

Assessment of Electronic Voting Technologies in Election Processes in Zimbabwe

Nkosikhona Moyo¹, Shikha Vyas-Doorgapersad²

Abstract

The electoral system in Zimbabwe following independence is the main topic of this essay. Furthermore, it is crucial to consider the numerous stakeholders that directly influence Zimbabwe's electoral processes, such as political parties, political institutions and electoral bodies, as well as any other election-related concerns. The study is qualitative and is based on data that may be found online, in official papers, articles, and laws. Document review is used to gather the data, and document analysis is used to evaluate it further. The results verify that the general conduct of elections has been enhanced by the implementation of electronic voting technology, such as biometric voter registration, in Zimbabwe. To enhance the context of EVTs and preserve election integrity, the essay suggests maintaining the biometric voter registration (BVR) system and gradually integrating other information and communication technologies (ICTs) in other election-related domains.

Keywords: *Biometric Voter Registration (BVR), Election, Electronic Voting Technologies (EVTs), Qualitative, Zimbabwe.*

Introduction

Zimbabwe's electoral system has evolved over the past four decades since the country attained its independence and ushered in Black majority rule. On attainment of independence, during the country's first universal elections, a proportional representation system of elections remained in place for the first five years until 1985. However, this was replaced by the single-member district (SMD) or first-past-the-post system at the turn of the first decade of independence. Currently, Zimbabwe uses the mixed or hybrid system of elections because of various amendments made to the country's Constitution and the principal legislation that governs the conduct of elections, the Electoral Act, and other related legal instruments (Sithole and Makumbe 1997, Sachikonye 2004, Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012, Zimbabwe Elections Support Network (ZESN) 2018 and Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) 2019). ZEC (2019: 4) states that Zimbabwe currently uses "a mixed electoral system consisting of the single-member majority system, the single-member plurality system, popularly known as the first-past-the-post system, and the proportional representation system".

According to ZEC (2019:4; also refer to <https://www.eisa.org.za/pdf/zim2018zec.pdf>), the single-member majority system is applied for the presidential election. In this system, the winner must obtain an absolute majority of votes, the minimum being 50% plus one vote. If no candidate secures an outright majority, a runoff election is conducted between the two candidates with the highest number of votes. Meanwhile, the proportional representation model is applied for 60 members of the Upper House of Parliament; that is, the Senate, 60 members of the National Assembly, all of whom must be women, and from the Provincial Councils in the eight non-metropolitan provinces (ZEC 2019: 5).

To qualify, a party must have filed its party PR nomination lists for the said elections during the nomination court proceedings. If it does not file its party-list nomination forms for all the elections under the PR system, then it will not be eligible to be allocated seats. The Electoral Act [Chapter 2:13] provides a formula for allocating the seats to eligible parties under this system (refer to <https://www.eisa.org.za/pdf/zim2018zec.pdf>). The first-past-the-post, also called the single-member plurality system, is used for elections in the Lower House of Parliament, the National Assembly and for

¹ Postgraduate student, School of Public Management; Governance and Public Policy; College of Business and Economics; University of Johannesburg, South Africa, Email: ncosicona@gmail.com.

² Professor, School of Public Management; Governance and Public Policy; College of Business and Economics; University of Johannesburg, South Africa, Email: svyas-doorgapersad@uj.ac.za, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8146-344X>

local authority elections. Under this electoral system, the country is divided into 210 electoral constituencies and 1,958 wards, each of which is represented by a candidate. The candidate who attains the highest number of votes, that is, a minimum of one vote more than the other candidate(s), is declared the winner (ZEC 2019: 5).

The rest of the article explains the evolution of election management in post-independent Zimbabwe, the role of Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and election management in Zimbabwe, and discusses the role played by major stakeholder in election processes. Based on the discussions, the article offers discussions and findings through analysis of data collected.

The article is qualitative. Creswell and Gutterman (2024: 11) define qualitative research as a rigorous form of research best suited to address research phenomena whose variables are not precisely known and would need to be explored. It is an approach also suitable for exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell and Creswell 2018:3). A document or documentary review is another technique employed in the study to collect data in response to the study's questions and objectives. A document review refers to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of available documents and records meeting certain criteria to make research conclusions (Bowen 2009 in Soga 2023:49). The study made use of a variety of relevant documents to access data that could not ordinarily be collected through primary means of interviews and observations by the researcher. The documents reviewed and analysed included, but were not limited to, policy documents, strategic reports, annual reports, policy reviews, assessments, quarterly reviews, institutional reports from ZEC and ZESN, and various reports from international organisations in the field of elections.

Evolution of Election Management in Post-Independence Zimbabwe

Election management in Zimbabwe, consistent with the evolution of the country's electoral system, has also experienced changes which have led to its current state. Zimbabwe's electoral environment has been characterised by numerous changes and developments since independence, which have resulted in the creation of a single unit management system of elections.

