



# Ballot Update

## Bulletin

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## ZEC Holds Crucial All Stakeholder Conference On Voter Registration



ZEC Chairperson Justice Makarau has said the Commission is ready to adopt BVR provided the funds are made available

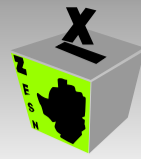
The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) organised an all stakeholders' conference in Harare on May 10 to provide an update on the implementation of a new voter registration system. Already, the Commission has been piloting the polling station based voter registration in recent by-elections. There are calls from political parties and civic society organisations such as ZESN for ZEC to adopt Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) to go along with the polling station based voter registration system.

ZEC Chairperson revealed that the Commission is considering four (4) Voter Registration options for use in Zimbabwe, namely Manual,

Electronic, and BVR that captures facial features and BVR that captures both facial and fingerprint. A decision is yet to be made on which model to adopt as this is dependent on a number of factors such as the availability of funds and feasibility among other issues.

ZESN's position is that the implementation of BVR requires careful planning, preparation and implementation to ensure that it is successfully implemented. Failure to follow due process in the implementation could jeopardise the process, with devastating consequences for electoral integrity and credibility.





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An example of a BVR kit that captures fingerprints

The stakeholder engagement by the Commission has been hailed as a positive step towards transparency; however there is need for more clarity on vital steps in the implementation of BVR. Of particular interest to most stakeholders is the tendering and procurement process which must be transparent in order to enhance confidence, integrity and credibility of the process.

Speaking at a public meeting held in Glen View, spokesperson of the People's Democratic Party Jacob Mafume argued that for the process of BVR implementation to be successful there is need for transparency and constant consultation between ZEC, political parties and civic society organisations.

ZESN chairperson, Ms Irene Petras said that "Procurement is one of the most critical steps in BVR deployment therefore there is need to ensure that adequate time is allocated for it. In addition, ZESN calls for a public tender process and public scrutiny of the

decision-making process and engagement of the service provider."

ZESN notes that procurement is one of the most critical steps in BVR deployment, in countries such as Kenya where they have had challenges with BVR it was mainly as a result of late and/or inappropriate procurement of equipment. ZESN's view on procurement is that there must be clear procedures relating to the composition of the procurement committee, drafting of tender documents and review of bids.

Furthermore, the procurement committee must take into account the experience of the vendor in handling similar projects and ensure that the vendor conducts a Site Validation Test of the system before it is rolled out. BVR technologies are an intensive process hence the process of procuring the vendor and equipment must be done in time. Some of the critical questions which must be addressed to ensure the successful implementation of the process include; has a feasibility study been conducted?

Is there going to be a pilot of the system as witnessed with the polling station based voter registration? Has a vendor been identified or is there going to be a tendering process for the BVR equipment? When is the process going to be rolled out? What is the technical capacity of ZEC to relate with the new technology? Are there adequate resources to place for the successful implementation of the BVR?

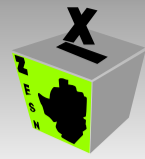
ZESN's view is that steps such as conducting a feasibility study, pilot of the BVR, timely procurement procedures, staff training on use of BVR, setting up of mechanisms for IT support and data recovery and consolidation and mechanisms for the electorate to check their registration status must be taken for a successful deployment of the technology in Zimbabwe.

ZESN urges the Commission to ensure that there are adequate mechanisms in place for citizens to check their names on the voters' rolls both physically and virtually.

ZESN believes that such an arrangement would speed up the rectification of any errors in registration details in the system. ZEC should consider integration of SMS systems into BVR to enable citizens to verify their registration status via SMS.

Election technologies in use in other countries include the use of SMS and social media to communicate with the electorate. In Pakistan, for instance the EMB used SMS to have voters check whether their voter registration details and statuses were accurate. Out of the 85 million registered voters 55 million successfully utilized the SMS platform at nominal financial cost to both the Commission and the voters.

