers are printed with the same errors. It also casts doubt on ZEC's ability to administer the election if mistakes are made on a simple exercise of compiling names for candidates who successfully filed their nomination papers. If such mistakes could happen with the nomination process, one wonders what chaos could be anticipated for other pressing electoral administrative processes like vote counting and tabulation. That already ZEC did not provide information on the nomination results in the two constituencies of Glen View North and Muzarabani South without providing any explanations is worrying especially where people are beginning to question the body's capacity to handle the harmonized election.

The MDC Mutambara faction managed to field 152 House of Assembly candidates while independent candidates around the whole country add up to 105. ***Please find an annexure of the list of candidates for both Senatorial and House of Assembly constituencies at the end of this report.***

Political campaigns

Political campaigns took off in earnest after the completion of the nomination process in the ten provinces. It has become evidently clear that some parts of the country remain no go areas for mostly opposition political parties although exceptions have been noted in Nyanga where Chief Mezani is reported to have allowed MDC (Tsvangirai) to hold a rally in his village. Observers have reported that the CIO have since started to victimize the traditional leader through continuous harassment and threats to withdraw the chief's benefits if he continues to give equal access to his area to all contesting political parties. The chief has however vowed to continue giving his people an opportunity to freely choose leaders of their choice.

Cases of political violence emanating from attempts to hold political campaigns have been reported in Mutasa North. In one such incident, ZANU PF youth camped at Katiyo Tea Estate are said to have attacked women going to attend an MDC rally on the 17th February 2008 around 1100hrs. Four MDC youths sustained serious head injuries when they retaliated and were attended to at Hauna hospital after a report had been made at Ruda Police Station. Reports from the constituency suggest that the youths who carried out the attack were recruited initially to pick tea at the estate but have allegedly been militarized under the leadership of a Mr. Madzima who is allegedly the base commander. Other senior camp officials at the camp include a Mr. Shumba, the Orientation Instructor and two instructors, a Mr. Shoko and a Mr. Pachena.

In urban areas, MDC (Tsvangirai), MDC (Mutambara), Simba Makoni, Independent candidates and ZANU PF have been able to conduct rallies. It is interesting to note that areas such as Bindura, once a "no go" area for opposition political parties, has been open to MDC (Tsvangirai) although people have been threatened with violence if they attended the MDC rallies. Morgan

Tsvangirai is reported to have held a rally in Bindura and Shamva with turnout reported to be over 1500. However, in Mazowe West, MDC (Tsvangirai) was denied access to the community hall for their rally by local authorities in charge of the property. The main reason for such denial was fear of victimization by ruling party structures for allowing the opposition access to communities in the area.

Rallies held in Zvishavane –Ngezi by contesting candidates have reportedly been peaceful. Posters of MDC (Tsvangirai) and ZANU PF can be seen littered in the constituency and none have been mutilated. Such an atmosphere is encouraging if the 2008 Harmonised Elections are to be considered free and fair.

However, Mberengwa North has been a challenge for MDC (Tsvangirai) to begin its campaign activities owing to the alleged intolerant behavior of war veterans in the area. The observer in the constituency reported that interestingly enough, a ZANU PF rally held on the 26th of February 2008 at Maboleni Business Centre was poorly attended. This is alleged to have irked war veterans in the constituency.

In some parts of Shurugwi North, residents have been forced to buy ZANU PF cards for security reasons. Political parties have shown a preference for door-to-door campaigns in this election. ZANU PF and MDC (Tsvangirai) have been using door-to-door campaigning in Matebeleland North, Matebeleland South, Midlands, Harare, and Bulawayo. In Gokwe Nembudziya, MDC (Tsvangirai) has not been allowed the use of school halls and grounds for rallies by responsible authorities yet ZANU PF was allowed the use of these premises. Urban centres have shown political maturity and tolerance as a ZESN observer witnessed youths wearing MDC regalia moving in the constituency freely. This is in stark contrast to the disruptions experienced at Nesikwe Business Centre where an MDC (Tsvangirai) rally held on 05 February 2008 was disturbed by MDC (Mutambambara) youths. ZESN also received reports of people being forced to attend ZANU PF rallies in Manicaland province.

