

“Miracle Votes” – An analysis of the March 2013 Referendum

A report by the Election Resource Centre

March 2013

OFFICIAL ZEC RESULTS

Total Votes Cast	:	3,316,082
YES Vote	:	3,079,966
NO vote	:	179,489
Rejected Ballots	:	56,627

BASIC FACTS

- The referendum result was the highest voter turnout in the history of Zimbabwe
- Voters were not required to have been registered as voters to vote in the referendum
- There was a marked increase in the number of voters who cast their ballots in 2013 as compared to those who last voted in 2008 in every province.

1.0 Introduction and Background

On the 16th of March 2013, Zimbabweans went to the polls to either endorse or reject a draft constitution which had been a product of a protracted process that is as almost old as the inclusive government. When the Global Political Agreement was consummated in 2009, the players to the GPA agreed on a raft of measures and signposts that would facilitate the creation of enabling conditions for the holding of free and fair elections in Zimbabwe.

Hence Zimbabweans undertook the constitutional making process partly to fulfill the provisions of the GPA and to afford Zimbabweans the opportunity to contribute towards the making of democratic indigenous constitution. It was also envisaged that a new constitution would provide Zimbabweans with an opportunity to transcend the past of violence, authoritarianism, impunity and arbitrary rule.

Resultantly one of the major benchmarks in the GPA, as guaranteed by the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), was the successful completion of the constitution making process, whose end-product would be a new constitution for Zimbabwe.

On the 16th of March, Zimbabweans voted overwhelmingly for the adoption of the new constitution, this after concerted effort by all the parties in the GNU who canvassed a yes vote. At the end of the day, 3 079 966 Zimbabweans endorsed the draft constitution, whilst 179 489 rejected the draft and 56 627 spoiled the ballots.

A glance at the results shows that whilst there had been reports of voter apathy, comparatively; Zimbabweans came out in their large numbers to cast their votes. The March 16 poll recorded the biggest voter turnout since 1980. Interestingly, there has been a marked increase in each province for this referendum in comparison with the March 2008 elections.

This report is an attempt to interrogate and analyse the voter behavior that influenced the relatively ‘high voter turnout’ in this poll. What could have driven Zimbabweans to come out and vote in such unprecedented large numbers, what is the comparative analysis? Could the numbers have been tampered with? And what does this mean for the coming crucial elections in Zimbabwe?

2.0 The Increased Voter Turnout

The March 2013 referendum witnessed an increased voter turnout by all standards in Zimbabwe since 1980, and all the subsequent elections that have taken place since then. The table below depicts the voter turnout in all of Zimbabwe’s elections since 1980.

VOTER TURNOUT IN ZIMBABWE: From 1980 to 2008

Election Year	Type of Election	Voter Turnout
Feb 1980	House of Assembly	2,702,275
June/July 1985	House of Assembly	2,972,146
March 1990	Presidential	2,440,816
March 1990	House of Assembly	2,237,846
April 1995	House of Assembly	1,468,191
March 1996	Presidential	1,557,558
Feb 2000	Referendum	1,312,738

June 2000	House of Assembly	2,506,973
March 2002	Presidential	3,046,891
March 2005	House of Assembly	2,696,670
November 2005	Senatorial	631,347
March 2008	Presidential	2,537,240
June 2008	Presidential Runoff	2,514,750
March 2013	Referendum	3,316,082

Further, it is also evident that, compared to the February 2000 referendum, the March 2013 recorded a significantly higher voter turnout. The February 2000 referendum had a total voter turnout of 1 312 738 whilst the March 2013 recorded a voter turnout of 3 316 082. The table below depicts the 2000 Referendum results

