

COMMENTARY

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# Assessing Zimbabwe's readiness to hold free, fair, and ethical harmonized elections in August 2023

## Introduction

Zimbabwe's anticipated 23 August 2023 presidential, legislative, and local government elections will be the third harmonised elections to be held after the adoption of a new constitution on 22 May 2013. The two previous harmonised elections were held on 31 July 2013 and on 30 July 2018. As Zimbabwe prepares for the August 2023 elections, it is time for various actors and stakeholders such as the government of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), political parties, election observers and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to reflect on whether the electoral law, regulations and practices are in line with the constitution, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections; and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

This policy brief examines the efforts made in aligning Zimbabwe's electoral law with the 2013 constitution, outstanding issues, and their possible impact on the 2023 elections. The views of political parties, election observers, CSOs and other commentators on electoral reforms are considered. The policy brief provides recommendations on how various stakeholders can improve the administrative and remedy process aspects of the elections in the remaining weeks before the voting day.

## Domestic legal framework and international guidelines

Zimbabwean elections are guided by the country's constitution and Electoral Act. Chapter 7 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe which came into operation on 22 May 2013 provides some important guidelines on the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. Chapter 7, Part 2, Section 155 of the constitution stipulates that elections should be peaceful and fair, conducted by means of secret ballot, based on universal suffrage and be free from malpractices.<sup>1</sup> The Constitution of Zimbabwe also provides guidelines on other crucial subjects related to the conduct of elections such as the timing, the operations of the electoral law and ZEC.<sup>2</sup> The Electoral Act, Chapter 2:13 gives detailed guidelines on all aspects of the conduct of elections such as voter registration, proclamation of general elections, voter education, election observation, nomination of candidates, postal voting, special voting, illegal practices, conflict management, role of the media, electoral court and electoral petitions.<sup>3</sup> Since 2013 opposition political parties and CSOs have been calling for the synchronization of the Electoral Act with the Constitution. Among other issues, sections of the Electoral Act needed to be amended to ensure that: ZEC is independent; the

1 Government of Zimbabwe, Constitution of Zimbabwe – As Amended up to 20th June 2023, (Veritas, Harare, 2023), Chapter 7, Part 1, Section 155, pp. 62-63.

2 Ibid., Chapter 7, Part 2-3, Section 155, pp. 62-65.

3 Government of Zimbabwe, Electoral Act, Chapter 2:13 – As Amended up to 28 May 2018, (Veritas, Harare, 2018).

voters roll is transparent and up to date; the ballot is secret; the accreditation of election observers is transparent and non-partisan; all political parties abide by the same rules and code of conduct; expeditious resolution of electoral disputes; all citizens of the required age (including those in the diaspora) have the right to vote; transparency in the production, management and access to voting material; and fair and equitable access to the state media by political parties.

Zimbabwean elections are also guided by regional, continental and international bodies' guidelines and conventions to which Zimbabwe is a signatory. The SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections promote free, fair and credible elections guided by the values of democracy, respect for the rule of law and human rights.<sup>4</sup> The guidelines also promote constitutionalism, electoral justice and peaceful resolution of election-related disputes.<sup>5</sup> Zimbabwe's opposition political parties and CSOs constantly make reference to SADC guidelines in their demand for electoral reforms. Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), for example, demands that Zimbabwe should meet standards stipulated by SADC on issues such as the independence of ZEC, neutrality of security forces, and opposition political parties' access to state

controlled media and their ability campaign freely.<sup>6</sup> The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance also stresses the need for regular free, fair and transparent elections run by impartial electoral bodies.<sup>7</sup> Among other pro-democracy guidelines, the African Union (AU) Charter states that all political parties should have fair and equitable access to the state-controlled media and they should all be guided and bound by a common code of conduct.<sup>8</sup> While SADC and AU guidelines are progressive in promoting free, fair and credible elections; the two bodies are limited by their lack of enforcement mechanisms.

There are also international conventions which can guide the Zimbabwean government and other stakeholders on the question of financing political parties and elections. The African Union Convention on Preventing and Combatting Corruption requires AU member countries to ensure transparency in the funding of political parties. In addition, the convention also requires that member states take measures that prevent corrupt and illicit financing of political parties.<sup>9</sup> The United Nations Convention Against Corruption requires member states to take punitive measures against public officials who use their positions to misappropriate and divert public funds.<sup>10</sup> If these international conventions are

4 Southern African Development Community (SADC), SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, (SADC, Pretoria, 2015), pp. 1, 3, 4.

5 Ibid., pp. 3, 4.

6 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'CiZC engages SADC over Zim crisis ahead of 2018', (CiZC, Harare, 5 June 2018), p. 1, <http://kubatana.net/2018/06/05/cizc-engages-sadc-zim-crisis-ahead-2018-polls/>, Accessed on 10 August 2018. Also see: Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'Joint Civil Society Press Briefing on the Zimbabwe 2018 Elections: Priorities for Reform, Challenges and Opportunities', (CiZC, Harare, 29 June 2018), <http://kubatana.net/2018/06/29/joint-civil-society-press-briefing-zimbabwe-2018-elections-priorities-reform-challenges-opportunities/>, Accessed on 23 August 2018. The SADC guidelines are outlined in: Southern African Development Community (SADC), SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections, (SADC, Pretoria, 2015), pp. 19, 20.

7 African Union (AU), African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, (AU, Addis Ababa, 2004), pp. 7-8.

8 Ibid., p. 8.

9 African Union (AU), African Union Convention on Preventing and Combatting Corruption, (AU, Maputo, 2003), p. 13.

10 United Nations (UN), United Nations Convention Against Corruption, (UN, New York, 2004), p. 18.



observed, they can reduce the prevalence of unfair electoral advantage, especially by incumbent political parties. The above is a succinct outline of the legal framework, guidelines, principles and conventions which are often made reference to by political parties, civil society and foreign observer missions in discussions of contentious issues in Zimbabwean electoral cycles.

