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**A Comparative Analysis of the 2018 Biometric Voter  
Registration and the 2013 Manual Voter  
Registration in Zimbabwe's Elections**

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**Abstract**

This study is a comparative analysis of the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) and manual voter registration processes with specific reference to Zimbabwe's 2013 and 2018 Harmonised Elections. The main objective of the study was to

investigate the challenges and opportunities of BVR against the manual voters' registration processes in Zimbabwe's 2013 and 2018 harmonised elections. This study employed qualitative methodology, where data was gathered using interviews, observations, and documentary searches. The voter registration process has been one of the major reasons for electoral disputes in Zimbabwe. The 2013 elections utilised the manual voter register, whereas the 2018 harmonised elections made use of the BVR process. The study noted that manual voter registration has been associated with long queues, many errors, and malpractices. The study also noted that the BVR process has brought some improvements to Zimbabwe's electoral processes. However, the study recommends that the Zimbabwean government should adopt electronic voting in order to make the BVR process more relevant.

**Keywords:** *Biometric Voter Registration System, Manual Voters Registration, Zimbabwe, Elections*

## 1.1 Introduction

Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) was introduced by the Zimbabwean government to deal with one of the contentious voter registration processes. ZESN (2018) states that voter registration establishes eligibility for individuals to vote. Through voter registration, citizens can exercise the right to vote. According to Section 155(2)(a) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the state must take all appropriate measures, including legislative measures, to ensure that all eligible citizens are registered as voters. In Section 36A of the Electoral Act Chapter 2:13, the President, on the advice of the Commission, 'may at any time proclaim in the Gazette order that there shall be a new registration of voters'. Hence, on the 9th of September of 2017, the then President, R.G. Mugabe, proclaimed that the BVR would start on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 (ZESN, 2018). In Zimbabwe, voter registration is conducted continuously, and the register is kept and maintained by ZEC (Electoral Act Chapter 2:13). Zimbabwe has now moved to a transparent voter registration process, the BVR (Mwanyisa, 2016). This study is an investigative analysis of the BVR and manual voter registration processes with specific reference to Zimbabwe's 2013 and 2018 harmonised elections. The study begins by explaining the theoretical framework and the relevant literature on this study. Following the theoretical framework, a more comprehensive research methodology that was used for this study is presented. The study also discusses and explains the various contributions submitted by the research participants. Their contributions were key towards a comparative analysis of the BVR process and the

manual voters' registration processes in the Zimbabwe 2013 and 2018 harmonised elections.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework**

This study relied on the theory of participation in elections. In support of the theory of participation in elections, Zimbabwe has been strategically holding elections since the 1980 elections up to the 2018 elections. The theory of participation in elections elaborates on how voter registration influences voters' participation. The probability that a single vote is pivotal is negligible in a large election. Hence, small voting costs should dissuade turnout (Anthony Downs, 1957).

Furthermore, the theory stresses that democratic governance contains competitive free, and fair elections whereby eligible citizens are entitled to participate in the whole political process (Huntington, 1984; Schumpeter, 1976). In many democratic governments, citizens hold the controlling shares of the political powers through citizens' participation in elections of all levels (Somjee, 1982). Citizens are supposed to participate actively in elections, including presidential elections, as a means of legitimising powers to their government (Berner, 2001).

This theory asserts that citizen's participation is a process that provides private individuals an opportunity to influence public decision-making processes (Burby, 2003). The theory lays down the idea that citizens' participation in presidential elections and other elections has a great influence on the country's decisions-making, which can determine people's daily lives, cutting across political, economic and social grounds. Citizen's participation in elections and other non-political matters is critical at all levels of the government to ensure that the government knows the intensity and needs of issues that are facing and affecting citizens (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004).

