



**Framing the debate: youth voter
registration in Zimbabwe in
preparation for 2018 elections**

**RAU Opinion 1/17
April 2017**

Introduction¹

Africa has a youthful population with approximately one-third of its population belonging to the 15 to 35 years age category. Zimbabwe also has a very large demographic youth bulge, with over 75% of the population under 35 years,² which this has ramifications for policy and welfare of the young. Following Huntington,³ youth bulges are theorised to be a potential source on instability, and supported by recent evidence,⁴ although this is disputed by other researchers.⁵ Democratic elections and sound policies may be a way in which the deleterious effects of youth bulges may be mitigated.

It appears Zimbabwe is perpetually in election mode, with people focusing on elections in their search for improvements in how the country is governed. It is theorised that democratic governments led by winners of competitive elections are more effective, responsive and accountable than those that rise to power through modalities outside elections^{6,7}. The youth make up about 41% of the eligible voters but only constitute 14% of the registered voters in Zimbabwe⁸. Thus, the youth are largely excluded from democratic governance processes⁹. They vote in less numbers than older age groups and fewer young people stand as candidates in local and national elections¹⁰. In response to political violence and other informal sanctions the youth often actively avoid participation to safeguard their informal enterprises¹¹.

A long-standing question in governance discourse is “Does democracy equate to good governance?” As Gaventa and McGee have put the issue:

¹ Report written by Daniel Mususa, Researcher (RAU)

² ZimStat (2012), *Census 2012. National Report*. Harare: Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency

³ Huntington, S. P (1996), *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Shuster.

⁴ Urdal, H. (2004). *The Devil in the Demographics: The Effect of Youth Bulges on Domestic Armed Conflict, 1950-2000*, Paper No.14, Working Paper Series. World Bank: Conflict Prevention & Reconstruction. [http://www.ds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2004/07/28/000012009_20040728162225/Rendered/PDF/29740.pdf]

Urdal, H. (2006). *A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence*. *International Studies Quarterly*. Volume 50, Issue 3, 607–629. [<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2006.00416.x/abstract>]

⁵ Goldstone, J. A., Bates, R. H., Epstein, D. L., Gurr, T. R., Lustik, M. B., Marshall, M. G., Ulfelder, J. and Woodward, M. (2010), *A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability*. *American Journal of Political Science*, 54: 190–208.

[http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic700749.files/Goldstone_et_al_Global_Model_Forecast_Pol_Inst_Type_script_2005.pdf]

⁷ Bates, R. H., Fayad, G and Hoeffler, A. 2012 “The State of Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa” in *International Area Studies Review* 15 (4) (December 1): 323–338

⁸ These statistics are anecdotal evidence from a concoction of informal analyses of the 2013 voters’ roll and the Zimbabwean population. This is an area needing attention

⁹ Due to patriarchy, political and economic exclusion as well as some religious and cultural beliefs and practices, the youth do not find it beneficial or worth their time to participate. Political regimes have effects on the material well-being of the people who live under them.

¹⁰ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) “Youth participation in electoral processes: new roles for African electoral management bodies” Policy Brief, November 2015 at <http://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/youth-participation-in-electoral-processes-africa.pdf>

¹¹ Oosterom, M.A., with Kache, C., Mususa, D. and Pswarayi, L. 2016 *The Violent Politics of Informal Work, and How Young People Navigate Them: A Conceptual Framework Evidence Report No 198*. Sussex: Institute of Development Studies

*“How can ordinary citizens - and the organisations and movements with which they engage-make changes in national policies which affect their lives, and the lives of others around them? Under what conditions does citizen action contribute to more responsive states, pro-poor policies and greater social justice? What is needed to overcome setbacks, and to consolidate smaller victories into ‘successful’ change?”*¹²

The youth in Zimbabwe also have to contend with these questions, and, furthermore, the world has been falling into a “democratic recession” since the 1990s with electoral authoritarianism slowly re-emerging and democracy is “under duress”¹³. The Zimbabwean populace is faced with high unemployment and under-employment, an unresponsive government, social injustice and deepening poverty while the youth are faced with poor governance and weak political participation, lack of livelihood opportunities, perennial relegation to low-paying menial jobs that offer restricted room for career advancement, massive migration, the politics of exclusion in the economy¹⁴, ever-increasing graft and systematic corruption in government and parastatals¹⁵. These have become the key drivers of citizens’ loss of confidence in the government.