## The quest for electoral reform

One of the major objectives of the coalition government (2009 to 2013) made up of the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the two Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) political parties was to work on and introduce a new and democratic constitution. Since the passing of the new constitution in 2013, CSOs such as the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) have been pushing for the alignment of electoral laws to the new constitution.<sup>11</sup> CiZC stressed that in line with Section 130 of the 2013 constitution the Parliament is obliged to align electoral laws with the constitution.<sup>12</sup> The 2013 harmonized elections, which ended the coalition government, were rushed and conducted

without enough electoral reforms. The Electoral Act had not yet been aligned with the 2013 constitution. As a result, the independence of ZEC was in question, the voters roll was not transparent, some political parties had very limited access to the state-controlled media, and diasporans could not vote. The elections were won by ZANU-PF. The then main opposition political party, the MDC-T, alleged that the electoral field was slanted in favor of ZANU-PF and claimed there was massive vote rigging. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Election Observer Mission and other election observer missions highlighted some concerns in their reports of the July 2013 elections.<sup>13</sup> Thus, despite a new constitution, Zimbabwe grappled with a disputed election.

Demand for electoral reforms by opposition political parties and CSOs continued after the 2013 elections. In mid-2016, eighteen political parties formed a coalition called the National Electoral Reform Agenda (NERA).<sup>14</sup> Some of the most notable political parties in this coalition were the Movement for Democratic Change – Tsvangirai, the Movement for Democratic Change – Welshman Ncube, the Zimbabwe People First, the Zimbabwe African People's Union and the People's Democratic Party.<sup>15</sup> NERA demanded the disbandment of ZEC and the establishment of a new independent electoral

11 Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), 'Analysis of the Electoral Amendment Act of 28 May 2018 and outstanding reforms ahead of the 30 July 2018 elections', ZESN and ZLHR, 2018, p. 1.

12 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'CiZC reiterates calls for amendment of the Electoral Act', (CiZC, Harare, 7 May 2018), p. 1, <http://kubatana.net/2018/05/07/cizc-reiterates-calls-amendment-electoral-act/>. Accessed on 5 October 2019.

13 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'Joint Civil Society Press Briefing on the Zimbabwe 2018 Elections: Priorities for Reform, Challenges and Opportunities', (CiZC, Harare, 29 June 2018), <http://kubatana.net/2018/06/29/joint-civil-society-press-briefing-zimbabwe-2018-elections-priorities-reform-challenges-opportunities/>, Accessed on 23 August 2018.

14 Tendai Mugabe, 'Nera: A bull with plastic horns', The Herald, 27 September 2016, p. 9.

15 Ibid. Also see: Robert Ndlovu, 'BVR system: A technical synopsis', The Financial Gazette, 13 to 20 April 2017, p. E2.

body by the United Nations, AU and SADC.<sup>16</sup> NERA also lobbied for the adoption of the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) system.<sup>17</sup> While the ZANU-PF government agreed to the adoption of BVR, it rejected the demand for the dissolution of ZEC and intervention by international bodies.

Efforts by opposition political parties in calling for electoral reforms were augmented by CSOs. Election Resource Centre (ERC) and ZESN, for example, urged the Parliament to align the Electoral Act with the Constitution of Zimbabwe before the 2018 elections.<sup>18</sup> In February 2017, civil society groups working to promote governance and democracy in Zimbabwe adopted the CSOs Collaborative Elections Strategy to push for electoral reforms ahead of the 2018 elections.<sup>19</sup> With ZESN taking a central role, advocacy on electoral reforms was one of the key programmatic areas. CiZC organised consultative meetings with CSOs and political parties, including ZANU-PF, on the need to reform the Electoral Act.<sup>20</sup> Between September 2017 and May 2018, CSOs gave comprehensive suggestions to the Electoral

Amendment Bill which was gazetted on 18 September 2017.<sup>21</sup> The bill then became the Electoral Amendment Act on 28 May 2018.<sup>22</sup> As discussed below, though inadequate and tokenistic, the law made some strides towards creating conditions needed for free and fair elections.

CSOs engaged with various election observer missions to demand free, fair and credible elections.<sup>23</sup> CSOs also took their advocacy efforts to the region by engaging SADC. They demanded elections which would meet SADC's guidelines. CSOs expressed concern that the ZANU-PF government which, since the 2013 elections, had two-thirds majority in parliament was dragging its feet on amending the Electoral Act.<sup>24</sup> As noted by ZESN, between 2013, when the new constitution was adopted, and September 2017, the Electoral Act was amended four times which shows the government's piecemeal approach to electoral reforms.<sup>25</sup> As in the past, CSOs are concerned that the ZANU-PF led government lacks political will to abide by the SADC principles and guidelines, and the African Charter on Elections.<sup>26</sup> CSOs

16 'Business as usual at ZEC: Justice Makarau', The Saturday Herald, 25 March 2017, p. 5.

17 Ndlovu, 'BVR system: A technical synopsis', p. E2.

18 Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Election Resource Centre (ERC), 'Communique on the Electoral Amendment Bill (2017) Currently Being Debated in the Parliament of Zimbabwe', 8 May 2018, p. 2.

19 Zimbabwe Election Support Network, Report on the 30 July 2018 Harmonised Election Advance Copy, (ZESN, Harare, 2018), p. 64.

20 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'CiZC reiterates calls for amendment of the Electoral Act', (CiZC, Harare, 7 May 2018), p. 1, <http://kubatana.net/2018/05/07/cizc-reiterates-calls-amendment-electoral-act/>. Accessed on 5 October 2019.

21 Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 'An Analysis of the Electoral Amendment Bill, 2017, Gazetted 18 September 2017', 2017, p. 1.

22 Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), 'Analysis of the Electoral Amendment Act of 28 May 2018 and outstanding reforms ahead of the 30 July 2018 elections', ZESN and ZLHR, 2018, p. 1.

23 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'CSOs up efforts towards credible polls', (CiZC, Harare, 8 June 2018), p. 1, <http://kubatana.net/2018/06/08/csos-ef-forts-towards-credible-polls/>, Accessed on 6 November 2018.

