An Assessment of Electoral integrity in Zimbabwe

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TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL ZIMBABWE

the coalition against corruption



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Acronyms and abbreviations

ACDEG	African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance
AU	African Union
CCC	Citizens Coalition for Change
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EDR	Electoral Dispute Resolution
EMB	Elections Management Board
ERC	Election Resource Centre
FAZ	Forever Associates Zimbabwe
FBO	Faith Based Organisation
FDG	Focus Group Discussion
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
KII	Key Informant Interviews
MMC	Media Monitoring Committee
MP	Member of Parliament
MPLC	Multi Party Liaison Committee
PVT	Parallel Voter Tabulation
PWD	Persons With Disabilities
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SEOM	SADC Election Observer Mission
SSA	Sub Saharan Africa
TI Z	Transparency International Zimbabwe
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNCRP	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability
UNCAC	United Nations Convention against Corruption
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluations Group
USSD	Unstructured Supplementary Service Data
VE	Voter Education
YOJA	Young Journalists Association
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZBC	Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
ZESN	Zimbabwe Election Support Network
ZHRC	Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission
ZMC	Zimbabwe Media Commission
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police



Executive summary

This report presents findings of a baseline study commissioned by Transparency International Zimbabwe (TI Z), in December 2025. The baseline study was commissioned in recognition of the fundamental role that credible, inclusive, and transparent electoral processes play in building accountable governance and preventing systemic corruption. By commissioning this study, TI Z sought to assess the state of electoral integrity in Zimbabwe as a benchmark, in order to support its advocacy and capacity-building initiatives for improving the quality and credibility of elections in the country. The report serves as a reference point for monitoring progress in electoral reform in Zimbabwe and contributing to the future of inclusive, transparent and accountable democratic governance.

This report provides an assessment of the efficacy of electoral integrity in Zimbabwe. In that regard, it focuses on interrogating the adequacy of past legal and institutional reforms; compliance with regional and international standards and providing recommendations for legal, institutional and procedural reforms that may enhance electoral transparency; the implementation of electoral processes and documenting stakeholder appreciation of the electoral environment.

Using a qualitative research design, the baseline study collected data through seven (7) Focus Group Discussions (FDGs), eleven (11) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) across three provincial capitals – Harare, Bulawayo and Mutare. These data were collected from purposively sampled institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs) that work in the arena of electoral democracy. This qualitative survey solicited for insights and lived experiences of community members in their appreciation of elections in general and their participation in electoral processes in particular.

Summary of Findings

Strong Laws, Weak Implementation

The study noted that Zimbabwe's Constitution (2013) and Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) are generally in alignment with international standards on elections such as the ICCPR, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) as well as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Principles and Guidelines governing democratic elections and their provisions are largely adequate for the implementation of credible elections. However, the quality of elections and electoral processes have been impacted by the selective enforcement and interpretation of the legal provisions that guide elections. The perceived selective application of the laws regulating public gatherings and campaigns was also cited as another factor that impacted on the evenness of the political playing field. The survey findings showed varied and dissimilar views regarding the independence of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC). Most respondents characterised the Electoral Management Board (EMB) as partisan due to allegations of politicized appointments, opaque procurement, and delayed results transmission.

Uneven Political Playing Field

The baseline findings demonstrate that political and economic playing field is largely uneven and largely in favour of the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). For instance the State media









was perceived to be largely biased, in its reportage on election issues. The general submissions were that the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) favours the ruling party, while opposition faces restricted access and negative reportage. The study also noted the ruling party was also alleged to have the advantage of incumbency, with unfettered access to state resources with concerns centred around the misuse of State resources such as food aid and agricultural inputs which are allegedly distributed as vote buying/inducements in the run up to elections. The study further noted concerns regarding the conduct of traditional leaders who in some instances were viewed as conducting their duties in a partisan manner and actively involved in political party campaigns.

Voter Registration & Education Challenges

Feedback received from both KIIs and FGDs indicated that respondents appreciated efforts by the ZEC in the provision of voter education during the different electoral phases. However, the voter education was largely viewed as inadequate in its failure to address the existing information gaps and in responding to voter misinformation and disinformation.

Electoral Violence & Dispute Resolution mechanisms

The study noted that Zimbabwe has legal provisions and systems in place that prohibit electoral violence including measures to address these in the event that they happen. A Code of Conduct for political parties, Multi-Party Liaison Committees (MPLC) as well as electoral courts are established to address any electoral disputes. Nevertheless, there are concerns over the enforcement of the Code of Conduct, which was regarded to be weak as it lacks clear penalties for those who contravene the code. Some respondents were also of the view that the electoral courts generally dismiss most of the cases on technicalities, undermining the public's confidence in the justice system.

Inclusion of Marginalized Groups

Survey findings showed that Zimbabwean laws encourage equal participation and inclusion of all persons in all spheres of life, and this includes, but not limited to, the exercise of political rights as enshrined in Section 67 of the Constitution. The legal provisions, coupled with efforts and mechanisms put in place to encourage gender equality cannot be over-emphasised. However, despite these positive mechanisms women continue to face financial and cultural barriers to candidacy and full (safe) participation in electoral processes. Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) also lack accessible voter materials (e.g. Braille, sign language) and other formats of their communication in accordance with Article 21 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Recommendations:

Key Finding	Recommendations
Legal & Institutional Reforms	•Align electoral laws with SADC Model Law (2021) and ACDEG. •Enact campaign finance regulations to improve transparency in the use of money in political parties especially during political campaigns.
ZEC Operational Improvements	•Enhance transparency: Publish voters' rolls and results in analysable formats. •Improve the voter education methodology and curriculum to make it more accessible and responsive to the needs of voters, including partnerships with other stakeholders in the provision of non-partisan voter education (VE).
Political Parties & Civil Society	•Train party agents to monitor all phases of the electoral processes and deploy party agents comprehensively. •CSOs and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) should enhance their capacity to observe key aspects of electoral processes. •ZEC should provide long-term accreditation for domestic election observers.
Regional & International Bodies	•SADC/African Union (AU): Strengthen post-election recommendation tracking to ensure accountability. •UN/Donors: Fund long-term electoral integrity programs.

Conclusion

Zimbabwe's electoral system suffers from a gap between progressive laws and unbalanced implementation which erodes public trust. It is a serious indictment on the integrity of the elections. Electoral reforms must prioritize transparency, inclusivity, and enforcement to restore credibility. Without systemic change, elections will remain contested, perpetuating instability.



1. Introduction

1.1 Literature Review

Elections are an integral component of democratic development. They provide a platform for citizens to elect their representatives, hold the government to account and contribute to the shaping of policy. As a cornerstone of democracy, elections are revered as a platform for citizens to directly choose their representatives tasked with running government. The assumption is that in a well-functioning democracy, electoral contestation would lead to uncontested outcomes where the entire process is credible and conducted in a free, fair and peaceable environment.

While recent scholarship on electoral integrity has led to remarkable advances to the general appreciation of the policy mechanisms that deliver better elections, there remains a long-standing debate about how we conceptualise electoral integrity. The quandary lies in what James and Garnett (2026) call three prisms of inquiry – whether electoral integrity should be judged on international agreement; or citizen perceptions on what constitute free, fair and credible elections; or whether contentions on electoral integrity should be connected to normative theory (Ibid)?

Without doubt, this debate about what constitutes electoral integrity has been muddled further by the rise in authoritarianism across the globe, democratic backsliding in Africa, global emergencies like Covid 19, climate change, foreign interferences as well as the rise in digital technologies (Marina et al,. 2026). These complexities are further summarised by Ham (2015) who acknowledges that electoral integrity is "notoriously difficult to measure, since it varies strongly, ranging from 'free and fair' elections with genuine contestation to 'façade' elections marred by manipulation and fraud" (p. 714). All these risks pose significant challenges in the conceptualisation of electoral integrity.

Despite these scholarly contestations, James and Garnett (2026), have attempted to define electoral integrity as a set of principles[2] to be achieved in elections which empower everyday citizen and help realise the ideals of democracy. They argue that the democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality as reflected in international standards and agreements, are central to the conceptualisation of electoral integrity. Pippa Norris (2014) on the other hand posits that, electoral integrity generally refers to the processes of elections that reflect best practices throughout the electoral cycle, including the pre-electoral period, the campaign, polling day, and the aftermath. Her assertion is premised on the need to reflect the genuine will of the people and ensuring that all processes should be free, fair and credible.

The Kofi Annan Foundation further buttressed Pippa Norris's contention defining electoral integrity as an election that is based on the democratic principles of universal suffrage and political equality – as reflected in international standards and agreements – and is professional, impartial, and transparent in its preparation and administration throughout the electoral cycle (Annan et al, 2012). The Ace Project (2012) further attests that electoral integrity should be premised on professional, impartial, and transparent preparation that underpins accountable administration throughout the electoral cycle. Electoral integrity also requires a consolidated effort with different stakeholders/ institutions playing their part diligently in an accountable and transparent manner. Thus in simpler terms, electoral integrity can be understood as the extent to which elections are conducted in a free, fair, transparent, and credible manner, in accordance with established laws, democratic principles, and international standards, ensuring that the will of the people is accurately reflected in the election results.

2 These principles include contestation, participation, deliberation and adjudication.

In essence, safeguarding the integrity of any electoral process is no mean feat and requires setting standards that can be used to measure the freeness, fairness and credibility of the poll. These standards must be set against the stark reality that elections – by their nature – are a complex process that require the participation of diverse stakeholders, where the stakes are incredibly high and littered with temptation to influence the outcome. This is usually done through rigging, unethical and/or illegal means which inevitably impacts the legitimacy of the process. Hence electoral integrity cannot be taken for granted. When compromised, electoral integrity leads to distrust, instability, and authoritarianism. On the contrary, protecting it requires strong institutions, public awareness, and accountability (Carter Center, 2024). Without electoral integrity, leaders and officials lack accountability to the public, as well as the necessary legitimacy.

Electoral integrity also allows for peaceful resolution of conflict, open dialogue, debate, and information sharing among leaders and the public hinged on public confidence in electoral and political processes. It is therefore not enough to just effect institutional reforms, the electorate need conviction and confidence in the genuineness of the reforms. Further, election officials, judges and courts must have independence that is respected by politicians. (Ibid). Therefore elections are indispensable for the democratic process

In the past two decades, the quality of elections has varied enormously worldwide impacting on the integrity of polls. In Zimbabwe, electoral processes have, to a very large extent, increasingly encountered significant challenges on the electoral integrity test. Some of the key challenges that have eroded the integrity of elections include biased electoral institutions, violence, media manipulation, disregarded observer missions, security force partiality and the politicisation of traditional leaders, which have fuelled the pervasive erosion of trust (Shayamunda and Mashamaite, 2023). The August 2023 Harmonised (Sic) elections was a pivotal moment in the country's democratic trajectory with heightened expectations of free, fair and credible polls. What obtained, on the contrary, were clear challenges - late opening of polling stations, covert violence, shortage of ballot papers all this coming after a truncated voter education process, politically tense pre-election environment and intimidation.

From the foregoing observations, perceptions of electoral integrity in Zimbabwe have been characterised by a profound trust deficit premised on largely held views that elections have repeatedly failed to meet the minimum democratic standards. Despite impressive participation statistics, general discontent has been brewing around the outcome of the elections with both political contestants, voters and observers concluding that elections have become tools to legitimize the ruling ZANU-PF rather than free, fair and credible contests especially in the 2018 and 2023 polls. To support this assertion, in a study conducted by Pippa Norris in May 2019, Zimbabwe was regarded as an Electoral Autocracy after being ranked 144th out of 165 countries on the electoral integrity scale (Norris 2019). This ranking followed an earlier study by Electoral Integrity Project whose findings ranked Zimbabwe as number 48 out of a 100 which is a low integrity profile (Norris and Gromping, 2019).

Given these low classifications, coupled with the electoral challenges that have been recurrent in Zimbabwe, TI Z concluded that it was prudent to undertake this baseline survey to assess the state of electoral integrity in Zimbabwe as a benchmark for electoral reform advocacy for the 2028 Harmonised (Sic) polls. This survey focused on Pippa Norris conceptual framework around the 11 categories covering the whole electoral cycle. These categories include, but not limited to the following, the legal framework, election administration, voter registration, voter education, campaign finance, media environment, voting process, election results, party & candidate nomination, code of conduct and dispute resolution.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Since 1980, Zimbabwe has held regular elections as and when they are constitutionally due. While the holding of elections presented a modicum of multi-party democracy, the electoral process has been characterised by allegations of manipulation, abuse of incumbency, institutional bias, vote rigging and politically motivated violence (Mbwirire, 2026). Since 2000, the electoral outcomes in Zimbabwe have been heavily contested. For instance, the 2002 presidential elections, 2005 parliamentary elections and the 2008 presidential run-off where marred by extreme violence in the run-up to the polls. The 2013, 2018 and 2023 Harmonised (sic.) plebiscites witnessed allegations of vote rigging of monumental proportions, busing of voters and multiple voting in 2013, to allegations of results manipulation in 2018 and the shambolic ballot paper shortage coupled with late opening of polling stations in 2023. As observed by Kika & Mavedzenge (2013, p2);

> [...] for over two decades, Zimbabwe has failed to hold elections that clearly pass the marks of credibility, freeness and fairness. Evidence abounds that elections are either rigged, resulting in contested outcomes, or where the oppositions wins, transfer of power is elusive".