2000 REFERENDUM RESULTS

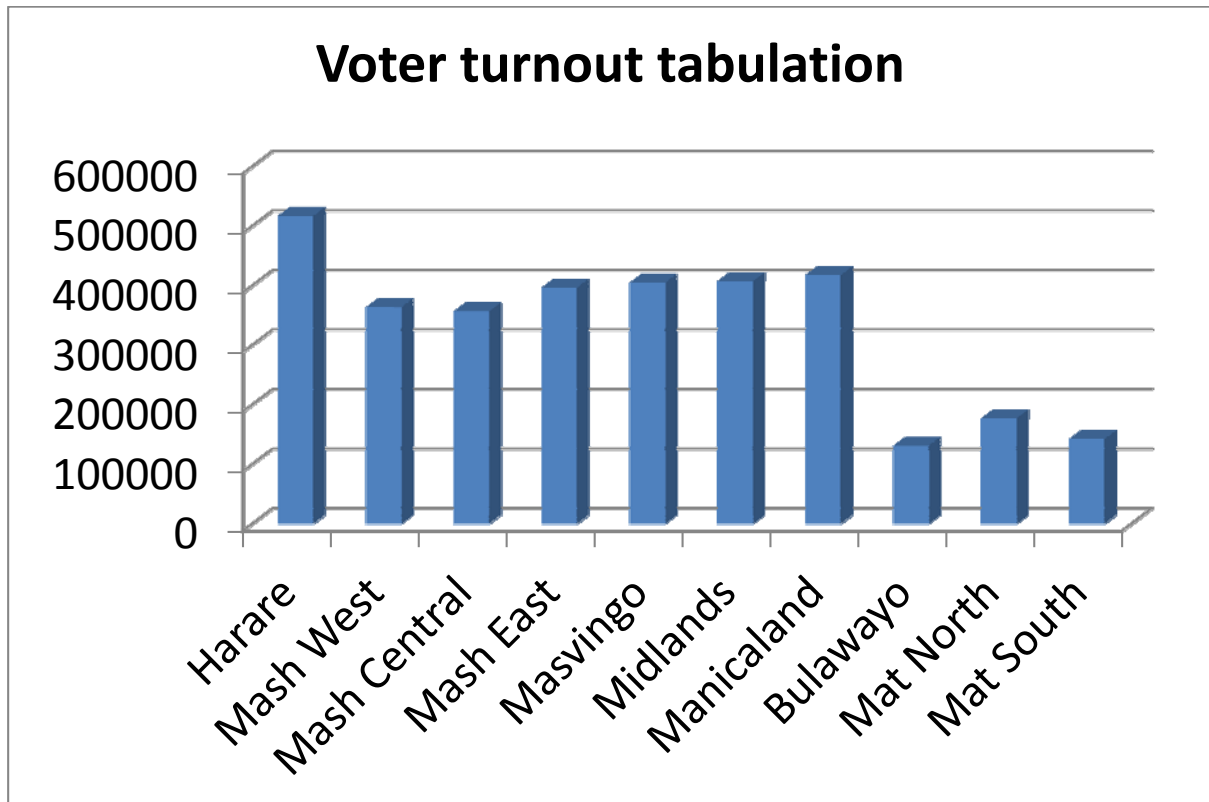
Province	No vote	Yes vote	Total
Bulawayo	90 422	27 737	118 159
Harare	218 298	73 410	291 708
Manicaland	67 787	38 993	106 780
Mashonaland Central	43 385	96 661	140 046
Mashonaland East	39 930	60 354	100 284
Mashonaland West	53 328	75 251	128 597
Masvingo	49 658	61 927	111 585
Matabeleland North	31 224	26 413	57 637
Matabeleland South	31 759	33 606	65 365
Midlands	70 572	91 587	162 159
National	696 363	585 939	1 282 302

A comparative analysis of the March 2008 Elections and the 2013 Referendum is also made, which shows that there has been a significant increase of people who voted in the referendum than those who participated in March 2008. The table below shows the numbers of the people who voted in March 2008 and those who cast their vote in March 2013.