24 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'CSOs vow to intensify campaigns for amendment of Electoral Act', (CiZC, Harare, 19 April 2018), p. 1, <http://kubatana.net/2018/04/19/csos-vow-intensify-campaigns-amendment-electoral-act/>. Accessed on 5 September 2019.

25 Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 'An Analysis of the Electoral Amendment Bill', p. 2.

26 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'Joint Civil Society Press Briefing on the Zimbabwe 2018 Elections: Priorities for Reform, Challenges and Opportunities', (CiZC, Harare, 29 June 2018), <http://kubatana.net/2018/06/29/joint-civil-society-press-briefing-zimbabwe-2018-elections-priorities-reform-challenges-opportunities/>, Accessed on 23 August 2018. Also see: Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), Zimbabwe Civil Society Organizations 2022–2024 Election Strategy, (ZESN, Harare, 2022), pp. 12, 17, 30, 46.

want SADC, as the regional body, and other global players to persuade the Zimbabwean government to respect the constitution to ensure free, fair and credible elections.<sup>27</sup>

Before the 2018 elections, the main opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change – Alliance (MDC-A), then led by Nelson Chamisa, published a document with all its concerns and demands on electoral reforms and the electoral environment.<sup>28</sup> Most of the issues were similar to the concerns of civil society discussed in this policy brief. A few of them discussed below were addressed in the Electoral Amendment Act of 28 May 2018. Emmerson Mnangagwa of ZANU-PF won the presidential election in 2018 amid allegations of vote rigging highlighted by the MDC-A. ZANU-PF also gained two-thirds majority in the legislature. In September 2018, ZESN urged the Speaker of Parliament, both houses of the ninth parliament and President Mnangagwa to prioritise electoral and political reforms and implement recommendations made by local and international observers.<sup>29</sup> However, no significant electoral reforms were made since the 2018 elections. The government has argued, for example, that it has introduced some reforms through amendments to the Electoral Act such as defining when candidates can pull out of the elections – which can only be done before 21 days

before the Election Day.<sup>30</sup> Since 2018, what has been changed through the amendment to the Electoral Act and being paraded as reforms does not address key issues raised by observers and stakeholders.

## Electoral reforms made since 2013

Responding to pressure from political parties and civil society the government enacted superficial electoral amendments. Although it fell below the expectations of CSOs,<sup>31</sup> the Electoral Amendment Act of 2018 was the most significant.

### ZEC BECAME SEMI-INDEPENDENT

- In line with the 2013 constitution, ZEC became semi-independent as its budget is no longer controlled by the Ministry of Justice as was the case in the past.<sup>32</sup>

### ZEC INTERACTION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

- The Catholic Commission for Peace and Justice in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ) stated that during the 2018 elections, ZEC organized more electoral consultative meetings with political parties, CSOs and other stakeholders.<sup>33</sup> This was regarded as incremental progression

27 Ibid. Also see: Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), Zimbabwe Civil Society Organizations 2022 – 2024 Election Strategy, pp. 12, 17, 30, 46.

28 MDC Alliance Policy and Research Department, Plan and Environment for A Credible Election in Zimbabwe, (MDC Alliance Policy and Research Department, Harare, 2018).

29 Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 'The ninth parliament must prioritise electoral reforms – ZESN', (ZESN, Harare, 17 September 2018), pp. 1-2.

30 The author is grateful to Tawanda Chimhini who raised this issue.

31 Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), 'Analysis of the Electoral Amendment Act of 28 May 2018', p. 1.

32 Zimbabwe Election Support Network, Report on the 30 July 2018 Harmonised Election Advance Copy, (ZESN, Harare, 2018), p. 65.

33 Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ), Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe Election Observation Report for 2018 Zimbabwe Harmonized Elections, (Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference, Harare, 2018), p. iv.

towards democracy.<sup>34</sup> The repealing of Section 40F of the Electoral Act which obliged foreign funding of voter education to be channelled through ZEC was a boost for civil society.<sup>35</sup> This meant CSOs could now play an active role in voter education.

**VOTERS ROLL** - One of the most significant measures brought by amendments to the Electoral Act was the introduction of the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) system. The BVR system uses stored physical and biological characteristics of voters to easily identify them at polling stations.<sup>36</sup> Using the BVR system, ZEC created the BVR voters roll which was better than the previous voters' rolls in three ways. First, it made it easier to remove the names of deceased voters. Second, facial photographs and fingerprints made voter impersonation impossible.<sup>37</sup> Third, it made it easier to remove duplicated names on the voters' roll.

## POLLING STATIONS AND VOTING

- Observers such as CCJPZ stated that in the 2018 elections, polling stations largely operated in line with the Electoral Act.<sup>38</sup> One of the most important changes brought in

the administration of elections since 2018 is that voting is now polling station based rather than ward based. This prevents multiple voting as voters are now required to vote at a particular polling station.<sup>39</sup> Another progressive change introduced in 2018 is that voters are no longer required to produce their voter registration slips at a polling station on voting day.<sup>40</sup> Previously, voters were required to produce their voter registration slips in cases where their names were not appearing on the voters' roll. More significantly, the Electoral Amendment Act of 2018 allows voters to choose a person who can assist them to vote, thus ensuring the secrecy of the ballot. Previously, election officers and policemen were authorized to assist illiterate and visually impaired voters.<sup>41</sup>

**GENDER MAINSTREAMING** - Section 5 and 11 of the Electoral Amendment Act of May 2018 requires ZEC to ensure gender mainstreaming in its top positions and in all electoral activities it regulates.<sup>42</sup> This means ZEC has a responsibility to encourage political parties to promote gender balance in the selection of their election candidates. However, as compared to the 2013 elections, NANGO noted a decrease in the number of

34 Musiwaro Ndakaripa, 'Civil society and peacebuilding in Zimbabwe's 2018 elections', *African Security Review*, (2023), pp. 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2023.2210124>. Also see: International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (NDI), *International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (NDI) Zimbabwe International Election Observation Mission Final Report*, (International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (NDI), Washington, 2018), p. 40.