## **1.3 Literature review**

Oriavwote.et.al (2000) defined voting as method used at amassing individual predilections into a collective verdict during elections or an act of legally signifying the electorates' ideal contender otherwise party during elections. This implies that the way in which citizens vote entails their motive behind their voting decision. Butler and Stokes (1974) explained voting behavior as system of political comportment, in which, at its basic level, the citizens use the ballot to accomplish things they care

about. According to Goredema and Chigora (2008), the ruling ZANUPF has always been winning elections and had a sweet and easy victory during the elections in Zimbabwe. The authors made a reflection on the 2008 harmonised elections which were characterised by a change in voting behaviour and pattern that has existed since 1980. Okolo (2000) cited by Odion (2012) states that the electoral system of any country plays an important role in maintaining and moulding citizens' political behaviour. Odion (2012) believes that the way in which an election is conducted in a given country determines the level of political culture and participation, not forgetting good governance in that country.

Mwaipopo (2013) conducted research on citizen's participation in presidential elections a case of Kigoma Municipal Council. The study sought to explore the reasons for the low turnout of citizens' participation in the 2010 presidential election at Kigoma Municipal Council. The study found that a lack of adequate political consciousness and citizens perceptions of elections and a poor voting system affect citizens' participation in elections. Whereas Satiya (2018) conducted research on factors that influence voting behaviour in Zimbabwe with specific reference to Zvishavane District. Researches, studies, and literature reviewed above pertaining to voting behaviour and elections do not do comparative analysis of electoral processes hence this study seeks to analyse the BVR and manual voter registration processes with specific reference to Zimbabwe 2013 and 2018 harmonised elections.

## **1.4 Methodology**

The study applied primary and secondary sources of data collection, and these have provided valuable data that is useful for this study. The researcher conducted fifteen key informants with leaders of various political parties, civil society organisations, and academics. The researcher applied purposive sampling to select participants for interviews. The researcher used his judgement to select participants with required information relevant for the study. The researcher conducted three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with students of Political Science from the University of Zimbabwe. The study also relied on secondary sources that involved the reviewing of the documents related to the subject of elections. These included books, speeches, newspaper reports, journals, political party reports, and political analysts' reports.

## **1.5 Discussion of Findings**

### **1.3.1 Registration Process and Maintenance of Voter Register**

Vollan (2013) states that the 2013 voter registration process in Zimbabwe was being conducted manually. The Zimbabwe 2013 Constitution gave the responsibility for the voter register to ZEC from the Registrar General. The voter registration process is done to limit voting to only the citizens who are eligible to vote. Evrensel (2010:6) states that voter registration is understood as the process of registering eligible voters, while the voters' register or voters' roll is the result of this process. The process ensures that citizens who are eligible to vote can be able to do so on the set election day. Voter registration is highly complex and is the single most expensive activity within the framework of elections (Evrensel 2010).

The responsibility of voter registration and the voter roll in Zimbabwe was shifted from the Registrar General's office to ZEC. Vollan (2014:12) states that "After pressure from SADC, an independent Zimbabwean Electoral Commission (ZEC) was established immediately before the 2005 election." The Zimbabwe electoral commission capacity building project (2016:11) observes that in the past, the registration of voters and the compilation of the voters' rolls were a responsibility of the Registrar General of Voters, acting under the supervision of ZEC. The Registrar General of Voters conducted the manual voter registration process up until the 2013 elections. Kuhne (2010) notes that voter registration remains very much on the margins of international attention, although it offers many ways to manipulate the outcome of elections. Manual on human rights monitoring (2008) noted that all citizens of a country must have the right to vote provided they have reached a qualifying age and have not been declared mentally incapable by a court of law.

The 2018 harmonised elections saw a biometric voter verification process. The process involves taking a voter's ID card to a polling station for a crosscheck in the voters' register (constituency register); a verification officer uses a fingerprint scanner to scan the left index finger of the prospective voter; the individual's fingerprint is captured and compared to the previously captured biometric database so as to obtain a match for the feature stored on the biometric voters register; if a matching is confirmed, the voter is believed to belong to the constituency and is issued with confirmation slip paper to vote on the election day.