At independence, the country's elections were managed by four loosely connected but distinct institutions, namely the Delimitation Committee, the Electoral Supervisory Commission (ESC), the Elections Directorate, and the Registrar General's Office (Sachikonye 2004: 119). According to Kabemba (2005:12), the ESC was tasked with supervising elections in the country, including the presidential, parliamentary, and local government elections. It was also responsible for the registration of all voters and election-related legislation, and it consisted of five commissioners answerable to the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs. The Delimitation Committee's role largely included the limitation and demarcation of the boundaries of the country's constituencies. Commissioners to this committee were directly appointed by the president, compromising their independence (Sachikonye 2004: 120).

Another key player in election management in Zimbabwe, at that time, was the Registrar General of Elections. According to Sachikonye (2004:122), the RG was a public servant whose office fell under the Registrar-General's Office in the Ministry of Home Affairs. His functions in the electoral process, however, entailed his being answerable to the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs. Since the Ministry of Home Affairs funds the functions of the Registrar-General, this office was answerable to both ministries concurrently. The duties of the RG were as follows: registering voters, preparing voters' rolls, presiding over the nomination court for the nomination of candidates, providing ballot papers, setting up polling stations, providing electoral staff, declaring election results, and taking custody of election materials (Sachikonye 2004).

Kabemba (2005: 10) identifies the Elections Directorate (ED) as another important body in conducting elections in Zimbabwe. Kabemba (2005) further notes that the ED was no more than a support structure to ensure that resources and logistics were in place to conduct elections. As such, it was not supposed to get involved in the operational side of elections. Its mandate was to give logistics support to the ESC and the RG. However, the ED would sometimes go beyond its mandate and get involved in elections by making

pronouncements on elections. Its importance rose significantly during the 2000 elections. On 7 June 2000, Statutory Instrument 161A of 2000 empowered the ED to accredit foreign observers on the recommendation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, thus moving away from the traditional responsibility entrenched in the Constitution and the Electoral Act (Kabemba 2005: 17).

The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and election management in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission is the principal and sole elections management body in Zimbabwe, established through Section 238 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (ZEC 2018: 4). ZEC (2018:5) further highlights that it is empowered by Section 239 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe to perform the following duties: (a) to prepare for, conduct and supervise elections to the Office of President and to Parliament; elections to provincial and metropolitan councils and the governing bodies of local authorities; elections of members of the National Council of Chiefs established by Section 285; and referendums; and to ensure that those elections and referendums are conducted efficiently, freely, fairly, transparently, and in accordance with the law; (b) to supervise elections of the President of the Senate and the Speaker and to ensure that those elections are conducted efficiently and in accordance with the law; (c) to register voters; (d) to compile voters' rolls and registers, € to ensure the proper custody and maintenance of voters' rolls and registers; (e) to delimit constituencies, wards, and other electoral boundaries; (f) to design, print, and distribute ballot papers, approve the form of and procure ballot boxes, and establish and operate polling centers; (g) to conduct and supervise voter education; (h) to accredit observers of elections and referendums; (i) to give instructions to persons in the employment of the state or of a local authority for the purpose of ensuring the efficient, free, fair, proper, and transparent conduct of any election or referendum; and (j) to receive and consider complaints from the public and to take such action in regard to the complaints as it considers appropriate (ZEC 2018).

ZEC is further mandated to carry out the following duties and responsibilities as stipulated in Section 5 of the Electoral Act [Chapter 2:13]: (a) undertaking and promoting research into electoral matters; (b) developing expertise and the use of technology regarding the electoral processes; (c) promoting co-operation between the government, political parties, and civil society regarding elections; (d) keeping the public informed about (i) the times and places where persons can register as voters and the progress of the voter registration exercise; (ii) the delimitation of wards, constituencies and other electoral boundaries, (iii) the location and boundaries of polling stations and when they are open for inspection; (iv) voters' rolls and the times and places at which they are open for inspection; (v) voting; and (vi) political parties and candidates contesting the election, and (vii) generally, all matters relating to the commission's work and the electoral process; (e) ensuring that gender is mainstreamed into electoral processes, and (f) making recommendations to Parliament on appropriate ways to provide public financing for political parties (ZEC 2018).

Makumbe (2010: 120), referring to the ZEC website, notes that the commission was established by Section 61 of the then Zimbabwe Constitution through the promulgation of Constitutional Amendment Act No. 17 (Act 5 of 2005). According to Makumbe (2010: 118), ZEC centralised the election management structure, which ensured that a single entity dealt with all election-related matters. Since its inception, ZEC has presided over three of the country's elections, beginning with the 2008 harmonised elections, and to the recent 2018 elections (www.zec.org.zw/reports). Chikwawawa (2019: 313) observes that ZEC managed its first elections in the country's first harmonised elections. According to Chikwawawa (2019), ZEC has faced numerous challenges in the management of elections and has, in the past, been criticised for failure to handle elections, particularly in 2008, where it took the body five weeks to announce the election results.

As highlighted above, one of the significant roles of commission is voter registration and voter education. However, voter education is not only exclusive to ZEC but can also be conducted by various non-state organisations with a similar interest in elections, such as civic society organisations. To this end, the voter registration process in Zimbabwe's electoral system is briefly outlined next.

