

# Biometric Voter Registration (BVR)

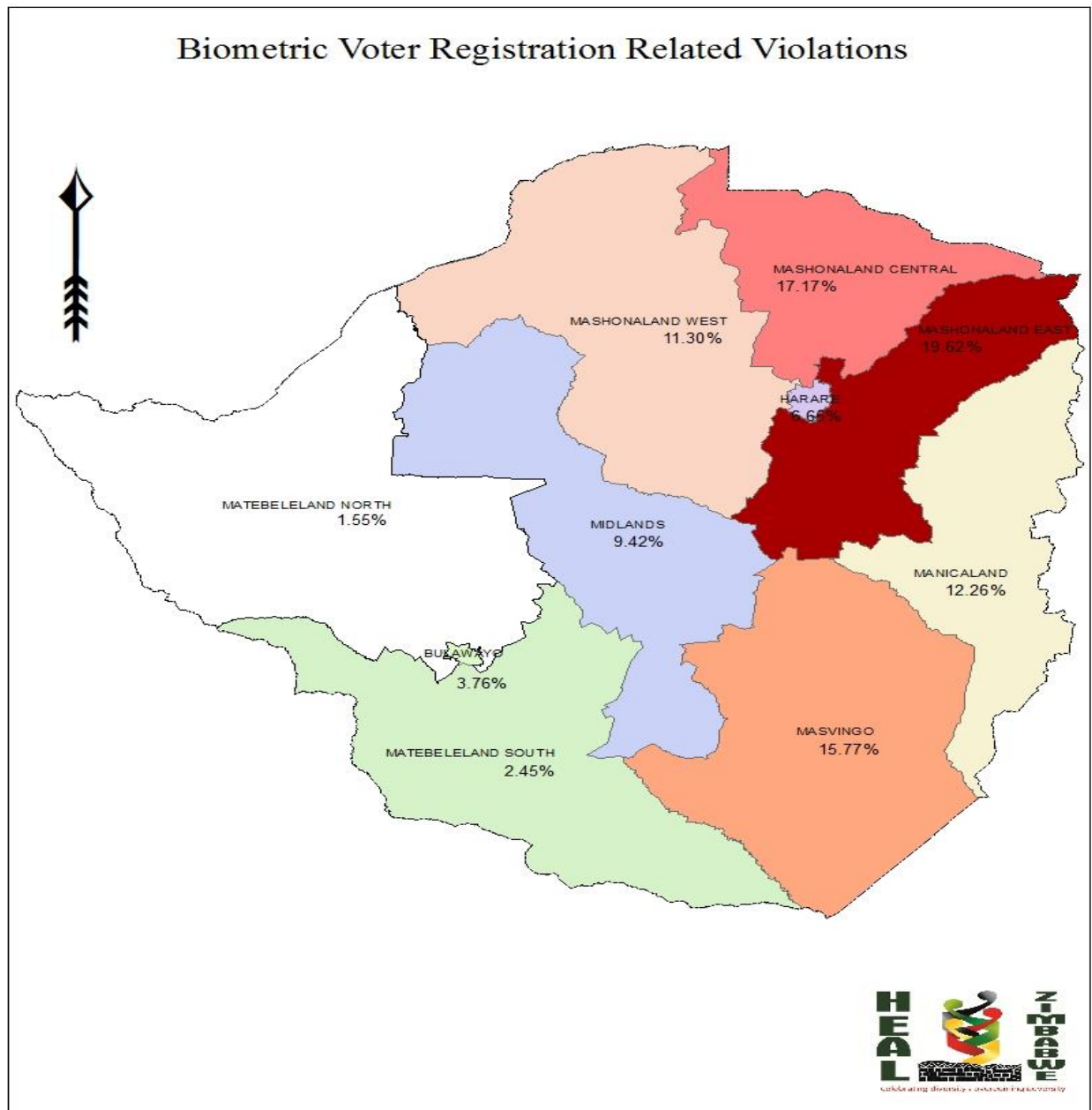
## Human Rights Violations Report.