35 Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), 'Analysis of the Electoral Amendment Act of 28 May 2018', p. 2.

36 Cyril Zenda, 'Politics of biometric voter registration system', *The Financial Gazette*, 30 March – 5 April 2017, p. 13.

37 Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 'ZESN 2018 Harmonised Election – Preliminary Statement', (ZESN, Harare), 1 July 2018, p. 2.

38 Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ), *Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe Election Observation Report for 2018 Zimbabwe Harmonized Elections*, p. iv.

39 Shastri Njeru, 'Electoral Commissions of SADC Countries (ECF) 2018 Briefing: Historical and Political Contexts of Zimbabwe', (Research and Advocacy Unit, Harare), p. 11.

40 Zimbabwe Election Support Network, *Report on the 30 July 2018 Harmonised Election Advance Copy*, (ZESN, Harare, 2018), p. 65.

41 Njeru, 'Electoral Commissions of SADC Countries (ECF) 2018 Briefing', p. 12.

42 Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), 'Analysis of the Electoral Amendment Act of 28 May 2018', p. 2.

women who contested for political office in the 2018 elections.<sup>43</sup> For example, in the parliamentary elections where 210 seats were contested, female candidates won 29 seats (13,8% of the total) in the 2013 elections but this dropped to 26 seats (12.3%) in the 2018 elections.<sup>44</sup> Thus despite the enactment of a law which promotes women participation in politics other factors and dynamics worked against them.

**INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION** - Section 239(i) of the Electoral Amendment Act of May 2018 requires ZEC and the executive branch of the state to accredit local and international observers.<sup>45</sup> In the 2018 elections, in addition to SADC and AU, foreign countries and blocs such as the United States (US), the European Union (EU) and Commonwealth were invited to observe the elections.

**CODE OF CONDUCT** - The Electoral Amendment Act of 28 May 2018 introduced the Political Party Code of Conduct.<sup>46</sup> The Electoral Code of Conduct criminalises and sets stiff penalties for intimidation, verbal abuse, and threatening statements.<sup>47</sup> In 2018, the Political Parties Code of Conduct was not effectively implemented. Political parties continued to violate the code of conduct

through intimidation, harassment and hate speech.<sup>48</sup>

**ELECTORAL COURT** - Under the Electoral Amendment Act passed on 28 May 2018, a special Electoral Court falling under the High Court now presides over electoral disputes.<sup>49</sup> This shows that a legal framework which takes electoral disputes and petitions seriously was established.

## Outstanding reforms and their possible impact on the August 2023 elections

Most CSOs argue that all the amendments to the Electoral Act and other electoral reforms are largely piecemeal and tokenistic.<sup>50</sup> They assert this makes it difficult to have free, fair, and credible elections in the country. Among other demands, they want the Electoral Act to be synchronised with the 2013 Constitution.<sup>51</sup>

**ZEC** - In line with section 235 of the

43 'Zimbabwe after the July 2018 storm: Opportunities and challenges for democratization, economic recovery, and civic engagement', CEADZ Brief No. 4/2018, p. 8.

44 Ibid., p. 8.

45 Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), 'Analysis of the Electoral Amendment Act of 28 May 2018', p. 6.

46 Njeru, 'Electoral Commissions of SADC Countries (ECF) 2018 Briefing', p. 11.

47 Zimbabwe Election Support Network, Report on the 30 July 2018 Harmonised Election Advance Copy, (ZESN, Harare, 2018), p. 65.

48 Musiwaro Ndakaripa, 'Civil society and peacebuilding in Zimbabwe's 2018 elections', African Security Review, (2023), pp. 6-7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2023.2210124>.

49 Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), 'Analysis of the Electoral Amendment Act of 28 May 2018', p. 2.

50 Zimbabwe Election Support Network, Five Key Asks: Towards Credible Elections in Zimbabwe, (ZESN, Harare, 20 November 2017), p. 1, <http://kubatana.net/2017/11/20/towards-credible-elections-zimbabwe-key-asks/>. Accessed on 10/8/2018.

51 Ibid., p. 1.



Constitution, ZEC is supposed to be a completely independent entity.<sup>52</sup> As it stands now, ZEC is not fully independent from the executive branch of the state. ZEC cannot get external funding, recruit staff, and initiate electoral amendments and regulations without the involvement of the Minister of Justice.<sup>53</sup> ZEC cannot accredit observers without the involvement of representatives from the government.<sup>54</sup> The lack of full independence by ZEC may, once again, lead to allegations of bias in favor of particular political parties in the 2023 elections.

**DISENFRANCHISEMENT OF CITIZENS** - CSOs, political parties and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) expressed concern that the Electoral Amendment Act of May 2018 did not include provisions for voting by prisoners, patients in hospitals, diasporans and many others manning state institutions on the voting day.<sup>55</sup> CSOs noted that disabled people are not fully integrated in electoral processes.<sup>56</sup> In the 2018 election, ZHRC expressed concern on the absence of braille in the Electoral Act which could have made it easier for the visually impaired voters to cast their

votes.<sup>57</sup> Thus, most CSOs and ZHRC want all Zimbabweans, including those outside the country, to be given an opportunity to vote.

**VOTERS' ROLL** - Civil society and opposition political parties have expressed concern at ZEC's failure to timely release the voters' roll as required by the Electoral Amendment Act of May 2018.<sup>58</sup> ZEC failed to release the voters roll before nomination of candidates by political parties.

**NOMINATION PROCESS** - In 2018 and 2023, the nomination of candidates was unprocedural and unconstitutional. CiZC noted that the Electoral Court sat to consider the 2018 election candidates before the voters' roll was released, contrary to the constitution, and the recommendations made by SADC in the 2013 election report.<sup>59</sup> In 2023, the nomination of candidates took place before the release of the voters' roll.

**POLLING STATIONS** - The Alliance of Community-Based Organisations (ACBOs) reported that in the 2018 elections a high number of voters were turned away for going to the wrong polling stations.<sup>60</sup> CiZC

52 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, 2018 Elections Evidence Factsheet: A Weekly Publication of the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition Information Centre 2018, p. 7.