The research findings indicated that Zimbabwe has been conducting elections since 1980. According to Section 155(1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Number 20 Act 2013, elections must be held regularly and must be peaceful, free, and fair. The Constitution further states that all eligible citizens ought to register as voters. According to the participants, Zimbabwe has experience in conducting voter registration processes. A participant from the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) indicated that the manual voter registration process has been used by the Zimbabwe government since the 1980 elections, except recently in the 2018 elections. The participant further indicated that the challenges that emerged in the 2013 elections led to an outcry over the manual registration process. Most participants indicated that the manual voter registration was a slow process. Participant 1 stated that manual voter registration was associated with long queues. Furthermore, participants stated that manual registration delayed the voters from doing their day-to-day businesses. The study established that the manual voter registration process, therefore, acted as a major barrier to voter turnout, leading to an inaccurate voter register. ZESN (2013) observes that long queues developed during this exercise (manual voter registration) due to the slow processing of applicants by officials. Also, the majority of the participants highlighted that several citizens arrived at registration centres without knowing the requirements for registration due to poor communication systems. Another participant indicated that the MDC party was at the forefront in criticising the manual voters' registration process, advocating for the introduction of the BVR. It seems that the traditional manual voter registration process became less efficient.

An MDC participant highlighted that ZEC employed a paper-based registration process in the 2013 elections, and the verification of data was also done manually. The participant further indicated that the problem lies in that manual voter registration on elections, and this problem has been associated with several other challenges. The Registrar-General was supposed to update the voters' roll. Another respondent from the ZANU PF party indicated that the process is expensive as a fresh register has to be organised and updated for every election. ZESN (2013) states that the funds provided were not sufficient. The voters' roll had hundreds of dead people, double names, and underage persons, and about 41 percent of the recorded voters were no longer present at the address shown in the voters roll. The majority of the participants further highlighted that during the 2013 elections there were accusations of

electors' slips being used to vote whose foundation could not be discovered.

Participant 1 indicated that voter registration exercise remains a crucial and indispensable process in the electoral cycle in Zimbabwe because in most countries, including Zimbabwe itself, only those who are registered to vote ultimately participate in the election day. Participant 2 indicated that the Zimbabwe manual voters' registration process attracted substantial investments in the lead-up to the BVR system. The participant further explained that challenges of manual voter registration that include long queues to register and a lack of updated voters registered called for the need of a biometric voter register in Zimbabwe.

The majority of the participants indicated that the 2013 elections necessitated a fresh voter registration system in the 2018 elections. The participants indicated that the principles of transparency and accountability could only be guaranteed by a BVR system. Another participant indicated that the manual voter registration did not meet principles of accuracy, and thus technological mechanicals sought to remedy the gaps. Additionally, participant 2 argued that it was clear that the manual voter registration exercise used in the 2013 elections and the register compiled did not meet the tests of comprehensiveness, authoritativeness, accuracy, and verifiability, which are the acceptable benchmarks governing voter registration processes. However, ZANU-PF participants argued that the problem of manual voter registration in the run-up to the 2013 elections was complicated by several factors, some of which were outside the purview of ZEC. The participant indicated that there were several challenges on various aspects of the electoral cycle that include delays in the voter registration process, which in turn interfered with the preparatory stages of the elections.

The study also found out that the manual voters' registration process was being manipulated by former president Robert Mugabe and the ZANU PF Party. The participants expressed that the ZANU-PF Party has been controlling the manual voter register to its benefit so that their party wins in all the elections. MDC participant argued that the voter roll contained several ghost voters who were not removed from the voters' list. The participant further highlighted that the ZANU-PF party controlled the voter register so that it could pave the way for multiple voting. Most participants indicated that the voter registration process in the urban areas was not as strict as it was in rural areas. The participants expressed that at times the ZEC registration teams would either open late or close too early.