### 1.0 Introduction

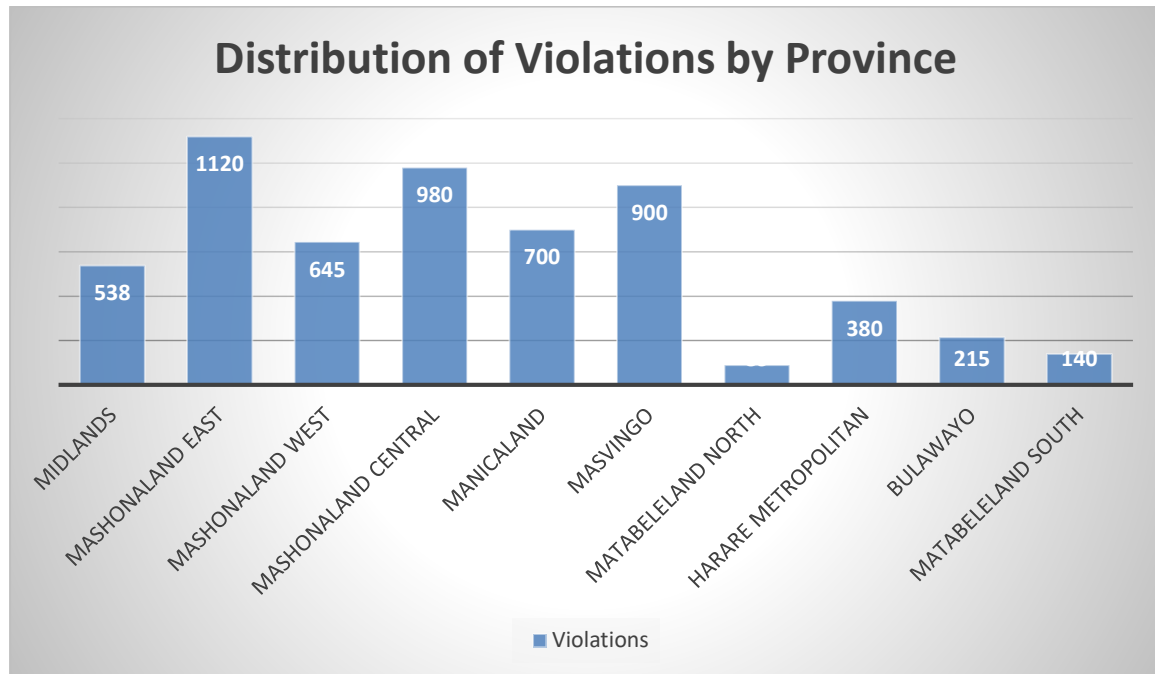
On 10 October 2017, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), launched a blitz Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) exercise across the country. The blitz was a follow up to the launch of the BVR by former President, Robert Mugabe on the 18th of September 2017. Several Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) including Heal Zimbabwe noted that the process was rolled out against a background where there was lack of robust voter education around the new voter registration exercise exposing the process to manipulation by politicians. This was a direct contradiction with International and regional best practices on elections such as SADC Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections that compel Electoral bodies such as ZEC to carry out robust voter registration exercises so as to raise awareness amongst the electorate and build confidence in electoral processes.

Heal Zimbabwe through its resident human rights monitors in all the country's 10 provinces monitored the environment during the mobile voter registration exercise. This was done with the objective of monitoring the environment and report on any cases of human rights violations as well as making referrals where necessary for redress. In 2016, Heal Zimbabwe established an early warning and early response system for easy detection and response to cases of human rights violations.

