

A Report of the Zimbabwe Election Support Network

May 2013

MOBILE VOTER REGISTRATION PROCESS IN ZIMBABWE

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INTRODUCTION

Free and fair elections cannot be undertaken without a proper verification that the voters participating in the election fulfill of legal requirements to do so. Best practice dictates that all the procedures related to the registration of voters be complete, inclusive and non-discriminatory. This is critical as any doubts or irregularities in this process will inevitably cast a shadow on the electoral outcome. Principles of voter registration include integrity, inclusiveness, comprehensiveness, accuracy, accessibility, transparency, and security and credibility

In Zimbabwe all the requirements for voter eligibility are clearly laid in the Constitution. The Electoral law however has to regulate, design, and update these requirements. Indeed the legal framework should require that voter registration be maintained in a manner that is transparent and accurate, protects the right of qualified citizens to register, and prevents the unlawful or fraudulent registration or removal of persons.

Against the background of a flawed, bloated voters' roll, over the past years calls have continued to come from citizens, political parties and civil society organisations for a transparent voter registration exercise to be conducted before the next election.

On the 29th of April, the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) and the office of the Registrar-General rolled out a mobile voter registration exercise to reach the prospective registrants across the country. The exercise began on April 29 and ran for 21 days until May 19 – although normal registration continued at district offices. ZEC is mandated by law to supervise the compilation of the voters' roll, registration of voters and maintenance of an up to date voters' roll among other duties and responsibilities.

The Registrar General set up 89 Mobile Voter Registration teams to cover 62 districts. The teams were located in selected wards and registration centers opened from 7am-7pm during week days and 7am -5pm during weekends. The teams also comprised of a team that was also issuing out national identity documents.

The just ended mobile voter registration process has been described by various stakeholders as chaotic and unsatisfactory. According to the Herald, Wednesday 22 May 2013 about 200 000 Zimbabweans registered as first-time voters'. An estimated 268 574 inspected the voters' roll, while 71 131 transferred from their previous ward. An estimated number of 214 230 people had their identity cards issued. The process was marred by lack of funding, inadequate publicity and voter education, thus the process has been defined as haphazard and ill-planned.

FRAMEWORK FOR VOTER REGISTRATION IN ZIMBWE

Voter registration in Zimbabwe is provided for in the Electoral Act [Chapter 2:13] in section 17A of the Act. The Act provides for registration, transfer, objections and deletions from the voters' roll. The registration of voters is conducted on a continuous basis to ensure that the voters' roll is up to date. For one to qualify to register as a voter, they must be 18 years old, resident in Zimbabwe and a Zimbabwean citizen. The voters' roll contains details on the voters' first names and last name, their national registration number, place of residence and any other information that may be deemed necessary by the Registrar-General of Voters. Voter registration in Zimbabwe serves a number of purposes which include: guaranteeing that people legally entitled to vote can do so. It also prohibits ineligible people from voting and prevents people from voting more than once.

The registration of voters is done by the Registrar-General of Voters under the direction and supervision of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission. The law stipulates that the voters' roll shall be kept by the Commission and maintained by the Commission. This is problematic given that the registration of voters, maintenance and updating is done by the Registrar General of Voters, who assigns responsibilities to Constituency-Registrars in the Zimbabwe's various constituencies. This situation creates problems regarding accountability of issues in the voters' roll. The law states that the voters' roll is a public document and open to inspection by the public. But in reality, accessing the voters' roll has remained a challenge as individuals and organisations that try to do so are viewed with suspicion. Access had also affected by the extremely high cost despite provisions in the law stipulating that purchase of the voters' roll should not exceed its production costs. Steps towards remedying this have however recently been taken through the enactment of the Electoral (Amendment) Regulations, 2013 (No. 18), SI 68 of 2013 published on the 17th of May 2013 which reduced the effective price of obtaining national roll from \$30,000 to \$2100.

Requirements

A person may register as a voter if they are a citizen of Zimbabwe, aged 18 years and above and must be resident in that constituency or ward. A person needs proof of residence which shows that the applicant is currently resident in the constituency or ward.

