



BIOMETRIC VOTER REGISTRATION UPDATE - NUMBER 19

08 February 2018 –As part of its oversight role on electoral processes, ZESN has been closely tracking developments relating to the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) Mop-up exercise which ended on 8 February 2018. This update is based on reports from ZESN’s mobile and static observers who were deployed at selected mop up, district and provincial registration centres countrywide. ZESN deployed a total of 263 static observers for the mop up exercise.

Turnout

As of 7 February 2018, ZEC indicated that they had registered 5,264,674 people since the commencement of the voter registration exercise. On the other hand 385,192 people were registered during the mop up voter registration exercise alone.

Turnout of people wanting to register at district and sub district centers was high in Harare, Chitungwiza and Bulawayo.

The sub-district centers, especially those in urban areas, were registering over 100 people per day which indicates that a large number of eligible voters are still yet to register in the catchment areas of those district centers. In Harare these centers include Town House, Parliament, Kuwadzana 2 High School and Highfield West’s Zimbabwe Hall. In Chitungwiza the centers include Chigovanyika Car Park Tent, Chitungwiza District Registry and Chitungwiza Head Office and in Bulawayo the centers include The Bulawayo Center and Tredgold Building.

In Bulawayo, the Bulawayo Center was registering between 120 and 150 a day and in response to the high turnout, ZEC on 7 February 2018, deployed 6 registration kits to serve the surge in number of registrants. The registration center at Tredgold Building had two kits, and was also registering between 120 and 150 people a day. On the other hand, high turnout of registrants was also been noted at Komsitheli registration center at the Registrar General's complex which recorded between 100 and 120 people a day.

At Kuwadzana 2 High School, in Harare, the center consistently registered more than 100 people daily. The catchment area for this registration center was large as evidenced by the fact that people from as far as Dzivarasekwa extension, Whitecliff, Grenary and Rainham were making their way daily to be registered as voters. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the BVR kit at this center was, for the most part, operated by one registration official. Despite the best efforts of the registration official, people had to wait for several

hours just to be served. ZESN provided this feedback to ZEC regarding the challenges at this center and in response ZEC deployed an additional kit to this center on 6 February 2018.

Allocation of BVR Kits

While ZESN appreciates the intricate mix of variables that ZEC needed to consider in deciding the number of BVR kits to deploy in different provinces the Commission could have responded better to the surge in numbers of people presenting themselves for registration at registration centers in urban areas.