Voter Registration and the Voters' Roll

ZEC (2018: 8) notes that since 2017, a new voter registration process has been initiated in Zimbabwe, in which biometric voter registration (BVR) technology is used, in line with the commission's constitutional mandate and legal provisions embodied in the Electoral Act. The Constitution of Zimbabwe of 2013 bestows the function to register voters upon the commission, a function previously undertaken by the abolished Registrar General of Voters' Office. In simple terms, voter registration is one of the core mandates of ZEC and currently employs technological instruments which capture a voter's biometric characteristics.

According to ZEC (2018: 9), the BVR process and application have improved electoral administration and resolution of related issues. The commission notes that the introduction of the BVR system was one such consideration made in line with the law to address issues relating to public perceptions on ghost voters, multiple registration voting, as raised by some stakeholders on the status of the voters' roll. ZEC (2018) further argues that such allegations cast aspersion on its mandate and introduce unnecessary conflict in the electoral process. Henceforth, according to the commission, the introduction of the BVR system entails a voter registration exercise that requires all voters to subject themselves to the new process to come up with a new voters' roll. ZEC (2018: 10) reiterates that the fact that a person was a registered voter since 1980 no longer counts, as all voters are now required to physically report at registration centres to have their details entered into the system. ZEC believes that this new registration system also effectively expunged allegations of ghost voters due to the requirement of an individual to be physically present for registration at a registration centre, before being enrolled on the new voters' roll (ZEC 2018).

ZESN (2018:5) also believes that the new biometric-enabled voter registration system has improved the country's electoral processes, in particular, the registration process and the actual voter's register, which has in the past been accused of being in shambles and contributing to alleged electoral irregularities such as manipulation and fraud (Makumbe 2010). Chikwawawa (2019: 311) supports the above view that the new BVR registration process has immensely contributed to reform efforts directed at improving the country's electoral profile. According to ZEC (2018: 10), this is coupled with the new requirement of the specific polling station-based voter registration. ZEC records that "this new voter registration system is also augmented by the polling station-specific voting system whereby a voter is restricted to voting at a particular polling station of choice in his or her ward. This constituted a shift from the past, where a voter could vote at any polling station within his or her ward or constituency, a practice that left the Commission in an invidious position when rebutting allegations of double voting. This new system also effectively dealt with the issue of double voting as it eliminated chances for such practice" (ZEC 2018: 12). Thus, the current voter registration process and the resultant voters' roll have shifted from a manual to a digital format, which also enhances the security of the voter and the vote since the former's biometric details are used to ensure that it is the specific individual casting the ballot and guard against potential double voting (ZESN 2018).

The Election Process

Like in any other maturing democracy, Zimbabwe engages in elections through a three-phased approach characterised by pre-election, election, and post-election phases. These are not abstract phases but processes which are provided for at law.

Pre-election phase: The pre-election phase is relatively long and involves numerous activities, which include voter registration and constituency delimitation campaigns, among many others. Section 17A (1) of the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) stipulates that "Voter registration shall be conducted on a continuous basis so as to keep the voters rolls up-to-date." The voter registration process is a significant feature in the pre-election phase of Zimbabwe's election process. It is a precursor of any voting process and, as such, a crucial component in the country's elections. In the past, voter registration, or to say the voters' roll, has attracted criticism from various sectors, but notably from civil society and opposition political parties (Makumbe 2016, Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012, Chan and Gallagher 2017). However, beginning with the 2018 harmonised elections, voter registration in Zimbabwe has improved since the adoption of the biometric technologies

to aid the process, culminating in the restoration of confidence in the process itself and partly in the entire election (ZESN 2018, ZEC 2019, and Chikwawawa 2019).

Another important feature during this period is the political campaigns, which prelude the actual voting, where political parties seek to outsmart each other in pursuit of votes. The Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) provides for free campaigns of political parties ahead of elections. However, there is no formal campaign period in Zimbabwe, although campaigns should end 24 hours before election day (Commonwealth 2018: 38). Election campaigns have, in many instances, been characterised by inter- and intra-party violence in Zimbabwe. However, the 2018 campaign period progressed peacefully with minimal incidents of violence and intimidation save for the bomb that exploded at a ZANU-PF rally in Bulawayo on 23 June 2018, which claimed two lives (Commonwealth 2018:38). During the campaign period, political parties market their manifestos and seek to impress their supporters to win voters away from their contenders. Other factors, such as constituency delimitations, nomination, and selection of candidates, among others, including respective parties' primary elections, occur before the election day but do not necessarily constitute the pre-election phase.

Election Phase: The election phase denotes the actual voting, vote counting, and announcement or publication of results. In Zimbabwe, the Electoral Act (Chapter 2:13) provides for the conduct of these activities, with Sections 51 to 69 elaborating the process of voting, counting, tabulation, and publication or publishing of the results. Zimbabwe uses a polling station-based voting system where a voter's name must appear on a voter register in that polling station to avoid cases of multiple voting and related cases of electoral fraud (ZEC 2018).