The study also found out that even though Zimbabwe has been conducting elections regularly, there were worrying cases of disputed elections. The respondents noted that there has not been any Zimbabwean election that was not disputed since 1980. One of the participants noted that the 2002, 2008, and 2013 elections were associated with post-electoral violence. In consonance with the above statement, Chikerema and Chakunda, (2014) argue that Zimbabwe has done relatively well in the conduct of regular general elections; however, questions have been raised on the quality of elections and a political environment associated with fear, violence, and rigging. Respondents from MDC highlighted that the 2013 elections were disputed, and this led the late MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai and other stakeholders to pursue biometric technology in the 2018 elections. The participant further indicated that the majority of the MDC participants did not want to see Registrar General Mudede in the new voters' registration exercise. Another respondent had to say:

Zimbabweans believed that BVR could improve the accuracy of Zimbabwe's elections.

In support of the above argument, (Wolf 2017) notes that the BVR system sought to reinforce the credentials of voters.

Nevertheless, in a bid to remedy problems noted by the manual voters' registration process and the 2013 elections, ZEC resolved to use BVR, which involved the capturing of personal biographic information, which included fingerprints and photo identification, which would then be transmitted to the ZEC central biometric database. Most participants indicated that the use of technology in voter registration exercise was presented as a departure from the manual voter registration, which had been associated with a plethora of flaws. The participants further indicated that the BVR process represents the best way to guarantee geographical coverage, accuracy, and verifiability of the voter registration exercise. A University of Zimbabwe lecturer argued that ZEC only shifted from manual voter registration to BVR so that it could fit in with modern technologies, as most countries are also embracing the use of technology in elections.

### **1.3.2 Comparative Analysis of the BVR and Manual Voters Registration processes on the 2013 and 2018 Harmonised Elections**

#### *1.3.2.1 Safety of voters' information*

BVR ensures the safety of voters' information. Most participants appreciated the BVR system that was adopted in the 2018 elections. Participants indicated that BVR used in the 2018 harmonised elections ensured transparency, effectiveness, accuracy, and efficiency of the registration system. Most of the participants indicated that the BVR system eliminated multiple voting and prevented invalid names on voter roll. Participants further highlighted that the decision made by the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to invite SADC countries to observe the 2013 elections and 2018 elections assisted in achieving the safety of voters' information. Research findings concur with literature, as Ashok and Ummal (2011) state that BVR ensures privacy and safety of voters' information.

#### *1.3.2.2 Technologically advanced*

BVR ensures technological advancement in elections. Most participants during the interviews highlighted that technology commonly used in the electoral processes includes telephone lines, computers, and calculators for results transmission. Participant 8 acknowledged that the BVR system used in the 2018 elections was a significant step towards reforming the electoral process in Zimbabwe. The participant mentioned that the 2018 harmonised elections were indeed conducted based on improved technology. The technology used was not only intended to enhance the credibility of the process but also to cure the problems that had been identified as part of the failures of the 2013 elections. Ponoroff (2010) argues that technology is a more accurate technique to adopt than the paper registration process.

The interviewees indicated that ZEC introduced BVR kits to conduct voter registration exercises in the run-up to the 2018 elections, which was an improvement from the previous manual voter registration process because of its two unique features, namely the automated fingerprint identification system (AFIS) and the facial feature recognition system. The research findings concur with literature, as Lodinova (2016) states that a biometric system relates to a pattern recognition system that captures and compares a feature either physiological or behavioural

peculiar to an individual to predefined templates of the same characteristics. Participant 1 stated that BVR has received very high support, even to the extent that the youth vote, which was lately insignificant, has increased greatly to 60% of the 5, 3+ million voters. However, the participant further indicated that although the BVR registration enabled the registration of more than 5.3 million voters, the process was not without shortcomings. Most of the participants indicated that BVR was associated with procurement challenges of the BVR kits that led to serious delays.

### *1.3.2.3 Transparency*

BVR ensures accountability and transparency in elections. While a national consensus had been built on the need to introduce the technology in the voter registration exercise, most participants indicated that ZEC failed to conduct a transparent process for the confirmation of personal details in the manual voter register. Subsequently, a voter's register was printed for registered voters to verify whether their particulars had been accurately captured. The participants indicated that during the verification period before the 2018 elections, ZEC resorted to printing hard copies of voter registers, abandoning the technical process to such an extent that other citizens could not find their names in the printed register. Some of the participants argued that the verification process consumed a lot of time since there were long queues at the polling stations. Participant 6 from the University of Zimbabwe argued that manual processes should be phased out as the country advances in technology use.