Youth Engagement in Governance

The space for citizens to engage the state in dialogue is continuously shrinking through the systematic intimidation, politics of patronage and neopatrimonialism¹⁶ in which elected leaders are more concerned with using state resources to create and sustain clientilism and loyalty networks based around personal material benefit. Under neo-patrimonialism the media and oversight institutions such as the police, courts and parliament become weak due to the illicit administrative practices that go unchecked. And when neo-patrimonialism degenerates into a “predatory state”, the consequences for citizens can be even more severe, and such a state of affairs has been argued for Zimbabwe.¹⁷

An ever-present grievance in the literature and anecdotal evidence is citizens’ frustration with lack of access to the “responsible authorities”. There is no room for objective, issue-based discussion that is not framed in combative terms of “us” versus “them”, regardless of how the “us and them” are defined either along political, factional, religious, racial or ethnic lines. Effectively, the citizens’ voice is drowned and they have little room to communicate with the

¹² Gaventa, J. and McGee, R. “Introduction: making change happen-citizen action and policy reform” in Gaventa, J. and McGee, R. (Eds) 2010:1 Citizen Action and National Policy Reform London: Zed Books

¹³ See Levitsky, S. and Way, L., “The Myth of Democratic Recession” in Journal of Democracy January 2015, Volume 26, Number 1:45-58

¹⁴ See for example Thonje, A. Ncube, G. 2014 “International Migration, Remittances and Sustainable Livelihoods: The Case of Chivi District” in Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) Volume 19, Issue 6, Ver. VII (Jun. 2014), PP 98-107 at <http://www.iosrjournals.org> and Hilker, L. M. and Fraser, E. (2009) Youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states Report prepared for DFID’s Equity and Rights Team Final report: 30th April 2009

¹⁵ Sachikonye, L. Whither Zimbabwe? Crisis & Democratisation

¹⁶ Lindberg (2003) defines neo-patrimonialism is an informal political system based on personalised rule and organised through clientilist networks of patronage, personal loyalty and coercion.

¹⁷ Bratton. M (2014), *Power Politics in Zimbabwe*. London: Lynne Rienner.

leaders on governance issues, leading to the situation where citizens become “risk averse”, perhaps “voters” rather than “active citizens” at least.¹⁸

The current drive to encourage youth voter registration reflects this belief in elections as the best way available for the citizenry to contribute to the governance of the country. It also emerges from the need to harvest maximum participation from the youth bulge to address youth exclusion, youth apathy and a way for the youth to determine their future¹⁹. Perceptions of exclusion lead can young people to search for alternative ways to engage the state and express their discontentment²⁰.

On the backdrop of massive under-registration of young persons as voters²¹, the belief has grown that elections, widely seen as rigged, are not a useful expression of young people’s views and agency. Against the notion that Zimbabweans are “risk averse”, the year 2016 saw a sudden upsurge in citizen demonstrations and social activism with the #Tajamuka/Sesjikile and #ThisFlag movements²², questionably enabling many people, primarily young people, to find the courage to openly express their discontent with the manner in which the country is being governed. These protests and demonstrations met with some expectedly brutal police reaction in a continuation of the theme of police heavy-handedness and repression of free expression. With the influence of these movements waning, the continued constriction of other spaces for citizen action, and for lack of better alternatives, elections become viewed as one viable option for the youth to utilise their numbers and influence the governance process without exposure to the State’s repressive machinery. However, against this hopeful scenario are the lessons of 2013 and previous elections since 2000.