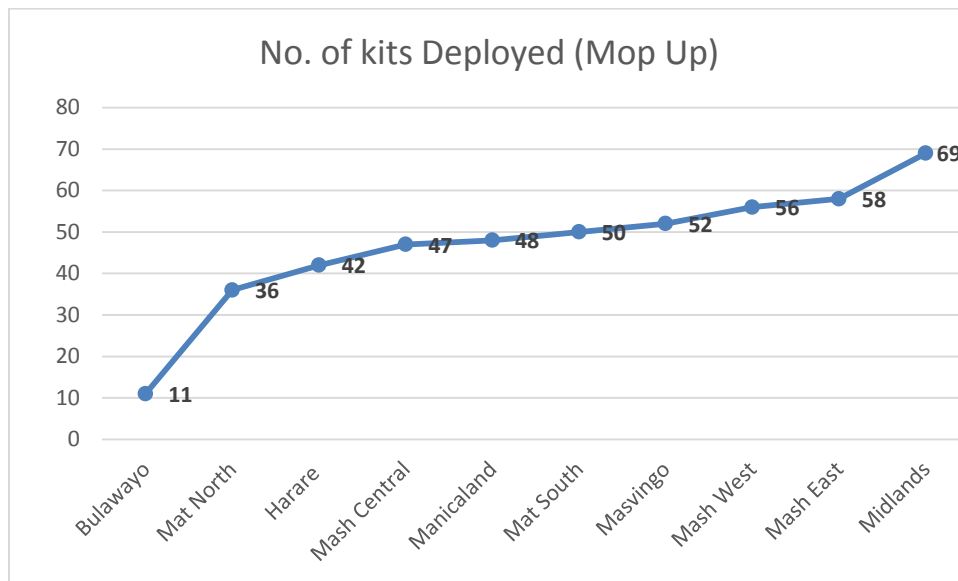


Figure 1: Distribution of BVR kits Countrywide

At some centers, registration officials turned away registrants that arrived after 15.00 hours. This worrying trend was reported countrywide at centers that received high volumes of people wanting to register. ZESN believes that instead of turning away people ZEC should have, in such instances, deployed more kits to such centers in response to the surge in number of registrants. Consequently Bulawayo, Matebeleland North and Harare ended up having the least number of registration kits. An analysis of the registration updates released by the ZEC on their website shows that Harare and Bulawayo also had the lowest percentages of people registered vis-à-vis the projected target (Zimstats 2018 projected voter population) as illustrated by the graph below.

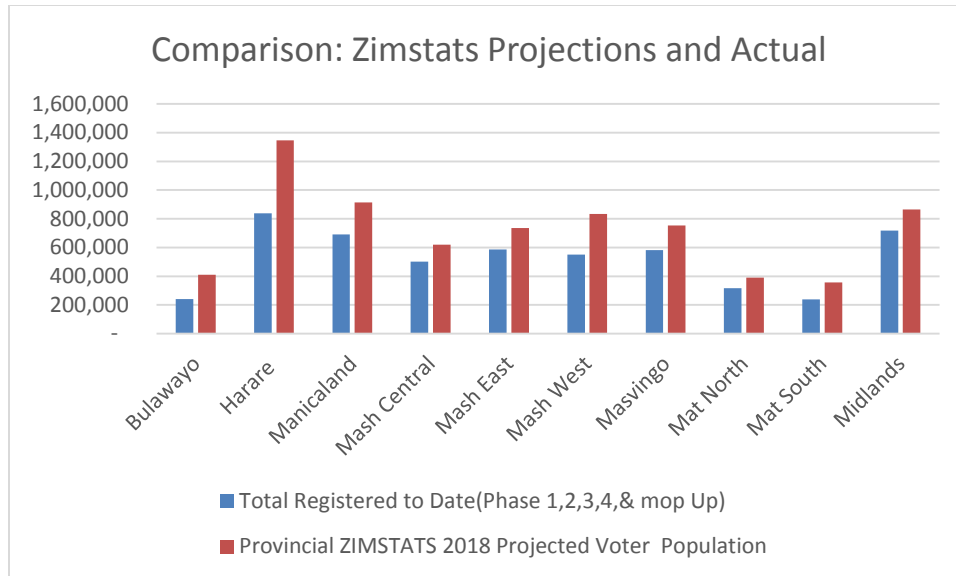


Figure 2: Comparison of Provincial ZIMSTATS 2018 projected Voter Population & Actual persons registered

Turned Away

ZEC reports that as of 7 February 2018, the number of persons turned away since the commencement of the exercise stood at 7,908. This figure represents slightly over 2 percent of people that presented themselves to register during the BVR Mop up exercise. The reasons include citizens classified as Aliens, who did not have long birth certificates, citizens with defaced and photocopied Identity documents. This number would have been reduced drastically if the Registrar General implemented a deployment plan for its mobile teams that was in sync with the itinerary of the ZEC BVR registration Blitz.

Continuous Voter registration

While ZESN appreciates efforts by the Government to avail resources for a BVR Mop up exercise, it is clear that judging by the turnout in urban areas, there is still a large number of people that were not be served by 17.00 hours on 08 February 2018, when the Mop up exercise ended. From the reports received from ZESN observers, it is evident that more people registered at the registration centers located at the sub-district level as compared to those who registered at the 63 districts centers. One of the key reasons for this trend is that registration centers at sub-district level are more conveniently located than those at the district level.

On 8 February 2018, which was the last day of the BVR mop up exercise, several district and sub district centers registered large numbers of people and had to close late owing to the high turnout. For instance Kuwadzana 2 high school closed at 17.50 hours after registering 265 people, Zimbabwe Hall in Highfield East closed at 20.30 hours after registering 432 people and turning away 50 people in the queue due to poor lighting, and the center at Remembrance in Mbare closed at 21.30 hours after registering 465 people, At Harare Townhouse, the center closed at 20.21 hours after registering 1,555 people (this figure represents data from only 11 of the 17 kits that were deployed at the center on the last day.)