Also worthy to note is that Zimbabwe's electoral legal framework provides for two types of voting, that is, postal voting and ordinary voting, with each type having its unique procedures and regulations. According to ZEC (2018: 58), Section 72 of the Electoral Act [Chapter 2:13], entitles citizens to use the postal vote in cases where those persons, their spouses, and others are registered as voters in a constituency, but are not able to vote in person on the polling day because they are on duty outside the country in the service of the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ). There are also those registered voters who will be on duty on polling day as members of the disciplined force or as electoral officers who are located outside their voting stations. This type of voting, although without evidence demonstrating so, has been criticised in many cases for being used as an opportunity by incumbents to manipulate the process in their favour (Sachikonye 2006).

Commenting on the polling day of Zimbabwe's 2018 elections, the Commonwealth (2018: xi) notes that the voting process was largely peaceful and orderly in some instances, with gendered queues and priority being given to pregnant women and lactating mothers. The report further observes that the elderly were assisted to vote as per electoral regulations and ZEC procedures, which the observers felt was commendable. The same report records that the counting process proceeded transparently and peacefully at polling stations in the presence of political party agents together with international and citizen observers (Commonwealth 2018: xii).

Post-Election Phase: The post-election phase is the period that occurs immediately after voting has concluded (ZEC 2018). However, it is sometimes confusing, as such requirements as the announcement of election results may be considered to be part of the polling or election phase, even though they occur after ballots have been cast. The election violence that occurred on 1 August 2018, resulting in the death of protestors, is considered an immediate post-election incident (Commonwealth 2018: xi). The Commonwealth (2018) condemned this occurrence, indicating that it was a setback to the country's elections and the 2013 Constitution.

The same report indicates that in 2018, following the victory of ZANU-PF and Emmerson Mnangagwa, the opposition filed a constitutional court application opposing the authenticity of the results and challenging the legitimacy of the president. The application was filed on 06 August 2018, with the hearing taking place on 10 August 2018 (Commonwealth 2018). Also noteworthy, during this post-election phase was the court hearing convened to interrogate the 1 August 2018 post-election violence, which resulted in

the death of protestors who were demonstrating against alleged vote manipulation and rigging before the election results were published on 03 August 2018.

Major Stakeholder in Election Processes

There are various stakeholders, however this section only focuses on political parties and media. Other stakeholders will be discussed in future publications.

Political Parties

Political parties represent the contestants' stakeholder group in elections and are an important member of any election that provides for competition or contest (Internet source: <https://aceproject.org/main/english/ve/veb03a.htm>). This group can, however, also include political contestants (individuals) who do not belong to a political party but are independent (Internet source: <https://aceproject.org/main/english/ve/veb03a.htm>). In Zimbabwe, the history of political parties is as old as the history of elections and political contests (Sithole and Makumbe 1997). However, their most recent history can be traced to the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, when universal suffrage was introduced (Sithole and Makumbe 1997).

ZANU-PF has been the dominant political party, having been the ruling party since the independence elections in 1980 (Chari 2017: 72). The main opposition political party was PF-ZAPU until 1987, when it was subsumed into ZANU-PF through the Unity Accord (Raftopoulos 2013, Mlambo 2014, Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012, Sachikonye 2006, Makumbe and Sithole 1997). However, in the elections in the year 2000, a new opposition political party emerged under the MDC, which has challenged ZANU-PF's hegemony since then (Chan and Gallagher 2020, Chan 2019, Chari 2017, Moore 2015, Kabemba 2005).

The MDC party has assumed the role of the main opposition in Zimbabwe's politics and elections. In the 2018 harmonised elections, it contested as a coalition with other small political parties under the banner of MDC Alliance and represented by Nelson Chamisa (Mathe 2020, Chikwawawa 2018, ZESN 2018, and ZEC 2018). Over 55 political parties registered to contest in that year's elections (Commonwealth 2018). However, the two dominant political parties recorded significant results, notably ZANU-PF and MDC Alliance (Commonwealth 2018, ZEC 2018, and ZESN 2018).

Political parties are a major stakeholder in any elections, as they represent the contestants and provide organisation for political representation (Internet source: <https://aceproject.org/main/english/ve/veb03a.htm>). In Zimbabwe, three political parties contested the recently held elections on 22 March 2022 to fill vacancies in parliament and local municipalities, which were created as a result of political party recalls and, in some cases, as a result of the death of an incumbent (Newsday 2022). The three major political parties include ZANU-PF, Citizens Convergence for Change (CCC), and the MDC Alliance. CCC was formed in 2022 as a splinter from the MDC Alliance but now commands the majority of the previous opposition votes and supporters, evidenced by the majority of seats it claimed in the March 2022 by-elections. Demonstrating the importance of political parties is the power that they wield, which empowers them to recall elected members from any forum, as dictated by the law. This entrenches their stakeholder status in the Zimbabwean elections.