On the 29th of February 2008, ZANU PF launched its election manifesto in Harare at a ceremony attended by its leadership at all levels and candidates for the presidential, parliamentary, senatorial and local government elections.

Voter and Civic education

ZEC deployed teams in all provinces to conduct voter education. There have been mixed reactions among the citizenry on the nature and content of voter education. ZEC officers' took advantage of public gatherings to disseminate information to the public. However, the officers did not seem to be fully aware of the details of the delimitation exercise and consequently failed to provide adequate information to the public. It was observed that in Masvingo's Gutu South, Midlands, Bulawayo and parts of Mashonaland East such as Mudzi and Uzumba, ZEC officials who were conducting voter education were impartial, professional manner as they informed citizens that they could vote for candidates and parties of their choice without fear.

Voter education was incomplete and inadequate as ZEC officials did not fully explain the manner in which the harmonized elections would be conducted and the practical implication on the voter of having four elections in one day, including number of ballot boxes, number and colour coding of ballot papers. Such details are very critical in rural areas where information on new developments is often scarce if not unavailable. It was also noted that ZEC appeared to have resource constraints in the conduct of voter education. In many instances, voter educators complained of not being allocated sufficient meal allowances and adequate training to disseminate correct information.

ZESN further noted discrepancies in the information disseminated by the ZEC voter educators. This included contradictory information on how voters requiring assistance would be treated.

In Norton a ZESN observer came across a ZEC brochure being distributed by the voter educators that stated that proof of residence would be required on polling day, in addition to identification documents. ZESN was subsequently inundated with calls regarding the legal provisions relating to this aspect. Such misleading information from a body constitutionally mandated to manage the electoral process in Zimbabwe caused undue alarm as prospective voters that had experienced challenges securing proof of residence to register dreaded going through the same nightmare to exercise their democratic right to vote. Although ZEC seems to have withdrawn the highly controversial brochure there is no guarantee that the electorate that was exposed to the misinformation have access to correct information before the election.

Use of public resources

The use of public resources in elections is the prerogative of the incumbent. The use of public resources benefits the party that has access to these resources and disadvantages those without access. It has been observed that government vehicle, offices and other ancillary services have been used for political purposes. It was noted that in Manicaland province, government vehicles were used for campaign purposes, this was observed in Chimanimani West where vehicle number GWRD 0228 was being used for campaign purposes through the ferrying of party supporters around the constituency. In Mashonaland Central, MDC was denied the use of school premises for their meetings while ZANU PF has had unrestricted access to the same. The use of state resources during election time has been a bone of contention as it gives one party unfair advantage over other players in an election. On the 14th of February 2008, in Kadoma Central, City Council vehicle registration number AAE 8396 was used to ferry ZANU PF nominees to Chinhoyi where the nomination court was sitting.

Undue Influence and Intimidation of voters

In the run up to this election, ZESN has observed a number of incidents of the coercion and intimidation of voters. In Mashonaland Central farming implements and inputs were allocated to ZANU PF loyalists and cardholders. In Mashonaland East province, chiefs informed people that if they voted for MDC they would lose the pieces of land they had acquired during the land reform programme. In the various rural constituencies in the Mashonaland region, chiefs have been distributing fertilizers and farm implements and beneficiaries were loyal ZANU PF supporters as there appeared to be no known, transparent criteria for beneficiary selection.

Intimidation of voters was witnessed at a ZANU PF rally held in Sanyati where party officials at the rally informed the electorate that voting for MDC would spark another war of liberation. Allegations of vote buying have been rampant in rural areas as the people have been given subsidized mealie-meal, cultivators, ploughs as well as fertilizers and these have been distributed in a partisan manner favouring ZANU PF supporters as was the case in Buhera South.

In Gokwe Sesame, Majaka Fanuel and his family were assaulted for allegedly trying to influence people to vote for MDC. Violence was also witnessed in Epworth when MDC (Tsvangirai) youth activists were assaulted at Domboshava police station when they had conducted a march in Epworth 7. In Harare, a Mr. Mangwende of Hatcliffe asked his campaign team to write down the names of ZANU PF supporters as they conducted door-to-door campaigns in order to establish if their supporters were registered voters. Such actions can be construed as intimidation especially where people are asked which party they support during these door-to-door campaigns.