53 'Gunning down people, legitimacy and hope: Zimbabwe's July 30 Democracy and Legitimacy Test: Forward to the past', Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC) Post 2018 Election Briefing Paper, August 2018), p. 9.

54 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, 2018 Elections Evidence Factsheet, p. 7.

55 'Gunning down people, legitimacy and hope: Zimbabwe's July 30 Democracy and Legitimacy Test: Forward to the past', Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC) Post 2018 Election Briefing Paper, August 2018), p. 9.

56 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'CSOs vow to intensify campaigns for amendment of Electoral Act', (CiZC, Harare, 19 April 2018), p. 1, <http://kubatana.net/2018/04/19/csos-vow-intensify-campaigns-amendment-electoral-act/>. Accessed on 5 September 2019.

57 Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC), 'ZHRC Preliminary Election Monitoring Report, 23 July to 31 July 2018', (ZHRC, Harare, August 2018), p. 1.

58 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'Joint Civil Society Press Briefing on the Zimbabwe 2018 Elections', (CiZC, Harare, 29 June 2018), <http://kubatana.net/2018/06/29/joint-civil-society-press-briefing-zimbabwe-2018-elections-priorities-reform-challenges-opportunities/>, Accessed on 23 August 2018.

59 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'Expecting the worst and hoping for the best', (CiZC, Harare, 22 August 2018), p. 1, <http://kubatana.net/2018/08/22/expecting-worst-hoping-best/>. Accessed on 27 October 2018.

60 Alliance of Community Based Organisations (ACBOs), A Consolidated Report of Long Term Local Observations of 30 July Harmonised Elections in Zimbabwe, 20 October 2018, p. 8.

claimed there was deliberate displacement of voters.<sup>61</sup> Voters would be asked to go and vote at different polling stations which in some cases the named polling station was some kilometers away. Since there was delimitation of electoral boundaries and constituencies ahead of the 2023 election, this challenge may be worse. As a result of delimitation process and increased number of voters, ZEC has increased the number of polling stations in 2023. A list of preliminary polling stations has been gazetted with a final one set for release on the Election Day.<sup>62</sup> There are concerns that the late release of such polling stations may disenfranchise some voters should there be any changes to the preliminary list.

**VOTING MATERIAL** - CSOs have also demanded greater transparency in the production, management and access to voting material.<sup>63</sup> While the Electoral Amendment Act of May 2018 introduced a significant transparency measure relating to limiting the number of excess ballots that can be printed,<sup>64</sup> CSOs such as ZESN and ZLHR are concerned on the lack of transparency in the procurement and printing of the ballot papers.<sup>65</sup> In 2023, ZEC has not yet complied

with the provision of the Electoral Act. It did not allow an independent verification of the number of ballots that it is printing for the 2023 elections. The Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI) want ZEC to be more transparent in the design of ballot papers.<sup>66</sup> Lack of transparency in the design of the ballot papers may lead to allegations of bias by ZEC.

**ASSISTED VOTERS** - CSOs such as CiZC have expressed concern at intimidatory and coercive practices which violate the secrecy of the ballot.<sup>67</sup> In the 2018 elections, in some areas, voters were put under duress to pretend to be illiterate and as a result, were coercively assisted to vote.<sup>68</sup> Such actions violate a voters' right to a secret ballot. In the current run-up to elections, videos have since emerged showing some political party activists threatening voters with unspecified actions if their party loses in a particular area. Such content serves as a clear indicator of recurring coercive strategies associated with unfair and non-autonomous elections.

**V11 FORMS** - Due to limited funding in previous elections, most opposition political parties failed to deploy election agents at polling stations in remote areas. Some opposition political parties alleged

61 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'Zimbabwe's 2018 elections fail to pass the credibility test', Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 1 August 2018.

62 Tawanda Chimhini gave the author this information. The author is grateful.

63 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'CiZC reiterates calls for amendment of the Electoral Act', (CiZC, Harare, 7 May 2018), p. 1, <http://kubatana.net/2018/05/07/cizc-reiterates-calls-amendment-electoral-act/>. Accessed on 5 October 2019.

64 Tawanda Chimhini gave the author this information. The author is grateful.

65 Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), 'Analysis of the Electoral Amendment Act of 28 May 2018', p. 2.

66 Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI), 'The ZEC/ZANU-PF Symbiotic Relationship, Military Factor and Post July 30 2018 Election Violence', Zimbabwe Political Economy Review, (ZDI, Harare, 14 September 2018), p. 6.

67 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'CiZC engages SADC over Zim crisis ahead of 2018', (CiZC, Harare, 5 June 2018), p. 1, <http://kubatana.net/2018/06/05/cizc-engages-sadc-zim-crisis-ahead-2018-polls/>, Accessed on 10 August 2018.

68 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'Zimbabwe's 2018 elections fail to pass the credibility test', (CiZC, Harare, 1 August 2018).

that ZANU-PF took advantage of that to rig elections.<sup>69</sup> CiZC stated that V11 forms for the presidential election were not displayed at 21% of the polling stations.<sup>70</sup> ACBOs noted that opposition agents were denied access to V11 forms in Chipinge, Chiredzi South, Uzumba, Maramba and Pfungwe districts.<sup>71</sup> Of concern has been the reluctance by ZEC to release V11 forms to verify its own results. This is a violation of an accountability and verifying measure that is consistent with regional and international best practice in election administration.<sup>72</sup> V11 forms were a contentious issue in the MDC-A's challenge of the outcome of the 2018 presidential election. If opposition political parties fail to deploy election agents, this issue may recur in the 2023 election.