In Bulawayo, at Tredgold building in Bulawayo central, 442 people were registered and at Bulawayo Center 621 people were registered on the last day. It is therefore prudent that ZEC considers extending the number of days that the sub-district registration centers will be open to facilitate registration of persons who still want to register to vote in the general elections.

Conduct of ZEC Officials

ZESN commends the ZEC officials for their professional conduct during the BVR blitz and mop up. However there was clearly a marked difference in the comprehension of election issues and attitude of the ZEC employees and those who were seconded to ZEC from Government. It is therefore imperative that ZEC training equips registration/voters' roll inspection officials on how to facilitate the work of observers and other electoral stakeholders that interact with them. Staff seconded to ZEC from Government Ministries, Statutory Institutions and Local Government appeared to be the most uncooperative when interacting with observers citing Official Secrecy Act as the reason for their inability to respond to inquiries that observers made concerning the registration process thus made the work of observers cumbersome. The Registration center at Remembrance drive is an example of such centers where for the past 12 days the ZESN observer were not been given any statistics relating to the total number of persons that registered on one of the two registration kits that have been deployed at the center.

Power Challenges

ZESN received some reports of registration being halted at centers where the BVR kits ran out of power. Such reports were not prevalent during the first two weeks of the BVR mop up exercise because of the dry weather spell that prevailed countrywide. However, this week the country received some rainfall and some of the BVR kits being used at registration centers located in the places with cloud cover experienced power challenges as the kits were failing to power up. Such reports were received from Chongogwe Secondary School, in ward 16 of Chivi district. This registration center, on 4 February 2018, had only one person registered and three were turned away because they did not bring the required national identification documents. The BVR kit was sent to charge between 10.00hours and 14.30 hours because the battery was failing to attain sufficient charge owing to the cloud cover.

Power challenges, especially in the rural areas also exacerbate the network challenges that were faced in some of the hard to reach areas. These negatively affected the speed at which registration statistics could be relayed to the ZEC headquarters. At the time that ZEC released its 7 February 2018 BVR update 95 of the 469 registration centers had not yet submitted their statistics owing to network and communication challenges.

Voters' Roll Inspection

Beyond the static and mobile centers that ZEC will open for the purposes of voters' roll inspection, there is need for the Commission to consider other inexpensive but effective ways of facilitating the inspection of the voters' roll. Android applications and a secure portal on the Commission's website may help increase access to this process by those who

would have registered. In addition, an SMS facility could also be used as is the case in South Africa, Liberia, Uganda and many other countries, so as to reach out to more people, particularly those who may not have access to the internet.

ZEC and other stakeholders need to step up efforts to increase awareness on the importance of the upcoming voters' roll inspection exercise to ensure that registered voters verify that their details were correctly captured in the preliminary voters' roll.

Gaps in electoral Procedures

There is urgent need for the Commission to share detailed regulations and guidelines for data management, voters' roll inspection and deduplication processes in order to allay stakeholder fears. For instance, it is unclear how a determination will be made by the Commission as to which entry will be kept in the event that a registrant is found to have registered more than once. The procedures to be followed by both ZEC and registrants when dealing with queries that relate to the accuracy of entries in the preliminary voters' roll are also not clearly stated at law.

Recommendations:

1. ZEC needs to add registration centers located at the sub-district level and other high traffic areas to the list of centers that will remain open after the end of the mop up exercise.
2. ZEC needs to ensure that Provincial and District centers where continuous voter registration occurs remained open to the public and are manned by a dedicated teams of BVR kits operators.
3. ZEC needs to ensure that its registration centers are open throughout the advertised times.
4. There is need to consider the introduction of technological innovations for the inspections of the voters' roll such as online and SMS platforms.
5. ZEC must liaise with the Registrar General in the quest to provide national identity documents such as long birth certificates to disadvantaged groups such as aliens to enable them to register.
6. ZEC should ensure that the BVR exercise updates are provided in a format that is disaggregated by various filters such as province, constituencies, age and sex among others.
7. ZEC needs to share with stakeholders all regulations pertaining to data management, deduplication and inspection of the voters' roll to increase stakeholders understanding of these important processes.

PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS IN ZIMBABWE

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