



MASS PUBLIC OPINION INSTITUTE

ZIMBABWE ELECTIONS 2005: Survey Report of the Pre-Parliamentary Elections

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Executive Summary

This report is based on a national survey conducted by the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI) as part of its core research activities of gauging the heartbeat of the nation on key issues of national importance. The forthcoming March 31, 2005 parliamentary elections are one such event and to probe public opinion on these elections and related matters, MPOI carried out a national survey in December 2004/January 2005. The survey was in the context of the suspension by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) of its participation in all national elections because of the alleged uneven electoral playing field. This suspension has since been lifted and the MDC has registered its candidates to contest the elections against its opponents, principally the ruling Zanu (PF).

It is imperative to give a brief overview of the political environment that prevailed at the time this survey was conducted. If we compare the period in which this survey was undertaken and that which prevailed prior to the 2000 parliamentary and 2002 presidential elections, it is indisputable evident that there has been a significant decline in the incidence of political violence and a general improvement in the ambience for elections. However, it is also evident that there is considerable fear among the people. The field teams detected and reported a high level of suspicion among the people, particularly in the rural areas. Respondents were somehow hesitant first in agreeing to be interviewed and in answering certain questions. The warnings that we got from some of the villagers in the rural areas to be “careful” are also indicative of the climate of fear that characterized the period under review.

Although the campaigning by all contesting parties had not heated up at the time the survey was conducted, there was a conspicuous absence of the opposition activity, particularly in the rural areas, which are considered a stronghold of the ruling party.

The MPOI survey finds that:

On voter registration, voting and elections

- Seven in ten Zimbabweans said they are registered voters while the rest who are unregistered cited handicaps including not knowing where to register, putting registration off and not having birth certificates.
- The majority of respondents do not bother to inspect the voters’ roll with only three out of ten Zimbabwean doing so.
- Apparently and unexpectedly in light of some persistent assertions about the state of the voters’ roll, nearly three quarters of the electorate say they trust the voters’ roll.
- Close to 90% of Zimbabweans view elections as important while 80% think that elections influence their lives.
- Half the electorate thinks the elections will be free and fair, three in ten are not sure while two in ten say the elections won’t be free and fair.
- Up to nine in ten Zimbabweans think their vote is a secret.

- Just over 90% say voter education is important but Zimbabweans are split as to who should provide it. Four in ten say the Government should provide voter education, a quarter would rather have NGOs do this while 15% think political parties should do this.
- Radio is an unrivalled source of political information with six in ten Zimbabweans mentioning radio as their primary source followed almost equally by word of mouth and newspapers.

On food aid and distribution

- Up to four in ten respondents say they are food recipients.
- NGOs are by far the key providers of food aid with nearly seven in ten food recipients saying they received it from NGOs compared to only one in ten who received it from Government-related bodies.
- As for the criteria used in food distribution, only 8% reported party affiliation as a criterion with a plurality saying they are not aware of the criteria used.

On SADC electoral guidelines and recent electoral reforms

- Predictably, only a small minority (16%) know anything about the SADC guidelines.
- A slightly bigger minority (28%) know about the electoral reforms introduced by government while the rest do not.
- On the new electoral reform to vote in only one day, just over half are not supportive of this innovation while a third of Zimbabweans are supportive.
- There is much more support for the use of translucent ballot boxes with 55 out of 100 Zimbabweans welcoming this but a third registered their disapproval.
- As for counting of ballots at the polling stations, six in ten are supportive but nearly a quarter are not.

On political violence

- As of December 2004, well over half (57%), had not witnessed or heard of any cases of political violence in their area while just over a third had either witnessed or heard of such cases.
- It is revealing that a significant proportion of Zimbabweans (slightly over half) think violence influences the way people vote while four in ten do not see the efficacy of violence in 'persuading' how people vote.

On the March 31 verdict

- An overwhelming proportion of Zimbabweans, close to 86%, declared their intention to vote in the crucial March 31, 2005 elections. Given that less than 70% of respondents are registered voters, there is a reservoir of

unregistered voters who intended to vote and were still to register as voters at the time of this study.

- As to what attracts them most, the party or the candidate, the electorate is split with 47% saying the party is more important against 45% who feel the candidate is more decisive. Relatedly, six out of ten Zimbabweans consider the candidate's plans to develop the area as influencing their vote rather than the candidate's party, a position supported by two in ten respondents.
- On the most crucial question of voter preferences, thirty in hundred Zimbabweans intend to vote for the ruling Zanu (PF) party while nearly sixteen in hundred expressed their preference for the main opposition MDC party. So, 46% of Zimbabweans can be said to be the hard-core party supporters who have firm voting preferences. Of major significance too is that up to 45 out every 100 potential voters are undecided, a vast reservoir that awaits harnessing by the political gladiators.
- Lastly, and as a parting shot, and without being probed 67% of Zimbabweans yearn for a peaceful, free and fair election while 15% felt they would rather have food on the table first.

Introduction

Zimbabwe holds its Parliamentary election on the 31st of March 2005. The election comes five years after the disputed 2000 Parliamentary election, which the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union (Zanu PF) party won with a slender majority over its main rival, the then newly formed Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The 2005 general election has generated great interest in Zimbabwe and beyond for a variety of reasons.

Firstly, the election will be a litmus test of the government's commitment to holding a free and fair election after committing itself to upholding the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration for free and fair elections at a SADC conference in Mauritius August last year. Secondly, it will test the two main parties' abilities to hold their own. As the ruling party attempts to lure back the urban vote which abandoned it in favour of the MDC in the 2000 election the opposition is attempting to dislodge ZANU PF's monopoly over the rural electorate. Thirdly, the plebiscite will gauge the mood of the electorate following the highly disputed parliamentary and presidential elections in 2000 and 2002 respectively. On the economic front, Zimbabweans continue to face severe hardships as incomes have been significantly eroded by spiralling inflation. There are persistent and serious allegations by donors, some NGOs and journalists about the use of food as a political weapon with several human rights watchdogs alleging the 'politicisation of food' in the country, especially in the rural areas. The Government has with equal consistence rejected outright such allegations. Where does the truth lie?

At the time the survey was conducted, the opposition MDC had suspended participating in all elections until the Government demonstrated its compliance with the SADC Guidelines and Principles on elections. The party has since rescinded its decision but indicated that it will participate under protest.

Will these various issues nudge the electorate to go out and vote in the hope that things will change for the better, or has the electorate lost hope in the electoral process? In short, do the people of Zimbabwe expect the March 2005 elections to be any different from the previous ones which have been enveloped in violence? These are some of the issues that analysts have been grappling with as the election approaches, some of which have motivated the study leading to this study.

It is against this backdrop that the MPOI conducted a public opinion poll in December 2004 and January 2005. The purpose of the survey was to gauge the mood of the electorate in the run-up to the plebiscite, with the expectation that the findings may further inform and instruct policy-makers and other stakeholders in the Zimbabwean polity. The survey also sought to establish the likely voting pattern in the election and to present some of the most important issues that voters will consider in choosing their candidates.

Methodology

The survey involved a sample of 1200 Zimbabweans of voting age who were randomly selected from the country's ten provinces. The sample frame used for the survey is the 2002 national population census. A total of 150 census enumeration areas were randomly selected as primary sampling units with probability proportionate to population size. The enumeration areas were stratified by province and by residential area.

Three teams of enumerators, with nine in each team, were deployed in the country's ten provinces in December 2004 and January 2005. Face to face interviews were conducted using a 45-question survey instrument. These were bolstered by key informant interviews that were conducted concurrently with the face to face interviews. Data entry and analysis was done in the Institute's computer laboratory using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Demographic Information

Of the 1200 respondents that were interviewed, 55% of them were from rural areas and 45% were from urban areas. The designation "rural" in this case includes communal areas, old commercial farms, new resettlement A1 and A2 farms, old resettlement areas. Table 1 below summarises the residential distribution of respondents in the survey:

Table 1: Residential distribution of respondents.

Residential area	% of respondents
Communal area	54.7
Commercial area	3.4
New A1 Commercial farm	1.9
New A2 Commercial farm	.2
Old resettlement area	.2
New resettlement area	3
High density	31.1
Low density	8.3
Total	100

Regarding age, adult Zimbabweans were grouped into six age categories as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Age distribution of respondents

Age category	% of respondents
18-20	15
21-24	17.8
25-30	21.3
31-40	18.8
41-50	12.5
51+	14.8
Total	100

In terms of gender, there was an even distribution of male and females even though, according to census data, there are slightly more females than males. It should be noted

that the refusal rate among female respondents was higher than for their male counterpart.

With regard to educational attainments, of the 1200 respondents interviewed, 10% reported that they have no formal education, 24% have primary level education, 47% have secondary education, 13% have attained high school level qualification and 6.5% have a tertiary education.

