



Election Irregularities



DEFICIENCIES OF MOBILE VOTER REGISTRATION EXERCISE COSTING SOME VOTERS



Mt Pleasant Voting Slowed by Police

Zimbabweans Turn Out to vote

With half the polling time lapsed, Zimbabweans seem to have taken to the polls in encouraging numbers today, 31 July 2013, following a tight cut throat six (6) week period of political campaigning across the country. The 'watershed election' is set to end the life of the Inclusive Government comprised of the two Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) formations and Zimbabwe African Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF).



Media reports and updates from across the country indicate that the mood in communities is mixed and measured, with some being ecstatic and determined while others are pensive and anxious. The common denominator seems to have been that all the groups came out to vote. The groups clearly also seem to be intergenerational, comprising of the young and old coming out in their numbers as early as 4am and queuing outside polling centres to cast their votes. In Harare, at David Livingstone Primary polling A and B approximately 200 people were waiting to be served by 7 am.

In an interview with the Crisis Report team the Director of Election Resource Centre Mr Tawanda Chimhini expressed that people have come out in their numbers and commended the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) for opening most polling stations on time and ensuring that there was general order.

"We are generally impressed by the enthusiasm to vote by Zimbabweans as lots of people were reported to be waiting at the polling station before opening. ZEC's conduct so far has generally improved from what we witnessed during the special voting process" said Chimhini

He however cautioned that it was too early for them to conclude the general conduct of the election.

"It is however too early to make an early pronouncement regarding the conduct of this election. We continue to receive reports from our observers on electoral irregularities like the changing of polling stations, presence of police in polling centres, like at Rusununguko Primary School in Mufakose and Kuwandzana 2 Community Hall" Chimhini said.

Speaking in Bulawayo, Civics actors echoed Chimhini's sentiments, expressing satisfaction on the general mood and attitude of usually apathetic voters who have come out in their numbers and the generally peaceful environment as compared to the 2008 one.

“ In High density suburbs people voted early, and in low density suburbs the lines have been short, probably because of the population density. The numbers have been encouraging, but we will only know as the day ends whether the scourge of apathy has been addressed” said Bulawayo Progressive Residents Association Director, Rodrick Fayayo.

The Chairperson for Women’s Coalition Virginia Muwanigwa stated that people are voting in their numbers and the process is proceeding well queues are reducing. “She also noted that some women where however facing challenges to vote.



Queues in Mbare

“In the morning women were fewer than men but by the afternoon there were similar numbers. Mothers with children are being allowed to go in front which is a good thing. I identified a woman who was denied to vote due to her name not being found in the voters’ role. She said she was instructed to go and check in another ward which I think might make one give up,” said Muwanigwa

Observers in Midlands Province’s Gokwe Central Constituency, reported general calm and huge early turn out at polling stations that were visited. They reported that at Rumumha Primary school, by 545 am, 76 had

already queued up to cast their votes, with similar queues averaging about 100 by 10 am at Gokwe bus terminus, Mulalazi, and Nyaradza.

In a bid to persuade voters political parties held a series of political rallies promising jobs, improving the health and education system and some even promising to cancel two year old municipality domestic bills to sway the voters.

Voters will be deciding who will be their President, Member of Parliament and Councillor for the next five years in what seemed to be a tight contest between the MDC and ZANU PF. ZANU PF, 89 Robert Gabriele Mugabe seeks to extend 33 years on realm of power while Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai 61 and Professor Welshman Ncube, 52, seek to make history by becoming the first opposition candidates to win elections since 1980. The winning candidates will however face a mammoth task in fostering unity among a divided and polarised environment while reviving the economy to its former glory.

Election Irregularities

Voting currently underway, as Zimbabweans vote in crucial Harmonised elections to choose councillors, members of parliament and the President, today, the 31st of July 2013. Since 7 am when voting began, there has been overwhelming high turn-out of voters who started queuing as early as 03:00 hours. The situation in the country is relatively peaceful and stable with a few incidents of intimidation, coercion and violence in some parts of the country. Although voting is going on smoothly at most polling stations, various election irregularities have been detected by some observers across the country and these include a presence of police officers in polling stations, many “assisted voters” despite being literate and a deliberate slowing of the voting process particularly in Harare.

The Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition is a broad based civil society network of over 72 active members comprising churches, women’s groups, social movements, residents associations, labour unions, human rights lawyers, and health professionals. It was formed in August of 2001 to focus on democracy, human rights, good governance and sustainable development issues – working locally, regionally and internationally.

Section 55(7) of the Zimbabwe Electoral Act provides that enough police officers must be available in the immediate vicinity of each polling station whilst Section 55(7a)(c) provides that they must exercise their duties of maintaining law and order in polling stations under the direction and instruction of the Presiding Officer hence they shouldn't necessarily sit around in polling stations as this has traditionally "intimidated" voters. One particular incident of heavy police presence was noted at Rusununguko Primary School, Mufakose where there were 4 police officers inside the polling station and 15 more who were outside the polling station. At Kuwadzana 2 Community Hall, and Mufakose High 1 School, both in Harare, there were 2 police officers inside the polling stations, one at the door and the other seated next to the Presiding Officer, reportedly taking down details of those who were walking in to cast their ballots and other unknown details which they were scribbling down.