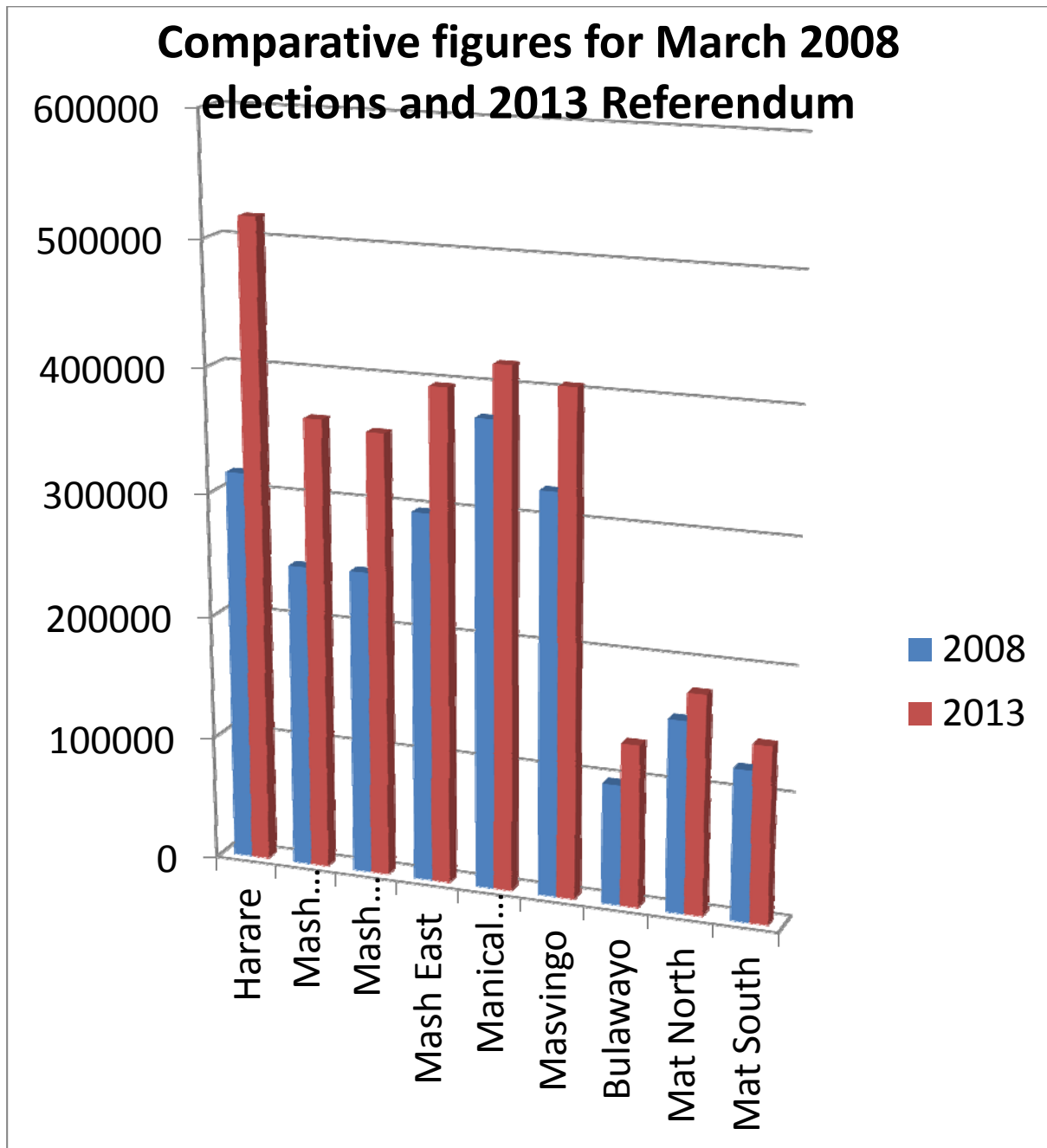
It also depicts the numerical increase that each of the 10 provinces registered for the referendum as well as the percentage increase. Harare recorded the highest percentage increase followed by Mashonaland West, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Masvingo, Midlands, Bulawayo, Matabeleland North and the province with the least percentage increase was Matabeleland South.