The survey involved respondents from a cross section of society in terms of occupation. They ranged from office managers to the unemployed. Table 3 below shows the occupation of respondents surveyed:

Table 3: Respondents' occupation

Occupation of respondent	% of respondents
Managerial	2.0
Skilled/artisan	5.1
Clerical	2.8
General	16.6
New Resettlement Commercial Farmer	1.0
Old Commercial farmer	0.9
Communal farmer	13.1
Self employed/informal sector	25.8
Top level civil servant	0.9
Domestic worker	3.5
Religious leader	0.6
Traditional leader	0.1
Student	8.9
Teacher	3.6
Medium level civil servant	2.0
Low level civil servant	1.1
Unemployed	12.0
Total	100

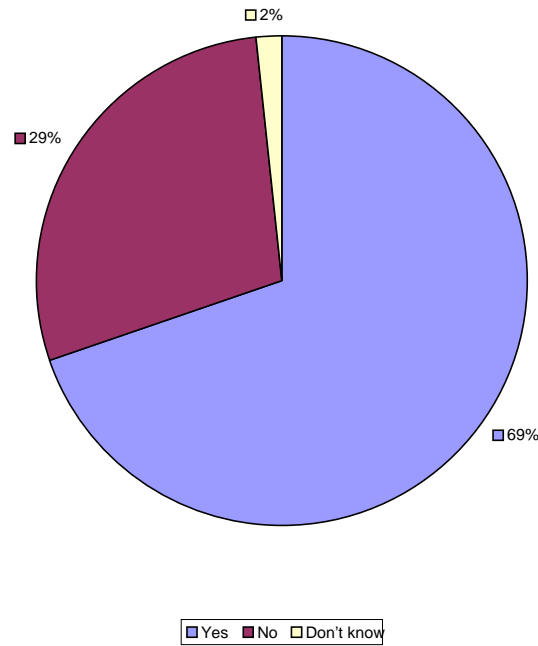
Voter Registration, Voting and Elections

We asked the respondents if they were registered to vote. Over two thirds (69%) said they were registered voters whilst 29% said they had not registered to vote. This seems to be the trend across the residential divide as a majority in both the urban and rural areas said they are registered to vote. There seems to be a difference however when one looks at the responses to this question on the basis of age. A majority is registered to vote in all the age categories except in the 18-20 age group in which up to 76% of the respondents said they were not registered to vote, while only 21% said they are registered.

We read the fact that a majority is registered to vote as a significant improvement from the previous elections, if we assume that those that are registered will actually go and vote. In the 2000 general election and the 2002 presidential election, the recorded turnout was 50% and 55% respectively. However, having three in four adult Zimbabweans not registered is worrying and suggests deficiencies in the voter education programmes. Or is

it that Zimbabweans are now so “exhausted” with the political dispensation that they are no longer interested in the political world they live in or trying to influence it? This is particularly so given the low voter turn-out in the ZANU (PF) primary elections.

Proportion of Registered voters



Those respondents who said they had not registered to vote were asked why they had not done so. A variety of reasons were given with the most frequent ones being that they did not know where to register (26%), they were just putting it off (21%) and that they did not have birth certificates (21%). In our view this is indicative of the need for a comprehensive voter education exercise to be embarked upon, in order to disseminate information such as where to register for an election.

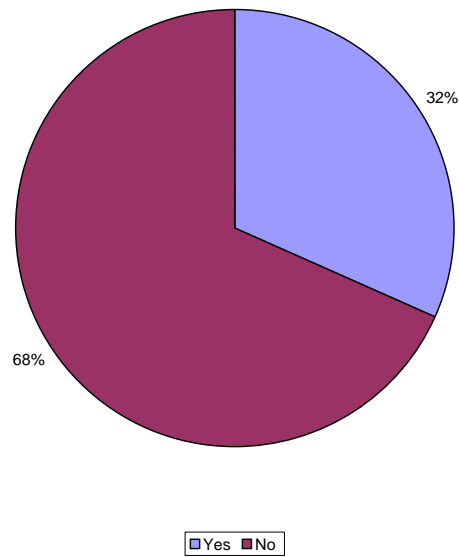
Table 4: Reasons for not being registered

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Do not have birth certificate	21%
Do not know where to register	26%
Do not want to register	14%
I have just been putting it off	21%
No proof of residence	5%
No letter from headman	2%
Other	10%
Total	100%

An interesting and relevant question was whether respondents had inspected the voter’s roll. This was taken to be a barometer of the interest in elections and the intention to vote. In a large sense, an election would be a failure if it does not arouse public excitement. More than two thirds (68%) said they had not inspected it, whilst only 32% said they had

done so. In fact, this finding cut across the age, gender, residence and education, a sure indication of disinterest in the election. This finding revealed that there was no public excitement over the forthcoming elections even when they were only four months away. Public excitement could also have been dampened by the uncertainty surrounding the MDC's decision to suspend its electoral participation. It could also be as a result of uncertainty surrounding the elections at the time, emanating from the MDC's 'wait and see' attitude towards its participation in the election.

Inspection of voter's roll



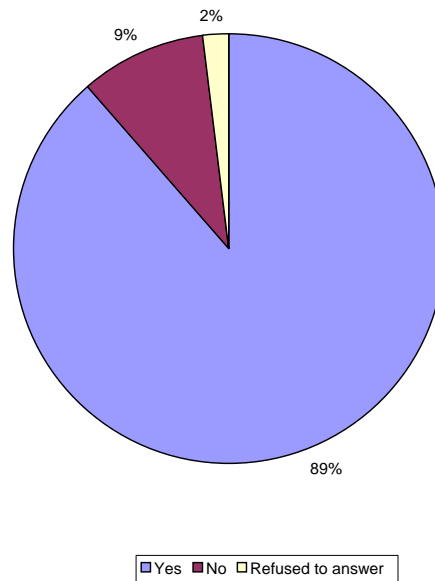
Trust in electoral institutions and procedures is very important for the legitimacy of the process and the credibility of the outcome. Thus, respondents were asked if they trusted the voters' roll. A majority of 72% said they trust it and 20% said they did not. Whatever interpretation respondents gave to the word 'trust', it appears there is a significant depth of credibility for the voters' roll. The credibility of this register of electors and the role of the Registrar of Voters in compiling it, have been some of the most contestable and perennial problems in post-independence elections in Zimbabwe.

Mass elections are a powerful political device of registering consent and choice. We therefore asked the respondents if they thought elections are important. A big majority thinks elections are important with 89% expressing this view, compared to only 9% who said elections are not important. This trend also prevails across the gender and residence variables. There is agreement amongst all the age groups that elections are important, except in the 18-20 age category. In the 18-20 age category (15% of the total sample), a majority (76%) said elections are not important, while only 21% said they are. This is the youngest age group and this seems to imply that the young adults are yet to appreciate the significance of elections. It must also be recognised that these are first time eligible

voters, the first layer of ‘born free’ Zimbabweans after the first layer qualified to vote for the first time in the 2000 elections.

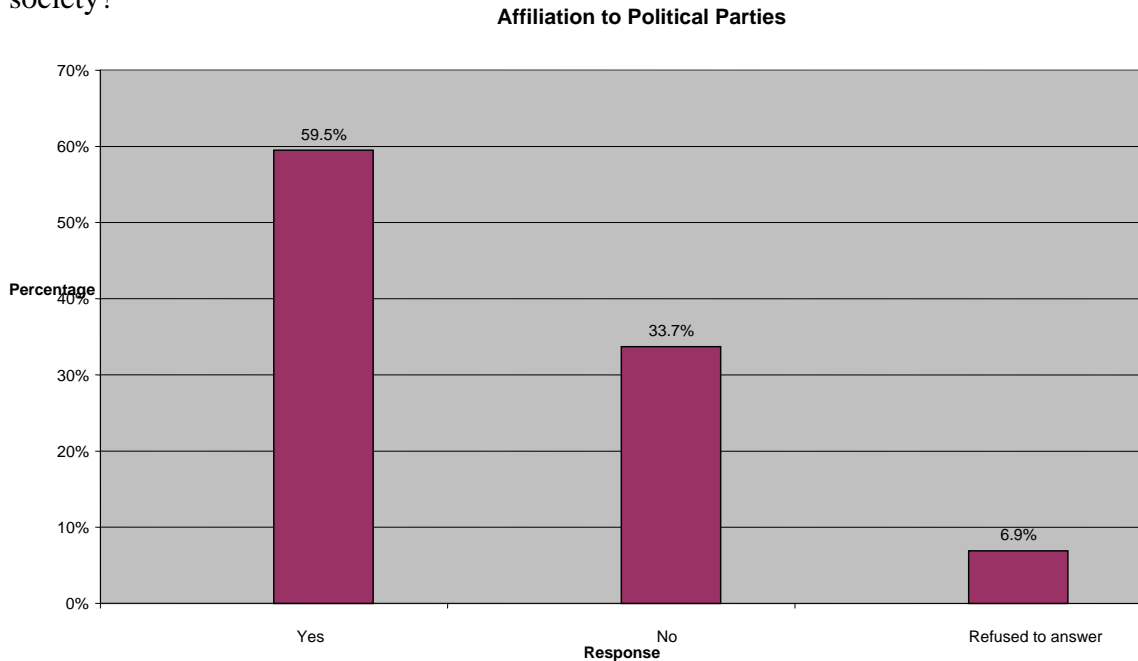
The fact that a majority of Zimbabweans thinks elections are important could be an indication that people still have respect for the democratic process of competition for power through the ballot box, despite the fact that Zimbabweans have been subjected to over seven years of economic hardships, which have been viewed as a direct result of the ‘bad’ politics of the country, past elections included.