Media

The media is one of the key stakeholders in elections with a very important role to play, especially in Zimbabwe. Chari (2017: 74) submits that the media has a crucial role to play in shaping public opinion and insight into the legitimacy or lack thereof of elections through framing practices. In framing perception, the media has the capacity to direct the voting patterns in an election or any form of contest, thus making it a key component of the elections (Chari 2017:73). According to Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA Zimbabwe), elections define democracy, while media enlightens and sustains it (Internet source: <https://zimbabwe.misa.org/issues-we-address/media-and-elections/>). This is an elaboration of the important role that the media plays in elections in particular and democracy in general. In this regard, the

media can be used to popularise the concept and campaign for the adoption of EVT's to maintain the integrity of elections in Zimbabwe.

Khan (2019:1) argues that mass media, over the years, have made a great contribution to the electoral process, giving both citizens and their leaders the freedom of speech and expression and the right to hold dialogue and discussions on the government's past performances and the promises of the future. Media provides a platform for transparency and accountability in elections (Khan 2019:2). Khan (2019) further contends that an election in a democratic polity without a vibrant media ecosystem would be a paradox that any country can ill afford. Afolabi (2020) comments that, as seen in their reporting in Zimbabwe, the media is polarised in that it is divided between the opposition and ruling party. Public media has a bias towards the government since the majority of their entities are state-owned, whilst the so-called private media retains a preference for the opposition.

Developments in the ICT sector have not spared the media, and its transformation has introduced it as a critical player in general mass media, digital media, or so-called social media (Khan 2019:2). The media has become a critical sub-stakeholder in electoral politics in Zimbabwe (Chan and Gallagher 2021). Chan and Gallagher (2021) point out that in Zimbabwe's 2013 harmonised elections, media, particularly social and digital media, had an influential role in the conduct of elections and influenced the voting patterns to a considerable extent. They specifically singled out a pirate account on Facebook under the moniker 'Baba Jukwa', which drew the attention of the electorate by publishing controversial political and electoral-related material in the run-up towards the 2013 harmonised elections.

The media plays an important role in elections through monitoring and reporting on any election-related information and incidents. Rao (2014: 4) submits that media organisations should comply with the code of conduct on integrity and accuracy. Failure by the media to project accuracy and fairness in electoral reportage has the potential to contribute towards or fan electoral violence (Rao 2014:4). Thus, the media occupies a critical role in the conduct of elections and is a major stakeholder whose role cannot be overlooked.

Discussion and Findings

The study sought to describe the phenomenon of elections and the role of EVT's in maintaining their integrity in Zimbabwe. Breakwell (2023: 91) suggests that when the (research) questions are genuinely new and address contextual change, it may be useful not to opt for only one design. Hence, considering the nature of the study, it was pertinent that it goes beyond exploring the concept of EVT's and elections in Zimbabwe and also describe the practice as it unfolds and how these new adoptions of ICT's are substantially altering the conduct of elections and the effect they have on the integrity of these processes. Babbie (2016: 93) reinforces the importance of adopting two designs for such studies by suggesting that descriptive studies answer the questions of what, where, when, and how; while exploratory studies address the question of why. This offers a complete guide for research, and was observed in this study, whose design employed both exploratory and descriptive approaches to address all the related research concerns. The information stated in the preceding sections was compiled through document review. The findings are the outcome of the document analysis stated below.

The history of EVT's in Zimbabwe is limited, only dating back to 2017 when the country adopted a biometric voter registration (BVR) system to register voters and maintain the voters' roll (ZEC 2018; ZESN 2018). This followed calls for the urgent need to ensure that the country's elections are free, transparent, credible, and fair to eliminate the electoral irregularities that had marred Zimbabwe's elections in the past, resulting in contested outcomes begging on legitimacy (ZESN 2018).

Zimbabwe's history of EVT's is brief, only dating back to 2017 following an order by former president Mugabe on 08 September 2017 to ensure that all wards and constituencies have a new and updated voters' roll. This was done through Proclamation No. 6 of 2017 under Section 36(a) of the Electoral Act and culminated in the adoption of the BVR exercise to register voters for the 2018 harmonised elections (ZESN 2018:4). However, this brief experience with EVT's in the country's electoral processes is already yielding

positive results evidenced by the country's improved rating in the global political corruption index and the clean elections index. The submission is however aware of the immense work that remains to be done in order to align the country's electoral processes with global, continental and regional standards.

The political corruption in Zimbabwe is recorded as follows, refer to Table 1.