When asked if the biometric technology has made a difference in the 2018 election results, the majority of the respondents felt that the biometric system improved the credibility of elections as the biometric machines reduced multiple voting. One of the respondents said that *"BVR system is also capable of promoting peaceful and credible elections in the forthcoming 2023 harmonised elections."* Participant 1 expressed that while the 2018 elections were generally peaceful and hailed by both local and international observers as „free and fair, the elections witnessed numerous shortcomings and challenges that brought into question the credibility and integrity of results. Participant 3 indicated that a post-election audit carried out by different stakeholders exposed evidence of malpractices, failure of technology, and willful complicity by electoral officials in the overall conduct of the elections. The research findings

also indicated that some of the participants argued that the legal and institutional framework governing election management and administration failed to guarantee credible elections despite BVR.

#### *1.3.2.4 Updating Data*

BVR makes updating voter information easier. Despite the challenges faced by other participants in the verification process, some of the participants argued that the BVR system in the 2018 elections is a far better registration process than the manual voter registration process that has been used in previous elections in Zimbabwe. Participant 2 expressed that she could not find any challenges in verifying her details. Participant 4 argued that at one point ZEC could not release the manual voter roll when it was requested. The Research and Advocacy Unit (2013), cited in Vollan (2014:24), concluded that the 2013 voter register had a number of duplicates and dead people. The participant argument tallied with literature, as Hanzi (2013) states that in the case of *Dabengwa and ZAPU v. Chairperson of ZEC and 2 others*, the voters' roll was not accessible. Dabengwa had asked for the electronic voter roll in 2012; unfortunately, ZEC failed to cooperate. Hanzi (2013:17) also stated that ZLHR even asked for the voter roll before voter registration commenced, and the voter register could not be accessed upon request as it was not up to date. The study noted that most participants noted that the manual voter register was not being updated consistently.

However, the study found out that BVR is prone to hacking. However, the issue of security challenges the adoption of contemporary technology in elections. Yard (2011:11) defines security as all the information is safely protected from unauthorised users to access or protection from loss. BVR is more challenging than the manual voter registration process with regard to data security. Voters' information and the register are vulnerable to hack. Wallach (2016) noted that a hacker can even delete voters from the poll, making it difficult for them to vote. Respondent 5 states that the biggest concern about modern technologies is hacking. He further explains that the BVR system is prone to information technology fraud. Respondent from the University of Zimbabwe stated that the BVR system like any electronic device is subject to unauthorised individuals accessing the voter roll. She noted that this can be done physically by the person or by remote. This issue of security and privacy is a questionable sector in the introduction of technology. Respondents agree that biometric systems can be hacked and

manipulated. Gupta (2011) stated that there is a need for secure systems of protection of data. The respondents strongly emphasised the fear of hackers getting access to ZEC computer programs.

However, participant 7 indicated that the manual voter registration system stores voters' details safely as it is free from being hacked. Most importantly, the study found out that the manual voter registration system does not allow any room for hacking of voters' details. The research noted that chances of hacking are minimised with the traditional manual voter registration process. As one respondent from the MDC party noted, "even members of ZEC cannot hack or alter the voters' details. The study also discovered that for many, especially the ZANU-PF party, the manual voter registration process may have been the most viable strategy of maintaining ghost voters in the register.

#### *1.3.2.5 Cost*

Manual voter registration is a cheaper process than the BVR process. The participant from ZANU PF argued that "the manual voter registration process is a cheaper process than the BVR system". The study found that most of the ZANU-PF participants felt that manual voter registration only required a pen and paper. Some of the participants further indicated that developing countries like Zimbabwe, which are financially crippled, ought to use cheap methods of voter registration. Participant 6 highlighted that the Mudede voter register was the cheapest technique that was used by the Zimbabwe government to register eligible citizens during the election period. Furthermore, as noted by respondent 6, the cost of BVR kits is the first identified negative impact on the introduction of contemporary technology in elections. In an interview with participant 7, the participant argued that "the BVR system is associated with high costs of equipment. She further noted that BVR is expensive as the BVR kits include cameras, printers, scanners, laptops, software, and power supplies". Holtved (2011) indicates that BVR is expensive from the initial purchase cost of biometric readers and devices, maintenance costs, data storage and upgrade costs, and data security costs.