Importance of elections to Respondents



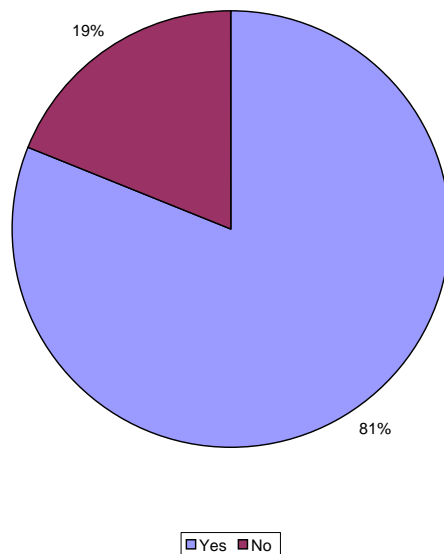
In an attempt to gauge the level of organizational political affiliation, we asked the respondents whether they belonged to any political party. Six in ten Zimbabweans do while 34% said they did not. We conclude that indeed there is a reasonably high level of association with political organizations in Zimbabwe. However, it would be interesting to know why the 34% do not belong to any political party. Could this be fertile ground for those that are aspiring to enter the electoral race as independent candidates? Is the 34% part of the apolitical clay of Zimbabwean

society?



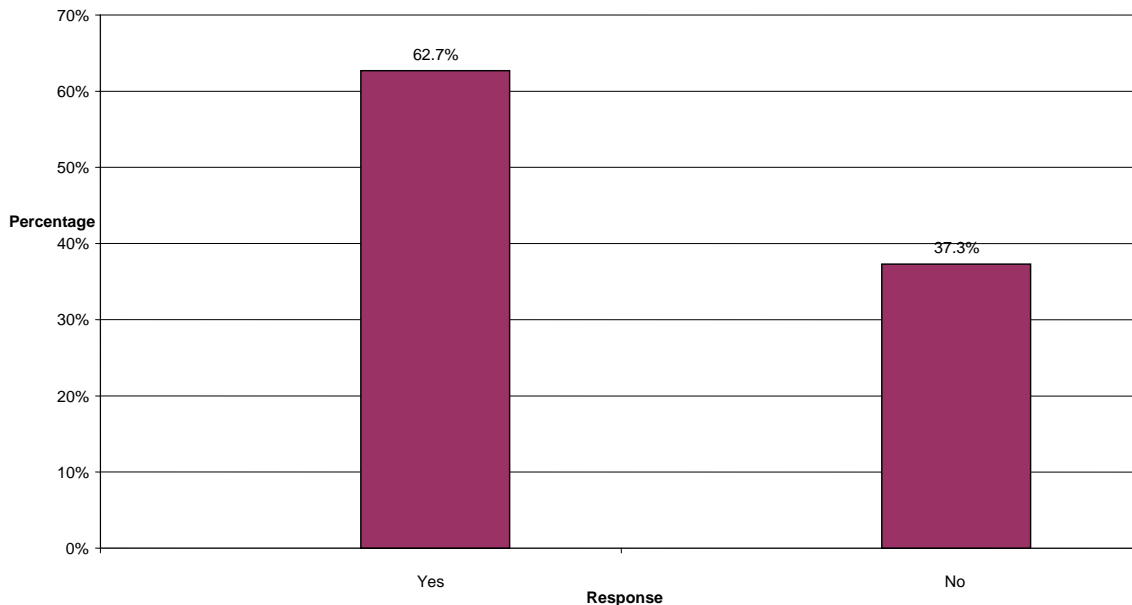
We also asked Zimbabweans if they thought elections influenced their lives. A majority 81% said that they think elections influence their life and 19% said they do not think elections influence their lives. Thus, most Zimbabweans think that elections have a bearing on their lives. This probably explains why in an earlier question a majority said elections are important to them.

Influence of Elections to People's Lives



For comparative purposes, we inquired if the respondents had voted in the 2000 parliamentary election. A majority of them said they had voted, with 63% expressing this view, compared to 38% who said they did not vote in the election. This is consistent with our findings in a previous survey that we conducted in October 2001 with regard to the 2000 elections. We asked the same question and 64% of the respondents said they had voted in the 2000 parliamentary election, while 36% said they had not.

Respondents and Voter Turnout in the 2000 parliamentary election



These results (about voting in 2000) must be viewed with considerable caution given the wide difference between the actual turnout in the 2000 election and the survey results. There is 13% difference between the 50% who turned out to vote in 2000 and the 63% who claim to have voted in that election. Clearly, there is a large body of Zimbabweans who constitute what may be called “aspirational voters”, i.e. aspire to vote but do not actually turn out to vote. Related to this may be the play of a prestige factor, whereby prestige is associated with being known to have voted, and conversely, a stigma attached to being known to have not voted. This may explain why many more people indicated that they voted than is reflected in the official statistics of voter turnout. This gains more salience when we recognise that over 3 million voting-age Zimbabweans have reportedly left the country after 2000.

Those that said they had not voted in the 2000 election were asked why they had not done so and 37% said they had not registered to vote, 33% said they were not old enough, 7% said they were not in their constituencies on the voting day, another 11% said they did not want to vote while 1% said they were threatened. Again we read this as an indication that there is need for voter education for the people to understand and appreciate the process of registering to vote, inspecting the voter’s roll and going out to vote on the actual day of voting.

Table 5: Reasons for not voting in 2000 elections

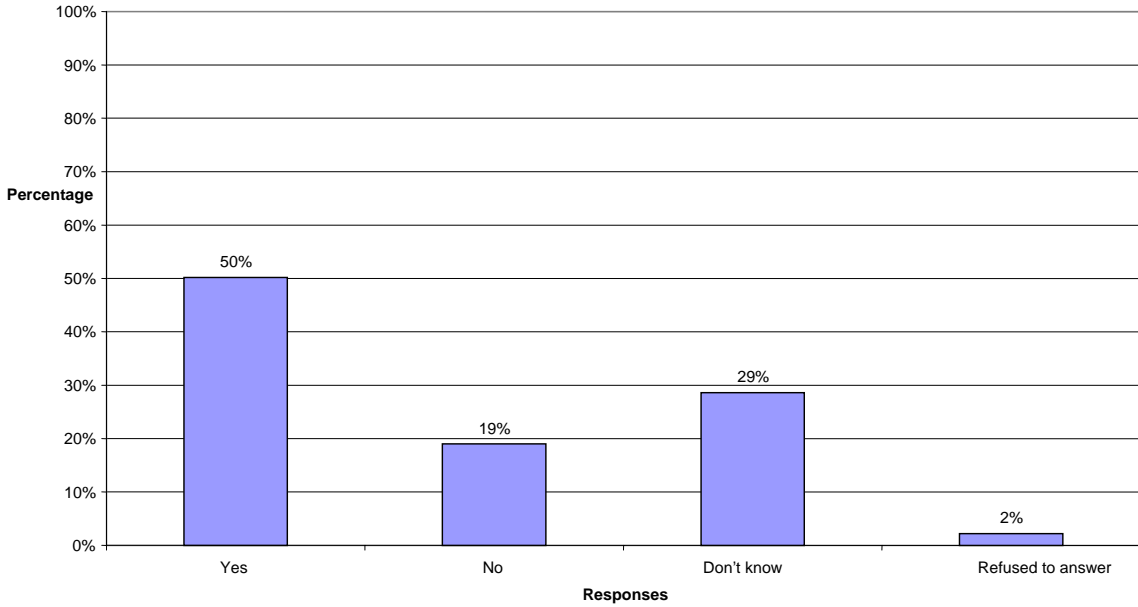
RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Was not old enough	33%
Was not registered	37%
Was not in my constituency at election time	7%
Voting period ended before I could vote	4%
I did not want to vote	11%
I was threatened	1%
Other	7%
Total	100.0%

In every election, probably the most important question is whether the elections are free and fair and we therefore asked adult Zimbabweans to indicate whether in their view, the March 2005 elections would be free and fair. Interestingly, half the sample answered affirmatively, i.e. that they thought the election will be free and fair while 19% said the election would be neither free nor fair. A significant proportion (29%) answered ‘don’t know’ to the question. The trend cuts across the demographic variables, although the degree to which the people think the election will be free and fair differs across some variables. In our previous surveys, we have noted a pattern where respondents hide their ‘real’ opinions under the “don’t know” response as a convenient shield against reprisal. We argue that there is likelihood that this was the case with some responses to some questions in this survey. The ‘don’t know’ response category also seems to be more popular among women when compared to men. Of those that expressed this view, 56% are women compared to 44% that are male, while of those that refused to say anything on the matter, 58% are female, compared to 42% that are male.