Table 1: Zimbabwe: Political Corruption Index

Zimbabwe	Political corruption index
Latest value	0.863
Year	2023
Measure	index points
Data availability	1960 - 2023
Average	0.539
Min - Max	0.214 - 0.863
Source	Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)

Source: The Global Economy, 2025

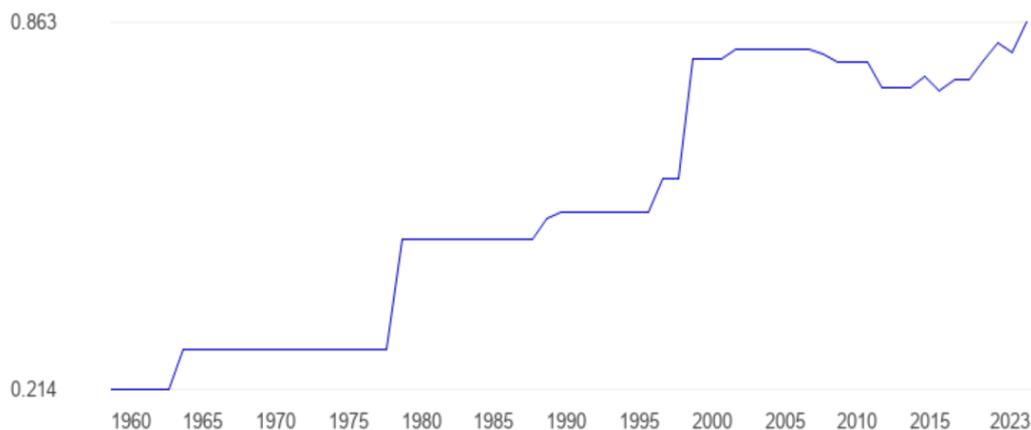
The table explores that “historically, the average for Zimbabwe from 1960 to 2023 is 0.539 index points. The minimum value, 0.214 index points, was reached in 1960 while the maximum of 0.863 index points was recorded in 2023” (The Global Economy, 2025). Note that the “higher values mean less corruption” (The Global Economy, 2025) and lower values means the opposite. Additionally, table 2 and graph 1 show the clean elections index in Zimbabwe.

Table 2: Zimbabwe: Clean Elections Index

Zimbabwe	Clean elections index
Latest value	0.160
Year	2023
Measure	index points
Data availability	1960 - 2023
Average	0.293
Min - Max	0.000 - 0.694
Source	Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)

Source: The Global Economy 2025

Graph 1: Zimbabwe: Clean Elections Index: Historical Series



Source: The Global Economy 2025

Note that “the latest value from 2023 is 0.16 index points, an increase from 0.154 index points in 2022. In comparison, the world average is 0.537 index points, based on data from 171 countries. Historically, the average for Zimbabwe from 1960 to 2023 is 0.293 index points. The minimum value, 0 index points, was reached in 1978 while the maximum of 0.694 index points was recorded in 1960” (The Global Economy, 2025). The increased index could be linked to the introduction of EVT’s to ensure “elections are free and fair with absence of registration fraud, systematic irregularities, government intimidation, vote buying, and

election violence” (The Global Economy, 2025). It is clear on the graph (Graph 1) that the clean elections index improved or rose quite significantly. This improvement can be attributed to the introduction of electronic voting technologies as it can be observed that between 2017 and 2023 the index on the graph improved signaling an improvement in the country’s conduct of clean elections.

Mathe (2019) supports this assertion by noting that in the 2018 harmonised elections, key aspects of the election such as voter turnout impressively improved reaching over 80 % with first time youth voters registering and participating in the election. Areas of voter registration and the compilation of the voter’s roll also remarkably improved and these are attributes that score a country’s index on clean elections in a positive direction. They substantially reduce its political corruption index or rating. The incorporation of ICTs in form of the BVR component in the country’s electoral processes drove the prospects of a reformed electoral system in Zimbabwe high.

Dziva et al. (2020: 48) note that for citizens to vote, they have to be properly and correctly registered as voters under the electoral rolls. They argue that it is, therefore, paramount for responsible authorities to establish comprehensive and robust systems to allow citizens the opportunity to register and inspect the correctness of their details ahead of a plebiscite. Dziva and Chigora (2018), citing Evrensel (2010), also concur that both the process of voter registration and the result (voters’ roll) need to be accurate, sustainable, and politically acceptable to various electoral stakeholders. Hence, there is a need to coordinate this process and capture details of eligible voting using accurate and robust systems that will ensure transparency, efficiency, fairness, and effectiveness of the process, in this instance, through the BVR process (ZESN 2018, ERC 2018, and ZEC 2018).

Digitising elections in Zimbabwe has been regarded as a potential solution to the irregularities that continually mar the electoral processes. As such, the introduction of BVR in 2017 became a celebrated development which was seen as a positive step towards mitigating electoral fraud in the then impending 2018 elections and subsequent plebiscites (Rusinga 2021, Mathe 2020, ZESN 2018). Siachiwema and Saunders (2021:81) bemoan that the 2018 election results were fraudulently counted and tallied, arguing that despite the presence of an efficient voter registration exercise and a credible voters’ roll, fraud still occurred at the counting and tallying stages of the polling process, which provoked renewed agitation for fully digitalising the entire electoral process (Mathe 2020).