"The BVR system accompanied by other electoral reforms has great potential to transform electoral processes in Zimbabwe. It is therefore imperative for the Government to clarify its position and clearly spell out the critical steps for the adoption of BVR in light of the limited time before the 2018 elections." added Ms Petras.



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## Political Parties call for delimitation exercise before 2018 polls

ZESN held a public meeting in Harare's Glen View suburb at the Glen View New hall on Thursday 19 May, 2016. The public meeting was part of a series of citizen engagement initiatives under the theme 'Biometric Voter registration in the context of electoral reforms'.

As part of recommendations on electoral reforms that must be implemented before the 2018 harmonised elections, opposition political parties present called for a delimitation exercise. Member of Parliament for Harare Central Hon Murisi Zwizwai of the MDC-T argued that since the last delimitation of electoral districts was done in 2007, the

next one is constitutionally due at the end of the ten-year period in 2017, a year before harmonized elections.

Participants weighed in on the issue arguing that given that the last delimitation was held in 2007 there would have been significant demographic movements and changes which would make it imperative to conduct a new delimitation to address the changes.

Opposition political parties who spoke at the public meeting argued that the need for boundary delimitation cannot be over-emphasised as this exercise will restore equality of voting strengths in all constituencies.

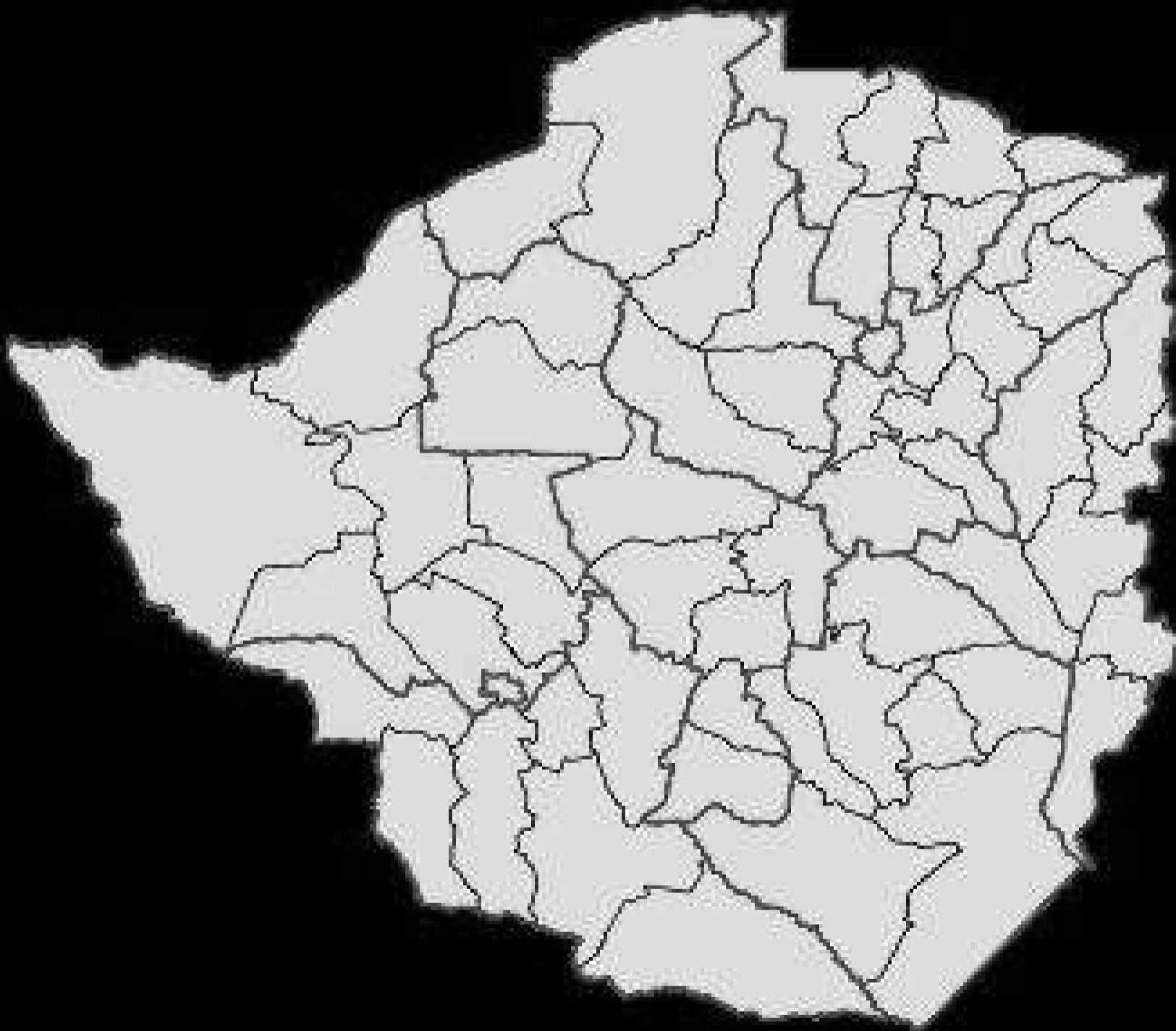
The parties also contended that failure by the Commission to conduct the delimitation exercise would be in violation of Section 161 of the Constitution.