Regrettably, contestations around elections have progressively undermined public trust in the democratic processes in Zimbabwe. Consequently, claims of irregularities, election rigging, incidents of violence and intimidation unfortunately mark Zimbabwe's democratic trajectory and have contributed significantly to gradual erasing of trust in electoral politics (Tirivangasi et al, 2021). Needless to say the trust and confidence citizens place in the institutions of governance and attendant electoral processes remains a hallmark of democracy and an essential component of electoral integrity. In light of the foregoing, TI Z commissioned this baseline study to make a qualitative assessment of the extent to which the conduct of polls meet electoral integrity standards.

1.3 Limitations of the Study

The three key limitations to the baseline survey were centred around resource constraints, timing and implementation as well as the contextual sensitivities associated with discussing governance issues in Zimbabwe. Most significantly, the baseline study was impacted by a shift from a mixed methods approach proposed at inception to a purely qualitative approach due to limited financial resources. To compound to this challenge a very small sample of KIIs and FDGs were conducted in only three of the ten provincial capitals. None of these were conducted within the rural areas which would have been essential in analysing the rural-urban perceptions of electoral integrity. This explains why the report is mostly text devoid of graphs, tables and other infographics that are the hallmark of quantitative data analysis. Secondly the survey was greatly affected by the roll out of the primary data collection exercise. Essentially, the baseline survey could not reach the target population because it was conducted towards the end of the year where most stakeholders – government agencies, independent commissions, donor community and civil society – were winding down for the Christmas holiday. Most of the agencies reached did not respond to the call for interviews. Third, discussing governance and democracy in Zimbabwe has its own potential challenges if the 'establishment' perceive it to be anti-government. In that regard, some respondents were not comfortable to freely express their views in fear of potential reprisals post the baseline study.

1.4 Baseline Scope and Objectives

Since the 2000, electoral processes in Zimbabwe have been heavily contested characterised by allegations of vote rigging, fraud, voter suppression, lack of transparency, court challenges and politically-motivated violence (Kika & Mavedzenge 2023). These challenges have been captured in various reports by domestic, regional and international election observer missions, human rights watchdogs, and Zimbabwe's National Human Rights Commission (ZHRC). The baseline study commissioned by TI Z is therefore timely and particularly necessary, as Zimbabwe prepares for the 2028 Harmonised (sic.) elections (sic.). The findings of this study will ultimately help in establishing clear benchmarks and reference points for measuring change and progress in electoral integrity in Zimbabwe.

Given the foregoing, TI Z recognises the fundamental role that credible, inclusive, and transparent electoral processes play in building accountable governance and resisting systemic corruption. In conducting this baseline, TI Z hopes to generate evidence-based tools that strengthen democratic institutions, elevate civic voices, and counteract electoral malpractice in all its forms. By commissioning the Baseline study, TI Z intends to assess the state of electoral integrity in Zimbabwe, as well as inform its advocacy and capacity-building initiatives aimed at improving the quality and credibility of elections in the country. The study will also serve as a reference point for monitoring progress in electoral reform and democratic governance going forward.

This Baseline Study Report therefore presents an overview of the current state of the country's electoral legislation, institutional frameworks, and administrative procedures, with particular focus on the performance and independence of electoral bodies, campaign conduct and finance, voter registration, electoral participation and dispute resolution. The Report also integrates voices of different stakeholders from the sampled three provincial capitals regarding their assessments of the electoral processes. It then proffers recommendations for stakeholders aimed at enhancing electoral integrity in Zimbabwe.

The objectives of the Baseline survey were as follows;



To evaluate the adequacy of the legal and institutional framework on elections in Zimbabwe;



To Assess the implementation of electoral processes and procedures in Zimbabwe;



To document stakeholder perspectives and experiences in order to provide a holistic picture of Zimbabwe's electoral environment;



To benchmark Zimbabwe's electoral framework and practices on their compliance with regional and international electoral standards and identify areas where Zimbabwe meets, exceeds, or falls short; and



To propose evidence-based recommendations for legal, institutional, and procedural reforms that can enhance electoral transparency, effectiveness, legitimacy, and public trust

1.5 Methodology

In alignment with guidelines provided by TI Z, the baseline survey adopted a predominantly qualitative ap proach to data collection. Qualitative research was adopted because it offers indispensable tools and/or methods essential for garnering deep insights and understanding of complex social phenomena and providing in-depth human-centred insights. Liam (2023) posits that qualitative research is either constructive and interpretive aimed at unveiling the famously noted framework, 5W1H(What, why, when, where, who and how) of social behaviours and interactions. In choosing this methodology, the researchers wanted to appreciate the contextual depth and holistic perspectives on the efficacy of electoral integrity in Zimbabwe. It was also important to explore the respondents' experiences, perspectives and the meaning they attribute to electoral integrity. Key methods attributable to the qualitative methodological approach such as in-depth interviews and focus groups discussions were employed to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the concept of electoral integrity and its efficacy in Zimbabwe.

With the aid of this research design, the baseline study data were collected through seven (7) Focus Group Discussions (FDGs), eleven (11) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) across three provincial capitals – Harare, Bulawayo

and Mutare. These data were collected from purposively sampled institutions, and CSOs that work in the arena of electoral democracy. The survey also solicited for insights and lived experiences of selected urban communities in their appreciation of elections in general and their participation in electoral processes in particular. Through these methods, the baseline survey delved into the subjective experiences and perspectives of the respondents providing a platform that uniquely recognised their voice, which is critical in informing policy and other interventions that TI Z will deem necessary.

In analysing data, the researchers adopted the deductive thematic analysis approach guided by the themes that had been agreed to at the inception meeting. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to identify, analyse and interpret themes within the data. Essentially, it is employed to uncover patterns within textual data. This structured and flexible approach was employed to explore participants' understanding of the concept of electoral integrity and their experiences in elections and electoral processes in Zimbabwe. Rather than relying on statistical data, the deductive thematic analysis focused on interpreting meaning, perceptions and perspectives as expressed in key informant interviews and focus group discussions conducted in the three provincial capitals (Amankwaa, 2016).

1.5.1 Data Sources

Desk Review
A thorough desk review was conducted throughout the baseline survey. It examined existing literature on electoral integrity pertaining to Zimbabwe, laws, guidelines and standards that apply to elections such as the following:

01 SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections;

02 SADC Model Law on Elections;

03 the ACDEG,

04 the Transparency International Guidelines on political integrity;

05 Domestic and international Elections Observer Missions Reports; and

06 CSO election monitoring reports- among other documents.

A comparative analysis with other jurisdictions in the region and globally was conducted to assess the best practices on electoral integrity which informed possible lessons for Zimbabwe.

Key Informant Interviews
Seven KIIs were conducted with strategic stakeholders working in the arena of governance and democracy in Harare, Bulawayo and Mutare. These institutions and organisations were purposively sampled for their expert insights into electoral integrity in Zimbabwe. Most of the KIIs were conducted in-person, while a few done through virtual and/or online platforms. Face-to-face interviews were essential for gathering in-depth comprehensive data from carefully sampled institutions. This approach was essential in building rapport and trust between the researchers and the interviewees encouraging participants to provide honest, nuanced and detailed responses (Bricki & Green, 2007). The interviews further assessed key stakeholders' appreciation and understanding of electoral integrity, interrogated the performance and appropriateness of key institutions mandated with administering elections and participation or lack thereof of both the electorate as well as domestic and international observers. KIIs offered the opportunity to elucidate questions in real-time, probed for deeper explanations, and adapted the interview to capture unexpected but relevant views resulting in higher-quality, more reliable data for understanding electoral integrity. The researchers mainstreamed several ethical standards including confidentiality, anonymity, consent and non-discrimination.

Focus Group Discussions

Eleven FGDs were conducted with civil society institutions and grassroot communities in the respective provincial capitals to assess their understanding of electoral processes, and establish whether or not most recent elections were conducted in a free, fair and credible manner. They also assessed the extent to which the election administration was managed – both transparently and professionally – whether or not their fundamental rights to political participation were upheld during the poll. These FDGs complemented KIIs in capturing diverse and nuanced perspectives from the communities, in particular their interface with electoral democracy. FDGs further examined the participation of women, youth, and marginalized groups in the elections as well as evaluating the effectiveness of key government institutions.

Overall, focus group discussions were used as an exploratory qualitative method to appreciate how electoral processes are understood among communities or how they comprehended multiple aspects of electoral governance. They also facilitated "illuminating the differences in perspectives" between participants enabling discussions that strengthened the appreciation of some of the issues that inform the baseline survey inquiry (Kelly, 2010).

1.5.2 Sampling

The baseline study adopted a purposive sampling strategy to reach out to the respondents. Purposive sampling is a non-probability technique used in qualitative research and revered for its focus on detailed and contextual meaning (Adeoye, 2023). Purposive sampling was adopted because it allowed for a targeted approach in the selection of respondents who were particularly knowledgeable and experienced in the area of elections and electoral process ensuring the collection of rich and relevant data.

1.5.3 Stakeholder Mapping & Analysis

Stakeholder mapping is a critical step in identifying and categorizing individuals, groups, and institutions involved in elections. Using TI Z's networks, stakeholders were mapped based on their roles, influence, and level of engagement with governance and elections. This approach was specifically intended to gather diverse perspectives and contextualize the findings aimed at enriching the analysis and ensured the recommendations were practical and relevant

1.5.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an essential component of qualitative research premised on its often personal and sensitive nature. These critical considerations were observed throughout the research process to ensure the integrity of the baseline survey. In line with the UNEG Guidelines to Evaluation, the baseline study processes prioritised safe, respectful, non-discriminatory participation by the respondents. Below are ethical issues that were considered:

Safeguarding of baseline participants such as women and other vulnerable persons.

Confidentiality and anonymity: Data were anonymised and strict confidentiality protocols were followed. Each and every response was treated with utmost secrecy. For example, no personal identifiers were required from those who participated to ensure anonymity of responses.

Consent/Assent: Participation at any level was entirely up to the respondent. Written/verbal consent were sought from each participant to be engaged in the baseline study. Consent was also be sought for audio recording and photographing.

Non-discriminatory participation: No participant were excluded from participating on condition of their health, disability, socio-economic status, among other vulnerability criteria.

1.5.5 Data Analysis

Following the completion of the data collection exercise, a raw data bank was created. The data bank included all the KIIs and FDG transcripts, field notes and secondary data extracts. These data were then stored electronically to facilitate the start of the analysis process. The next step was the familiarization process, where the researchers read, and re-read the raw data noting ideas and potential patterns and developing reflective memos that generated early insights.

With the aid of data analytical software NVivo, the researchers worked through the data systematically, identifying the key features in the data and developing initial codes that summarized the data segments. After the initial coding, data were then grouped into broader patterns and/or themes using mind-maps. These themes were then reviewed to ensure coherence with the ones that had been developed and agreed to before data collection and endorsed at the inception meeting. Through this recursive process some themes were retained while others were merged. Some were discarded completely.

The themes that had been retained were then further reviewed with the aim of refining their essence and describing how they related to the questions on the KII and FDG data collection tools. Detailed description of each theme and supporting quotations, in their original language, were developed to enhance clarity. The final process before write up was the interpretation of the data, a second level analysis basically working out what the data means. This process involved looking at, among other things, the similarities and differences in responses from the three provincial capitals, relationships between themes, differences in how strongly respondents felt about key sensitive issues like the role of ZEC in election administration as well as typical and unusual responses. After this analytical rigour, the remaining themes were used in the write up process of the baseline report.

A Pre-Election Phase

2. The Findings

2.1 Legislative and Policy Frameworks

Zimbabwean electoral processes are informed by a number of legal and policy frameworks at international, regional and national levels. The Baseline study inter alia reviewed and analysed legal and policy documents as well as election observer mission reports, in the recent past. These data sources include, but not limited to the following;

01 The Constitution of Zimbabwe

02 The Electoral Act

03 Regional and International Principles and Guidelines on Elections

04 CSOs election monitoring reports

05 Domestic and International Elections Observer Mission Reports.

Table 1 Regional and International Electoral Standards and Zimbabwe's Compliance

Instrument/ Guideline(s)	The Standards, Best Practices	Zimbabwe's compliance levels	Reference/ source
SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections	Full participation of citizens in political process	Partial compliance. Concerns raised about voter registration comprehensiveness and accessibility, particularly for young and first-time voters	Carter Center report (2024); SADC observer missions
	Freedom of association and political tolerance	Partial compliance. Reports of opposition political party meetings being unreasonably cancelled by Police	SADC Electoral Observation Mission (2023)
	Equitable access to state media for all political parties	Non-compliance. State media consistently favoured ruling party over opposition; lack of independent TV/radio stations	SADC observer reports; Veritas analysis
	Independence of the Judiciary and impartiality of electoral institutions	Partial compliance. The Law clearly provides for judicial independence. The concern is on the executive's involvement in the official appointment processes.	Carter Center Academic Research by Nshindano (2025)
	Equal opportunity to exercise right to vote and be voted for	Partial compliance. High nomination fees may discourage less wealthy candidates, including women ; concerns about high percentage of assisted voters potentially being influenced	SADC mission (2023); AU observers (2013)
	Establishment of impartial, all-inclusive national electoral bodies	Mixed. ZEC has constitutional mandate but faces public confidence challenges regarding impartiality; appointment mechanisms questioned	Carter Center; Africa Confidential (2023)
UN Convention Against Corruption	Integrity-building measures in public insti-tutions	Partial compliance. ZEC signed integrity pledges (2025); anti-corruption courts established; implementation remains a chal-lenge	Carter Center Report (2024)
	Incorporate the principle of transparency into funding of political par-ties.	Political Parties (Finance) Act does not provide for disclosure of funding sources, limits to campaign spending and disclo-sure of how the funding is uti-lized.	Political Parties (Finance) Act.
African Charter on Human and People's Rights (hereinafter referred to as the Banjul Charter)	Article 9- Right to receive information	Non-compliance. Information disclosure by the relevant Elections institutions is inadequate	Carter Center SADC and AU reports (2023)
International IDEA Electoral Justice Standards	Effective remedies for election complaints	Partial compliance. Electoral Court established but jurisdiction overlaps cause delays; ZEC's constitutional Electoral Dispute Resolution (EDR) mandate not fully implemented	IFES Report

Instrument/ Guideline(s)	The Standards, Best Practices	Zimbabwe's compliance levels	Reference/ source
Universal Declaration of Human Rights – UDHR (1948)	Article 21 states that the will of the people should be expressed through periodic and genuine elections conducted by universal and equal suf-frage and secret ballot	Zimbabwe holds regular elec-tions, which complies with this principle. However, concerns have been raised about equal political participation, intimida-tion, and restrictions on opposi-tion campaigning, which may undermine the "genuine elec-tions" requirement	UDHR
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)	Guarantees free partici-pation in public affairs, the right to vote and be elected, and elections conducted by universal suffrage and secret bal-lot.	Partial Compliance. Zimbabwe is a state party to the ICCPR and holds elections. However, ob-servers and human rights groups have cited restrictions on politi-cal freedoms and intimidation, affecting a level playing field.	ICCPR
African Union Election Observation Guidelines	Requires credible elec-toral management, equi-table media access, and transparent vote count-ing and results manage-ment.	Partial compliance. AU observ-ers sometimes report that elec-tions were generally peaceful, but also note logistical chal-lenges and issues impacting on transparency.	AU-COMESA EOM 2023

2.1.1 Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013

In terms of Section 2 (1), The Constitution is the supreme law of the country. In Section 67, the Constitution guarantees political rights of every citizen, including the right to free, fair and regular elections for any elective office. Under the same section, citizens are accorded the right to make political choices freely, to form or join and participate in activities of a political party or organisation of their choice, and to take part in peaceful political activities.