- A certificate of occupation or title deeds
- Lodgers permit or card
- Rates/water statement in applicant's name
- Electricity statement in applicant's name
- Credit store statement showing the physical address of the applicant, in the respective area
- Written statement from landlord, parent or friend confirming the applicant's address accompanied by a house card, electricity bill, rates bill or any similar document in the name of the landlord, parent or friend staying with applicant.
- Sworn statement by employer or applicant confirming applicant's address.
- Hospital bill or envelopes with post markings reflecting applicant's address and any other information or document sufficient to ascertain the applicant's residence.
- Confirmation by the Village Head or Resettlement Officer or farm owner

This report presents the detailed findings of ZESN's observation of the mobile voter registration process.

METHODOLOGY

To observe the voter registration process ZESN employed a two-pronged methodology. Firstly ZESN deployed its 210 Long term observers, resident in each National Assembly constituency to registration centres to observe the process. To supplement and verify information received from its long term observers; other civic organisations and the media, ZESN also deployed 10 mobile teams consisting of three persons drawn from its membership and secretariat to cover the ten administrative provinces in Zimbabwe. These teams observed the mobile voter registration process from the 17th to the 19 of May and covered 35 registration centres. ZESN developed a voter registration checklist specifically designed for the observation process.

The observation process assessed the following issues below:

1. Proof of residence
2. Processing time (duration to register one person)
3. Personnel, how many officials were present? Adequacy of personnel?
4. Opening and Closing time
5. Prospective registrants turned away and reasons turned away (women, youth, aliens)
6. Challenges encountered by people trying to register

7. Whether inspection was happening concurrently

OBSERVATION FINDINGS

Distribution of Mobile Voter Registration Centers

The Registrar- General set up a total of 641 centers throughout country. The table 1 below shows the distribution of centers by province. Mashonaland East had a total of 113 centers, Matabeleland North 89, Matabeleland North 85, Mashonaland Central 76, Midlands 74 and Bulawayo 12 centers one for each of its 12 constituencies. There is an obvious rural bias as more centers were allocated to the rural areas.

Harare and Chitungwiza could have been allocated more centers as Harare is the most populated province and the most registered voters. Manicaland could also have been allocated more centers as it is the second most populated province and is second in terms of the estimated registered voters for 2013. Mashonaland East with the most centers far out numbers other provinces like Midlands which is known to be the largest province geographically.

The Registrar General did not explain the criteria used to allocate mobile registration centers. A likely formula would have been to use the population census figures.

Table 1: Distribution of Centers

Province	Number of Centers	Population Census Figures	Estimated Registered Voters-2013	Registered Voters-2008
Bulawayo	12	655,675	367,178	313,459
Harare and Chitungwiza	25	2,098,199	1,216,955	766,478
Manicaland	49	1,755,000	807,300	709,664
Mashonaland Central	76	1,139,940	547,171	448,477
Mashonaland East	113	1,337,059	641,788	624,630
Mashonaland West	77	1,449,938	710,470	582,989
Masvingo	41	1,486,604	668,972	699,199
Matabeleland North	89	743,871	334,742	345,264
Matabeleland	85	685,046	308,271	342,280

South				
Midlands	74	1,622,476	762,564	739,510
Total	641	12,943,808	6,365,411	5,571,950

An analysis of the list of polling stations from the Constitutional Referendum and the 2012 Census data reveals that 232 wards with the greatest need for voter registration. While voter registration needs to be done in all 1964 wards, the ZEC should prioritise voter registration in the 232 wards¹.

Funding

The process was hampered by inadequate funding. According to various media reports, the amount requested by ZEC to comprehensively roll the process was fully not disbursed by Treasury but an initial amount of \$4 million). As such ZESN is concerned by the lack of seriousness of the current government to avail adequate resources to both ZEC and the Registrar General to carry out registration and ancillary voter education. ZESN reiterates its position that the registration of voters is a highly sensitive and political issue hence the authorities should support the process with the necessary resources. In addition, ZEC should receive funding from the Consolidated Revenue Fund so that there is no reliance on a line ministry to provide resources for its activities.

Human Resources

There were no adequate human resources which resulted in long queues and largely a failure to process identity certificates, birth certificates and to register people timely. In Chikomba, Harare South, Mbire, Shamva North and Mhondoro-Ngezi long winding queues were witnessed and were reported to be the order of the day during the mobile registration exercise.