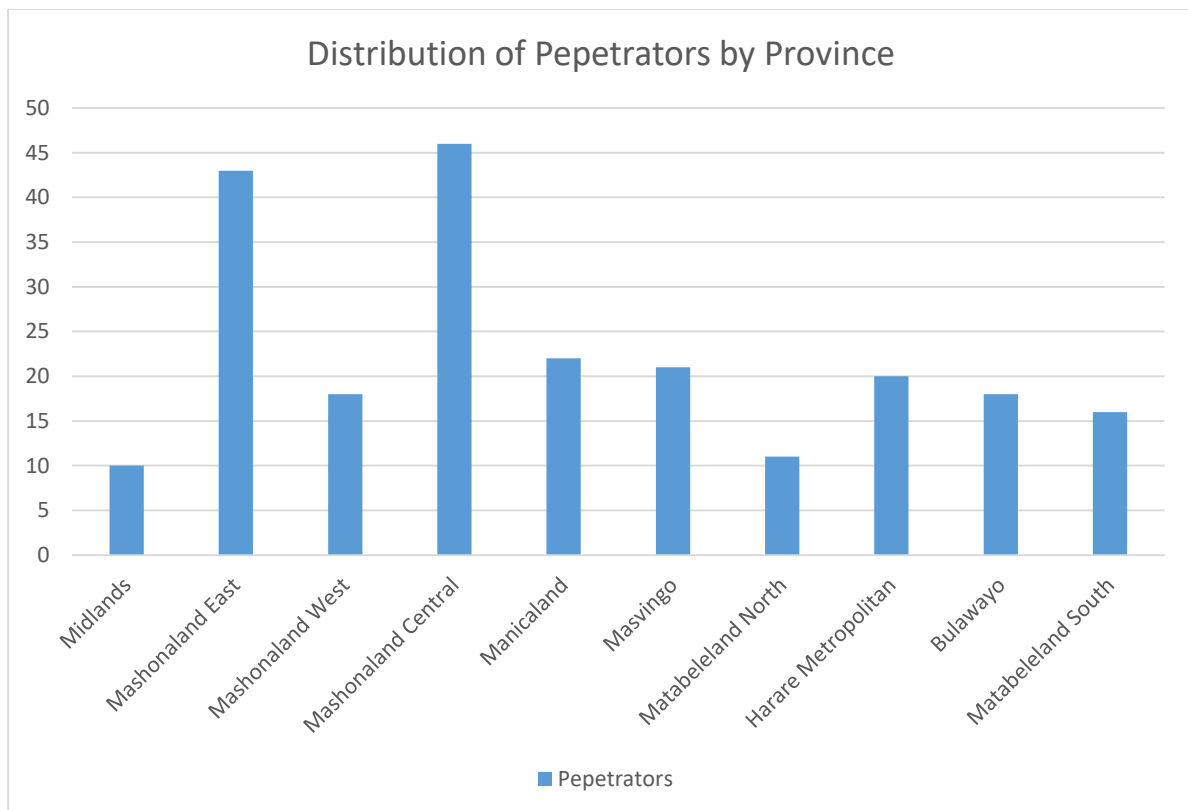


Generally, Heal Zimbabwe noted that the BVR process was characterised by gross human rights violations that range from forced submission of serial numbers of voter registration slips, assault, threats of denial of food aid, forced attendance to political meetings, writing down of people's personal information etc. Two notable categories of perpetrators of these human rights were Traditional leaders (mostly Village heads) and ZANU PF structures. The prevalence of such violations greatly runs against the grain of Part 8 of the Electoral Act on Offences in Registration of Voters that criminalises acts of intimidation during voter registration. Between 10 October 2017 to 08 February 2018 when the mop up exercise came to an end, Heal Zimbabwe recorded a total of 5 707 cases of BVR related violations countrywide.