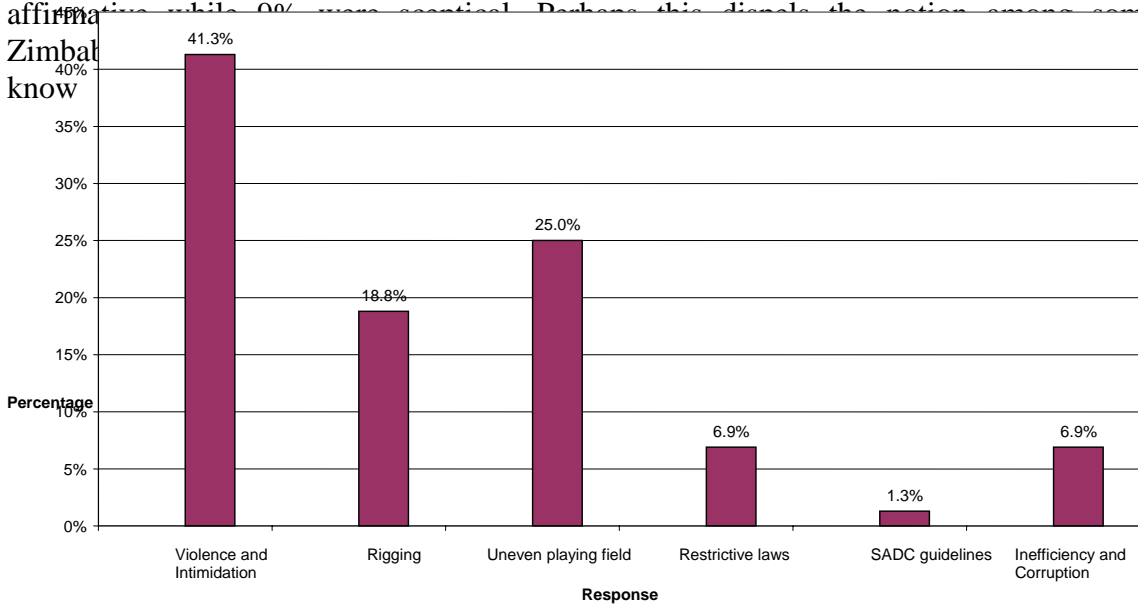
We should point out that there was no standard definition of ‘free and fair’ as we deliberately left the respondent to interpret it in any way they felt appropriate. In follow-up open-ended question we asked those that had said the election will not be free and fair why they thought so. Several reasons were given with the most common ones being “violence and intimidation” (41%), “uneven electoral playing field” (25%), “rigging of elections”, while 7% ascribed the uneven playing field to the restrictive laws like the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA).

An interesting finding is that when we asked the same respondents whether they knew of the SADC guidelines on elections the Zimbabwean government had signed up to, an overwhelming majority of 84% expressed ignorance of such guidelines. In addition, when we asked the respondents if they are aware of the electoral changes introduced by government, a majority 72% said they are not aware of the changes, whilst only 28% said they are aware of them. The SADC guidelines were signed by all member states in August 2004, about four months before the survey while the reforms to the electoral reforms were passed by Parliament a few days before the study.

Respondents' views on Prospect of free and fair elections



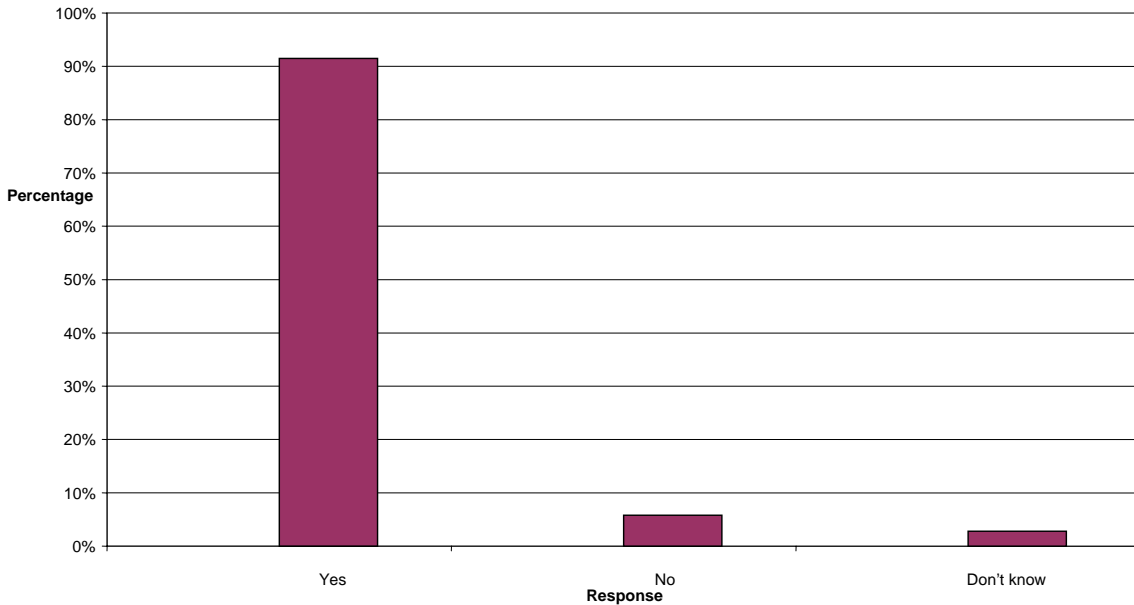
Another crucial question we asked respondents was on the secrecy of their vote. Asked if they thought their vote is a secret, an overwhelming majority of 91% answered in the affirmative while 9% were sceptical. Perhaps this dispels the notion among some



On Voter Education and Political Communication

In order to vote ‘wisely’ or make a meaningful voting decision, one must have a reliable flow of information about the electoral issues, the candidates and their programs as well as adequate and relevant information about how to exercise ones vote. Voter education is indisputably vital for such purposes, as are the media of communication. On these matters, we first asked if respondents if they thought voter education is important, and a whopping majority (92%) said it is, while only 6% thought it is not. We interpreted this as an affirmation of the fact that Zimbabweans yearn to know about the electoral and democratic processes that affect their lives.

Respondents' views on Importance of Voter Education



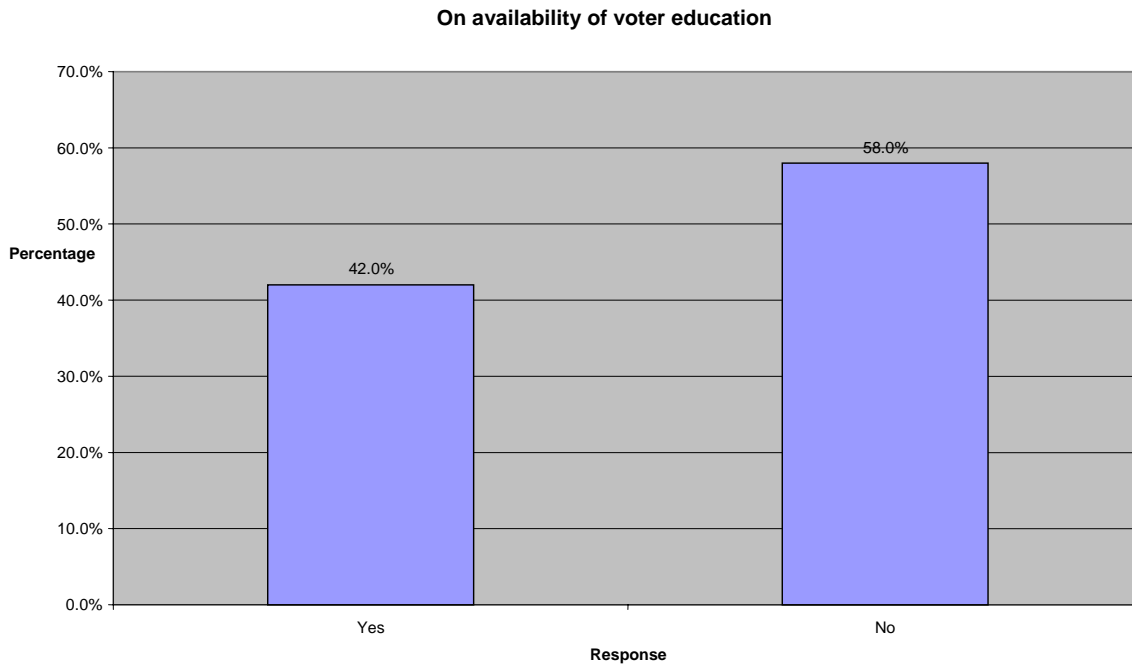
We probed those respondents who value voter education who they think should provide it. Of these, 37% said government officials should provide it, 25% said non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should and 15% said this should be the duty of political parties. We read this to mean voter education should be provided by all stakeholders involved in running elections, non-governmental organizations included. Perhaps this should also inform the government of the critical role that NGOs play, particularly in light of the new Zimbabwe Electoral Commission Act that bars NGOs from providing voter education and confining this role to the newly created Zimbabwe Electoral Commission or organisations approved by it.

Table 6: Who Should Provide Voter Education

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Government officials	40%
Non-governmental organizations	26%
Political party	15%
Don't know	10%
Other	9%

Total	100.0%
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The survey further asked respondents if they had received any voter education and 42% said they had, while 58% said they had not. This is worrying if one considers that the survey was conducted just three months before the election. What could explain this is the fact that government has barred civil society organizations from providing voter education. Previously, these organizations have played a major role in the provision of voter education. Government seems to be making deliberate efforts to make sure that the electorate is not educated on civic matters, including electoral issues.



Respondents who had received voter education were probed on who had provided it, and 47% said government officials, 25% said political parties and 11% said non-governmental organizations. NGOs are being deliberately elbowed out of the critical field of voter education and being replaced by government-related bodies and officials whose impartiality is questioned by some key stakeholders.