### **1.3.3 Results Management System: Tallying, Transmission, and Declarations of Results**

An MDCT participant indicated that perhaps the greatest failure of the BVR process was how ZEC handled the whole aspect of the 2018 results. The participant further indicated that from counting, tabulation, declaration, and transmission of results, manifest failures were noted that if not remedied, lives are going to be lost. The conduct of ZEC poses serious dangers to future elections in Zimbabwe. Participant 8 indicated that after the 2018 harmonised elections, tallying, transmission, and publication of results attracted substantial debate. Participant 1 expressed that upon the completion of the 2018 harmonised elections, several court cases were filed challenging the manner and procedure used by ZEC in the results announcement. From the interviews conducted, the participants indicated that the judiciary did not receive much compliment in its work to resolve electoral disputes. Most participants indicated that the massive failure of results transmission on Election Day by ZEC and other technological failures did not come as a shock to many Zimbabweans since Zimbabwe elections have always been associated with fraud. As argued by participant 4, “it was clear that the ZEC and its BVR system were designed to fail just like they did when it was using manual voter register”. Participant 2 indicated the major problems regarding transmission and publication of results were the manifest failure of BVR for electronic transmission of provisional results and the lack of clarity in the management and tabulation of hard copy results. Nevertheless, the study uncovered that Zimbabwe has always been in a crisis of tallying, transmitting, and declaring election results both in the 2013 and 2018 elections.

The study also found out that the participants expressed that less has changed from manual voter register to biometric voter register, arguing that the government of Zimbabwe does not recognise the independence of ZEC as indicated in the Zimbabwean Constitution. Participant 3 argued that “nothing new is ever going to come out of ZEC as long as ZANU PF is still ruling”. Most participants questioned the credibility of the electoral process as ZEC officials are appointed by the president of the government (ZANU PF party). The participants further argued that ZEC must have full autonomy in all its operations. It was also argued that there is a need for further electoral reforms; for example, the electoral law must vest ZEC with the sole responsibility and function for accrediting election observers. Furthermore, the participants indicated

that ZEC's independence and the transparent and independent process of appointments would ultimately enhance confidence in ZEC and, in particular, the crucial work of the management of the elections. Most of the MDC participants criticised the Electoral Act for giving the Minister of Justice the power to promulgate regulations made by ZEC. MDC participants indicated that in the run-up to the 2013 elections and 2018 elections, clear splits and fissures emerged in ZEC that undermined its neutrality and independence.

In another interview, participant 6 stated that "ZEC is manipulated by members of security forces". The participant indicated that the Commission must not depend on the government to carry out its responsibilities. The participant, in rhetorical manners, asked, "Can ZEC get the trust of Zimbabwean citizens in bringing free and fair elections in 2023." The participant further explained that ZEC is influenced by the government in its functions. Participant 8 supported participant 6, that as long as the president has the responsibility of announcing the election date, then ZEC will never be an independent commission. He expressed that the election date itself must be set by the commission and not the president. However, participant 9 asked, "Who knows, ZEC could still be linked to the Office of the Registrar General." Moreover, the participant questioned the appointment of a former soldier, Utoile Silaigwana, to lead ZEC in the 2018 elections. The study noted that the appointment of the former soldier limited the credibility of ZEC and generated suspicion of election rigging.