	REF	2008	increase	% change
HARARE	517458	315447	202011	64.04
MASH WEST	363624	244784	118840	48.55
MASH CENTRAL	356973	245323	111650	45.51
BULAWAYO	131151	97236	33915	34.88
MASH EAST	396827	297312	99515	33.47
MASVINGO	404889	323550	81339	25.14
MIDLANDS	407522	347150	60372	17.39
MAT SOUTH	142576	121723	20853	17.13
MAT NORTH	177277	154881	22396	14.46
MANICALAND	417785	375159	42626	11.36
	3,316,082	2,522,565	793,517	

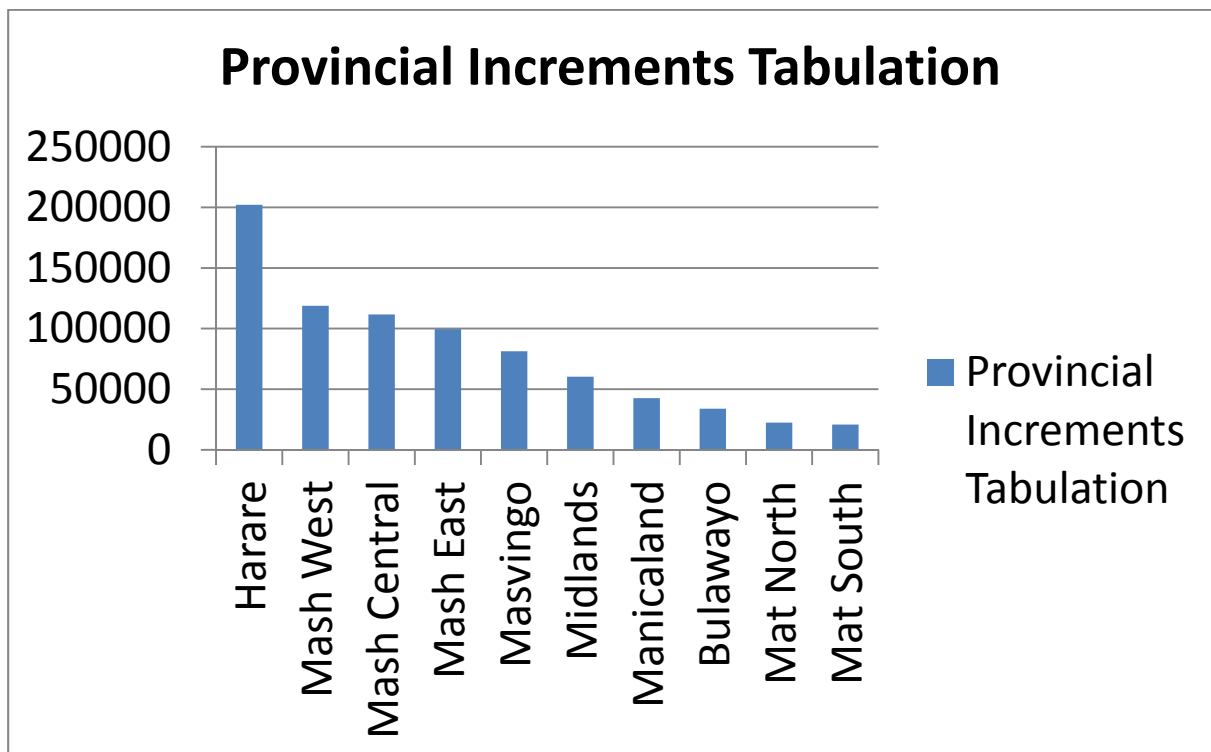
The graph below illustrates the pattern of voting in the ended referendum, which shows Harare had the largest voter turnout followed by the three Mashonaland Provinces. The Southern regions, comprising Bulawayo, Matebeleland North and Matebeleland South had the lowest voter turnout.



The graph below illustrates that there was an increased voter turnout for the March 2013 Referendum when compared to the March 2008 Election.



The chart below depicts the voter numerical increases of the provinces in terms of voter turnout when compared to the March 2008 elections.



3.0 Unpacking the Miracle Votes: The Implications

The recent flurry of votes in the just ended referendum has left more answers than questions, with various suggestions being made to explain the rise in the voter turnout. The reasons have varied from vote rigging to an increased interest in the electoral process. In this section, the Election Resource Centre (ERC) unpacks some of the reasons which could have led to the comparatively high voter turnout.