**GENDER MAINSTREAMING** – In the 2018 elections, ZHRC expressed concern that the nation was failing to fulfil the SADC Protocol on Gender which provided for a 50-50 female-male political representation.<sup>73</sup> This was reflected in the low number of female candidates. Research commissioned by ERC reveals that the percentage of women candidates for the National Assembly elections has dropped from 14.4% in 2018

to 11% in 2023.<sup>74</sup> It appears that the main political parties in Zimbabwe do not prioritise gender equality in their internal processes. This is especially so when political stakes in general elections are high. As noted by National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO), the exclusion of women at the candidate nomination stage marginalises women in politics and decision-making.<sup>75</sup>

**OBSERVERS** - There are some outstanding issues related to election observation. ZESN called for the amendment to the electoral law so that the accreditation of observers can be solely done by ZEC commissioners in accordance with Section 239 of the Constitution.<sup>76</sup> ZESN and the ERC have called, as is the case in some African countries, for the scrapping of the payment of accreditation fees by election observers.<sup>77</sup> ZESN and ZLHR have noted that the Electoral Amendment Act of May 2018 did not stipulate regulations guiding long-term election observers.<sup>78</sup> There have been allegations of government vetting observers for the 2023 elections.<sup>79</sup> This has a bearing on the independence of the invited observer missions.

69 'Norway, EU avail US\$1,16m for Zim parties', Zimbabwe Independent, 20 to 26 July 2018, p. 5.

70 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, (CiZC), 'Zimbabwe's 2018 elections fail to pass the credibility test'.

71 Alliance of Community Based Organisations (ACBOs), A Consolidated Report of Long Term Local Observations of 30 July Harmonised Elections in Zimbabwe, pp. 7-8.

72 Tawanda Chimhini gave the author this information. The author is grateful.

73 Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC), 'ZHRC Preliminary Election Monitoring Report, 23 July to 31 July 2018', p. 1.

74 Election Resource Centre (ERC), The Conduct of Political Parties in the Electoral Environment and the Impact on Promoting Free and Fair Elections in Zimbabwe, (ERC, Harare, 2023), p. 3.

75 'Zimbabwe after the July 2018 storm: Opportunities and challenges for democratization, economic recovery, and civic engagement', CEADZ Brief No. 4/2018, p. 8.

76 Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 'An Analysis of the Electoral Amendment Bill, 2017, Gazetted 18 September 2017', 2017, p. 3.

77 Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Election Resource Centre (ERC), 'Communique on the Electoral Amendment Bill (2017) Currently Being Debated in the Parliament of Zimbabwe', (ZESN and ERC, Harare, 8 May 2018), p. 2.

78 Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), 'Analysis of the Electoral Amendment Act of 28 May 2018', p. 2.

79 Tawanda Chimhini gave the author this information. The author is grateful.

**FINANCING OF CAMPAIGNS** – In Zimbabwe, the financing of political parties is regulated by the Political Parties Finance Act.<sup>80</sup> The Act regulates how citizens, permanent residents, companies, and associations finance political parties and it prohibits foreign funding of political parties. However, Zimbabwean political parties are not required by law to disclose the source of their funds and how they use the funds.<sup>81</sup> The European Union Observer Mission to Zimbabwe (EUOM) noted that lack of transparency in the use of funds undermines the levelness of the playing field.<sup>82</sup> Magnus Ohman argues that excessive use of money in politics can work against popular opinion as underfunded political parties can find the cost of campaigning very high and thus making it difficult to change the political system.<sup>83</sup> The lack of transparency also leaves room for vote-buying which may tilt the election contest in favor of political parties with bigger financial muscle. Thus, Zimbabwe needs a law that effectively regulates campaign financing.

**ABUSE OF PUBLIC RESOURCES** – International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (IRI/NDI) representing the United States noted that Zimbabwe's electoral law does not curb

the abuse of public resources for political gains.<sup>84</sup> IRI/NDI noted that abuse of state resources tilts the playing field in favor of the ruling party and undermines public trust in the electoral processes. As noted by Megan Ritchie and Erica Shein the use of state resources in elections increases power inequalities in electoral processes and gives incumbents 'unfair electoral advantage'.<sup>85</sup> EUOM recommended that legislative measures should be taken to prevent abuse of state resources such as government vehicles, property, and funds.<sup>86</sup> Abuse of public resources may tilt the election contest in favor of the incumbent political party.

**MEDIA ACCESS** – For many years, various stakeholders have been expressing concern on the unequal access to state-controlled media by political parties in Zimbabwe. CSOs such as ZESN and ZLHR expressed concern that the Electoral Amendment Act of May 2018 did not introduce binding measures to enforce fair and equal access to the public media by political parties.<sup>87</sup> For example, penalties were not imposed on media houses that fail to comply with fair and balanced media coverage and equal access by political parties. Lack of access to the media limits the capacity of opposition political parties to disseminate information

80 Musiwaro Ndakaripa, 'Zimbabwe's 2018 elections: funding, public resources and vote buying', *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 47, No. 164, (2020), pp. 301-312, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epub/10.1080/03056244.2020.1735327?needAccess=true>, Also see: International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), 'Political Party and Campaign Finance in Zimbabwe', (IFES, Harare, 2018), p. 1.

81 Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), 'Report on the 30 July 2018 Harmonised Election – Advance Copy', (ZESN, Harare, 2018), p. 64.

82 European Union Election Observation Mission (EUOM), *Final Report Republic of Zimbabwe Harmonised Elections 2018*, (EUOM, Brussels, October 2018), p. 23.

83 Magnus Ohman, *Controlling Money in Politics: An Introduction*, (International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), Washington, D.C. 2013), pp. 2-3.

84 International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (NDI), *IRI/NDI Zimbabwe International Election Observation Mission Final Report*, (International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute (NDI), Washington, DC, October 2019), p. 32.

85 Megan Ritchie and Erica Shein with Matthew Sanderson, Bryson Morgan, and Jeremy Lagelee, *Unfair Advantage: The Abuse of State Resources in Elections*, (IFES, Arlington, 2017), p. 1.

86 European Union Election Observation Mission, *Final Report Republic of Zimbabwe Harmonised Elections 2018*, p. 21.

87 Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), 'Analysis of the Electoral Amendment Act of 28 May 2018', p. 11.



about their programmes and policies to the electorate.