Youth and Elections in Zimbabwe

Elections nonetheless provide one of the critical underpinnings of the modern democratic state²³ and, for the youth, who are already marginalised from the mainstream economy, voting may be one of the only viable options for them to “speak” to public representatives after the shortcomings of, and resistance to demonstrations and protests. Voter registration as

¹⁸ Eldred Masunungure, Tony Reeler, Richman Kokera, Daniel Mususa, Stephen Ndoma & Heather Koga (2016) *Are Zimbabweans Revolting? An examination of Risk-taking and Risk-Aversion since 1999*, MPOI & RAU

¹⁹ “Time for youths to stand up and be counted” The Herald, April 22, 2016
<http://www.herald.co.zw/time-for-youths-to-stand-up-and-be-counted/>

²⁰ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) “Youth participation in electoral processes: new roles for African electoral management bodies” Policy Brief, November 2015 at
<http://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/youth-participation-in-electoral-processes-africa.pdf>

²¹ A total of 1 920 424 people under the age of 30 ought to have been registered as voters in 2013 but were not. See [RAU \(2013\), *An Audit of Zimbabwe’s 2013 Voters’ Roll*. July 2013. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit.](#)

²² The #ThisFlag and Tajamuka/Sesjikile movements are Zimbabwean citizen-led movements which have led protests and demonstrations against the government in 2016 and in 2017. They are calling for ending of corruption in government, poor public service delivery, high unemployment, widespread corruption, payment of civil servants’ delayed salaries, demanded the resignation of president Mugabe and the sacking of corrupt ministers, among other grievances

²³ See Dahl, R.A. 1989 *Democracy and its critics* New Haven: Yale University Press, and Przeworski, A., Stokes, S.C., Manin, B (Eds) 1999 *Democracy, accountability, and representation* New York: Cambridge University Press

a requirement for one to vote is thus, a necessary step in that direction hence the view that “...*If you do not vote do not complain*”. Embedded in such sentiments is the view that people should not only speak out on social media and then neglect to vote, which is the only action that has a chance to lead to some of the desired outcomes. For some among youth the elections are an avenue for correction of the country’s developmental direction, replacement and rejuvenation of national philosophies, and a chance for reinstatement of national aspirations leading to such impassioned pleas for the youth to register as voters. As one commentator has expressed this:

“...let us all be wise as youths. We have watched our beloved country become an example of a failed state... I respect all our elders, but it’s about time our mothers, fathers, grand fathers and great-grandfathers...and let the young people change the fortunes of our great Zimbabwe. Today I will not write about unfulfilled promises, the corruption, the looting by our unyouthful leadership and they have used us, we all know this has happened. Let us youths pave the way for a new Zimbabwe. Let us register to vote and actively participate in 2018 Zimbabwean election...I rest my case. I hope you do the right thing [register and vote]”²⁴

Failure to register as a voter means that someone cannot vote. Ensuring that the roll is complete and that all eligible voters are registered, the voter registration process must uphold democratic principles such as transparency, inclusiveness, accountability and comprehensiveness²⁵. The Zimbabwean voters’ roll has been and continues to be subject to irregularities affecting citizens’ trust in the completeness, accuracy and integrity of the voters’ roll.²⁶ Inevitably, if the integrity of the voters’ roll is in doubt, the result of an election conducted using that voters’ roll will be contested. The allegations of partiality of the judicial system and the inexplicably long time taken in which the judicial system takes to hear election cases, becomes another key factor hindering acceptance of the elections results. This also affects people’s confidence to bring before the judicial system any election results or electoral processes which they object to.

There is a long history in Zimbabwe of election petitions being brought to the courts, dismissed without judgement, as was the case for 2002 Presidential election, or the process delayed until the petition was no longer was no longer relevant, as was the case with the petitions from the 2000 elections, and never mind the opposition winning the election in 2008 and failing to ascend to power.

²⁴ Ndlovhu, N. “5 Reasons you should register to vote in 2018 elections” <https://openparly.co.zw/2017/01/31/5-reasons-you-should-register-to-vote-in-2018-elections-ivote4peacezw/>

²⁵ See ZESN Voter Registration in Zimbabwe, and ZESN “Position Paper on Proposed Voter Registration Regulations” at <http://www.zesn.org.zw/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ZESN-Paper-on-ZEC-Voter-Registration-Regulations.pdf>

²⁶ RAU (2009), *2013 Vision – Seeing Double and the Dead. A preliminary Audit of Zimbabwe’s Voters’ Roll*. Derek Matyszak. September 2009. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit; RAU (2014), “*Numbers out of Tune? An examination of the vote in Hamonised July 2013 Election.*” Full Report. Governance Programme, Research and Advocacy Unit [RAU] 10th April 2014, Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit.