Dziva and Chigora (2018:47) state that the call for the transition from paper-based systems to electronic voting was due to the dynamic electoral challenges bedevilling Zimbabwe since the year 2000. According to Dziva and Chigora (2018), the electoral challenges that Zimbabwe faces predominantly stem from the archaic electoral systems that have been a subject of manipulation for over two decades and require transformation, specifically through the incorporation of EVT’s. The adoption of BVR and the electronic voters’ roll, which is accessible to all stakeholders, is an indication of the authorities’ plans to gradually introduce an efficient, transparent, and credible electoral model (ZEC 2018:20).

Dziva et al. (2020:48) record that a desirable and acceptable standard of the voter registration process has to be fair, transparent, effective, comprehensive, and inclusive to produce a secure and reliable register in the eyes of all interested parties. Thus, the voter registration process and the resultant voters’ roll should not advantage or disadvantage one contestant over another. Any voter registration process that falls short of these integral democratic principles often affects the credibility of an election and puts the legitimacy of the winner in the spotlight. ZESN (2013: 30) observed that the voters’ roll, before its automation, had numerous defects on all audits conducted on the voter registers in preceding years, and unearthed evidence of tampering with the voters’ roll.

The decision to adopt BVR technologies was necessitated by the need to improve the country’s electoral profile and enhance its democratic efforts (ZEC 2018: 20).

However, there is a limited regulation specifically regulating electronic voting in Zimbabwe (Moyo 2021). However, there exists legislation governing the general conduct of elections in Zimbabwe and the use and related activities of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Henceforth, the article only

discusses these frameworks in relation to elections in general, and electronic voting, where there is mention or reference to such. The section of the law that relates to biometric voter registration (BVR) is the only EVT that the country has adopted and implemented. In that case, the study recognises that, chief among the legislation governing the electoral processes is the Zimbabwe Constitution of 2013, followed by the Electoral Act (2:13), the 2018 Electoral Regulations, Postal and Telecommunications Act (12:5), the Data Protection Act, and the National ICT Policy, among others. The assessment of these frameworks may form part of future studies.

Conclusion

In discussing the country's political background, the chapter delves into the electoral system that existed pre-independence, so that the study traces the evolution or development of the electoral system currently in place and the emanation of current challenges threatening the integrity of elections in Zimbabwe.

It is considered that there is currently no legislation that specifically addresses or regulates electronic voting in Zimbabwe. It is further deduced that the extant legislation refers to the general conduct of elections and the general area of ICTs without focusing on electronic voting as a specialised or specific subject. There are provisions of law that refer to ICTs and their relation to voting or elections. The provisions for BVR, the only component of the EVTs in Zimbabwe's elections, is discussed in the study to understand its significance in election processes.

The article leaves a scope for future studies. There is also a need to review the role of elections in good governance and ensuring service delivery. The year 2024 has been dubbed an election year, with numerous countries going to the polls. However, there appears to be a developing question on whether elections translate to good governance and service delivery, among other issues. Questions that beg for answers relate to whether elections still serve their initial role in promoting democracy or have now turned into tools of authoritarian consolidation through retention of power using elections.

NOTE

This article is based on an unpublished PhD thesis titled Moyo, N. 2025, Electronic voting technologies to maintain the integrity of elections in Zimbabwe, at UJ under the supervision of Prof. S. Vyas-Doorgapersad. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg.

References

- Afolabi, O.S. (2020). Biometric technologies, electoral theft and management of elections in Nigeria and Zimbabwe. *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*. 42 (2): 205-229. <https://doi.org/10.35293/srsa.v42i2.80>.
- Babbie, E. (2016). *The practice of social research* (14th Ed.). Boston. Cengage Learning.
- Breakwell, G.M. (2023). Choosing a research design in *The Cambridge handbook of research methods and statistics for social and behavioral sciences*. Nichols, A.L. and Edlund J.E. (Ed). Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Chan, S. (2019). Free and Fair?: Observation of Selected African Elections. *Journal of African Elections*, 18(1), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.20940/JAE/2019/v18i1a1>
- Chan and Chari, T.J. (2017). Electoral violence and its instrumental logic: Mapping press discourse on electoral violence during parliamentary and presidential elections in Zimbabwe. *Journal for African Elections*. 16: 72-94. DOI: 10.20940/7294
- Chikwawawa, C. (2019). Zimbabwe 2018 elections: Shattered hope for change and economic recovery. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*. 3 (3): 312-316. <https://rsisinternational.org/journals/ijriss/Digital-Library/volume-3-issue-3/312-316.pdf>
- Chan, S and Gallagher, J. (2017). *Why Mugabe won: The 2013 elections in Zimbabwe and their aftermath*. London. Cambridge University Press.
- Creswell, J.W. and Gutterman, C. (2024). *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. New York. Pearson.
- Dziva, C and Chigora, P. (2018). Building a case for the adoption of an e-voting electoral system in Zimbabwe based on the Namibian experience. *Journal of Public Administration and Development Alternatives (JPADA)*. 2 (1): 49-63. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329913113_BUILDING_A_CASE_FOR_THE_ADOPTION_OF_AN_E-VOTING_ELECTORAL_SYSTEM_IN_ZIMBABWE_BASED_ON_THE_NAMIBIAN_EXPERIENCE