Voter Education and Publicity of the Registration centers

According to ZEC two voter educators were deployed to cover each district which was not adequate to cover the vast wards in both rural and urban areas and considering the distance these educators had to cover, it has been envisaged that the ZEC could have engaged the church and civic organizations to assist in conducting voter education. The process was also hampered by shortage of funding and failure to distribute the resources timely.

Publicity of the registration centres was inadequate. The publicity should have preceded the registration process however centres were published a week after the process had commenced. Had the centres been well publicised, turnout including also provision of proper

¹ Refer to the "ZESN Analysis of Polling Stations from the 2013 Constitutional Referendum for the 2013 Harmonised Elections" April 2013, www.zesn.org.zw

requirements from prospective registrants would have improved both turnout and reduced the number of people who were being turned away for possessing insufficient documentation.

Engagement of Electoral Stakeholders

Apart from engaging the political parties on the process, there was a general feeling that the process was not inclusive and therefore could not tap into the support of the church and the civic society. At a meeting called by the Electoral Commission, Reverend Rogers Daylight Korombi of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe also accused the ZEC of turning to churches when elections were just around the corner. “The voter registration ends on the 19th but you are calling us today (16 May). From an honest point of view, unless if you are calling on us to rubberstamp what is not happening on the ground, it’s really, really pathetic,” he said in reference to the mobile registration exercise.

ZESN encourages the Commission to seriously engage the stakeholders in order to lessen the load of stretching the little resources allocated to the process.

Role of Political Parties

Some political parties were visible and active, as they bussed/ provided transport to their supporters to the registration centers. In Mashonaland East, youths from ZANU PF, could be seen moving door to door writing names of those who had registered. In Bulawayo, Pumula South Ward 27 war veterans were confirming with people who had registered. In Mashonaland West, Hurungwe District, at Nyamambizi primary School, ward 12 ZANU PF youths were seen standing by the gate and they were selecting people at the gate and determining who was eligible to register in the exercise.

Opening and Closing of the centers

The centers had to open at 7am to 7pm during week days and 7am to 5pm during weekends. However this was not the case at some centers visited by ZESN. Some centers opened later than scheduled and closed earlier but however this was not widespread to all the centers the ZESN teams visited. In Harare South Ward 1, DDF Manyame Hall and Crest Breeders opened much later than the scheduled time. At Vezvi Primary School Ward 15, Mwenezi District when the ZESN observers visited the center at 08:30 am it had not been opened.

Adequacy of the centers and materials

The accuracy of the voter register is a key element in ensuring that all qualified voters can enjoy the right to vote. A few incidences have been recorded where those who wished to check their names in the voters’ roll failed to do so as there was the absence of a full voters’ roll. Reports from St Barbara School in Mutasa District Ward 13, Manicaland Province showed that the

voters' roll had missing names for those from the alphabetical order of N,O,P,Q,R,S,T,U,V,W,Z. The center closed around midday as they had run out of materials for registering purposes. It was also noted that there were no affidavits provided to confirm residence but a plain sheet of paper was provided for those who did not have proof of residence.

A report from one Centre in Zvishavane rural also had half of the voters' roll absent hence those who had come to check their names could not be assisted. There is need for Voter registers and voter lists to be assembled and maintained in a way that it is accessible to all.

ZESN further urges adequate resourcing of the centers with materials like power back-up in the event of black-outs so that the process is not halted when there is a power outing. In Midlands Zvishavane Rural observers reported that there were no machines for IDs as at 2 pm on the 18th of May and in addition there was no full voters roll. At St Barbra's Primary School in Mutasa Ward 13, the affidavits which were being utilised by those who could not obtain the requisite proof of residence were in short supply.

The Registrar-General's office should deploy enough staff to all the wards and further look into the distances prospective voters travel to access the process as it frustrates potential registrants. In Masvingo Province, Mwenezi at Vezvi people slept at the mobile registration centre as they had travelled long distances of more than 20km to get to the nearest centre in their ward. In Mashonaland Central at Utete Primary School, Guruve North people also travelled for about 20km.

The centers established for the purposes of voter registration were insufficient to cover all the wards and in particular urban areas had fewer registration centers. The registrar general set up 89 mobile voter registration teams to cover the whole country. This was inadequate as some provinces had less mobile registration teams.