Furthermore, Chapter 7 of the Constitution provides for the roles, responsibilities and principles that institutions administering elections should adhere to. Section 155 provides for the principles of the election system, which include ensuring that elections must be peaceful, free and fair; they must be based on universal adult suffrage and equality of votes; and that they be free from violence and electoral malpractices. In addition, the Constitution gives guidance in terms of conducting referendums, the timing of elections as well as delimitation of electoral boundaries. More importantly, Section 3 of the Constitution provides for founding values and principles, which include rule of law and fundamental human rights and freedoms. Specifically, section 3(2) elaborates on the principles of good governance which bind the State and all its institutions and agencies. These principles include, among others, a multi-party democratic political system and guidance on management of the electoral system.

2.1.2 Electoral Act [Chapter 2:13]

This is the primary legislation governing elections in Zimbabwe. It sets out rules and procedures which guide the conduct of elections and the functions of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC). The Act establishes the ZEC as the independent Elections Management Body (EMB), responsible for administering and supervising all elections and referendums. Its duties include; preparing, maintaining, and revising the voters' roll; delimiting constituencies and wards; conducting voter education; accrediting observers and monitors as well as announcing election results.

Part 18B of the Act provides for measures against politically motivated violence and intimidation during elections. Section 14(d) of the Electoral Code of Conduct for Political Parties and Candidates, mandates the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) and other Constitutional Commissions to assist in the reporting, documentation and referral of human rights violations in the electoral process. Most significantly, the Act makes provisions for conflict management in elections.

2.1.3 SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (revised 2021)

This is the main document for the regional approach to promoting democratic norms. The Guidelines provide that member States have an obligation to ensure the transparency and integrity of the entire electoral process. The Guidelines outline the 7 fundamental principles that must underpin all electoral processes. These include- full participation of citizens; political tolerance; separation of political party and the State; supremacy of the Constitution and the rule of law; transparency and accountability; acceptance of election results; and inclusivity.

In addition, the Guidelines provide for the establishment of an impartial, all-inclusive, competent, and accountable national EMB, whose independence must be both operational and financial. The Guidelines further elaborate on the role of stakeholders in electoral processes among them the conduct and participation of political parties; the media; CSOs and SADC observers. The Guidelines also mandate States to promote and respect the values of electoral justice which include integrity, impartiality, fairness; professionalism, efficiency and regular elections.

2.1.4 The SADC Model Law on Elections

This is a critical regional soft-law instrument, which was adopted in 2021 to provide a practical, detailed template for member states to reform their domestic electoral laws to comply with the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections (2021). It is a non-binding regional template meant to guide SADC Member States when drafting or reforming national electoral laws. It translates SADC democratic standards into practical legal provisions. Basically, this instrument aims to harmonise electoral laws across SADC Member States. It is informed by the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, the African Union (AU) instruments (especially African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Good Governance (ACDEG) and other International electoral best practices.

2.1.5 The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Good Governance (ACDEG) 2007

The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Good Governance (ACDEG), 2007 is a binding AU treaty that sets continental standards for democracy, constitutionalism, elections, and good governance. This Charter seeks to promote adherence to universal democratic values and principles; encourage constitutional order, rule of law, and good governance; and to promote regular, transparent, free and fair elections- amongst other provisions in order to promote peace, security, stability, and development in Africa.

2.1.6 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948)

In terms of Article 21 of the UDHR, "everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.....The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures". This also gives emphasis on the need for integrity in electoral processes.

2.1.7 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) 1966

The Covenant provides that every citizen has the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs, either directly or through their freely chosen representatives. It also provides that citizens have the right to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot. More so, the Covenant provides that all the rights needs to be equally enjoyed by PWDs and other marginalised groups

The Baseline study showed that most respondents were of the view that the existing Constitutional and Legislative provisions adequately support the administration of transparent and credible electoral processes notwithstanding that the laws are not always applied consistently and fairly across the political spectrum. The laws regulating public gatherings, especially the Maintenance of Public Order Act (MOPA) were singled out as being applied selectively impacting on the ability of some political parties and their supporters' enjoyment of fundamental political rights and freedoms.

Feedback from all the KIIs across all three provincial capitals reveal that Zimbabwe has some of the best electoral laws and policies. These electoral laws are quite solid on paper and largely in line with the electoral best practices. In Bulawayo, men only FDG noted that

> *[...] Zimbabweans are good at crafting very good laws however the implementation is lacking. Supporting institutions equally lack power to enforce and uphold these laws. Disability inclusion lacks in these policies. Selective application of the law renders these framework useless".*

One FDG respondent from Kambuzuma, in Harare summed up the disparity between good laws and their implementation;

> *[...] Hatina dambudziko nemitemo isu senyika. Mitemo yedu yakanakisa, pamwe kutokunda dzimwe nyika. Problem yedu ndeyekuti pakuzoshanda kwemitemo kwacho ndookusinganzwisisiki zvachose, zvinotoita kunge Animal Farm chaiyo, where some animals are more equal than others' (We do not have a challenge with our electoral laws and policies as a country. Our laws could even be better compared to other jurisdictions. The challenge is on the implementation of the laws – it appears like an Animal Farm, where some animals are treated as more equal than others).*

Across the three provinces, most FDG respondents raised concerns regarding the effectiveness of the reports and recommendations made by international and regional elections observation missions, "these reports mean nothing as their recommendations are never implemented by the government." Nevertheless, KII respondents had an alternative view which acknowledged that such reports provided electoral stakeholders provide an important benchmark for advocacy for policy reform.
On whether Zimbabwe's international, continental and regional commitments have had any impact on the electoral processes in Zimbabwe, a FGD of young people from Bulawayo noted that "

> [...] while Zimbabwe is a sovereign state, she gone on to make shame of the electoral process. Regional, continental and international commitments mean nothing to the process of conducting elections. We saw in the last election all the observer missions wrote statements however that did not change the result or conduct of ZANU PF and the Electoral management body ZEC. "njenge SADC yikudlalisa isikhathi, it's just a grouping of like-minded people who are simply there to waste people's time with sham elections.

However persons with disability in the Bulawayo Metropolitan province bemoaned lack of domestic implementation of international mechanisms. *"UNCRP has articles that speak to so many things including the participation of women and persons with disabilities. Zimbabwe has not been intentional in adherence to these."*

3. Understanding Electoral Integrity

The Baseline survey noted that the concept of electoral integrity was not well understood amongst most respondents, especially within communities. Even though there was a basic appreciation of the need to have free and fair elections, most respondents across the three provincial capitals expressed their limited understanding of the concept of electoral integrity. On the contrary, most KII respondents demonstrated a clearer appreciation of the concept of electoral integrity as well as its key principles.

3.1 Fairness, Freeness and Credibility in elections

The principle of fairness in elections covers the entire administration of electoral processes in an impartial manner to mitigate bias and support the efficacy of the system. It requires that all candidates/ participants in an election must be treated equally and that electoral officials must carry out their duties without favour, bias or discrimination (Ace, 2012). This inter alia entails that the secrecy of the ballot should to be guaranteed at all times, results must be inclusive and, if disputed, resolved in a fair and transparent manner. Impartiality and non-discrimination towards candidates and political parties should be upheld, ensuring that every voter and candidate has an equal ability to participate and compete in the election (Lartey, 2024).

Based on reports from regional (SADC, AU), international observers, domestic observers and human rights organizations, Zimbabwean elections have been falling short of some of the key fairness assessment criteria. Survey respondents were of the firm view that the general perception obtaining in the country is that ZEC was not fully independent to administer a free, fair and credible election. In Harare for example, most respondents held the view that "all the bosses and staff members down-to the lowest grade are recruited based on their political affiliation, and they will just have to work to please a specific political individuals." In general there was a lack of trust amongst most of the respondents in terms of the level of fairness, freeness and transparency of electoral systems in Zimbabwe.

Survey findings also show that Zimbabwe has a comprehensive legislative framework that promotes free, fair, credible and transparent in electoral processes. This framework is underpinned by the national objectives and the bill of rights in the Constitution guarantees non-discrimination, equality, good governance and democracy practices. However, most KII respondents in Harare were of the view that despite these progressive mechanisms, there still exist some regressive laws such as the Patriotic Act and maintenance of order laws, which have been used to restrict equal participation of different political actors in electoral processes.
Further feedback received during the baseline study pointed to concerns that;

> *[...] there is always misuse of state resources during elections. Food aid and agricultural inputs such as seed and fertilizers are usually distributed during campaigning sessions by members of the ruling party. Contrarily, other political parties do not have access to the same resources- making the political playing field uneven.*

In addition, respondents raised further concern over intimidation allegedly perpetrated by traditional leaders, especially in rural communities. In Manicaland for example, a participant during an FGD shared that;

> *[...] in our rural community, the traditional leaders hold meetings to remind their subjects on which political party to support and vote for. Our elderly will also be warned that they need to advise their children in the urban areas to support a specific political party. Some traditional leaders actually give threats of evictions in the community, if one is seen or even suspected on supporting any other political ideology. People live in fear, and for the sake of their personal peace and security, they will just go with what the leaders would have dictated.*

These observations were consistent with the report issued by the SADC Election Observer Mission (SEOM) following the 2023 Zimbabwe Harmonised (sic.) elections, which noted that the elections "fell short of the requirements of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Electoral Act, and the SADC Principles and Guidelines." Specific criticism included the banning of opposition rallies, biased state media, and issues with the voters' roll and polling station results posting (SADC EOM, 2023). Similarly, other observers that include the African Union, the European Union (EU) as well domestic observers cited critical flaws, including intimidation, delayed release of the voters' roll, and administrative shortfalls, especially on Election Day in the capital city.


VOTE
HERE

4. Universal and Equal Suffrage

Universal suffrage guarantees that every adult citizen has the right to vote without discrimination, while equal suffrage ensures that each citizen's vote carries the same weight as any other. In Zimbabwe, these principles are firmly embedded across multiple legal level international treaties, regional SADC instruments, and constitutional law and enabling legislation.

As the foundational document of international human rights law, the UDHR establishes the basic principle of democratic participation. Article 21(3) of the UDHR provides:

"The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot or by equivalent free voting procedures." This provision is significant because it explicitly couples universal and equal suffrage as inseparable requirements for genuine democratic governance. Article 25 of the ICCPR guarantees every citizen the right and opportunity *"To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors."*

The Banjul Charter in Article 13(1) states that *"Every citizen shall have the right to participate freely in the government of his country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives in accordance with the provisions of the law."* The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) has elaborated that the right guaranteed under Article 13(1) is extended to "every citizen" of a particular State and that "any curtailing of the right can only be justified by reasons of legal incapacity". This interpretation strongly reinforces the universal character of suffrage under the African human rights system.

As a member of the SADC, Zimbabwe is bound by the regional body's Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections. Clause 2.1 of the SADC Principles provides the foundational requirements which include *"Full participation of citizens in the political process"* and *"Equal opportunity to exercise the right to vote and be voted for".* The Guidelines also include non-discrimination in voter registration as a core obligation. This regional framework reinforces the universal and equal suffrage principles found in international instruments while providing specific guidance for electoral administration in the SADC context.

In the Constitution of Zimbabwe, universal and equal suffrage are elevated to founding values of the Republic. Section 3(2)(b) of the Constitution explicitly establishes the electoral system as a component of good governance. It provides for *"The principles of good governance, which bind the State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level, include an electoral system based on (i) universal adult suffrage and equality of votes; (ii) free, fair and regular elections; and (iii) adequate representation of the electorate."*
Section 67(3) of the Constitution provides the specific guarantee of voting rights by stating that *"Subject to this Constitution, every Zimbabwean citizen who is of or over eighteen years of age has the right (a) to vote in all elections and referendums to which this Constitution or any other law applies, and to do so in secret; and (b) to stand for election for public office and, if elected, to hold such office."*
The voting age is thus constitutionally fixed at eighteen years.