**ROLE OF THE MILITARY** - CiZC urges security forces to abide by the constitution and stay out of the electoral processes.<sup>88</sup> The involvement of security forces in political affairs and electoral processes is a violation of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.<sup>89</sup> ZDI is of the view that the military is a stumbling block to the transition to democratic rule in Zimbabwe.<sup>90</sup>

**TRADITIONAL LEADERS** - Some traditional leaders openly support the ruling ZANU-PF party and sometimes go as far as harassing and threatening opposition supporters and activists. Good practice is that traditional leaders should be non-partisan in line with the Traditional Leaders Act and the Constitution.<sup>91</sup> CiZC is calling for the introduction of a code of conduct for traditional leaders.<sup>92</sup> If measures are not taken, as is happening, traditional leaders may

prejudice some political parties in rural areas.

## **ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS** -

After the voting day, opposition political parties and CSOs want ZEC to announce elections in time, which is within five days, in line with the Electoral Act.<sup>93</sup> CSOs want ZEC to be more transparent in the transmission, tabulation, verification and announcement of results to avoid tensions that can threaten peace.<sup>94</sup>

**ELECTORAL COURT** - The Research and Advocacy Unit has called for the amendment of the Electoral Act to ensure that the Constitutional Court which presides over electoral disputes is entirely independent.<sup>95</sup> CSOs also want an extension of the period of hearing election petitions.<sup>96</sup> CiZC noted that the Electoral Act deals more with technical issues of elections and is weak on dispute resolution.<sup>97</sup> The Electoral Court should be given power to enforce the Code of Conduct for Political Parties.<sup>98</sup> CiZC wants the Electoral Court to be given power to disqualify

88 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'CiZC engages SADC over Zim crisis ahead of 2018', p. 1.

89 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'Joint Civil Society Press Briefing on the Zimbabwe 2018 Elections'.

90 Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI), 'The ZEC/ZANU-PF Symbiotic Relationship, Military Factor and Post July 30 2018 Election Violence', p. 9.

91 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'Zimbabwe's 2018 elections fail to pass the credibility test'.

92 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'CiZC reiterates calls for amendment of the Electoral Act', (CiZC, Harare, 7 May 2018), p. 1, <http://kubatana.net/2018/05/07/cizc-reiterates-calls-amendment-electoral-act/>. Accessed on 5 October 2019.

93 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'Joint Civil Society Press Briefing on the Zimbabwe 2018 Elections'.

94 Election Resource Centre (ERC), 'ERC urges ZEC to fully comply with principles of election management as they finalise the 2018 Harmonised Election' (ERC, Harare, 1 August 2018), p. 1.

95 Njeru, 'Electoral Commissions of SADC Countries (ECF) 2018 Briefing', p. 12.

96 Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'CiZC reiterates calls for amendment of the Electoral Act'.

97 'Gunning down people, legitimacy and hope: Zimbabwe's July 30 Democracy and Legitimacy Test: Forward to the past', Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC) Post 2018 Election Briefing Paper, August 2018), p. 9.

98 Njeru, 'Electoral Commissions of SADC Countries (ECF) 2018 Briefing', p. 12.

candidates who violate the Code of Conduct for Political Parties.<sup>99</sup>

## Conclusion and recommendations

Since 2000, Zimbabwe has disputed elections shrouded in their legal, administrative and process aspects. In most cases, this caused legitimacy crises for the government and polarisation of the masses. Violence and intimidation associated with electoral processes also caused trauma, hatred and resentment within communities. The adoption of a new constitution in 2013 raised prospects for a transition to democracy. However, after a decade Zimbabwe is still grappling with calls to fulfil the synchronisation of its Electoral Act with the 2013 constitution. Free, fair and credible elections are important for the government's domestic and international legitimacy which is crucial for resolving a myriad of economic and social challenges bedevilling Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, once an election date has been proclaimed no legal reforms can be made until after elections and the formation of a new government. Hence, this policy brief will offer recommendations related to the improvement of the administration and processes of elections:

ZEC, CSOs, political parties and other stakeholders should intensify voter education. Voters should be made aware of delimitation of electoral boundaries and constituencies

which took place before the proclamation of the election date. This has led to the introduction of new polling stations. This is important to reduce frustration caused by the turning away of voters on the election day. Citizens should know that it is their constitutional right to vote using a secret ballot and should not be coerced to be assisted to vote.

All political parties should deploy election agents at all polling stations in constituencies they are contesting to avoid allegations of polling station-based vote rigging. All V11 forms should be properly displayed at all polling stations. ZEC should commit to publishing all V11 forms as part of their verification of declared results.

ZEC, the Zimbabwe Media Commission, and the Ministry of Information should urgently take measures to ensure that all political parties are given equal access and fair coverage in state-controlled digital and print media. The state media should be penalised should they be found in violation of the law. This is important in levelling the electoral landscape.

Security forces should stay out of electoral processes. The police should be impartial and give all political parties equal opportunity to hold campaign rallies and canvass for votes. Security forces should not use excessive and unjustified force on civilians.

In line with the constitution traditional leaders should be non-partisan and stop campaigning for political parties.

<sup>99</sup> Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), 'Electoral irregularities point to 2018 electoral fraud', (CiZC, Harare, 4 June 2018), p. 1, <http://kubatana.net/2018/06/04/electoral-irregularities-point-2018-electoral-fraud/>, Accessed on 6 September 2018.

ZEC should take due diligence in the transmission, counting, verification and announcement of results. Political parties should allow ZEC to undertake its constitutional mandate of announcing results without undue direct or indirect interference.