Despite the plethora of grievances that the populace urgently needs to be addressed, Zimbabwe's past experience with elections suggests that elections may not be the best avenue for redress of those problems. The youth need the government to respect other democratic principles beyond elections. As it is, democracy and development are erroneously tied to elections. In reality Zimbabwean citizens have in the past and still continue to ask if the conditions for democracy to thrive are present simply because elections are held regularly²⁷. Elections do not wholly equate to democracy and the realities of past Zimbabwean elections have shown that not every vote actually counts in the final analysis due to voter intimidation, politically motivated violence, assisted voters, and Special Votes among other voting malpractices²⁸. Political parties actively participate in fanning violence²⁹, inducing fear in the citizenry and fuelling voter apathy. There is a need to build and harness young people as assets, to reinforce their capacity to participate as integral components of national development and governance processes³⁰. The youth voter registration drive is seen as a precondition for drawing on the benefits of the youth bulge.

The rule of law ensures that people's rights, including political rights, civil freedoms and mechanisms of accountability, and the political equality of all citizens, are safeguarded and potential abuses of state power is constrained³¹. The Zimbabwean government has been condemned for not respecting the rule of law and for presiding over elections characterised by voter intimidation, violence and other irregularities that prevent the elections from being free, fair, or credible and reflective of the wishes of the people.

...democracy is not only a "regime in which those who govern are selected through contested elections" ...but more importantly "democracy is a system of government in which parties lose elections" For this to become reality, elections must first allow for multiple parties and candidates to compete, and second, they must be sufficiently free from manipulation to allow for de facto competition, resulting in alternation in power if citizens so desire (van Ham Stafan and Lindberg, 2015:5)³²

Following van Ham Stafan and Lindberg (2015), there are questions that need to be raised about the forthcoming elections in 2018, before young people are encouraged to follow the same electoral route that has failed to meet acceptable standards in the past. In Zimbabwe

²⁷ Reeler, T. & Chitsike, K. (2005:6) Zimbabwe at the Cross-Roads: Views of Zimbabwean citizens on democracy and transitional justice. Pretoria: Dialogue Unit Community and Citizen Empowerment Programme, Kutlwanong Democracy Centre, IDASA

²⁸ ZESN elucidates that for elections to be meaningful, the elections must be an accurate reflection of the wishes of the voters as expressed in their votes, the vote must reflect the voters' choices not those made under coercion.

²⁹ LeBas, A., 2006. "Polarization as Craft: Explaining Party Formation and State Violence in Zimbabwe," in Comparative Politics, 38, 4 (July) <http://jcp.gc.cuny.edu/2006/07/01/volume-38-number-4-july-2006/>

³⁰ Students Partnership Worldwide (SPW), DFID-CSO Youth Working Group 2010 "Youth Participation in Development A Guide for Development Agencies and Policy Makers"

³¹ O'Donnell "Why the Rule of Law Matters" in *Journal of Democracy* Volume 15, Number 2004, pp 32-46

³² van Ham Stafan, C. and Lindberg, I. 2015 "Vote Buying Is A Good Sign: Alternate Tactics of Fraud in Africa 1986-2012" Working Paper Series 2015, The Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem Institute), University of Gothenburg, https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/43/dd/43ddad26-aae0-48fb-895a-5609fd96e981/v-dem_working_paper_2015_3.pdf

elections have been held since Independence in 1980, but they have not led to developmental and responsive governance. The problems with the inaccuracies of the voters' roll, demarcation of constituencies for the benefit of particular political parties, electoral violence, imprisonment of opposition leaders, displacement of citizens, constriction of non-partisan opportunities to participate in political, social, and economic spheres in Zimbabwe need to be addressed, the institutional controls over the government respected, and effective mechanisms put in place to protect the rights of citizens³³.

The number of voters is not the most important variable that needs to be addressed. The irregularities with the voters' roll affect the credibility of the resultant elections and raises questions over the merits of the drive to get people to register as voters. As pointed out earlier, there is massive under-registration of potential young voters³⁴. As shown by the table below, past elections have been held with relatively high numbers of voters, but the concerns of the youth have largely remained the same, and unmet. Is the focus on youth voter registration only targeted at increasing numbers, just about numbers of voters, or is it to increase the meaningfulness of the election and people's freedom to choose the leaders they want? There seems little correlation between high youth voter registration, high voter turnout and the realisation of the youth's concerns such as job creation and ending of state-led violence and intimidation of voters.