## **1.5 Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **1.4.1 Conclusions**

This study sought to conduct a comparative analysis of the BVR and the manual voters' registration processes with specific reference to Zimbabwe's 2013 and 2018 harmonised elections. The study embraced a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews to gauge the perspectives of the target respondents. Several important lessons were generated from the study that will contribute meaningfully to voter registration and democratic consolidation in Zimbabwe. The lessons will also contribute towards the strengthening of the electoral process. The conclusion and lessons learnt can be summarised as follows:

The research study found out that although ZEC is the main player in election administration in Zimbabwe, other stakeholders also equally play an important role, and their actions also impact the electoral process

and election administration. Strengthening and reforming ZEC must of necessity take into consideration the roles played by the Government of Zimbabwe, political parties, civil societies, the media, and even the voters on election administration. For instance, the conduct of political parties in the electoral process, the role of voters exercising their sovereign right in registration and voting, and the resolution of electoral disputes by the judiciary, all contribute to credible election management.

The study concluded that Zimbabwe elections (2013 and 2018 elections) have been associated with poor election management and election violence. It was highlighted by the participants in the study that election violence in Zimbabwe is caused by the disputed elections. If left unresolved (election management), the potential for electoral violence will be high come the 2023 elections. Most participants indicated that the probability that ZEC is going to manage the 2023 elections well is 50:50. The possibility of violence in the forthcoming elections, therefore, presents further justification for reforming election management and ZEC.

While the 2018 elections witnessed remarkable improvement in the laws and the conduct of the elections since it used a BVR system, the shortcomings noted, if not remedied, will pose significant hurdles in the conduct of future elections in Zimbabwe. As evidenced from the above findings, challenges were noted through the entire electoral cycle, from the promulgation of the laws to the organisational structure of ZEC, the voter registration process, results transmission, failure of technology, and resolution of electoral disputes, with the conclusion that, as presently constituted, ZEC cannot be relied upon to procure a credible electoral process.

#### **1.4.2 Recommendations**

The study generated recommendations that can be considered by the government of Zimbabwe, political parties, civil societies, and ZEC.

- **Recommendations to ZEC**

ZEC should launch election preparations early enough to mitigate the shortcomings and challenges that were noted in election administration in both the 2013 and 2018 elections. Enhanced planning and management capacity of ZEC is consistent with the election cycle approach that requires a holistic approach to the entire electoral process

in a timely and well-sequenced manner. A context-based determination on suitable election technology should be done by ZEC. ZEC should initiate the procurement of essential election materials, for example, BVR kits, well in advance and conclude the process by December 2022.

ZEC should also develop an automated voter registration system for voter registration and the maintenance of the voter register. This should include an automotive system for the registration of Zimbabweans in the diaspora. Automated voter registration will go a long way in enhancing the inclusion of voters, particularly those who do not have time to go and register at ZEC outlets or ZEC district offices. The ZEC must ensure that its voter registration field officials are properly trained in the use and management of the registration system and verification equipment in future exercises to avoid unnecessary delays, long queues, and equipment malfunction. Additionally, the ZEC should consider collaboration with the National Registrar Department on citizenship identification to assist in future voter registration exercises. Such collaboration can help eliminate or minimise the registration of minors and deceased people.

The ZEC must intensify the dissemination of information through media outlets, particularly radio, to increase public awareness on the use of technology in elections to boost confidence in the citizens. ZEC should prepare a realistic election operational plan to guide in the preparation of the 2023 elections.

- **Recommendations to the Government of Zimbabwe:** The Government of Zimbabwe ought to make collaborative efforts with non-state actors. The government of Zimbabwe should ensure that ZEC is allocated adequate funding to initiate voter registration and election preparations in time. The prevailing economic and political environment in Zimbabwe points to a very volatile election in 2023 if the government does not put in place a conducive environment.
- **Recommendations to the Civil Societies:** Civil Societies should complement ZEC work in conducting voter education. Civil societies should ensure greater transparency and accountability in the electoral process.
- **Recommendations to the Judiciary:** The judiciary should remain independent as desired to harmonise jurisdictions arising from election disputes.
- **Recommendations to the Political Parties:** Political parties should deploy trained agents to monitor electoral practices and point out any

malpractices that may arise. They should also ensure peaceful campaigns to allow ZEC to attend to its core mandate of election management.

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