In response to the raised concern around the heavy police presence, Mr Tawanda Chimhini, Director of the Election Resource Centre (ERC), indicated that according to the Electoral Amendment Act, it is lawful for the police to be seen in and around polling stations but however expressed grave concern on such presence which may have a huge impact on the election result outcome. *"Victims of politically motivated violence may be intimidated by the mere presence of the police who have been seen as champions of human rights violations by either directly perpetrating violence on civilians or by deliberately ignoring incidents of politically motivated violence,"* he said.

Mr Chimhini added that the police leadership has openly pronounced that they support ZANU PF and will not accept or salute any President who does not have liberation war credentials hence it remains a major concern if the police are seen to be "interfering" with the voting process.

The Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition has also gathered that there are some voters who are claiming to be "illiterate" hence requiring assistance. At Muroyi Polling Station, 36 voters requested assistance to vote whilst 45 were also assisted in Zaka Central, Ward 9 in Masvingo, 37 at Gutu, 45 at Rusununguko Primary School in Mufakose, as they claimed to be illiterate. Such a trend was witnessed even in March this year during the Referendum where some political parties coached their supporters and other eligible voters to claim that they could not cast their votes without assistance. Elections experts have deemed this issue as an attempt to subvert the vote by influencing a certain particular voting pattern and outcome.

In this light, the ERC Director, Mr Chimhini stated that it is unfortunate that the international observers did not deter such irregularities which began during the pre-election period. "Election Day observation alone is inadequate, had the international observers been closely monitoring the entire electoral process, such coaching of would be voters would have been detected and dealt with way before the Election Day. These are efforts by certain political parties to influence voters in their favour. We can only hope that international observers get the context and possible consequences of such behaviour."

DEFICIENCIES OF MOBILE VOTER REGISTRATION EXERCISE COSTING SOME VOTERS THEIR FRANCHISE

Voting in most parts of the country has largely been reported to be taking place peacefully, albeit slowly, with one or two incidents witnessed that are afoul of the peaceful tenor of the election so far.

In a situation that seems to be affecting people on wide scale across the country, the short time given for consolidation of the voters roll with new and transferred voters during the 30 day Mobile exercise, seems to be costing many voters their right to vote.

In Harare West Constituency, at Alfred Beit primary school polling station, scores of people were turned away after their names were not seen on the voters roll. Most of the affected reported having register to vote in Harare West but at Mt.Pleasant Mobile registration centre. Their names now appear on the roll of Mt. Pleasant Constituency. In Harare West, the

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situation was excessive to the extent that senior ZEC official had to be called to try to assist. The Vice Chairperson of ZEC, Joyce Kazembe who came to attend to the matter, unfortunately couldn't offer immediate relief to the affected voters, blaming the registrar general's office for the mishap.



Three women waiting at Mt Pleasant Primary to find out why they don't appear on the voters roll

During the Mobile Voter registration exercise, people could

conduct the act of registration from any Register Generals office or mobile centre, and identify, through documentation, the constituency and wards they belonged to. Ordinarily, given opportunity people would register in their wards, but due to financial constraints, the Registrar Generals team basically spent less than 3 days per ward, instead of the 30 that the constitution demanded.

In the space of an hour, between 930 a.m and 1030 a.m a Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition mobile observer unit, witnessed at least 10 cases of the above stated mishap.

Some of the affected, after being informed that they had their names registered in a different constituency, could not definitively commit themselves to going to Mt. Pleasant to exercise their right, especially after queuing for hours in Harare West Constituency.

Similar cases have also been reported by observation teams in various part of the country. In other lesser cases, the matter related to a different polling station in the same ward or constituencies.

Mt Pleasant Voting Slowed by Police

THE voting exercise in Mt. Pleasant in the capital Harare's northern areas has been so far characterized by heavy presence of police officers receiving preferential treatment at the polling stations.

The officers were coming to Alexandra Park, and Belgravia Sports Club among other polling stations.

The police officers have been bussed to the polling stations from undisclosed destinations and most voters who have been in the queue since 7 am are yet to cast.

When leader of the African Union (AU) delegation, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo arrived at Belgravia sports club before 8 am; he informed people in the queue that he had recommended for a faster voting process and setting up of two queues.

Some of the police recruits were washing their hands after they were found to be having a red substance believed to be shoe polish and the queue was still moving reasonably fast before it began to suffer with the influx of the police officers who jumped straight to the front of the queue.

At 10:00 am there were many of the police officers arriving and voting whilst the main queue remained stagnant at Belgravia Sports Club.