	24-25 June 2000 House of Assembly Election	9-11 March 2002 Presidential Election	31 March 2005 House of Assembly Election	26 November 2005 Senatorial Election	March/June 2008 Presidential Election (First Round-29 March 2008)	March/June 2008 Presidential Election (Second Round-27 June 2008)
Registered Voters	5,049,815	5,647,812	5,658,624	3,239,574	5,934,768	5,934,768
Total Votes (Voter Turnout)	Not Available	3,130,913 (55.4%)	2,696,670 (47.7%)	631,347 (19.5%)	2,537,240 (42.8 %)	2,514,750 (42. 4%)

Table 1: Registered voters and Actual Voter Turnout in selected elections³⁵

The accuracy and completeness of the voters' roll remains in doubt due to slow voter registration processes, and insufficient information on voter registration requirements and voter registration procedures. It has also become expected that, before general elections in Zimbabwe, the government introduces changes in constituency boundaries and voter registration eligibility criteria.

In the past, these changes have led to systematic disenfranchisement of some eligible voters³⁶. Zimbabwe's citizenship laws have disenfranchised huge numbers of Zimbabweans

³³ See for example Reeler, T. & Chitsike, K. (2005:24)

³⁴ See again RAU (2013), *An Audit of Zimbabwe's 2013 Voters' Roll*. July 2013. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit; see also "Voter Registration in Zimbabwe" [[http://www.gndem.org/sites/default/files/Voter Registration in Zimbabwe.pdf](http://www.gndem.org/sites/default/files/Voter%20Registration%20in%20Zimbabwe.pdf)]

³⁵ Adapted from "African Election Database: Elections in Zimbabwe" at <http://www.africanelections.tripod.com>

such as former farm workers and Zimbabweans of Malawian and Mozambican descent³⁷. Disenfranchisement of women stems from the patriarchy that pervades Zimbabwean social structure and its influence permeates through the political systems³⁸. To register to vote in Zimbabwe, one is required to provide national identification documents together with proof of residence. Most married women are required to show their married surnames on their documents whether they have taken their husband's last name or not. This becomes a challenge for women who do not have the financial resources to comply with the law. Another challenge for women is the ability to provide proof of residence documents in a society where property and leases are registered in the men who are the heads of households. Due to this strong influence of patriarchy, a large number of women were turned away from polling stations and disallowed from voting because they failed to provide the required identity documents, mostly documents showing their married surnames

A voters' roll that excludes such huge numbers of dubiously disenfranchised Zimbabweans is an inaccurate record of the eligible voters, and, inevitably, the elections conducted using such a voters' roll are an invalid claim of the Zimbabweans' choice of leaders. The "Zimbabweans" that are allowed to register and vote should be concerned about the exclusion of eligible voters who are being improperly excluded from the eligibility criteria. The emphasis on youth voter registration shows a disregard for the impact of the voters' roll's inaccuracy and an unfair exclusion of large number of voters in the outcome and meaning of the election result.

Stakeholders should to focus on youth voter registration, perhaps because that is the one step that the youth voters have a small measure of control over. Beyond the voter registration process, there are a host of issues to whose continued inattention makes the entire election process and result a farce. Garcia-Ponce and Pasquale (2014) show that the political landscape, in particular the electoral environment has not changed through the 2002, 2008 and 2013 elections:

*"...the Zimbabwean political climate ...is marked by an abusive incumbent government, economic instability, and poor socio-economic conditions. Zimbabwe is an ideal case for testing the relationship between political repression and citizens' attitudes for at least two reasons. First, Robert Mugabe's regime has been characterized as a militarized form of electoral authoritarian-ism. Elections have been held on regular basis since independence in 1980. Yet elections have been neither free nor fair, and the state has routinely used violence to repress opposition groups and their supporters."*³⁹

³⁶ See Matyszak, D. and Reeler, T. 2014 Report on the conditions of the 2013 Harmonised Elections. Harare: RAU