ZESN observers in Midlands noted that in Shurugwi, teachers at Svika Secondary School and Nhema Primary School have been forced to buy ZANU PF party cards for security reasons. Chirumanzu South's electorate has been warned that if they do not vote for ZANU PF, they would not receive drought relief. This comes in the wake of critical food shortages currently facing the country. In Guruve, in Mashonaland province, farmers were warned by the district administrator that should they vote for the opposition, their farms would be repossessed. Residents of Ward 17 in Bulawayo were warned that if they did not vote for ZANU PF they would not receive food

handouts. Residents were told that they were hungry because they had voted wrongly in the past. The electorate in the same ward was further threatened that there would be guards in the polling stations that would see for whom they would have voted. In Binga South, people that had not attended a rally held by ZANU PF on the 25th of February were labeled sell-outs and would not be considered for income generating projects in the near future.

In Makonde constituency, on the 18th of February 2008, Henry Kanhema and Albert Matenga were beaten up and held at gun point by one Davison Mupambi who is suspected to be an intelligence operative. They were assaulted for being MDC supporters.

In Matobo North, training of youth militias has become more visible as these are seen doing their daily drills under the watchful eyes of their commanders. This has instilled fear in the residents who have no clear understanding of what these youths are supposed to do after their training.

An incident was recorded in Mashonaland Central's Sanyati GMB when the manager was seen on 22 February 2008, distributing maize under Operation Maguta while wearing ZANU PF regalia. In Kadoma Central, on the 23rd February 2008, Fani Phiri asked members present at his rally to write down their names so that they could receive maize, mealie-meal and sugar.

NGO Activities

ZESN adverts deemed to be direct voter education were scrapped from the electronic and print media following a letter from ZEC asserting that the law only allowed the conducting of voter education by institutions authorized to do so by ZEC. The letter was copied to media houses and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Services. Civic education adverts inserted by civil society organisation such as National Associations for the Care of the Handicapped (NASCOH) were also taken off the air after a few days after ZEC's intervention.

Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) members were arrested and beaten up near the ZANU PF provincial offices in Forth Street in Harare for distributing fliers deemed inflammatory to the ruling party. In Manicaland GOAL was denied access to the community as it was perceived to be in cohorts with opposition MDC.

Security forces

In Hurungwe North, Mr. Godfrey Gumbo and Mrs. Nziramasanga were detained on the 26th of February 2008, by police for five days for holding a house meeting for MDC candidates. They appeared in court and were subsequently remanded to 12th March 2008, on free bail.

Reports from Mashonaland provinces indicate that MDC (Tsvangirai) officials have been denied clearance to hold rallies on the basis that there were inadequate police personnel to provide security. Such has been the case in Mazowe West. The Herald of 27 February 2008 carried a story to the effect that the police would not hesitate to use force on any political actors who deem to embark on political activities they deem illegal. While the role of the police is critical in elections, the statement by the Commissioner - General Augustine Chihuri, although made under the guise of assuring the public of efforts that the police is making to ensure there is a peaceful election environment was effectively partisan and intimidatory. The tone of the statement was such that it portrayed unwillingness on the part of the police, to accept victory by the opposition in the election. Chihuri's stated that "we are not deterred by the utterances of hate from the western world concerning the issue as it is in their interest to discredit all who are not their puppets in their quest to defend their interests..." In the same vein, the Prison Services Commissioner Rtd General Paradzai Zimhondi made a claim to the essence that he would not salute Tsvangirai or Simba Makoni in the event one of these two won the presidential election. He asserted that he had urged prison officers to vote for ZANU PF. This is symbolic of a security force that is partisan and lacks tolerance and respect for basic democratic principles.

Traditional leaders

ZESN observers have noted that the role of traditional leaders in some areas has been political and partial in favour of ZANU PF. Government made a public announcement that only traditional leaders had the mandate to distribute inputs provided by government. Some chiefs in Mashonaland East were reported to be urging people to vote for the ruling party if they did not wish to be evicted from their respective villages. ZESN observers noted that in Mt Darwin East and North, intelligence officers, youth militia and war veterans were seen to be threatening the electorate by coercing people to attend rallies. The role of traditional leadership in the politics of Zimbabwe therefore continues to be controversial. In Chipinge South, Headman Chindukumire summoned and warned the MDC (Tsvangirai) chairman one Mr. Mtimukulu, for holding a meeting on the 20th of February 2008. He was threatened with eviction from the village if he continued with MDC activities. While some traditional leaders have shown partisan tendencies, there have been others who have remained neutral, as demonstrated by the traditional leaders in Buhera West who urged their people to vote for candidates of their choice.