Both KII and FDG findings across the three capitals were in sync that the Constitution of Zimbabwe and the Electoral Act make sufficient provisions for the equal enjoyment of electoral rights by both women and men. However, there were perceptions from the survey results that in practice political parties acted as gate keepers to access women's participation as electoral contestants.

A gendered analysis further demonstrated that patriarchy was another stumbling block to equal participation of women in elections both as electoral contestants or voters. In their assessment on gendered participation the AU-COMESA Election Observation Mission (AU-COMESA EOM) encouraged Zimbabwe to put in place the necessary mechanisms that accelerate the achievement of gender equality through increased quotas for women. The sixty (60) reserved seat quota for women in the National Assembly represents 21% of seats. Thus, Zimbabwe currently

falls short of the international and African Union normative frameworks which advocate for gender parity in elective positions. The AU-COMESA EOM further noted that the reserved seats quota for women in Parliament, adopted in 2013 and set to expire in 2023, was extended by two more electoral cycles. The extension of the women quota is highly commendable.

Regarding youth participation, The AU-COMESA EOM commended Zimbabwe for the adoption of a youth quota in the National Assembly. This affirmative action will increase youth representation in political governance which is in line with the country's constitutional requirements and the ACDEG.

One participant in the Manicaland FGDs highlighted that, *"when you want to stand for an election as a councillor pamwe pacho unotyisidzirwa, pamwe kutoshaya ma resources, pamwe vanhu vanoti kana uchida kukwikwidza tipeka mari tipinde muvanhu".* The participant cited intimidation and lack of resources to support political campaigns as a major hindrance.

Women respondents also raised concerns over equality in political participation. Female participants from Chitungwiza stated that majority of them faced limitations in enjoying equal access and participation in political process due to lack of financial resources which contributed to an uneven playing field that was disadvantageous to women.

In one of the FGDs held in Harare, majority of the participants stated that there was no universal and equal suffrage in electoral processes. Gender equality remains a mirage since women are always disproportionately affected. The biggest challenges were centred on financial capabilities of the contesting parties to the electoral processes. Furthermore, it was also indicated that there appears to be no clear law nor policy that regulates the use of money in electoral processes in order not to accord an unfair competitive advantage of some parties over others.
In Bulawayo, women only FDG noted that although the Electoral law is gender neutral, making it more applicable to both men and women, however the nomination fees for the 2023 Harmonised (sic.) elections greatly restricted women to participate in elections *"nomination fees have become a restriction (omama bayithola nzima imali yokubhalisa ukuthi babe ngabameli leyo yinto eyenza babebalutshwane abangena emncintiswaneni)".*

5. Voter Registration

Voter registration is intended to ensure that everyone entitled to vote can do so, to prevent ineligible persons from voting, and to guard against multiple voting by the same individuals. The accuracy of the voter register is a key element in ensuring that all qualified constituents can enjoy the right to vote (Goodson-Gill, 1998).

Section 17A of the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) provides for the conduct of continuous voter registration by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission. In addition, the Commission periodically conducts enhanced voter registration where additional voter registration centres are opened for defined periods of time. To be eligible to vote in an election, a person must be a Zimbabwean citizen of at least 18 years old, in possession of either a national identity card or a valid Zimbabwean passport and have his/her details as proof of residence.

The aforementioned provisions provide for broad participation by eligible voters and the registration procedures allow for claims and objections. Survey respondents acknowledged the several voter registration Blitz that ZEC conducted ahead of the Boundary Delimitation exercise which provided an opportunity for those who wanted to register or transfer their vote to do so at a registration centre closer to them as opposed to the District and Provincial ZEC Offices. Respondents however decried the limited publicity for the itinerary of the mobile registration teams. In urban areas respondents indicated that more time and larger teams needed to be deployed to mobile registration centres that were located in 'high traffic' zones such as shopping centres.
Respondents in Harare raised further concerns over the gaps in the law regarding voter registration versus its

limitation on the full enjoyment of the right to vote. For instance, the electoral laws do not allow 17-year-olds to register to vote, who could be 18years at the time of voting. This gap limits the participation of young people in electoral processes. Another issue noted was that ZEC appears to be more active and visible in voter registration in the period closer to general elections. There is therefore need for ZEC to be more active in the registration outside the blitz that are held just before major elections

There were also concerns by some Manicaland FGD participants regarding the currency and accuracy of the voters roll, some respondents claimed their registration details had changed between the inspection period and the actual election-day. This impacted on the confidence of voters on the status of the voters' roll.

Survey findings across the three provincial capitals implored ZEC to ensure that the online and Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) platforms work efficiently and contain information that is current. This would make it easy for voters to check on their registration status. The USSD and Online platforms need to have information that is synced to the latest changes on the main voter's roll. Baseline survey findings also showed that the Voter's roll needed to be made available to all electoral contestants for use even during campaigns and as well as being available to stakeholders who request to use the voters roll within the confines of the Law. According to survey respondents this was not the case during the electoral cycle for the 2023 Harmonised (sic.) Elections.

FDG participants in Manicaland suggested that there is a need for a more efficient way for enrolling unregistered voters on the voters' roll. Respondents further suggested that the Registrar General be tasked with automatically enrolling those who turn 18 years on to the voter register.



6 Voter Education

Voter education is a critical component of democratic elections, as it ensures that citizens are informed about their rights, electoral processes, and the importance of participation. At the international level, voter education is not always explicitly stated as a standalone right but is implied within broader rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and political participation.

The UDHR provides in Article 19 that *"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom… to seek, receive and impart information…"* This provision underpins voter education by guaranteeing citizens' access to information necessary for informed electoral participation. In addition, Article 21(1) provides that *"Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country…"* Meaningful participation requires that voters are adequately informed, making voter education an implied obligation.

Similarly, the ICCPR reinforces these rights. Article 19(2) states that *"Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression… including freedom to seek, receive and impart information…"* For this right to be effectively exercised, states are expected to ensure that voters are adequately informed about electoral processes, thereby making voter education an essential component of democratic governance.

At the regional level, African instruments more explicitly recognise the importance of civic and voter education. The Banjul Charter provides in Article 9(1) that "Every individual shall have the right to receive information." This right supports voter education by ensuring access to electoral information. The ACDEG places a stronger emphasis on voter education. It obliges State Parties to promote civic education and public awareness on democratic processes, and to ensure informed participation of citizens in elections.

Furthermore the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections explicitly provide for voter education as a key component of credible elections, the need for informed citizen participation and equal access to information for all voters

The Constitution of Zimbabwe provides a strong foundation for voter education. Section 67 (Political Rights) states that *"Every Zimbabwean citizen has the right… to make political choices freely…"* This right presupposes that citizens must have access to adequate information, which is facilitated through voter education. Section 61 (Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Media) provides that "*Every person has the right to freedom of expression…"* This includes the right to receive and disseminate information relevant to elections. Section 62 (Access to Information) further provides that *"Every Zimbabwean citizen… has the right of access to any information held by the State…"* This is crucial for voter education, as it ensures that electoral information is accessible to the public.

The Electoral Act provides provisions on voter education. The Act mandates the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to; Provide voter education to the public, Regulate voter education by other stakeholders such as NGOs and civil society. It also sets conditions for voter education, including that; it must be accurate and unbiased, it must not be conducted in a partisan manner, and that Organisations providing voter education may require accreditation. These provisions ensure that voter education is credible, neutral, and consistent with democratic principles.

Feedback received from the respondents across the three provinces expressed mixed reactions on the reach of voter education during the electoral cycle. Some KII respondents noted an improvement in the conduct of ZEC in the provision of voter education especially during the 2023 Harmonised (sic.) elections. However there remains a host of concerns regarding some administrative issues on voter education. For instance, ahead of the 2023 elections, ZEC issued a directive instructing all CSOs that wanted to conduct voter education to re-apply. However the applications were only approved less than two months before the 2023 Harmonised (sic.) Elections which severely impacted on the CSOs' ability to amplify ZEC voter education efforts. Also of particular concern was that the accreditation expired a week after the elections, making civic voter education a non-continuous process. The accreditation process became cumbersome as CSOs are required to re-apply ahead of by-elections.

In Manicaland for example, it was highlighted that there were some hard-to-reach communal communities who in the past have relied more on civic voter education which was being facilitated by CSOs. However, of late, concern was raised that these CSOs were no longer visible in their communities.

In Bulawayo, KII respondent noted that,

> [...] ZEC itself is widely perceived as lacking impartiality. Its voter education is often criticized as being technical, minimalist, and late. It focuses on "how to vote" (mechanics) but inadequately addresses "why to vote," voter rights, how to check the voters' roll, how to protect your vote, and what constitutes a free and fair process. This fails to build an informed and confident electorate. Also, ZEC's programs are often under-funded, starting too close to elections, and rely on formal channels that fail to reach far ending communities marginalized groups (youth, rural women, persons with disabilities).

Another issue that came up from the youths in the FDGs conducted in Harare was that;

> [...] the voter education programmes conducted by ZEC rarely uses platforms and languages that resonate with us as the youths. Most of us are more present on social media platforms and ghetto vibes music. We find the programmes to be too formal and not really appealing to most of our peers.

During an FDG discussion, a PWD from Kambuzuma, Harare bemoaned that, "voter education programmes and materials facilitated by ZEC are rarely produced in accessible formats such as braille, sign language videos, and other easy-to-read formats."

The baseline study findings propose that in terms of best practices, EMBs are expected to be collaborative in their approach to the provision of voter education. Collaboration with a wide range of accredited CSOs, religious groups, and community leaders could be ideal to maximize reach of the voter education efforts. Both the curriculum and methodology used to provide voter education needs to be improved to make the information more accessible to voters with unique needs and to make the voter education more responsive to the prevailing information gaps.

Voter education messages need to address the prevailing myths, disinformation and mis-information trends that will be prevailing in the different constituencies and provinces. Manicaland FGDs participants expressed concern with quality of voter education which they said was mainly limited to telling people the election date and the type of election. Furthermore, voter education needs to be a continuous process and not to be last-minute rush before an election. The information also needs to be non-partisan, and build confidence with the electorate in the process. Most importantly, there is need for the ZEC to be adequately resourced for it to effectively carry-out voter education by among other things deploying an adequate number of voter educators with sufficient voter education materials.

In Bulawayo, young people summarised voter education challenges as follows:

01 Lacks inclusive VE and disability friendly voter education.

02 Information disseminated is generic.

03 Intersectionality approach should be applied.

04 Voter Education should be a continuous process as every day there are new eligible voters.

05 Information should be disseminated even to the peripheries deeper rural areas.

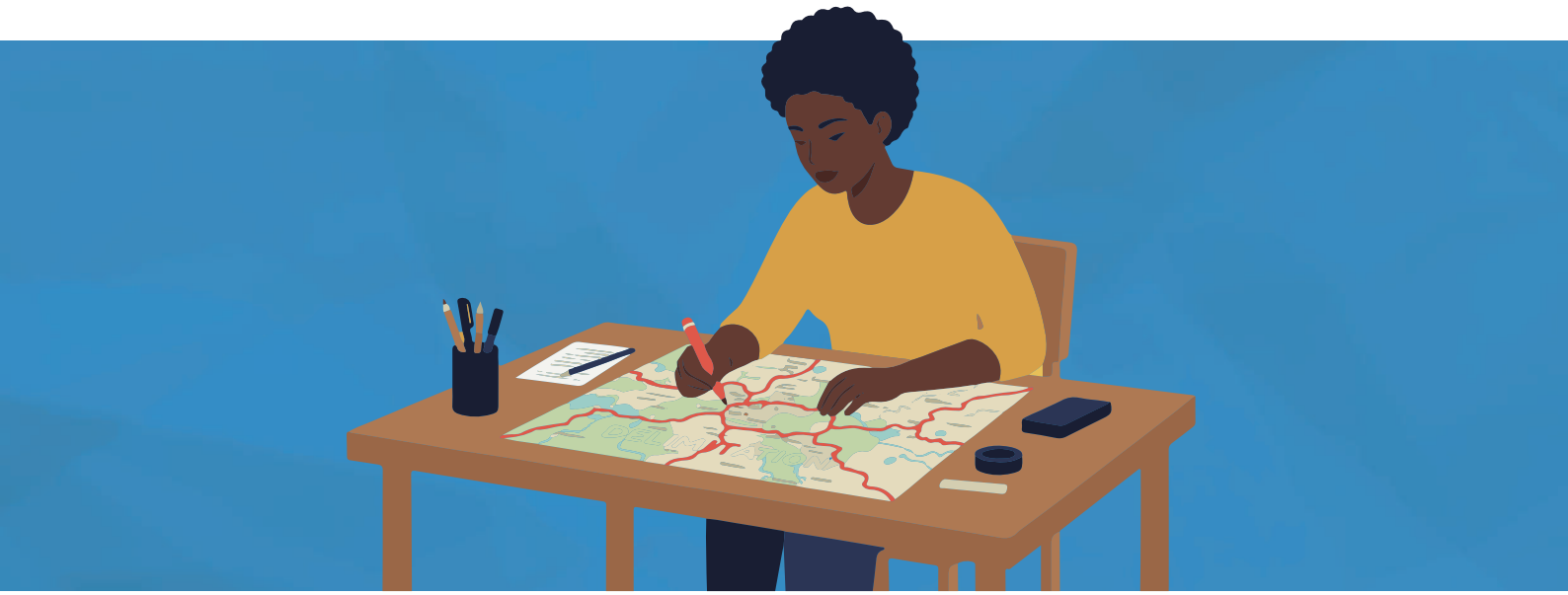
7. Delimitation

According to the ACE project Boundary delimitation usually refers to the process of drawing electoral district boundaries. However, it can also be used to denote the process of drawing voting areas (also called polling areas, districts or election precincts) for the purposes of assigning voters to polling places. The periodic delimitation of electoral boundaries is necessary in any representative system where single-member districts or uniformly small multi-member districts are used. If electoral boundaries are not periodically adjusted, population inequities develop across districts (Ace, 2012).