The calls for a delimitation exercise were made as part of a significant number of requisite reforms that would coincide with other key reforms such as the adoption of the polling station based voter registration and the biometric voter registration. According to Section 239 (e) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe outlines one of the functions of ZEC is to delimit constituencies, wards and other electoral boundaries. Given that in past elections there have been accusations of gerrymandering of

constituencies (the intentional drawing up of constituency boundaries to the advantage one political group at the expense of others) a fresh exercise might help allay those allegations.

The issue of when the next delimitation exercise is due has been a cause of much debate given the different interpretations that have come out regarding the provision of the law.

The calls by the opposition parties for ZEC to institute a study to ascertain whether all constituencies are in line with the 20% deviation rule for all election boundaries are part of the reforms they wish to see before the 2018 elections.



The last Delimitation exercise of electoral districts was conducted in 2007



## ZESN engages political parties and citizens on electoral reforms



ZESN organised two public meetings in Bulawayo city centre and Glen View 1 in Harare in the month of May as part of a series on citizen engagement initiatives under the theme 'Biometric Voter registration in the context of electoral reforms'. The meetings were organised to facilitate engagement and dialogue in unpacking the pros and cons of the Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) system and other electoral reforms in light of the impending 2018 elections.

In Bulawayo three political parties made presentations namely; MDC, MDC-T and ZAPU and in Harare four political parties MDC-T, Transform Zimbabwe, People's Democratic Party (PDP) and ZANU PF were present. In both public meetings ZESN provided an overview of the BVR system and lessons learnt from other countries such as Nigeria, Uganda and Zambia.

Generally the political parties agreed that the adoption of BVR would

enhance the credibility of elections by eliminating double registrations and aiding in the cleaning of the voters' rolls.

There were calls by the ZANU PF representative at the Glen View meeting for the timely implementation of the process and availing of adequate financial and human resources.

"For the implementation of BVR to be

successful it should be accompanied by other electoral reforms must be implemented to create a conducive environment for credible polls." said ZESN at the Bulawayo public meeting. Of particular interest were issues to do with the tendering and procurement processes for the BVR system given the high level of technical expertise required in the implementation process.

There were calls for transparency and consultation with political parties in the selection and vetting of vendors as this would further enhance stakeholder participation and confidence in the process.

Comprehensive voter education related to the polling station based voter registration and the biometric voter registration were identified as key issues in both meetings. The state media was called upon to corroborate the efforts of the ZEC, ZESN and other CSOs in disseminating information regarding the new developments in the electoral processes.

Based on the deliberations it is clear that the general consensus is that the adoption of a BVR though positive is not the solution to all electoral challenges but has to be accompanied by other electoral law reforms to create a conducive environment for the holding of credible elections.



Member of Parliament Hon Murisi Zwizwai making a presentation at the Glen View public meeting as representatives of ZANU PF, PDP, Transform Zimbabwe and participants follow proceedings.