# Appendix

**Table 1: Electoral reforms since 2013: Achievements, outstanding issues and their possible impact on 2023 elections**

Actors / Stakeholders concerned	Electoral issue	Achievements in electoral reforms made to date	Outstanding electoral reforms / issues	Possible impact of outstanding reforms in the 2023 elections
Legal				
Opposition political parties, Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (ZESN), Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC), international observers.	Alignment of electoral law with the <a href="#">2013 Constitution</a> .  Reform of the Electoral Act.	On 28 May 2018, President Emmerson Mnangagwa signed into law the Amended Electoral Act.	The five amendments to the Zimbabwe Electoral Act between 2013 and 2018 are not enough.  The need for new electoral law which is fully aligned to the 2013 constitution.	Biased security sector, state media and traditional leaders.  Uneven electoral playing field.
ZESN, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), international observers such as EU EOM.	<a href="#">Political Parties Finance Act</a>	Enacted before 2013, the Political Parties Finance Act regulates how citizens, permanent residents, companies, and associations finance political parties and it prohibits the funding of political parties by any other sources.	Zimbabwean political parties have no spending limits, are not obliged to report contributions and spending nor required to publish their financial spending.	EUOM noted that lack of transparency in the use of funds undermines the levelness of the playing field. Through vote buying, political parties with more funds are more likely to gain more votes.
Administrative				
Opposition political parties, ZESN, CiZC, Election Resource Centre (ERC), international observers.	Independence and transparency of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC).		Reconstitution of the electoral body - (ZEC).  ZEC to be staffed by highly professional personnel and to be provided with enough resources.	Lack of confidence in ZEC and the electoral process. ZEC's perceived lack of independence has the potential to lead to a disputed poll outcome.



Actors / Stakeholders concerned	Electoral issue	Achievements in electoral reforms made to date	Outstanding electoral reforms / issues	Possible impact of outstanding reforms in the 2023 elections
Opposition political parties, CiZC, Election Resource Centre (ERC), Election Situation Room (ESR).	Comprehensive and User-Friendly Voters Roll.	<p>Introduction of Biometric Voters Roll in 2018.</p> <p>The Biometric Voters Roll entailed prospective voters giving their facial photographs and fingerprints to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission.</p>	<p>ZEC should come up with a voters roll which satisfies all political parties and stakeholders.</p> <p>All citizens, including women, youth, prisoners, disabled, patients in hospitals should get the opportunity to vote.</p>	<p>Delay in the release of the voters roll causes suspicion and mistrust among political parties.</p> <p>The release of the voters' roll after the nomination process violated the Electoral Law. It prejudiced some aspiring candidates.</p> <p>Diasporans cannot vote using the postal system.</p>
ESR.	Nomination process.	In 2018, to a large extent, the nomination process went well.	In the 2018 and 2023 elections the nomination process took place before ZEC released the voters' roll.	Delay in the release of the voters' roll may have partly contributed to the chaotic registration of nominated opposition candidates.
Opposition political parties, CiZC, Zimbabwe Democracy Institute (ZDI).	Ballot papers.		In 2018, there was a lot of secrecy in the printing and the ballot papers.	We are yet to see any concerns about the design and printing of ballot papers in the 2023 elections.
Process				
Opposition political parties, CiZC, ZDI.	Role of the Military.		The military must abide by the constitution and stay out of the electoral processes.	Involvement of the military in electoral processes may slant the political landscape in favour of a particular political party.
CiZC, ZDI, CCJPZ, International observers such as IRI/NDI, EUOM.	Monopolization of state institutions and abuse of public resources.		Electoral Law does not curb the abuse of public resources for political gains.	Abuse of state resources may tilt the electoral landscape in favor of the ruling party and give it undue electoral advantage.
Opposition political parties, ZESN, CiZC, ZDI	State Media.		State media is biased in favor of the ruling party, ZANU-PF.	The incumbent party, ZANU-PF, gets unfair widespread coverage of its programmes and political advertisement.
Opposition political parties, Election Situation Room (ESR), Heal Zimbabwe Trust (HZT).	Traditional leaders.		Some traditional leaders are campaigning for the ruling party ZANU-PF.	This may increase the ruling party's share of votes at the expense of opposition political parties.

Actors / Stakeholders concerned	Electoral issue	Achievements in electoral reforms made to date	Outstanding electoral reforms / issues	Possible impact of outstanding reforms in the 2023 elections
Opposition political parties, CiZC.	Secrecy of the ballot.		In the 2018 elections, some communities were threatened that their ballots would not be a secret. As the 2023 elections approaches, videos have emerged of political activists telling voters in rural areas that candidates they will vote for will be known.	Lack of a secret ballot may lead some voters to vote for particular political parties and candidates out of fear.
Opposition political parties, ZESN, CiZC, Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe.	Role of citizens and CSOs.		Teachers, students, and other citizens forced to attend ZANU-PF rallies.	Coercion, intimidation, and violence is a violation of human rights. This can traumatise voters, citizens, and communities.
ESR, National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO), Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU), Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC).	Gender mainstreaming.		The percentage of female candidates in elections fails to meet the SADC Protocol on Gender.	The major political parties, ZANU-PF and CCC have made some efforts to abide by the women's quota guidelines in their selection of candidates.  However, by far, most election candidates and political activists in the country are men.
Opposition political parties, ZESN, ERC.	Election observation.	In 2018, for the first time since 2002, Western observers were invited to observe elections.	There is need to amend the electoral law so that the accreditation of observers can be solely done by ZEC and to guide long-term election observation.	With the exception of a few Western individuals who have been declared 'persona non grata', the Zimbabwean government has promised to accredit all international observers.

**Source: Designed by author**

## About SIVIO Institute

SIVIO Institute (SI) is an independent organisation focused on ensuring that citizens are at the centre of processes of socio-economic and policy change. It aims to contribute towards Africa's inclusive socio-economic transformation. It is borne out of a desire to enhance agency as a stimulus/catalyst for inclusive political and socio-economic transformation. SIVIO's work entails multi-disciplinary, cutting edge policy research, nurturing citizens' agency to be part of the change that they want to see, working with communities to mobilize their assets to resolve some of the immediate problems they face.

SIVIO institute has three centres/programs of work focused on; (i) civic engagement (ii) philanthropy and communities (iii) entrepreneurship and financial inclusion. SI addresses the following problems:

- ▶ Inadequate performance of existing political and economic system
- ▶ Increasing poverty and inequality
- ▶ Limited coherence of policies across sectors
- ▶ Ineffectual participation in public processes by non-state actors
- ▶ Increased dependence on external resources and limited leveraging of local resources

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