According to International IDEA problems arise where boundary delimitation results in electoral districts that are disproportionate, or even actively contradict the principle of fair elections. For example, challenges usually arise in cases of malapportionment or gerrymandering, where electoral districts are intentionally designed to benefit certain electoral participants. Therefore, boundary delimitation must follow the standards and basic principles of electoral districting (IDEA, 2022).

In the run up to the 2023 Harmonised (sic.) elections, Zimbabwe undertook a delimitation of constituencies in accordance with Sections 160 and 162 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe. Section 160 sets 210 as the total number of constituencies that the country must be divided into. It also mandated the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to "*divide local authority areas into wards according to the number of members to be elected into the local authority concerned*". Section 161 sets the timelines for conducting boundary delimitation which must happen every ten years following the results of a national census. It further establishes the criteria that must be followed including ensuring, as far as possible, equal numbers in each ward and constituency, that no ward is divided between two or more local authorities or two or more constituencies. It further provides geographical and qualitative guidance in the delimitation including giving consideration to physical features, means of communication, geographical distribution of voters, community of interest and population.

In their stakeholder interface meetings, the SADC Election Observer Mission (SEOM) was appraised of the delimitation process and the attendant challenges that had befallen that process. Stakeholders noted, in their submission to SEOM that the boundary delimitation exercise conducted by the ZEC in 2022 was marred with controversy. Some stakeholders were of the view that the delimitation exercise failed to meet the prescribed constitutional requirements. Some stakeholders even attempted to have the delimitation report set aside. Combined Harare Residents Association and Another v Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and Another (286 of 2025) [2025] ZWHHC 286 (2 May 2025) and Bhamu v Mwonzora and 4 others (14 of 2023) [2023] ZWCC 2 (4 May 2023) were two such attempts to set aside the delimitation report.



8. Political Party Electoral Campaigns

Electoral campaigns are a central feature of democratic elections, providing political parties and candidates with the opportunity to present their policies and persuade voters. For campaigns to be meaningful, they must be conducted in an environment that guarantees freedom of expression, association, assembly, and equality of opportunity.

At the international level, electoral campaigns are protected through broader civil and political rights. The UDHR provides in Article 19 that *"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression… to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media…"* This provision is fundamental to electoral campaigns, as it allows candidates and parties to communicate their messages to the electorate. In addition, Article 20(1) provides: *"Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association."* This is essential for campaign rallies, meetings, and political mobilisation.

Similarly, the ICCPR reinforces these freedoms. Article 19(2) states that *"Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression…"* Article 21 and 22 provides for the rights to peaceful assembly and the right to freedom of association respectively. Together, these provisions ensure that electoral campaigns are conducted in an environment where political ideas can be freely exchanged.

At the regional level, African instruments provide more specific standards for electoral campaigns. The Banjul Charter guarantees the following rights;

01 **Article 9- "***Every individual shall have the right to receive information…"*

02 **Article 10-** *"Every individual shall have the right to free association…"*

03 **Article 11-** *"Every individual shall have the right to assemble freely…"*

These rights collectively support the conduct of electoral campaigns.

The ACDEG requires State Parties to:



Promote political pluralism



Ensure fair competition among political parties



Guarantee freedom of expression and assembly during campaigns

The SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections clearly provide that:

01 Political parties must have equal opportunity to access the media

02 There must be freedom of assembly and campaigning

03 The electoral environment must be peaceful and tolerant

These standards directly influence Zimbabwe's regulation of campaign activities.

The Constitution of Zimbabwe on the other hand provides the core rights underpinning electoral campaigns.

Section 61 (Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Media) states that *"Every person has the right to freedom of expression..."* This enables candidates and parties to communicate campaign messages freely.

Section 58 (Freedom of Assembly and Association) provides that *"Every person has the right to freedom of assembly and association..."* This supports campaign rallies and political gatherings.

Section 67 (Political Rights) states that *"Every Zimbabwean citizen has the right... to make political choices freely... and to participate... in political activity."* This directly protects campaign participation.

Section 155(2) further provides that *"The State must take all appropriate measures... to ensure that all political parties and candidates contesting an election have reasonable access to all material and information necessary to participate effectively."* This is a critical provision ensuring fairness in campaigning, including access to media and information.

The Electoral Act has provisions that regulates the conduct of electoral campaigns.
Key provisions include:

01 Regulation of campaign periods

02 Prohibition of intimidation, violence, and bribery

03 Rules governing campaign materials and advertising

04 Maintenance of law and order during campaigns

The Act ensures that campaigns are conducted in a peaceful and lawful manner.

In general the sum total of these global, continental, regional and domestic guideline provides a benchmark for political parties to receive equal opportunity under the law to canvass for votes during campaign periods. However, in Zimbabwe several reports by both the international and domestic observers bemoaned, the advantage of incumbency and the perceived conflation between the state and governing party as one of the factors that make the playing field uneven especially in relation to the 2018 and 2023 **Harmonised (sic.)** elections.

The Open Election Data Initiative defines electoral campaigns as *"the means by which candidates and political parties prepare and present their ideas and positions on issues to the voters in the period preceding Election Day".* The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU's) Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections (1994) states that "everyone individually and together with others have the right: to express political opinions without interference, to seek, receive and impart information and to make an informed choice, to move freely within the country to campaign for election, and to campaign on an equal basis with other political parties, including the party forming the existing government".

Survey findings in in Harare, Bulawayo and Mutare mirrored the findings by the international and domestic observer missions confirming that the electoral framework provided equal opportunity for electoral contestants to canvass for votes during campaign periods. However, advantage of incumbency and the perceived conflation between the state and the governing party was regarded as one of the factors that make the playing field uneven. The Manicaland KII respondents illustrated the challenges that some opposition electoral contestants faced in accessing public space for the purposes of holding rallies. Such challenges manifested in that every time their sitting Member of Parliament tried to gather his supporters to hold a rally, the meeting would be disrupted by supporters of other parties. The people from the community jokingly say *"vamwe vanoti akavhoterwa asina kuita ma campaigns", "that the Member of Parliament (MP) was voted for and won without campaigning".*

9. Campaign Financing

The role of money in politics in significant. Electoral contestants and their parties need resources to implement effective political campaigns that allow for them to canvass for votes and publicise their policy positions. The Global Civil Society Coalition for the UNCAC's 12th Regional Meeting for Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) held on 24 September 2024 explored the complex interplay between money, power, and corruption in African elections. The meeting concluded that in SSA "the increasing influence of money in politics poses a significant threat to the integrity of electoral processes" (UNCA 2024). Article 7.3 of the UNCAC calls on countries to enhance transparency in the funding of electoral campaigns and political parties.

Zimbabwe signed the UNCAC on February 20, 2004, and subsequently ratified it on March 8, 2007. As a State Party, Zimbabwe has committed to implementing anti-corruption measures and has taken steps to domesticate the convention through its national legal frameworks, including the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment No. 20) enacted in 2013 and the Anti-Corruption Commission Act. The Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) is the body mandated to lead the fight against corruption in the country.

The political party funding is mainly regulated by the Political Parties (Finance) Act, Chapter 2:11, whose provisions were largely viewed by most of the Manicaland FDGs participants as having inadequate provisions for transparency in both party funding and campaign finance. The current regulation does not set any limits on how much electoral contestants can spend on campaigns, neither does it make it mandatory to disclose the amount of donations received and how they are utilised. In essence, the use of money in electoral campaigns is largely unregulated. There is no legislation that provides for appropriate ceilings, periodic audits and disclosure of campaign spending. The absence of effective regulation on party and campaign funding makes the playing field uneven for electoral contestants and leaves the influence of money in politics unchecked.

Survey respondents from Bulawayo noted that although the country has the Political Party (Finance) Act (Chapter 2:11) that amongst other things, regulates permitted (citizens, permanent residents, companies, and associations) and prohibited (all others) sources of funding, there are no spending limits, no compulsory requirements to report contributions and spending, and no requirements to publish financial reports. More so, there is also no institution that has a mandate to oversee political finance regulations. Such gaps make the political finance ecosystem incomplete and hence create an 'arms race' of campaign spending which makes the process of contesting for political power a preserve of the super-rich and open to illiberal influences.

While no definitive international consensus exists on what constitutes the best practice regarding political finance, there is a growing need for transparency in the funding of political parties and candidates in the fight against corruption. Article 7 (3) of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) calls on countries "to consider taking appropriate legislative and administrative measures [...] to enhance transparency and funding of candidates for elected public office and where applicable, the funding of political parties".

The African Union Convention on Combatting and Preventing Corruption (AUCC) under Article 10 on funding of political parties also highlights the importance of transparency in political finance and urges its members to adopt measures to "proscribe the use of funds acquired through illegal and corrupt practices to finance political parties" and to "incorporate the principle of transparency in the funding of political parties" in their national legislations.

Over the past three electoral cycles, the AU's domestic and international observers have called for campaign finance regulation as one of the ways to level the electoral field between ZANU-PF and other opposition political parties. For instance, after the 2018 harmonized elections in Zimbabwe, the AU recommended that the government and Parliament should consider reviewing the Political Parties Act to ensure transparency and accountability in campaign financing. Abuse of state resources and other improper forms of influencing votes should be prohibited to ensure a more levelled electoral playing field.

10. Media Environment

The Constitution, the Electoral Act's sections 160 (e) – (k) and (s) sets out provisions on how the Media ought to cover and flight adverts on elections and political parties. Section 61 of the Constitution provides for freedom of expression and freedom of the media and this right extends to all media, both private and publicly owned. Statutory Instrument 33 of 2008 sets regulations on: Election programmes to be broadcast, equitable allocation of airtime especially on the public broadcaster; election adverts; the media's conduct in an election; and an appeal mechanism for aggrieved parties.

Most survey respondents across the three provincial capitals bemoaned biased reporting and unequal access to state media during elections. Allegations were that in the last two **Harmonised (sic.)** elections, the state broadcaster Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) accorded more coverage to the ruling party's activities than the other contesting political parties. The opposition parties only received very limited airplay, couched with negative reportage.

Statistics show that the media coverage was heavily skewed to the extent that it largely concentrated on two political parties, ZANU-PF and Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC), limiting the other political parties in terms of visibility. The Media Monitors (MM) reported that Media coverage was skewed in favor of ZANU-PF which had 63% coverage, followed by CCC with 20%, United Zimbabwe Alliance (UZA) 5%. The remaining 23 parties had media coverage accounting for 12%. Emmerson Mnangagwa of ZANU-PF had the lion's share of media publicity amongst presidential candidates with 58%, and Nelson Chamisa of CCC had 17%. The other 8 candidates settled for 25%. State-owned media had more coverage (77% on ZBC; 58% in public newspapers). However, public broadcasters flighted CCC adverts in most cases after a series of ZANU-PF adverts[2].

Accreditation of Journalists

The accreditation of media practitioners for the purposes of covering elections was cumbersome and unnecessarily tedious and repetitive. For instance, for the 2023 Harmonised (sic.) elections, a journalist needed dual accreditation, from the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) and the ZEC. In addition, some media practitioners expressed concern about the delays by the ZEC in processing accreditation for both local and foreign journalists. In 2023 the Young Journalists Association of Zimbabwe (YOJA) took the ZEC to court over the delays in accreditation of journalists and other related matters[3].

2 ZESN 2023 Harmonised (sic.) Election Report

3 https://zimbabwe.misa.org/2023/08/22/journalists-urgent-application-referred-to-ordinary-court-roll/#:~:text=the%20Young%20Journalists%20Association%20of,in%20the%20current%20electoral%20cycle.

11. Political Environment and Candidate Nomination

Candidate nomination is a critical stage in the electoral process, as it determines who is eligible to stand for public office. It is closely linked to the broader right of political participation and must be regulated in a manner that is fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory. At the international level, candidate nomination is anchored in the right to political participation and the right to stand for public office.

The UDHR provides in Article 21(1) that *"Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives."* This provision implies that individuals must be able to present themselves as candidates without unreasonable restrictions. More explicitly, the ICCPR guarantees the right to stand for election. Article 25(b) states that *"Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity... to be elected at genuine periodic elections".*

At the regional level, the Banjul Charter reinforce the right to stand for office and participate in elections. Article 13(1) provides that *"Every citizen shall have the right to participate freely in the government of his country..."* This encompasses the right to contest elections, which necessarily includes fair nomination procedures. The ACDEG further obliges States to; Promote democratic participation, Ensure regular, transparent, and credible elections and to Uphold equality of opportunity for candidates. The SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections provide for all political parties and candidates must have equal opportunity to contest elections. These principles directly influence how Zimbabwe structures its nomination processes, especially in ensuring fairness among candidates.

The Constitution of Zimbabwe guarantees the right to stand for election. Section 67(3)(b) provides that *"Every Zimbabwean citizen who is of or over eighteen years of age has the right... to stand for election for public office and, if elected, to hold such office."* This is the core constitutional basis for candidate nomination. Section 155(1) (Principles of Democratic Elections) further provides that elections must be *"free and fair... and conducted in accordance with the law."* This implies that nomination procedures must be lawful, transparent, and fair. In addition, Section 56 (Equality and Non-Discrimination) states that *"All persons are equal before the law..."* This ensures that nomination requirements must not unfairly discriminate against certain individuals or groups.