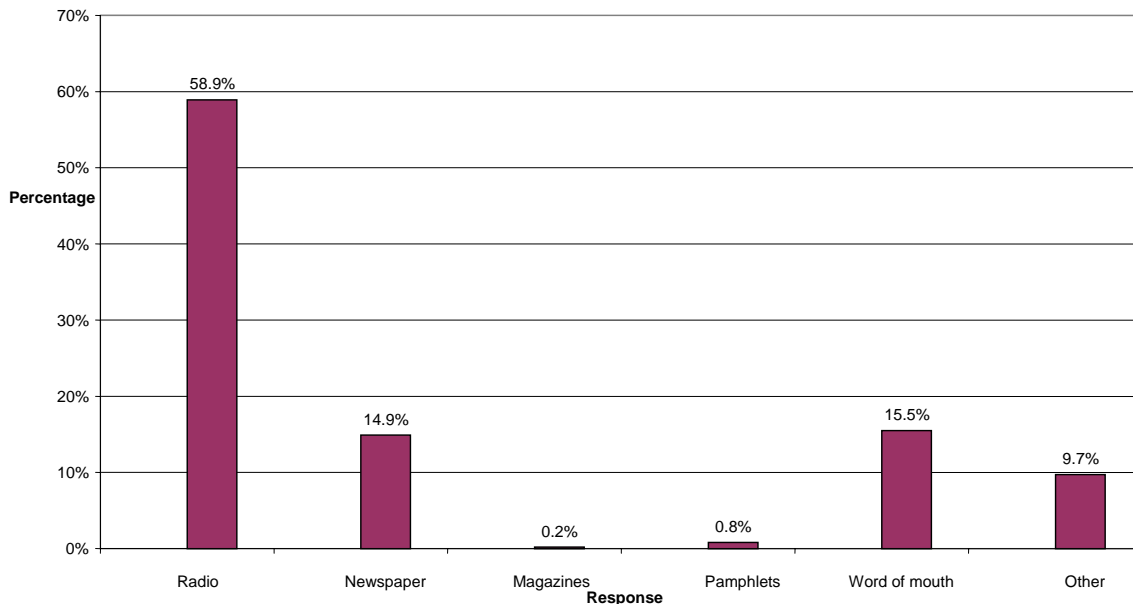
Table 7: Providers of voter education

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Government officials	47%
Non-governmental organizations	11%
Political party	25%
Don't know	9%
Other	9%
Total	100.0%

On the related issue of providers of political information, we asked respondents what they would consider to be their key source of information in this election. Radio is considered to be the key source by a majority of the respondents, with 59% expressing this view,

while 15% cited the newspaper as their key source of information. Significantly, up to 16% mentioned word of mouth as their main source, indicating that formal means of political communication are non-existent or rudimentary in some communities. The popularity of radio transcends the different variables of age, gender and residence, although there is a degree of variation in intensity of popularity across these variables. For example the percentage of respondents that use the newspaper as a key source of information is significantly high among the urbanites (44%). This is obviously explained by the fact that the circulation of newspapers has a distinct urban bias. The preponderance of the radio as a key source of information is equally understandable given the fact that a majority of Zimbabweans reside in rural areas and most Zimbabwe Holdings radio broadcasts reach the remotest parts and in many such cases radio is the only source of information.

Most important source of information

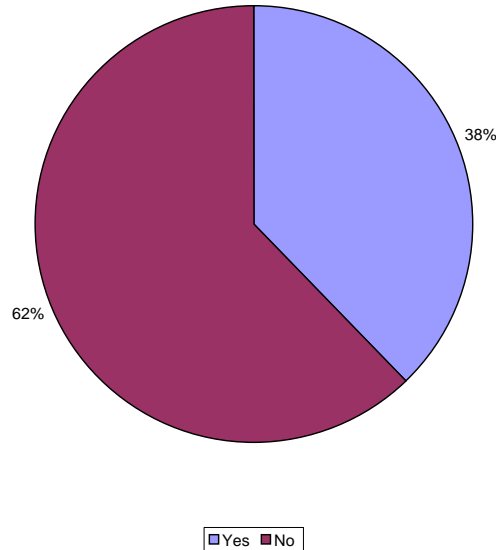


Food Aid and its Distribution

Many concerned Zimbabweans, donors, journalists and even foreign, especially Western governments, have over time expressed deep concern at the use of food assistance as a political weapon to manipulate and influence political preferences or as vote catching devices. The survey sought to find out the veracity and prevalence of such claims. We asked the respondents if they had received any food aid at all and nearly two thirds (62%) said they had not received any, while 38% said they had. It could not be established whether the non-recipients actually needed food aid or were self-sufficient. For instance a report by the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) published in April 2004 projected that around 41% of the rural population (3.3 million people) would be food insecure from December 2004 to March 2005. Government has been denying this

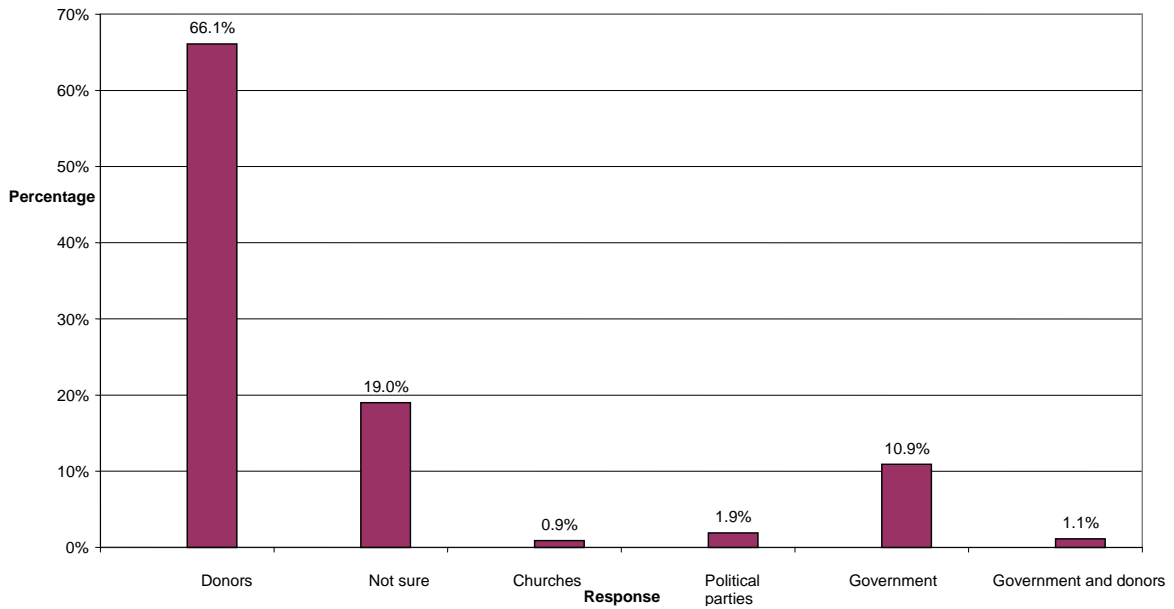
and has been allegedly inflating crop yields to portray the image that the country does not need food. In May last year President Robert Mugabe declared that the country was reaping a bumper harvest of grain and advised the World Food Programme to wind up its food distribution programme in Zimbabwe. “Why foist food on us?” Mugabe demanded. “We don’t want to be choked”. Apparently, not many Zimbabweans are being choked!

On Food Aid



Who are the providers of food aid, we inquired from the food recipients. Donors emerged as the most common source of food with 66% of the respondents citing them (the major ones being PLAN and CARE International), 19% said they were not sure who had provided them with the food aid and 11% said they received it from the government. The rest mentioned several other sources, among them churches.

Food aid provider



We also asked food aid recipients what criteria had been used in the distribution of food aid and 43% said the criteria was needs-based; 22% said it was given to the aged, 16% said it was given to orphans, while only 8% said party affiliation.

Table 8: Criteria for food aid distribution

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Aged	22%

Children	2%
Widows	5%
Orphans	16%
Party affiliation	8%
Disabled	3%
Needs-based criteria	43%
Total	100.0%

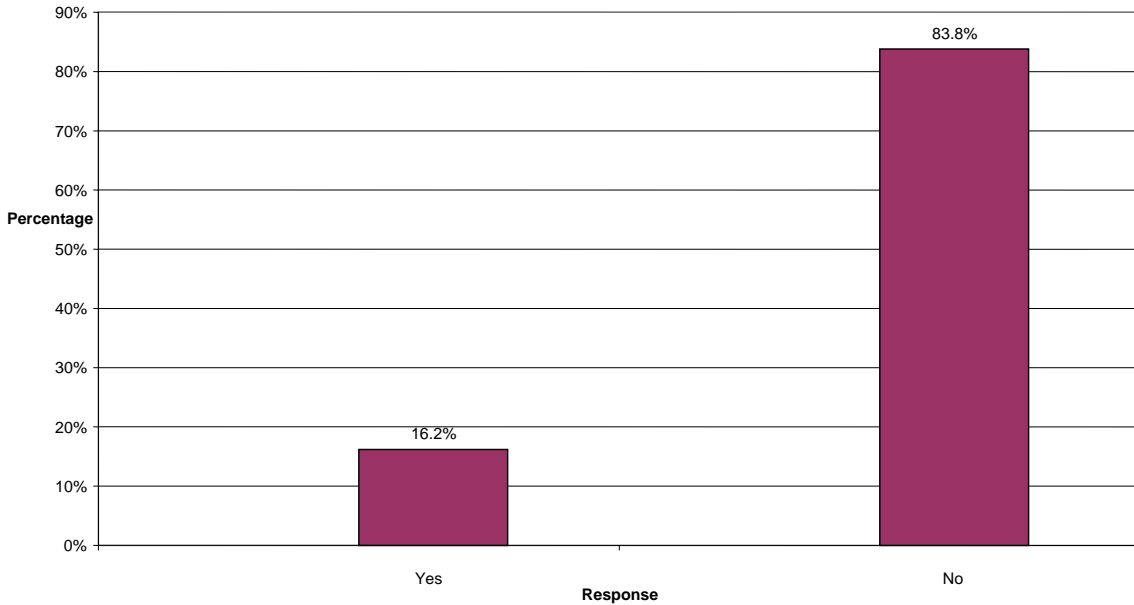
SADC Guidelines and Electoral Reforms

In August 2004, the SADC Heads of State and Government unanimously endorsed a set of rules and procedures governing elections in member countries. The Zimbabwe Government proceeded, in a widely publicised and self-congratulatory manner, to put some of the provisions into domestic law and has since gone to town about the degree to which it had complied with the spirit and letter of the SADC guidelines. These legislative moves culminated in the ZEC Act and the Zimbabwe Electoral Amendment Act. The study then asked respondents about their awareness of these electoral developments.