- Kabemba, C. (2005). An assessment of Zimbabwe's election administration in Olaleye, W. 2005 Negotiating the impasse: Challenges and prospects for democratisation in Zimbabwe. Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA). Research Report No 9. Johannesburg, South Africa: EISA. https://www.academia.edu/84186687/Negotiating_the_impasse_challenges_and_prospects_for_democratisation_in_Zimbabwe
- Khan, F B. (2019). *The Game of Votes: Visual Media Politics and Elections in the Digital Era*. New Delhi. Sage. ISBN-10: 9353286921
- Mathe, L. (2020). The challenges and opportunities of web 2.0 elections: The case of Zimbabwe. *Journal of African Elections*. 19 (2). DOI: 10.20940/jae/2020/v19i2a7.
- Mlambo, A S. (2014). *A history of Zimbabwe*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Moore, D. (2015). *A history of Zimbabwe*. New Contree. 73. a174. DOI:10.4102/nc.v73i0.174
- Musara, E. And Chigora, P. (2020). Democratisation and securitisation of Zimbabwe's national elections: Opportunities and challenges for biometric voter registration. *Journal of Public Administration and Development Alternatives (JPADA)*. 5 (1): 48-62. DOI: 10.10520/EJC-1f1fe79410.
- Makumbe, J. (2016). Electoral Politics in Zimbabwe: Authoritarianism Versus the People. *Africa Development*, 31(3): 45–61. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ad.v31i3>.
- Makumbe, J. (2009). *The Impact of Democracy in Zimbabwe: Political, Social, and Economic Developments*. South Africa: Centre for Policy Studies (CPS). <https://coilink.org/20.500.12592/wdtj8s>
- Mathe, L. (2020). The challenges and opportunities of web 2.0 elections: The case of Zimbabwe. *Journal of African Elections*. 19 (2): 125-145. DOI: 10.20940/jae/2020/v19i2a7.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. (2012). Elections in Zimbabwe: A recipe for tension or remedy for reconciliation? Wynberg: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation. DOI: 20.500.12592/066715
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S J and Ruhanya P(ed). (2020). *The history and political transition of Zimbabwe: From Mugabe to Mnangagwa*. Cham: Macmillan.
- Newsday (2022). The high cost of democracy . . . as by-elections, cars gobble US\$22 million. Article by Chitemba B. <https://www.newsday.co.zw/theindependent/politics/article/2276/the-high-cost-of-democracy-as-by-elections-cars-gobble-us22-million>
- Raftapolous, B. (2013). The 2013 elections in Zimbabwe: The end of an era. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 39 (4) .971-988. DOI: 10.1080/03057070.2013.862101
- Rankhumise, P. (2008). Reflections on the 2008 Zimbabwe elections. IISA. Brief 2. DOI: 20.500.12592/tfdrgd
- Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU). (2014). *Zimbabwe Since 2013 Elections: Final Report*. Harare. RAU.
- Rusinga, R. (2021). Zimbabwe's 2018 harmonised elections: An assessment of credibility. *Journal of African Elections*. 20 (1): 90-114. DOI: 10.20940/JAE/2021/v20i1a5.
- Sachikonye, L M. (2003). The electoral system and democratisation in Zimbabwe since 1980. *Journal of African Elections*. 2(1): 118-140. DOI:10.20940/JAE/2003/v2i1a10
- Sachikonye, L M. (2004). Constitutionalism, the electoral system and challenges for governance and stability in Zimbabwe. *Journal of African Elections*. 3(1):140-159. DOI:10.20940/JAE/2004/v3i1a8
- Sachikonye, L. M. (2006). Political parties and the 2005 elections in Zimbabwe. *Journal of African Elections*. 4 (2): 63-73. DOI:10.20940/JAE/2005/v4i2a4
- Sithole, M and Makumbe, J. (1997). Elections in Zimbabwe: The ZANU-PF hegemony and its incipient decline. *African Journal of Political Science*. 2 (1). 122-139. <http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals>
- Soga, B. (2023). *A comparative analysis of the use of e-government services by small businesses*. Unpublished PhD. Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg.
- The Commonwealth. (2018). *Zimbabwe Harmonised Elections*. Harare: The Commonwealth.
- The Global Economy. (2025). *Zimbabwe: Political Corruption*. https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Zimbabwe/political_corruption_index/
- Zimbabwe Elections Commission. (2018). *Harmonised Elections Report*. Harare. https://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/2018%20Harmonised%20Election%20Report.pdf
- Zimbabwe Elections Support Network. (2018). *Biometric Voter Registration Report*. Harare. <https://www.zesn.org.zw/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/ZESN-BVR-Observation-Report.pdf>
- Internet source:
<https://aceproject.org/main/english/ve/veb03a.htm>
<https://www.eisa.org.za/pdf/zim2018zec.pdf>
<https://zimbabwe.misa.org/issues-we-address/media-and-elections>.