The Electoral Act provides detailed procedures for candidate nomination.
Key provisions include;

01
Nomination Courts: Candidates must be nominated through a formal process conducted by nomination courts.

02
Nomination Papers: A candidate must submit completed nomination forms signed by a prescribed number of registered voters.

03
Nomination Fees: Candidates are required to pay a nomination fee.

04
Voter Education should be a continuous process as every day there are new eligible voters.

05
Qualifications and Disqualifications: The Act outlines who may or may not stand for election (e.g., citizenship requirements, criminal disqualifications).

These requirements aim to ensure that candidates are serious, eligible, and properly endorsed, while maintaining order in the electoral process. However, both domestic and regional observer groups noted inconsistencies in candidate nominations as well as application for the notice periods for election campaigns.

For instance, the ZESN 2023 Harmonised (sic.) Election Report (2023) noted that internal party democracy concerning candidate selection in both the governing party ZANU-PF and the largest opposition party, the CCC, was fraught with several challenges. ZANU-PF used primary elections to select candidates to represent the party in the National Assembly and Local Authority elections. CCC, on the other hand, selected its candidate using a process called 'Community Consensus'. While the two most dominant political parties used different processes to select their candidates, both processes led, in some instances, to disputed outcomes, re-runs, allegations of intimidation, vote rigging, and the imposition of candidates.

The SEOM noted the inconsistent application of the notice period for election campaign gatherings. During its consultations, the SEOM received complaints from some political parties who alleged that Zimbabwe Republic Police required a seven-day notice period instead of the three-day notice period that was application during elections period as outlined in section 7(1)(b)(ii) of the Maintenance of Peace and Order Act (MOPA).

While the domestic, regional and international standards were succinct, the baseline study findings showed varied responses from both FGDs participants and KIIs. The findings demonstrate that the right and opportunity to be elected was provided for at law, and that during the Nomination process candidates whose submissions had technical errors and deficiencies were given an opportunity to correct them before a final decision was made by the Nomination Courts.

Nevertheless, responses on candidate nomination requirements varied greatly from one FGD to another with some respondents regarding the requirements as fair while other regarded the nomination fees as a steep financial hurdle for electoral contestants.

Manicaland FGDs participants were of the general view that the nomination court requirements were reasonable and that the nomination fees did not impose financial barriers for candidates interested to participate either as independent candidates or on party tickets. The absence of nomination fees for aspiring councillors was regarded as progressive however concerns were raised with the apparent selective application of the requirement for aspiring councillors to have cleared all council bills/rates at the time of submitting nomination papers. A significant portion of respondents in Harare, were of the view that nomination fees for the National Assembly elections and Presidential election presented a significant financial burden for those aspiring to contest in those two elections.. The respondents further argued that the sharp increase in the nomination fees ahead of the 2023 Harmonised (sic.) elections, impacted on the realisation of equal suffrage.

Women only FGD in Bulawayo corroborated this accession arguing that the nomination fees inhibited women to participate in election *"omama bayithola nzima imali yokubhalisa ukuthi babe ngabameli leyo yinto eyenza babebalutshwane abangena emncintiswaneni."*

The survey findings also revealed that one of the biggest hurdles for aspiring candidates was intra-party political dynamics which culminated in failure by some candidates to lodge their nomination papers ahead of the sitting of the Nomination Court as permitted by the Electoral Law. Some respondents from the Manicaland FGDs suggested that the requirements for candidate nomination set the bar too low for those seeking to hold public office, especially for those seeking to contest the local authority elections.



B Election Day Phase

The AU-COMESA EOM noted that the environment on Election Day was generally peaceful and calm with no incidents of violence witnessed. Although long queues were observed up to mid-afternoon of day one of voting, voters were largely orderly, except in a few isolated cases where the crowds became agitated due to delays in opening of polling stations, particularly in Harare, Bulawayo and Manicaland.

The mission further observed late opening of some polling station particularly in Harare and Bulawayo Metropolitan provinces. In 2023, there was an unprecedented scale of litigation against some of the results of nomination processes results which in turn delayed the printing and subsequent delivery of the local authority ballot papers. Nevertheless, the AU-COMESA EOM expressed concern that communication regarding the delays was not done promptly to the stakeholders, especially political parties and candidates.

13. Electoral Participation

Electoral participation, meaning the right of citizens to vote, stand for public office, and engage in political processes, is a cornerstone of democratic governance. In Zimbabwe, this right is protected and regulated through a multi-layered legal framework. While international and regional frameworks provide guiding principles, the national framework gives binding legal force.

The UDHR establishes the foundation of democratic participation. Article 21(1) provides that: *"Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Further, Article 21(3) states that "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government"*. These provisions affirm that legitimacy of government derives from citizen participation in elections. Similarly, the ICCPR, in Article 25 provides that *"every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections... guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors."*

At the regional level, the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* provides in Article 13(1) that *"Every citizen shall have the right to participate freely in the government of his country..."* This reinforces participatory governance and equality in political processes. In addition, the ACDEG strengthens democratic norms by requiring State Parties to ensure citizen participation in governance. The SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections set standards for electoral participation. These include; full participation of citizens in the political process, equal opportunity for all political parties, freedom of association and expression.

The Constitution of Zimbabwe in section 67 provides citizens with the right to make political choices freely. This ensures that participation is meaningful, not merely formal. The Electoral Act operationalises these constitutional rights. Notably, Section 67 of the Constitution stands as the central guarantee of electoral participation, ensuring that every citizen has the right not only to vote but also to actively engage in political processes. Together, these frameworks aim to promote inclusive, free, and fair participation.

Electoral Participation is the lifeblood of democracy, involving different numbers of people in different activities at different times (Franklin 2001). Electoral participation refers to the involvement of eligible citizens and stakeholders in the electoral process. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines an electoral stakeholder as any individual, group, or institution that has a legitimate interest in, influence on, or responsibility for the conduct, outcome, or integrity of an election. These stakeholders include election management bodies, political actors, voters and civil society, media, security actors, observers, and international partners (UNDP, 2016).

While the most common form of participation is voting in elections, voter registration, turning up to vote on election day and generally engaging in political discussions, taking part in campaigns and civic activities are all central components of participation.

While the right to participation is revered in international, continental and regional frameworks, the study noted that most of the respondents did not have a clear understanding of what electoral participation entails. After unpacking the concept, 26% of the respondents at an FDG in Harare indicated that they remained unsure on whether or not there was fair and/or equal participation. Some of the respondents clearly indicated that they were unbothered on what happens since "it does not mean anything," imputing that elections have predetermined outcomes that cannot be altered by effective participation. Another third of the respondents shared positive sentiments highlighting that there was fair and equal electoral participation in Zimbabwe citing the presence and participation of CSOs that provide civic and voter education during elections, the involvement of the electorate in public consultations as well as the participation of independent observer missions and constitutional commissions during elections.

However, the some of the respondents, were of the view that there is unequal participation in the electoral processes in Zimbabwe due to unequal access to the electorate by political parties especially during campaigning periods that makes the electoral whole process uneven.

Other respondents noted that participation in elections was not free especially in the rural and peri-urban areas where communities are subjected to coercion to influence their voting patterns. Low voter turnout during by-elections was highlighted as another indicator of limited participation in electoral processes.

In Bulawayo survey respondents posited that Government, through its various political entities, has eroded the integrity of elections, through coercive participatory methods. For instance, State security agents, the police and army are used as intimidation tools especially in rural areas. In the last election there was a surge in the participation of ZANU PF affiliated civic society organisations among them Heritage Trust and Forever Associates Zimbabwe (FAZ). All these challenges presented a huge hindrance in electoral participation by ordinary Zimbabweans.

During the Manicaland data collection, respondents demonstrated a good understanding of the varied contributions to electoral integrity that different stakeholders made including the unique but complementary contributions each of them made in support of electoral processes in Zimbabwe. Overall, the FGDs participants expressed the view that the relationship between the ZEC and its stakeholders, could improve when pertinent information that should be in the public domain is shared. This would allow different electoral stakeholders an opportunity to interface with electoral processes from an informed position.

To illustrate how difficult it is to access basic information from the ZEC one Manicaland FGD participant noted that;

> [...] if you try to get granular information on votes received by different candidates in your constituency a typical responses from ZEC would be: what do you want the information for, and if you say for academic purposes the Commission's response can be is your university accredited to ask for that sort of information.

It was clear from the host of responses that the ZEC is largely regarded as not adhering to open election data principles, generally not providing updates in a timely and complete manner. Formal requests for information are oftentimes not responded to, restricting the public and electoral contestants' access to pertinent electoral information. The responses appear to reinforce the view that ZEC as a public institution engages in stonewalling as a communication strategy.

14. Election Administration

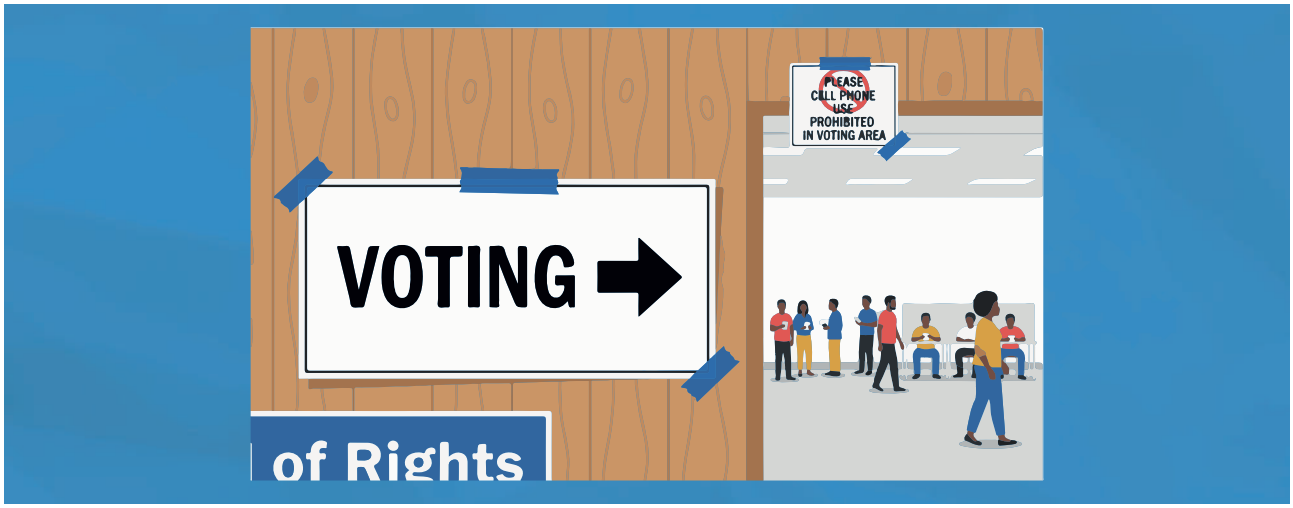
An independent and impartial electoral authority that functions transparently and professionally is recognized internationally as an effective means of ensuring that citizens are able to participate in genuine democratic elections and that other international obligations related to the electoral process can be met. This is the benchmark upon which electoral administration in measured across the globe.

Electoral processes in Zimbabwe are managed and administered by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC). The ZEC is an independent Chapter 12 institution established in terms of Section 238 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe. Its core mandate is the conduct of elections and referendums in Zimbabwe. It is guided by a core set of principles, among them, transparency, impartiality, independence and integrity. However, over the years, ZEC has received mounting criticism from various international and domestic observer groups over its conduct of recent elections especially the 2023 Harmonised (sic.) plebiscite. While ZEC officially states its commitment to values like integrity, impartiality, and transparency, observers consistently highlighted a lack of independence and operational shortcomings that compromise the fairness and credibility of the electoral process.

Zimbabwe's electoral process is guided by global human rights standards which include the UDHR and ICCPR *as well as the continental and regional normative standards.* More specifically, Article 21(3) of UDHR establishes the principle of free and fair elections, by stating that *"the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government"* while Article 25 of the ICCPR guarantees universal suffrage, periodic elections and free political participation. It cements that *"Every citizen shall have the right [...] to vote and to be voted into office.*

The ACDEG, provides the continental benchmark for the conduct of elections. The charter promotes regular transparent elections, constitutional rule and Independent electoral bodies. At the sub-regional level, the SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections provides for principles such as full participation of citizens, political tolerance, equal opportunity for parties and independence of electoral institutions. These principles directly influence Zimbabwe's electoral administration and reforms.

At the domestic level, The Constitution of Zimbabwe provides the national framework for the administration of elections. Section 155 sets the Principles of Elections noting that elections must be peaceful, free and fair and that they should be conducted by secret ballot based on universal suffrage. Section 67 provides for Political Rights, by stating that every citizen has the right to free, fair and regular elections and to make political choices freely". Sections 238–239 creates the ZEC, mandating it to administer elections. These provisions state that ZEC's functions include, *"to prepare for, conduct and supervise elections... and ensure they are... free and fair"*. It seeks to ensure independent electoral administration. The Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) as the enabling legislation provides for all the operations of the electoral processes in Zimbabwe, including the overall administration of elections.