Adult Zimbabweans are generally not aware of the SADC guidelines on elections. We asked the respondents if they knew about the SADC guidelines on elections and a huge majority (84%) said they did not, while only 16% said they did. We tried to establish if education has an impact on people's knowledge of the guidelines and we found out that only amongst those with tertiary education was there a majority saying they knew about the SADC guidelines. Among those with no formal education, an overwhelming majority of 94% said they were not aware of the guidelines, while among those with high school level education 80% said they were not aware of them. The percentage of respondents who were not aware of the SADC guidelines goes down as the level of education goes up. Residence has no notable effect on responses as a majority is not aware of the guidelines independent of residential location.

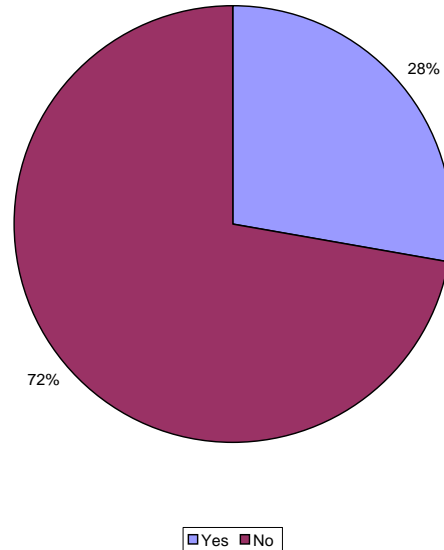
The level of political cognition on this issue was very minimal, probably because of the time factor, just four months after the Mauritius Summit. We feel this is not encouraging at all given the fact the guidelines have been set as a benchmark to measure the compliance of SADC countries with the democratic credentials set out in the SADC protocol. To have an overwhelming majority of the people not knowing the criteria for judging whether an election is free and fair is inimical to the democratic conduct of elections. This becomes particularly so when the same majority expresses the view that the elections will be free and fair as they did in a previous question. It also strongly suggests that the big "vote of confidence" about the freeness and fairness of the elections was being made against a benchmark other than the SADC guidelines.

Knowledge of SADC guidelines on Elections



We also asked the respondents a closely related question; whether they were aware of the electoral reforms introduced by the government in December 2004. Another big majority was not aware of such reforms with 72% expressing this view, while only 28% said they were aware of them. The picture remains the same across the gender, age, residence and occupation variables. Again this demonstrates the newness of the reforms at the time, coupled with lack of a focused and sustained debate on the electoral reforms, particularly in the public media, which remains a key source of information for a majority of the population.

Awareness of Dec 04 Electoral Reforms

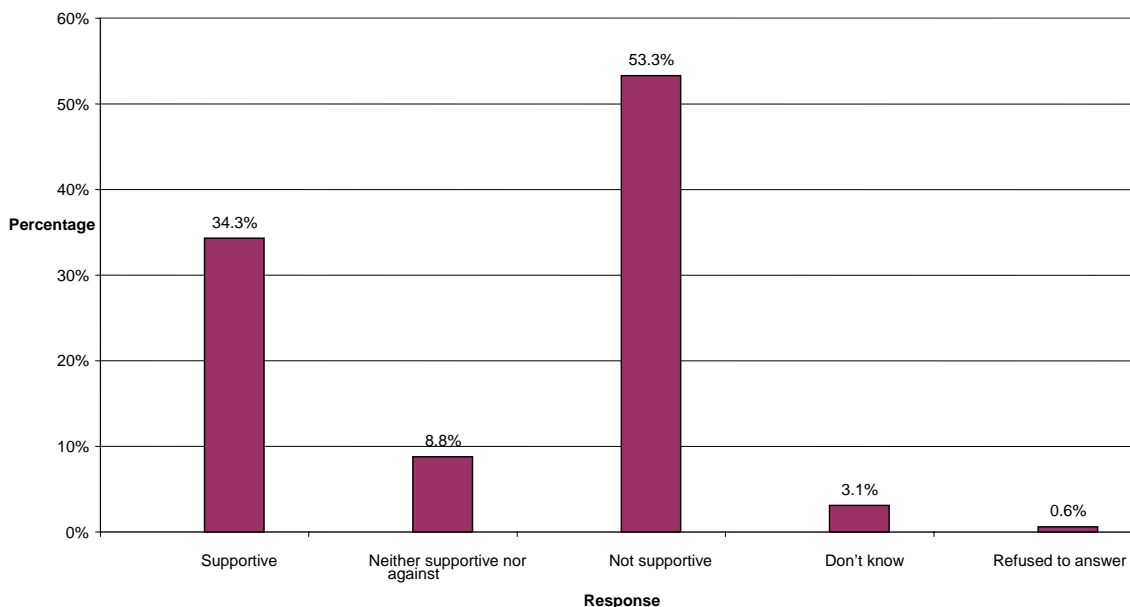


We then unbundled the various electoral reforms introduced by government and asked the respondents how supportive they were of some of them. A slight majority of 53% said they were not supportive of the idea of limiting voting to one day, 34% said they were, while 9% expressed indifference. This could mean that while the argument for the one day voting is that it reduces loopholes for electoral malpractices, more than half the electorate probably view this as a move that could disenfranchise them. It also denotes lack of trust of what Government is “really” up to, especially after the nightmares or voting in Zimbabwe’s urban areas during the 2002 presidential election.

Many people in Harare failed to vote in March 10-11, 2002 election as there were few polling stations, a move that was interpreted by many to be a ploy by the ruling party to starve opposition stronghold areas of polling stations, while concentrating them in the rural areas where the ruling party traditionally has had an edge over the opposition.

In a post election survey in July 2002 for instance, we asked those that had not voted why they failed to do so. A majority of the respondents in Harare (27%) said they had given up on the long queues, compared to the 17% who said their names did not appear on the voters’ roll, 21% who said they were not registered to vote and 26% who failed to vote because they were not in their constituencies on the actual day of voting. However, in this survey, disapproval of voting in one day transcends the urban-rural divide as a majority even in the rural areas is not supportive of the idea.

Views on 'one day voting" reform measure



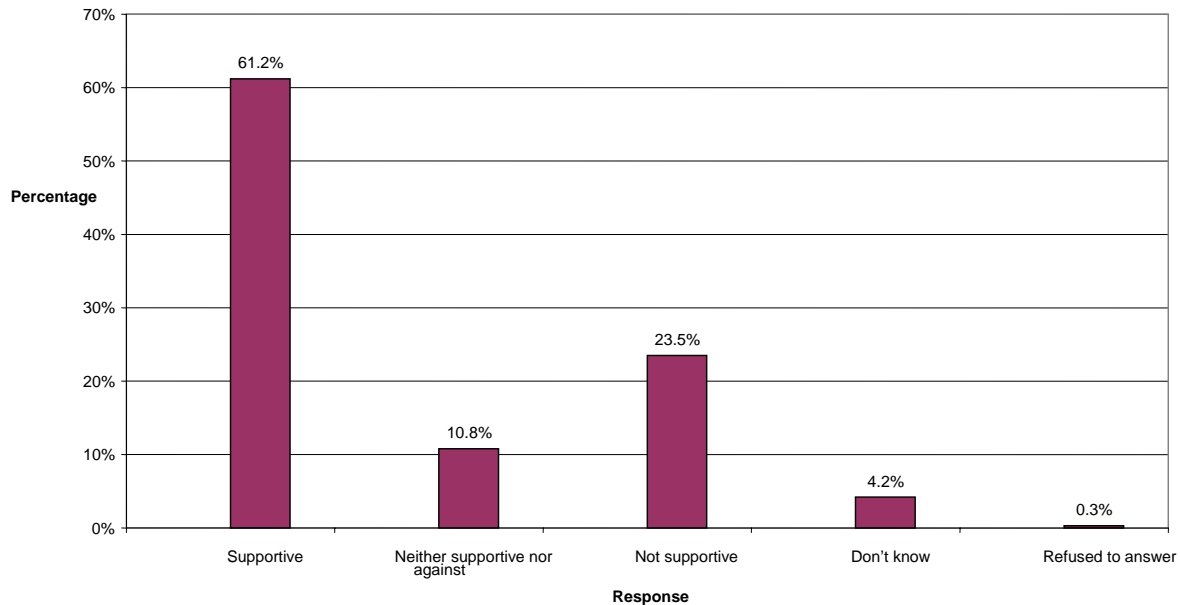
Another electoral innovation is the use of translucent ballot boxes. A slightly higher majority of respondents (56%) said they were supportive of the idea while 32% said they were not. This could be interpreted as an indication that there was apprehension on the part of the electorate with regards to the use of the wooden boxes in previous elections. There have been allegations that the use of wooden boxes has some loopholes as they can be stuffed with ballots without other party agents catching the rigging.