³⁷ Dube, R. 2008:5 *A Right or a Privilege: Access to Identity and Citizenship in Zimbabwe* Harare: Research and Advocacy Unit

³⁸ See Chitsike, K. and Chishiri, T. 2016 *Very Constrained and Confined. The lack of middle class young women's voices in political discourse* Harare: Research and Advocacy Unit

³⁹ Garcia-Ponce, O. and Pasquale, B. 2014 "How Political Repression Shapes Attitudes Toward the State"

Given the realities of the violent patterns of past Zimbabwean elections, elections have not allowed citizens to hold elected representatives to account for their performance. The highest office that matters above all other positions is the presidency, which has not changed despite the numerous presidential elections that have been conducted in Zimbabwe. The incumbent's wish to stay in power forever has led to the repeal, alteration and amendment of constitutional clauses term limits⁴⁰. This also has an indelible imprint on the manner in which elections are conducted, and hence the need to address this issue before the emphasis on youth voter registration.

The drive to increase youth participation in elections is an attempt to strike the seemingly improbable balance between mere **participation in** and securing the **benefits from** the elections. Voting in elections does not mean the youth will reap benefits **from** the elections. While the youth are not an inflexible age-based category⁴¹, there are some core issues that can be identified to be the main concerns of the youth. Elections are expected to lead to the fulfilment of those multiple youth concerns. For the youth, the benefits from elections should include reduction in numbers of young people conscripted into political violence, inclusion of the youth in decision-making over issues that affect them, and restructuring of institutions and overall socio-economic structures to improve young women's participation in governance processes. The institutional arrangements that embody and preserve the conditions of youth's adverse inclusion and marginalisation in governance - not just electoral processes - must be broken down and the state must be seen actively engaging and encouraging youth participation. For the youth, elections need to deliver on the youth agenda-however that is defined.

The youth agenda in elections

Too much focus on mere voting in elections and not on the benefits of participating in those elections leads to disillusionment in the process. For many young people the questions that need to be answered are:

- Is there a youth agenda that needs to be heard?
- Which contestants in the elections are focusing on government effectiveness and do the youth know about those contestants' ideologies? Are those candidates selling their ideas to the youth to secure the youth vote?
- How best can those candidates gain access to the youth to sell their understanding of the youth agenda, given the parliamentary whipping⁴² system?
- Are the youth voting according to political party ideologies and do individual candidates' messages' resonate with the youth agenda (s)?

⁴⁰ Bates, R. H., Fayad, G and Hoeffler, A. 2012 "The State of Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa" in *International Area Studies Review* 15 (4) (December 1): 323–338 asserts that such changes in presidential term limits attack the very essence of representative democracy

⁴¹ Hilker, L. M. and Fraser, E. (2009) Youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states Report prepared for DFID's Equity and Rights Team Final report: 30th April 2009

⁴² The whipping system is a system in which parliamentarians are forced by their political parties to toe the party line in parliament despite them personally, holding views that do not agree with their parties' official stance.

- Will the elections lead to the Rule of Law and an effective government?
- Will the election results deliver/contribute to political stability and absence of violence?
- Is the election going to be free from manipulation, vote buying and violence?
- Will the result reflect the free choices of Zimbabweans?
- What is it about the coming election that is going to be different from the previous ones, and why should the youth have faith the new election result and consequences of the results will be different from the last election?
- So why should the youth register and vote?

Conclusions

In the light of the problems with the voters' roll, should stakeholders continue to push for voter registration or for reform of the electoral landscape, or both? Should the youth focus on mere participation in elections or rather on the benefits of participating in elections? If the conditions present do not suit the attainment of any one of these possible desired outcomes, what should the youth do? Does the focus on elections and youth voter registration downplay the role of legacy of intimidation, violence, abductions and denial of drought-relief food aid in shaping the outcomes of those elections? Does the youth voter registration effort reflect an erroneous assumption that the electoral playing field is even and that the principles of democratic voter registration are going to be observed and the eventual election results are not going to be subject to manipulation? There is a need to move away from 'electoralism' and the focus must be on the **meaningfulness** of the elections.

This paper does not provide incontrovertible answers; rather, it highlights some of the structural issues that need to be attended to for the youth voter registration exercise and ultimately, for the elections, to help in the realisation of the youth agenda.