Requirements for Registration

According to ZEC Chairperson, Justice Makarau "no prospective voters should be turned away for failing to produce proof of residence, adding residents could still use affidavits to confirm their residence".

Proof of residence has remained a major obstacle to eligible voters. ZESN reiterates its previous calls over the past years for the relaxation of registration requirements in Zimbabwe, chief among these being the acceptable proof of residence in urban areas and the need for endorsement by the chief in rural areas. ZESN is of the view that such requirements might result in the exclusion of potential voters should their lessors or chiefs or kraal heads fail or refuse to avail proof of residence or endorsement. At various registration centers aliens were turned away defying both the directive of cabinet and supported by the new constitution.

A brief scan of observations the 18th of May is revealing. At Matarutse Ward 1 in Chegutu close to 100 people were turned away as they had no identity documentation this could have been avoided if enough voter educators had been deployed on time to conduct voter education and provide information on the requirements for registration and the process of inspecting the voters' roll. In Matebeleland North Mahlothova Primary School, Umguza District Ward 9, in the presence of observers, seven (7) people were turned away because they brought birth certificates and photocopies of IDs for registration. At Seke 4 High School in Chitungwiza, those who were turned away did not have proof of residence at all also pointing to the lack of proper and comprehensive voter education.

Though proof of residence was relaxed especially for those in urban areas, were a prospective registrant would fill and sign the affidavit, application of this was not uniform. In some cases observers reported that some centers were not in possession of the document, whilst its application was selective.

Aliens

In the just ended mobile voter registration, most aliens did not register as they were not considered Zimbabwean citizens. Whilst ZESN does not have exact numbers of aliens who were turned away, there is reason to believe that many were turned away because the current constitution had not been gazetted. Chapter 3 which deals with citizenship will come into effect on publication day of the Constitution. Section 35, 36, 37 and 38 of the current constitution recognises citizenship by birth, descent and registration. The Registrar General thus needs to re-register those who were previously termed aliens.

CONCLUSIONS

The mobile voter registration exercise was hampered by shortage of resources and this affected the execution of the whole exercise. Publicity and voter education were inadequate and the ZEC did not engage other critical stakeholders (the church and civil society) to complement its efforts. The process was thus chaotic and haphazard and with few teams on the ground most prospective registrants were unable to register. The ZEC and the Registrar General need to coordinate and plan in the future to ensure that the process is transparent and that extensive voter education and publicity happen before the exercise begins.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The process must be re-started in line with the new constitution which stipulates a thirty day period for registration after its enactment; it is our view that the preceding exercise cannot be a substitute for this constitutionally mandated process.

2. Legal instruments guiding the issue of “aliens” and the use of affidavit as proof of residence put in place recently should be well publicized to ensure that citizens are able to fully benefit.
3. As a precondition to the aforementioned exercise, the public must be adequately informed of the process, the requirements and the modalities prior to the commencement of the process. ZEC should thus give adequate notice of the mobile registration process.
4. A comprehensive inclusive process must be undertaken with adequate financial and well trained human resources. This process must be effectively decentralized to the ward level in each constituency. Adequate time must be allocated to each center in proportion to the population density in the community.
5. Stakeholders should have unfettered access to the process, particularly civil society organizations pursuing their legitimate functions of sensitizing, mobilizing citizens to participate in the process.
6. There should be effective supervision of the Registrar General’s office by the ZEC to safeguard the integrity of the process for which ZEC is ultimately accountable to stakeholders.
7. ZEC should have clear and defined targets for the mobile voter registration drive (i.e. how many first time voters, aliens, and transfers are the ZEC expected to process during the 30-day registration exercise).
8. The ZEC should present objective criteria used to determine where, how many and for how long each registration team will be in any given ward.
9. Preliminary rolls should be provided to enable potential voters to check for their names.
10. The Zimbabwe Election Commission should use the 2012 Census data to target areas for extra voter registration



In Harare South, the registration centre closed at 5pm and the people in the above image were turned away without being registered



In Mutasa District this registration centre closed at 1pm on 19 May



In Mwenezi at Vezvi Primary school people were being recorded in a text book before proceeding to register