While the normative framework for election administration is succinctly provided for the baseline survey respondents across the three provincial capitals were consistent in their condemnation of the *"ZEC's failure to deliver transparent elections over the years".* Some of the issues annotated as evidence of failure from FDGs in Bulawayo are summarised as follows:

Captured by a certain political party.
Tendering of individuals affiliated to the ruling party to provide voting materials.
Appointment of commissioner related with big names in the ruling party.
Deliberately choosing to remain old fashioned refraining from all innovative systems including diaspora voting and remaining manual in the day of digital transformation.
Voters roll still has deceased people's name.
Delimitation was hurried process and lacked voter buy in.
Confusion on voting day occasioned by the transferring of voters which was allegedly deliberate.

A youth only FGD in Bulawayo further summed up its characterisation of ZEC as follows:

> [...] ZEC has failed to perform its mandate it has become an extension of ZANU PF. (Izihlobo zeziphathintambo yizo ezigcwele eZEC, Kusukisela kumaCommisioner abonakala egqoke iRegalia yeZanu emihlanganweni.) To us ZEC as a referee is just a ZPF proxy.

The Manicaland FGDs indicated that ZEC's level of transparency and professionalism has not met citizens' expectations in their province. To support this observation, one participant noted that the trust deficit between ZEC and members of the public is even expressed in daily conversations. The participant summed this up *"kana vanhu vakuita majokes ekuti...haa iwe ndokujuta kunge ZEC...zvinhu zvashata"*, you know things are bad when people openly joke that they can hoodwink you like ZEC.

In the same province, some FGD participants raised concerns about the professional and ethical conduct of the ZEC, expressing the perception that while ZEC receives adequate funding, the financial resources are sometimes misused, *'mari dzinenge dzitoripo....asi vanozodzishandisa zvisizvo'.* This was a popular viewpoint among the FGD respondents.

However, apparent inefficient use of resources allegedly led to costly mistakes during the elections, such as during ballot paper design, transportation of materials etc. Some of the challenges were summarised by KII respondent in Harare as follows:

> [...] From the last election, there were a couple of issues that arose regarding the general administration of elections. To begin with the delimitation process itself, people were getting confused on polling stations. On Election Day, we were all disturbed by the late disbursement of ballot papers, late voting, etc. When it comes to by elections, we have witnessed very low turnout. The electorate sometimes are not aware on what election they are participating for. There is need to increase voter education, as it is a key component of electoral administration. Equally worrying is the misinformation especially on social media. There is therefore need proper and robust communications during elections.

largely sufficiently resourced with requisite human, financial and logistical resources to enable effective delivery on its mandate, it's use of such resources also came under scrutiny. However, some Manicaland FGDs participants noted that despite the aforementioned shortcomings, the ZEC should be commended for the successful roll out of the Biometric Voter Registration ahead of the 2018 Harmonised (sic.) Elections and the successful conduct of the 2022-2023 Boundary Delimitation Exercises are cases in point.

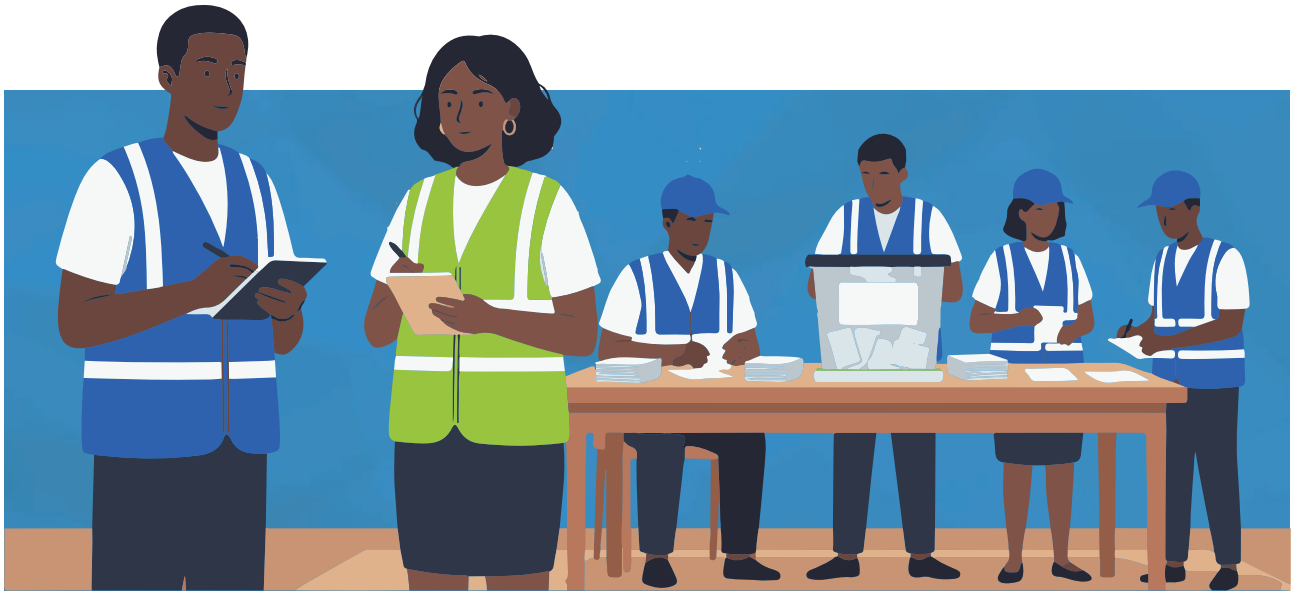
On a further positive note the AU-COMESA EOM noted that in all polling stations visited, the polling staff demonstrated adequate levels of professionalism, competence, understanding of their roles and responsibilities, adherence to procedures and a sense of commitment. These observations were echoed by other international observers like The Carter Center as well as domestic institutions like ZESN.

15. Election Observation

Election observation is a key mechanism for promoting transparency, credibility, and public confidence in electoral processes. It involves the monitoring of elections by independent domestic and international observers to assess whether they are conducted in accordance with democratic standards.

At the international level, election observation is grounded in broader principles of transparency, political participation, and access to information. The UDHR provides in Article 21(3) that *"The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government..."* For elections to reflect the will of the people, they must be transparent and credible, which is reinforced by election observation. Furthermore, Article 19 provides that *"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression... including freedom to seek, receive and impart information..."* This right underpins election observation by allowing individuals and organisations to gather and disseminate information about electoral processes.

The regional instruments in Africa provide more clearer guidance on election observation. The Banjul Charter provides in Article 13(1) that *"Every citizen shall have the right to participate freely in the government of his country..."* Free participation undergirds credible elections, which are strengthened through independent observation. The ACDEG places a stronger emphasis on electoral transparency. It requires State Parties facilitate observation and monitoring of elections. The SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections also recognise election observation as a central component of free, fair and credible elections. The principles provide that; Member States should extent invitation to invite observers who must be allowed to operate freely and that Elections must be conducted in a transparent manner. These regional standards are particularly influential in Zimbabwe, as SADC routinely deploys observer missions during elections.
The Electoral Act provides detailed provisions governing election observation.



Key provisions include;

01

Accreditation of Observers: Election observers must be accredited, typically through an accreditation committee established under the Act.

02

Role of Observers: Observers are permitted to monitor various stages of the electoral process, including, Voter registration, Campaign period ,Polling and counting

03

Code of conduct: Observers must adhere to a code of conduct, ensuring neutrality and non-interference.

04

Observation rights: Accredited observers are allowed access to polling stations and counting centres, subject to the law.

These provisions ensure that election observation is regulated, structured, and consistent with national interests, while promoting transparency.

While the institutional framework provides a basis for electoral observation, practical challenges can limit the extent to which these provisions are fully realized. Independent observers are typically required to register with ZEC, which can facilitate their participation in the electoral process. The ZEC also has a responsibility to provide observers with the necessary access to polling stations and electoral events to carry out their duties effectively. However, reports by international and regional observer groups to the 2023 Harmonised (sic.) elections among them the (EU) Observer Mission to Zimbabwe, The Carter Center and the SADC EOM noted with concern restricted access, lack of timely information, and intimidation of observers raising concerns about the true independence and effectiveness of the observation process.

The concerns by observer missions were echoed by KII respondents in Bulawayo who noted that despite the established legal framework, there are persistent challenges that continue to undermine the integrity of electoral observation. Instances of political interference and violence during electoral periods have created an environment where independent observers faced significant risks. Furthermore, the lack of sufficient resources and training for observers can hinder their ability to conduct thorough and effective monitoring.

Furthermore, most FDG respondents in Bulawayo were of the view that while the institutional framework for elections in Zimbabwe includes legal provisions that support electoral observation by independent observers, the practical implementation of these provisions has been largely inconsistent. Barriers such as restricted access, political intimidation, and resource limitations often impede the effectiveness of independent electoral observation. They recommend that strengthening the legal and institutional provisions related to electoral observation, alongside ensuring the safety and support of independent observers, is essential for fostering a transparent and credible electoral process in Zimbabwe.

Additionally, both KII and FGDs respondents in Manicaland expressed frustration with observer accreditation process which was regarded as slow and expensive. Respondents suggested the need for an efficient and cost-effective way of accrediting local observers. The current approach, according to the respondents, presented a significant logistical and financial burden to observers as each observer had to physically present themselves at the designated observer accreditation centre and pay a prescribed fee.

C Post-Election Phase

16. Election Results

Most of the FGDs respondents in Manicaland concurred that transparency of the vote count and tabulation was most transparent at the polling station Level. As results were collated further up the chain, the transparency became less. Partly because of the failure of some political parties to deploy their agents at the appropriate levels where collations of results happen and failure of the members of the general public to understand the results tabulation and transmission processes especially for the presidential election.

Most of the Manicaland FGDs respondents were of the view that transparency around results transmission could be enhanced if results were transmitted in real time and displayed in a timely fashion as collation is ongoing. In addition most of the Manicaland FGDs respondents expressed dismay at the unavailability of elections results at a granular level. This is because the vote count and tabulation is most transparent at the polling station Level. As result are collated further up the chain, the transparency becomes less. Partly because of the failure of some political parties to deploy their agents at the appropriate levels where collations of results happen.

Survey findings across the three provincial capitals suggested that perhaps the EMB could improve the results collation and transmission system to make it hybrid. Thus, an electronic for real time results transmission and have a physical back-up that can support the verification of results.

Most Respondents across the three provincial capitals were of the view that there were largely sufficient safeguards to prevent multiple voting or other forms of ballot fraud. It was noted that electoral contestants should deploy party agents to all polling stations to enable the electoral contestants to comment authoritatively on the electoral processes and outcomes. However, respondents in Manicaland highlighted that they were unsure if sufficient safeguards' are in place regarding the collation and transmission of results process. This uncertainty is compounded by the fact that party agents were and/or are invisible at various levels of the transmission process notwithstanding that party agents from different political parties were mostly visible at some of the polling stations.
Survey findings from FDGs in Bulawayo felt that Zimbabwe has mechanisms designed to promptly correct errors, publish results quickly, and offer detailed breakdowns of election outcomes, challenges such as logistical delays can complicate the process. Strengthening the efficiency of result transmission and enhancing error correction procedures are essential steps toward ensuring a transparent and trustworthy electoral process. Timely and detailed reporting of election results not only fosters public confidence but also encourages active participation in the democratic process, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of the electoral system.

17. Code of Conduct

According to G.S. Goodwin-Gill (1998), codes of conduct can contribute to fairness and to the appearance of fairness in the administration of an election. Codes can be viewed as tools which contribute to freedom and fairness; to effective choice; to a representative and credible process; to transparency and accountability; to inclusive practices; to reducing adversarial relationships; and to the emergence and consolidation of a democratic political culture. If it is effective, a Code of Conduct will promote consultation and discussion across party lines, in the interests of a 'good' election, but also more generally in promoting confidence among the participants and expectations within the electorate. The rules relating to the conduct of free and fair elections may be implemented effectively, supplemented, and fulfilled through the practical medium of a Code of Conduct [13].

One of the requirements in the nomination process is to sign the code of conduct which prescribes the acceptable conduct during electoral campaigns. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International

IDEA, 1997) notes that “Unless a code of Conduct is enforceable by legal methods, it can be effective only if the parties act in good faith”. Political parties are generally encouraged to adopt electoral codes of conduct that outline acceptable behaviors and commitments during campaigns. These codes aim to foster a culture of integrity in the electoral process and are often promoted by the ZEC and civil society organizations. The engagement of political parties in signing these pledges is seen as a commitment to uphold democratic principles and respect for opponents and voters. While many parties recognize the importance of these codes, participation can vary based on political dynamics and the level of competition among parties.

Most of the FGDs participants in Manicaland were of the view that the code of conduct is not effectively enforced because of the absence of clear punitive measures against those who contravene its provisions. Hence some political parties and their candidates violated the provisions of the code of conduct with impunity. Respondents were aware that party agents and electoral contestants are required to sign the code of conduct, but they suggested that peace pledges could be signed at the national and provincial levels to making the commitments public.

Most KII respondents in Bulawayo noted that the effectiveness of enforcing these codes of conduct has been a significant concern. While there are established mechanisms for monitoring compliance, including the involvement of independent observers and civil society, challenges remain in holding parties accountable for violations. Incidents of electoral violence, hate speech, and intimidation during campaigns are often reported, suggesting that adherence to the codes is not always upheld.

FGD respondents in Bulawayo concluded that in as much as political parties in Zimbabwe are encouraged to sign campaign pledges and adhere to electoral codes of conduct aimed at fostering ethical competition, the enforcement of these codes is often weak. The presence of political pressures, along with resource constraints faced by ZEC, can undermine effective compliance and accountability. Strengthening mechanisms for enforcement and promoting a culture of civic responsibility among political actors is essential for enhancing the integrity of the electoral process in Zimbabwe. Enhanced collaboration between stakeholders, including civil society and ZEC, will also be crucial in addressing these challenges and promoting adherence to ethical campaigning practices.