- Relaxed voting requirements: The requirements for casting a vote in a referendum were not as stringent as those in an election. Voters were only required to use their national IDs in the absence of a voter's roll which enabled a number of unregistered, but ineligible voters to cast their votes. This included almost 3 generations of voter grandaunts who turned 18 years between 2008 and 2013.
- The Voting procedure was less complex as compared to an actual election, exemplified by the average 3 minutes that voters took to complete voting.
- The relatively prevailing peaceful political engagements could have revitalized confidence in the electoral processes.
- Political party canvassing manifested in the tussle for numbers between the two main political parties ZANU PF and MDC-T.
- The utilization of social media as a platform for public debate increased the interest in the Referendum. The social media platforms that were widely used especially by the young people included facebook and twitter.
- A new generation of first time voters that voted.
- Effectiveness of voter awareness programmes spearheaded by both civil society and the main political formations who are party to the GPA.
- The swirling desire to end the transitional period, it might be that most Zimbabweans have grown weary of the tripartite governance framework and they believe that since the constitutional reform exercise was one of the major obstacles, ensuring its passage would expedite the conduct of elections, hence the end of the coalition government.

3.1 The Fears...

There are fears from other sections of the society such as the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) and those who campaigned for a no vote that the referendum result could have been rigged and that the high voter turnout was manipulated through ballot stuffing. This thinking is motivated by the belief that ZANU PF was using the referendum as a test case for the forthcoming General elections slated for this year, and that the results reflect on ZANU PF's test run of its rigging machinery and its coercive machinery of systematically driving out its supporters especially in the rural areas to vote en'masse.

Whilst we cannot be able to authenticate claims of rigging, this high voter turnout could be attributed to the coercive capacities of the political parties, especially ZANU PF, to drive out their supporters in a systematic manner to vote in a block. There were reports of voters being given cards before voting in the rural areas as well as registering their names with party officials before voting. Such coercive and intimidatory practices could be replicated in the next elections.

3.2 Where the “Yes” could have come from?

- Core supporters of the three parties in the GPA.
- Forced voters.
- Women (who constitute the majority of voters). There was consensus amongst women from all walks of life that this constitution is a good document for women hence the massive mobilization by women's groups and women politicians to endorse the draft.
- The youth vote, although more still needs to be done to ensure that young people participate in electoral processes.

3.3 Where the “No” could have come from?

- Core members of the National Constitutional Assembly and its consortium (ISO, PTUZ and MDC-99).
- Some MDC members whose voting was not polluted by group action and party opinion leaders. They retained their freedom of choice.
- There was a clique in ZANU PF which found expression through Jonathan Moyo, which at some point vehemently opposed the completion of the constitution making exercise. There is no telling that this clique could have made a sudden about turn to endorse this draft given how vigorously they campaigned for the disbandment of COPAC and the holding of elections under the Lancaster House Constitution.
- Some ZANU PF members who at some point were told about the ‘toxic’ issues in the proposed constitution. For instance, those who once were told that the COPAC draft would allow gay LGBTI rights (gay and lesbian rights) – at some point ZANU PF embarked on a campaign against the draft which spread to most areas like Gokwe Chireya. However, following their ultimate agreement ZANU PF could have failed to effectively reach some of its members who already had embarked on a campaign against the draft to re-orient them on the party’s new position.

4.0 Conclusion

The results of the just ended referendum show a trend of increased voter turnout in the poll. Political Parties in the country will analyse and interpret the results in an attempt to prepare for the forthcoming elections. It is most likely that the voter turnout in the referendum could be a mirror of the next elections. On the whole there was a marked increased voter turnout in Harare and the three Mashonaland Provinces. The referendum was also characterized by a low voter turnout in Bulawayo, Matebeleland South and North provinces. Against this background it is clear that stakeholders charged with electoral management and voter mobilization that a deliberate strategy be employed to target these provinces which had a low voter turnout. The need to increase voter mobilization around the country, especially targeting the youth and first time voters, remains urgent.

Contact Details

Website: www.erc.org.zw, Email: erczimbabwe@gmail.com, Twitter: @erczimbabwe,

Facebook: Election Resource Centre Zimbabwe,

Landline: +2638644089854