Table 9: Views on use of translucent ballot boxes

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Supportive	56%
Neither supportive nor against	9%
Not supportive	31%
Don't know	3%
Refused to answer	1%
Total	100.0%

A lot of controversy has often surrounded what happened to the ballot boxes in between the journey from polling station to the central counting point in the constituency. In light of this controversy, a third electoral reform measure was introduced, i.e. counting the ballots at the polling station where they have cast. We asked our respondents their view on this and 61% said they were supportive of the idea while 24% said they were not. Another 11% said they were indifferent. Again, one detects a degree of apprehension with the previous system where ballots had to be transported to counting centres.

Views on Counting Ballot Papers at Polling Station



Lastly, we asked the respondents whether they thought the electoral changes introduced by government were sufficient to level the electoral playing field and 39% said they were not, while 23% were affirmative. Another 37% did not know. It is instructive that some of the sceptical Zimbabweans actually are not even aware of the new electoral reforms but nonetheless condemned them as a matter of routine. They are reflexively dismissive of any government initiatives in this area. Again, this suggests deeply ingrained distrust of Government.

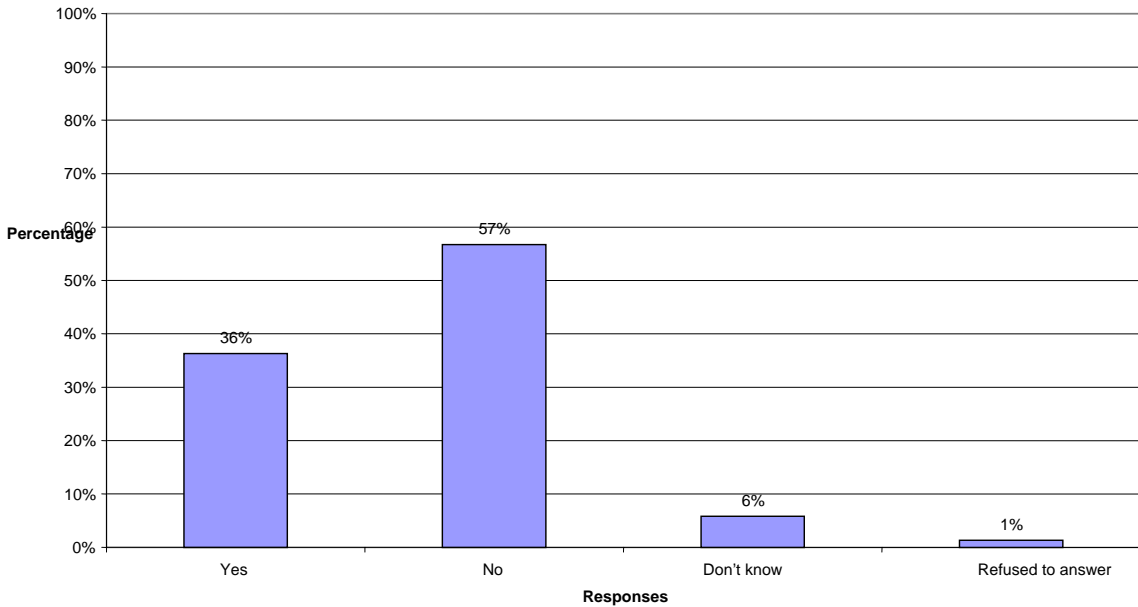
On Political Violence

As early as 1990, late political scientist Masipula Sithole wrote that from the 1963 Zanu split from Zapu, “the use of violence against the opposition has become part of the Zimbabwe political culture” (1990, 457). The tempo of this violence was amplified in the 2000 and 2002 elections and indeed, Sithole’s assertion has become somehow engraved as a permanent feature of Zimbabwe electoral politics. The survey was therefore ‘naturally’ keen to know the prevalence of political violence in the run-up to the March 2005 elections.

We asked the respondents if they had experienced or heard about any incidences of violence so far in their area. A majority 57% said they have not, while 36% said they have. Although there has been a marked decline in cases of violence in the run-up to this election, compared to the previous ones, the prevailing level of violence is still unacceptably high, with 36% having experienced or heard of, political violence in their

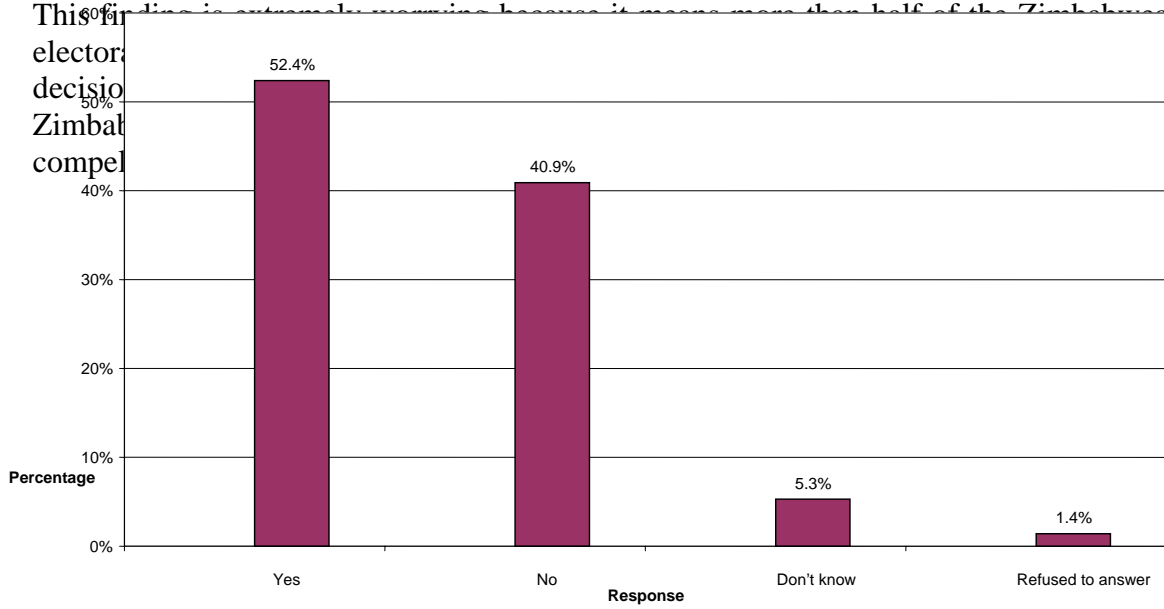
area.

Incidence of Political violence

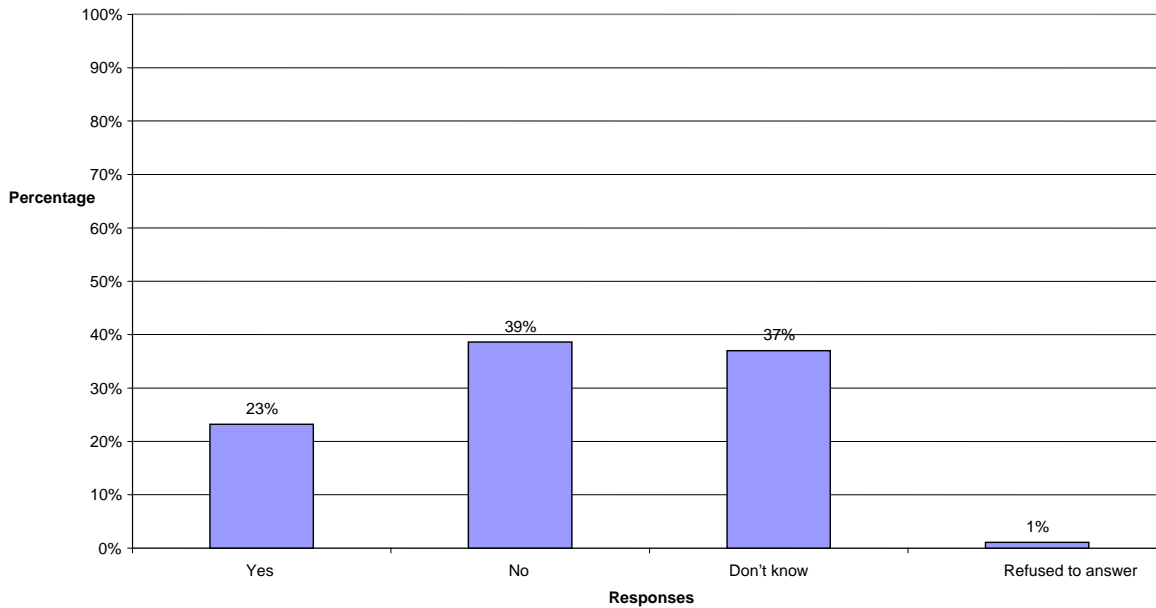


Asked whether they think political violence influences people to vote for a party or candidate they would not otherwise vote for, 53% said it did while 41% said it does not.

This finding is extremely worrying because it means more than half of the Zimbabwean electorate believes that political violence influences their voting decisions. This is a significant finding because it means more than half of the Zimbabwean electorate believes that political violence influences their voting decisions.



Views on Adequacy of Electoral Reforms



On the March 31 2005 Elections

How many people turn out to vote in an election is always of interest to the public and competing politicians and the numbers who turn out to express their political choice at the ballot box is indicative of the passion for elections and support or lack of it for the political system as a whole. Apathy can be a danger signal to the health of the body politic. We therefore inquired about the level of interest in the election and the proportion who intended to vote.