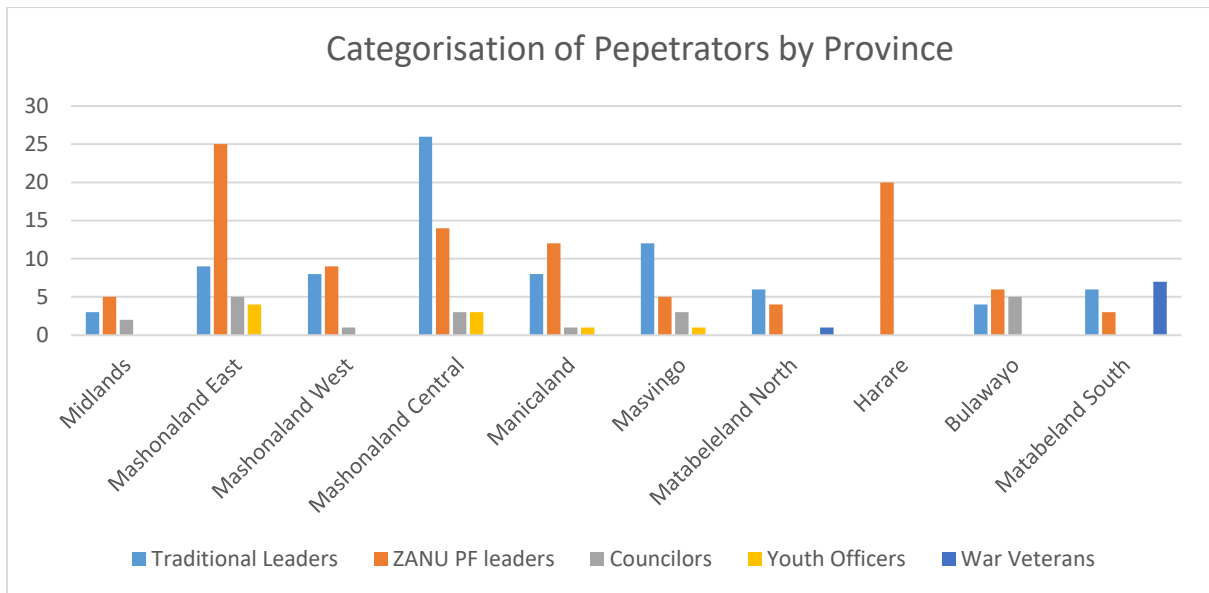
## 2.0 Observations.



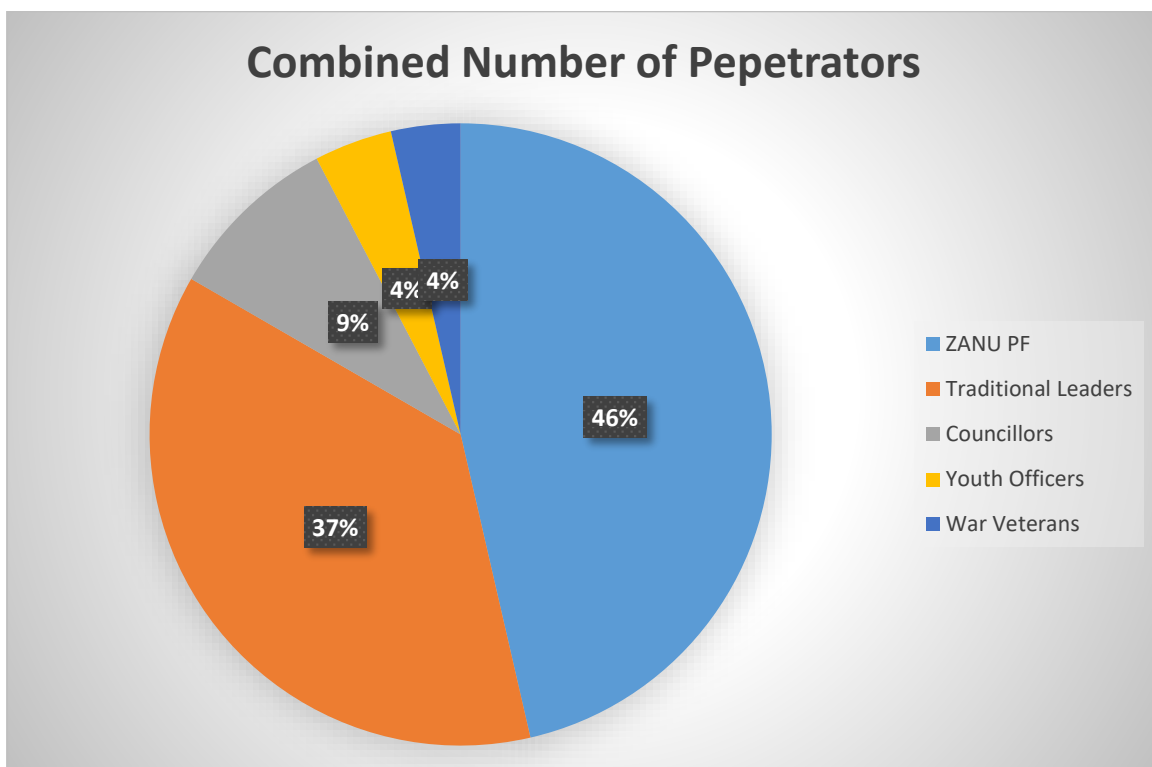
Heal Zimbabwe observed that of the 10 provinces in Zimbabwe, Mashonaland East recorded the highest number of human rights violations with 1 120, followed by Mashonaland Central and Masvingo with 980 and 900 human rights violations respectively. Manicaland (700), Mashonaland West (645), Midlands (538) and Harare (380) recorded average figures. Matabeleland South and Matabeleland North recorded the least number of human rights cases with 140 and 89 respectively.