18. Electoral Dispute Resolution

Darnolf et al, 2015 notes that "The credibility of elections, acceptance of election results and stability of the election environment increasingly hinge on the effective resolution of disputes and violations throughout the electoral cycle. An effective electoral dispute resolution (EDR) system can provide a means of redress for violations of electoral rights and a mechanism for remedying flaws in electoral processes".

Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) established EDR mechanisms that include:

The Special Investigative Committee
According to section 133J of the Electoral Act, immediately after an election is called, the Commissioner-General of Police shall establish one or more special police units to investigate cases of politically-motivated violence and intimidation arising from the election.

The police officers constituting the special police units established shall investigate as expeditiously as possible all cases of politically-motivated violence and intimidation that are referred to them by the police, a multiparty liaison committee, the Commission or the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission or are otherwise brought to their attention.

Multi-Party Liaison Committees
Multi-Party Liaison Committees (MPLCs) are conflict-resolution structures established under Section 160B of Electoral Act. They bring together representatives of contesting political parties, independent candidates, and the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) to prevent or resolve disputes and ensure compliance with the Code of Conduct during elections.

Media Monitoring Committee
The Media Monitoring Committee (MMC) established in terms of Section 160K of the Electoral Act is a joint body chaired by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and includes the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC) and the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe. Its mandate is to monitor election coverage in the media, ensure equitable access for all parties, and call out bias or misinformation.

Electoral Courts (Section 161)
Electoral Courts in Zimbabwe are special divisions of the High Court established under the Electoral Act to hear and determine electoral petitions, disputes, and appeals. They provide a judicial mechanism for resolving election-related conflicts, including challenges to results, candidate eligibility, and alleged irregularities.

Electoral Courts function as special courts of record, meaning their judgments carry the same authority as High Court rulings. The courts are established to support speedy resolution of electoral disputes to safeguard the integrity of elections.

Code of Conduct for political Parties and candidates.
Is a statutory instrument under the Electoral Act (established under the fourth schedule) that governs the behaviour of parties and candidates, enforceable through the Electoral Court and other mechanisms. It is central to Zimbabwe's efforts to maintain electoral integrity.

The purpose of this Code is to promote conditions that are conducive to free and fair elections and a climate of tolerance in which electioneering activity may take place without fear or coercion, intimidation or reprisals.

One of the KII respondents in Harare expressed awareness of the mechanisms listed above and was of the opinion that the formal EDR mechanisms have failed to solve electoral disputes in a manner that supports the creating of sustainable peace in the country. This respondent's opinion was echoed by others who added that there seems to be a disproportionate number of electoral disputes that are dismissed in the electoral courts on the basis of technicalities as opposed to the cases being heard and determined on the basis of substantive issues raised by complainants

In Mutare, survey findings show that there were allegations that the formal EDR mechanisms have failed to solve electoral disputes in a manner that supports the creation of sustainable peace in the country. This assertion is premised on what the respondents contented were disproportionate number of electoral disputes that are dismissed on the basis of technicalities as opposed to the cases being heard and determined on the merits. Respondents also cited the cost of legal representation as a huge financial burden for those who seek to contest the outcome of some electoral processes.

Survey findings from Bulawayo demonstrate a growing perception that courts are captured and that the law is weaponised against political opponents of the ruling party. According to a youth only FGD electoral courts have failed to deliver fair and transparent judgments. They, however, encourage political players to wish to bring their disputes to courts to bring sufficient evidence so that their matters will not be decided on technicalities.

19 Conclusion

The Report has assessed Zimbabwe's electoral practices against established regional and international instruments, revealing a significant and persistent compliance deficit. While Zimbabwe formally adheres to the procedural requirement of holding regular elections, the substance of its electoral democracy falls short of the standards set by the SADC Principles and Guidelines, the African Charter, and UN conventions. Overall Zimbabwe's polls in the last two decades, especially the 2008, 2013, 2018 and 2023 fall far short of the electoral integrity test for free, fair and credible elections as summarised below.

The evidence from multiple observer missions and academic reports highlight consistent failures in critical areas. These include the lack of equitable access to state media, the continued use of legislation that curtails freedom of assembly and expression, and persistent issues with the transparency and accuracy of the voters' roll. Furthermore, the inadequacy of electoral justice mechanisms undermine public confidence in the process.
Although there are isolated instances of formal compliance, such as the constitutional framework for an independent electoral body, the implementation of these provisions remains weak. This pattern creates a gap between the de jure legal framework and the de facto electoral experience of citizens.

The administration of elections has continued to receive fierce criticism from key stakeholders including domestic, regional and international observer missions, political parties and civil society over the management of the polls. At the top of the criticism is the lack of independence and operational shortcomings of the ZEC that have compromised the fairness and credibility of the electoral process. Notwithstanding that the Commission is endowed with resources and has been applauded for its meticulous and transparent voting process and ballots collation at the polling station level, its results transmission process has been heavily criticised for its opaqueness which impacted on the transparency of the vote. Essentially the findings of the study show that the administration of elections lacks independence in key areas undermining the credibility of the electoral process.

Reports by international and regional observer groups to the 2023 Harmonised (sic.) elections among them the (EU) Observer Mission to Zimbabwe, The Carter Center and the SADC EOM noted with concern restricted access, lack of timely information, and intimidation of observers raising concerns about the true independence and effectiveness of the observation process. Barriers such as restricted access, political intimidation, and resource limitations often impede the effectiveness of independent electoral observation.

While the Constitution and Electoral Act provides a succinct legislative framework for the equitable allocation of public broadcaster air coverage during the elections, the ZBC's allocation has remained largely skewed towards the ruling party at the expense of other contesting parties. Most parties had, not only limited publicity, but hugely negative reportage of their activities. This was also compounded by the prevalence of coordinated misinformation and disinformation campaigns against the opposition, intimidation and censorship of journalists covering political events impacting on media freedom.

The role and use of money is another challenge that confronts the electoral process. Campaign finances are not regulated by law and political parties receive donations without any caps on spending means the playing field remains uneven. To make matters worse without these oversight mechanisms entails that the incumbent can access and use of state resources without regulation.

Although an effective electoral dispute resolution (EDR) system which provide a means of redress for violations of electoral rights and a mechanism for remedying flaws in electoral processes was in existence, it has largely failed to adjudicate electoral disputes in a fair and equitable manner. Findings show that there is a disproportionate number of matters that were dismissed on technicalities rendering the EDR mechanism worthless. The perceived political bias in electoral court challenges has raised serious allegations of the compromise of judicial independence.

In conclusion, achieving genuine electoral integrity in Zimbabwe requires more than just periodic elections. It demands a holistic commitment to the entire electoral cycle, from the pre-election period to the resolution of disputes that may arise. Reforms must focus on depoliticising state institutions, guaranteeing fundamental freedoms, and ensuring that all citizens can participate in a process that is not only procedurally correct but also substantively fair, transparent, and inclusive.

20 Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive findings of the TI Z Baseline Survey (December 2025), summarised below are the recommendations proposed to different stakeholders for their consideration, towards enhancing electoral integrity in Zimbabwe. These recommendations are designed to address the specific gaps, perceptions, and systemic failures identified in the report.

20.1 Recommendations for the Government of Zimbabwe & the Parliament

20.1.1 Harmonise National Laws with Regional Standards:

Expedite the legislative process to align the Electoral Act and related laws (e.g., Maintenance of Public Order Act, Political Parties (Finance) Act) with the SADC Principles and Guidelines (2021), the SADC Model Law on Elections, and the ACDEG. This includes adopting provisions on the clear separation of party and state, equitable media access, and enforceable campaign finance regulations.

20.1.2 Repeal/Amend Restrictive Legislation:

Review and amend laws such as the Patriotic Act and the Private Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Act that are perceived as tools to restrict civic space, political freedoms, and the work of election stakeholders.

20.1.3 Enact a Comprehensive Campaign Finance Law:

Introduce legislation mandating public disclosure of donations and expenditure, setting reasonable spending limits, and establishing an independent enforcement mechanism to curb the corrupting influence of money and level the playing field.

20.1.4 Guarantee Financial and Operational Independence of Chapter 12 Institutions:

Ensure that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and other supporting commissions (ZHRC, ZACC) receive their allocated budgets timeously and directly from the Treasury, without executive interference.

20.1.5 Professionalise the Security Sector:

Mandate and enforce strict neutrality of the security services (police, military) before, during, and after elections through clear protocols, training, and accountability measures for breaches.

20.2 Recommendations for the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC)

20.2.1 Proactive Information Disclosure:

Adopt a policy of maximum proactive disclosure. Publish all critical electoral data (voters' roll in analysable format, detailed polling station results, procurement details, and audit reports) in a timely, accessible, and user-friendly manner (online portals, USSD).

20.2.2 Standardise and Publicise Procedures:

Create and widely disseminate clear, standard operating procedures for all processes, from voter registration blitz schedules and candidate nomination to results collation and transmission — to reduce confusion and suspicion.

20.2.3 Transform from Gatekeeper to Facilitator:

Shift from controlling to co-ordinating voter and civic education. Establish a permanent, inclusive National Voter Education Taskforce with CSOs, faith groups, and disability rights organisations to co-create and disseminate materials.

20.2.4 Reform Accreditation Processes:

Simplify and reduce costs for local election observer and citizen monitor accreditation. Implement online systems and ensure applications are processed efficiently and fairly.

20.2.5 Enhance Inclusive Practices:

Mainstream accessibility. Produce all voter education materials in multiple formats (Braille, audio, sign language, easy-read). Use diverse communication channels (social media, community radio) to reach youth, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and remote communities.

20.2.6 Strengthen Internal Accountability:

Implement robust internal audit and procurement oversight to address public perceptions of resource misuse ("mari... vanozodzishandisa zvisizvo").

20.2.7 Enforce the Code of Conduct Actively:

Move beyond being a secretariat. Publicly, consistently, and impartially investigate and sanction all violations of the Electoral Code of Conduct by all parties, including the misuse of state resources.

20.3 Recommendations for Political Parties & Candidates

20.3.1 Promote Inclusive Candidate Selection:

Adopt transparent, democratic, and inclusive procedures for internal candidate nominations, particularly to enhance the participation of women, youth, and marginalised groups.

20.3.2 Publicly Uphold the Code of Conduct:

Leaders must publicly commit to and enforce the code within their ranks. Sign and publicise peace pledges at national and provincial levels.

20.3.3 Invest in Agent Training:

Systematically train and deploy competent party agents to all levels of the electoral process—not just polling stations, but also ward, constituency, and national collation centres—to ensure effective oversight.

20.3.4 Utilise Formal EDR Mechanisms:

Engage sincerely in the Multi-Party Liaison Committees (MPLCs) and other Electoral Dispute Resolution (EDR) forums to resolve conflicts promptly and avoid violence.

20.4 Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Media & Academia

20.4.1 Coalition-Based Advocacy:

Form strategic coalitions to advocate for the legal and institutional reforms outlined above, using the TI Z Baseline Report and regional standards (SADC, AU) as evidence.

20.4.2 Parallel Data Collection and Analysis:

Continue and expand independent, evidence-based monitoring. Conduct parallel voter tabulation (PVT), systematic observation, and in-depth analysis of the voters' roll and campaign finance.

20.4.3 Targeted Civic Education:

Develop and disseminate critical, rights-based civic education that goes beyond mechanics to explain electoral integrity, how to safeguard votes, and how to seek redress.

20.5 Recommendations to the Media

20.5.1 State Media:

Fulfil constitutional and SADC-mandated duty to provide equitable and impartial coverage to all political contestants. Establish clear, transparent allocation rules for airtime.

20.5.2 Private & Independent Media:

Invest in investigative journalism on electoral processes, campaign finance, and the conduct of state institutions. Provide platforms for diverse voices and fact-based debate.

20.6 Recommendations to Academia - Research and Thought Leadership:

20 .6.1 Generate Independent Analysis:

Produce scholarly research and policy briefs on electoral reforms, drawing comparative lessons from the region and internationally.

20.6.2 Public Dialogue:

Host neutral, expert-led public dialogues and debates on electoral integrity to inform the national conversation.

20.7 Recommendations for Regional & International Bodies (SADC, AU, UN)

SADC & AU - From Observation to Accountability:

20.7.1 Follow-Up Mechanisms:

Develop formal mechanisms to track implementation of EOM recommendations by member states. Move beyond reporting to fostering accountability.

19.7.2 Technical Support for Reform:

Offer sustained, demand-driven technical assistance to support the domestication of the SADC Model Law and ACDEG into Zimbabwean law and ZEC's operational procedures.

19.7.3 Pre-Election Engagement:

Engage earlier in the electoral cycle to assess the pre-election environment (legal reforms, voter registration, campaign climate) and advocate for corrective action.

20.8 Recommendations to International Partners

20.8.1 Fund Core Electoral Integrity Work:

Provide flexible, long-term funding to credible domestic CSOs for monitoring, advocacy, and civic education, ensuring it is not misconstrued as political interference.

20.8.2 Support Institutional Capacity:

Offer technical and capacity-building support to ZEC and other oversight bodies, conditional on demonstrated commitments to transparency and inclusivity.

By adopting this multi-stakeholder, evidence-based approach, Zimbabwe can begin to bridge the stark gap between its progressive laws on paper and their flawed implementation, a gap captured by the respondent's analogy of "Animal Farm, where some animals are more equal than others." The goal must be to build a system where all stakeholders play by the same rules, leading to elections that are truly credible, inclusive, and trusted by the people of Zimbabwe.

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