Up to 86% of the respondents said they were going to vote, 2% said they were undecided, while 12% said they were not going to vote. If the statistics are anything to go by, we predict a high voter turn-out. However, the very high statistic needs to be read with caution given that only 69% of adult Zimbabweans reported that they are registered voters at the time. It is highly unlikely that the other 17% could have managed to register between the survey and close of the voter registration exercise. Thus, a significant bloc of potential voters is 'aspirational' voters who aspire to vote but never actually turn out to vote. In any case, such a high voter turn out (86%) would be unprecedented in the elections history of post-independent Zimbabwe apart from the estimated 94% voter turnout in 1980.

We asked those that said they were not going to vote why they were not going to: 57% said they were simply not interested, 34% said they were not registered, 6% said they did not have ID's and 3% said they fear violence and they do not have confidence in the election result.

Table 10: Reasons for not going to vote

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Not registered	34.0%
No Identity card	6.2%
Not interested	56.7%
Fear of violence & no confidence in results	3.1%
Total	100.0%

Do people vote for parties or candidates? A senior ruling party official once remarked, or rather bragged, at a campaign rally that even if the party were to field a donkey, it would handsomely win. We therefore asked respondents which they thought was more important, the party or the candidate in this election. The responses show that the party and the candidate are almost equally important in this election, as 47% feel the party is more important than the candidate whilst 45% feel that the candidate is more important than the party.

This suggests that in the mind of the electorate, the candidate fielded by the competing party must be strong and credible. It is not enough for a party to field an incompetent and unpopular candidate on the grounds that his/her party affiliation is all that matters. This may also open political space for competent and skilful independent candidates. In short, the words of former Zanu-PF Information Minister, Jonathan Moyo who is standing as an independent in Tsholotsho, the party is not the only “ticket to heaven”.

The survey further probed respondents what factors they consider in choosing a candidate to vote for in the 2005 parliamentary election. The candidate’s plans in terms of developing the area topped the list with 62%; 22% said they consider the candidate’s party. Only 4% said they consider the candidate’s ethnic background. Other responses are given in the table below.

What is clear from the statistics is that the electorate will not be manipulated by candidates through food and cash handouts only, something that is very common during election time. This was also prevalent in the ZANU PF primaries. To the contrary, the electorate will vote for candidates with sound developmental projects. Another key finding in this regard is that there is little room to use ethnicity as a trump card in this election. Perhaps ethnicity as a determinant factor is downplayed by the fact that in most constituencies, particularly in the rural areas, the contesting candidates have their roots in those constituencies. Again this could be read as an indication that there is space for the emergence of independent candidates if they come up with credible developmental plans for their constituencies.

Or are Zimbabweans abandoning ethnic thinking and going for policies and programmes, one wonders. Is ethnicity becoming less salient and Zimbabweans becoming less materialistic? These are interesting but difficult questions to answer at this stage

Table 11: Criteria for choosing candidates

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Candidate’s ethnic background	4%
Candidate’s plans for developing the area	62%

Candidate' party	22%
Whether candidate has given food aid	2%
Whether candidate made donations to constituency	3%
Other	8%
Total	100%

Any electoral survey would be incomplete if not uninteresting and pointless if peoples voting preferences are not asked. We therefore asked the respondents which party or candidate they would vote for in the election and 30% said they would vote for ZANU PF, 16% said they would vote for the MDC, 18% refused to answer the question or said their vote is their secret. Another 12% said it does not matter which party they belong to, 16% said they did not know, while 7% said they were not going to vote.

Of interest in these findings is the percentage of respondents that refused to answer the question or hid behind the 'my vote is a secret' response. It is imperative to emphasize that in this survey we observed a high degree of reluctance to talk on the part of our respondents, particularly those in the rural areas and the smaller towns. There was therefore a tendency to profess ignorance on issues or to opt to refuse to give an opinion. This was particularly so with regards to this question because of its 'sensitive' nature given the highly polarized political environment currently prevailing.

Although we detected a marked decrease in incidences of political violence, there was still a noticeably high degree of fear among the people. This is not surprising given the fact that Zimbabwean politics have always been associated with political violence, particularly in the last five years. The inertia or residue of the "culture of fear" engendered by the 2000 and 2002 violent elections still casts a heavy shadow on the country's political landscape.

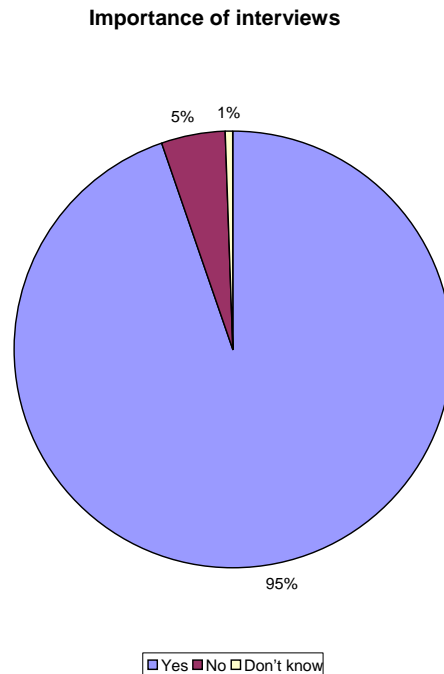
It is reasonable to infer that those that refused to answer the question and those that chose to say their vote is a secret associate with the opposition and are likely to vote for the MDC, if they vote at all. It is quite evident that in most cases associating with the opposition, particularly the MDC, is considered 'dangerous' because of the ruling party's intolerance of the opposition, which is interpreted by its rank and file as an instruction to eliminate anyone that belongs to the MDC. Even those that said they would vote for ZANU PF might have done so as a 'security measure' for fear of victimization if they fail to associate themselves with the dominant party.

Table 12: Voting preferences for the March 2005 elections

RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF)	30.1%
Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)	15.7%
ZANU (Ndonga)	0.5%
Doesn't matter which party they belong	11.8%
None	6.2%
Don't know	16.5%
Other	1.5%
Refused to answer & Secret	17.7%
Total	100%

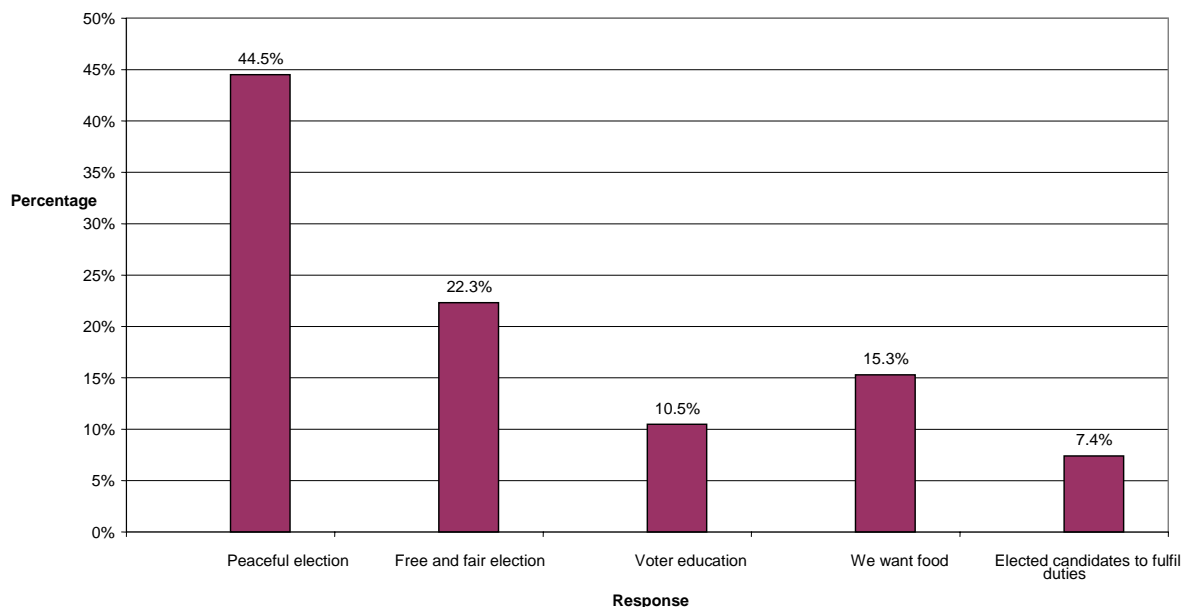
An aside

In a bid to assess the relevance of public opinion research to the public in Zimbabwe, we asked our respondents if they thought interviews like these are important. An overwhelming majority (95%) said they were and only 5% said they were not. This demonstrates that Zimbabweans yearn to be consulted on issues that affect them. It is therefore imperative for policy makers and decision makers to seek public opinion in their policy-making.



Lastly, we fielded an open-ended question asking respondents to make any other comments they wished to. Only 19% of the total sample volunteered to do so, perhaps out of 'interview fatigue'. Nonetheless, we got quite a number of interesting comments but the most common ones were that people were looking forward to a peaceful parliamentary election (45%), they wanted free and fair elections (22%), they want food (15%) they wanted voter education (11%) and that elected officials should fulfil their promises (7%).

Other comments



Conclusion

It is now irrefutable that the Government and the ruling party are in search of the all important but elusive certificate of popular legitimacy. The attempts, at least at the symbolic level, to comply with the SADC guidelines, are a concerted move to pass the litmus test. The political ambience surrounding the elections, though a marked improvement compared to the 2000 and 2002 elections, is still problematic for achieving a free, open and fair election whose outcome is accepted by concerned. More still needs to be done to level the playing field further and this is surely in the hands and capacity (and interest) of Government to do so.