Heal Zimbabwe recorded a total of 225 perpetrators (185 males and 40 females) who were involved in committing human rights violations around the BVR exercise. To note is that most of these perpetrators would intimidate people at public functions such as political rallies, food aid distribution meetings, funerals etc. The perpetrators were distributed across all the 10 provinces which are Midlands, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West, Mashonaland Central, Manicaland, Masvingo, Matabeleland North, Harare Metropolitan province, Bulawayo and Matabeleland South. Highest incidences of human rights violations were recorded in political hotspots which are Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Midlands, and Manicaland. Mashonaland Central and Mashonaland East had the highest number of perpetrators with 46 and 43 respectively.



The perpetrators who were committing human rights violations during the mobile BVR exercise are ZANU PF leadership largely ward chairpersons, traditional leaders, youth officers, councillors and war veterans. 26 traditional leaders were recorded as perpetrators in Mashonaland Central, followed by 12 in Masvingo and 09 in Mashonaland Central. A total 25 ZANU PF leaders were recorded in Mashonaland East, 14 from Mashonaland Central and 12 in Manicaland.



The diagram above illustrates the distribution of perpetrators across the country. ZANU PF leaders recorded the highest number of perpetrators constituting 46% of the 225 perpetrators recorded countrywide. The majority of the ZANU PF perpetrators are from the ward and district level who claimed to have received orders and directive to demand serial numbers of voter registration slips from their superior leadership within the ruling ZANU PF party. Traditional leaders were the second highest constituting 37%. Councillors constituted 09%, whilst Youth Officers and War Veterans recorded 4% each. All the four categories of the perpetrators moved around communities demanding serial numbers accompanied by threats of violence, withdrawal of food aid and agricultural inputs and some victims were assaulted in the process for failing to cooperate. As such, communities ended up giving in to the demand of the perpetrators as a way of staying away from trouble. Heal Zimbabwe observed that these people instilled fear stealing away the constitutional rights and freedoms of community members and also trying to manipulate the secrecy of the vote.

Heal Zimbabwe observed that the victims ranged from community members, teachers, opposition supporters and some traditional leaders. Measures that were undertaken by local communities especially victims included reporting the cases to civil society organisations, the police, Independent Commissions such as the ZEC and ZHRC.