Publication of list of polling stations by ZEC

On 8 March 2008 ZEC published the list of polling stations for the 29 March election. ZESN commended the Commission for this, as this information is critical for registered voters to know where they will vote on Election Day. However the Network noted with concern that the list contained significant errors and relatively few polling stations in Bulawayo and Harare provinces.

ZESN noted that the polling station information for Matebeleland North appeared to be scrambled – with polling stations located in the wrong constituency. For example, Victoria Pre-School polling station is listed in Ward 1 of Binga Rural District Council (RDC). Actually the polling station is in Victoria Falls Municipality. This is just one of many such errors for the province. ZESN called on ZEC to urgently print a corrected list of polling stations to ensure that all registered voters know their polling stations on Election Day.

Further, ZESN noted that there was significant discrepancy in the number of registered voters per polling station for different provinces. There could be some variation; it was of concern that the number of registered voters per polling station in Bulawayo and Harare is more than twice that of the other provinces (see table below). The situation is similar in Gweru and Mutare municipalities where the average number of registered voters per polling station is 1,234.8 and 1,277.3 respectively. As a result, the average voter in Harare province would need to be processed in 22 seconds and some cases in as little as 9 seconds (Chitungwiza Ward 2 – 9,281 registered voters and 2 polling stations). The average number of voters should be consistent by both constituency and ward. ZESN encourages the ZEC to increase the number of polling stations in Bulawayo and Harare provinces as well as other urban centres so that all Zimbabweans have a reasonable opportunity to vote on 29 March.

Below is a table showing the number of polling stations and the average number of registered voters by province:

Province	Registered Voters	Polling Stations	Average No. of Voters per Polling Station	No. of Assembly Constituencies	Average No. Voters per Assembly Constituency
Bulawayo	313,459	207	1,514.3	12	26,121.6

Harare	766,478	379	2,022.4	29	26,430.3
Manicaland	709,664	1,150	617.1	26	27,294.8
Mashonaland Central	448,477	774	579.4	18	24,915.4
Mashonaland East	624,630	1,038	601.8	23	27,157.8
Mashonaland West	582,989	1,100	530.0	22	26,499.5
Masvingo	699,199	1,202	581.7	26	26,892.3
Matebeleland North	345,264	545	633.5	13	26,558.8
Matabeleland South	342,280	528	648.3	13	26,329.2
Midlands	739,510	1,289	573.7	28	26,411.1
Total	5,571,950	8,212		210	

On 11 March 2008, ZEC reacted by publishing a revised list of Polling stations for Matebeleland North. While this is commended, there is still need to address the number of polling stations in urban areas.

Recommendations

Based on the above observations ZESN makes the following recommendations:

- Political parties need to embrace political tolerance and desist from acts of violence as these infringe on people's right to choose candidates of their choice freely.
- ZEC needs to ensure that adequate resources for voter education and registration are available. There is also need for adequate monitoring mechanisms to ensure that voter education is conducted in a uniform, professional and non-partisan manner.
- Voter registration should be an on going process and stringent requirements which disable people from registering should be done away with in order for it to be an inclusive process.
- Traditional leaders need to be apolitical and not align with any political party. There is need to cultivate a culture of tolerance among traditional leaders for all Zimbabweans to be able to exercise their right to choose leaders of their choice.
- The use of public resources in favour of one political party at the expense of others is not acceptable. Thus, the use of public resources for campaign purposes needs to be curbed.
- Urgent attention to increase the number of polling stations in urban areas, to allow for adequate and equitable access to the polls.

Conclusion

Remaining committed to the promotion of democratic elections in Zimbabwe, ZESN urges all Zimbabweans to go in their numbers to vote and exercise their right to choose their leaders. We also recommend that all political players do conduct themselves in a transparent, tolerant and non-violent manner.