### **3.0 Heal Zimbabwe's Interventions**

Heal Zimbabwe strives to protect and assist the affected people so that they are able to access justice and requisite social services. In the period under review, the organisation responded to the recorded human rights cases by facilitating for victims to report to the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC), the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and the Police. Heal Zimbabwe also formally wrote to the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) raising concerns over human rights violations related to the BVR. ZEC acknowledged that they have received numerous reports concerning the collection of serial numbers by unscrupulous political entrepreneurs. ZEC in response, reassured Zimbabweans that compilation of serial numbers does not compromise the secrecy of the ballot. *"..As a Commission charged with ensuring that elections are conducted efficiently, free and fair, ZEC heavily discourages the practice and have met with political party liaison committees on this.."* read part of ZEC's response to issues raised by Heal Zimbabwe. ZEC also indicated that collecting serial numbers of voter registration slips is useless since it does not show where one finally votes and does not compromise the secrecy of the ballot.

Added to this, Heal Zimbabwe as part of its target advocacy initiative, engaged all the recorded perpetrators imploring them to desist from denying community members their democratic rights of free participation in electoral processes. The organisation also engaged all the implicated Village heads in Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East and Masvingo. Generally, the Village heads highlighted that most of the directives came from the local ZANU PF leadership within their areas. Heal Zimbabwe implored the Village heads to uphold their constitutional duty of not violating fundamental human rights and freedoms of any person as enshrined in Section 281 of the constitution. In light of this, Heal Zimbabwe wrote to the Ministry of Local Government to raise concern over the misconduct of some Traditional leaders who are meddling in partisan politics. This is a violation of Section 282 of the Constitution.

It must be noted that Heal Zimbabwe officially reported the human right violations cases to the police. The Police responded by highlighting that they have launched investigations into the cases. It is quite unfortunate that Heal Zimbabwe did not record any report of arrest of perpetrators of human rights violations during the BVR process. This was despite numerous reports made to the police both at local and national level. HZT is equally concerned with the welfare and security of victims who have lost faith and confidence in the Police. The organisation further calls for institutional reforms within the Police so as to restore confidence within the citizens who feel let down by the police.

### **3.1 Way forward**

**In light of the above Heal Zimbabwe proposes the following;**

- a) ZEC must raise awareness on any electoral process prior so that citizens are better informed.
- b) Civil society organisations and the church in partnership with the ZEC, NPRC and the ZHRC must conduct outreach programmes in local communities to demystify these human rights violations linked to voter registration slips and highlight on the criminality of the practise.
- c) The police must swiftly investigate and arrest all perpetrators of the BVR human rights violations.

- d) The NPRC in conjunction with other relevant stakeholders must swiftly set up an early warning and early response system that responds to indicators of political violence as the 2018 plebiscite draws nearer.
- e) Independent Commissions such as the ZHRC, NPRC and ZEC must decentralise their offices for swift reporting and response to cases of human rights violations.
- f) Political parties must uphold the Electoral Code of Conduct for Political Parties which stipulates that NO political party or any of its members or supporters, and NO candidate or any of his or her supporters, may: *(a) use violence, or threaten violence or incite or encourage the use of violence, against anyone on account of his or her political opinions or membership or support of a political party or participation in the election; (b) intimidate, or incite or encourage the intimidation, of anyone on account of his or her political opinions or membership or support of a political party; act in a way that may provoke violence or intimidation;*

#### 4.0 Conclusion

The BVR process was marred by numerous cases of electoral related malpractices. Section 133B of the Electoral Act highlight *that any person who (d) compels or attempts to compel a person or persons generally to attend, or participate in any political meeting, march, demonstration or other political event; shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding level ten or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years or to both such fine and such imprisonment.* Added to this Section 155 of the constitution stipulate that *elections must be “free from violence and other electoral malpractices”* In light of this, the BVR process fell short in meeting standards that outline free and fair electoral processes. Heal Zimbabwe shall continue raising awareness in local communities on the need for peace and tolerance under its National peace Campaign: **13 Million Voices for Peace**. The organisation has been moving around communities engaging community members and duty bearers on the importance of upholding peace and social cohesion.

.....**ENDS**.....